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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

MENDING IDENTITY: THE REVITALIZATION PROCESS OF THE MUISCA OF SUBA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

by

Paola Andrea Sánchez Castañeda

2018

To: Dean John F. Stack
Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs

This thesis, written by Paola Andrea Sánchez Castañeda, and entitled Mending Identity: The Revitalization Process of the Muisca of Suba, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Juliet S. Erazo

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Albert Kafui Wuaku

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Ana Maria Bidegain, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 26, 2018

The thesis of Paola Andrea Sánchez Castañeda is approved.

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Dean John F. Stack
Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs

____
Andrés G. Gil
Vice President for Research and Economic Development
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2018

DEDICATION

To my mother and my brother

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing this thesis has undoubtedly been the most significant learning processes in my career, not only academic learning but, above all, personal learning. This work has meant rethinking and reassessing the history of my country, and with it, my identity. But none of this would have been possible without the struggle of the Muisca community of Suba, that struggle that allowed me to know them, to share with them even if it was for a short time, and more than anything, to LEARN. From my first encounter with the Muisca community of Suba, I have learned the value of place in the construction of identity, the strength of that space in connection with their ancestors, and its current human and non-human entanglements. I have learned about the history of my country, a history that has been built and propagated without the active participation of this community. *IPQUA* (thank you), Muisca community of Suba, it has been an honor for me to walk with you through your territory and through your real history.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

MENDING IDENTITY: THE REVITALIZATION PROCESS OF THE MUISCA OF SUBA

by

Paola Andrea Sánchez Castañeda

Florida International University, 2018

Miami, Florida

Professor Ana Maria Bidegain, Major Professor

For over five centuries, the Muiscas have faced direct colonial aggression against their traditional belief systems and sacred practices that have been historically demonized and driven to the brink of extinction. Despite such circumstances, however, the Muisca community has thrived to the present day, and since the turn of the twentieth century has begun to undergo a process of re-identification as an indigenous community in an attempt to revitalize their ethnic identity and practices. These efforts of re-indigenization have challenged their historically coerced identities, actively engaging in returning to traditional practices and beliefs, demand cultural and spiritual liberties, and regain their proper rights to sacred lands, which have also been devastated for centuries. Based on an ethnographic study conducted in Colombia, this thesis examines how rituals in sacred places are of central importance to this community within the re-indigenization process that is currently underway in the Muisca community.

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Introduction

From the late twentieth century to the present day, processes of re-indigenization have increasingly been taking place around the globe as political platforms such as multiculturalism have amplified these re-indigenization projects. Notwithstanding apparent differences among them, many indigenous groups across Latin America are currently undergoing similar re-indigenization processes and share a comparable history of having been coerced by their respective states to identify as peasants. Part of the re-indigenization process for many indigenous groups has involved not only posing a challenge to this coerced identity, but also a reinterpretation of their history, active engagement in returning to their traditional roots, demands for cultural and spiritual liberties, and regaining the rights to their sacred lands. Furthermore, these processes of re-construction are phenomena that enable decolonization of historical memory.

In the wake of cultural obliteration, sacred places and rituals have become essential elements of communal healing in the re-indigenization process of the Muisca community from Suba, a town aggregated to Bogota, Colombia. This community located in one of the suburbs of the capital city has undertaken a social, political, and cultural task of re-constructing their identity in re-affirming their status as Muiscas and as indigenous people. Hence, for the last few decades, this community, wholly removed from the social imaginary of the nation, has been rebuilding from the ashes, contesting centuries of violent colonization.

At the arrival of the Spanish conquerors, in the sixteenth century, the Muiscas were located throughout what it is known as the *Altiplano Cundiboyancense*, a region constituted by several savannas in eastern Cordillera of the Andes. As a consequence of the rapid

adaptation and settlement of the Europeans, the project of colonization was more ruthless in this region compared to others where the conquerors did not have easy access, neither geographically speaking nor interacting with the native population. Hence, the complete domination over the land was a critical point at the beginning of the loss of identity (Escobar 2008, 60).

After the successful colonization, several political processes extended the violent politics of invisibilization that have permeated the historical memory of the nation. During the 19th and 20th centuries, what is called the Republican period after the Independence, those who still identified as Muiscas were categorized as *Campesinos/ raizales* [peasants]. This categorization was solely based on the economic activity developed by indigenous people without recognizing their cultural signification. This process of recategorization, also known as *mestizaje*, was discourse and political agenda which involved removing all cultural and cosmological heritage of indigenous peoples to homogenize the Colombian nation.

However, in current times, the Muiscas are rewriting their history as a community that has struggled with centuries of physical and cultural genocide. Through the revitalization of their traditional practices, the reinterpretation of others, and the conscious creation of culture, called as ethnogenesis; they are combating a new reality after abrupt urbanization. For the Muisca, as with several other indigenous groups who have place-based epistemologies, sacred places are vital to recovering their collective memory. Unfortunately, those sacred lands that they have been struggling to regain for centuries have been converted into district parks, high-value condominiums, and garbage dumps.

Muiscas' sense of attachment to the sacred places, and their intimate linkage to what they consider their home is understood by the American anthropologist Keith Basso as what he calls a *Sense of Place*. He argues how "places possess a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection, inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of whom one used to be, or musings on who one might become" (Basso 1996, 55). This concept from Basso supports one of this work's hypotheses on how communities, in their processes of meaning-making, perceive places, make them sacred, and make them part of their cosmology.

From a political and cultural framework, Arturo Escobar (2008) in *Territories of Difference*, argues how particular groups' identities respond to place-based situations, and how the struggles of identity are strongly linked with struggles for land, in the case of indigenous communities in the Colombian Pacific. Indeed, for Muiscas their struggle for land has been parallel with their struggle of re-identification as political and cultural actors in Colombia.

In these struggles, *Ritual* becomes vital as a mechanism to reconstruct the notion of an indigenous community and its strong relationship with the landscape. Muisca cosmology is being re-interpreted and revitalized through the appropriation of sacred places. The belief is being performed and lived by the members of the community through regular rituals organized by community leaders. As the religious studies scholar, Catherine Bell argues, "ritual activity is tangible evidence that there is more to religion than a simple assent to belief; there are practices, institutions, changing customs, and explanative systems" (Bell 1997, 22). Ritual is the action performed by a cosmological foundation that,

furthermore, as I will argue, create a sense of unity in the community in this re-identification processes.

Fieldwork in Suba, Bogota, Colombia

How do sacred places define processes of re-identification for indigenous communities? What role do rituals play in the reconstruction of their indigeneity? What is the relationship between identity, place and the sacred? How is indigeneity lived in urban environments? These are some of the questions that accompanied me during my stay in Suba, a suburb of Bogota, which used to be a town, and where the Muiscas have their history and identity rooted in.

I had the opportunity to share time with the Muisca community of Suba for several weeks from mid-July to August, when I had to return to the US. Being in the public gatherings allowed me to witness the overwhelming contrast between their deep yearning to re-identify themselves publicy as Muiscas and the disparaging glances from the other citizens. Those outsiders, like the vast shared imaginary of the Colombian citizenry, believe that the Muiscas were a great community from the pre-Columbian history, nearly exterminated during the conquest and the colonial periods. However, the contemporary Muiscas, as they call themselves, are a group of families entirely rooted in the area of Suba, where they and their ancestors have lived and strenghtened their traditional identity. I found a community led by an active group of youth members who were wholly devoted to their project, using technological instruments to record their elder's knowledge. Above all, they were convinced that the aggression towards their sacred lands, their spiritual and religious systems, and even their corporeal appareance must be confronted from multiple positions.

Portraying a community of thousands of members, in such short period it is not an easy task. I used three methods to collect data in Suba: first, participant observation: I participated in different activities, including various rituals, sometimes as merely an observer but most of the times as an active participant in the activity. Second, interviews: I conducted semi-structured and unstructured interviews with some members of the community, around 50 members of various ages. My first and more extended contact was with the youth members, which allowed the entrance to the *Cabildo* and which introduced me to other members of the community. Finally, I used audiovisual material; I took all the photographs used in this thesis and recorded both video and voice recordings to document the gatherings in the sacred sites and the interviews.

Chapter Outline

In chapter 1, I develop a brief historical summary of the Muisca history. Pointing out the long-standing re-categorization of the Muiscas as a Campesinos/*raizales* [peasants from a specific location] to understand the crucial implication of this categorization in history and consequently in their identity. In effect, I could affirm that the internalization of their identity in economic terms, as mere peasants, (rather than as indigenous persons with cultural value), was crucial in the project of invisibility perpetuated against this community for centuries. Finally, this issue allows understanding why their sacred lands lost cultural and spiritual value.

In chapter 2, I present how the process of re-indigenization of the Muisca is undertaken in two ways: the first, through the revitalization of their traditional practices and knowledge, and the second, through the process of ethnogenesis, a process of creation of ethnic culture. Hence, this community has faced the challenges of a system that has

misunderstood the reality of several communities, imposing on them exotic and non-existent imaginaries of what is indigeneity. Consequently, the display of indigeneity has become a conscious performance of identity in what I have highlighted as 'spaces of visibility.' In contrast with the long-standing invisibility to which the Muiscas have been reduced, I argue that the rituals have served as an identity mechanism in public spaces, such as central plazas or public parks. However, those rituals also have been essential instruments of communal cohesion in private places such as the urban orchard, which I present as well.

In chapter 3, I will develop the importance of bringing attention to the sacred places that are no longer under their ownership, in the reconstruction of their history. For many indigenous groups who have place-based epistemologies, sacred places are especially vital to recovering their collective memory. It is in these places that the human and the sacred find each other in an attempt to reconstruct an identity and to rewrite the historical memory of a community that disappeared from the social imaginary. Principally, this chapter aims to work on the phenomenology of place during the rituals in those sacred places. Additionally, how the narratives of their cosmogony in these places empowers the project of re-indigenization.

Finally, one of my most profound aims is to present an argument for abolishing the notion that indigeneity is a unique, pure, or static concept. Indeed, it is a social construction shaped by different power structures, (states, scholars, economic organizations, and so on) that determine what it is or what it is not. Following De la Cadena, "indigenism today is a process...the new indigenism seeks to undo hegemonic signifiers, affect their usual semantic chemistry to produce new valences, and thus reconfigure indigeneity itself

opening it up to the acknowledgment to historical contemporaneity and radical social justice" (De la Cadena 2007, 11). Since indigeneity itself is a process which involves this reconfiguration of various elements, the case of the Muiscas in particular poses significant challenges. Not only have they undertaken their process of ethnogenesis in an urban area, but further, the Muiscas are fighting to regain their cultural identity and traditional lifeways which have been suppressed from the social memory. This study seeks to decolonize, to some extent, the epistemological violence lived by the Muiscas, who have been removed from Colombian history.

Chapter 1.

Muiscas: A History of Disappearance and Re-Appearance

> The straw huts and the mud of the Chibchas[1] sank in the dust that the horses of the conquerors raised, with the same ease with which the memory of the men disappeared, and scarcely left traces in the names of the rivers, the lagoons, and the mountains. (Caballero in Gomez 2005, 321).

Introduction

In the case of Colombia, as in other Latin American countries, many indigenous communities had their identities diluted through the coercion exerted during early colonization; not only materially through political and economic power, but also ideologically by the Catholic Church which fought against the religious and cultural expressions of the natives. Hundreds of years of physical and cultural genocide led to new forms of identification for indigenous peoples as a way of coping with the violent scenario that many groups were facing during this early colonization period.

In the sixteenth century, in the case of the communities around Bacata, now known as Bogota, this period of early colonization could be understood from different perspectives. In fact, the conquest and colonization were processes differentiated by the nature of the communities with which the Spaniards encountered. Based on one of the interviews with one of the members of the community,

> In 1537, the conquerors arrived at Suba, and because they arrived in the Holy Week, they were being pacifist instead of coming aggressively to this territory. They [the Spaniards] had been in the Americas for some time before, so they knew a couple of things about the organization in the communities. In the case of the Muisca community of Suba, the Spaniards took advantage of the old local quarrels to take the control

[1] Another name to call the Muiscas, this name is related to the linguistic family.

> over these territories. The cacique was converted to Catholicism, being the first Catholic Muisca. Moreover, three after his baptism, he died. That was because he betrayed his beliefs, his community, and his identity.

In contrast with many accounts of the Conquest, the differences in the encounter with the Muisca community responded to the previous knowledge of the Europeans regarding the dynamics in the American territory among the indigenous people, and the local conflicts between the communities. Precisely, as the member affirms, the position of the *cacique* as an intermediary more than as an aggressive leader, allowed the easier incursion of the Spaniards in the Muisca territory. While in some regions such as Mexico, Peru or even the North of the Andes where the communities were more physically resistant to this exogenous action, the phenomenon in the Muiscas of Suba—based on these accounts—was different.

The settlement of the Europeans in the territory was successful and possible due to the dynamics between the *caciques* and the Spanish authorities. The indigenous elite saw in the European allies that will fight against other caciques, and the Spaniards used the leadership of the *cacique* institution to reaffirm their status within the community. This alliance was crucial to the process of settlement due to the local knowledge of the native *caciques*, they not only assisted the Europeans to establish their political and economic systems, but they made possible their survival in that territory providing them with information about food and health. However, in that process the Muisca *caciques* were adapting their culture easily to the colonial structures, being the first in converting to Catholicism and learning Spanish. Notwithstanding, the European support to the *caciques* and the constant close interaction with them were not well received by the community.

Instead, in less than a century the distinguished prestige and respect towards the *caciques* decreased to the point that the Spaniards did not need them to establish their control over the territory (Langebaek 2005, 35).

In the meantime, the religious authorities were ensuring their position within the community, showing how the community was resisting to the European imposition through the power of the attachment to their cultural and religious belief; the cultural assimilation of Spanish culture in the Muisca territory had an indigenous matrix that was hidden to ensure its survival. This cultural resistance was possible by the creative adaption of the religious system—rites, myths, sacred places and substances—to their new realities in colonial time,

> At the base of the social structure, among the indigenous people and mestizos, among the blacks, mulatos, and zambos, a dynamic of religious creativity was generated that, from its own symbolic linguistic universe, reinvents a religious expression to face its new situation. It seeks to account "in their own way" of the traumatic experience of domination and submission: a) to the colonial regime and economic exploitation of these "Christian" gentlemen, who committed all kinds of abuses with them, and b) to the various forms of which the Church sought (compulsively or persuasively) to baptize to incorporate them into colonial Christianity. The colonial company rearticulated the pre-existing social system. The set of social relations and material and symbolic production of the indigenous culture was profoundly modified, thus destroying not only in a direct way the beliefs, rites, and symbols but also its own base of support in the previous social system. Where the Spanish and Portuguese managed to impose their own system of domination, on the basis of the systematic occupation of land, the destruction of the old political system and the forced introduction of seigniorial relations and a productive regime oriented towards the markets of the metropolis, Colonial society entered a phase of transition to a totally foreign mode of production for indigenous society. (Parker 1993, 27).

These hybridizations and syncretism allowed to the Spaniards to establish their religious system. However, the natives, even in their marginalized position, also played an active role in transforming and adapting their traditional culture. Unfortunately, regardless all the symbolic resistance, the irreparable loss for their identity was, undoubtedly, the loss of territorial autonomy and ownership.

Unlike the British colonization, Spain was determined to strip the pre-Columbian civilizations of their wealth, for which it undertook an intensive exploitation of the existing populations, rapidly decimating the native population; this was contradictory, since it endangered the base of the seigniorial settlement in America, which was agricultural servitude (Zuleta, 1990). The backwardness of Spain conditioned the economic formation during the conquest and colony periods, that was reflected in a society attached to feudal institutions that did not let them progress. Only from the eighteenth century, when the Bourbons replaced the monarchs of the House of Austria—the Habsburgs— the reforms of these institutions allowed a stimulus to capitalist development, which resulted in important modifications to the structure of rural property and in the *resguardos*, as well as in the treatment of the indigenous population. (Machado 2009, 18).

With a new Spanish policy, the colonies began to be valued, not as a source of precious metals, but as important markets for Spanish manufactured goods and as suppliers of raw materials. The liberalization of trade culminates in 1768, when the obstacles that since Carlos V had become a constraint for freight traffic between the colonies were removed. In 1778 the last trade restrictions imposed by Habsburg policy were abolished, in the well-known "regulation for the free trade of Spain and the Indies." From that time

on, the process of decomposition of the *resguardos* began practically, as the paternalistic policy towards the indigenous people was modified. Their lands were redistributed according to the adult population and land was auctioned off. The dispossession began when several *resguardos* were concentrated in a single one, generally distant from the populated centers and on the land of lower quality (Liévano Aguirre in Machado 2009, 19). In fact, this process of dispossession begins when the land changes its social value in the face of the crisis that had been generated in Spain, from the wealth generated in the accumulation of metals to the production of wealth through labor, which makes the land in the physiocratic criterion. The encomienda would be one of those institutions that organize both the exploitation of the Indian and the land, which generates intense pressure on the indigenous *resguardos*. Finally, the dissolution of the *resguardos* during the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries marked the moment when the old communities, reconfigured within the institutions born of the colonial world, lost their autonomy and were integrated into the broadest categories defined in economic terms as peasants and semi-urban workers (Lopez 2005, 333).

From "Indio" Peasant to Urban Indigenous

"At some point, they began to look at us as peasants, but not because we wanted to, it was the conquest and all the changes that made us indigenous peasants. However, we always maintained customs, customs, and traditions of the Muisca culture." (Claudia Yopasa—Muisca woman—in BBC Mundo 2013).

In the centuries following the stages of colonization, in the Republican times, many of the native ethnic groups in Latin America, such as the Muiscas of Bogota, came to be labeled under the social categorization of peasants, thereby eliminating their cultural heritage from

the social imaginary. As Pallares affirms "*Campesino* [peasant] was the code for "Indian" in public discourse. The association of *campesino* with respect suggests one consequence of double consciousness—internalization of the negative stigma attached to indianess" (Pallares 2002, 161). For most of the indigenous communities in Colombia, the effects of this elimination of identity led to syncretic developments as well as the internalization of dominant cultures.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there was an international agenda to establish and develop "the nation-state" with the hope of a general homogenization of populations under one nation with no space for pluri-ethnic identities. Categories such as peasants and artisans were used to erase any cultural or spiritual communal cohesion, and consequently, all indigenous claims to land or other rights went unheard. This socio-political strategy which was employed to dominate indigenous identities by labeling them under another category can also be understood in economic terms, as Pallares states,

> Since the 1930s, the term campesino [peasant] has been used to refer to all people who cultivated small parcels of land. Although the term itself does not contain any obvious reference to ethnic or racial origin, on the coast it refers to people of mixed Indo-African-European descent, whereas in the highlands it refers primarily to people of indigenous descent. Since one's socioeconomic category was presumed to determine individual and collective identity, there was no distinction made between the peasant as a socioeconomic category and the construction of the peasant as a social or political identity. (Pallares 2002, 149).

While keeping their cultural heritage in the background, many of the indigenous communities and movements, which had the category of *campesino* imposed on them, effectively seized this identity and used it as a political and social platform to help make their struggles more visible. As it is stated in Velasco's (1979) work, "Indians were under

such cultural domination that they were incapable of mobilizing on the basis of ethnicity. Therefore, they could produce change only when struggling as a class (Velasco in Pallares 2002, 26). Despite the efforts undertaken to erase the cultural identity of these indigenous groups, they nevertheless united by class identity not only to resist further domination but also to regain political rights.

This process of stripping indigenous peoples and other groups of their identities and homogenizing them under the category of *campesino* was officially routinized throughout most of Latin America and became known as *mestizaje*, translated as miscegenation, from the Spanish word mestizo or mixed. In Colombia, this was a political task from the state aimed at eliminating the multiple origins and heritages in the nations and uniting the entire country under one agenda. The preclusion of specific policies addressed to the created classes was the purpose of this path, and the idea of "one state, one nation" was the battle between the racial identities; characteristically, indigenous peoples versus the national identity (as Colombians). Indigenous peoples in Colombia had their traditional ways of life wiped out not only by way of being categorized with the same label as any other citizen but also because their allotted position in society was included among other marginalized groups under the heading of *campesino*. *Mestizaje*, then, was an "an all-inclusive ideology of exclusion" (Stutzman in Chaves and Zambrano 2006, 7), and the result of this ideological mechanism of domination was a fusion, of racial and cultural identities that would inevitably later enable future resurgences of indigenous peoples.

This process of *mestizaje* is currently evident in the capital city of Colombia, Bogota, particularly in the legendary community which thrived before the arrival of the conquerors the Muiscas. Many of the citizens who culturally identify as Muiscas have

recently undertaken the project of reidentifying as indigenous peoples, however, they are situated in the capital city which poses unique challenges. This community for many of the Colombian inhabitants was a community made extinct first by centuries of an efficient process of colonization, followed by an ideological movement of mestizaje, and finally, by an aggressive process of urbanization of their towns,

> By the twentieth century then the republican model of unitary nation, conjugated with a company of erasure of the colonial past that would culminate in the removal of the bohios, in the burial of the rivers and of the visible urban indigenous imprint, already fulfilled several decades (Hettner in Zambrano 2008, 199).

The Re-Appearance of the Contemporary Muisca

The construction of political identities is the result of multiple factors, not only within the communities within which they are created but also from the external realities of these phenomena: “while political identity is constructed, it cannot be merely invented outside of a specific historical context” (Pallares 2002, 31). It is within this panorama, following Jackson and Warren (2005), and due to the international pressures of economic rulers such as the IMF and the World Bank, that Latin American countries adopted neoliberalism as the economic system that would allow this region to connect with the global idea of progress and development. In addition to this economic framework, the strategy of multiculturalism as a pluralistic social space for the democratic participation of the ethnic groups was determinant in the consolidation of ethnic-social movements in the continent. From monoracial liberalism to multicultural neoliberalism, this alliance was artfully permeated throughout Latin American nations under one discourse to different audiences, a discourse that ultimately became hegemonic, defeating alternatives that would have

afforded greater recognition to ethnic differences. Within this scenario, communities that before were affiliated to *campesino* (peasant) movements undertook the challenge of reidentifying under what they hid for centuries as a mechanism to survive,

> A new politicized Indio macro identity, departing not only from the peasant political identity formerly prevalent in the highlands but also from local identities that often constituted the sole basis for political mobilization in earlier periods. The regional and cross-regional identification and the creation of an imagined community among different groups is a distinctly modern phenomenon that is deeply linked to economic and political modernization (Pallares 2002, 4).

The reconstruction of historical memory in the era of global capitalism is the task of many ethnic communities. After trying to make one nation with one racial ideology, now the challenge is to rethink the nation as a complex concept supported by the ethnic and cultural differences that built the region of Latin America. Furthermore, to the extent that the political and social field to Indigeneity was not understood as a hassle but as a potential advantage.

With the new political constitution established in 1991 in Colombia, the spectrum for new identities was opened, and the recognition of Colombia as a pluri-ethnic nation was the response of an indigenous population larger than 1,200,000 people with around 87 communities (ACNUR n.d). The acknowledgment of this reality was necessary after centuries of domination and segregation. Even though this recognition was a tremendous political step forward, the violence exerted on these communities has continued, not only through political and economic power but also through scholarship.

Chapter 2.

The Struggle of Re-Becoming: The Identity Resurgence of the Muisca Community of Suba.

La identidad es como un espiral, va de afuera hacia adentro; adentro está el corazón y nosotros hasta ahora vamos caminando lo exterior y vamos hacia lo interno. El corazón es la fuerza motora del ser humano, cuando lleguemos a ese corazón podremos decir que somos muiscas. Podremos respetar el espacio, podremos generar nuestros modelos de vida sin necesidad de destruir el modelo de vida de la tierra.

[The identity is like a spiral, it goes from outside to inside; inside is the heart, inside is the heart and we are going to walk the outer and go towards the internal. The heart is the driving force of the human being; when we reach that heart, we can say that we are Muiscas. We can respect space; we can generate our life models without destroying the model of life on earth.]—Member of the Muisca community of Suba.

Introduction

During the last decades of the 20th Century, the resurgence of indigenous identities in Latin America has been a challenge not only for the State—which has felt the need to implement new policies to respond to these movements—but also for scholars, who have been shifting their lenses to look at indigeneity, its meanings, its manifestations, its epistemologies, and its struggles.

After over a century of nation building, Latin American states had to change the discourse and faced the new reality of several processes of revitalization or re-indigenization of different communities that under the label of other categories, almost always associated with labor, undertook the task of re-interpret themselves within an ethnic identity category.

Even though related to a historical past, these cultural phenomena also responded to global movements of recognition of a multiethnic reality over the globe. Platforms like the *Indigenous and Tribal Convention* in 1989 allowed these communities to establish a new path in their pursuit of political, cultural and economic rights. The analytical change towards the category of indigenous was established based on the criteria founded at this convention. As the official document recognizes, indigenous peoples were recognized under these terms:

> Tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations; peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions (International Labor Organization).

Additionally, the Convention stated the relevancy of the self-proclaimed communities to be considered into the framework of political, national, ethnic recognition, the "self-identification as indigenous or tribal shall be regarded as a fundamental criterion for determining the groups to which the provisions of this Convention apply" (International Labor Organization). For the Muiscas, and other communities in processes of re-indigenization, this criterion opened a space of political recognition necessary for their project.

As a matter of fact, as a state response to the possible uprising of these communities, there was a new political space, created for the consolidation of projects of re-indigenization, as Escobar quotes,

> There is a connection between the 1990s identities and the neoliberal state; however, the identities can be seen only in part as a result of the state. As the earlier model of a populist a racially homogenous project of nation-building entered into crisis, the state promoted the creation of new identities it was unable to control (Gros, Pardo, and Alvarez in Escobar 2008, 213).

The connection between the political changes in Latin American countries and these processes in the early 90s could be understood from the impact of the international pressures on Latin America agenda. This was one, if not the most, important reason for this shifting from *mestizaje* discourse to multiculturalism. Indeed, a wave of constitutional reforms took place in the continent, and as a model for the continent, Colombia established a new constitution in 1991. This new perspective stated the nature of the country as a pluri-ethnic nation, recognizing the diversity of cultural and ethnic groups, to manage this cultural diversity and to legislate the minority population. Furthermore, entitling these communities with differential rights such as: the recognition of the ethnic diversity and its protection,[2] the political recognition of communal ethnic lands,[3] the recognition of native languages or dialects as official languages in their territories,[4] ethno-differential

[2] Article 7-8, Colombian's Constitution of 1991.

[3] Article 63, Colombian's Constitution of 1991.

[4] Article 10, Colombian's Constitution of 1991, and developed in the Law 1381 of 2010 or *Ley de Lenguas* (Languages Law). This law regulates the recognition, the protection and the development of the linguistic individual and collective rights of the different ethnic groups in Colombia.

education,[5] the protection of the archaeological heritage and other cultural resources that shaped the national identity,[6] a particular political circumscription for ethnical candidates in the Chamber of Representatives,[7] the recognition to their own exercise of their jurisdictional functions within their communal ethnic territory,[8] and finally, the entitling of the self-governance of the ethnic territories based on their own political and organizational system, Further, they were encouraged to participate in the government decisions regarding the exploitation of natural resources within their territories.[9] This constitution's approach to ethnic acknowledgment was a model for other Latin-American constitutions reformations throughout the 1990's, and the early 2000's such as Peru (1993), Bolivia (1995), Ecuador (1998), Venezuela (1999), Brazil and Mexico (2001).

As might be expected, since this shift regarding the position of indigenous peoples was an external imposition over national policies, rather than an internal change in what indigeneity meant for the state, and for the nation's imaginary; we could interpret why there is not a genuine inner longing in the collective imaginary of the indigeneity in Colombia, which led to the current troubled politics of alterity within the Nation. It was an external, but not an internal desire to acknowledge the indigenous diversity in the nation. Notwithstanding, the relations displayed after the constitutional recognition among the

[5] Article 68, Colombian's Constitution of 1991, and developed in the national Decree 804 of 1995. This decree regulates the education for ethnic communities.

[6] Article 72, Colombian's Constitution of 1991.

[7] Article 176, Colombian's Constitution of 1991.

[8] Article 246, Colombian's Constitution of 1991.

[9] Article 330, Colombian's Constitution of 1991 and developed in the national Decree 1320 of 1998, and 982 of 1999.

nation, whether between the indigenous communities and the political authorities or between the communities with the non-indigenous citizens, have been decisive for the natives.

Indigeneity a fixed category for non-contemporary indigenous

What is an indigenous community? Is there a shared agenda by all these communities that are categorized as indigenous? These are some of the questions that have accompanied me during the development of this study. It has been difficult to state a response due to the challenge that has been for the scholarship to analyze the concept of indigeneity.

Defining indigeneity has been a long work of significant amount of academics who have undertaken the work of establishing an analytical category that permeates multiple groups of communities around the world. This concept seeks to comprehend and legitimize the idea of shared identity based on an assumption of cultural continuity. Essentially, indigeneity has become a generic, indiscriminate, ambiguous concept used by international organizations, governments, and scholarship, and for this reason, it is deeply politized. Being generic sustains the idea of unique indigenous identity, homogeneous, static and of course imprecise, and ineffective; this is a consequence of the long-standing objective of describing the “Other” from colonial and ethnocentric analytical terms. The category of the indigenous is reproduced based on past imaginaries supported on equally backward categories of analysis.

In this respect, the construction of the indigenous “Other” has been assigned to them based on generalized presumptions that have served to legitimize the mere existence of indigenous peoples, even the validity of the claim of their rights (Friedman 2008). As a

consequence of this imposed construction over the communities, the reproduction of this imaginary has been constituted as a political tool by these groups. The performance of what is expected as indigenous to fulfill certain requirements imposed by the State, is used within communities where their day-to-day lives are closer to "modernity" than to that exotic indigenous. This agenda is displayed in their discourses to political authorities, many times also addressed to anthropologists and academic researchers, with the purpose of gaining access to the ethnic rights within the frame of the multicultural policies of differentiation. In this regard, scholarship has served not only in the production of knowledge but the foundation for ethnic policies,

> The unquestioned right to know in terms of one's disciplinary concepts and methods is at the foundation of the cognitive authority of scientist and other professionals. It places them in the local sites of laboratory and field, not as participants but as "judging observers" who are themselves to be unjudged. The outcomes of their work extend beyond the boundaries of their disciplines, professions, and institutions. This is because the institutions in which professionals make and transmit knowledge are instruments of governance. In the broadest sense, the double participation of scientist and other researchers is a participation in the local activity as hidden agents of governance. Except in special circumstances, whether any particular professional wills it or not, the participation is in support of the existing social, political, and economic orders—loyalty to these things are embedded in the institutional folk concepts of profession and university. (Addelson in Valladolid and Apffel-Marglin 2001, 644).

Hence, these discourses, characterized by the traditionalist approaches of their project, are the product of the social and historical conjunction always addressed to the power structures (Lopez 2005; Escobar 2008), as one of the members of the Muisca community states:

> The anthropologist has come so many times with the same questions, forgetting our particularities, so the community already has a pre-

> established discourse. The scholar misses the chance to know the community outside his/her old structure of the study. That is why we also play our cultural performance. Now we know how to generate identity, we know that we need particular kind of things, revitalize and spread our language, revive specific clothing practices, and so on.

In this pursuit of their rights, the indigenous communities have politicized their lives. Further, this strategy has also reaffirmed the historical stereotypes on indigeneity. Forgetting the importance of a careful look at the particular differentiation of each community; even among their own Muisca identity, as one of the members affirms, there is not a homogeneous idea of a Muisca identity. In this sense, essentialist approaches that conceive identity as an unchanged element have exerted structural violence that perpetuates robust hierarchy systems, and indeed, under this inadequate academic framework, along with the popular imagination, these communities are self-essentializing their identity to response the demands from the state and the citizens.

In this process of rediscovering their roots, the Muiscas are going through a path of self-reinterpreting their place in the history, in the collective memory, as Escobar states,

> Identity in this view is a complex form of self-understanding improvised from the cultural resources at hand in a historical background. Their focus is on the intersection of person and society, the individual and the collective, and on how power and culture are negotiated at this intersection to produce particular identities in ways that evince the structured as well as the agential dimension of the process. (Escobar 2008, 217).

Regardless of their particular conditions of life, both historical and current, all these communities have been defined in a reduced form that nationalizes the indigenous cultural identity analytically and invisibilizes the historical processes in which it develops (Jackson

and Warren 2005). Tradition has been imposed through the multicultural laws as the unique valid path to be indigenous, under the form of identity diacritics demanded by the different governmental institutions. The indigenous have become themselves with the definitions, the discourses and the identity constructions that lay on them; reading them, constructing them, subverting them and re-configuring them. Their identity could be performed as rigid as the outsiders require, but despite this reality, as Wilson states, identity is "an incredibly slippery notion" ... Identity is better seen as a paradox rather than a statement, he says, for as soon as such a statement is made, it blurs and dissolves (Wilson in Jackson and Warren 2005).

The construction of ethnic alterity in an urban environment

As stated above, there is a substantial connection between identity and the political system in Colombia; either to deny the reality of different ethnic identities, as it was the case of the *mestizaje* process to reaffirm and open the space for them. Unfortunately, these continuously change in the position of these communities in the society left profound consequences in the national imaginary of what ethnicity means for the state, scholarship and citizens. Indeed, these consequences have determined the nature and the complexity of the relationships between the groups and the rest of the nation, relations that have not been significantly positive.

In Bogota, the case of the Muisca re-identification process has been framed in a state of historical discontinuity that broke the cultural identification of the community for centuries. This void in their recognition as indigenous affect their identification as an ethnic community, as well as the way in the entire nation perceived the Muisca community. On

the one hand, the external perception of the community was the result of the politics of invisibilization during the 19th and 20th centuries, and on the other hand, that perception determined the current situation of marginalization of the re-indigenization process of this community in the city, regardless the current political framework. As Pallares affirms, the shared inadequate indigenous imaginary, along with a long-standing marginalization of these communities, do not allow a natural incursion of these ethnic movements to the political and social field; however, “indigenous forms of activism that may appear to reflect a false consciousness are instead the outcome of the consciousness formation process of communities that have been racially subordinate” (Pallares 2002, 32).

Notwithstanding the newly opened space for the ethnic recognition of indigenous communities, the main problem that Muiscas face is the lack of credibility in their project. As I have stated above, there is a gap in their history that has allowed this marginalization, but their current problem is the struggle between the Muiscas and structures such as the state and the scholarship which, through the exertion of structural violence, have determined what fits in the category of indigenous in Colombia. As it is the case of the political district recognition of indigenous groups in Bogota, with the Decree 543 of 2011, the district states what will be categorized as indigenous community, “a group or set of families of Amerindian ascendency, that have consciousness of that and share values, features, usages, customs of their culture, ways of government, management, and social control or, their own normative systems distinguished from other communities” (Concejo de Bogota).

Hence, even though the restricted and generic category where all the communities are cataloged, there is a particular element that I would highlight in light of the case study of this thesis; this element is the state of consciousness in the project of rebecoming an indigenous community. As it is stated in the district definition, these groups have a consciousness of sharing elements constitutive of their realities, and in the case of the Muisca community of Suba, this collective consciousness of their project is fundamental.

Re-becoming Muiscas: the re-indigenization process of the traditional inhabitants of Suba.

In the late decades of the twentieth century, a group of families, traditional inhabitants of the territory of Suba undertook the project of re-identify themselves as an indigenous community, not as descendants of the "extinct and forgotten" Muiscas, but as contemporary Muiscas of Suba. This affirmation is shared by the community to leave behind those false and exotic ideas of their heritage; the Muisca ethnicity "has been reified as well as encumbered with multiple subtexts. The most popular of these has been the illusion that casts present-day ethnic groups as residual fossils of a pristine, pre-Columbian past" (Corr and Powers 2012). On the contrary of those pre-Columbian identities, this community in its process of re-indigenization has struggled between the reality in their inner dynamic and the external doubts about the possibility of being urban and indigenous (Lopez 2005, 336). In words of one of the women members: "yes, we are indigenous people wearing jeans and using cell phones; we do not need to disguise ourselves to please the government and the other citizens."

In the process of re-constructing their identity, the Muiscas developed a new sense of self-awareness in taking the constitution of their identity into their own hands. This process of rebecoming process of Muiscas has been nourished by two processes, wholly embedded, that have allowed the current success in their project; through the revitalization of their traditional practices and knowledge, and through a process of ethnogenesis. These consciousness-altering practices of self-constitution are the result of multiple relations with the "outsiders," multiple attempts to reposition themselves as a recognized ethnic community, and even, the multiple inner questions of their own identity. All these interactions ruled by power structures are the frame for the re-indigenization process and their new understanding of their identity; as Escobar quoted Foucault,

> "the production of subjects through discourses and practices [are] linked to the exercise of power—practices through which the subject is objectified in various ways, for instance through mechanisms of discipline and normalization [in this case by different institutions and citizens], as much as practices of subjectification that the subject performs on himself or herself. For some, a theory of identity cannot be complete without an account of subject's active self-constitution." (Escobar 2008, 205).

On the one hand, as a vital part of this process, the members of the community are revitalizing the collective memory through the interpretations of the oral tradition within the community, along with the study of academic and archeological data. From my perspective, the work of the youth members has been vital in this part; they have been taking advantage of the technological resources[10] to rescue the traditional knowledge of the elders of the community. Additionally, most of the leaders of the community have been

[10] Among these resources are cameras, voice recorders, high quality microphones that were provided by the district government.

developing their research on data from Colonial times and archeological material to determine the legal ownership of the territories of Suba, finding as well myriad information regarding the cultural tradition of their ancestors. These members are continuously and consciously engaged in work of "inventory, experimentation, reconstruction, and fluidity of information, creating non-everyday bridges of the word among extended families, between paths, with raizales of other towns" (Carrillo 1997).

The research on these documents allowed the community to establish the real belonging of the traditional families to the *Cabildo,* furthermore to reaffirm the collective bond between the families that have suffered the same violent events throughout their history (Carrillo 1997). This recognition of the ethnic character of the last names[11] of the families has been vital in this process to recognize that there is territorial continuation of the Muisca community,

> We have an Amerindian ancestry easily verifiable not only from the large number of existing historical testimonies, many of which date from the mid-nineteenth century, about the *resguardos* and the community, but because through the surnames that are currently valid—Bulla, Bajonero, Cabiativa, Piracún, Nivia, Niviayo, Yopasá, Caita, Cuenca, Mususú, Neuquén, Chízaba, Chipo, Caipa, Quinche, Cera, Landecho, Lorenzano, Rico, Ospina, Córdoba, Triviño, Torres and others of Spanish and European ancestry that are in the process of legitimization within the community—the offspring of the original owners of the Resguardos dissolved at the end of the 19th century (Cabildo Indígena Muisca de Suba).

[11] "The members of our indigenous community are who by paternal line-first surname-or by maternal route-second surname-had a clearly Muisca or Castilian surname that appeared in the registers of the late nineteenth century. It should be noted that the number of people who today have both surnames per paternal line and maternal line is significant" (Mususu in Lopez 2005, 340).

This sense of belonging verified through the study of these historical documents not only has meant a legitimate claiming of their ethnic rights, but also the accurate recognition of shared “hidden” history. Hence, a communal sense of differentiation with the new inhabitants of the post-urbanized Suba has been strengthened.

Additionally, this process of re-indigenization has used these historical findings along with the traditional knowledge to develop several microprocesses that will be studied throughout this work; the revitalization of the myths during the private and public gatherings, the use of their native language for the symbolic re-appropriation of the territory, or even its use in daily practices; the resignification of the *chicha* as a powerful, and sacred symbol of identity, the harvest of their traditional plants as source of food sovereignty, as well as other practices that they have found significantly essential to reconstruct their identity.

Likewise, this process has been characterized as a process of ethnogenesis. Ethnogenesis processes could be understood as paths of the creation of a culture within processes of the revitalization of identities. In the case of the Muisca community, it could be interpreted by Jonathan Hill’s conceptualization, as “a concept encompassing people’s simultaneously cultural and political struggles to create enduring identities in general contexts of radical change and discontinuity” (Hill 1996, 1). This process is the result of the historical gap lived by the Muisca community and their inner need to [re]create their identity. As evidence, during the time I shared with this community, I could interpret how some of the practices carried out by the community did not respond to the historical documentation, but by a conscious process of creation of identity.

Hence, this analytical framework of ethnogenesis allows a better understanding of the ongoing process of culture, even in ethnic communities. In the case of the Muisca community, since the first contacts with the conquerors to current times, the constant interactions with outsiders have determined continuious change in their traditional practices, "however the concept of ethnogenesis is deployed, the symbolic criterion of contrast—one language, appearance, or culture as distinct from another—is a key feature." (Corr and Powers 2012). Therefore, this symbolism is created and recreate several times to satisfy the external judgment on the indigenous diacritic markers (Lopez 2005); as one member of the community told me: "in the 90's was the first approach to their first traditional custom, and since then we have created about four more, for women and men; however, when we are in different gatherings with other communities they make fun of us, there is intercultural discrimination. However, we understand that this is part of our process, to become visible."

Since the state's recognition of the political organization of Muiscas, as the first urban indigenous cabildo in the country in 1991, this community has faced innumerable aggressions against their process of revitalization. Identity has become a task, instead of a static and pure inheritance, and the Muiscas as an explicit contestation have responded with numerous performances not only in the private sphere but also in the public space. This has made the latter the most important in the pursuit of cultural and political visibility. This research suggests that, public celebrations have become the space to face the doubts of real indigeneity to the state, scholarship, and in general to the citizen that imposes the unchangeable idea of Indigenous on this contemporary urban community.

Corn and Quinoa Festival and Solstice celebration

Within the framework of the solstice celebration, the Muisca community of Suba holds the Corn and Quinoa festival. As a public event, I could take part as participant observer in the rituals, the games, and the different performances that took place on that occasion. As a harvest celebration, this community organized along with the local mayor's office a day-long festival to show their strong bond with the territory, using the corn and quinoa as symbols of their nature as indigenous people attached to the land. On the one hand, this celebration was one of those 'spaces of visibility' needed to create a sense of alterity with other citizens inhabitants of Suba, inasmuch as "ethnic, or indeed any form of, identity has thus to be viewed as the temporary result of an ongoing process of mutual definition, as such necessarily involving a plurality of perspectives" (Jenkins and Sax in Kopping, et al. 2006, 12); but it was also an essential space for re-strengthening a sense of community that the leaders of the project of re-indigenization are looking for. Finally, these spaces are challenging through visibility the popular stigma as an extinct community that the Muiscas have remained for centuries. Indeed, this celebration was a festival to thank Mother Earth, but it was also a festival to remember that before they were peasants, they were proudly Muiscas.

During the ceremony, as in all the meetings whether private or public, a ritual of harmonization took place. It started with the gathering of all the participants in a circle. Both members of the community and outsiders, such as me, joined the public celebration. Then the salutation to the four of the cardinal directions—which are related to sacred places located in those directions—and to the ground, greeting the Mother Earth. This salutation is performed facing those directions, raising the hands to the sound of the conch shell that

is played by one of the leaders and the counting of the three first numbers in muysccubun[12]—*ata, boza, mica* [one, two, three]—. The silence during this salutation allows perceiving the deep respect towards the significance of the ritual.

Afterward, one of the male elders, an *Abuelo* [a grandfather] of the community with the assistance of an elder woman prepare a substance with different plants and water that was used to perform the *limpia* or cleansing to all the participants in the circle (See Figure 1). Regardless of the origin of the participant, whether Muisca or non-native, the *Abuelo* went over the entire circle dabbling each of us with the plants. Throughout his path, the *Abuelo* was reciting different prayers that were difficult to hear due to the noise made by the other Muiscas. Meanwhile, he was performing the *limpia*; all the community started the celebration, dancing, drumming, singing, and playing different traditional musical instruments. The community was proud of their cultural and spiritual roots, and it was evident their happiness being able to show this to the entire town.

[12] Native Muisca language, "la lengua de la gente" [the language of people].

Figure 1. The Abuelo is performing the limpia to the participant in the circle. In the back, the Catholic Church.

Beyond the pride that showed in their discourses, this performative act or ritual was done in conjunction of their thoughts, the spoken word and the embodiment of these thoughts. As Bell conceptualizes it “ritual [is] a type of functional, structural mechanism to reintegrate the thought-action dichotomy, which may appear in the guise of a distinction between belief and behavior or any number of other homologous pairs.” (Bell 1992, 20). Rituals become the instrument to manifest their beliefs in corporeal actions.

The location of this event was crucial for the visibility of it. The ceremony took place in what it used to be the central plaza of the town, where the political and religious buildings were located; the local mayor’s office and the Catholic church of the town have been situated in this space for centuries. The symbolism of the spatial location where the

ceremony would take place would constitute a strategy of rooted social body ritualization (Bell 1992, 93), in a communal-ownership land.

The locality of the annual celebration would determine the effectiveness of the performative act, as Judith Butler affirms, there is a connection between the space and disposition of bodies for being in public performances,

> "when bodies assemble on the street, the square, or in other forms of public space…they are exercising a plural and performative right to appear, one that asserts and instates the body in the midst of the political field, and which in its expressive and signifying function, delivers a bodily demand for a more livable set of economic, social, and political conditions no longer afflicted by induced forms of precarity" (Butler in Postero 2017, 18).

This public claiming resonates with the locality of the *Cabildo* office which is also situated in this plaza, recognizing the exceptional importance of this place not only for the indigenous but also for the citizens of Suba. Therefore, the Muiscas along with the local mayor's administration decided to organize these activities in this place. The plaza that has been a remarkable place for the Muisca identity, within the shift to the modernization era suffered by the Suba *pueblo* [town], which "represent[ed] an intermediary space- not necessarily a place of transition between rural and urban life but a permanent in-between. [Since] *pueblos* are the symbolic and ceremonial center of the rural highlands" (Pachano in Pallares 2002, 61). Therefore, this symbolism is what the Muiscas wanted to challenge and revitalize showing the significant connection between ritual performances and the creation of identity (Kopping et al. 2006, 17).

Surprisingly, during the *limpia*, a funeral was taking place in the Catholic Church, and many of the people who were attending the funeral approached the circle were the

Abuelo was performing the *limpia*, some of them curious, but most of them outraged with the ritual. The confrontation between the Catholic believers and the Muiscas started when some of the Catholics started yelling at everyone: *váyanse de aquí partida de marihuaneros! ¡Brujos! ¡Drogadictos! ¡Solo hay un Dios!* [get out from here, you bunch of marihuaneros! Sorcerers! Drug addicts! There is only one God!]. In this case, one of the stigmas associated with the indigenous imaginary has been the consumption of illegal substances, as Goffman states the "reference to a deeply discrediting attribute" (Goffman 2006, 13) enables non-indigenous Colombians to disparage the entire process of re-indigenization, marginalizing the community even more.

As the conciliatory response from the indigenous participants, they kept performing their dances. Meanwhile, the *Abuelo* was finishing the *limpia* for all the participants; they completely ignored the aggression from the Catholics. Nevertheless, discontent was evident in some of the participants; and for others, I could perceive in their expressions that the remains of a distressed past were still rooted. Despite the expected pacific confrontations, the cleansing was the beginning of several activities of the festival.

This festival was a celebration of what means to be a Muisca for the native inhabitants of Suba. Around the plaza were located many stations with vendors, all of them from the community, with products from their garden and pottery with Muisca symbology.

While the celebration was taking place, in the center of the circle, there was a setting with different elements: among them were rain-sticks, candles, conch shells, drums, tobacco, corn, and *chicha* [fermented beverage made with corn or fruits], Andean panpipes, drums, and different plants (See Figure 2). Around these elements there were located

around 15 tree trunks that were used for sitting by several members of the Muisca community and other indigenous communities, such as the Yanakunas; Most of the participants in the circle were men. They started sharing the *chicha*, which was made by one member of the community, also tobacco and coca leaves.

Figure 2. The setting of sacred elements.

In the circle where these elements were shared, the *chicha* was given first to an old woman of the community. She was wearing the traditional costume, and even though she was in a wheelchair, she was enjoying all the rituals, dancing while sitting to the rhythm of the different traditional instruments (See Figure 3). She was embodying the ritual, more than a mere conscious performance, this elder was displaying the materialization of the connection between bodies and rituals, as Bell explains, the ultimate purpose of rituals is to re-establish this sense in bodies,

> The end of ritualization—that which it does not see itself doing—can be said to be the production of a 'ritualized body.' A ritualized body is a body invested with a 'sense' of ritual…This 'sense' is not a matter of self-conscious knowledge of any explicit rules of ritual but an implicit "cultivated disposition." (Bell 1992, 98).

Figure 3. Moment when the community was sharing *chicha;* in the right-bottom appears the elder in the wheelchair.

This elder incarnated all the Muisca symbolism, and furthermore, she was a woman. Women within the community have been crucial in this process, as Escobar states, there is a vital "role in the re-creation of culture, including religion and healing practices; and women's protagonism in social organization, particularly the family and the extended kinship. (Escobar 2008, 236). Moreover, in this case, women for the Muiscas have signified the silent and almost imperceptible resistance to the complete extinction of the identity.

In contrast to the other activities that were performed along with the outsiders, the *chicha* was the only substance that was shared with the participants, even with those from outside the community. I could interpret this action as part of the Muisca need to re-position

the *chicha* as an element of their identity framed in a positive environment; to start breaking down the stigmas carried out by the community for centuries. As Gomez affirms,

> This element is also part of what the Muiscas call the re-signification of the territory. With this, they hope that, in the midst of modernity, sacred geography could be recognized amid the instrumental use of the rural and urban land of the *Cundiboyancense* Highlands. The *chicha*, by representing the energy of the "mother" is the matrix that contains the Muisca memory that, from the present, gives a meaning to the past that, as we saw, was marked by constant transitions that reconfigured space, social networks, the economic and moral systems of the Muisca with the imposition of colonial administrative models is the product of a dynamic process and that their status transformations did not start with the arrival of the Spanish, but with the formation of corn societies. (Gomez 2013, 158).

Throughout the afternoon, different activities were performed, all of them praising the Muisca identity; playing *tejo,*[13] drinking *chicha*, dancing traditional Andean genres, eating *arepas* and quinoa *dulce de leche.*[14] This celebration was a performance of direct disposition of showing their indigeneity for those who still consider that the Muiscas were extinct. Indeed, the display of different ethnic-elements in public has been a current practice of the Muisca community to be recognized not only by the political authorities but by the social imaginary to reconstruct the historical memory. Therefore, these practices of ritualization, as Catherine Bell suggests, could be interpreted as conscious strategies within this particular situation of public contestation,

> Practice is situational and strategic, people engage in ritualization as a practical way of dealing with some specific circumstances. Ritual is never simply or solely a matter of routine, habit, or "the dead weight of tradition. Indeed, routinization and habitualization may be strategies in

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[13] Traditional Muisca sport which has become national traditional sport.

[14] Latin American dessert.

> certain cultural situations, but so might the infrequent yet periodic reproduction of a complex ritual tradition. (Bell 1992, 92).

In addition to the aforementioned, the de-territorialization suffered by this community since colonization times had yielded to different ritual practices of appropriation of the territory. In the Muisca project, not only the public spaces but also the private spaces are recovering meaning. In one of the gatherings where the community was discussing regarding the new health insurance that could benefit them, I met one of the spiritual leaders of the Muiscas. Since the first moment we met, the *tanyquy* [spiritual leader] was willing to help me. With certain precautions regarding my research interests, he shared some coca leaves to chew, and we started a short conversation when he invited me to go to their community garden.

The Urban Muisca Orchard

This private space, full of community memories, was opened for me. The community orchard localized in the Salitre neighborhood is a space owned but shared by one of the members of the *Cabildo*. Doña Rosa[15] is the owner of the house where the orchard is located; the place, in the middle of an urban neighborhood, is a lot with a house, a parking lot, and the orchard (See Figure 4).

I arrived at the orchard with the spiritual leader, early in the morning, he introduced me to Doña Rosa and immediately started with a ritual of harmonization. The *tanyquy* set the incense around the central space in the orchard, positioning the sticks in the four cardinal directions, meanwhile Doña Rosa lit the wood fire. During the entire visit, and almost in every moment that I shared with the community, the *tanyquy* was willing to talk

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[15] The name has been changed by the author.

and explain to me elements of the rituals. As he explained to me, as a representation of the wisdom within the community, the women are in charge in each of the rituals to light the fire, especially in the orchard. The fire was set to cook throughout the day, and the first meal shared is a tea of *panela* [unrefined whole cane sugar], marihuana and fennel. Doña Rosa, the *tanyquy* and I were sitting, sharing the meal and chewing coca leaves, meeting each other. The story of Doña Rosa became for me the manifestation of the really crucial role of women within the community, as evidence, Doña Rosa is a contribution to "food security, biodiversity conservation, and territorial appropriation" (Escobar 2008, 236).

This orchard, which more than a private space, has become one of the few places where the community encounters several elements missing in their project. It is a place where they develop their spiritual rituals, a place where they use to produce several foods (25 different plant species, such as spinach, quinoa, chard, among others), and also a place to make a sense community, to strengthen the community bonds needed in this revitalization project. For instance, the activity of cleaning and picking up the crops in the orchard is usually made on weekends, when the community meet up to help, to share the food, to talk, and to knit.

Figure 4. Left, orchard view from outside the property. Right, inside the orchard.

During this visit, without any announcement, the *tanyquy* took me to the orchard. He started talking, and just asked me if I had any medical condition, he took my hands and started hitting me with a bunch of stinging nettles, whilst he was making prayers, welcoming me into the community, and wishing me "un buen caminar en la vida" [a pleasant walk in my life]. Being hit with stinging nettle is a traditional activity among the Muiscas due to its medicinal properties, and furthermore, this activity has been used as an entrance door for outsiders that are willing to know about the community, as it is the case of researchers. In fact, the perception towards me, not only by the spiritual leader but by the orchard owner, changed after this ritual. They gave me the opportunity to know more about them and their personal stories. Doña Rosa, who was a little hesitant in the beginning, began to share their legal struggles with her lot and her battles not only with the legal authorities but with her neighbors. Her struggles with the ownership of this place, her resistance to falling in the modernity and capitalist project of urbanizing the territory as her

neighbors have done, and her selfless devotion to this process, showed me the vital role that she has developed within the community. Her role model has inspired many women strengthening the social fabric and the attachment to the Muisca territory,

> Women are seen as a stronger referent of belonging to place…men thus effect different but equally important appropriations of use spaces…Women are seen as consolidating it through socialization processes and the construction of identities through a panoply of practices of food, healing, and production. When these practices are disrupted, the links to territory start to weaken. (Escobar 2008, 61).

After the performance of the initiation ritual, I could acknowledge the importance of the respect towards the spirit of the plants, and I was allowed to clean the crops along with them. Finally, we cut some marihuana buds to make their traditional lotion. Defoliating and macerating the marihuana became a process of spiritual and physical interconnection with the plant and the Mother Earth, it became a moment of trust and respect towards the community. They allowed me to participate in an activity that has been performed to use marihuana for medicinal purposes, and the possibility of knowing the way they produce this lotion made with Vaseline and chamomile.

In this respect, the use of substances such as coca leaves and marihuana within the community has been a double-edged sword. Undoubtedly, the use of these plants is a contestation against the stigmatization of these substances by the state and the religious authorities, and a symbol of identity, a symbol of the unbroken relationship between indigeneity and the Mother Earth. However, unfortunately, the consumption of these substances within the community is still considered as a marginalized practice; and the long-standing impact of Catholicism on the members of the community, along with the public stigma of these substances have led a fundamental challenge between the use by

some members, and the cautioning by others. As Gomez illustrates, stigmatized substances such as the *chicha*, marihuana and coca leaves have suffered the religious battles between the Christianity and the traditional usage of them,

> The demonization consisted of a constellation of social representations that linked *chicha* with idolatry and demon worship. Precisely, every conflict with drunkenness was condemned morally by the accuser of Indians because these were an indicator that some were still practicing their old religion, going against the good morals of Catholic Christianity. (Gomez 2013, 148).

The gatherings at the orchard have become a private space for the resurgence of the Muisca community, and in the words of one of the members: "the consumption of these substances allows the ceremonial concentration, the strengthening of loyalty within the community and even, collective decision-making." (See Figure 5). In this respect, in these gatherings both of the processes to re-indigenize the community take place; on the one hand, the revitalization of traditional harvesting, their relationship with the crops, the collective work, the consumption and sharing of *chicha*. On the other hand, the process of ethnogenesis with the usage of new substances such as marihuana, resistance in an urban environment, and of course, the conscious identity creativity that emerges from these gatherings.

Figure 5. Members of the community, and one Yanakuna, smoking tobacco and chewing coca leaves. In the back, other members are dancing and sharing chicha.

Conclusion

Identity has become a task instead of a reality for the Muisca community of Suba. In their path of reconciliation with history, this community has undertaken the challenge to re-interpret their traditional practices not only for a self-understanding of their identity but also for an external exaggerated indigenous performance. These performances respond to the power relations between scholars, government, citizens and the community; relations that have been constructed under socio-cultural categories that no longer expose the realities of the indigenous communities.

Throughout this chapter, I have shown how those fixed cultural categories of what indigeneity means are ineffective, ambiguous, and even conflictive. As Lopez asserts,

“social identities [such as indigeneity] do not constitute fixed and irremovable essential categories, they are cultural elaborations that are constructed in the midst of processes of conflict and struggle and that, therefore, are subject to constant reconfigurations.” (Lopez 2005, 335). Notwithstanding, these long-standing categories are still reproduced in the political frameworks addressed to ethnic groups, and furthermore, are present in the social imaginary of the indigeneity.

Consequently, some indigenous communities such as the Muiscas reconstruct their identity consciously whether the revitalization of traditional ways or the creation of new meanings as it is the phenomenon called ethnogenesis. Whichever the path, the re-indigenization of the Muisca community has evidenced the resistance to oblivion and extinction; in words of Carrillo,

> The conscious reconstruction of their lost links is also a form of "strategic" resistance. Thus, societies that conceive the present as accumulated space and time, also have a historical experience accumulated conscious as unconscious (not only structural immutable) that governs the strategies of resistance, among which we highlight the restructuring of myths to achieve explanations of the past in the present (Carrillo 1997).

Finally, within this process, as a strategic instrument, this community has used its performative acts as resistance mechanisms and spiritual empowerment. Rituals became ‘spaces of visibility,’ spaces of symbolic contestation to centuries of physical, social and cultural oppression, and furthermore, spaces of identity and territorial re-appropriation. These rituals could be interpreted in multiple ways, but within a spiritual environment, myriad silent battles are taking place. Inevitably, these performances have purposes as Taylor affirms,

> Performances function as "vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity" through reiterated behaviors. "Embodied practice offers a way of knowing" … While there are many sorts of performance in the public sphere, [there is a special interest focusing on theatrically and spectacle], where actors draw from the ephemeral repertoire of embodied practices and knowledge such as spoken language, dance, and ritual. (Taylor in Postero 2017, 18).

In this endeavor, the Muiscas are using these spaces to re-construct their identity along with the transferring of indigenous knowledge to the youngest generations involved in this project.

Chapter 3.

Ritual and Sacred Places: The Symbolic Claiming of Places Over Spaces

Amisquanan, chiquyca fihistana hac chimucanynga.
[Walking, we know our territory]—Member of the Muisca community of Suba.

Introduction

Contemporary social processes of reidentification with traditional ways of life for indigenous communities are complex and prolonged paths which present trying yet essential challenges. These include not only a reconstruction of identity and a reinterpretation of established history but also a coming to terms with the modern-day realities of nations. These processes of reidentification do not come from anywhere—like any human phenomenon; reidentification projects are the result of different social and political factors—colonization, cultural degradation, loss of land, and so forth—that have coalesced and created the impetus for many indigenous communities to strive for a re-indigenization of their identities.

Latin America has been a region that has seen multiple phases of political and economic domination since colonization in the sixteenth century to the more contemporary effects of capitalism and globalization. Under this context, the dynamics of cultural identification has suffered the effects of these constant conflicts between the established power structures and the different native groups in a given region. Even after the physical colonial presence was eradicated, other dynamics of domination and segregation of native communities have remained, taking on new forms, but always relegating the indigenous groups to marginalized sectors within Latin American societies at large. These residual dynamics of domination can be addressed through multiple ways of understanding

violence, but here I would like to focus on how dominant power exerts violence through aggressions against territory and its relationship with indigenous peoples.

For the Muiscas, the process of re-indigenization is complex insofar as by losing their rights to land; they also face epistemological violence exerted towards them which prevents them from regaining traditional ways of knowing. Being obliterated as an ethnic community led to a communal internalization of a different reality; on the one hand, they belonged to an indigenous community, but on the other hand, this community was utterly assaulted and erased from the social imaginary. As a result, their practices, their beliefs, their identity shifted over time and must be understood as "continuous, dynamic processes characterized by tensions and contradictions as well as continuities (Pallares 2002, 34).

At present, in their project of revitalization of their ethnic identity, and as a response to their historical reality, the process of ethnogenesis for the Muiscas has been "a creative adaptation to a general history of violent changes including…forced relocations…imposed during the historical expansion of colonial and national states in the Americas." (Hill 1996, 1). For the Muiscas, the revitalization of their indigenous identity has involved a reinterpretation of traditional practices and a creation of different ethnic practices; both of which constitute a means of coping with the violence from the past and the present. Most importantly, however, is that this process of re-identification for the Muiscas displays an inner conscious desire to differentiate themselves from those who have seen them in a lower racial and social category. As Hanchard states,

> Collective formation—the interpretation, response, and creation of collective actors whose lives are deeply shaped by macrostructural factors—involves a group's awareness of a specific antagonism or

> difference vis-à-vis another group that may lead to political struggle. Specifically, racial consciousness stems from specific antagonisms between two groups that have been racialized and from the individual and collective recognition of power relations between two groups (Hanchard in Pallares 2002, 31).

The Muiscas' struggles posed by re-indigenization have culminated in the town of Suba which has been crucial in their struggle for regaining their traditional lifeways and political rights. Being a community that is native to the region where Suba is located has shaped the Muiscas epistemologies, their identity, and their history. Therefore, to understand the different dynamics lived in this complex scenario, one must first grapple with concepts of space, place, and territoriality that are used to differentiate the perspectives between the inhabitants of this town which are the Muiscas and the state authorities.

Space versus Place: The Muisca Epistemology on Their Ancestral Land

Like many indigenous and native peoples, the Muiscas are known to be place-based communities, meaning that their ways of knowing are rooted in particular places and spaces. The importance of this cannot be overstated; place-based identities are relational systems of interconnected meanings between a community and certain places that, throughout time, have created this interrelated existence: "the complex relations between the biophysical and human domains (physicochemical, organic, and cultural, broadly speaking) that account for particular configurations of nature and culture, society and nature, landscape and place, as lived-in and deeply historical entities." (Escobar 2008, 29). Communities need places, as much as places need communities. These identity constructions have taken place in certain spaces, which over time have transformed their importance and have become a place; in other words, a place is a space charged with meaning— "what begins as undifferentiated space, ends as a single object-situation or

place…When space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place.” (Yi-Fu Tuan in Casey 2009, 28).

However, this dichotomy between what it is considered to be a space or a place is a long-standing battle between what humans had experienced and endowed with power. In the case of the Muisca community, the understanding of the differentiation of epistemologies regarding space/place has significate centuries of aggression against the territory and its inhabitants. In an urban environment, the distinction between a meaningless space or meaningful place is a social and political construction by the political authorities and the communities located in those spaces. This contrast between what means for the community their sacred places, and for the outsiders, only a mere land which has to be used for economic purposes, has implicated the irruption of the Muiscas’ sacred places, converting them in district parks, dumpsters, and condominiums to which the members of the community do not have access (See Figure 6).

Figure 6. A hill of the Nevados Park, a sacred place for the Muiscas, but a public park for the citizens. On the top, a complex of high-cost apartments, where some *raizales* were displaced from.

Historically speaking, from the Spanish conquerors of the sixteenth century to present day state power, politics have been utterly devoid of recognizing the importance of these places and as a result, have produced a significant rupture in the history of the Muiscas and other indigenous peoples of Colombia. Escobar (2008) states that “this marginalization of the place has had profound consequences for our understanding of culture, nature, and economy” (30). However, in the case of the Muiscas, many questions arise: Which are those spaces? How did those spaces become sacred? What are the contemporary implications of this marginalization in the re-indigenization process of the Muisca community? What practices are changing the perception of these spaces to the outsiders? The development of these questions will be determinant to argue why the

relationship between these sacred places and the Muisca community is fundamental to their revitalization project.

Suba: A Space of Multiple Meanings

A central element of the re-indigenization project of the Muiscas is the town of Suba, one of the twenty localities within the capital district of Bogota, Colombia. This locality is situated in the north-west of the city and is inhabited by 1,100,000 people, of which approximately 2,500 families belong to the Muisca community. Since the arrival of the conquerors in the sixteenth century, Suba was a town located on the outskirts of Bogota, the capital city. However, after centuries of continuing population growth in the area, along with other consequences of the violence and its forced displacement, Bogota began to face certain demographic outcomes, receiving for years migrants from other provinces. Its infrastructure growing started to absorb many of the towns located around the city, among them Suba. In the year of 1954, Suba became a locality of the city, losing its category as a town, to start a new dynamic as part of a big city. This event was the final breakdown for the Muisca community in its connection with it was its hometown, with that intermediary spatial and temporal notion called *el pueblo de Suba* [Suba town].

Why do I say the final breakdown? The elevation of Suba as a locality of the capital city was a formal and definitive statement after decades of aggression. During the last decades of the 20th century, the expansion of the city to other towns signified to the native population a change in their historical dynamics with the territory. With abrupt urbanization from the late 70's, the Muisca community, which was still considered a community of different families of peasants, faced the impositions of different authorities to modernize the town, changing their relational patterns entirely with their environment.

The modernization project did not have space for ethnic-or place-based identities. Not only through direct aggression towards the environment but also through a silent imposition of a new ideology of progress and capitalist values, “the Western paradigm of development, where it is assumed as progress the growth of the market, without seeing in depth the social and ecological costs” (Restrepo 2005, 324). Within the community one of the members affirms that this “progressive ideology” not only has impacted in the young generations but even in some elders, as her grandmother:

> I remember that when the urbanization started, there were no facades but brick, and it was only a single-story house ... [but] that is another [element] they brought to the [the community] that idea that the one who built was that one who had money, and [consequently] progress. My grandmother always lived on land and brick, but when the urbanization began, she did whatever it took to change the house and set a plate to build another floor.

Therefore, with some inhabitants of the town convinced of the “positive” change of this environment, it was easier for the political and economic authorities to start their occupation in the rural space of Suba. This constant struggle between the community and the government left an even more significant crack in the Muisca identity, the place where their traditional activities took place was not their home anymore, as Escobar states:

> Factors linked to the “loss of territory,” including “loss of traditional values and identity,” loss of traditional production practices… internal conflicts in the communities; the cultural impact of national media; out-migration and the arrival of people foreign to the region espousing the ethics of capitalism and extraction. (Escobar 2008, 60).

Capitalist societies have a different understanding of the importance of nature, places, and culture, and in this case “the Indian people of that place lost their lands and their collective affiliation in the midst of processes of increasing commercialization, dramatic urban expansion and consolidation of a excluding project of nation” (Zambrano

2008, 200). The values of modernity have impacted the indigenous territory and therefore, their identity. In words of one elder of the community: "the Muiscas did not arrive at the city, the city arrived in our land. The city is a monster that has devoured us".

As is shown in figure 7, several exogenous elements such as state policies, governmental interventions, exploitation of resources[16], displacement, trigger the loss in their traditional identity, and consequently their territorial rights.

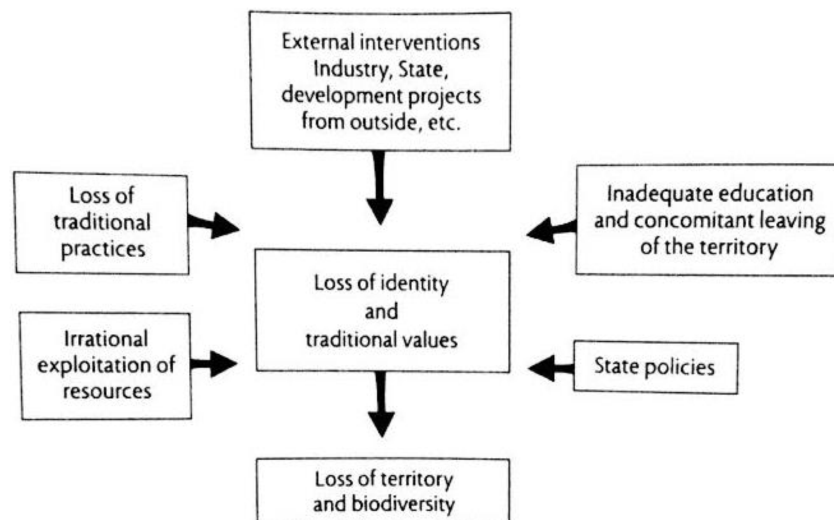

Figure 7. System that generates loss of territory (Ecological River Basin Design in Escobar 2008, 60).

Within this historical, political and economic context, in this complex matrix of various relations, the Muisca community undertook the challenge to revitalize and re-indigenize their community. In this process, the solid attachment of this community to the space that has been their home for centuries is determinant. In their differentiation between

[16] In Suba, for centuries different authorities developed the exploitation of different resources such as salt and clay.

what it is for others a meaningless space, for the community the town of Suba is charged with the history of their ignored culture.

In this project, the Muiscas engaged in the process of visibilization and appropriation of spaces along the Suba territory. Meaning-making of places, charging them again with their spiritual significances and making visible the process in which they are. The indigenous struggle is not only against the politics of invisibilization from the State, but also with several actors, such as: construction companies, new inhabitants (displaced communities from other parts of Colombia and other citizens), the upper-class population, paramilitaries groups, among others; "from the perspective of the local social movements, all the external actors—including guerrillas, paramilitaries, capitalists, and the state—share the same project, namely, the control of peoples, territories, and resources… this project is planned process related to the historical experience of racism and coloniality." (Escobar 2008, 64).

The new re-appropriation of this territory was a response to this long-standing marginalization, not only of their identity but also of the environment as well, that hidden relationship between the space and the indigenous community was no longer kept in the shadows, and the sacred place has been becoming a new subject in this complicated struggle. The outsiders' irruption in their place was not enough to erase the history of it. As formulated by the philosopher Edward S. Casey,

> Even if we vacate a place and it stays unoccupied, it does not become and instant void or revert to being a mere part of space. So long as we (or other living organism) have once been there, it has become a place—and it remains a place, insofar as it bears the sediment traces of our presence. These traces, which act to shape and identify a place and not

> just to haunt it, need not be externally, much less eternally, engraved; they can be inward memory traces possessed by all who have shared that place. Whatever their exact character, such traces establish what might otherwise be a mere locus or site as a place, a status which, once gained, is perhaps never entirely lost. (Casey 2009, 103).

In this process of re-indigenization, the activities carried out by the community are displaying different elements of their ethnicity that are becoming visible to the society. During July-August of 2017, the community started to re-appropriate the territory through an activity called *Paisajes Sonoros* [Soundscapes], this activity was a manifestation of their inner desire to expose their process, along with the public re-affirmation of their relationship with the land, the animals, and their ancestries.

Paisajes Sonoros [Soundscapes]

The *Paisajes Sonoros* were a series of walks when I could share with the community and other outsiders, the symbolic place appropriation of the Muiscas throughout four of their sacred places. Through the teaching of their native language and its use in the gatherings, they were making meaning in those places again, in addition to re-establishing the ownership of the places not only as theirs but as places with their subjectivities. This was a way to reclaim the power of Mother Earth.

The first gathering was in the Tibabuyes Lagoon before 7 am around 60 people from the community and around ten outsiders, including me, were ready to start the first walk. Even though the gathering took place in the lagoon, on that occasion the ritual was going to be in the surroundings of the *Parque del Indio*[17] [Indio Park], in the south hill of

[17] Indio has been used as a pejorative adjective to denote people with indigenous heritage or indigenous', sometime peasants' physical features. Within the community the use of this word has signified a stigma an a

Suba. In the group, there were youth members, the spiritual leader *tanyquy*, some elders, most of them women, and other members. Moreover, the outsiders, we were all young, and as far as I know, most of them were students. I was not sure about the dynamic in these gatherings, that opportunity was one of the first encounters with the community, and when I arrived, I saw the Muiscas with many of technological devices, such as cameras, voice recorders, professional microphones, and many traditional instruments. I was confused, but later I approached one of the members to ask her about these devices; she told me that through the recording of the sounds in these territories, the community could listen to the narratives and the melodies produced by the traditional instruments and the natural sounds, so they could heal the territory and their memory (See Figure 8).

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shame. In one of the interviews, one of the members of the community told me how throughout his life this "nickname" signified years of disgrace and identity issues: "They stripped us of our identity to make us feel bad about ourselves. Discrimination processes range from little ones, and in school with other children. I started in the cabildo process when I was about 11 years old and that transformed my idea of myself. For many years, I had to live with the signage of the *Indio*, and as a nickname I was always the *Indio*. And in that moment, I felt badly, as if that were ugly or less than the other kids. They were making fun of me. But after entering to the process [of re-indigenization in the cabildo], that changed, I began to value myself".

Figure 8. One member is telling the story of the dump where we were. The members are using the devices to record the oral memory of these sacred places.

The last member to arrive at the lagoon was the one in charge of the linguistic teaching, he said that he took longer to arrive because on his way to the lagoon, he found a tobacco plant in the ruins of some Muisca's houses, and he stated that this plant needed to be offered to the Mother Earth as an element of Muisca resistance. In this regard, I could understand the symbolism in this action. He found a tobacco plant—which is a sacred plant for this community (see Figure 9)—in the remains of a capitalist society that has been displacing and breaking the bonds of this community for years. I came to this conclusion only in another talk with him; we were walking through the ruins of these houses that were taken from the community to build a new road in the area where the Muisca have been for centuries. The abrupt urbanization of Suba has changed the dynamics not only within the community but further, between the Muiscas and nature.

Figure 9. Tobacco plant founded offered as a *pagamento* [offering] to the Mother Earth. In the back, members of the community are setting the devices to record the cosmogony narrative.

We started walking through the now urbanized Suba, precisely through the Rincon neighborhood. In this area, many of the members of the Muisca community have their houses, and on the way, they were meeting people, inviting them to join us to the mountain. It took us less than 30 minutes to climb to the hill, all around is now urbanized, with a frightening contrast between low-class properties and upper-class condominiums. Indeed, when we arrived at the place where the community wanted to gather and perform the ritual, it was a green corridor between two upper-class condominiums, which is crossed by one river, almost without strength, but resistant as the Muiscas, to the modernization project.

The Muisca community was making a symbolic appropriation of the place, aiming the community will listen to it, talk to it, call it by its "native name" in *Muysccubun* (the Muisca language), walk through it, interiorize it, and feel it. The experience of being in this

particular time of the day—in the morning when the auditive contamination is less of a problem, and therefore, the real sound of the territory could be heard—in this particular place, has its meaning for the community, their epistemology of nature, of place, has built their own identities, it is "through their daily practices of being, knowing and doing, [that] local groups have actively constructed, though in the midst of other forces, their socionatural worlds for several centuries". (Escobar 2008, 31). Regardless the substantial impact of the urbanization policies and the construction companies, the Muiscas have resisted in their microworlds.

Once we arrived at the green corridor, one of the members[18] led the talk. She started by showing us the brook, insisting on speaking to the territory in the native language, how the territory was used to; naming it with force, further and even more significant for her, listening to it. Feeling the land as an entity, as a being that could be felt in complete interaction with the Muiscas, in a profound and intimate linkage. After few minutes, the entire group started getting comfortable around the space where the ritual was going to take place. We were sitting around the remains of what used to be a river, a river where the community used to wash their clothes, where they used to meet for lunch and of course, a place for celebrations. As one of the members told me, their relationship with these places changed radically in the past 30 years, the urbanization and its massive demographic wave have been significant reasons for the loss of the Muisca identity, and principally this loss

[18] I used to think that this person was part of the community due to her active position within it, however she was indeed an outsider. She has been developing many activities within the community in this process of re-indigenization as the composition and performance of several songs which have become a symbol of the project. However, for some of the members of the community her work has produce discomfort, even disapprove.

has meant a gap in their spiritual connection with the environment, manifested in their stories and legends (See Figure 10). According to this woman, the place where her family lived before being displaced by one construction company, was filled with stories and legends that showed the different dynamics of the community and the environment by that time,

> Where we grow up, up in the peak of the mountain, by that time everything was forest, and in the center of it, there was a lagoon, when we were kids that is where we used to play, but my mom always repeated: keep an eye out if you're getting closer to the lagoon at nights, because she [the lagoon] sings to you to attract you. We always had that very present, and we used to swim during the day in the lagoon but one day we stayed longer, and one of my cousins said that he was almost hypnotized by a soft song, calling him. Finally, we had to run from there because he almost drowned. Moreover, there are dozens of stories like this one, you can ask any of us, and there are always people with stories related to water places.

Figure 10. *Tanyquy* under the remains of a waterfall that was damaged by the construction of that column.

After finishing discussing the importance of the territory, the same woman [the outsider] who took the lead since the beginning of the walk, started the central ritual. As I have explained in the chapter before, the first ritual in any of the Muisca gatherings is a salutation to each of the cardinal directions and the Mother Earth. By that moment, I was not aware of the magnitude of the problem that would cause the fact that this outsider was directing the central part of the ritual[19]. Nevertheless, during this moment I could hear some comments that I could not understand. Indeed, a woman next to me seemed annoyed by this, and the outsider's doubtful attitude about the location of the sacred places made me wonder about her position within the community.

Regardless of this issue, the gathering continued, the salutation ended and another young woman, a Muisca woman, started reading the myth of the origin of the Muisca community. In fact, these series of walks are framed within the project of revitalization of their identity. Therefore, the re-interpretation and re-signification of their cosmogony have a crucial role in this process, showing how ethnogenesis and revitalization are processes completely embedded for the Muiscas. As Carrillo affirms, the Muisca cosmogony represents a mechanism of resistance framed in the multiple and long-standing conflictive encounters of the community with different actors.

[19] I went to the *cabildo* the day after this event to talk to the members, and in general to share with them as much as I could. We went to eat with some members of the community among them, the outsider woman. I could notice that something was not going well as other days, and when we were at the restaurant, one of the Muisca woman started an altercation, bringing out the fact that the outsider was leading such an important and significant ritual. Along with the Muisca woman, other members agreed, affirming that in this process of re-indigenization the cohesion of the legitimate members was vital to the strength of the project itself. The outsider replied affirming that this "xenophobic" position against the outsiders would lead them to the extinction. However, for the Muiscas and specifically for the Muisca women, current time is not the right moment to "adopt" [verb that they used to refer to the opening of the community] outsiders and accept them as Muiscas.

> These processes can be divided into two groups: the first and most common is the use of western and popular thinking to complete the links lost in the myth and guarantee holistic explanations. The second is the conscious reconstruction of myths about the past, which seek to contrast and criticize the relationship with the current dominant society. I have called these two forms of resistance "contextualization," which I define as the mechanisms by which people are permanently reforming myths following cognitive schemes (such as the water cycle), in an update that guarantees survival, contrast and criticism of current social situations. Thus, there may be re-rationalizations, syncretism or acculturations, which are essential for the *Raizal* knowledge to survive (Carrillo 1997).

In the same way, one could distinguish several essential elements that potentize this ritual; being in a violated place that brings memories about their childhood, their families, a place that was taken from their community, symbolizes a mechanism of public and communal resistance. This symbolic appropriation of this place shows how significant is this space for a group of people that claim a shared identity based on the inhabitance of Suba. Further, this public narration of their cosmogony in the community helps to strength the fabric of the members and establish an ontological barrier of alterity with the other outsiders which were part of the event, but also with the people who curiously watched from the windows of the houses that bordered the green corridor.

From the beginning of the ritual, one, even from the distance of being an outsider, can feel the particular experience lived between the environment and the community, from a phenomenological approach to this experience one can capture "the intersubjective process of shared experience by focusing on the domain of everyday, immediate activity and on the embodied life-world of practical and social life." (Escobar 2008, 317). These shared experiences on place recreate the nostalgic past when the community had ownership

over these lands but most important, showing how their revival of the cosmology is an element of social resistance to the present reality (Carrillo 1997).

Figure 11. *Tanyquy* during the setting of the elements for the ritual of harmonization.

After the performance of the ritual of harmonization (see Figure 11), one of the primary purposes of these gatherings was to experience in the place, their cosmological stories, their myths, and their meanings. Hence, Muisca woman started reading the cosmogonic narrative, meantime all the community was listening in silence, all sitting around, some of them closing their eyes, others looking around the space. In a later conversation, a member of the community clarified me that he wrote this narrative, as an

interpretation from the historical archives written in the conqueror's journals, but also from oral tradition gathering. This indeed is another example of the conscious process of identity construction within the frame of their re-indigenization project. This new, created knowledge and culture is “based on collective action, means that knowledge emerges out of particular encounters and relationships in particular localities. This view of knowledge goes a long way toward re-embedding knowledge in the regenerative collective actions of local communities, human and nonhuman. (Valladolid and Apffel-Marglin in Grim 2001, 643). The collective goal of re-constructing their place-based identity has signified a new process of spiritual learning for the community, but also for the outsiders who were allowed to be in these gatherings.

The people in charge of recording the woman’s voice had professional microphones and recorders; further, some members were playing the traditional instruments such as pan flutes, quenas, and ocarinas softly. The disposition of all the participants was evident, even for the outsiders, the environment allowed to a complete immersion within the story, their cosmogonic narrative that not only tells us the story of their origins but also, highlights the importance of this strong attachment to their sacred places and their claiming,

> In one of the beginnings, the darkness was infinite and extended in every corner of the universe; there was only one being, the first grandmother, the great mother *Baque*. In her greatness gave birth the light and thousands of birds came out of her belly, all with black plumage as the depth of an eternal hole. Their peaks shone so bright that they carried light in different directions; for each place where it illuminated great stars materialized, the force of its wings filled the space of movement and thus, planets arose that collided with each other, leaving residues that floated freely in space.

The birds continued on their way, flooding with light and brightness every place they passed extending, even beyond what can be understood. When they dissipated, they let glimpse a being that shone more brightly than the stars that came out of their beaks. *Baque*, his mother, named him *Chiminigagua* because of the brightness of his body. *Chiminigagua*, upon opening his eyes, observed impressive chaos, the stars died quickly, the planets collapsed one another, and their debris generated even more havoc. *Chiminigagua* immediately decided to organize what he saw. With his strength and vigor, he gave the stars stability and gave each planet a path; placing everything in its place and giving a place to each thing. Thus, life began to flourish.

Hence, in one of the many newly organized planetary systems our world emerged: land, water, air, and fire constituted it, from the lagoons between the highest mountains emerged a woman, *Furachogue,* together with a small child who grew up to reach the fertile age. Many years later, the world came to stability, and it was the moment when those beings began to reproduce among themselves. From their union emerged thousands of creatures that were populating the world, leaving the moors and lagoons, those beings were adapting to their spaces and needs.

Furachogue was very fertile, dozens of children were born from her at the time, and for many years she continued to giving birth without ceasing; from her belly emerged beings of a thousand forms, insects, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals ... and an extensive list of existences, among them the *Muisca* was born. Women and men, beings born together with fish, toads, frogs, and lizards, began to live, they could not understand the world in their complexity, they did not know how to talk, and they could not find ways to communicate with each other, their fragility managed to move *Furachogue*, for that moment she had passed her most fertile age, old, she thought that she had already given birth to too many beings who multiplied and diversified; thus, she decided to teach the Muiscas, realizing that in a short time they were reproducing, quickly populating the valleys near the lakes. However, their first meeting with them was disappointing, since men, women, children, young people, the elderly did not understand each other, they all made meaningless sounds, without saying anything, some looked like recognizing themselves and others just walked along the rivers, the mountains and lakes around it.

Furachogue gathered everyone and spoke slowly hoping to be understood. She explained with patience, but she realized that first, they would have to learn to listen. She saw them all emitting sounds at the same time, imitating some animals; whistling, roaring, and snarling, performing as the magnificent mammals of high mountains a first step to the exercise of the word. So, it was proposed a game to them; the

Muiscas would have to find a storm and observe a flash, after that they would wait in silence for the arrival of a roar from the sky. It was thus that in the rainy season, the gray clouds promised a great storm and suddenly the sky was illuminated; finally, the flash had arrived, and the silence was immediate. Everyone looked at each other, but nobody made a sound; until soon the sky screamed a loud sound. Not only did it seem like a roar, but it also sounded like the sky split in half. Suddenly, the sky shone again, and during the roar, they managed to perceive a voice, it was the voice of *Furachogue,* who spoke very loud and very clear; she had managed to make all the Muiscas silent, and everyone listened to her, she spoke the language of creation. Although she gave them the secret to being able to speak, the Muiscas had not yet cultivated the word and did not know very well what sounds to make, so the great mother showed them that everyone could name things their way. What would be the best name for everything? They listened to *Furachogue* who explained to them that they had to decide between each one the proper name for each element, since sharing the words would help them to understand each other. Thus, those who lived closest were grouped, with time they agreed among themselves. Those from the north called the woman *fura*, those from the south *fucha* and some at the center decided to call their women *bura.*

By regions, they decided the sounds that best adorned their words, for each valley new forms of naming flourished and although from valley to valley they changed little by little, it was possible to find similarities in the places where the Muiscas had settled. Thus, the words were appearing, they named their mother *Bachué,* they knew the name of *Baque* and *Chiminigagua*, and to each one of their brothers they put a name, to the deer: *guahagui,* to the toad: *hyba* and to the serpent: *muyso*. They named the plants, recognizing their properties, corn, and pumpkin, called *aba* and *zihiba*; to the big trees like the alder*, guane*; the places they inhabited gave them names such as *boza, suacha, muyquyta*, ... Moreover, to the lake from which *Bachué* emerged, they called *Iguaque*[20].

This was how little by little they understood each other, although it was necessary for the passage of time. The words were inherited from *paba* and *uaia* to shoot; although it took time for all to be naming the elements of day to day. Meeting men, women, young and old, they listened and then agreed; on a regular basis they went to the call of that good woman whom they called *Bachué,* grateful, they came to each of the meetings with offerings that were shared during the long hours of dialogue in which they listened to the recommendations of that protective mother,

[20] In words of Mircea Eliade (2005), *Iguaque* is the *axis mundi* for the Muiscas, the space where the sacred is emerged, and it is considered as the center of the cosmic order.

> whose words invited take care in brotherhood with all the beings that inhabit the world the sacred places, sources of life. After many encounters, *Bachué* already aged saw that the Muiscas she had taught became self-sufficient, in each valley they had managed to establish a way of communicating, and although in each region there were variants, they managed to understand each other. Always remembered the original relationships that existed between them, so *Bachué* understood that it was time to walk other worlds and going with his partner returned to *Iguaque*, place of origin of all life in the world and there, she said goodbye. The Muiscas, their children, accompanied them along the way offering songs, also sounds of banners full of rattles and flutes carved on hollow bones that sounded like birds. The farewell cry was touching; when they entered the water of the *Bachué* lagoon and her companion, who was already aged, they began to change their skin, their wrinkles fell off their bodies, and a tail replaced their feet. While their bodies as shells fell in the water, two large snakes could be seen swimming in the lagoon, *Bachué* and her companion rejuvenated as serpents returned at the beginning of time, reminding all the Muiscas to honor the bodies of water, evidence of the strength of life.

Along with the conscious production[21] of this passage pertaining to their cosmogony, in these kinds of activities, the community was reaffirming their control over the territory, and building spaces where the community was connected with their sacred territories. Furthermore, the community incorporated these activities the remembrance not only of the tangible land but also their spiritual roots. The re-ethnicization of the community's identity goes hand in hand with the knowledge and re-significance of their mythical stories, all these framed in the experience in place. As Jenkins states "for many Indigenous peoples their way of life- including their stories, cosmologies, identities, and much else that we might put under the (perhaps alien) heading of "religion"- depends on the intimate connection to specific creatures and particular places" (Jenkins 2017, 242).

[21] This is part of the process of ethnogenesis within the community.

In addition to the essential inner experience of self-encounter in place, these communal activities allowed participants to strengthen the social ties needed in this process of re-establishing the contemporary Muisca community. This sense of community lived during the ritual is further manifested throughout the entire gathering in micro-actions filled with meaning; the members share fruit juices—*curuba* and strawberry—and food cooked by them as *arepas*, cakes, cookies. Meanwhile, the members start expressing their reproaches regarding the current situation of the landscape; indeed, along with the recording of these cosmological stories in the sacred place, one of the principal purposes of these walks is to record the stories of the members about these specific locations. Moreover, talking about their memories it is also realizing the contrast with the current situation of these spaces.

In this remembrance, the significance of the elders' word has been crucial for the creation of meaning in these spaces, for them these places represented their material connection with their past, their families, and their history. One *abuela* [a woman elder, a grandmother] remembered how this specific place where we were, it was a water well where she and her grandmother used to go to wash their clothes; that there was where she learned the vital respect towards nature, especially towards the sources of water. As stated by Lopez, this narrative about places, not only charge with multiple meanings and remembrances about their history but further, with invaluable spiritual and mystical representations that with modernity has been erased,

> In the stories of the elders, networks of roads and rivers that cross the savanna of Bogota, which go from the north to Boyaca, and which always served to communicate the mountain ranges and the hills, are revealed. They are moved by wonderful beings whose existence the

> oldest know, a rural world full of births of water fed by snakes, of treasures that disappear in the eyes of men, of children turned into *mohanes* or of women kidnapped by old caciques who live in the mountains. It is not about collections of stories, but stories that weave a sense for the *raizales*. (Lopez 2005, 339).

With the disappearance of the ancient way of life, most of the phenomena that tell the myths and discourses that sustained its thought also disappeared. History is dismembered and lost, and with the death of each elder is torn more. In this regard, she also remembered the time when the abrupt urbanization started burying the rivers with concrete to build condominiums, mansions, and club for the upper-class from Bogota. Indeed, within the community, the effects of some constructions signified the loss of their homes, and with them, the Muisca indigenous spirit; one youth woman told me the story of her family house:

> We were at the top of the mountain, but Ardila Lulle started building his mansion and used dynamite on the hill, all those aftershocks affect all this area of the Rincon and the peak of the mountain too. Breaking a pipe and our houses had a landslide, and we were displaced from there. What they gave us as indemnification did not help us, and of course, nothing will be enough to recover the spiritual value. That house in El Rincon, my grandpa told my dad: "build over there *mijo*[22], to raise your children and live up there quietly, my dad still told my grandfather that he was the one who had to build the foundations, by that time it was symbolic that the grounds of the houses were made with cousins, uncles, and brothers. The house had spirit because my grandpa was still vigorous at that time. Moreover, that is why our house was one of the last houses to fall...and even though some of my uncles still do not believe in the indigenous beliefs, they said: here is the strength of my father; they think in that, but they still cannot accept it and say it; Ahí está Niviayo [Niviayo rests in there], this is what they repeat. The government was cheating, they did not give us the money we deserved, and they demanded the title deed, but at that time we did not have it, it was only by name. With what they gave us, and some savings, my father, bought

[22] A colloquial synonym/and term for son.

> near the Tibabuyes wetland, because we were neighbors of the lagoon, and because my dad says: I am not going out from Suba!

The process of being in place allows the social cohesion and the reconstruction of their history, linking those personal stories and its meanings to particular spaces. These places become the meeting point of different Muisca generations, of each person with the community, their families, even the meeting with their self, in different temporal moments. Further, the encounter with other indigenous communities, with outsider citizens, animals, entities, with their ancestors; which are part of the environment, as Carrillo (1197) affirms, the *raizales* humanize nature by populating it with their dead.

Places become complex systems that connect subjectivities and gives sense of community, even, it gives a path to continue their history,

> The power a place such as mere room possesses determines not only where I am in the limited sense of cartographic location but how I am together with others…and even who we shall become together. The "how" and the "who" are intimately tied to the "where", which gives to them a specific content and a coloration not available from any other source. Place bestows upon them "a local habitation and a name" by establishing a concrete situatedness in the common world. This implacement is as social as it is personal. The idiolocal is not merely idiosyncratic or individual; it is also collective in character. (Casey 2009, 23).

Precisely, this symbolic reclamation of their sacred and traditional places orients them towards the future of the community, reinforcing them to face the challenge of modernity, urbanization, displacement, and discrimination.

One week later, the meeting for the second walk took place in the central plaza of Suba, this time the ritual was going to take place in the *Parque de Los Nevados* [Snowy Park]. This place has been a significant sacred place for the community since before the

arrival of the Spaniards, for centuries it was a Muisca cemetery, from where the panoramic views were well-known for being a strategic place allowing the members to know the movement of other groups within their territory. Further, from the peak of the mountain, in bright days, it is possible to observe four volcanos; the *Nevado del Ruiz, del Tolima, Santa Isabel,* and *del Cisne,* located 200 km from Suba. Regardless the history of the Muisca community of Suba and this mountain, Bogota's office of environment is the institution in charge of the management and administration of this place. Therefore, the access and permissions to the Muiscas are limited.

After meeting in the central plaza, we started our path to the park with around the same amount of Muisca members from the first walk, but this time, more outsiders joined the event. On our way, the leaders of the session decided to stop in a space that had meaning for the community. The access to it was not allowed, it was a space between a new upper-class houses complex and a low-class neighborhood with many Muiscas inhabitants; this green corridor was in fact, a natural border between two different worlds (See Figure 12). We stopped for around an hour to listen to the stories of those members. It was difficult for me to believe that under my feet, one of the largest rivers of the area, a river that has been the source of water for the community for centuries, was buried to urbanize and build houses to which the Muiscas do not have the possibility to live in. Therefore, being there is only a temporal experience of remembrance. However, as one of the members stated, "this river is like the Muisca community, it has been buried under the concrete, under the modernity project, but even with all the forces against us, like the river, we are still alive." After recording several stories and observing how this corridor has become a forgotten dump, we continued our path to the park.

Figure 12. ***Tanyquy*** **is looking to the river that was cut it to build the condominiums. To the left the result of the oblivion, a dump.**

Upon our arrival to the park, we were not allowed to enter because it was closed due to some repairs. After more than 45 minutes of arguing with the security guards of the park, and after bringing an official permission, we were allowed to enter the park but with a security guard in charge of the group. Despite the guards' inquisitive and sometimes intimidating presence, the ritual took place around a small waterfall. This time, the narrative unified several essential elements for the community in this process of re-indigenization: the knowledge of their indigenous language, the revitalization of their cosmogony narratives and the reaffirmation of the ownership of the land base of these sacred narratives.

One of these crucial ethnic components that some outsiders point out to discriminate and discredit the Muisca is the absence of fluid linguistic skills as a diacritic marker; for this reason, the community has started to incorporate their native language *muysccubum*, to their daily practices, but more importantly to these ritual gatherings. Within the narrative, many familiar day-to-day elements were incorporated into the story, as a method to spread the use of the language in the community. During the narration, all the community kept quiet, and the sounds of the environment were the perfect soundtrack of this sacred story,

> In the afternoon of the second day of farming everyone is usually ready to perform specific tasks, during the night men gather to prepare sullen, pick up their tobacco leaves and go into the *cusmuy* [spiritual temple] until morning; women, on the other hand, take advantage of the moment and prepare *fapqua,* popular drink in the territory that required a laborious work; it was necessary first to grind the corn and cook the flour until it was dough, extracting the starch that was finally put to ferment full days. *Combafura Chisaba* was doing her homework; she was a young woman with light skin and black hair, wearing a brown *fuchaguane* [skirt], which was held on her hip with a reddish *inzona* [belt]. On her neck, she wore a very long *Quihiza chyza* [necklace] with brown beads, bits of copper and snail shells that interlocked around her neck and covered her chest. After passing a couple of loads of corn, on a grinding stone, she realized that soon the evening would come. After getting excited she quickly placed a white *foi* [blanket] on her shoulders, put in her *fique*[23] *chisique* [bag] a few masses wrapped in *ameros* and a medium *totuma*[24] with *curuba* [banana passionfruit] juice. Escaping then from her labors he set out to enjoy her favorite activity throughout the day; she sought the highest place on the hill of Tuna[25], just above the cemetery and sat on a large rock from which she could observe everything on the majestic horizon.
>
> Looking to the east, she thought that in the mornings *Sua* came out behind the hills where the town of *Usaquén* was located, welcoming the

[23] A natural fibre native from Andean regions such as Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador.
[24] A traditional kitchen implement used to contain liquid or food in Andean Regions. This implement comes from the fruit of the Totumo tree.
[25] This mythological story is referring to the specific place where we were during the ritual.

new day. The hills that were in that direction extended from north to south and in them, besides the town of *Usaquén*, were the town of *Teusacá* and the town of *Usme*. Looking west, she observed the hills that are the home of the people of *Chia* and *Cota,* and she remembered how on clear mornings it was possible to visualize the impervious snowy mountains that were far away on the lands of the *Pijao* people.

Combafura, at the same time, she smiled, took out of her *chisua* an *iefun*, a mixture of yellow corn, sweetened with honey and wrapped with the husk of the cob carefully, she unfolded it slowly and bit it, observing how the bright afternoon changed little by little at night.

While *sua* was taking its way, the shadows that were projected on the hill where *Cota* is, reminded her of a familiar face, and so in what she first thought when she saw the splendid star losing itself, in the end, it was in ancient history that her *caca* [grandmother] used to tell her at the time of spinning the cotton *toguas* [ball]; that story narrated that in the early days, when everything was very remote, a mighty God fell asleep, and it was the time that his dream lasted that his petrified body rose like a high mountain in the distance.

Combafura closed her eyes and listened, as if she were there, to the words of her *caca* [grandmother], if the mountains were the bodies of the ancient creators of the world, our little hills would have to be two wise grandmothers. Opening her eyes, she imagined it that way, since, sitting in *Tuna*, she could see the hill of Suba at her side, together, the two small mountains resembled, as she said her *caca* [grandmother], to two sisters' grandmothers who just poke their heads, and she, to that extent, lay sitting on one of her crowns.

While it was the moment she expected, the entire night, *Combafura* let her imagination run. From the point where she was located it was possible to observe all *Tuna*, also Suba, further south *Engatyba, Yntyba* and the great locality of *Myquyta*, all towns that share access to a gigantic river that used to flood much of the land through which it crossed; she observed how, right next to the cemetery, a stream of translucent water descended from the top of the hill, she thought, that from those places sprung multiple births as if white, transparent hair were born from those heads.

These watery hairs ran through an old body, on their slopes on the western side they were built of three or four terraces per family, in them there was an orchard, a large house where the family lived, a pantry, a ceremonial house and a house that exclusively they used for women to meet; the forests of the eastern slope of these hills guarded the placentas of each of those who were born in this territory, they are entirely sacred places where you can converse with the ancestors in difficult times.

> In the skirt of each one of the hills, similar to the young woman, to a pair of necks, the wrinkles of those venerable old women allowed to make giant furrows, *sunas* and *sincas*[26], that took advantage of to plant corn, beans, amaranth, black potato, red potato, yellow potato and quinoa, for which the name of the town of Suba is given. The wrinkled skin of *Tuna* and *Suba* allowed prosperity; the *riachuelos, quebradas,* and *arroyos*[27] went down flooding the furrows, to be with that large river that comes from *Tyquyzipa* and connects *Tuna* with *Usquatyba, Boza,* and *Suacha*; these flooded areas were the bosoms of the grandmothers.
>
> After the play of colors that gradually illuminated the horizon, *Combafura* turned his gaze to *tybaguy chupqua* and *fuquy chupqua*, extensive wetlands where all forms of life flourished, and home to the *uamuyhyca* [Pez Capitan][28], delicious fish that could be eaten in season, she observed how the sky it was getting dark and *Combafura* moved away from the thoughts of the analogy of the grandmothers and lay back on the stone while the wind whispered the arrival of twilight.
>
> When he was on his back he looked at the sky and then at the savannah, she looked to her left in the direction of Aguas Calientes and, excited, she noticed that the clouds were turning yellow, she felt a deep joy, noticing how the birds returned to their nests and their trills. They filled that beautiful moment with music, watched the sky change as *sua* walked; so, the white turned yellow, then took a reddish hue, and finally, the blue became lilac.
>
> *Combafura* astonished tried to remember each color, capture in her memory every second of the sky while Sua was disappearing on the horizon and the sky took on an increasingly darker color. The woman, radiant, took another *foi* from her bag and wrapped it around her body to protect herself from the cold. Thus, the night finally arrived, and the sky darkened utterly, allowing her to be dazzled by the first stars. *Combafura* still observes them, in every second day of farming she still enjoys looking at the sky and the horizon, although more and more the body and the territory are changing.

The territory drawn in the story is the review of the symbolic appropriation of space by the Muiscas; not only the cosmological connection between the origins of the civilization but also, between their ancestors and their presence in particular spaces that

[26] Also known as Waru is an Andean agriculture technique developed in pre-Columbian times in zones in areas prone to floods.
[27] Three different ways to call rivers with low current.
[28] An endemic catfish from the Bogota River basin.

have become sacred. These conscious constructions that the *raizales* make of the myths correspond to their intrinsic need to find their process of revitalization in sacred narratives.

Muisca Body as a Place of Resistance

Bodies as they already belong to places…places belong to bodies. –Edward S. Casey

The activities of re-appropriation of the territory have been possible only after conscious processes of embodiment and internalization of places. Given the colonization of their lands, the Muiscas have internalized the concept of territory not only as a piece of tangible land, but also as their own bodies rooted in this determinant place; in fact “the body of the ‘peasant’ remains as Muisca body although it is unconsciously and, with it, resists so that its biological being is inscribed in the total order of the West (...) It also retains an identity, and a lifeline project "(Pinzón and Suárez in Carrillo 1997). As one of the members affirmed to me “el Territorio se manifiesta en nosotros, cada uno de nosotros es territorio Muisca” [The territory is manifested in each of us, each of us is Muisca territory]. As Leistle affirm, the body as a place of memory and identity became as one, but the most important instrument of resistance to the cultural genocide lived by the Muiscas,

> In a phenomenology of the body, the notion of identity is inseparably connected with human embodiment…having a body as an embodied perspective is a conditional requirement for experience; but the process of taking on this perspective in experiencing leads to an involvement of the body itself. The perceiving body necessarily takes part in the perceptual situations its sensory activities are continuously generating. This process of “becoming part of”, of “inhabiting the world”, however, is itself grounded in a fundamental loss of identity. (Leistle 2006, 69)

The body has become a means and an end in itself; the Muisca body has faced their reality through their corporeal adaptations; whether as a means to experience the place, or

as an end, as an extension of the place itself, “body and place are congruent counterparts. Each needs the other. Each suit the other…place is where the body is”. (Casey 2009, 103). Furthermore, their bodies and their the corporeal actions are also the means to re-appropriate the territory, “places become interior presences within bodies” (Casey 2009, 103).

This complex system of multiple interconnections, between the Muisca body and their sacred places, (places that are also the sum of multiple elements—a human-nature coproduction) has facilitated the new realities and possibilities of this community. With this public interaction, the community is creating spaces of becoming contemporary Muiscas, at the gaze of multiple actors, as Casey affirms, “in creating build places, we transform not only the local landscape but ourselves as subjects: body subjects become fabricating agents.” (Casey 2009, 111). The Muiscas become active actors and subjects of power in the current times.

Undoubtedly, the impact not only of the first colonizers but furthermore, of the current power structures has opened a gap in the indigenous place-based epistemologies. The violent irruption in this relationship has infringed an irreparable wound in the Muisca identity (elaborate) but also, in the collective national memory. However, the elements of re-appropriation of territory in public scenarios have allowed a dialogical exchange between the contemporary Muiscas and the outside society that is part of this process, making possible a reconstruction of their identity and a re-interpretation of the national history.

Conclusion

> Places are the site of dynamic cultures, economies, and environments rather than just nodes in a global capitalist system. –Arturo Escobar.

Without question, the most significant challenge in current times for the Muisca community is the defense of the territoriality. Since the sixteenth century, the seizure of their territory has been without surcease, and in current times, the economic system has appropriated not only their land but their epistemologies as well. These structures of violence have shown that "without the region-territory, communities would be even more vulnerable to being reconstructed by capital and the state. (Escobar 2008, 62). In other words, the capitalist ideology has changed the way the Muiscas understand their ancestral connection to their land. With new ideas imposed related to what means progress and development, the Muiscas families have been displaced in the last decades, in my opinion, as an instrument to weaken the social cohesion among the families. As Arturo Escobar affirms,

> "Displacement is an integral element of Eurocentric modernity and development. Modernity and development are spatial-cultural projects that require the continuous conquest of territories and peoples and their ecological and cultural transformation along the lines of a logocentric order." (Escobar 2008, 65).

In this sense, the Muiscas are part of this current project because of their location and the ownership of the land, but not because of their essential ecological knowledge, in addition to their immensurable collective memory. However, the awareness of this reality by the vast majority of the Muisca population has kept them in a continuous struggle against the government, the construction companies, and the other citizens. Indeed, the firm bonds constructed in this process of ethnogenesis have allowed "the defense of the

territory [that] entails the defense of an intricate pattern of place-based social relations and cultural constructions; it also implies the creation of a unique sense of belonging linked to the political construction of a collective life project. (Escobar 2008, 67). More than a battle for communal, ethnic lands in an urban area, the Muiscas' struggle is towards a defense of the environmental sustainability of Suba. It is a defense for respect towards Mother Earth and the subjects who inhabit this land. Their battle is a direct critique of the modernization project, understood far from the indigenous epistemologies, and its asymmetric power structure; culture sits in places, and no degree of globalization can ever reduce place to the logic of capital, technology, or transnational media. (Escobar 2008, 317).

The vitality of these sacred places entangles the reconstruction of the Muisca identity along with the "strengthening of people's capacity to withstand the traumas of capitalist modernity (from poverty to war) in place, building on people's struggles for the defense of place and culture, and fostering people's autonomy over their territories. (Escobar 2008, 64). This battle between Eurocentric views of progress and development economies and indigenous place-based epistemologies only has resulted in an unbalanced struggle where we all know the end, the environment only appears as a silent background, and its agency has been ignored. In this sense,

> The goal of many of today's struggles is the defense of place-based conceptions of the world and practices of world making—more precisely, a defense of particular constructions of place, including the reorganizations of place that might be deemed necessary according to the power struggles within place. (Escobar 2008, 67).

Therefore, the ethnogenesis of re-indigenization projects undertaken by the contemporary Muiscas based on their relationship with their sacred places signifies a

challenge to the Colombian state, to scholarship, and to society overall. These actors must reinterpret the social imaginary of what has been imposed by centuries and demand their rightful ownership of their lands and their historical memory. Acknowledging the importance of different traditional ecological epistemologies can help to destabilize the essentialist constructions of nature, culture, and society.

Conclusion

The identity fluctuations in the Muisca community have been the result of centuries of domination both physical and ideological, from the Spanish colonizers and the Catholic

Church to the Colombian State. Recognized as "Indians" until the nineteenth century, the Muiscas struggled with being labeled as *campesinos* (peasants), a category which was imposed on them by the colonizers in the widespread de-indigenization of Colombia. However, despite even a strong stigma associated with the internalization of centuries of marginalization, the Muisca community has been able to engage in the ongoing and challenging process task of reinterpreting their history. This can be understood as an urban indigenous community which not only sees themselves as an ethnic group descended from the remarkable but "extinct" Muiscas, but also a newfound identity which is in the process of becoming.

From considering themselves as peasants, in accordance to the historical and political processes of re-indigenization around the globe, the ethnogenesis of the Muiscas has been constructed based on their traditional knowledge and has led to one of the most significant ethnic movements in Colombia. Being recognized by the State as the first urban indigenous *cabildo* [indigenous organization] in the country has signified various reactions and challenges to this community. On the one hand, this political acknowledgment has provoked doubts from the political authorities and scholarship, triggering a re-stigmatization of their practices by society. On the other hand, however, their public participation in multiple cultural and environmental activities has allowed a new construction of the social imaginary in another sector of the population.

These public appearances, most of them, rituals, or how I referred throughout the study as 'spaces of visibility' are spatial and temporal moments when the Muiscas perform their indigeneity as a diacritic marker in the cultural revitalization. Beyond that being a mere

strategic mechanism, as some scholars such as Bell state; these rituals are consciously embodied actions of decolonization, revitalization, and production of identity.

The project of decolonizing their identity has been a complicated challenge for the Muiscas. This task of memory decolonization starts from within the community and being the memory a sum of different malleable elements, makes this task even harder. In their project, with the creation of narratives written altogether they achieve a new interpretation of the past, not the past written in the national school books, but the Muisca past, a past of multiple epistemologies that only the Muiscas could expose. Likewise, along with the narrative, symbolic practices such as public rituals give new meanings for the other citizens about their existence and re-affirm their project of re-indigenization. As stated by Lopez, the "production of memory" goes hand in hand with the decolonization of itself,

> The production of memory is a fluid process, subject to tensions, permeable to the influence of hegemonic discourses with which local memories are in permanent dialogue. Many of the social groups that face processes of domination are excluded from the 'official' stories so that unofficial memories are developed that are maintained through orality. This produces a correspondence between subalternity, orality, and memory. Only the histories of minorities, always fragmentary and dissident, are known only partially. (Lopez 2005, 337).

Therefore, keeping the Muiscas in the unattainable past and romanticize them as the legendary Andean civilization was the perfect strategy for the power structures to do not take responsibilities of the structural violence exerted to this community for centuries. Nevertheless, whether from the global re-indigenization processes or the inner force of re-identification, the Muiscas have undertaken this path to reaffirm an existence that is not only important for themselves, but for the entire nation for a better interpretation of the history. Indeed, as Warren affirms "revitalization is a process of political articulation and

cultural hybridizing, not an inevitable nostalgic escape to the past." (Warren 1998, 38), a past that instead of erasing, the Muiscas want to re-write it. This was a work about an indigenous community entirely enrooted in what they consider as their sacred land, which has been taken from them and violated in front of their eyes. Entirely powerless for centuries, under other labels, the Muiscas are more alive and present than ever. Present in many of the traditional practices of the Andean life, the Muisca epistemology has survived, hidden but not extinct, to multiple aggressions, showing so, the resilient nature of this community,

> Today, the Muisca is much more present than we think. It is not a resolved past, but a present full of contradictions made of innumerable traces, scattered, passed over, illegible by centuries of colonization and internal colonization during the Republic. It is a memory that must be confronted, interpreted, that does not come to us at all clear. (Restrepo 2005, 325).

Finally, the re-indigenization process of the Muisca community not only open the space to rethink the written history and the untold stories but further, the current challenges of modernity. The Muisca project signifies an example of contestation against the promulgated idea of 'Western progress' within an urban environment. This ideology in Suba has signified massive urbanization in environments of endogenic nature, the displacement of place-based communities, urban segregation, and impoverishment within an area where the communities used to have different socio-cultural and environment dynamics. With their process, this community exposes how indigenous epistemologies present strategies to face the problems of environmental and political injustice in the 21st century.

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