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Quyca Muysca: Urban Coloniality of Nature, Cuerpo-Territorio [Body-Territory], and Muysca Resurgence

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QUYCA MUYSCA: URBAN COLONIALITY OF NATURE, CUERPO-TERRITORIO [BODY-TERRITORY], AND MUYSCA RESURGENCE

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To: Dean Shlomi Dinar
Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs

This dissertation, written by Paola Andrea Sánchez Castañeda, and entitled Quyca Muysca: Urban Coloniality of Nature, Cuerpo-Territory [Body-Territory], and Muysca Resurgence, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

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

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Joshua, and my abuelas Rosa and Mabel.

In loving memory of my abuelito Oliverio, the cardinal songs accompanied me on this journey.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

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Florida International University, 2023

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This dissertation investigates the territorial dimensions of the Muysca community of Suba's process of Indigenous resurgence through the ethical and methodological framework of Participatory Action Research (PAR). In drawing on the meanings and embodied practices attributed to, and associated with, territory by members of the Muysca community, I argue that the Muysca Indigenous resurgence movement both challenges processes of urban coloniality while also cultivating novel expressions of urban indigeneity. Building on three years of prior engagement with the community, in addition to twelve months of ethnographic research guided by PAR, in Bogota, Colombia, I analyzed archival material and employed ethnographic techniques such as in-depth participant observation, semi-structured interviews, participatory mapping, and visual methodologies. Informed by critical feminism, decolonial thought, and urban political ecology, I mobilize the Indigenous notion of cuerpo-territorio [body-territory] to analyze the Muysca urban experience in two interrelated aspects. First, I argue that encounters between the Muysca and the state are characterized by continuously being immersed within regimes of authenticity that structure how the Muysca interact and

negotiate with governmental institutions toward territorial recognition and sovereignty. I particularly explore how the Muysca have embraced performance as an instrument mediating between the institutionalized demands for diacritic markers and the Muysca identity revitalization. Second, I present the notion of body-territory to highlight the relationship between the Muysca bodies and Suba. By examining Muysca meanings of territory, this study reconceptualizes space as an extension of the Muysca body. It presents the effects of urban coloniality on the Muysca, focusing on urban development, environmental degradation, urban planning policies, and the erasure of Muysca socioecological epistemologies. Nevertheless, I present how the Muysca of Suba contest this logic by engaging in everyday bodily practices of resurgence, such as the conservation of urban gardens called Muysca Tâ, the occupation of sacred natural places, and the revitalization of their language, Muysc cubun. In illustrating how the concept of body-territory provides an ontological foundation for approaching the experiential, semantic, performative, and contested aspects of the Muysca of Suba's territorial struggles, this dissertation provides a novel lens through which to better understand urban indigeneity in the Global South.

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Fuech Ty
Fuechyna gata abosa
chicacas chiguexicasa
quychyquy aza quycaua
mabie chihuc abgasqua
Chia Suba gue nga
Suba chichizac chiguene
chie chipquen ys agaioa
as chihac ys agusqua
Muyscac chiguene gue
Muyscac chiguene gue

Fuechy (fireplace) song
"In the fuechy, around the fire,
Our grandmother and our grandfather
place the food and many stories
they teach us
that we are from Suba
and raiz(ales) from Suba,
So, we remember,
They tell us,
Yes, we are Muyscas!
Yes, we are Muyscas!"

"Suban Tymansoz Abtynan"
Cultural Colective Subana Chitysqua.

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation investigates the territorial meanings driving the Indigenous resurgence of the Muysca[1] community of Suba, exploring how they actively contest

[1] Throughout the dissertation I use different spellings for *Muysca* and *Muisca* purposely. Based on ethnographic research, the spelling *Muysca* aligns with the community's self-identification as part of their process of language revitalization. Conversely, *Muisca* is employed to denote the institutionalized name endorsed by the Colombian State during the process of recognition of the Cabildo during the 1990s. Therefore, I use Muisca when referring to the governmental entity that represents the community.

urban coloniality and cultivate alternative expressions of urban indigeneity. As an introductory piece, I present the song created by the Muysca collective *Subana Chitysqua*, a cultural group of young members of the Muysca community, to illustrate many elements of interest in this dissertation. The primary focus of this research is understanding the discursive mechanisms and corporeal experiences and practices related to territory, deeply rooted in Muysca ontology, which forms the political foundations of the community's territorial claims. In this regard, the song presents itself as a discursive mechanism of resurgence; in addition to being created and performed in *Muysc cubun*—Muysca native language, which is currently being revitalized—it establishes a narrative of historical belonging to the land of Suba. The story of Muysca dwelling in Suba has been transmitted within the community for generations, but it was only until the Constitutional recognition of Indigenous peoples in 1991 in Colombia and the Muysca institutional recognition as the first urban Indigenous *Cabildo*[2] (Niviayo 2017) by the state that these stories of territorial rooting could become visible. Nearly two centuries after the Republican laws established the privatization of communal Indigenous lands known as the colonial *resguardos* (Castillo 2019) and the integration of the Indigenous populations as part of the mestizo society through the project of *mestizaje* (Safford 1991), the Muysca community of Suba is currently resurging as an Indigenous community, now in a highly urbanized environment.

[2] Indigenous *Cabildo* in Colombia is "a special public entity, whose members are members of an indigenous community, elected and recognized by it, with a traditional sociopolitical organization, whose function is to legally represent the community, exercise authority and carry out the activities attributed to it by the law, by their customs and internal regulations of each community" (Decree 2164/1995).

Driven by debates within decolonial and feminist scholarship and Urban Political Ecology (UPE), I mobilize the Indigenous Latin American notion of *cuerpo-territory* [body-territory] (Cabnal 2017) to analyze the Muysca urban experience in two interrelated aspects. First, I examine the encounters between the Muysca and the Colombian state as characterized by continuously being immersed within regimes of authenticity (Coulthard 2014; Povinelli 2002) that structure the way the Muysca and other Indigenous communities interact and negotiate with governmental institutions toward identity recognition and territorial sovereignty. In particular, performance has been a requirement but also a site of resurgence (Povinelli 2002; Swyngedouw 2011) for the Muysca community; visual depictions of Indigenous otherness are expected by both state institutions and non-Indigenous citizens, and the Muysca have embraced performance as an instrument mediating between the institutionalized demands for diacritic markers and Muysca engagement with revitalizing their identity.

Second, I present the notion of *cuerpo-territorio* [body-territory] to highlight the relationship between the Muysca Indigenous bodies and their territory of Suba, maintaining that the body is a historic territory unto itself (Echeverri 2005). By examining Muysca meanings of territory, this study reconceptualizes space as an extension of the Muysca body, analyzing it as one "single subject of political agency that resists and identifies violations against [Indigenous] bodies and territories as part of the same process" (Zaragocin 2018, 204). It aims to present the corporeal and cultural impacts of urban coloniality on the Muysca community, by examining how urban coloniality is exhibited in Suba in the form of urban development, environmental degradation, urban planning policies, and the erasure of Muysca socioecological

epistemologies. Nevertheless, the Muysca of Suba contest this logic by engaging in everyday bodily practices of resurgence, such as the conservation of urban gardens called *Muysca Tâ*, the occupation of sacred places, and the revitalization of their language, *muysccubun*. I argue that indigeneity, as an embodied-in-territory category, provides the ontological foundation to understand the experiential, performative, and contested aspects of urban indigeneity. By engaging with embodied practices of resurgence that challenge the colonial socio-ecological arrangements, this dissertation significantly contributes to two fields of inquiry, establishing a meaningful dialogue between them. Firstly, it delves into the intricate realm of Indigeneity, offering an innovative approach that aptly captures the embodied experiences of violence and contestation of Indigenous peoples within urban settings. Secondly, as scholars whose work centers on UPE have called for a more heterodox UPE that includes decolonial insights and recognizes the ongoing processes of racial and colonial capitalism in the construction of uneven urban landscapes (Simpson and Bagelman 2018), this study enriches the growing field of Urban Political Ecology by shedding light on the racial dimensions inherent in the production of the city in the Global South.

1.2. Theoretical framework: Urban Political Ecology, Urban Coloniality of Nature, and *Territorio*.

1.2.1.Racializing the urban space

The racialization of space has historically operated as a technology of dispossession and displacement of indigenous peoples. However, within the development of capitalist urbanization, the fundamental role of the racialization of space remains

underexplored within the context of urban political ecology (UPE) and critical urban geography (Dorries, Hugill, and Tomiak 2019). Similarly, there is limited geographic scholarship on how indigenous lands have been desecrated through capitalist urbanization projects that transform, pollute, and endanger entire ecological systems and the affective ties indigenous communities maintain with them. Nevertheless, contemporary scholarship in geography has recently started exploring how urban space has been an overlooked space for indigeneity since "sites of indigeneity were imagined as either temporally or physically at a distance from sites of civilization and progress" (Hunt 2017, 5). This historically racialized idea of the city as a space for rational thinking, remote from those who live closest to 'nature,' has been a long-standing imaginary that has led to the creation of discourses of extinction of indigenous peoples from urban environments as a means of displacing and deterritorializing these communities (Heynen 2016), as it has been for the Muysca of Suba.

Since the city has been portrayed as a modern space of progress and development, racialized colonial imaginaries have conceptually and materially spatialized indigeneity in rural spaces, where the socioeconomic dynamics are significantly different from those in the cities. This has had the effect of "developing a racialized social geography with civilized urban [citizens] at the center and barbarous rural Indians on the margins" (Canessa 2005, 12). In the case of Latin America, Indigenous peoples were never entirely expelled, displaced, or made extinct, as assimilation narratives have suggested. They maintained a presence throughout the colonial, modernization, and neoliberal multicultural periods and "continued to live, albeit in dire conditions, within the peripheries of colonial and early postcolonial cities" (Horn 2019, 20). In spite of cities

being understood as spaces where the Eurocentric legal-tenure logic has deeply settled, "Indigenous peoples maintain a presence and a cultural relationship that creates a persistent coexistence of an Indigenous cultural geography with the settled legal-tenure geography" (Howitt, Muller, and Suchet-Pearson 2009, 363).

The essentialized ethno-spatial narratives of Indigenous removal, however, became hegemonically integrated within the Colombian society's imaginaries of Indigenous identities, locating authenticity in rural environments while segregating and pointing out 'inauthentic' urban Indigenous identities (Blatman-Thomas 2017). As Sarah Hunt asserts, "western spatializations such as the frontier, the survey, and the grid, played an important practical and ideological role in colonial expansion, legitimizing the displacement of Indigenous peoples from their territories" (2014, 30). These spatializations first established during the colonial period, remained inscribed in urban landscapes which spatially arranged "how and by whom urban space is to be inhabited" (Simpson and Bagelman 2018, 565). As a result of these historical spatial arrangements and public imaginaries, indigenous experiences "of urban spaces are precarious and stigmatizing if not erased," which "shapes access to and rights over health, housing, welfare, public space, and political representation" (Radcliffe 2017, 224; see also Lipsitz 2007; Walker and Barcham 2010; Christensen 2013; Quicke and Green 2017; Potter 2020; John 2020). As it is expressed by Lipsitz (2007), race becomes an element defining spatial segregation,

> "Race serves as a key variable in determining who has the ability to own homes that appreciate in value and can be passed down to subsequent generations; in deciding which children have access to education by experienced and credentialed teachers in safe buildings with adequate

> equipment; and in shaping differential exposure to polluted air, water, food, and land" (Lipsitz 2007, 12).

Thus, the racialization of space has been fundamental for expanding capitalist territorializations such as the urbanization of Indigenous lands. Through legal and policy regimes, the ordering of space has significantly impacted these communities' everyday experience and access to their sacred and traditional territories. Some have labeled these processes of spatial segregation in terms of "environmental privilege" (Park and Pellow 2011; Brahinsky, Sasser, and Minkoff-Zern 2014; Argüelles 2021) insofar as they have limited or denied certain racialized bodies access to and control over nature and environmental resources. In the district of Suba, for instance, the creation of recreational parks in sacred enclaves for the Muysca, such as the *Tibabuyes chupqua* [wetland], residential expansion and exclusionism in sacrosanct mountains, such as the Indio Park, and the imposition of higher property taxes on community gardens located in areas ripe for development are all examples of how environmental privilege is exercised and excludes Indigenous communities in urbanized spaces from nature (Sánchez-Castañeda 2020). These technologies of dispossession are not only experienced at the material level but negatively affect the complex network of affective relationships between indigenous communities and the environment. Moreover, through urbanization, Indigenous systems of knowledge about their environment – what Escobar (2008) has called "local models of nature" – suffer an ontological and epistemological rupture that puts the cultural survival of these communities in danger.

1.2.2. Urban Coloniality of Nature: colonial narratives and the subordination of nature and bodies

According to some scholars (Leff 2007; Escobar 2015), the current ecological crisis that is differentially experienced across the globe reflects a crisis in the Eurocentric model of modernity that has privileged economic-based understandings of nature while marginalizing place-based epistemologies. For Latin American decolonial thinkers, the hegemonic narrative of capitalist progress and development, which objectifies nature as a commodity that can be controlled and exploited, arises from what has been called "the colonial matrix of power" (Quijano 2000, 2007, 2020). The *colonial matrix of power*, or *the coloniality of power*, refers to the structures of exploitation and domination that emerged from the legacy of European modern expansionism across the Global South (Quijano 1992). Numerous thinkers have drawn on the coloniality of power in an attempt to critically interrogate the multiple forms that coloniality takes. Among these is the "coloniality of nature," a concept tied to the colonial matrix of power but which links it to the decimation of place-based and traditional epistemologies and alternative modes of being in relation to nature (Escobar 1999, 2008, 2019; Alimonda 2009; Alban and Rosero 2016; Grosfogel 2016).

As Arturo Escobar (2008, 121) affirms, the coloniality of nature is founded upon modern discourses characterized by hierarchical classifications. These hierarchies posit Eurocentric modern rationality as the only viable epistemological system, while nonmodern, 'primitives', women, dark bodies, and nature are subordinated. The objectification of nature and the subordination of racialized and gendered bodies become

intertwined according to the coloniality of power (Lugones 2020) insofar as they reproduce narratives and practices of exploitation against Indigenous bodies and their relationships with nature. The coloniality of nature reduces nature to a "subaltern space" that is to be exploited and reconfigured according to the accumulation regimes established during modernity (Alimonda 2009, 66). Given that the coloniality of nature has persisted since the colonial period in Latin America, the occupation, exploitation, and destruction of biodiversity and Indigenous knowledge systems remains a threat for several communities, including Indigenous peoples, whose "existence[']s] is ultimately dependent upon intimate relationships of reciprocity, humility, honesty and respect with all the elements of creation, including plants and animals" (Simpson 2014, 10).

In response to the coloniality of nature's disruptive effects across multiple dimensions such as Indigenous bodies and lands, decolonial thought has been developed to delink and contest the colonial matrix of power while aiming at "epistemic reconstitution" (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 166). Through practices of "epistemic disobedience" (Mignolo 2009, 2011), decoloniality works to reify notions that emerge from alternative "regimes of nature," such as those that emanate from Indigenous ontologies (Escobar 2008, 2019). C*uerpo-territorio* [body-territory] and embodiment (Cabnal 2015) emerge as valuable examples of epistemic disobedience, providing decolonial concepts that nourish the debates surrounding Indigeneity and Territory and situate the production of knowledge in the margins. In this dissertation, embodiment is a vital concept, and I follow Lorena Cabnal's Indigenous feminist approach. She proposes *embodiment* or the act of *embodying* as

> the individual and collective action that our outraged bodies take at the injustices other bodies experience. They self-convene to gather political energy to resist and act against multiple patriarchal, colonialist, racist, and capitalist oppressions. *Embodiment* generates affective and spiritual energies and breaks imposed borders and time. It provides us with closeness, collective indignation, but also with revitalization and new strength, to **recover joy without losing indignation**[3] (2015, 1).

Likewise, another insightful concept that provides a link between embody-ment and territory, is the notion of *vincularidad* [vincularity]. Arising from Andean Indigenous thinkers, this notion develops from the "awareness of the integral relation and interdependence amongst all living organism (in which humans are only a part) with territory or land and the cosmos" (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 1). The notion of *vincularidad* illustrates how relational modes of existence are characteristic of many Indigenous peoples' conceptions of their environment (Pierotti 2011, 18). Moreover, these alternative regimes of nature demonstrate how these communities are engaged in decolonial praxis to resist and unsettle the ongoing colonial technologies of control over their territories.

By situating this framework in cities, I argue that the coloniality of nature is spatialized in urban environments, where it remains present in the narratives and practices that continue to render the knowledges, worldviews, subjectivities, and human-nonhuman relationships of urban Indigenous communities invisible. Whereas decoloniality offers a robust theoretical framework, some have suggested that more ethnographic work is needed (Oslender 2019). In drawing on ethnographic research on the Indigenous revitalization process of the Muysca of Suba, I examine how racial imaginaries of Indigenous peoples in Colombia work to negate urban Indigenous

[3] Translated by the author. Bold made by Cabnal in the original text.

communities' rights to traditional territories while also silencing and rendering their alternative relational ontologies of nature and the environment invisible. I develop this argument in two ways: first, by foregrounding the fundamental role of racism in capitalist urbanization (Dorries, Hugill, and Tomiak 2019), I illustrate how colonial racial violence remains present and is materialized through processes of race-based spatial segregation, displacement, and urban planning policies that control access to nature. Second, in focusing on the ongoing urban coloniality of nature experienced by the Muisca community of Suba, I demonstrate how the enforcement of colonial socioecological configurations increasingly endangers indigenous place-based ontologies of nature as well as the biodiversity of Suba.

1.2.3. Territorial Turn in Latin America and Territorio

The debates on territory in which I position myself have emerged within a particular historical context in Latin America. Some scholars have referred to the "territorial turn" as the period from the late 1980s through the 1990s, when in the wake of Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities' resurgence in Latin America, there was a wave of constitutional changes regarding the legal recognition of multicultural diversity. The constitutional changes towards multicultural recognition also entailed granting ethnic communities collective property rights over approximately 200 million hectares of land throughout Latin America (Bryan 2012; see also Larson et al. 2008; Pacheco and Barry 2009; Correia 2019). In Colombia, newly recognized ethnic communities were granted 30% of the national territory (Jackson 2019). Coined by the historical and cultural geographer Karl F. Offen (2003), who has worked extensively in Pacific Colombia, the *territorial turn* is defined as a new form of territorial governance that guarantees

territorial rights to Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities throughout Latin America. As a new mode of spatial organization, the territorial turn embodied a dramatic change from the assimilation project—*mestizaje*—which entirely ignored ethnic territorial claims for centuries (Van Cott 2000). Global forces, such as the International Labor Organization's Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ILO 169), influenced the constitutional changes involving the recognition of ethnic communities and their territorial rights. ILO-169 was passed in 1989, and it promoted one of the most important definitions of territory, specifically as "the total environment of the areas which the peoples concerned occupy or otherwise use" (International Labor Organization, Article 13.2). The Convention also states that governments shall respect and guarantee the relationship between Indigenous peoples and their territories or lands. In subsequent articles, the ILO highlighted the importance of the collective nature of the relationship between the territory and Indigenous peoples and recognized the cultural and spiritual values these communities attribute to the land.

Likewise, through the ratification of ILO 169, governments must guarantee a national legal system that identifies and protects the rights of ownership and possession of the lands which have traditionally been occupied by Indigenous communities, as well as the use of lands that have been used for subsistence and traditional practices (ILO, Article 14). The domestic law of countries signatory of this convention, therefore, had to guarantee significant territorial administration changes. Following in the footsteps of the ILO, the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) stressed the right that Indigenous peoples have to "maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands,

territories" (UNDRIP, Article 25). While the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples corroborates the need for Indigenous peoples to "maintain and strengthen" their relationship with their territories, it nevertheless fails to provide a clear definition of territory.

Another important dimension of the territorial turn highlighted by Offen involves the multivalent role of the World Bank (WB) in multicultural reforms. Offen highlights that the WB was not only the leading financer of projects that sought to return territory to Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities, but it was also the main economic sponsor of conservation and environmental projects around the world (see also Horta 2000), leading Offen to regard it as the institution with the most power to "shape the language and timing of reform laws and the procedural decrees implementing them" (Offen 2003, 66). In Colombia, Offen suggests that the World Bank operated through various environmental projects, for instance, the Natural Resource Management Program, that demarcated and calculated land titling in the Pacific Coast of Colombia. In this endeavor, the program worked with communities to help define the collective boundaries through participatory mapping, and in doing so, was able to include traditional practices, sacred places, history, and traditional knowledge into the cartographic definitions (61). Despite increasing community cohesion and creating new understandings of territory, the use of communities' knowledge was nevertheless appropriated to achieve the economic purposes of the World Bank. An example of this can be found in the WB's final report on the Ecuadorian territorial turn, wherein it asserts that there is a relationship between indigeneity and development, or what the WB refers as "ethno-development." Ethno-development, like those projects implemented in other countries, sought to build on "the

positive qualities of Indigenous cultures, with close attachments to ancestral land, including the capacity to mobilize labor and other resources to promote local employment and growth" (WB 1997, 4). By investing in environmental projects and ensuring its interests within the social movements' agendas, the World Bank aspired to stabilize property regimes in countries where communist threats were a reality. The WB also sought to "remove biodiverse lands from the vagaries of market forces (by ensuring that collective properties cannot be transferred), to foment foreign direct investment" (Offen 2003, 51). In a paternalistic "contractual relationship," the World Bank's interest was to 'share' the control of the land in exchange for the commitment of ethnic communities' conserving of the biodiversity resources within those territories (51). Offen's assessment concludes by stating that while this new form of governance offered exciting possibilities for Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, in practice, these constitutional changes have not been successful. Offen argues that there must be "a transfer of appropriate financial resources, genuine administrative power, and progressive laws instituting them if new ethnic-territorial regimes are going to improve social justice and environmental conservation in Latin America" (66).

While Offen's aim is not a conceptual clarification of the notion of territory but a historical elucidation of the process of ethnic land titling in Latin America, Offen provides a valuable and institutionally-operative definition of territory as "a form of collective property engendering rights extending beyond existing private property relations" (2003, 48). Echoing scholars such as Arturo Escobar (1998; see also Escobar 2008), Offen's definition gathers not only the narrow state notion of territory but also captures the collective and relational nature of property asserted by many Indigenous

groups. Offen's approach to territory helps to resolve one of the contradictions highlighted in this dissertation between the state and development-oriented actors' perspectives on territory, which are centered on rigid notions of identity and economic growth within a bounded space, versus the perspectives from Indigenous and other ethnic communities that intertwine their relationships with a unconstrained environment, their traditional practices, and their histories of struggle and resistance in place.

Other scholars have also suggested that the territorial turn has been an opportunity to challenge conventional notions of territory and to emphasize how territory, as a process, is "continually produced and altered through historical processes" (Bryan 2009, 2012; see also Agnew and Oslender 2010). Bryan stresses the disconnection between the state institutions' understandings of territory and the relational and complex nature of territory within Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities. According to Bryan (2020, 203), territory has been understood as a "closed object, a thing that can be mapped, recognized, and demarcated" through legal regimes. As a jurisdictional space, territory has become governable through the production of cartographic knowledge; while in some cases, it is produced in collaboration with the communities, it is nevertheless used and reproduced in order to control land and resources, both natural and human. For Bryan, maps—even participatory maps—offer only a partial understanding of territory (203). While mapping provides visibility to specific physical spaces by facilitating the "recognition of Black and Indigenous territories, giving them a place in a social and spatial order founded on their dispossession" (204), the demarcation or titling of these land claims based on mapping shows the insufficiency of this method. Bryan argues that territory is a political technology "that is used to engage peoples' everyday

knowledge of the terrain, organize practices of calculation, distribute political authority, and recognize rights in the name of governing more effectively" (Bryan 2012, 218). In this sense, territory is reinforced within the juridical realm at the expense of the communities' notions. As Bryan asserts,

> the law provides a means of translating historically and geographically situated knowledges into a putatively universal language of rights. In turn, the emphasis on formal recognition further shifts attention to practices of administration, demarcation, and management that materialize a socio-spatial order that is legally produced (Bryan 2012, 218).

For many scholars including Bryan, the territorial turn and its effects on property rights for Indigenous peoples can be understood as a political and economic technology of governance within the Latin American states (Bryan 2012). Situating the state above communities in the recognition and granting of land property, "states come into being through these claims and the assertion of control over territory, resources, and people" (Neumann 2004, 185; see also Bryan 2011; Wainwright and Barnes 2009). Reproducing colonial relations of property, race continues to be an important element of legal consideration (Ng'weno 2007). As Brenna Bhandar (2018) states, "racial regimes of property" continue as a fundamental foundation to create the narratives of land property ownership. These regimes efface place-based notions of territorial property to enforce economic notions of productivity and value (Anthias 2019). While some scholars have suggested that Indigenous communities have strategically engaged with hegemonic notions of property to achieve access to land (Povinelli 2002, Bryan 2012; Erazo 2013), the calculation of land and its limited distribution and administration by ethnic communities have yet to change the underlying inequalities.

One interesting outlook on the territorial turn has been offered by the American geographer Joel Correia. For Correia, while it is evident that a relation exists between territorial politics and the economic actors that boosted these reforms, Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities have also played a significant role in this process insofar as their efforts have "unsettled territory to create communal spaces for more just futures" (Correia 2019, 11). For Correia, more than a mere result of neoliberal economic actors, the territorial turn is an on-going process and "an assemblage of material practices and discourses advanced by Indigenous communities that seek to remake and maintain their traditional territories" (13). Correia's argument aligns with Bryan's assertion that the territorial turn is an unfinished process that does not solve the structural inequalities by solely distributing land to certain recognized ethnic communities. Instead of challenging colonial logics of territory, by accepting the delimitation of spatial order based on state property rights, this process limits the ability to "radically alter extant power relations" by reaffirming the authority of the State as rights provider (13). As a second element within his argument, Correia affirms that territory is a relational assemblage and a space for collective organization. This approach follows Latin American scholars that have integrated Anglophone and French scholarship within new debates about the multiple territorial epistemologies experienced by ethnic communities. Correia uses the concept of assemblage to understand territory as a relational concept, emphasizing the unfinished nature of the territorial turn as a process, to conclude that the territorial turn has worked through different temporalities and competing territorialities. Understanding territory as a dynamic assemblage situates "Indigenous struggles within a longer time horizon" by uncovering the power relations and historical remnants that have shaped the present

politics (13). In contrast to other thinkers, Correia suggests that the territorial turn does not solely encompass land demarcation and titling, but it possesses an emancipatory potential since it was born out of Indigenous struggles. In giving agency to Indigenous social movements, Correia claims that, "Indigenous political mobilization influenced the turn to territory" (26). Even though Correia recognizes that these restitutions do not radically alter the structural, political, and economic factors that determine dispossession, he maintains that for those communities that have recuperated collective spaces, this process contributes to the possibility of self-determination as well as the space to engender possible decolonial futures.

Without a doubt, the territorial turn and debates on territory have offered a deeper understanding of alternative notions of territory, expanding the concept beyond its relationship with the modern state by bringing together epistemologies from Indigenous and Afro-descendent cosmologies. This engagement has been developed for some time by Latin American scholars (Leff 2000; Haesbaert 2013; Escobar 2008; Zibechi 2012); however, for Anglophone academia, this remains a very contemporary approach. In an attempt to bring more approaches from decolonial, feminist, and Latin American scholars to Anglophone scholarship, I engage with some of the alternative notions of territory and thereby nurture this analytical framework.

1.2.4. Territorio: alternative notions of territory

In the Latin American context, the notion of territory or *territorio* (in Spanish) has begun to move away from its associations with space, power, sovereignty, and borders towards a more "regional decolonial approach to territory" (Halvorsen 2019, 804). More than a battle of knowledges, what intellectuals from Latin America have promoted

signals what Boaventura de Sousa Santos has termed an "ecology of knowledges" (de Sousa Santos 2018, 32). By 'ecology of knowledges', de Sousa Santos means a "collective cognitive construction led by the principles of horizontality and reciprocity" (78). The ecology of knowledges invite the "promotion of non-relativistic dialogues among knowledges […] engaged in ever broader epistemological disputes aimed both at maximizing their respective contributions to build a more democratic and just society" (de Sousa Santos et al. 2007, xx). In this sense, far from promoting a universal concept of territory that is historically and geographically situated in Western thought, the ecology of knowledges approach to territory suggests collaboration among alternative perspectives to enrich the theoretical understanding of territory while not overshadowing or disregarding other modes of thought.

For some scholars (Sandoval, Robertsdotter, and Paredes 2017, 45), *territorio* is an "arena of dispute" (see also Manzanal 2008), where through constant negotiation and contestation, different actors struggle to control a space. However, for these scholars (Sandoval, Robertsdotter, and Paredes 2017), *territorio* must be understood as a very specific Latin American concept that emerges among power-relationships in space, between global forces and place-based groups. In their own words, a *territorio* is "a complex spatial entity shaped by both place-based and external elements, where a diversity of social arrangements interplays with social relations" (56). This conceptualization of territory provides the possibility to think of *territorio* as a site of multiple and competing logics that constantly redefine this term. As they suggest, *territorio* takes on a political dimension, especially when used in the analysis of social movements in Latin America, and can become a space of collective action (53).

Territorio, therefore, represents the opportunity to associate everyday practices, feelings, place-based ontologies, and struggles into a spatial entity that is in constant negotiation (Escobar 2008; Zibechi 2012).

In his work, Halvorsen (2019) interrogates the Eurocentric state-bonded notion of territory, affirming that less has been explored within alternative epistemologies in Latin America. For Halvorsen, "territory is not only produced by the modern state and dominant strategies of measuring and controlling from above; it is resisted, (re)appropriated and (re)defined in the course of diverse grassroots struggles" (803). To arrive at this conclusion, Halvorsen affirms that there is a need to decolonize territory through an intellectual and practical task. Firstly, it is essential to expose the limits of the narrow concept within Anglophone thought and integrate alternative knowledges produced in other languages, cultures, and outside academia. Secondly, as a praxis, decolonizing territory means to expose and reverse the "hierarchies that shape practices of knowledge production" (791). In his attempt to expand the concept of territory, Halvorsen argues that instead of competing with the Western/state-centric notion—to which Elden (2013) would refer as the unique concept of territory—Halvorsen argues that multiple epistemologies on territory can be brought together in order to enrich the framework. He suggests that territories have multiple actors that exert their power—both from above and below—producing what he calls "overlapping and entangled territories" (Halvorsen 2019, 794). With this in mind, Halvorsen proposes a notion of territory that does not eliminate contrasting visions but instead puts them in conversation without any hierarchical relation. For the scholar, these territories are overlapping since there has never been a space that has not been territorialized before; therefore, all spaces have

'territorial configurations' (Santos 2005) that overlap with "historically existing forms, practices, institutions, memories" (Halvorsen 2019, 795). For example, Halvorsen affirms that colonial processes of territorial appropriation are the result of dominant ideas and practices of territoriality that have historically oppressed other forms of territory based on race, gender, and class (795). Secondly, for Halvorsen, territories are entangled insofar as they are caught within various "political projects in the course of strategies to appropriate and occupy space within a (post)colonial context" (795). He illustrates this entanglement in the context of Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities by stating that the Western-modern notion of territory has been contested and redefined from below. Communities' subversive use of using calculative techniques designed by the dominant State, such as mapping, are therefore being used to claim ancestral lands. This entanglement is the result of constant processes of domination and resistance within territories.

Halvorsen mainly engages with the notion of *territorio* in order to decolonize the concept in the practice of production of knowledge. Through this epistemological dialogue between territory—in the Anglophone scholarship—and *territorio,* Halvorsen aims to expose the existing hierarchies within the coloniality of knowledge. As a decolonial practice, engaging with theories and concepts from non-Western academia—including mestizo scholars as well as Afro-descendant and Indigenous scholars—promotes a "radical and ethical reorientation of scholarly practices, including who and what we cite […] how we work with colleagues from the Global South" (Halvorsen 2019, 795). Hence, Halvorsen concludes with an invitation to rethink the way geographical knowledge has circled around the Western notion of territory without

integrating other epistemologies, and furthermore, without an ethical commitment to involve other actors in the production of knowledges, such as grassroots movements, and Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities. bonded notion of territory, affirming that less has been explored within alternative epistemologies in Latin America.

For the Uruguayan activist-scholar Raul Zibechi, territory is the "space in which to build a new social organization collectively, where new subjects take shape and materially and symbolically appropriate their space" (2012, 19). Based on decades of work with social movements in Latin America as an active participant, Zibechi examines how these collectives have engaged in counter-practices that challenge colonialism and capitalism, as has been the case with the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN is the acronym in Spanish). For Zibechi, these social movements share certain particular features such as the following: 1) the territorialization of their movement; 2) the pursuit of autonomy from the State and political parties; 3) the active role of women within the groups; 4) the re-valorization of their identity and knowledge. All of these features allow them to succeed at appropriating alternative economic and social models that do not echo capitalist-state models. Zibechi's contributions to the concept of territory in Latin America are also an invitation to expand this concept through active engagement with epistemologies from subaltern movements. In the same manner, for the Brazilian geographer Carlos Walter Porto-Gonçalves (2015), as for other Latin American scholars, the concept of territory has transcended its meaning beyond the boundaries and legal regimes of the State, to signify a process in which multiple actors are involved and pursue the control of space and its capital. According to this understanding, territory signals

> a process of appropriation and control of geographical space, of its peoples and resources, revealing the power relations that traverse the field of political ecology. The territory is being "reinvented" as a space-place for the cultural re-appropriation of nature (Porto-Gonçalves 2015, 73).

For some scholars, the influence of theoretical turns such as the ontological turn and posthumanism in both anthropology and geography (Anthias and Hoffmann 2020) have provided opportunities to include alternative ontologies into the territorial conversation. The Colombian scholar Arturo Escobar (2008), who has worked for decades with social movements in Colombia, especially with Afro-descendant communities on the country's Pacific coast, has conceptualized territory as a relational term. Working with the concept of territory from the *Proceso de Comunidades Negras*[4] (Process of Black Communities—PCN by its acronym in Spanish), Escobar echoes their definition of territory "as the space of effective appropriation of ecosystems by a given community […it] embodies the life-project of a community" (59). Like Porto-Gonçalves, Escobar's defines territory as a relational term, highlighting both the space of ecosystems and the role of territory within a communal life-project. As an *Espacio de Vida* (life space), these communities experience territory in relation to culture and biodiversity as an on-going collective process. As communal space, the *Espacios de Vida* are constituted by the needed and indispensable space where the communities create and recreate their lives; it is thus a living space where the ethnic, historical and cultural survival is guaranteed (Escobar 2015, 32).

[4] The Process of Black Communities is a network of 140 local-based organizations that work towards the recognition and control of the territory in Pacific Colombia (Escobar 1999).

Escobar argues that in order to understand how territory is more than a material basis of subsistence for these communities, it is crucial to attend to ontological differences. For instance, when one is referring to the concept of community within these ontologies, this notion is expanded from a concept centered on only humans to include the nonhuman (animals, mountains, ancestors, etc.) and their relations in space (Escobar 2015; see also De la Cadena 2010; 2015). Here is where the incompatibilities are present. For Escobar, the civilizational crisis, especially the ecological and social crises produced by the One-World ontology,[5] can be confronted through a *lucha ontológica* (ontological battle) that would contribute to cultural and ecological transitions to the pluriverse. While the state institutionalizes territory as a bounded ethnic space in the One World ontology, for the Afro-communities involved in the PCN, territory means a conjunction of space, meanings, memories, relationships between the human and the nonhuman, and struggles that can only be understood through an ontology that differs from that of the Colombian State.

In this section, I have reviewed how the territorial turn and *territorio* have served as a theoretical framework that integrates alternative conceptualizations of territory, specifically from Latin America. On the one hand, some scholars have suggested that the territorial turn has been studied as a mode of spatial governance to control ethnic difference (Bryan 2012) but also as an empowerment platform that has positioned ethnic

[5] The One-World World (OWW) is a term coined by Arturo Escobar. In his work, Escobar argues that this ontology, which is associated with the capitalist, secular, liberal, patriarchal, white logics, "wishes to organize everything in terms of individuals, private property, markets, profits, and a single notion of the Real. [In addition] the OWW seeks to banish nature and the sacred from the domain of an exclusively human-driven life (Escobar, n.d.).

visions and struggles for territory within political changes throughout Latin America (Correia 2019). On the other hand, the examination of *territorio* within Latin American scholarship has shown how grassroots movements, Indigenous and Afro-descendent communities have illuminated and nourished the notion of territory with alternative ontologies that highlight the relational nature of this concept. Indigenous communities in Latin America have maintained a sense of cultural difference despite centuries of dispossession, segregation, and displacement, and nowadays, have undertaken a process of decolonization through the "re-appropriation of their historical patrimony […] and [the] reinvention of their cultural identities" (Porto-Gonçalves and Leff 2015, 86). Nevertheless, the possibility of real spaces for self-determination and autonomy continues to be only an aspiration for most of these Indigenous communities.

1.3. Chapters summary

In Chapter 2, *Mestizaje, Muysca dispossession, and Suba as Indigenous land*, I offer a concise historical narrative of Muysca's territorial dispossession. I highlight that while the presence of the Muysca population was not entirely vanished from their traditional lands in Suba, they instead endured the process of invisibilization and assimilation promoted by the implementation of Colombian *mestizaje* laws. This chapter provides a comprehensive analysis using archival material, historical literature, and ethnographic material to support two main ideas: first, I present that the Muysca Indigenous peoples, along with other racialized populations, were the invisible workforce in the building and maintenance of Bogota and Suba—which was later attached to the main city as a locality. Secondly, in alignment with the main argument of this dissertation, I argue that the production of Suba as an urban environment has been the

result of the concomitant relationship between the exploitation and transformation of the land of Suba and the Muisca Indigenous body(ies). This chapter articulates the history of the relationship between the degradation of the environment in Suba and the racialized violence experienced by the Muyscas. It illustrates how this process of urbanization, as an expression of the coloniality of nature, perpetuates colonial spatial logics and establishes new mechanisms of displacement, ecological degradation, and spatial segregation in the current urban planning policies such as the Land Management Plan[6] (POT).

Chapter 3, *Participatory Action Research and Decoloniality as Praxis*, is a reflective narrative on the design of this dissertation research, which emerged through participatory work with the Muysca community of Suba. This chapter presents the theoretical and ethical framework that has guided me and continues to direct my work. While I emphasize the necessity of radical theory, as I argue in this chapter, praxis must be a central and obligatory element in participatory-based methodologies, involving thinking and incorporating creative methodologies in the field and with the communities. In this chapter, I review critical scholarship on decolonizing and participatory methodologies and outline the phases of this research. These include the preliminary phase that served as the foundation for the design of this dissertation project, as well as the two ethnographic phases conducted with the Muysca community, including a description of the methods conducted. These ethnographic phases involved research with both disengaged and engaged members of the Cabildo institution. Furthermore, I present

[6] Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial (POT) by its acronym in Spanish.

the data analysis process and the political action involved with this process of research. Drawing on PAR as my main methodological foundation, with this dissertation, I aimed to experience research as a journey of utilizing my academic knowledge in service of Muysca's political struggle. Following some of PAR's main references, Fals-Borda and Rahman (1991) assert that "through the experience of something, we intuitively apprehend its essence…In PAR such an experience, called *vivencia* in Spanish, is complemented by another idea: that of authentic commitment" (4). For Fals-Borda to employ PAR, there is an inseparable bond between knowledge production, commitment, and action-praxis. By commitment, Fals-Borda means, the intellectual's attitude of rejection of "being a simple observer and puts his thinking or art at the service of a cause" (Fals-Borda 1970, 66). In my case, renouncing the possibility of committing to the community's causes was not an option, and this dissertation is the result of an ongoing process characterized by humility and commitment.

In the era of 'contemporary colonialism' (Alfred and Corntassel 2005), described as an epoch when the legacy of colonialism has evolved in new subtle techniques of Indigenous oppression, scholars in both anthropology and geography continue to engage with critical work questioning the relationship between scholarship and the on-going practices of colonialism (Cameron, de Leeuw, and Greenwood 2009; Kobayashi and de Leeuw 2010; Hunt 2014; Barker and Pickerill 2020). Scholars have raised concerns, for instance, with regards to how anthropologists continue to be the 'experts' on Indigenous peoples in legal claims for recognition and land claims (Povinelli 2002; Lea 2012; Shulist 2016), thereby continuing to represent 'voice of the colonized' (Paine 1990; Said 1989; Simpson 2007). By the same token, during most of the 20th century, geographic

scholarship “was inclined to conflate Indigenous peoples and the natural environment, perpetuating ideals of the ‘noble savage’ living in spiritually attuned communities understood both biologically and culturally to be authentic and unmediated primordial outcomes of wild, untamed lands” (Kobayashi and de Leeuw 2010, 5). Moreover, geographers have pointed out how Indigenous ontologies have yet to be fully integrated into the discipline, and as such, geography continues to practice forms of epistemological violence (Shaw, Herman, and Dobbs 2006; Sharp 2013; Hunt 2014). In Chapter 4, *Indigenous Ontologies and Epistemologies of the State*, I engage contemporary scholarship on indigeneity as an institutionalized category governed through regimes of authenticity and recognition. In order to illustrate this, I examine the interactions between the Muisca of Suba and the state/district authorities, which can be understood through these three themes: 1) Proving Indigenous authenticity and obtaining recognition; 2) Becoming Indigenous citizens; 3) Challenging and contesting state and district authorities’ epistemologies. Using the examples of the *Santuario* territory, the *chupqua* [wetland] Tibabuyes, and the Indigenous urban gardens—*Muysca Tâ*, I demonstrate how these ontological encounters between governmental authorities and the Muysca people represent instances where legal regimes of Indigenous recognition perpetuate colonial technologies that erode Indigenous communities' ongoing attempts of self-determination. Likewise, I present how these legal techniques aim at producing and shaping the indigeneity that resembles the state’s essentialist imaginaries.

Examining the existing literature on colonial violence against Indigenous peoples' bodies and lands reveals how contemporary scholarship has shifted the lenses towards the importance of Indigenous peoples' bodies, recognizing the experience of symbolic and

structural violence at this micro-level. In Chapter 5, *The Politics of Embodied Indigeneity*, I delve into the concept of Indigeneity as an embodied and in-place category. In this chapter, I review how feminist and decolonial scholarship has analyzed the notion of *Cuerpo-territorio* [body territory] as one "single subject of political agency that resists and identifies violations against [Indigenous] bodies and territories as part of the same process" (Zaragocin 2018, 204). Drawing upon ethnographic material, I present the Muysca notion of territory, which is inherently connected to the Muysca body. Through this analysis, I examine the impacts of urbanization-induced environmental degradation on the Muysca people; these impacts are manifested in various forms, including health ailments, pollution of their sacred sites, and threats to the process of revitalization.

Nevertheless, considering the Indigenous bodies as a critical analytical framework provides an empowering space to comprehend the mechanisms of contestation that the community has created in order to maintain their relationship with their sacred and traditional lands and their ongoing process of Indigenous revitalization. For instance, I revisit the case of the *Muysca Tâ* to expand on how these spaces serve as sites where their indigeneity is corporeally experienced through being in-place, engaging in the embodied practice of urban gardening, and contesting colonial socioecological ordering in the city. Finally, I present how the Muysca community of Suba must constantly negotiate its identity in public spaces through the performance of their indigeneity. Like many urban Indigenous peoples, they face strong regulations and demands for authenticity within multiculturalism, all of which complicate and attempt to negate their emerging and ongoing process of becoming Indigenous. Indigeneity is an embodied identity, and I argue that performance mediates between the institutionalized demands for diacritic

markers and Indigenous engagement with re-indigenization or revitalization of their identity. Specifically, through the case study of the Muysca, I explore how urban Indigenous revitalization processes are challenging essentialist notions of indigeneity while they navigate the cultural politics of identity in Colombia.

1.4. Reflections on Positionality

I engage with Participatory Action Research (PAR) as the main methodological and ethical framework in this dissertation research. With more than six years of research with the Muysca community of Suba, particularly twelve months of continuous fieldwork research for this work, I analyzed archival material and employed ethnographic techniques such as in-depth participant observation, individual and group semi-structured interviews, participatory mapping, and visual methodologies with the Muysca community of Suba in Bogotá, Colombia.

This reflection is the product of encounters and discounters in the field but also interwoven with a personal narrative detailing how my positionality played a role in the research process. I was born and raised in Bogotá, Colombia. My childhood and adolescence were lived between two distant but very similar places, Soacha and Suba. Soacha, an integral part of Bogota's Metropolitical Area of Bogotá, predominantly shelters working-class families. This municipality is characterized by high rates of Unsatisfied Basic Needs (NBI acronym in Spanish), overcrowded households, overurbanization, and high rates of criminality (alcaldiasoacha.gov.co). These metrics resemble many of the issues experienced in Suba, the other place where I grew up. Back in 2017, when I started my work with the Muysca of Suba, I vividly recall a pivotal encounter. During my initial steps towards gaining approval from the Muisca Cabildo,

the former Governor Ivan Niviayo posed a fundamental query: “Where are you from?” Without hesitation, I replied: “From here, from Suba”. This response marked the commencement of my path as a researcher within the community, yet it was but the first stride in a more complex endeavor.

Valentine (1999) suggests that “as we move through different spaces our bodies negotiate a range of identities and statuses” (347). In my case, this intricate interplay of identities manifested as a continuous multifaced process. I was raised in Suba and experienced similar socioeconomic conditions to that of many of the members of the community. However, substantial barriers emerged due to Muysca’s perception of my positionality: while I was a native Spanish speaker, my training and residence in the United States as a doctoral student of anthropology, prevented many initial interactions. The breakthrough arrived only after immersing myself in various community events, working in the gardens and the kitchen, and fostering informal conversations with members of the community. Through these efforts, I gradually unveiled aspects of my upbringing that they were looking for. Once I told my story as a young woman of color, an international student with an assistantship, and a lifelong inhabitant of Suba, members of the community opened up to talk about their own stories and relate to many of the experiences I shared with them.

Beyond my personal story, another element that facilitated the cultivation of affective ties within the community was my methodological approach, which I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 3. Engaging with Participatory Action Research, a methodology pioneered by the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda, I embraced an ethical stance that forged a collaborative space for epistemological exploration. My main goal with this

dissertation was to develop research from the margins that would explore and produce a meaningful piece "not on the marginalized but research by, for, and with them/us" (Brown and Strega 2005). It is important to clarify that my intention does not involve assuming the role of an interpreter or translator of the Muysca ontology. In this regard, I share the perspective of some (Ramos 2012) who present the limitations of non-Indigenous anthropologists at the moment of analyzing the complex realities of Indigenous peoples. I am acutely aware of the limitations of writing within the confines of Eurocentric academic standards; nevertheless, as a result of a collaborative process, the aim of producing this piece is the potential to attain governmental and civic visibility and representation, as well as factual resources such as access to land, education, housing, and health services.

CHAPTER 2. *MESTIZAJE*, MUYSCA DISPOSSESSION, AND SUBA AS INDIGENOUS LAND.

2.1. Introduction

The *Chircales,* or brickmakers, were open-pit artisanal brick and tile industries located in some of the surrounding areas of Bogota, including Suba. Since the Colonial Period, the artisanal production of bricks and tiles was necessary to form the new colonial centers that would later become cities. In the case of Bogotá, the *chircales* were located both in the south of the city, in the area of San Cristobal (Cifuentes Sarmiento 2020), and in the hills of Suba. These extraction sites were crucial in the development of the city and the surrounding towns, especially during the early decades of the twentieth century. I begin this chapter using a historical account of the *chircales* to illustrate two crucial elements in this dissertation: first, Bogotá, as was the case of other colonial centers, was framed as a 'white' place during the colonial and republican periods, yet the presence of Indigenous peoples was not entirely removed, displaced, or obliterated (Horn 2019). In contrast, Indigenous peoples, along with other racialized populations, were the workforce in the building and maintenance of cities (Zambrano 2008), and as I develop in this chapter, their existence was integrated into the mestizo society for economic reasons. The labor of the Muysca was essential in the production of bricks at the *chircales* (see Figure 1); as discussed in one informal conversation with a member of the community: "the Muyscas were forced to produce the bricks that built the foundations for the city that later would eat us" (see Figure 2) (Fieldwork notes October 2021).

Figure 1. A Muysca Indigenous worker at the chircales. Source: Picture from a personal archive of one of the members of the community.

Figure 2. Brick from one of the chircales in Suba at the house of one of the Muysca people. Source: picture taken by the author at the house of Indigenous woman María Ozuna.

The second element I would like to highlight with this account is the concomitant relationship between the historical exploitation and transformation of the land of Suba and the Muysca Indigenous body(ies). The *chircales* were places of exploitation and

pollution of natural sites in Suba, since the artisanal production of bricks involved the extraction of sand from the hills, causing erosion, landslides, and pollution of water sources, as well as air pollution caused by the burning of the bricks and tiles in the artisanal ovens. Likewise, the *chircales* were spaces of racialized labor where the Indigenous Muisca bodies were exploited and polluted from a very young age. The *chircales* were one of the earliest emblematic places of the expansion of ideals of progress and development and the symbolic and material foundation of the modern city. Even though the *chircales* do not exist in Suba any longer, based on this ethnographic research, some members of the community remember themselves or their family members working in these places, providing a relevant example to start this chapter as it articulates the history of the relationship between the invisibilization of the Muysca, the production of the city of Bogota, the degradation of the environment, and the racialized violence experienced by the Muyscas for centuries.

This chapter provides a historical survey of the process of Muysca territorial dispossession and cultural erasure. In this endeavor, I arrange this chapter in three sections. First, I present a brief overview of the interrelated Republican projects of dissolution of Indigenous identities (*mestizaje*) and dissolution of commonly-held Indigenous lands (called *resguardos*), following a liberal ideology of Indigenous economic integration as mestizo citizens. Second, I situate the process of Suba's transformation from a largely self-sufficient, rural town into a marginal 'locality'[7] of Bogota, the capital city of Colombia. Finally, I elaborate on the process of Muysca

[7] '*Localidades*' or 'locality' is a term to refer to administrative divisions within the city of Bogota. The city is divided into 20 localities in total. Each locality is semi-autonomous unit responsible for managing public services.

Indigenous resurgence and state recognition during the late decades of the twentieth century.

2.2. Republican laws, *Mestizaje*, and *Resguardo* Dissolution

In this section, I explore how the nation-building formation in Colombia involved a set of reforms in the nineteenth century toward modernization that included the dissolution of the Indigenous common lands, known as the *resguardos*. The *resguardos* were colonial institutions established as, among several purposes, mechanisms of spatial segregation to divide the republic of Spaniards and the *repúblicas de indios* [Indian republics] from the 16th century to the 19th century (Safford 1991). These land arrangements recognized that "the Indigenous communities that paid tribute [shall enjoy] inalienable rights to the usufruct from indivisible community lands" (del Castillo 2019, 772). However, the control of these *resguardos* was in the hands of primarily ecclesiastic authorities, which would "convert Indigenous people into good subjects of the Catholic monarchy" (773). While this administrative spatial control can be seen as an early device of Hispanicization, the cultural integration of Indigenous peoples into the mestizo society only took place throughout the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century with the emerging republican laws.

According to Lopez (2005), Indigenous communities, as organized within colonial structures like the *resguardos*, enjoyed a degree of autonomy that gradually eroded between the 16th and 20th centuries (333). The pursuit of liberal principles during the quest for independence from Spanish rule promoted land privatization. This dissolution of the *resguardos* in Colombia, however, was not a straightforward process of abolition of ethnic-based communal lands but a complex and intricate process that

involved multiple actors and motivations. Some scholars (Esteban Palma 2017) have mentioned that the Creole elites sought to emulate discursively European values of universal freedom, rights equality, and population cohesion as the motivation behind the project of homogenization of the population in the emerging Nation-states in Latin America. Nevertheless, according to Safford (1991), the process of assimilation of the Indigenous population into the mestizo society not only sought to endorse the native population with equal rights but to integrate them economically as workers and potential consumers, and foremost, to convert "non-alienable Indian community lands to individual property" (1). The case of the main city of Bogota and its surroundings (see Figure 1), where the Muysca *resguardo* of Suba was located, was not an exception. Larson (2004) affirms that, as it was in the rest of the country, "Colombian policy makers hastened to liquidate colonial vestiges of Indian landholding and segregation […] New liberal policies mainly targeted Indian communities that held usufruct rights to common lands (*resguardos*) in Colombia's eastern Cordillera, the hinterlands of Bogota" (72).

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Sección: Mapas y Planos, Mapoteca Nº 4, Ref. : 504-A. Dimensiones: 18 x 31 cms.
1777. Partidos de Usaquén y Suba.

Figure 3.Colonial map of Bogota and the surrounding towns of Usaquen and Suba in 1777. Source: General Archive of the Nation, Colombia.

Along with the territorial reforms towards the privatization of common lands, the project of *mestizaje* [miscegenation] aimed to forge a national identity by blending diverse ethnicities. Throughout the 19th century, numerous Latin American nations embarked on a process known as *mestizaje* [miscegenation], aimed at erasing ethnic distinctions. Mestizaje served as a nation-building endeavor and operated by unifying populations within each nation both biologically and culturally. Essentially, it was part of an ideology and political effort to promote European immigration, eliminate racial and cultural diversity, and establish a monolingual nation and a bourgeois market culture under a single legal system (Larson 2004, 86). The mestizaje initiative sought to eliminate

cultural diversity by homogenizing the various ethnic groups within each Latin American country and reclassifying them based on their socioeconomic status. This process led to creating a "singular synthesis" that blended multiple cultural legacies (Stolle-McAllister 2014, 235). Mestizaje operated inclusively and exclusively, shaping a single citizen known as a "mestizo," which was considered a progressive step toward erasing existing ethnic and racial hierarchies (Poole 2016).

Some scholars (Esteban Palma 2017) argue that Indigenous communities were assimilated into broader labor categories, such as peasants or semi-urban workers, erasing their unique cultural identities tied to specific territories. This assimilation process compelled them to advocate for their rights primarily based on their social class rather than their ethnic backgrounds. Throughout Latin America, the project of *mestizaje* "was furiously assimilationist when it came to an indigenous present; Indians were excluded from this new national imaginary until they became deracinated and adopted mestizo ways" (Canessa 2012, 8).

The idea of rendering invisible indigeneity and other ethnic identities through the state project of mestizaje aimed to establish a mestizo 'equal' citizenship; nevertheless, as the Colombian scholar Santiago Castro-Gomez asserts, establishing social hierarchies was determined by the individuals' phenotype, defining the position within the social space and, therefore, their capacity to obtain cultural and political assets (Castro-Gomez 2010, 69). As the author presents, the social inequalities of the time were not based only on the material resources that one part of the population possessed but, drawing on Iberic ideas on racial differentiation, *criollos* [creoles] continue to reproduce social stratifications around "blood cleansing" pretensions (71).

For indigenous populations in Latin America, *mestizaje* resulted in the mixing of racial and ethnic backgrounds with African and European groups, effectively assigning non-indigenous or mestizo identities to indigenous peoples (Perz, Warren, and Kennedy 2008). In the case of Colombia, according to Esteban Palma (2017), at that time, mestizos were viewed as people whose cultural heritage stemmed from a blend of European, Indigenous, and African backgrounds, which led to a distortion of the deep ancestral roots of early Colombians. As a result, *mestizaje* gave rise to citizens who associate with a national identity but grapple with feelings of hypocrisy and insecurity when attempting to adopt either a distinctly European or distinctly Indigenous identity fully.

This push for a unified mestizo population involved both ethnic elimination and mixing, making *mestizaje* a form of governmental biopolitics of whitening (Castro-Gomez 2010). This had devastating effects on Indigenous groups, suppressing their unique ontologies, epistemologies, and sacred practices (Rodriguez and Cuevas 2017), while displacing them from their traditional territories. Indigenous peoples lost their ability to self-identify and were prohibited from engaging in their traditional sacred practices and rituals. The consequences of mestizaje persisted for over a century, leading to the abandonment of seasonal rituals and festivals, the loss of communal practices such as the use of sacred psychoactive plants, the use of native languages, and the defense of communal lands. In Colombia, for example, the *chicha* (maize beer), or as it is called within the Muysca communities—*fapqua*, is a sacred and traditional beverage consumed in rituals and other celebrations by communities in the Andes.

Particularly, in the Muysca community, *fapqua* consumption predates the conquest; however, the first appearance in colonial documents dates to one of the earliest

colonial documents titled "*The process against the cacique of Ubaque in 1563*". In this document, Spanish authorities describe their experience perceiving the ceremonial gathering of the *Biohote*. For the colonizers, the *biohote* was misrepresented as uncivilized gatherings primarily centered around intoxication and excessive drinking or *borracheras*. This specific document suggested that the Muisca chieftain, or *cacique*, of the Ubaque municipality hosted a grand celebration alongside other Muisca caciques, where the consumption of c*hicha* allegedly led to pagan rituals, uninhibited sexual behavior, and even the sacrifice of Indigenous individuals (Londoño Laverde and Casilimas 2001). Contrary to these colonial portrayals, the *Biohote* ceremonies historically served as a means to fortify the bonds within each community, foster communication and trade, and facilitate collective decision-making (Gómez-Montañez and Gómez-Cáceres 2020). While chicha was depicted in these negative terms during the colonial period, its consumption was not entirely prohibited; rather, for centuries, it was stigmatized, as it was associated with the "cognitive darkness" of Indigenous peoples and framed as a disease-transmitting practice (Castro-Gomez 2010). Physicians labeled *chicha* as a threat to public health and a perverse danger to the working class and it was banned, and hundreds of the *chicherías* [traditional places of chicha production] started operating underground (Gallini and Osorio 2015).

According to numerous scholars, the sole reason for the prohibition of the *chicha* and its traditional production in small, mainly family-owned bars was the arrival of foreign alcoholic beverages, particularly beer. With the foundation of the German brewery 'Bavaria' in Bogota, "the chances for beer to become a popular good (and a profitable investment) were highly dependent on its ability to displace chicha

consumption among the vast majority of the people of Bogota" (Gallini and Osorio 2015, 112). Banning *chicha* was a mechanism to eradicate the traditional production in the hands of the Indigenous and working-class families, but also to transform the bodies through the consumption of "modern" products; late nineteenth-century and early twentieth century's hygiene policies "marked and transformed [the bodies of the Indian men and women are] in various ways by the institutions and structures of the nation-state, concerned to turn Indians into citizens" (Canessa 2005, 150).

Simultaneous to the state politics of race-blending, which were founded on rhetorical arguments of Indigenous and Afro moral inferiority (Larson 2004), territorial dispossession of areas near Bogota was justified through arguments that highlighted the assimilation of Indigenous peoples. For instance, by the mid-eighteenth century, it was already perceived by the Spanish authorities that in *pueblos* [towns] where Muysca *resguardos* were located, Indigenous peoples were being hispanicized. Berdugo, a visitor to the Spanish Crown, testified that the 'Indians' were "*bien ladinos, y hablan la lengua castellana, sin que necesiten de intérprete para nada*" [very mixed race and they speak Spanish without the need of an interpreter] (Berdugo, Jaramillo Uribe and Chavez de Bonilla 1963, 144). In his report, Berdugo highlights the contrast between his encounter with the Indigenous and the last royal visit conducted decades before when the Spaniards needed translators to interact with the natives. The proximity of the Muysca resguardos to the colonial centers was critical in the process of Muysca assimilation, invisibilization, and territorial dispossession. As Larson affirms, "Highland Indians occupied an ambiguous middle ground in this geo-cultural and racial order. Neither savage nor civilized, the Highland Indians of the northeastern provinces near the city of Bogota were

the best candidates for cultural improvement and eventual assimilation" (Larson 2004, 77).

According to Jose Maria Samper (1861), a Colombian lawyer, politician, and writer, in one of his classic works on the nineteenth-century Colombian society, "*Ensayo sobre las revoluciones políticas*", the Chibcha (another erroneous name used for the Muysca people) were ultimately 'civilizable'. His essay illustrates the racist liberal thought of this time; for these creole elites, the economic and social progress and modernization of the emergent nation were only possible through the assimilation of ethnic communities and the liberalization of land. By configuring a rhetoric of Indianness and blackness "as the antithesis of the Homo economicus" (Larson 2004, 80), the creoles were establishing "internal colonialism [as the] reformulation of the colonial difference within the formation of the modern nation-state after decolonization" (Mignolo 2000, 197). By 1850, Manuel Ancízar, an elite creole, celebrated the early signs of a successful *mestizaje* process and the improvement of the race in the traditional Muysca territory of Tunja when he wrote,

> Today one notes in the new generation the progressive improvement of the castes: the children are white, blond, of fine and intelligent features and better built bodies than their elders […] [However,] the Indians are still there, in part, even though you cannot see them (Ancízar quoted by Safford 1991, 28).

As the assimilation process was more aggressive towards the invisibilization of Indigenous people near the colonial cities, the dissolution of the *resguardo* lands was more agile, in contrast to those in remote areas such as the Cauca and Pasto Provinces (Larson 2004). On October 11, 1821, the Colombian government established the law titled "*Sobre la abolición del tributo, i repartimiento de los resguardos de indígenas*"

through which the state formally declared all Indigenous peoples as equals to the other citizens and ruled by the same law (del Castillo 2006). While this may seem like a progressive move, it simultaneously abolished any territorial distinction for the native population. Several years later, specifically on November 16, 1875, Suba underwent a transformation into a sovereign municipality, shedding its Indigenous *resguardo* identity. This marked the commencement of the intricate process of dividing the *resguardo* lands, which proved to be far from straightforward. On the contrary, while at the time, the governmental authorities conducted a series of surveys and Indigenous eligibility studies, by 1895, "Suba *resguardos de indígenas* [indigenous reservations] still existed" (del Castillo 2019, 797). According to historian Lina del Castillo, the multiple failed attempts from the state to determine and calculate land distribution in Suba, based on complicated Indigenous eligibility categories made by elite scientists of the time, resulted in the population's resistance and criticisms. The Indigenous eligibility requirements were constantly changing as understandings of indigeneity were transforming and subjective to the authorities' reckoning (del Castillo 2019). Although certain surveys allocated *resguardo* lands to Muysca Indigenous families like Bulla, Cabiativa, Niviayo, and Mususú—families that still reside in Suba today and contribute to the Muysca cultural revival—by the early 20th century, nearly all of the resguardo lands had been ultimately divided and sold to the highest bidder (797).

In the subsequent section, I outline the urban development process of Suba, which commenced in the mid-twentieth century and has profoundly altered the character of this town, which has now evolved into a 'locality' within the Colombian capital city, along with the dynamics among the Muysca population. While most of the impacts of these

environmental and socio-economic changes are developed in the following chapters, in this subsequent section I briefly summarize the historical changes of Suba in recent decades.

2.3. *Su uba, flor del sol* (Flower of the Sun).

> 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).

Following the dissolution of the *resguardo* institution, Suba underwent a significant transformation. It shifted from being a rural, town centered on agriculture, to becoming a peri-urban extension of Bogota, ultimately being officially incorporated into the capital city as a 'locality' in 1954. Over a span of less than a century, between the abolishment of communal land tenure and the onset of urban development, Suba experienced continuous expansion as a peri-urban region. In accordance with Adam's observations, these areas can be identified by the following distinct characteristics:

> a third geographic space located between the urban and rural hinterlands […] characterized by everchanging land uses, land values and landownership. It is also a zone where peri-urban dwellers and other actors confront both urban and rural laws and institutions. (Adam 2020, p. 59).

As Adam suggests, this in-between space poses a challenge for the dwellers, as they face an ambiguous socio-political place. For instance, for the Muysca dwellers, this process of environmental transformation has not been a clear journey. These developing changes have occurred and continue to occur without their participation; therefore, almost all of the harm caused by urban development has been unexpected—I delve into this issue in

more detail in Chapter 4. As one Muysca member, Angela Niviayo, suggests, the Muysca have faced displacement, among other harms, as a result of their invisibility in the building of Suba as a district,

> "Urbanization is a voracious force that arrives in territories without asking, without considering the opinions of the beings who live here. In the case of Suba, my family has been one of those that has suffered from the issue of displacement as result to the construction of city" (Interview with Angela Niviayo, February 16, 2022).

In the mid-20th century, Bogotá underwent significant urban expansion, leading to the transformation of several nearby towns that were once seen as satellite municipalities. These towns, namely Engativa, Fontibon, Usme, Usaquen, Bosa, Sumapaz, and Suba, were integrated into Bogotá through an annexation process with the goal of modernizing the capital city. In pursuit of this objective, diverse laws and urban planning policies, such as Decree 3640/1954, were implemented to integrate these former towns, given the pressing social and economic demands in the capital as a result of increasing immigration. By the year 1954, Suba ceased to be a neighboring municipality to be part of the capital as a result of the declaration of Bogotá as a Special District, meaning that the city enjoyed administrative autonomy. Following these territorial changes that generated the escalation of urban development, both legal and illegal, as well as the substantial arrival of population, mainly during the 1970s and 1980s, some native families[8] in Suba began to mobilize around the revindication of their indigeneity, as *raizales*[9] from Suba. While the town was being transformed into a highly densified

[8] The Muysca families of Suba that have been part of the process of Indigenous resurgence include the following clans: Niviayo, Yopasá, Cabiativa, Nivia, Neuque, Piracún, Caita, Caipa, Bulla, Chizaba, Bajonero, Landecho, Chipo, Quinche, Cuenca, and Mususú.

[9] *Raizales* is a self-denomination used by the Muysca people to denote belonging to the land of Suba. It comes from the word *raíz* in Spanish, which means "root." The Muysca have begun to utilize this term

'locality', the Muysca people's identity continued to be rooted in a rural and agricultural-oriented town.

From the 1950s to the 1990s, the abrupt process of urban development in Suba brought to the 'locality' a continuous process of socio-cultural, territorial, and environmental destruction, "configuring an urbicide" (Beuf, Quimbayo Ruiz, and Jasso Ruiz 2023, 311). The notion of urbicide serves to illuminate the inherent relationship between urban development and the disruption and/or erasure of multiple territorial epistemologies. Beuf, Quimbayo Ruiz, and Jasso Ruiz define it as "the process of symbolic and material destruction of the urban experience [that threathens] human and non-human urban natures" (2023, 293). In this sense, since the second half of the 20th century to the current times, the Muysca people have experienced destruction on various fronts, revealing that socio-environmental disparities are an integral aspect of the urbanization process (Cook and Swyngedouw 2012).

Based on Bogota's official census of 2019, with more than 1,161,500 inhabitants, Suba has been one of the two localities in Bogotá that has expanded its urban environment the most in the last 15 years (Unidad Administrativa de Catastro Distrital 2022). With the highest levels of population density in the city, Suba has expanded its highway network and urban development by 432%, while reducing its green areas by 56% since 1985 (Achicanoy, Rojas-Robles, and Enrique Sanchez 2018). One of the significant consequences of Suba's urban growth that has negatively impacted numerous Muysca families is the displacement brought about by urban infrastructure development.

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because of the Colombian state's failure to recognize their historical and spiritual attachment to the Suba region, unlike what has occurred with the Afro-Caribbean ethnic groups located in the Colombian Caribbean Coast, who have been granted title to vast territories of their historically occupied lands.

As similar experiences have been witnessed in various cities across the Global South (Ng'weno 2018), in Suba, the process of expropriation and the imposition of higher housing taxes has resulted in the displacement of numerous families, leading to the erasure of cultural heritage and the degradation of the community's social fabric—I delve into this issue in greater detail in Chapter 4. However, I would like to offer two brief examples in this chapter to situate the current process of urban development and its impact on the Muysca community.

Over the past two decades, the construction of *Avenida Transversal 91* [Avenue 91] has been a profoundly distressing event for many Muysca families. The development of this road was made possible through the expropriation of hundreds of family homes and the division of those that remained. For Maria Angelica Cabiativa, a member of the Muysca community and the owner of one of the Muysca gardens that I will discuss later in the dissertation,

> The construction of infrastructure, such as walls, streets, and avenues, has created physical barriers that have isolated the community. Most notably, the recent development of the *Avenida Transversal 91* has led to the separation of numerous families within the community. This displacement was initiated by the district planning authorities, and now the community is grappling with a profound sense of fragmentation—[with tears welling up in her eyes]—While these divisions may appear physical, they are, in reality, eroding the strength of families and the overall cohesion of the community (Interview with Maria Angélica Cabiativa, January 29, 2022).

In addition to the development of road infrastructure, recent district administrations led by Enrique Peñalosa and Claudia Lopez have presented their wetland degradation projects as part of a broader urban "re-greening" initiative for the city, branding them as 'sustainable environmental growth.' Nevertheless, I echo other scholars that suggest that

"despite sustainability's premise of social equity alongside environmental improvement and economic growth, the inherently political greening of cities has widened socioeconomic divisions along interconnected lines of race and class" (Goodling 2021, 750). As I elaborate on in Chapter 4, these projects not only marginalize the involvement of Indigenous and economically disadvantaged communities that would be directly affected by these initiatives, but they also disregard the warnings of environmental experts who have highlighted the irreversible threats posed by these urban development projects to the entire *Ecological Main Structure* (EMS) of the city.

The development of Suba as a Bogota 'locality' has not followed a unidirectional trajectory. Instead, it has been an ongoing process shaped by various actors, with the Muysca people among them, contributing to the evolving meaning and identity of Suba. Echoing Simpson and Hugill's (2022) assertion, "settler colonial cities are not produced in a unilateral or top-down fashion by states and capital, but as contested spaces where logics of dispossession meet the affirmation of Indigenous lifeways and ongoing anti-colonial struggle" (1314). Building upon this line of thinking, my argument asserts that the Muysca Indigenous resurgence process, along with the community's strong emphasis on Suba as Indigenous land, has given rise to a collection of fresh narratives regarding the city, sacred natural sites, and the commons. These narratives have wielded significant influence, to the extent that even political figures, including the local mayor, have adopted them to project an image of being a multicultural administration.

In the last section of this chapter, I briefly present the decade of the 1990s, when amidst the constitutional changes that recognized the multicultural diversity in the country, the Muysca of Suba were recognized as an urban Indigenous community.

However, as they are located in a vastly urbanized landscape, the Muysca people have not been granted rights to communal lands as other Indigenous peoples in rural environments.

2.4. Muysca resurgence and institutional recognition

> ‘History’ is only made up of stories that we tell ourselves, but simply that the ‘logic of stories’ and the ability to act as historical agents go together. Politics and art, like forms of knowledge, construct ‘fictions’, that is to say material rearrangements of sign and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done (Ranciere 2013, 35).

As I have reviewed in this chapter, during the 19th century, Colombia embarked on a process of assimilation called the mestizaje process, further exacerbating the erosion of Indigenous traditions and territories. This process introduced new forms of dispossession through land ownership systems and eroded Indigenous cultural and ethnic identities by implementing assimilative mestizo policies that reclassified them based on socioeconomic factors. Derogatory terms like 'Indio,' 'Indio ignorante' (ignorant Indian), and 'Indio animal' (animal Indian) were widely employed to insult Indigenous identities, justifying their land dispossession and cultural obliteration. As a result of the stigmatization and assimilation of indigeneity, many Indigenous peoples across Latin America refrained from identifying as Indigenous, as the term had become associated with memories of humiliation and exclusion (Gómez-Montañez 2017). Within this context, the *mestizaje* program operated as a colonial tool, restructuring indigenous communities to the extent that some individuals only recognized their indigeneity later in life (Harris, Carlson, and Poata-Smith 2013). Despite relentless efforts to erase

Indigenous peoples through various colonial regimes, many Indigenous groups managed to thrive, preserving their traditional identities, ancestral practices, and cosmologies.

In response to these oppressive conditions, some Indigenous communities embarked on acts of resurgence, reasserting their traditional identities and practices. One noteworthy example is the Muysca community of Suba, which embarked on an Indigenous revitalization process starting in the 1950s, and it was reified in 1990, when the Cabildo was recognized. According to Molina (2007), some dispossessed and marginalized mestizos began to reconnect with their indigenous heritage through reflection, and this connection started to manifest in various ways. It became apparent through their bond with the land, personal life narratives, ancestral surnames, present-day needs, and interactions with others. They realized that embracing their indigenous identity was a secure and advantageous choice. For the Muysca of Suba, this revitalization has involved symbolically reclaiming the territories from which they had been dispossessed by imbuing their sacred spaces with a blend of traditional, reinterpreted, and new meanings. This process of Muysca resurgence can be examined as what Adolfo Albán calls an act of *re-existence*, which he refers to as

> The mechanisms that human groups implement as a strategy of questioning and making visible the practices of racialization, exclusion and marginalization, procuring the redefining and re-signifying of life in conditions of dignity and self-determination, while at the same time confronting the bio-politic that controls, dominates, and commodifies subjects and nature (Alban in Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 18).

This process of *re-existence* has been explored from different angles; for instance, Esteban Palma (2017) uses the notion of Foucault's governmentality to affirm that two state mechanisms of social order have molded the process of Indigenous revitalization in

Bogota. First, through the production of the mestizo citizen as a result of independence from Spain, as was explored in the last section. Second, through the regulatory mechanisms of Indigenous recognition established by the multicultural policies of the new Political Constitution in 1991. Following the same train of thought, Escobar suggests that

> 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 (Escobar 2008, 213).

The resurgence of the Indigenous identity within the city of Bogota, especially the resurgence of an ethnic group that was considered 'extinct,' however, raised a series of questions about the 'authenticity' of the Muysca ethnic identity (Chaves and Zambrano 2006). While I will delve into this topic with greater depth in the upcoming chapters, it is relevant to note that during the 1990s, the Muysca of Suba encountered significant challenges on their path to recognition. This resurgence of Muysca identity can be understood through the lens of two interconnected approaches: revitalization and ethnogenesis. Revitalization, on the one hand, has involved engaging with colonial archival material and actively recovering and disseminating oral traditions, often in collaboration with the community's elders. On the other hand, the process of ethnogenesis has created a space for communal cultural re-imagination, arising as a response to the historical erasure and discontinuity experienced by the Muysca people. The lenses of ethnogenesis provide theoretical foundations to comprehend the process of cultural creation in the Muysca community. Hodge (2019) defines ethnogenesis as a processes of

identity production and a site of resistance of disenfranchised populations. He affirms that,

> "ethnogenesis can be defined as the processes by which the identities of social groups change quantitatively or qualitatively over time. Ethnogenetic theory effectively treats societies as "social species" that evolve and adapt to the exigencies of the world around them, thereby creating and, often repeatedly, re-creating themselves as distinct, autonomous ethnic groups. […] Ethnogenesis [is] a tool of resistance and liberation used by marginalized or oppressed populations. And moreover, the trend has been to stress ethnogenesis as an internal process rather than a product of external stimuli" (4).

This process of resurgence, however, for the Muyscas, as has been the case of other Indigenous communities under revitalization of their identities, has been caught up in equations of power that have resulted, for instance, in failure (Comaroff 1996). For example, in 1999, the Muisca Indigenous Cabildo of Suba lost its legal recognition (Chaves and Zambrano 2006) after allegations of corruption within the process of individual ethnic recognition—as detailed in Chapter 5. Nonetheless, as conveyed by the former governor Ivan Niviayo in one of the history classes for the community and during our interview, after losing institutional recognition, the leadership of that era shifted their focus away from territorial sovereignty towards identity formation. Their aim was to restore their legal recognition eventually (Fieldwork notes April 5, 2022; July 22, 2022). At this moment, emphasizing markers of indigeneity became imperative in their quest to regain institutional acknowledgment as Indigenous Cabildo. For the community, the intertwined process of resurgence, which involved a subversive use of colonial archival material, the preservation of elder and oral tradition, and the production of Muysca traditions, served as the bedrock for reclaiming state recognition. After several years, in 2005, the Muisca Indigenous Cabildo of Suba was once again officially recognized as an

Indigenous institution and as the native community of the land of Suba. However, the struggle for territorial rights continues to this day.

CHAPTER 3. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH AND DECOLONIALITY AS PRAXIS.

> Tenemos que navegar entre los dos fuegos: lo occidental y lo propio. Aunque aprendamos y reconozcamos el valor en el conocimiento occidental, lo principal siempre será aprender de lo propio y volver al origen [We have to navigate between the two fires: the western and our own. Even though we learn and recognize the value of the western knowledge, it will always be primary to learn of our own, and to return to the origin] (Interview excerpt with the Sabedor [wise] Gonzalo Cabiativa, April 2022).

3.1 Introduction

Epistemicide or murder of knowledge was coined by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) to refer to processes of subordination, marginalization, and obliteration of alternative knowledges that do not operate within the Eurocentric scientific thinking. Within this universalized system of thought, cosmologies, collective memories, oral histories, languages, and other sources of non-Western, nonscientific type knowledge remain mostly silenced as illegitimate forms of knowledge, until they are operationalized and employed by modern education institutions (Vaditya 2018, 273). While postcolonial, critical race theory, feminist, and currently, decolonization projects aim to question and challenge the epistemological domination in academia, nevertheless, Indigenous epistemologies—and other voices from the margins—continue to be highly excluded from the production of knowledge in most of the academic disciplines.

Since the last decades of the 20th century, however, scholars in the social sciences and humanities began to inquire about the absence of other types of knowledges and even the way that knowledge has been acquired. For instance, scholars such as Michel Foucault discovered that by employing different methodologies such as what he called

'genealogies', those hidden knowledges could emerge and have potential towards epistemological emancipation. As Foucault affirmed, genealogies are "therefore not positivistic returns to a more careful or exact form of science. They are precisely anti-science" (1980, 83). By challenging the foundations of science production, these buried knowledges surface and display how positivist social sciences have been developed "from the privileged position in history" (Vaditya 2018).

To these marginalized epistemologies, Foucault called "Subjugated knowledges", what he was referring as

> a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity. I also believe that it is through the re-emergence of these low-ranking knowledges, these unqualified, even directly disqualified knowledges (…), and which involve what I would call a popular knowledge (*le savoir des gens*) though it is far from being a general commonsense knowledge, but is on the contrary a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it- that it is through the re-appearance of this knowledge, of these local popular knowledges, these disqualified knowledges, that criticism performs its work. (Foucault 1980, 82).

Following Foucault's analysis, Indigenous epistemologies, therefore, could be examined as historically 'subjugated knowledges' that continued to be considered as such as they are not legitimized as equal by the dominant modern science. Nevertheless, during the last decades, there is a significant movement towards the decolonization of the research process in social sciences by "conducting research with Indigenous communities that places Indigenous voices and epistemologies in the center" (Datta 2018, 2). With scholars, both native and non-native, thinking about the field and its peoples as

collaborators more than “data plantations” (Swadener and Mutua 2008), qualitative research engaging with decolonizing methodologies is currently reclaiming the space for marginalized epistemologies.

In this dissertation, I focus on the multiple processes and outcomes of coloniality manifested at multiple scales in the lives of the Muysca community of Suba. As a legacy of colonialism, coloniality has “worked and continues to work to negate, disavow, distort and deny knowledges, subjectivities, world senses, and life visions” (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 4), and it is manifested at the macro scale through the absences in Indigenous law, to the level of the body of the Muysca people. For the Muysca people, the obliteration has not only happened at the epistemological level but their mere existence in the historical accounts was removed from the national imaginaries through narratives of colonization and assimilation. Nevertheless, as decolonial practices have been present as a counterforce to colonial violence, my interest in this dissertation is to present “knowledges resurging and insurging from below” (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 4), the subjugated knowledges of the Muysca community of Suba. I engage with Participatory Action Research as a main methodological framework in this endeavor. During the fieldwork research, from August 2021 to May 2022, I employed ethnographic techniques such as in-depth participant observation, individual and group interviews, participatory mapping, and visual methodologies, with the Muysca community of Suba, in Bogotá.

I do not pretend to establish a guideline for decolonial research practices, “there is not pre-determined, singular or authorized suite of methods for pursuing that goal. The challenge is contextual, engaged and performative—it requires not just methods of research, but approaches to being-in-the-world” (Coombes, Johnson, and Howitt 2014,

851). Nevertheless, I align myself with different critical scholars who acknowledge the necessity of a self-inquiry research stand on social justice within the process of knowledge production. Rethinking the path of decolonization as a ceremony (Wilson 2008), requires a challenging self-examination and potentially de-learning process, that while uncomfortable, is above all, an ongoing rewarding journey.

3.2 Theoretical approaches to the research process

3.2.1 Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Participatory Action Research (PAR) emerges from the Global South by the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals-Borda (1970; 1986; 1988; 2009; see also Rappaport 2020). Fals Borda, who worked with impoverished rural communities on the Caribbean coast of Colombian and with peasants in the Andes in Colombia, built an experimental methodological framework to produce knowledge based on the notion of epistemological justice (Fals-Borda and Rahman 1991). For Fals-Borda, Participatory Action Research is,

> It is the involvement of the deprived groups and classes in the knowledge—producing research process—from conception and proposal to analysis—which is referred to here as "participation". Participation in this sense is not a mere sharing of information, even less the manipulative type of participation currently present as official policy by certain governments and institutions. It is rather the break-up of the subject-object dichotomy in all spheres of life including the research experience in the social sciences. Methodologically, this approach leads to the utilization of dialogical techniques in fieldwork, and a rejection of exploitative, one-sided or asymmetrical relationships between the researchers and the researched (Fals-Borda 1983, 5).

Fals-Borda's aim with PAR goes beyond the research process in the search for an academic outcome. PAR creates the space to experiment with the communities, in his words, "the poor, oppressed and exploited groups" to acquire "serious and reliable

knowledge upon which to construct power, or countervailing power" (Fals-Borda and Rahman 1991, 3). In addition, PAR has offered the possibility to question the researcher's training, as has been my case during this research, by pushing the scholars to embrace "different cosmologies, ontological principles and epistemological standpoints" (Jordan and Kapoor 2016, 145). By accentuating the symmetrical position of the researcher, and their commitment to the communities, Fals-Borda's approach radically critiqued and continues to challenge the illusions of "neutrality or objectivity that has come to be institutionalized within academia as the standard by which truth claims are assessed" (Brown and Strega 2005).

While PAR has framed numerous research throughout several disciplines since its inception during the 1970s, some authors (Jordan and Kapoor 2016) have suggested the risk of the corporatization and misappropriation of PAR (Whyte 1991). For these authors, PAR has been transformed "as a scientific/technical endeavor divorced from its antecedents of radical and emancipatory politics originating in the Global South" (Jordan and Kapoor 2016, 135), and it has been appropriated by scholars, corporations such as the World Bank, and NGOs to gain acceptance and better reception by communities, educational institutions, and governments (Whyte 1991).

3.2.2 Critical methodologies

Since the 1970s, scholars such as the Brazilian Paulo Freire (1970), the Colombian Orlando Fals-Borda (1987), and the Martinican Frantz Fanon (2004), who worked with historically exploited and oppressed groups particularly in the Global South, started to question the foundations of academic research, especially the dichotomy between researcher/researched subjects and the involvement of the researcher in political action.

In their works, these scholars promoted a profound challenge to the existing approaches to qualitative research and generated pedagogy and methodological frameworks that sought to "counter the epistemic privilege of the scientific paradigm" (Kovach 2015).

Following this trend of thought, critical scholars continued to develop approaches that would generate spaces for epistemological emancipation and diversity, expanding the reach of academic knowledge by emphasizing community participation, praxis, and ethical and political commitment to their methodologies. As Brown and Strega (2008) affirm, "the knowledge creation process has been separated from concerns about praxis: theorizing about the political nature of knowledge creation has rarely been translated into transforming our research practices". Therefore, orienting research towards community's self-determination is a political act that has the potential of emancipation and change, as Kovach affirm "critical research can be emancipatory—or not—depending on where you want to take it (either way it's political)" (Kovach 2015).

One of the critical methodologies that emerged from the canon texts mentioned before, is Black Emancipatory Action Research (BEAR) (Akom 2011). BEAR constitutes a radical methodological framework that places in the spotlight race and its relationship with knowledge production. Akom draws on different critical methodologies such as Critical Race Theory, Participatory Action Research, Feminist scholarship, and Critical Afrocentricity, to promote a methodology that integrates "a theory of structural racialization into ethnographic and PAR approaches". BEAR shares many of the characteristics of other community-based, participatory frameworks including the engagement of the community members in every phase of the research process, the nature of the projects as "co-learning process[es], […] [the] balance between research and

action" (113), and the potential capacity of the research towards change. Nevertheless, the main difference between BEAR and other approaches is the focus on race and racism, and its intersections with gender, class, ability, and other discourses that create systems of oppression around the research production process.

Along the same line, scholars promoting Decolonizing Methodologies (Smith 2012) expose the processes that render invisible the *pluriverse* (Escobar 2015), for instance, Boaventura de Sousa Santos' "sociology of absences" (2001). The *sociology of absences* "consists of an inquiry that aims to explain that what does not exist is in fact actively produced as non-existent, that is–as a non-credible alternative to what exists" (de Sousa Santos 2004). Additionally, researchers involved in decolonizing methodologies not only aim to create spaces of visibility of non-Western knowledge through the active engagement of epistemologically oppressed communities but also, assume a performative agency as a collaborator to these communities. In this regard, Swadener and Mutua (2008) affirm that,

> "Decolonizing research recognizes and works within the belief that non-Western knowledge forms are excluded from or marginalized in normative research paradigms, and therefore non-Western/indigenous voices and epistemologies are silenced and subjects lack agency within such representations (…) decolonizing research as a performative act functions to highlight and advocate for the ending of both discursive and material oppression that is produced at the site of the encryption of the non-Western subject as a "governable body"" (Swadener and Mutua 2008, 4).

Following the same train of thought, Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021) propose a concise set of elements that must be present when contemplating conducting decolonizing methodologies. For these authors, who work with the refugee population, it is morally imperative to embrace decolonizing approaches when working with colonized

and oppressed groups. They offer four practices in qualitative research that should be present to be considered as engaging with decolonizing methodologies: "1) Exercising critical reflexivity 2) reciprocity and respect for self-determination, 3) embracing "Other(ed) ways of knowing, and 4) embodying a transformative praxis" (3). These authors, as several others engaging with these types of methodologies, remain clear in the need for researchers to create communal epistemological spaces to collectively imagine methodologies and methods to ethically produce knowledge, nevertheless, they make explicit that this engagement should be an embodied praxis. While feminist scholars such as Allison Hayes-Conroy (2017), consider that this embodiment at "the 'visceral realm' – i.e., the state/feeling of bodies in interrelation with environments/space" (51) must be sought by researchers to improve the methods employed, scholars engaging with Indigenous methodologies in Latin America (Sweet and Escalante 2017), both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have signaled the problem of separating the body and the land as described in visceral geographies. Whereas visceral geographies provide a space to rethink the relational and affective fields involved in the research production, it nevertheless continues to examine the distinction between bodies and land, contrasting with notions of *Cuerpo-territorio* [body-territory] through it is expressed that bodies "are extensions of and part of the land" (597).

The notion of *Cuerpo-territorio* is an essential framework in this dissertation and resonates with the epistemological foundation of Fals-Borda's Participatory Action Research (PAR). This research process was and continues to be highly influenced by the work of this Colombian author who highlighted the notion of "*sentipensar*" as this life principle for communities (Escobar 2015) and also, as the foundation for PAR.

Sentipensar [feeling-thinking] emerges from a relational ontology that stresses the inextricable connection between emotions-feelings and thoughts, between the heart and the mind, both involved in the cognitive process of certain communities. Considering *Cuerpo-territorio* and *sentir-pensar* as conceptual compasses for this dissertation emerged from some of the first informal conversations with community members when they explained to me how thinking and feeling the territory emerged from the same place, their *pquyquy*, their hearts. Placing their hands on their chests, the Muysca, that are in process of revitalizing their native language, expressed to me how *pquyquy* embraced their meaning-making process. In Muysccubun, *pquyquy* has several connotations which include heart—as the organ, temper, character, condition, mood, desire, willpower, thought, sense, consciousness, understanding, mind, value, virtue, among others, depending on the context and the linguistic variations (Muysca.cubun.org). In this sense, engaging with methodological approaches such as PAR that would make justice to the Muysca ontological differences was necessary in order to capture their experiences and knowledges.

3.3 Research Phases

3.3.1. Preliminary Phase: Background for Dissertation Methodological Approach

My first encounter with the Muysca community of Suba happened during the Summer of 2017 when I was awarded the Helen J. Dunnick Native American Program Endowment, Fieldwork Research Fellowship, from the Department of Religious Studies at Florida International University to conduct my master's thesis research with an Indigenous community in Colombia. I never intended to work with the Muysca people in the first place; instead, I foresaw conducting my master's thesis with the Nasa Indigenous people,

in the southwest of Colombia, in the Cauca department; nevertheless, due to violent events in the region, it was impossible to conduct my fieldwork, and I stayed in Bogotá.

Under these circumstances, I came across the Corn Celebration of the Muisca community of Suba, the solstice celebration in June 2017, only 10 minutes from my childhood home. Like most Colombian citizens, I had integrated the extinction of the Muysca people under the successful colonization process within the imaginaries of Colombian national history. As presented in the chapter 2 on history, the process of mestizaje deliberately concealed the Muysca identity in Bogotá and its surroundings to promulgate an idea of the city as a 'white place,' as a space for modernity and progress.

My master's thesis fieldwork was my first attempt to bring awareness to the ontological diversity in the city of Bogotá; through the examination of the sacred and ritualistic practices of the Muysca community as a mechanism to symbolically reappropriate urban public spaces (Sanchez-Castañeda 2018, 2020). While this fieldwork allowed me to present my research ideas and goals to the community, it nevertheless showed me the limitations of the epistemological domination exerted by Westernized researchers, and the need for what Swadener and Mutua (2008) have called "reframing the field" (8). By "actively decenter[ing] the Western academy as the exclusive locus of authorizing power that defines research agenda" (8), I started questioning my positionality and the set of ethnographic practices and tools that I was using to complete rather than to engage with my research. One of the main causes of that self-questioning process was the poor involvement and excitement of the interviewees to the questions and concerns I was presenting, I was, as one of the participants told me: "asking the same

questions, looking for the same answers" (Interview with Jorge Yopasá, member of the Muysca community, 2017).

Once back in the United States, analyzing the data and reviewing my fieldwork notes, beyond my imposed focus on ritual and other religious practices, there were two transversal elements in almost all of the conversations and interviews: *territory* and *the city*. With related words and ideas such as 'the land', 'our land', 'our Suba', 'our place', 'urbanization', 'cement/concrete', 'the urban', and the most predominantly terms *territory* and *the city*, the Muysca people declared what were the most significant and needed lines of research. As Coombes, Johnson, and Howwitt (2014) suggest, the real challenge of conducting ethical research goes beyond the implementation of 'Indigenous methodologies' but "reaches at the heart of the enterprise to question the very purpose of research" (845). There was a need to center the Indigenous community's inquiries, concerns, and worldviews and reestablish the epistemological foundations for my dissertation research.

As this research emerges from years of discussions, encounters, and dis-encounters with the community and with myself as a researcher and ally, I decided to reframe the way I conducted my master's thesis for what I was envisioning as my dissertation methodological approach. Echoing Smith (2012) for me, choosing a different ethical approach to the selected methodology was crucial because it was going to "frame[d] the questions being asked, determine[d] the set of instrument and methods to be employed, and [it would] shaped the analyses" (144). Consequently, after engaging with readings on participatory methodologies, critical methodologies, Indigenous, feminist, and decolonizing methodologies, during the first semesters of my doctoral

program, I was looking for a more authentic and ethical relationship with the community; echoing some scholars such as Margaret Kovach, I wanted my research to be "respectful and honour relationships in addition to research outcomes" (Kovach 2015).

A. Ethnographic Research

As mentioned before, this dissertation project is the outcome of several years of in-person and virtual discussions with community members. However, the text presented here focuses on the ethnographic research conducted from the Summer of 2019 to the Summer of 2022. In the Summer of 2019, I was awarded the Tinker Field Research Grant Program for preliminary research for one month in Bogotá, Colombia. During this time, I returned to the research site not only as a researcher but as a friend and ally, and with some members of the Muysca community, we started envisaging the route toward potential and feasible projects. What I was encountering was how through the co-design of the research process for this dissertation, I was generating spaces of epistemological legitimation, strengthening bonds with the community but also, and in my experience more important, I was engaging with action toward the potential use of research in political struggles—as I will confirm later in this chapter.

I was awarded in a second time with the Tinker grant for Summer 2020, however, due to the global COVID-19 Pandemic, I could not go in person to arrange the proposal and the set of possible research questions, nevertheless, I continued the process with a set of meetings through online platforms with members of the community. While these meetings allowed me to continue connecting to some happenings within the community, time and trust are "interlinked elements in collaborative research and sit at the centre of any effort to cultivate a deeper understanding of place" (Coombes, Johnson, and Howitt

2014, 848). This, nevertheless, prevented me to continue to form and strengthen the previous relationships and bonds of trust with my collaborators. For instance, I was not aware of the series of ruptures that the community was going through. As Olsen (2017) affirms, "Indigenous voices may not always be harmonious [and] Indigenous interests may clash" (521), and due to internal divergences within the Muysca community, nowadays, several members of the community have created cultural, social, and environmental collectives disconnected from the political authority of the Cabildo, as some scholars affirm, transcending the individual action and working collectively towards a decolonial change (Swadener and Mutua 2008, 6). While members of these organizations remain within the census of the community and continue to be recognized as Muysca peoples, these collectives have rejected the Cabildo institution, as this represents a colonial-like establishment that, as several scholars suggest, continues to maintain and even exacerbated the asymmetrical relations between the State and Indigenous peoples (Povinelli 2002; Hale 2004; Greene 2007; Mazanelli 2020). For members of these collectives, to achieve self-determination and autonomy, decolonization is necessary since the State has generated a system of policies, institutions, and mechanisms that prevent real empowerment and symmetrical relationships, as it is stated by one of the members of these collectives, Erika Nivia. For her, the Cabildo has failed in depending on resources from the State and its institutions, instead of promoting decolonial actions towards autonomy. She affirms,

> "The very institution of Cabildo has been mounted on the discourses that the 'West', the State and the city bring, looking for resources, but in reality, there is no [identity] strengthening, [for instance] the Cabildo does not have a presence [in all of our territory]. And well, the State is

> happy because they tell us everything we have to do, including food, forms of jurisdiction, for example, [the district office of] Social Integration that gets involved in developing programs for the indigenous communities, calls for cultural projects and gives the community $10, 20 million pesos, so all the Cabildos are waiting for the State to give us that money, but in reality, autonomy is not generated. I believe that there is potential, which is precisely what we want to make visible. It is important that, in addition to showing the problems of our territory, we must look again to strengthen what belongs to us, what is our own, and what generated autonomy for us. For instance, 30 years ago, we did not need a State that was giving us a monthly grocery, because [for example] my grandmother had her garden and sold her vegetables and herbs, but with the urbanization, we lost autonomy [...] An institution such as the Cabildo, there is no resistance, no will to strengthen what we are" (Member of the Muysca community of Suba, Erika Nivia, 2021).

For this research, due to the previous relationships with the cultural brokers I was working with and following a gender perspective of looking at internal differences (Olsen 2017, 521), I decided to conduct the first part of this research with these collectives that aimed to create spaces of decolonization, resisting the authority of the Cabildo, promoting self-determination, and autonomy. For the first four months of this ethnographic research, I actively participated in events promoted by the *Emzac Uaque* [we walk together as equals] Indigenous collective at the *Niviayo Ta* [*Niviayo*: the owner's last name, *Tâ*: garden] urban Indigenous Garden and cultural center, and other sacred places for the Muysca. Following Swadener and Mutua's (2008), and other's (Watson and Till 2010; Coombes, Johnson, and Howitt 2014) approach to the nature of decolonizing research as a performative act, I not only attended events promoted by this cultural collective but also, participated, in either cooking, preparing the land or cleaning. Among the activities fostered by the collective, there were: weaving teaching sessions taught by Jorge Yopasá; children's language and music educational sessions guided by Wilmer Talero, local artists, and Alejandro Durán (an ethnomusicologist that has worked

for several years with the community); ethnobotany sessions guided by Angela Niviayo (the owner of the Niviayo Ta garden); and territorial recognition sessions to several sacred places such as the Tibabuyes wetland and the *Parque del Indio* [Indian park].

During this first phase of my ethnography, with the collaboration of the *Emzac Uaque* members, I conducted 14 semi-structured interviews with members of the Muysca community at their houses, at the Niviayo Tâ garden, also at three other gardens, all of them owned by Muysca women who either have inhered the land or have occupied it through non-violent means. Even though I was interested in the experiences of these women, in particular, all of these interviews were conducted in groups, since none of the women were interested in having individual sessions. These interviews were hours long—5 hours approximately per interview—since they involved a tour of the gardens, cooking of meals for the group, and sometimes consumption of sacred plants (Picture 1). By engaging in these practices, I was, what some scholars have referred to as "listening affectively" (Delpit 1988). This way of approaching research generates a different nature of the interaction between the researcher and the interviewee[s]; "a very special kind of listening, listening that requires not only open eyes and ears, but open hearts and minds. We do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs" (297).

Figure 4. Interview with Elizabeth ‘Chavelita’ Sánchez at her urban garden. Source: Photograph taken by the author.

Members of the *Emzac Uaque* actively collaborated in the process of recruiting more members of the community to participate in this project. During these months, we—the members of the community collaborating and me—agree that all the photographs taken by me during this research, would be shared with the people that allowed to be photographed and they would have the right to share them as well; for instance, as it was the case of some collaborator who used the picture to promote their entrepreneurship (Picture 2). The process of consent in this phase, as it was during the second phase of my

research, was and remains an iterative process, as Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021) affirm, as founded in Indigenous methodologies, this project thinks of the process of consent as "iterative cyclical process rather than a single event to promote participants' capacity for self-determination" (4).

Figure 5. Jorge Yopasá, Indigenous anthropologist, traditional weaver, and member of the Emzac Uaque collective. Source: Photograph taken by the author.

In the second phase of my ethnographic fieldwork, I focused on the process of the Muisca community of Suba that continues to be associated with the authority of the Cabildo. Before my arrival and due to the previous interactions with members and authorities of the Cabildo, I was able to share the proposal for this project and it was approved by the

Consejo de Educación (Education Council) of the Cabildo. During this phase of the fieldwork, I conducted 17 interviews more, for a total of 32 interviews during the ethnography—all of them in Spanish and codeswitching in their native language Muysccubun and recorded—25 of the interviews were video-recorded with verbal and written consents of the participants. These interviews and my notes during those were later transcribed and coded using NVivo software. Of these 32 interviews, 18 of them were with men (58%) and 13 were with women (42%) members of the community. Those 17 interviews conducted in the second phase of the research took place at the Cabildo office, at the houses of some of the participants, 1 of these interviews at the Suba local mayor's office with the current locality mayor, Julian Moreno, but most of the interviews took place at the *Santuario* [Sanctuary] mountain, where the community has reclaimed symbolic land ownership through its occupation—I describe in detail this process in Chapter 4. On this mountain, the Muysca community has built several gardens, the community *fuechy* [firewood kitchen], it is the place of one of their sacred stones, and also, the place where the placenta and the remains of several members of the community have been buried. During this phase, I attended several gatherings at the *Santuario*, among them: meetings with other Muisca nations and other Indigenous communities, meetings with local, district, and national political authorities, *trasnochos* [all-nighters] which were events where the community would stay up throughout the night, reasoning and sharing sacred medicine. These *trasnochos* took place, especially during main celebrations such as the solstices and equinoxes. Additionally, I attended to work at the gardens, where they are usually daily. Conducting the interviews at the *Santuario* was decided by the participants, and by conducting interviews in place, there was a

legitimization of the community's ways of knowing and feeling their sacred spaces. In my experience, by conducting these interviews on place there was a "collective knowledge-producing practice as opposed to the structured individual interview […], but also on a recognition that the spiritual realm is expressed through the physical world" (Jordan and Kapoor 2016, 144).

The interviews were possible through the active role of different councils—the Women's Council, Elders and Wise Council, and Youth Council—within the community that promoted the participation of the Muisca and created the space for conducting the interviews. The set of questions were more conversation themes from where multiple directions were taken by the interviewees, as intended, these semi-structured questions established a departure point more than a static concern. Concerning their inquiries, these questions were about their meanings and memories of their territory, the everyday effects of urbanization in their activities, relationships with the human and non-human—including sacred medicine, sacred places, and animals—and the level of their bodies. Also, these conversations navigated through topics of the political representation of the Cabildo and their stands on local and national ethnic policies.

In the same way that we agreed with members of the community detached from Cabildo in the first phase of the ethnography, with this section of the Muysca community we established communal ownership of the pictures taken by me during this ethnography. In fact, after sharing a couple of my pictures with the authorities, they asked me to be in charge of the official photographs for the Cabildo[10], which later were shared on their

[10] Social media accounts of the Cabildo Muisca of Suba: Instagram: @cabildo.muisca.suba; Facebook: Cabildo Indígena Muisca Suba; website: www.subamuisca.com

social media accounts and used in public events. Gillian Rose (2014) argues "photographs and videos can convey feelings, emotions, states of mind, affective states, sensual effects: and all these are important in understanding the lively and enchanted materialities of urban places" (8), in addition to this, in the case of this ethnography, photographs and videos have the power of visibilize an Indigenous community that has been purposely rendering invisible, and continues to struggles for spaces of visibilization, such as protests or rituals in public spaces (Sanchez-Castañeda 2020). By engaging with visual methodologies such as photography and video, there was an opportunity for creative methods and modes of representation (Coombe, Johnson, and Howitt 2014; Kinkaid 2019), where, for instance, we could explore spaces of "non-verbal communication using strategies already active in the population, such as acting in ritual/theatrical events or sharing meals". (Hayes-Conroy 2017, 52).

In search of venues to render visible the existence and struggles of the community, I came across two photography contests within the American Anthropological Association (AAA). The first contest was with the Society for the Anthropology of Food and Nutrition where I submitted three photographs where women from the urban gardens were portrayed to exhibit the relationship between these women, their gardens, and the city; I received the second place in this competition; the pictures and a brief were posted on the society's website[11]. Likewise, the second contest I participated in and was awarded was the Annual AAA Anthropology Photo Contest to be featured in the 2023 AAA Calendar. Participating in this contest was a great opportunity

[11] FoodAnthropology. Winners of SAFN's 2nd Annual Anthropology Day Photo Contest.

to mobilize the community on social media to attain enough ‘likes’ and ‘shares’ to be selected as one of the 12 winners.

Another method that we incorporated in this research was participatory mapping, during some sessions with some members of the Women's council, Elder Council, and Education Council. Due to its radical potential to represent not only land, but the set of relationships, memory, and practices attached to some places (Pearce 2008; Hirt 2012; Desbiens, Hirt, and Collignon 2020), more Indigenous communities are nowadays engaging with counter-mapping (Peluso 1995). As it has been explored in geography and anthropology in settled societies, maps remain an essential actor in struggles for territorial rights (Rye and Kurniawan 2017). The appropriation of mapping techniques by Indigenous communities has been a strategic method to approach political authorities to reclaim “spatial capital” (Desbiens, Hirt, and Collignon 2020, 6) and “to bolster the legitimacy of ‘customary’ claims to resources” (Peluso 1995, 384). Following this, as the Muysca community’s territorial struggle towards the defense and control of some sacred places is currently being evaluated by the local authorities, to be granted communal land ownership over the *Santuario* mountain—Chapter 4—there is a vital component of this legal struggle that depends mainly on the community’s ability to prove strong ontological attachments to these places. This is the reason why we focused the sessions of participatory mapping on remembering the stories, anecdotes, and myths attached to the sacred places for the community in Suba, and also, talking about the current threats of urbanization and pollution that these same places face. During these sessions, it was evident the potential of mapping as it “calls for affective, performative and emotionally

invested research with Indigenous peoples that befits a deeper sense of place" (Coombes, Johnson, and Howitt 2014, 849).

These sessions of participatory mapping were a learning experience undeniably for me, but for the community, they were also experiences of knowledge sharing and exchange and, spaces of political consensus, as the members discussed the potential risks of making available to the public and especially to local authorities, knowledge on the geographical location of natural resources and material culture. Echoing Johnson, Louis, and Pramono (2005),

> "Communities need to understand the ramifications of such mapping efforts before decisions concerning whether or not to digitize, record or symbolically represent sensitive community information. For some researchers, this may mean the development of entirely different research methodologies, focused more on the needs of the community than on the needs of the researchers" (94).

Figure 6. Session of participatory mapping with members of the Women's Council. Source: Photograph taken by the author.

Figure 7. Session of participatory mapping with members of the Education Council. Source: Photograph taken by the author.

Reflections on personal ethical commitment and political action

During the process of conducting fieldwork with the Muysca community of Suba, several political struggles were happening regarding the defense and claim of their traditional lands, in particular the communal ownership of the *Santuario*. For two months (March 2022-May 2022), a group of members of the community (authorities and representatives of some councils) and I met weekly to write the Land Acknowledgement Mandate that would be the foundation for the *Santuario* land claim. Most of these meetings happened at Suba's local mayor's office building and were partially supervised by people from the district government in charge of ethnic and environmental affairs.

The *Mandato de Control Territorial y Ambiental* (Mandate of Territorial and Environmental Control) has as its main purpose to establish, for the first time since the

foundation of the Cabildo 30 years ago, the territorial defense and control over their sacred places, using their concepts of 'territory', 'sacred sites', and 'thought system'. As was stated,

> The general assembly of the Muisca Indigenous Cabildo of Suba, as the highest authority, mandates the following territorial and environmental control document, which must be complied with in a mandatory manner, in order to ensure the protection of sacred and ancestral territories in accordance with the *el Derecho Mayor* (Indigenous Law), *la Ley de Origen* (Indigenous Origin Law), and the customs and habits of the Muisca people (Cabildo Indígena Muisca de Suba 2022, 1).

This mandate is the foundation for the current territorial claim of the *Santuario*, and other potential sacred places in Suba. With this mandate, the community can now start the process of claiming ownership of this mountain by establishing it as the location of a practice of cultural heritage. This is because in order to claim public or private lands as sacred and ancestral for the Muiscas, the community has to formulate a document where they demonstrate that certain traditional or sacred practice/ritual takes place at a particular space, in this case, at the *Santuario* mountain (Chapter 4). This mandate would prove the community's socio-ecological relationship with the place manifested in their legal statements.

Working collaboratively in this project towards the defense and potential communal ownership of sacred land for the community has been a very rich and humbling learning process, where I have been able to contribute to the writing of the document by, for instance, using fragments of the interviews I conducted to sustain the cultural and cosmological importance of these sacred places, and also assisting in lines of intercultural translation with the local authorities. Echoing scholars on decolonial

thinking, decolonization is foremost a process "in both research and performance of valuing, reclaiming, and foregrounding indigenous voices and epistemologies" (Swadener and Mutua 2008, 2), and by working with the community to defend their place-based epistemology, I moved from the disconnected and insensitive position as a researcher to a more ethical, open "and susceptible…learning from difference rather than learning about the Other" (Jones and Jenkins 2008, 480) type of collaborator.

We finished the document while I was still in Bogotá, Colombia, however, I had already left for the United States when this was approved by the General Assembly at the Cabildo of the community, in August 2022, and presented to the Suba local mayor and his authorities in October 2022. Nevertheless, I continue to be engaged with this project through online meetings with members of the community, among them some of the authorities, that keep me informed of the process.

B. Data Analysis

Since sections of the interviews I conducted served as data for the current production of the land claim document of the *Santuario*, some collaborators and I revised the recordings to organize and filter the data that could be part of the epistemological foundations for the legal claim. During these meetings, preliminary themes (Ryan and Bernard 2003, 102) emerged through "in vivo coding" (Strauss and Corbin 1998, 115; Saldaña 2014), by using Repetition (Ryan and Bernard 2003, 2; 89) as a primary technique. Likewise, during these sessions, members of the community help me with the translation and interpretation of parts of interviews when interviewees code-switching between Spanish and Muysccubun.

This preliminary analysis was crucial to collectively observe certain patterns in the data, however, most of the data analysis phase of this research took place when I came back to the United States. I used NVivo software to organize the interview transcriptions in Spanish, photographs of the research, and my field notes from both the interviews and occasional observations outside the interview settings. Based on the preliminary in vivo coding, I coded using NVivo all the data—including photographs—to later create categories that would help me to interpret the patterns in the material.

While I continued to have data analysis sessions with some members of the community, being in the United States makes this phase of the research work slightly more challenging. As a limitation for this phase, in addition to the expected affective distance produced by conducting these sessions online, not all of the people that attend the in-person activities have access to a computer and/or Internet service, which reduced significantly participation in the meetings. Nevertheless, I continued to share relevant findings, theoretical influences, and analytical paths.

Finally, as part of the agreements between the Cabildo and me to allow me to collaborate as a researcher in the community and respect the nature of the project by making the knowledge generated accessible (Vaditya 2018, 273), I must come back after my defense and present my dissertation to several audiences, including to the local government institutions, to provide academic foundations for their territorial claims.

3.4 Note on ongoing and future collaborations

As mentioned before, I collaborated in the process of researching and writing the first Land Acknowledgement Mandate of the Muisca community of Suba during my ethnographic field trip. Nevertheless, this mandate is only the first step towards what

going to be the process of land claim—I develop how the process is and what entails in chapter 4. Therefore, while I am in the US, I remain part of the research group that is developing the document that addresses the local mayor's office from which the community claims that their cultural survival depends on the *Santuario* as sacred indigenous Muisca land and as the site of several sacred practices.

Additionally, with some members of the community that was part of this dissertation ethnography, we are currently researching to collaborate in writing an article for a peer-reviewed journal about traditional cultivation techniques and Indigenous gardens within the Muysca community in both urban and rural settings.

3.5 Conclusion

> "We must delve into our realities, the texture, taste and smell of our traditions, the why of our cultural values, the structures of our personalities with all their qualities and defects…it is better to construct a science of reality derived from direct personal experience, contact with real people, and fieldwork, to give flesh and bones to cold calculations" (Fals-Borda 1983, 3).

I acknowledge the contradictory and complex nature of decolonizing research within Academia, nevertheless, among my multiple purposes, with this dissertation, I attempt to rethink the way scholars in the social sciences produce knowledge in collaborative ways that improve the lives of the communities which have been epistemologically marginalized. Decolonizing research methods requires unveiling the researcher's loci of enunciation and challenging methodological paradigms of 'objectivity' to promote a more active political role of the researcher and an ethical commitment towards change in both academic and socioeconomic realities.

As stated by scholars of participatory methodologies "the exclusion of ways of knowing from the perspective of marginal groups thwarted the abundant possibilities of knowledge could encompass" (Kovach 2015) by questioning and challenging the ongoing ways of knowledge production, "practitioners of PAR need to understand that theory is central to their work and that such theory, if it is true to the origins of PAR, will have a political hue that is likely to be oppositional, subversive and radical in our neoliberal times" (146). In addition to this, as much as engaging with radical theory is needed, as it was explored in this chapter, praxis is a crucial element in participatory-based methodologies, by thinking and incorporating creative methodologies (Dowling, Lloyd, and Suchet-Pearson 2018) there is the possibility of enriching the disciplines and expanding the reach of our work.

As a concluding remark and based on the experience of navigating between Western research standards and Indigenous protocols, while there is a movement towards the embrace of protocols in Indigenous research in some educational institutions[12], there is a need for the participation of Indigenous scholars and/or scholars trained in alternative methodologies in universities' ethical offices, to include standards in line with Indigenous and other epistemological marginalized communities. Ethical review protocols do not embrace the ethical protocols needed to conduct research with Indigenous peoples, and issues of Indigenous' "voice, representation, and collaboration" (Brown and Strega 2005)

[12] Universities and Government Protocols for Research with Indigenous Communities, "Toolbox of research principles in an aboriginal context" (2018); University of Washington, "Indigenous Studies: Indigenous Research Methods" (2022); University of Melbourne, "Indigenous Knowledges Research" (2022); University of Colorado, "Indigenous Research & Knowledges in North America" (2022); University of British Columbia, "Indigenous Research Methodologies" (2022).

usually emerge as researchers do not engage with alternative methodologies that open the space for other concerns and voices within the research process. As relationality and accountability (Wilson 2008) continue to be overshadowed by claims of objectivity and neutrality, “there is a need to shift the Western ethical standards that are directed to individual integrity into one of collective responsibility, with a focus on respectful and genuine relationships” (Thambinathan and Kinsella 2021, 5).

CHAPTER 4. INDIGENOUS ONTOLOGIES AND EPISTEMOLOGIES OF THE STATE: BECOMING MUISCA AND THE REGIMES OF AUTHENTICITY AND STATE RECOGNITION.

> Urbanization has affected us because those who have arrived do not like that we dwell here. They have discriminated against us. They do not know that there is an Indigenous *Cabildo*; they ignore it and say: "Those are not Indians, don't talk to me about that!" This [discrimination] should not happen because we are from here, clear-cut from here, carry the blood, our blood is indigenous, and it comes from our ancestors (Interview with Maria Ozuna, October 6, 2021).

4.1 Introduction

In most contemporary anthropological and geographical scholarship, there has been a shift from seeking a unique definition for indigeneity towards studying how this concept is produced, authenticated, experienced, mobilized, and contested (De La Cadena & Starn 2007). While there is no shared definition of indigeneity, what is shared in contemporary indigenous scholarship across both disciplines is a critical engagement with the nature of the concept of "indigeneity." Following the lead of several scholars, indigeneity has more recently been understood as a fluid, relational, highly political, and deeply historical, geographical, and socially contingent process and analytical category embedded within multiple power relations (Castree 2004; De La Cadena and Starn 2007; Bryan 2009; De la Cadena 2010; Kobayashi and de Leeuw 2010; Canessa 2012; Harris, Carison, and Poata-Smith 2013; Hunt 2017; Radcliffe 2017; Ellison 2018). The resurgence of indigeneity, and the focus of scholarship, has shown how this is a negotiated process and practice configured among several actors, including the State, citizens, and international actors (Povinelli 2002). In this chapter, I review and engage

with the analytical category of indigeneity, which I argue remains immersed within institutionalized colonial regimes (Alfred and Corntassel 2005), to present how the relationships between the Muisca of Suba and the state/district authorities have been framed within these three themes: 1) Proving Indigenous authenticity and obtaining recognition; 2) Becoming Indigenous citizens; 3) Challenging and contesting state and district authorities' epistemologies. Based on ethnographic accounts, these themes emerged as frames through which the community, but also members of the community as ethnic individuals, encounter governmental authorities.

4.2 Regimes of authenticity and recognition experienced by the Muisca of Suba

> The politics of authenticity forces some people to become authentic by becoming inauthentic (Sissons 2005, 42).

As a result of attempts of cultural assimilation and invisibilization by the project of *mestizaje* and the experience of being engulfed by urbanization, the Muisca of Suba have faced the stigma and the questioning of their identity as Indigenous in the city. They have had to navigate multiple layers of negotiations in which power is inflected by "demanding types of authenticity, sociality and adaptability from indigenous subjects" (Radcliffe 2017). While the 'trap of authenticity' for indigenous communities has been studied within different subdisciplines of anthropology, such as tourism, folklore, ethnomusicology, museology, religion, and performance (Conklin 1997; Hendry 2005; Zorn 2005; Bendix 2009; Leite & Graburn 2009; Merlan 2009; Zhu 2012; Theodossopoulos 2013; Bigenho 2016), in this chapter, I explore how "the very question of indigenous authenticity has deep roots within colonial racism" (Sissons 2005, 43), and

these regimes of authenticity continue to regulate the everyday territorial experiences of the Muisca people of Suba.

Legal technologies of authenticity are the primary tool towards recognition and, therefore, differentiated communal rights such as access to land and political representation in the best of cases. Both of these projects of governance have been revised as continuations of a larger assembly of colonial structural violence (Maddison 2013; Hunt 2017), the primary purpose of which continues to be the erasure of indigenous people's existence, not by, as in the past, eliminating their physical bodies, but rather by obliterating "the histories and geographies that provide the foundation for Indigenous cultural identities and sense of self" (Alfred and Cornstassel 2005, 598). In *Being Indigenous: Resurgences against contemporary colonialism* (2005), Native scholars Alfred (Bear Clan Mohawk) and Cornstassel (Cherokee Nation) expose how, within contemporary colonialism as they coined it, State-imaginaries or "fictions" (608) of indigeneity are imposed on indigenous peoples to domesticate and disrupt their identities and integrate them within the doctrines of the empire. Taking away the power of self-determination of the Indigenous communities, most recently through multicultural policies, the State remains responsible for defining indigeneity, supervising authenticity, and granting recognition (Jaimes 1992; Weaver 2001; Chaves and Zambrano 2006; Tsing 2007; Andrade 2017). Hence, multicultural legal systems are indeed a top-down political process of recognition which, for some scholars, has meant a continuation of colonial affairs, not a "radical alteration of historical conflicts, of power relations, or the dominant, modern, colonial and Western state model" (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 61).

In addition to the governmental recognition of Indigenous identity, for the Muysca, the struggle has been around the State and District authorities' recognition of their sacred territory. Some (Nixon 2011; Stoler 2016) have suggested that indigenous peoples' bodies have been transgressed insofar as they are located and affected within racialized environments, and in the case of the Muisca, the obliteration of their identity has also been experienced in erasing their sacred geographies and territorial epistemologies, displaying how structural violence is both embodied and place-based. Echoing Nixon's (2011) theory of slow violence, several scholars have examined how 'slow violence' operates in such a subtle way that seems invisible at macro-levels (de Leeuw 2016). For Nixon (2011), this type of violence is almost undetectable and is "gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space" (2). The targets of this type of violence are what Nixon borrows from Kevin Bale, "disposable people" (4), a category where marginalized genders, ethnicities, classes, and races are encapsulated.

Following the same train of thought, drawing upon a decolonial feminist framework, the geographer Sofia Zaragocin uses settler colonialism as a valuable framework to understand the indigenous experience of elimination in Latin America. She has explored how settler colonialism's logic of elimination is a "gendered, racialized and sexualized land-based project" (Zaragocin 2019, 375). For Zaragocin, the settler-colonial logic is displayed through the everyday structural violence experienced in the territories and bodies of the indigenous women. Maintaining resonances with Patrick Wolfe's logic of elimination, Zaragocin has discussed 'geographies of elimination' as well, arguing that these constitute territorial projects of cultural amalgamation and land dispossession based

on a state structure of violence against indigenous peoples and indigenous women in particular. For Zaragocin, as for other feminist decolonial authors, the coloniality of gender and race is experienced in place. Through "sustain[ed] encroachment on their territory, environmental degradation, and state abandonment" (373), this logic of elimination works at the micro-level in the everyday-in-place experiences of survival of these peoples. For the Muisca of Suba, through different mechanisms, the institutional authorities, such as the local authorities, including the mayor's office through its various district secretaries (Secretary of Social Integration, Secretary of Urban Planning) and the Bogota's Water and Sewage company, aim to control, surveillance, and pacify the community's claims.

4.2.1. El Santuario

The Muysca community of Suba has attempted to appropriate their territory through different mechanisms since the Colombian State has failed to grant them land rights. While most of the actions that the Muisca have used to re-appropriate their territory have been symbolic, through rituals, soundscapes, and protests (Sanchez-Castañeda 2018; 2020), one example of direct action has been the occupation of an area in the Suba hills, which the community has called *El Santuario* [The Sanctuary] (Map 1; Picture 1).

Figure 8 Map Santuario mountain.

Figure 9. *Hyca*, sacred stone at the Santuario mountain. February 9, 2022. Source: picture taken by the author.

In 2018, the Muisca community of Suba occupied the land adjacent to the south side of the *Parque Mirador Los Nevados*—a sacred place for the Muisca that was transformed into a fenced district park, where a Muisca cemetery was located. The recovery of the *Santuario* has been the first direct mechanism of territorial appropriation since the foundation of the Muisca Cabildo. The land of the *Santuario* is a private property with permits to be urbanized, where the community, with the authorization and support from the Cabildo, occupied to build their first *Qusmuy* or ceremonial house, around one of the sacred stones (Figure 2) located in Muysca territory. The community has built a *fuechy* [fireplace], three food and medicine gardens, and their ceremonial house on this mountain. Since the occupation, the Muysca have carried out countless rituals and celebrations in the *Santuario*; among them, mothers have buried their

placentas, and families have buried Muysca members that have passed. Likewise, the Muyscas have had intercultural meetings, political meetings with the other Muysca nations (Figure 3), educational and cultural sessions, communal cultivation and harvest events, and the *trasnochos* [noun for sessions of staying up all night discussing issues for the community, usually using medicine].

Figure 10. Political gathering in Santuario with political authorities of the other Muisca nations. March 25, 2022. Source: picture taken by the author.

After multiple attempts of being evicted, the local district authorities had to intervene and negotiate legal mechanisms for the community to remain in this place. In this regard, during my interview with the local mayor of Suba, Julian Moreno emphasized his role in the land acquisition process for the Santuario conservation. He asserted that,

> What we have sought in the Sanctuary *property* is the acquisition of that *property* by the district to give it to the community somehow. Today, [this is a] *private property* which, among other things, has a partial plan to be urbanized […] The district acquires it through an environmental patrimony figure, and these rituals take place there; these ancient and sacred practices are going to be guaranteed[13] (Interview with the local mayor of Suba, Julian Moreno, May 4, 2022).

While the local authority affirms that the district would buy the property to 'give it to the community', he never discussed the multiple layers involved in this process and how it would never mean the actual land transfer to the community. The way that the district authorities frame this process, I argue, is highly problematic and continues to be inscribed within colonial regimes of authenticity. First, the local mayor, Moreno, uses the institutional figure of acquiring the land—which he highlights, on several occasions, is a developable private property—as environmental patrimony or heritage; however, this does not mean entitling the land to the community or ordaining it as Indigenous land, where the community would be sovereign, but instead, his administration is deploying what some have called as urban greening (Byrne 2012; Porter, Hurst and Tina 2020). While in this section, I am focusing my analysis on the process of *El Santuario*; during the entire interview with Moreno, he emphasized the strategy of re-greening Suba as a groundbreaking progressive political stance that—in his view—aligns with the goals of the Muisca Cabildo. Nevertheless, I agree with what some scholars exploring similar processes have suggested, that the deployment of urban greening projects is a "new technology through which accumulation by dispossession is enacted, and how

[13] The words in italics correspond to the author's emphasis.

dispossession continues to function according to racialized logics of capital" (Porter, Hurst, and Tina 2020, 229).

This notion of environmental heritage continues to emerge as a top-down mechanism for determining green spaces that could serve as pacifiers for the community, in contrast to genuine movements towards Indigenous sovereign territories, in this case, Muisca territory in the city. As Coulthard (2014) suggests, these types of governmental techniques of "colonial recognition politics serve the imperatives of capitalist accumulation by *appearing* to address its colonial history through symbolic acts of redress while in actuality "further entrenching in law and practice the real bases of its control" (155). By framing this space as environmental heritage, the local authorities continue to exert epistemic violence and remain unaccountable for the work of erasure of the Muisca territorial ontologies and everyday epistemologies enacted in the production of urban planning policy. "The community would help us to take care of the place",—Moreno suggested when talking about this sacred place for the community; it is precisely the language he used during this interview that I wanted to break down. His language, as his administration's policies, are not neutral or innocent; instead, they exhibit a system of knowledge founded on urban coloniality.

Second, this entire process of 'giving' the land to the community is not as simple as it sounds. As I was working with the community on their first Land Acknowledgement Mandate document, I could participate in the briefing sessions led by the mayor's office employees. To allow the community to remain—but not be sovereign—through the purchase of the *Santuario* land by the authorities, the Muisca community of Suba must prove their indigeneity through a set of documents that guarantee how their 'ancient and

sacred practices'—as the local mayor calls them—take place in this particular space of the *Santuario*. For several weeks, a group of community members, some of their authorities from the Muisca Cabildo, and I met at the offices of the local mayor of Suba to write the first Land Acknowledgment Mandate of the Muisca of Suba. This mandate was written as one of the multiple documents needed to claim the *Santuario* and establish sacred attachments with other places in Suba. In one of the first sessions, one employee of the mayor's office sat with us and explained the whole process, we introduced each other, and once she heard that I was a doctoral candidate in anthropology, she exclaimed: this is perfect! You [the Muiscas] can use her academic work to sustain your territorial claim. She knows precisely the language we need in these documents. Do you have pictures? —she asked me—we need lots of pictures, aerial pictures, pictures of the rituals, of everything! After this encounter with the district authorities, I remembered how this experience had been the experience of many other academics working with Indigenous peoples or state institutions in Indigenous matters. In this regard, Elizabeth Povinelli has discussed that,

> The Belyuen and their lawyers and anthropologist need[ed] to convince a land commissioner that they satisfied the specific requirements of the LRA; namely, that they were a "local descent group" who have "common spiritual affiliations" to a site on the land that place them under "primary spiritual responsibility to the site" and for the land (Povinelli 2002, 208).

As presented by Povinelli in the case of the Belyuen in northern Australia, the Muysca of Suba must engage in a series of bureaucratic requirements in order to fulfil the governmental expectations on what type of 'sacred', 'ancient', 'traditional', or 'Indigenous' practices take place in the *Santuario*. In this subject, as a response to the

lack of understanding of Indigenous ontologies, scholars have suggested that Indigenous peoples sometimes engage in practices of representation referred to as "strategic essentialism" (Paradies 2006, 355; see also Graham 2002; Rappaport 2005). The rationale behind adopting strategic essentialist practices has been understood as a way to "seek recognition and demand rights as 'indigenous peoples'" (Hodgson 2011, 5). For instance, the anthropologist Michael Cepek (2016) sustains that in response to stereotypical expectations, the Indigenous peoples have shifted and fashioned mythological stories within their struggles against the mining projects in their territories. Based on Cepek's ethnographic accounts, while the elders acknowledge that these stories resulted from multiple discussions between them and the environmental activists, for the younger generations, these stories have become part of their cosmological foundations (Cepek 2016). In common, the Muysca people have put in place and connected cosmological stories and historical anecdotes to the *Santuario,* providing with meaning their territorial claims.

Strategic essentialism is largely viewed as a response to the State's expectation of a "hyperreal Indian"[14] (Ramos 1994)—a demanding, and to a certain extent almost impossible, representation of indigeneity which reproduces a "politics of shame" (Povinelli 2002). As some scholars have asserted, this "nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, [and] can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being" (Taylor 1997); instead of celebrating diversity

[14] The Brazilian anthropologist Alcida Rita Ramos coined the term "hyperreal Indian" (1994). For Ramos, the hyperreal Indian is the product of the 'perfect Indian', the Indian that has been molded by the interests of dominant actors, such as international organizations. Ramos asserts that replacing the lived every-day experiences of indigenous peoples, this "Indian is more than the real Indian" (161).

state-driven regimes of authenticity tend to domesticate the existence of the Indigenous peoples (Conklin 1997). For the Muisca community, while these discourses of authenticity have meant a constant negotiation of their identities within categories they aim to resist, they must nevertheless adjust to (see also: Harris, Carlson, and Poata-Smith 2013; Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen 2014). The British anthropologist, Tania Li, condemns the multiple obstacles for indigenous peoples to get involved within liberal legal and bureaucratic categories while shaping their identities to plea for their rights. She affirms that,

> Those who demand that their rights be acknowledged must fill the places of recognition that others provide, using dominant languages and demanding a voice in bureaucratic and other power-saturated encounters, even as they seek to stretch, reshape, or even invert the meanings implied (Li 2001, 653).

While the process to acquire and remain legally in the land of the *Santuario* is still in course, other Muysca territorial struggles are currently happening with socioecological negative impacts that are not part of the authority's ethnic agenda. For instance, the degradation of the Tibabuyes *chupqua* [wetland], one of the sacred and most venerated places in Muysca cosmology.

4.2.2. Tibabuyes chupqua: Muysca uterus

> "I was born in the *chupqua*. There was a huge lagoon; I remember they [my grandparents] used to take juncus to make the mats. My grandmother weaved the juncus. That same plant was left to dry, and they would weave with it. They would weave rafts, and we other four or five kids we would go hunting for fish" (Interview with Elizabeth 'Chavelita' Sánchez Caita, October 22, 2021).

> "My placenta is buried in the *chupqua*; I was born there."
> (Informal conversation with Elder woman from the Muysca community, May 12, 2022).

On August 9, 2021, local authorities in Bogota violently evicted members from the Muisca community and environmentalist protesters from the *Tibabuyes chupqua* [wetland]. The protesters had been peacefully squatting for months, standing against a 'greening' urbanization project that is currently being undertaken in the *Tibabuyes* wetland by the Water and Sewage Company of Bogota and the mayor's office. The protesters claimed that the urbanization projects promoted by the district authorities and the Water and Sewage company of Bogota would be an act of ecocide. The Juan Amarillo Tibabuyes wetland is the largest in Bogota, Colombia. With more than 222 hectares, this wetland connects a chain of wetlands and rivers in the city. It is the ecosystem of several endemic species of flora and fauna of the country, such as the Bogota rail (*Rallus semiplumbeus)*, an endangered species of bird. The construction of a massive infrastructure project called the "*Parque Lineal Conexión Corredor Ambiental Juan Amarillo*" [Linear connection park and environmental corridor Juan Amarillo] will have, as members of the community and environmental activists affirm, devastating effects on the entire ecological system of the city, as well as a significant loss to the Muisca cosmology. For the Muysca people, as for other indigenous communities, the territory is understood as more than the material ground for human existence (Escobar 2015); land signifies a space and set of relations that are part of the concept of community. For the community, the Tibabuyes wetland has historically acted as a sacred place for many rituals, such as the *Huitaca* or Flower Celebration. The wetland continues to be the place for seasonal celebrations such as the equinox and solstice festivals. In reaction to the threat of urbanization on the wetland, the Muisca people of Suba have begun engaging with practices of countermapping and soundscapes to disrupt colonial strategies of spatial segregation, indigenous erasure, and the coloniality of nature.

For instance, during the equinox in September 2021, members of the community celebrated this seasonal event and their traditional *Huitaca* with a presentation of the results of a countermapping effort that included their traditional agricultural system, the chain of rivers and wetlands connected to the Tibabuyes before urbanization, and several sacred places (Picture 3), an activity of reforestation (Picture 4), and a session of soundscape (Picture 5) that involved a walk through the wetland with the Elder Blancanieves and a session of storytelling in *Muysc cubun.*

Figure 11. Muysca community members during the presentation of their map of Suba.

Figure 12. Reforestation made by young members of the Muysca community in the wetland.

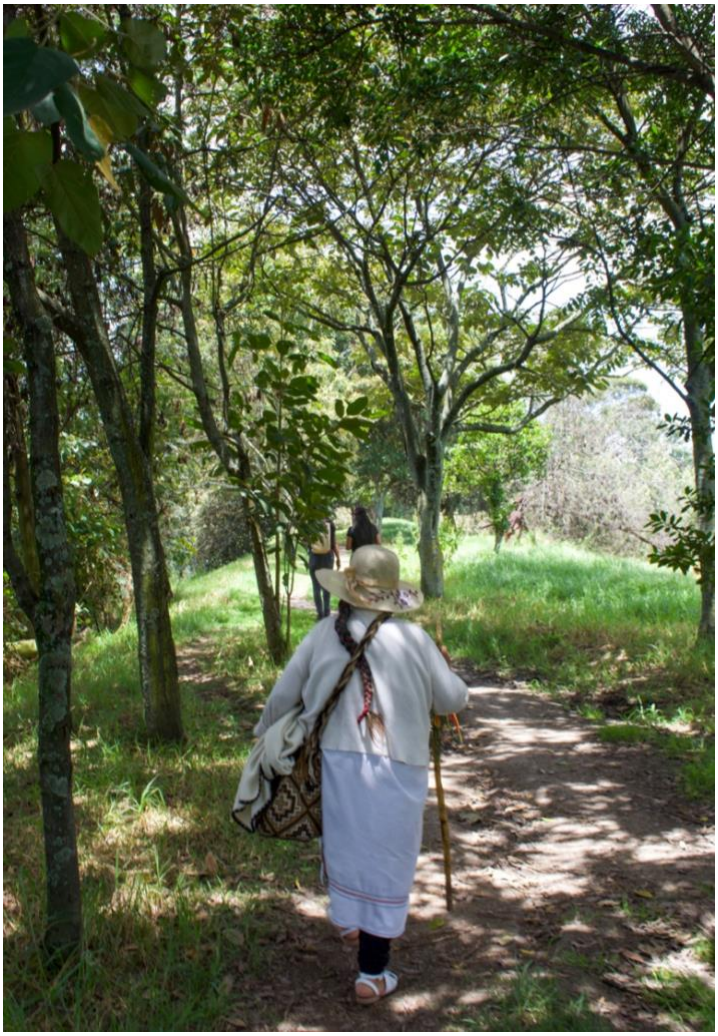

Figure 13. Elder Blancanieves during a soundscape walk in the Tibabuyes wetland.

The territorial resistance of the community, both symbolic through rituals and direct through protests and occupation in the wetland, counters the socioecological destruction experienced by the ecocide caused by the district authorities. Although there are few local decrees and agreements, there are specific articles[15] concerning the right to Indigenous territoriality—it is not clear what the authorities mean by this—the experience of

[15] Agreement 359 /2009, Article 7: On territoriality; Decree 543/2011, Article 7: Political paths and lines of action.

Indigenous peoples in Bogota, for instance, the Muysca's does not resemble these dispositions.

Among these legal propositions, there are:

- "To promote and facilitate the participation of legitimately recognized indigenous organizations and peoples in the District, in the administration processes of the district's protected areas through the inclusion of differential parameters in the applicable norms and in the selection processes that correspond".
- "The identification, characterization, and redefinition of the Muisca indigenous territory in the city to recover the memory and ancestral practice".
- "To guarantee participation in implementing environmental recovery, conservation, and preservation processes with indigenous peoples from their worldview, allowing them to contribute to constructing an environmentally sustainable city".
- "The recognition and promotion of the social production of the own habitat of the indigenous cultures, with emphasis on the supply of housing with dignity criteria appropriate to the worldviews, uses, and customs of indigenous peoples, with a differential focus on the criteria for assigning housing subsidies".
- "To guarantee including the Muisca ancestral vision, rights, and practices in the planning instruments that develop the *Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial* (Land Management Plan) in the territories that affect them".

Based on ethnographic material and my own experience after working for several years with the Muysca community, none of these territorial decrees and agreements are in exercise, and of greater concern are some of the assertions made by the local mayor of

Suba, Julian Moreno, whom Bogota's mayor, Claudia Lopez, appointed. Notably, concerning the last proposition listed, the local mayor affirmed that there was no place for the participation of the Indigenous communities, let alone the Muysca of Suba. Whereas by law, it is stated that the involvement of the Muysca would be guaranteed and that their 'ancestral vision, rights and practices' would be included in the urban planning foundation for the Land Management Plan—which peculiarly is called "Re-greening Bogota"—there was prior and informed consultation. In the interview, after I asked him how the participation of the Muysca people was granted in the process of the new Bogota's urban planning policy for the following 15 years that it was going to affect them and their sacred territories directly, Moreno framed this practice of Indigenous ontologies removal, in the following terms,

> "in terms of their participation in the construction of the Land Management Plan[16] (POT), it must be said clearly, the POT is a *very complex process for citizen participation* (...) these territorial management plans may have many difficulties in the instances where at the Bogotá Council or at Territorial Planning Council must be approved and they tend to be vulnerable to political sabotage (...) Everything remains that "I do not approve your land use plan because it is you! No matter what I say because I am your contradictor. And against that logic, I believe participation is always compromised; constructive participation is compromised." (Interview with the local mayor of Suba, Julian Moreno, May 4, 2022).

Moreno reduced his answer by emphasizing that the citizen—not Indigenous—participation in this process was complex and that political opposition was the reason for not including Indigenous ontologies. In response to this, in addition to the squatting and protests that the Muysca continue to have (Picture 6), the *Cabildo* Muisca demanded the

[16] Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial (POT) by its acronym in Spanish.

constitution of a Muisca *resguardo* to the National Land Agency and Sustainable Development Minister to "safeguard and revitalize the ancestral struggle and the comprehensive reparation that must be made for the Muysca de Suba indigenous community arguing that,

> The Land Management Plan (POT) [has] been an instrument without consultation to the community that has deteriorated, modified, contaminated, *concretized*[17], to make way for development, destroying our sacred sites, altering their natural order, polluting our water sources, and losing our food autonomy, [this has] unbalanced our socioeconomic conditions and [it] has privatized and disrupted our roads[18] (Right to a petition presented to the National Land Agency and the Environmental and Sustainable Development Minister, 2023).

The Tibabuyes *chupqua* is not a mere 're-greening' urbanistic project, for the Muysca, the *chupqua* is their mother's uterus. As people of water, the Muysca have a strong attachment to the sacred *chupqua*. As presented in the beginning of this section, several Elder members of the community tell stories and anecdotes about their birth and childhood in the wetland; in particular, many members assert that their placentas remain buried in the wetland, even in locations that have been urbanized or drained. In this regard, the anthropologist Marisol De la Cadena (2010) engages with the politics of indigenous recognition by analyzing the ontological foundations of human/non-human social and political relationships in the Andes. De la Cadena, echoing Stengers (2005), proposes that we 'slow down reasoning' to challenge our conceptual foundations and inaugurate spaces for new political actors such as "Earth-beings," entities who are present in everyday Andean life. De la Cadena's work

[17] Concretized is used in this document both as a verb that expresses the making real of an idea, but also as a metaphor from the noun concrete as cement. The Muyscas use this expression on several occasions.

[18] In this expression, the Muyscas used the term roads not as an infrastructure, but as paths in a spiritual sense.

shows that although states with multicultural policies in the Andes claim to recognize diversity, they still have not engaged with the decolonial challenge of rethinking politics in non-westernized terms. Conversely, indigenous leaders must "speak in modern terms, translating their practices into a politically acceptable speech, and leaving 'the unacceptable' behind without necessarily abandoning it" (De la Cadena 2010, 349; see also Graham 2002; Hale 2020). And while the Muisca authorities have engaged in this ontological translation, the local and national governmental authorities do not guarantee that those statements would have a space in the urban planning policy construction, as shown with Bogota's Land Management Plan.

Figure 14. The Muisca governor, Jeison Triviño Cabiativa, quarrelling with an employee of the mayor's office.

4.2.3. Muysca Gardens as State's Urbs nullius

In Colombia, particularly in Bogotá, the Secretary of Housing has been the entity in charge of implementing mechanisms to control the development and

underdevelopment of urban land. One of the mechanisms these women highlighted was categorizing their urban gardens as *lotes de engorde* (colloquial Colombian expression) or unbuilt urbanized properties. The categorization as *lotes de engorde*, "vacant lots" or undeveloped developable or undeveloped urbanized land, follows the proposition of preventing real estate speculation. By imposing high property taxes on these vacant lots, the local authorities aim to avoid the cases of land grabbing and accumulation of unproductive land in Bogotá. Although these spatial arrangements are designed by the authorities to reduce land speculation by landowners and developers, there is no differentiation of the socioecological configurations in Indigenous lands.

In this regard, I argue that the lack of policies differentiating Indigenous and non-Indigenous urban lands arises from a logic of dispossession driven by capitalist urbanization. By declaring a space as 'vacant,' 'empty,' or 'unproductive,' district authorities erase Indigenous ecological knowledge, sacred relationships with the environment, and productive traditional food systems and render Indigenous women's dwelling in these lands invisible. These depictions of nondevelopment echo the colonial notion of *Terra Nullius*, which stands as "the racist legal fiction that declared Indigenous peoples too "primitive" to bear rights to land and sovereignty when they first encountered European powers on the continent, thus rendering their territories legally "empty" and therefore open for colonial settlement and development" (Coulthard 2014, 175). Following this train of thought, I use Coulthard's analysis of *terra nullius*, specifically, his groundbreaking notion of *Urbs nullius*—an "urban space void of Indigenous sovereign presence" (176), to foreground the colonial foundations of the process of urbanization and urban planning in Bogotá.

On this subject, two of the Muisca women who own these urban gardens declared that both have dealt with lawsuits that aim to classify their lands as 'vacant lots' to be auctioned and offered to developers. In our conversations, they asserted that:

> "My grandma had to sell her lands because she could not afford to pay the property taxes; those were too expensive." (Interview with Angela Niviayo, February 16, 2022).

> "It [Urbanization] has affected us in various ways. The first way is through high property taxes. Because here, my territory is decreed as a *lote de engorde* (vacant lot). Several of my relatives sold or parcelled their houses; they charge you up to laughter. Now it is all brick; there is no land to sow" (Interview with Elizabeth 'Chavelita' Sánchez Caita, October 22, 2021).

> Well…we have had a lawyer, we have had about five legal processes, five lawyers who have not been able to move this forward, who say that it is very tangled... but here we are, here we are in the territory. The government has been unable to remove us, and we will not let ourselves be removed. Here we are fighting, standing in the fight, dwelling… dwelling today, sowing it [the territory], enjoying it, and harvesting it" (Interview with Maria Ozuna, October 6, 2021).

Currently, there are two mechanisms to regulate urban gardens in Bogotá: first, the *Protocol for the economical use of agroecological urban and peri-urban agriculture activity in the public space of the capital district of Bogotá* (Resolution N. 361, December 30th, 2020), and the *Agreement 605* of August 27th, 2015, "whereby the guidelines are formulated to institutionalize the agroecological urban and periurban agriculture program in the city of Bogotá" (Alcaldía de Bogota 2015). Nevertheless, neither these stipulations were crafted nor debated around the existence of Indigenous urban gardens in Bogotá. Instead, these regulations were produced around the economic benefits of institutionalizing urban gardens in public spaces, on the one hand, and around the control and inspection, on the other hand. Around this latter purpose, women from the

community affirmed that they had obtained resources for their gardens through the district programs, though not as Indigenous-based gardens.

The analytical framework offered by *Urbs nullius* allows us to comprehend how urban coloniality operates in Bogota by transforming Indigenous knowledge/labor and land into 'vacant' of racial identity. First, by framing the lots where Indigenous gardens are located as empty and undevelopable, the State and local authorities put in place a logic of dispossession, which is the foundation of capitalist urbanization. Second, the material manifestations of *Urbs nullius* logics show us how it transforms Indigenous women's place-based knowledge and labor in gardens, as sources of economic profit and growth. In regard to the latter, women of the community declared how the dynamics imposed by the local mayor's office and the Bogota's secretaries have changed how they and the community have developed the projects to obtain resources for their gardens. As these programs are thought and developed for Bogota's citizens disregarding their ethnic origins and associations, the owners of these Muysca gardens have applied and attained resources as individual entrepreneurs in competition to other non-Indigenous citizens, transforming them from being part of an Indigenous collective into neoliberal citizens.

4.3. Becoming an Indigenous Citizen

Within scholarship interested and situated in Latin America, there has been a concern in looking at multicultural policies as technologies that have imagined and produced what has been articulated as the '*Indio permitido'* ('the authorized Indian') (Hale 2004). The American anthropologist Charles R. Hale borrows the concept of *Indio Permitido* from the Bolivian anthropologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui as a helpful tool to understand the politics of indigeneity in Latin America. Hale (2004; 2006) argues that in Guatemala, as

has been the case of nearly all of the countries in Latin America, multiculturalism appears as a mode of governance of indigenous voices that is combined with 'aggressive neoliberal policies' and shifts the long-standing project of *mestizaje* (miscegenation) and assimilation. For Hale, "the core of neoliberalism's cultural project is not radical individualism, but the creation of subjects who govern themselves in accordance with the logic of globalized capitalism" (Hale 2004). According to Hale, recognizing the sociopolitical category of the '*Indio permitido*' as a domesticated ethnic identity explains how multiculturalism "contributes to the rising prominence of indigenous voices at the same time as it creates limits to their transformative aspirations" (17). While the institutionalized project of *mestizaje*[19] spanned centuries, a shift towards the multicultural agenda pushed a wave of constitutional reforms across the Latin American continent that included "legal reforms that officially recognized their ethnic diversity, called for participatory government, and as a result restructured rights along ethnic lines, including collective land rights, which were not seen in legal texts before" (Ng'weno 2007). It has been observed that multiculturalism initially appeared as a political arrangement in response to global demands to recognize ethnic minorities; however, the effects of multiculturalism are multivalent. While on the one hand, multicultural policies represent powerful mechanisms of governance (Brown 1995), on the other hand, they acknowledge the agency of peasants and ethnic resurgences in Latin America and, therefore, present policies of representation that provide possibilities for "indigenous efforts to unsettle

[19] The biological and cultural process of homogenization known as mestizaje emerged in the nineteenth century throughout Latin America. Based on racial science, mestizaje "were embedded in the ideology and politics of whitening, which aimed to import European immigrants, eradicate racial-cultural diversity, and construct a monolingual nation and burgois market culture under a unitary rule of law" (Larson 2004, 86). See also De la Cadena (2005); Wade (2016).

territory to create communal spaces for more just futures" (Correia 2019). The circumscribed notion of indigeneity that has been produced and regulated as the '*Indio permitido*' continues to be shaped by discourses of authenticity and politics of recognition. Following Coulthard (2014), the practice of circumscribing indigeneity "in its contemporary liberal form promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples' demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend" (3).

Concerning the Colombian case, the anthropologist Jean Jackson, who has worked for over 50 years with Amazonian indigenous groups in Colombia, meditates on the complexity of the struggles of indigenous peoples in defining themselves as Indigenous in this country. Based on her own experience as an anthropologist and using other scholars' ethnographic experiences, Jackson (2019) analyses how neoliberal multiculturalism has been deployed in Colombia as a form of governmentality that recognizes legally and normatively ethnic and cultural differences (13). Echoing several scholars' work, Jackson stresses that "neoliberalism's cultural project endorses indigenous cultural rights"; however, it does so "without supporting other necessary changes" (17). While recognizing the strong agency of the indigenous movement in Colombia, Jackson emphasizes that the State undertakes this project to manage minorities and thereby prevent potential threats to the economic system. One of the most significant discussions throughout Jackson's analysis is the complexity around regimes of authenticity in Colombia. Exploring several cases of reindigenization—among them the Muiscas—Jackson discusses how these communities challenge ongoing colonial imaginaries that shape how indigenous peoples deploy their identity (175).

Multiculturalism has been considered a technology of governmentality, or what the Argentinian scholar Macarena del Pilar Manzanelli has referred to as 'ethnogovernmentality' (Mazanelli 2020), a set of institutional devices that were created to acknowledge and manage cultural diversity. However, for Manzanelli, as for other scholars (Povinelli 2002; Hale 2004; Greene 2007), neoliberal multiculturalist policies have maintained and even exacerbated the asymmetrical relations between the State and indigenous peoples. It has been suggested that while there is a recognition of the diversity of cultures within the State, this recognition is channelled through a citizenship regime that disregards notions of collective indigenous property and instead centers recognition on a model based on the liberal-westernized citizen-individual that is settled on private property (Mazanelli 2020, 117). These politics of recognition, therefore, rehash colonial configurations insofar as they are ascribed within a Western understanding of political representations, thus keeping 'the indigenous problem' within the same modern Eurocentric logic of coloniality (Mignolo 2007; Quijano 2014).

In this regard, I would like to analyze the production of the Muisca Indigenous neoliberal citizen through the case of environmental projects led by governmental institutions. One of the examples of this change in the socioeconomic agency of the Indigenous Muisca and mechanisms of neoliberal control have been around urban agriculture, as it promotes a disciplined citizen that collaborates, participates, and volunteers in governance (Ghose and Pettygrove 2014; Mudu and Marini 2018). For the Muisca women who maintain their gardens with minimum resources and face increased property taxes, these neoliberal devices have transformed how they interact with state institutions. To obtain material resources from the local and national government,

unfortunately, Indigenous communities—or individual members as citizens, not as Indigenous citizens—must engage in state-led projects that "simultaneously obscure and reproduce race and racism as organizing principles of society through discourses about individual responsibility and the supposed color-blindness of market-based systems" (Ghose and Pettygrove 2014, 1093). Therefore, as in most ethnic and impoverished racialized communities, participation in these state-led projects depends on different elements that could prevent their involvement and success in these initiatives. To name a few, for instance, knowledge of the law, as well as of the language used for grant proposals; labor, both from the members of the community as well as collaborators, as has been the case of my participation in different grant proposals, and other resources such as time, transportation, and access to technology. The participation of citizens in these programs, far from tackling the socioecological inequalities experienced by Indigenous peoples, particularly women that own these urban gardens, is designed to assuage the claims and needs of the communities. By making the communities or the citizens compete for grants or projects, the authorities make their participation a "component of collaborative governance used to reduce state responsibility for social service provision, and citizen volunteers are compelled to fill welfare deficiencies resulting from lapsed government spending" (Ghose and Pettygrove 2014, 1092).

Based on the analysis of informal conversations and during some interviews, these projects have resulted in the internalization of neoliberal ideology as they have shaped the language and aspirations of some community members. Whereas the community previously expressed their needs negatively, regarding the support they lack from the State, they now describe their needs with an increased sense of individual

agency, as they are now 'participating' in projects that may help them acquire goods and services. This represents a shift in the burden of responsibility from the State to the neoliberal citizen, in this case, the neoliberal Indigenous. As it can be analyzed, the interaction of these women with district and national institutions has not been through the mobilization of their ethnicity but from their economic position as citizens or 'entrepreneurs' in local markets. For instance, one of the women suggested that thanks to her participation in programs with the Botanical Garden Institution, she has been able to sell her produce and also obtain gardening supplies,

> I am with the Botanical Garden of Bogotá, they have taught me a lot, and I have the opportunity to take my vegetables to the Botanical Garden to sell. I have been with them for five years. They come and advise me; for example, if I have a plague, I call, and then they say: well, add chilli pepper, add paprika. Sometimes they bring me fertilizers, and they also get me seedlings (Interview with Elizabeth 'Chavelita' Sánchez Caita, October 22, 2021).

4.4. Discussion

Without the region-territory, communities would be even more vulnerable to being reconstructed by capital and the State (Escobar 2008, 62).

In this chapter, I explored indigeneity as a legal and juridical category (Ng'weno 2007; Graham and Penny 2014), deeply immersed within colonial matrices of power that is managed through regimes of authenticity which continue to design the way Indigenous communities, specifically for the interest of this research, the Muisca people, interact and negotiate with governmental institutions, towards territorial recognition and sovereignty. While scholars recognize that political platforms such as multiculturalism have been used to empower certain groups with territorial rights and claims to national citizenship, there

is nevertheless a consensus that multiculturalism constitutes a technology of governmentality. Often, the cost for indigenous groups, as presented here for the Muisca people, to gain rights to land or recognition is that they must adapt their traditional understandings to fit neoliberal governance and property ownership models. In addition, the ontological, epistemological, and cosmological understandings of the identity and territory of the Muisca of Suba are not reflected in the philosophical underpinnings of modern western society and thought, reproducing colonial forms of silencing and epistemological violence. While I have noted that the Muisca have nevertheless been able to secure forms of empowerment through multicultural platforms, they normally do so by strategically essentializing themselves to meet state expectations of what indigeneity looks like. However, strategic essentialist practices freeze cultural identities into static representations that do not reflect what is otherwise a fluid, evolving indigenous culture or transforms them into neoliberal Indigenous citizens.

In the following chapter, I analyze how indigeneity as an "embodied ontology" is also questioned by imposing a type of indigeneity at the micro and embodied scale (Radcliffe 2018, 438), but contested and revitalized through embodied practices of resurgence. By reviewing how regimes of indigenous authenticity also operate at the level of indigenous bodies, we can also recognize performativity as an embodied tool of cultural difference that indigenous peoples use to help navigate state regimes of authenticity and recognition.

CHAPTER 5. THE POLITICS OF EMBODIED INDIGENEITY: *MUYSCA CUERPO-TERRITORIO*, PERFORMANCE, AND RESURGENCE

5.1. Introduction

> "The territory is not only the relationships woven with the other as a person, but with the environment and animals; we are all territory, and our bodies are immersed in this system" (Interview with Andrea Caita, March 31, 2022).

Within contemporary feminist and decolonial scholarship, anthropologists and geographers have critically examined how indigeneity is embodied as "a social-corporeal positioning" shaped by colonial-modern relations (Radcliffe 2018, 436). In this chapter, one of the elements I explore is how the Indigenous body has been a recent focus of study across both anthropology and geography disciplines as a new scale to understand how indigeneity is shaped, produced, performed, and embodied, but also contested and reimagined (Hunt 2017). In an attempt to analyze the multiple scales where colonial power operates, scholars have been documenting how the colonized body continues to be a site of oppression and resistance (Ellison 2018). Feminist and decolonial theorists have maintained that the ongoing legacy of colonial violence continues to function at the micro-level geographies, such as the body of Indigenous women, children, and homes (de Leeuw 2016). In her work, Sarah de Leeuw (2016) signals how even though there is a significant amount of geographical work—also applicable to anthropology—on how colonialism continues to operate at the level of land and resources, less attention is directed towards how technologies of contemporary colonialism operate at the intimate, private, embodied, visceral level of Indigenous women and children. By changing the scale of study, de Leeuw affirms, scholars could unveil how colonial violence remains

invisible in the "intimate and micro-scale domestic spaces." Accordingly, by "paying closer critical attention to the stories of Indigenous women and children living visceral experiences of colonialism, we might better recognize the complex and deeply relevant geography of tender spaces through which the biopolitics of colonialism operate" (de Leeuw 2016, p.15). For de Leeuw, as for other scholars (Stoler 2016; Radcliffe 2015), colonial presence at the macro levels—lands, economic systems, legal structures—is first lived at the micro, visceral level, within the bodies of Indigenous individuals. Therefore, this scale should be acknowledged and examined.

In February 2022, I sat in the office of a Muysca medicine walker—as he describes himself—Jeison Yopasá. During this visit, Erika Nivia and Jorge Yopasá sat beside me and participated in this conversation, as they were the gatekeepers during this visit. Jeison, trained as a nurse and paramedic at the National University of Colombia, started our conversation by telling Erika and Jorge that his youngest son was born in the house where he lives and works. As I have heard stories about the burial of placentas as offerings to the territory within this process of cultural and territorial revitalization, I immediately asked Yeison about it, and he replied by pointing to a clay planter behind me:

> "It is buried there. My son came to rescue the *Yopo*[20] medicine; that is why he was born here, in the territory, and his placenta is buried here. [Having his birth at the house] caused me much trouble with the institutions (…). They do not want us to bring our sacred practices back" (Interview with Yeison Yopasá, February 12, 2022).

[20] *Yopo*: the *Anadenanthera peregrina* tree's ground seeds are consumed as a snuff. This sacred medicine contains the psychoactive agents DMT, bufotenine, and 5-MeO-DMT (Rodd 2002).

Almost all of the Muysca I interviewed, as well as others during informal conversations, asserted that offering the placenta was an act of reciprocity; as their bodies come from the territory, they give back to it and root themselves back in it. In his statement, Yeison underlines two elements I will develop in this chapter: first, the body-based relationship between the Muysca and their territory. The community members brought in this racialized and embodied relationship during the interviews and informal conversations, highlighting different aspects in which this manifested—for instance, the relationship between urban development, environmental degradation, and illnesses. The second element I will develop in this chapter is how some bodily practices of resurgence, such as the use of *Yopo* and midwifery, are targeted by authorities and institutions. Even as they try to eliminate these important cultural practices, these same state institutions expect the display of indigeneity through performances that better fit an essentialized notion of how Indigenous identity should be exhibited to recognize the Muysca identity. In attempting to develop these elements, I engage with feminist and decolonial scholarship, particularly analyses of *cuerpo-territorio* [body-territory], to argue that analyzing indigeneity as an embodied-in-territory category provides the necessary ontological foundations to understand how urban indigeneity is experienced, challenged, performed, and contested by engaging with practices of resurgence.

In this endeavor, in the first section of this chapter, I use ethnographic accounts to introduce the notion of territory based on Muysca ontology, and its relationship with the Muysca body, in different aspects of the Indigenous everyday experiences. In particular, I emphasize the effects of urban development and environmental degradation in the Muysca body. I will present the *Muysca Tâ* [Muysca gardens] to illustrate this body-

territory relationship, where indigeneity is embodied in the territory through urban agriculture and other practices of cultural resurgence, such as language revitalization. Second, I present how performance has been a requirement but also a site of resurgence for the Muysca community. Body representations of indigeneity are expected as visual depictions of otherness by state institutions and non-Indigenous citizens. Nevertheless, the Muysca have embraced performance as an instrument mediating between the institutionalized demands for diacritic markers and Muysca engagement with revitalizing their identity. In this section, I will present some spaces where Muysca performances occur, such as intercultural meetings, events promoted by local authorities, and rituals of territorial symbolic appropriation.

5.2. *Quyca [territory]* and *Puyquy [heart]*: Indigenous territories and meanings of territory in Muysca ontology

5.2.1. Indigenous territories in Colombia

In 1991, after a century of a political Constitution promoting a homogenized society in Colombia, a new Constitution emerged from an active, diverse, and participatory movement. This initiative proposed establishing a constituent assembly, with the participation of different social actors, such as demobilized members of insurgent groups, union groups, former presidents, scholars, and, unprecedently, members of Indigenous and Afro-descendent groups, among other actors. Through Article 7 of this new Constitution, the Colombian State recognizes and shall protect the ethnic and cultural differences of the Colombian Nation (Political Database of the Americas 2011). With the passing of this article, an end came to the "State's policy of assimilation of Indigenous peoples, that since the 1980's decade, aroused international

rejection" (Semper 2006, 764; *my translation*). In the words of the political scientist Donna Lee Van Cott, the assimilationist tradition of *mestizaje*

> promoted a culturally and ethnically homogeneous vision of national identity based on the myth of a mestizo nation. The new model explicitly recognizes the failure of the Creole nation-building project and begins a new one based on the veneration of ethnic and cultural diversity" (Van Cott 2000, 8).

Through different articles in the new Constitution[21] (Constitute Project 2021), the Colombian State is required to recognize and guarantee the development of multicultural

[21] **Article 10:** The languages and dialects of ethnic groups are also official in their territories. The education provided in communities with their own linguistic traditions will be bilingual.
Article 63: Property in public use, natural parks, communal lands of ethnic groups, security zones, the archaeological resources of the nation, and other property determined by law are inalienable, imprescriptible, and not subject to seizure.
Article 68: The members of ethnic groups will have the right to education that respects and develops their cultural identity.
Article 72: The nation's cultural heritage is under the protection of the State. The archaeological heritage and other cultural resources that shaped the national identity belong to the nation and are inalienable, not subject to seizure, and are imprescriptible. The law will establish the mechanisms to restore control over them when they are in the hands of individuals and will regulate the special rights that ethnic groups may enjoy when they occupy territories of archaeological wealth.
Article 96: The Colombian state shall recognize the nationality of Indigenous peoples straddling border areas.
Article 176: The law may establish a special constituency to ensure the participation in the Chamber of Representatives of ethnic groups and political minorities and Colombians residing abroad. Up to five (5) representatives may be elected for this constituency.
Article 246: The authorities of the indigenous [Indian] peoples may exercise their jurisdictional functions within their territorial jurisdiction in accordance with their own laws and procedures as long as these are not contrary to the Constitution and the laws of the Republic. The law will establish the forms of coordination of this special jurisdiction with the national judicial system.
Article 329: The configuration of the Indigenous [Indian] territorial entities will be drawn subject to the provisions of the Organic Law of Territorial Planning, and their delimitation will be affected by the national government with the participation of the representatives of the indigenous communities following the plan of the Commission of Territorial Planning. The safeguards that apply relate to collective property which may not be sold. The law will define the relations and coordination of these entities with those of which they form a part.
Article 330: In accordance with the Constitution and the laws, the Indigenous territories will be governed by the councils formed and regulated according to the uses and customs of their communities […] The exploitation of the natural resources in the indigenous territories will be done without impairing the cultural, social, and economic integrity of the Indigenous communities. In the decisions adopted with respect to said exploitation, the Government will encourage the participation of the representatives of the respective communities.

rights such as the recognition of ethnic citizenship with special rights (Jackson 2019, 50), the right to use their languages, the right to have their education systems, the granting of citizenship to those communities whose territories trespass the national borders, the recognition of their authorities through a particular jurisdiction, and also, the right to the configuration of Indigenous territorial entities called *Entidades Territoriales Indígenas* or ETIs. Nevertheless, the existence of the ETIs has been only possible in the Constitutional paper without proper integration with other territorial entities (Semper 2006, 767). The anthropologist Jean Jackson affirms that these territorial units are unlikely to materialize in the near future "since the political will to legislate them into existence has so far been lacking" (Jackson 2019, 51). Nevertheless, the *resguardos* (collectively-owned territorial units where the ethnic communities exert their authority and sovereignty) have been recognized and assigned throughout the national territory with more than 34 million hectares of titled surface (Amazon Conservation Team). Even though the institutional model of the *resguardos* has been an essential step towards the autonomy and self-determination of Indigenous peoples in Colombia, this land titling has lacked authentic and integral support from the State and other actors involved.

Even though the contemporary Constitution in Colombia has been one of the most comprehensive pieces concerning the place of Indigenous rights throughout the Americas, some scholars such as Van Cott affirm that the Constitution of 1991, as a multicultural outcome, reflected political and economic actors' concerns; therefore, these actors were anticipating that this new legislation "would improve the legitimacy and governability of the state while lifting the psychic burden on the state and society of a homogeneous national identity with no basis in reality" (Van Cott 2000, 32). In this

sense, while the *resguardo* institution was an initial step towards the self-determination of Indigenous and other ethnic communities whose recognition had been denied for centuries, the demarcation, titling, and universal sovereignty of these institutionalized territories remains in the hands of the Colombian State. Some scholars (see Anthias and Hoffmann 2020) have suggested that these overlapping spatialities—Indigenous territories and the state territory—follow a racialized colonial logic of segregation.

To illuminate the complex overlapping of territorial ontologies, Astrid Ulloa, a Colombian anthropologist, uses the case of Indigenous people living in la Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta of northern Colombia. In this region, four Indigenous communities—the Arhuacos, the Wiwas, the Kogis, and the Kankuamos—live side by side with different actors who complicate their autonomy and development of self-determination. In her work, Ulloa has exposed how other actors and forces "reconfigure and overlap territorial ordinances, that confront the Indigenous logics and blur the processes of recognition for the sake of development, progress, economic opportunities or military and territorial control" (Ulloa 2010, 89; my translation). For Ulloa, several actors at different scales significantly impact the possibility of what she calls *autonomía relacional indígena* (Indigenous relational autonomy). By this, Ulloa means:

> The ability of Indigenous peoples to exercise self-determination and governance in their territories based on relationships, negotiations, confrontation, and participation, which they have to establish with the State and various local, national, and transnational actors in the search for recognition and implementation of their political and territorial autonomy (Ulloa 2010, 89; my translation).

Ulloa has argued that while there is state recognition of territorial control in the *resguardos*, the reality shows how the boundaries of these spaces are transgressed when

different actors such as the State, criminal groups, NGOs, transnational environmental groups, among others, territorialize these territories and reconfigure the dynamics of these spaces. In contrast to the encroachment of actors that risk the survival of the Indigenous communities, the visions of territory from the communities themselves are characteristically experienced in place and relation with the human and nonhuman. Based on the Indigenous visions of territory, Ulloa (2010) argues that the territory, in addition to being seen, is also felt as the experiential space of the sacred, everyday experience, the space of knowledge of their own laws, and the space of the relationships between humans and other beings. In this view, for Indigenous communities, territory means a physical and symbolic space where different beings, memories, and knowledges encounter one another. However, echoing Ulloa, this vision of territory is susceptible to continuous processes of colonization, reconfiguration, and reoccupation. Therefore, this imposition of institutionalized territorial logic at multiple scales detaches Indigenous peoples from their ancestral territories to confine them to an institutionalized version called the *resguardo.* In the words of the geographer Penelope Anthias, in practice, territory appears to be a technology of rule that "efface[s] alternative Indigenous ontologies of land and reinscribe[s] state sovereignty over Indigenous socio-natures" (Anthias 2019).

Indigenous peoples have presented their visions of their ancestral territories in different texts. In Conchacala et al. (2010), Indigenous peoples from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta present their signification of territory. For these communities, their traditional territory or *senénulang* (in the Kogui language) is the totality of their sacred territories from which all righteous behavior and ritual practices emerge (Nemogá 2011). From their territories arises the consciousness to pursue *yuluka* [harmony] as the primary

principle that guides the relationships among all the beings on the planet (Nemogá 2011). Therefore, to reestablish that equilibrium, the communities from the Sierra aim to recover governance of the territories (Conchacala et al. 2010, 10). For the Indigenous peoples from the Sierra, their right to autonomy within their sacred territories is vital for pursuing their *planes de vida*[22] (life plans), "which pose their vision of future and development according to their needs and cultural practices" (Ulloa 2010, 78). However, as has been exposed in contexts such as Colombia, territory has been "characterized by a complex overlaying of sovereignties and spatialities following sedimented histories of racialized dispossession, and colonial and postcolonial rule" (Anthias and Hoffmann 2020, 4; see also Moore 2005).

In the case of the Muisca community of Suba, the incompatibility between the notion of *resguardo* from the Colombian State and Muysca's notion of *territorio* has led to a legal void that has yet to be examined. Through Decree 2001 of 1988 and Decree 2164 of 1995, the Colombian State regularizes the procedures for the *resguardos* to be recognized and titled to Indigenous groups within the national territory. Nevertheless, within the decrees, the concept of Indigenous community is spatialized in a rural environment[23] (Article 2), completely ignoring the existence of urban Indigenous communities. In this sense, while in these decrees, there is a recognition of the loss of land titles of all the Indigenous communities through the dissolution of the *resguardos*

[22] Indigenous Life Plans in Colombia are "the contribution of indigenous peoples to the construction of Colombian society, based on cultural diversity and pluralism that we agreed to in the Political Constitution of 1991 (…) [these Life Plans] allow the articulation of the plans of the Indigenous Governments with other instruments and processes of national and regional planning, as well as with the formulation and implementation of public policies (Gaia Amazonas 2020).

[23] Article 2 -Decree 2164 of 1995 (Ministerio del Interior n.d).

during the colonial period and the instauration of the Republican Laws, the execution of programs that shall return territorial sovereignty to Indigenous communities will only be possible in rural environments since this law completely disregards the presence of Indigenous communities in the cities. Although the Muysca community has followed the obligatory legal regime to be recognized as an urban Indigenous community and established their Cabildo, their territorial rights have not been granted after 30 years of legal recognition.

One can argue that the notions of territory from the Colombian State and the Muisca community are contrasting. Firstly, the Colombian State spatializes Indigenous territories only in rural environments, while for the Muisca community, this spatialization must be in the city, where their traditional lands have remained. Secondly, for the State, Indigenous territories or *resguardos* are considered legal and socio-political institutions where legally recognized communities exert their right to communal landholding. In contrast, for the Muisca people, while they operate within State regimes, they perceive their territory as a relational network, a space and a transcendent relation between humans and their environment; even recognizing their bodies as extensions of the physical territory—a notion that I will develop in the next section. In this sense, these legal and epistemological incompatibilities result in the continuous dispossession of land for the Muisca community.

5.2.2. Qyca: Muysca ontology of territory

> The territory is the origin. The territory is part of my body, of my being, not only mine but also my family, of the Indigenous families… 70% of my body, which is water, is from this territory. The other 30% is land,

> land of this territory (Interview with Governor Jeison Triviño-Cabiativa, March 31, 2022).

For the Muysca of Suba governor Jeison Triviño-Cabiativa, *territorio* [territory] is viscerally tied to his body and the bodies of his family clan. Like his statement, during this ethnographic research, several Muysca peoples asserted an intrinsic relationship between the physical land in Suba, their bodies, and other elements they recognize as parts of the territory—memories, ancestors, animals, sacred plants, and traditional knowledges. Hence, I suggest analyzing the Muysca experience through the lenses of *Cuerpo-territorio* as "decolonized embodied ontology" (Naylor et al. 2018) would capture the embodied, grounded, ethical, and political nature of the relationship between the Muysca body and their territory. As a concept and a method, *cuerpo-territorio* re-scales the body and the territory as a political subject that honors the local and intimate spaces—the families, homes, the bodies, and the practices experienced in those places (Dowler & Sharp 2001; Freeman 2001; Gibson-Graham 2002; Hyndman 2004; Smith, Swanson, and Gökarıksel 2016; Ulloa 2016; Halvorsen 2018). Lorena Cabnal (2017), a Maya-Xinka feminist, states that assuming, dignifying, and healing the body as a historical territory has an emancipatory potential (101). In addition, by reconceptualizing territory as a part or extension of the body (Sweet and Ortiz 2016), there is a recognition of the relational nature between Indigenous bodies and the territory, as an ethical relationship between "a group of humans, landscape and history" (Echeverry 2005, 232).

Territory and its inherent relationship with the Muysca body were described during the interviews by the Muysca, interweaving several elements, actors, and practices. The following concept map (Figure 1) is based on these ethnographic accounts, and it was shared and discussed with the Muysca community to be presented in this

dissertation. By visually representing the relationship between territory, the Muysca community, and their process of cultural revitalization, and urbanization, it is possible to illustrate the Muysca spatial and corporeal epistemology and how this is under threat by processes of urban development.

In the following concept map, I present the most recurrent themes and subthemes that emerged during the interviews and informal conversations with the Muysca of Suba. The categories capitalized and in darker colors are the concepts that the Muysca members mentioned more often and emphasized. The green category represents the ideas in relation to the concept of territory. The orange category represents the Muysca community and the inherent values as Indigenous community. The yellow category presents the process of Muysca Indigenous resurgence and the practices linked to it. The blue category refers to what the Muysca people assemble as the theme of urbanization and its subthemes which are ideologies and consequences of this process. Finally, as emerging from this blue category of urbanization, the red category presents the actual and potential threats that urbanization establishes on the Muysca people and their process of Indigenous resurgence.

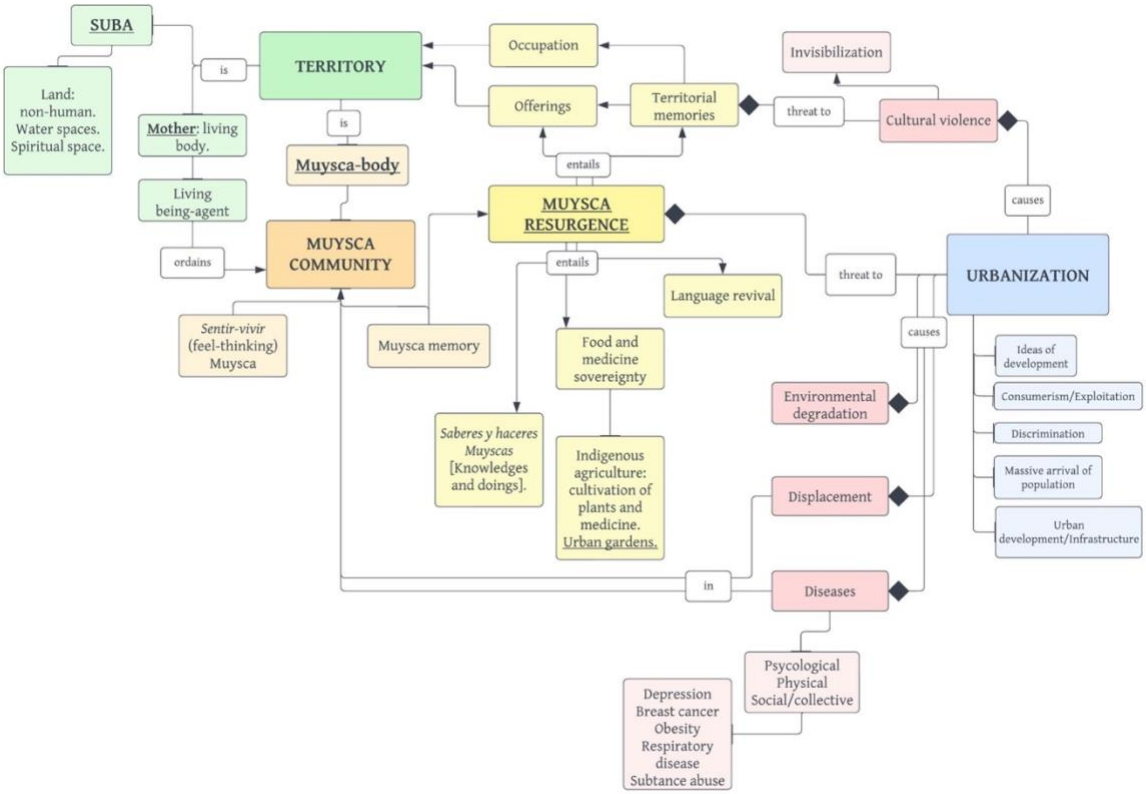

Figure 15. Concept map of Territory.

During the 32 interviews I conducted during this research—and several informal conversations with community members—territory was the central concept that emerged. *Territorio* [territory] was defined in four interconnected ways and related to the processes of Muysca resurgence and urbanization through different ways. I will present some excerpts of these definitions to present later how this alternative ontology of territory is experienced at the Muysca body level and urban development processes threaten it. These four ways to describe the Muysca ontology of territory were not separated; for many members, *territorio* could simultaneously encapsulate these multiple meanings.

1. *Territory as land (material/physical extension or area):*

> "A piece of land that our ancestors gave us…Suba as a locality. All of Suba is sacred because this territory has provided us with lots of food. We used to harvest and grow animals; this is why Suba is sacred" (Interview with the Women and Elder Council members, May 7, 2022).

Some of the Muysca describing territory started by emphasizing its materiality and physical features. They recounted stories accentuating how the land of Suba was characterized by fertile soils, water sources, and biodiversity that would provide them with food sovereignty. When describing territory in this way, the Muysca people I interviewed would emphasize the ecological threats that urban development has brought to Suba and the process of Indigenous revitalization. For instance, interviewees mentioned how before the rapid urban development process, many of the members of the community, or at least in the *utas* [Muysca traditional neigborhoods], used to have access to clean and cost-free sources of water or *aljibes* [well or water deposit tanks]. However, new urban planning policies, the integration of Suba as a locality to Bogota, and the adjustment to new water management companies made possessing these water sources illegal. These mechanisms of coloniality of nature have prevented several Muysca families from accessing water in neighborhoods where the water and sewage company does not have supply lines, or where the inhabitants cannot afford the service.

2. *Territory as a living being:*

> "Territory means the *ley de origen* [24] of our people and our cosmogonies" (Interview with Mabel Niviayo, May 6, 2022).

[24] *Ley de origen* [Law of Origins] refers to Indigenous laws that establish the "ordering of spiritual forces, material forces, nature, the world, the cosmos, people; finally, everything. [These] are laws that govern all moments of life, from birth and growth to death. That Law of Origin is manifested in a very close

In this sense, for the community, the territory was described as a motherly living being, an agent who can organize and ordain the community in their decision-making processes. For instance, Elder Gonzalo and medicine man Utigua mentioned that by placing the *hyca* [sacred stones] in particular spaces, the *territorio* [territory] initially configured the space in Suba where sacred places would be located, for example, the location of the ceremonial house in the occupied the *Santuario* land. Hence, for the Muysca, the territory as a living agent directed them to squat and occupy this property to reclaim the land and establish sovereignty. In the words of Mabel Niviayo, by organizing the territory as *she—hischa uaia*[25] initially did, the territory organizes the Muysca community.

3. *As sacred space:*

> "My territory is all these sacred places that we have lost due to urbanization" (Interview with Camila Yopasá, April 6, 2022).
>
> "The territory is the place where my ancestors and my grandparents have walked for generations and centuries. For me, the territory is everything that composes it, not only nature but also *usos y costumbres*[26] that we have maintained generation after generation even though they have changed (Interview with Alejandro Samacá—Nivia clan, April 6, 2022).
>
> "I believe that the territory encompasses a conception beyond, in addition to the physical, that is, the spiritual. It is like that moment out there that we have with it [the territory] and the other beings that inhabit it. It is also how we connect with our *older siblings*, as the *sabedores* [knowledgeable ones] say—they are the mountains, hills, rivers, and other beings […] I think there is a problem with colonization, with what we have been dealing with, that has impacted how we are relating to the

relationship of what is spiritual and territorial. Within the territorial framework are the sacred sites from which communities meet to make major decisions" (Rodriguez 2017, my translation).

[25] The Muyscas mainly refer to the territory as a female motherly entity, using the pronoun *she*. They also refer to *territorio* as *hischa uaia* [mother earth], *la madre tierra* [mother earth], and *la madre* [the mother].

[26] *Usos y costumbres* [customs and traditions] refers to the Indigenous or traditional customary law based transmitted for generations since Spanish colonialism throughout Hispanic America.

> territory, our feeling, acting and how we think about the territory as a community" (Interview with Daniel Rodriguez—Yopasá clan, May 6, 2022).

The Muysca describe the territory of Suba as sacred insofar as it holds a myriad of traditional and spiritual meanings; for instance, some affirmed that the sacred water places are where their ancestors continued to dwell (Interview with Jorge Yopasá, October 4, 2021) or as it is presented in the interview excerpt, the territory is inhabited by non-human beings, to what the Muysca refer as the *older siblings*—as these entities possess higher knowledges. Scholars such as Marisol De la Cadena (2010) have worked on the complexity of indigenous recognition politics by analyzing the ontological foundations of human/non-human social and political relationships in the Andes. De la Cadena, echoing Stengers (2005), proposes that we 'slow down reasoning' in order to challenge our conceptual foundations and inaugurate spaces for new political actors such as "Earth-beings," entities who are present in everyday Andean life, as it is the case of the Muysca community. De la Cadena's work shows that although states with multicultural policies in the Andes claim to recognize diversity, they still have not engaged with the decolonial challenge of rethinking politics in non-westernized terms. Conversely, indigenous leaders must "speak in modern terms, translating their practices into a politically acceptable speech, and leaving 'the unacceptable' behind without necessarily abandoning it" (De la Cadena 2010, 349; see also Graham 2002; Hale 2020).

As presented before, Indigenous territorial rights in Bogota are yet to be granted, and the ontological challenge between the Muysca notion of territory and the district authorities' views on the profitable land of Suba becomes even more problematic when other non-human beings are part of the debate. Hence, as many scholars have suggested,

there is an urgent call to acknowledge the specificity of certain indigenous concepts that can only be understood within "indigenous spatiotemporal ontologies, which are distinct and locally situated" (Hunt 2017, 9).

4. *Territory as the Muysca body:*

> "The territory is what the grandparents used to say: one's self is one with the territory; one does not own the land, but *hycha uaia* [mother earth] owns us. You must always ask permission to sow and thank when you harvest" (Interview with Elder Gonzalo Gomez-Cabiativa, April 9, 2022).

> "*The territory is what I am*. It is the word of the Elders, of my ancestors. It is my history, what I did not live but what roots me in this land. The territory is what produces roots in my life" (Interview with Henry Lorenzana, January 29, 2022).

> "We are all the territory; our bodies are immersed in this system" (Interview with Andrea Caita, March 31, 2022).

Finally, the most repeated way the Muysca describes territory is as a connected part of their body, as Indigenous to Suba. As presented in the concept map, this conception of the territory is bonded with the notion of the Muysca body, which is expressed as the Muysca community—as the ensemble of Muysca bodies. During all the interviews, the community members stressed the embodied ontological nature of the territory. This is not surprising, as despite being recognized as an Indigenous community, they have not been granted communal lands like other Indigenous communities in rural areas in Colombia. Therefore, lacking the recognition of communal landholding has been central in the narrative emphasis of the ontological bondedness between the land of Suba, the non-

human agents such as animals, plants, spiritual beings, memories, and the body of the Muysca.

The Muysca historical memory and the *Sentir-vivir* (feel-thinking) Muysca is experienced at the corporeal level emerging as place-based epistemology that serves as foundations for the process of Indigenous resurgence. Nevertheless, for the Muyscas, the process of resurgence has been threatened, among several things, by urbanization. The Muysca people affirm that urban development, the increasing arrival of population, and the ideologies that could emerge from these phenomena, such as consumerism, development, and discrimination against the native population, are pressures that the Muysca see as obstacles in the process of revitalizing their Indigenous culture in a more developed landscape. For instance, the urban development of their sacred and traditional lands and the substantial impoverishment experienced by a significant part of the community has meant less access to cropland necessary for food and medicinal sovereignty. For the Muysca, this inability to grow their food and medicine due to land degradation, the construction of private and public infrastructure, the increase in land taxation, and the pollution of Suba has resulted in multiple negative consequences for the community. Among these effects, the Muysca people most often affirm that urban development is causing the deterioration of the environment, which is intrinsically connected to the deterioration of their health.

5.2.3. Puyquy [heart]: urbanization, environmental degradation, and the Muysca body.

> "Urban development has brought dryness to the environment and our *puyquy* [heart]. We do not say: Oh, I have diabetes, I am sick; no, we say our hearts are drying up. If our bodies are sick, it is because we do not have territory; it is because we do not have the food of this territory".

(Interview with Yeison Yopasá, February 12, 2022).

The relationship between the indigenous body and indigenous territories has been analyzed as interconnected and interdependent agents affected by the same operationalization of violence (Hunt 2017). For the Muysca, experiencing the territory as ontologically tied to their bodies has also been manifested in different forms of corporeal distress. On this subject, scholars have also exposed the continuing colonial relations of power that operate on Indigenous bodies, in particular by suggesting how the difference between natives and other citizens has been produced and maintained in Indigenous bodies and lands (de Leeuw, Kobayashi, & Cameron 2011; de Leeuw 2016). In this sense, the relationship between systematic violence exerted towards Indigenous bodies is positively related to the colonial technologies operating in Indigenous lands (de Leeuw 2016; Zaragocin 2019). For the Muysca of Suba, urban development and the demographic changes this produces have impacted the community in several ways; nevertheless, in this section, I will focus on presenting how the degradation of the environment caused by urban development has affected the everyday lives and health of the Muysca people.

Harvey (2001) asserts that "places and localized ways of life are relationally constructed by a variety of intersecting socioecological processes occurring at quite different spatiotemporal scales" (285); in the case of the Muysca community, the socioecological production of the city has had impacts at the communal level, but also at the corporeal one. During many conversations, the community members affirmed that the expansion of urban development over their sacred sites and what used to be rural spaces in Suba had affected the community's health at three levels: psychological, physical, and

collective. Sedentarism, depression, obesity, cardiovascular and respiratory disease, cancer, and harmful drug use patterns are among some health issues the Muysca affirmed were brought to Suba when urbanization started in the mid-twentieth century.

With a longstanding tradition of hunting and growing their food, the abrupt urbanization process affected the Muysca in their nutrition—the types of food and cooking techniques—their daily activities, including working in agriculture—growing crops and raising animals—and walking to water sources. For the Muysca Henry Lorenzana, the process of urban development changed not only the landscape but his body skills and food consumption, which has caused him ailments related to sedentarism,

> "I used to climb cherry trees; my body could climb, hike, and carry fruits and vegetables. I used to hike *Rincon* Hill, following my grandpa and uncle to eat the fruit of the *Arrayán* [myrtle] tree; now, the entire forest is gone and urbanized. I have not eaten that fruit in decades. I used to eat what the territory provided seasonally. My body has moved from climbing trees to adapting to the streets. (Interview with Henry Lorenzana, January 29, 2022).

In the same way, Elder Gonzalo Cabiativa affirms that urban development affected him and his family in several ways. In his words, echoing the thoughts of many Muysca individuals I interviewed, a remarkable change that urbanization brought to the Muysca community was how it made many women's communal practices, such as river gatherings, impossible. As central in the reproduction of Indigenous knowledges and practices, women's gatherings in water sources, for the Muysca, were spaces of territorial appropriation. In addition to this, Elder Gonzalo highlighted the effect of urbanization on the Muysca body and health,

> "I used to walk more before the urbanization. We had a rural life. With my mom, we carried the water for cooking, cleaning, and for the crops. Also, she would carry a bag with all our clothes on her back to wash them in the river with the other women. We were happy to walk our mountains […] With the arrival of more people to Suba, it was necessary for more and more buses to transport the worker to the main city of Bogota. This brought us more air pollution than we were not used to, causing respiratory illnesses and cancer. [With] the urbanization, the concrete arrived, and as the monster, it has destroyed everything, our bodies, our territory, and our culture" (Interview with Elder Gonzalo Cabiativa, April 9, 2022).

Our conversation with Jorge Yopasa and Erika Nivia echoed many of the declarations of the other Muysca people. They also affirmed that they are not surprised by the large numbers of women with breast and uterus cancers within the community as the degradation of the *chupqua* [wetland] Tibabuyes, which in the *muysccubun* language means women's nipple and uterus, is inherently connected with illnesses in these areas of the female body. Jorge and Erika stated without hesitation that this would continue to happen as the wetland continues to be developed into a district park and is partially given to urban developers for residential buildings.

> The degradation of our territory is highly violent. When the cops violently displaced community members and other environmental activists squatting in the wetland, we cried. Jorge wanted to go and fight for our territory, but I did not want him to be killed by the cops. [She began to cry.] The cops killed animals, threatened our community, and served the companies that wanted to develop. As this continues to happen, more of us will fall ill. (Interview with Erika Nivia October 4, 2021).

One of the main arguments of this dissertation is that urban coloniality, as the legacy of colonial logic that operates in the city, is materialized through urban planning policies and experienced at the *cuerpo-territorio* level of the Muysca

people. Nevertheless, the community, through their process of Muysca revitalization, is contesting these technologies, challenging the historical narratives, and producing alternative socioecological configurations that reflect their Muysca ontology. One of the ways they are doing so is through the care of the Indigenous urban gardens.

This chapter focuses on the different ways *cuerpo-territory* [body-territory] as an embodied Indigenous ontology takes form; in the following section, I present the case of the Muysca Indigenous urban gardens, *Muysca Tâ* [Muysca gardens] to illustrate this body-territory relationship, where indigeneity is embodied in the territory through the practice of urban agriculture and other practices of cultural resurgence, such as language revitalization.

5.3. *Muysca Tâ*: The gendered, racialized, and embodied nature of urban gardening in the Muysca community

> "We, the Muyscas, are like the tobacco [plant] that they [the State, authorities] wanted to cover, but it is born in the middle of the asphalt and comes to say: see, I am medicine, and I am medicine in this territory and I am medicine and I am a plant that will help to heal" (Interview with Angela Niviayo, February 16, 2022).

Gardens and urban gardening in the Muysca community have been private and intimate spaces and activities mainly in the hands of Muysca women that were unnoticed until recently. Corntassel suggests that “often daily actions are overlooked during discussions of community resurgence and self-determination movements” (Corntassel 2018, 17); nevertheless, during the last ten years, these gardens have played a significant role in the process of Indigenous resurgence for the Muysca community. In the context of territorial

dispossession, these micro-geographies of indigeneity in the cities, where there is a sense of '*intra-urban rurality,*' as Jorge Yopasá affirmed, or "*micro-ruralities*" and "*rural islands*" as former Muisca governor Ivan Niviayo confirmed, have served as the spaces where other epistemologies are embodied and grounded. In this section, I illustrate how these gardens are central to the community in two aspects: first, in these spaces, members of the community—particularly women—are recovering food and medicine sovereignty. Second, the *Muysca Tâ* [Muysca gardens] are sites of cultural resurgence, or in their words, *aulas vivas* [living classrooms] of their revitalized knowledges and the production of socioecological natures in the cities.

As in the case of North American 'food deserts' (Ghose and Pettygrove 2014; Sadler et al. 2016), the neighborhoods where the Muysca gardens are located in Suba are areas with limited access to healthy and affordable food, especially organic fruits and vegetables. Therefore, these Muysca women cultivating their food and medicine is an embodied "political tactic of social and economic development that remedies the government's inability or unwillingness to mitigate difficult urban conditions" (White 2015, 553). Lack of green spaces or parks, location of pollution facilities, overurbanization, and high levels of population density, are among the urban environmental conditions experienced in these neighborhoods and which are experienced at the level of the body.

During the interviews and informal conversations with the members of the Muysca community, some of the embodied effects of experiencing urbanization were described in terms of physical and psychological body ailments. The Muysca body and their territory are one entity, as Zaragocin (2018) suggests, a single subject connected in

which the violence exerted in one part of the extension is experienced in the other. In this case, the Muysca asserted that the urbanization of Suba had had effects on their land as it has had effects on their health; for instance, three Muysca women who own *Muysca Tâ* affirmed that:

> "My territory was filled with cement; it was filled with sand. I do not have space; I feel like I am drowning…I feel bad. Thank God and my dear mother, she left me this little land where I can be, get fresh air, sow my plants, feed my family and myself" (Interview with Maria Ozuna, October 6, 2021).

> "Urbanization has had direct effects on our corporality, starting with the food, because by not having healthy food nearby that used to be found in the same house or exchanged between neighbors, what happens is that we now have supermarkets and stores close by that do not offer us quality food. This directly affects our health because by not eating well, we do not have good defenses, and then our health easily deteriorates, and we acquire new diseases that worsen over time. Additionally, with urbanization, young people are devoting themselves too much more sedentary jobs that do not allow them to have enough physical activity. Also, as we are locked up at home, we do not have the mental health to be in optimal conditions to face the challenges imposed by life. We are increasingly far from nature, from the trees that help us purify the air. As *indigenous people, we must have contact with the earth to balance ourselves*" (Interview with Maria Angélica Cabiativa, January 29, 2022).

> "In the past, the doctors were our grandparents and our parents who cured us with herbs; for a stomachache, it was peppermint; for the flu, lemon, orange, or even rosemary, they used to make rosemary stem inhalations. Broadleaf plantain leaves for the liver, chamomile for stress. There was no cancer; there was no stress. On the other hand, now with urbanization, there is stress everywhere, walking and the cars whistling, before the only thing that was heard was the crowing of the roosters, of the little birds, and now there are no birds" (Interview with Elizabeth 'Chavelita' Sánchez Caita, October 22, 2021).

Winona La Duke, an Indigenous scholar, affirms that the "process of colonization not only deteriorated our bodies, but also our knowledge of food" (La Duke et al. 2010, 22). Echoing her assertion, these Muysca women caring for their gardens experiencing

urbanization, as a by-product of colonial spatial violence, affirmed that the more families that had to sell their lots or were displaced by the construction of public infrastructure (as was the case of Angela's and Maria Angelica's family), the more knowledge about food and medicine cultivation was lost. Nevertheless, these women presented in this section have revitalized cultivation techniques, restored native plants, created a communal place for cultural resistance and learning, and provided a space for food and medicine sovereignty while enacting a gendered, racialized, and embodied practice of sustaining relationships with their territories.

Angela Niviayo, in contrast to her fellow Indigenous women who inherited ancestral lands, occupied a piece of land at the top of Rincon Hill and embarked on a mission to revive an urban oasis. Motivated by her parents' unfortunate loss of their home due to a landslide triggered by the construction of a mansion across the mountain, Angela took it upon herself to reclaim the land and transform it into a thriving, urban nature haven. McClintock suggests that "urban food production has historically served as a means of subsistence for low-income, racialized, and marginalized populations, supplementing diets and providing agriculturalists with supplemental income from sales of garden surplus" (McClintock 2018, 7) and while during the interview, Angela emphasized the social role of her garden as a place of dissent, during the informal conversations held in the garden, and in my experience in this space, the process of cultivation and food production is essential as a basis for economic subsistence. For Angela, selling the vegetables and herbs she harvests and the eggs from her more than 20 chickens to the population that lives around provide her with income to maintain the garden and afford other expenses as a single mother. She has not only transformed the

piece of land she occupied years ago, but also has become a communal leader by providing food and medicinal plants to Indigenous and non-Indigenous highly marginalized populations that cannot afford quality foods and, in some cases, no food whatsoever. By holding events based on donations, Angela has been able to host *'ollas comunitarias'* (community pots) to feed the population inhabiting the area around her garden which would otherwise not be able to afford food, primarily children (Figure 7).

For Angela, *Niviayo Tâ* is a socioecological contestation to the process of racial urbanization experienced in the Muysca territory,

> *Niviayo Tâ is a living classroom*, a community garden, that reflects resistance to the urbanization that came to our territory. Let's say the purpose is an autonomous construction of our *Plan de Vida* [Life Plan]; yes…it is a contribution to the Life Plan of the community by us in the garden.

While some scholars (Kingsley and Townsend 2006; Passidomo 2016; Shostak and Guscott 2017; Christensen et al. 2019) working on the Global North experience have emphasized the potential of urban gardening in promoting new social networks, significantly less scholarship has analyzed the experiences in the Global South—with some exceptions (Shillington 2013), and even lesser attention has given to the intersections with race and gender in the practice of urban gardening. In the case of the Muysca gardens, "repoliticizing [their] right to food and land" (Tornaghi 2014, 563) has meant an everyday challenge of recreating alternative socioecological systems that respect the land and their bodies, and that are in contestation to the limited presence of the state in these marginalized territories. These gardens can be "conceived as spaces through which citizens can challenge dominant power relations and claim rights to the city" (Ghose and Pettygrove 2014, 1092), particularly when these are thought, created,

and lived as spaces for education, cultural preservation and transmission, and ecological conservation. In addition, Angela affirmed that her garden has served as a living classroom, a living space for cultural resurgence and territorial resistance amid urbanization. In *Niviayo Tâ*, Muysca leaders have hosted language revitalization classes, traditional music classes and performances (Figure 7), classes teaching cultivation techniques for sacred and medicinal plants (Figure 8), and countermapping sessions, making this space a place to foster alternative epistemologies.

Figure 16. An event at Niviayo Tâ with children from the Saturnino Library during a music and language revitalization class.

Figure 17. Event flyer for a class in cannabis extraction.

With *Niviayo Tâ*, Angela has promoted alternative food production approaches, including traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and cultural revival mechanisms. In this sense, *Niviayo Tâ* is a remarkable empirical instance where "cultivation and food represent a biopower device at the disposal of dominant classes for the subjugation of bodies and control of populations that have their different strategies to resist subjugation, leaving room for more holistic approaches and subversive practices" (Mudu and Marini 2018, 551). As central to the production of urban space (Shillington 2013, 104), these women have made of the mundane and domestic space of their homes and gardens, strategic spaces for political contestation, and the possibility of more socioecological just futures in the city.

In this chapter, drawing on decolonial and feminist scholarship, I have argued that indigeneity is an embodied-in-territory category necessary to comprehend the

complexities of urban Indigenous experiences. In this endeavor, I presented how, for the Muysca, the notion of territory is inherently connected with their bodies and, therefore, their indigeneity. To illustrate the Muysca place-based ontology, I explored how the *Muysca Ta* [gardens] have served as spaces where their indigeneity is experienced corporeally through both being in-place and engaging in the embodied practice of urban gardening. Likewise, as the Muysca are immersed in the process of resurgence, these spaces have also served as places to achieve food and medicinal sovereignty, language revitalization, and the recreation of alternative socioecological systems in the city. The last element I consider relevant to understand how indigeneity is an embodied-in-territory category is the analysis of Muysca performativity. In order to complete the development of my argument and culminate this chapter, I explore how, when talking about indigeneity as an embodied identity, the notion of Indigenous performativity plays a significant role both as an expectated component of authenticity from non-Muysca, and as a source of revitalization and enfranchisement for the community.

5.4. Muysca performativity: Indigenous performance as sites of resurgence

In addition to being naturally other, indigenous people are expected to be visibly other (Sissons 2005, 42).

When talking to the older generations and some of the current political authorities in the Muysca community, one of the incidents the Muysca have faced in their revitalization process was the loss of state recognition or *personería jurídica* [legal personhood] during the 90s. Though the community was recognized as the first urban Indigenous Cabildo after the new political Constitution in 1991, years later, in 1999, the state annulled its recognition as an Indigenous community. This annulment resulted from

the significant growth of the Muisca community, which did not display their Indianness enough, according to the state's judgment. For the authorities, the Muisca community lacked the necessary diacritic markers to be recognized as an ethnic community, distinct from the mestizo Colombian society (Chaves and Zambrano 2006). While the state claimed corruption issues within the Cabildo, such as the inclusion in the community census of non-Indigenous citizens to receive state differential rights, neither the community nor the state could prove the claims of illegality. Though not recognized for several years, members of the Muysca community continued to gather and envision mechanisms to recover their legal recognition as an Indigenous community. Ivan Niivayo, who has been a notable figure over the last decade in the community, as he was the governor of the Cabildo for five years, affirmed that during the early 2000s, the leaders of the community moved their focus from territorial claims to focus on recovering the institutional legitimization by addressing the state's ethnic requirements.[27] In this endeavor, several leaders emphasized cultural revival through the study of the native language—*muysccubum*. Due to the lack of fluency in the language, even among the oldest people in the communities, Muysca leaders resorte to using colonial archives to increase their knowledge of vocabulary, the re-creation of the Muysca attire, and the revival of the Muysca cosmology, among other acts. After years of highlighting Muysca otherness to the state authorities, the Cabildo recovered their legal recognition as an

[27] It is relevant to mention that anthropologists played a significant role in the annulment of the Muisca community's legal recognition. For members of the community, those anthropologists in charge of this institutional evaluation of Indianness developed an assessment based on essentialist representations of indigeneity, which did not reflect the particularities experienced by the Muysca people as victims first of colonization, and later, assimilation policies and urban expansion. For a further discussion, see also: (Rappaport and Dover 1996).

Indigenous community and Cabildo of the Colombian Republic. Therefore, Muysca's performance of indigeneity became an instance of what I will call “sites of persuasion.”

Anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli, in her work, has emphasized how indigenous communities are expected to visually represent the ‘other’ before the State's eyes. Povinelli states that “indigenous performances of cultural difference must generally conform to the textually mediated imaginary of Aboriginal traditions and more specifically to the legal definition of ‘traditional Aboriginal owner’” (Povinelli 2002, 180). Povinelli (2002) maintains that the Aboriginal embodiment which comes to represent this so-called ‘traditional aboriginal’ is also prescribed by the State and thereby requires forgetting how Indigenous bodies and practices have been disciplined through colonial technologies of oppression. For Povinelli, as for other scholars, performance has become one of the multiple mechanisms of indigenous legitimation and recognition that are both an imposition from the State and a decisive action of space appropriation and resistance.

In this chapter, I have argued that indigeneity is a place-based embodied ontology, and to analyze the Muysca experience, I have used *cuerpo-territorio* to understand how the territory is embodied, experienced, and contested in the city. Nevertheless, to complete my argument, in this section, I explore the significance of performance for the Muysca community, both as a state requirement and as an embodied means of revitalizing their identity. As visual representations of their indigeneity are often expected by state institutions and non-Indigenous citizens, Muysca cultural difference is constantly challenged as being less Indigenous as they dwell in the city and have engaged in modern ways of living. However, the Muysca have embraced performance as a powerful tool to

navigate the demands imposed on them and actively revitalize their identity. Within this context, I highlight several spaces where Muysca performances occur, including intercultural meetings, events organized by local authorities, and rituals that symbolically reclaim their ancestral territories.

5.4.1. Performance and Indigeneity

The Elder Blancanieves has been an important agent of Muysca resurgence for over 30 years. During the equinox celebration in September 2021, members of the Indigenous collective *Emzac Uaque*—a collective that emerged as a countermovement to the institutionalized entity of the Muisca Cabildo (see Chapter 3)—gather at the *chupqua* Tibabuyes. While the Elder Blancanieves is an active member of the process within the Cabildo, she also participates in other activities promoted by other Muysca peoples. On this occasion, the members of *Emzac Uaque,* in addition to making offerings to the wetland as a means to celebrate the change of season, also wanted to present the final version of the process of countermapping conducted in *Niviayo Tâ* garden and reclaim the wetland symbolically after a month of being violently evicted by the local authorities.

I engage with Judith Butler's work (1990, 1993) to comprehend, among several things, how performance has also been understood as a mechanism of resistance insofar as, she argues, the assembly and location of bodies in specific spaces may inadvertently end up challenging the different institutions or forces that have vigorously worked to invisibilize their existence and their location in those spaces (Butler 2011). For Butler (2016), as for other authors (Wright 20055; Rodrigues 2012), bodies can become spaces or territories of resistance by transforming those spaces where they are present and assembled. Similarly, drawing on Rancière's *Dissensus* (2015), the geographer Erik

Swyngedouw (2011) examines how performative staging in particular places is experienced as resistance or emancipation. According to Swyngedouw, in pursuit of protest against specific political order, "the subject appears in space and transforms both him-/herself and the socio-spatial configuration through performative practices of dissensual spatialization" (Swyngedouw 2011, 375). Although Swyngedouw does not engage with Indigenous performances in particular, his approach to understanding performance as a political act nevertheless provides a foundation to analyze performance as a practice connected to specific and meaningful spaces contested and transformed through the embodied practices of resistance.

As presented by these authors, the Muysca act of celebrating the equinox with an event of countermapping and reclaiming sovereignty over this sacred place symbolically had the purpose of dissenting against the invisibilization and dispossession. Among the activities conducted, during this *romería* [pilgrimage] the Muysca performed an initial ritual of offering and consumption of medicine (Figure 9) and a walk through the wetland. During the walk, they listened to songs in Muysccubum, and others in Spanish, which included lyrics that contested the current degradation of the wetland. They also engaged in the reforestation of native plants in a section of the wetland that is being developed, and a political and language revitalization class.

Figure 18. Elder Blancanieves shares ambira medicine with one of the attendants during the equinox celebration at the chupqua Tibabuyes.

Anthropologist Beth Conklin (1997) has further stressed the centrality of Indigenous bodies and their visual representations, suggesting that they influence notions of cultural authenticity of indigeneity even among indigenous groups themselves. With extensive ethnography of several Amazonian Indigenous communities in Brazil, Conklin's well-known work, *Body paint, feathers, and VCRs: aesthetics and authenticity in Amazonian activism* (1997), analyzes how Western notions of authentic indigeneity impact body self-representations of Indigenous identity within these communities. According to Conklin, "Indigenous body representations have constructed a permissible image that identifies native elements with Western concepts and thereby wins the approval of outsiders" (Conklin 1997, 713). These are sites where Indigenous peoples "engage broader publics and other interested parties and attempt 'to get their versions of

history and regimes of value acknowledged and disseminated to wider audiences'" (Morphy in Graham and Penny 2014, 4). As presented in the case of the Muysca of Suba, it appears that "the role of exotic appearances as markers of indigenous authenticity" (Conklin 1997, 728) is a requirement for maintaining recognition by the State and by non-indigenous Colombian citizens, a form of "coloniality of being" (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 242). Until the Muysca complied with the state requirements of otherness, the internalized meanings of legal and external notions of indigeneity, and visually and discursively offered a more "Indigenous" identity, their legal personhood remained unacknowledged (Figure 10). While it seems disempowering, Indigenous leaders have also been part of this identity construction (Rappaport and Dover 1996). According to Rappaport and Dover (1996), the display of certain 'expected essentialism' as a strategic choice emerges "in the course of a struggle" (37). As some scholars have exalted, through the dialogical nature of performativity, indigenous performers can shape viewers' understandings of what it means to be indigenous by "discovering themselves and making themselves legible" (Clifford 2013, 47; see also Graham and Penny 2014; Jackson 2019).

Figure 19. Muysca woman performing traditional dance at the annual urban Indigenous meeting at the Casa de Pensamiento Xaguara Sun Siasua [Muysca 'Thought House'].

Indigenous identity is a self-conscious and reflective process, remote from static and essentialist notions of indigeneity, even though, in some cases, the communities must adhere to those notions. As Graham and Penny affirm, Indigenous peoples "embrace indigeneity as a process of emergence" (Graham and Penny 2014, 2). In this sense, since performances "of emotions have become increasingly important in the practice of

politics" (Routledge 2017, 114), performativity may also empower Indigenous peoples insofar as it may include the enacting of practices that fall outside of what has been stereotyped as "Indigenous" for centuries. For instance, the pilgrimage to the *chupqua* Tibabuyes, previously mentioned, which involved several activities aimed at symbolically reappropriate the wetland. Although mainly intended for members of the Muysca community, the pilgrimage also sought awareness amongst non-Muysca citizens. The *romería* aimed to elucidate the process of resurgence of the community and their political demands to the local authorities to protect the wetland from the projects or urban development.

Whereas some scholars have signaled how public performative acts have been commodified within the "colonial-modern fascination with native bodies" (Radcliffe 2018, 438; see also West 2016), these acts have nevertheless provided empowerment and particular types of agency for indigenous communities. For those Indigenous peoples, such as the Muysca people, that might not fit within the state's and public's imaginaries of Indianness (i.e. located in rural landscapes), the experiences of performance of urban Indigenous peoples become a necessary "means of asserting claims based on difference" (Graham and Penny 2014, 8).

5.5. Conclusion

> "As Muysca, the territory is another living being related to the cosmos and us humans. These relations are not inequitable, but we have an egalitarian relationship with a territory, *coexistence*. For me, the territory is a being who also feels and shares what she has with us" (Interview with Mabel Niviayo, May 6, 2022).

The theoretical review along with the ethnographic analysis on Indigenous embodiment and the microlevels of colonial power presented in this chapter shed light on the significance of the Indigenous body as new scale of analysis. Scholars across both anthropology and geography have shown that categories of indigeneity—and gender—are reified in the form of bodies and that phenotypes are the site upon which colonial representations become ascribed; as Radcliffe suggests, "racism, gendering, and so on are inscribed directly and apprehended through individual bodies (2015, 7). In the process, state and international discourses on indigeneity are reproduced in intimate spaces such as within the school and even the household. Moreover, feminist decolonial scholars have shown an intimate connection between the colonial mechanisms that operate on the body and those that operate on the land, noting that the coloniality of gender and race is experienced in place. For some, indigenous rights are constrained by the same colonial logic that has operated on the land, and the subjugation of indigenous bodies is an extension of colonial violence against indigenous lands. Decolonial feminists from Latin America have utilized the notion of body-territory as a means of highlighting this relationship between indigenous bodies and the land, maintaining that the body is a historic territory unto itself and that by reconceptualizing space as an extension of the body, one can gain greater insight into the ethical bond that exists between landscapes, humans, and histories. As in the quote above by Mabel Niviayo, the Muysca embodied ontology of territory provides an ethical disposition that establishes a parallel relationship between the territory and the community.

In sum, not only does shifting analytical focus from the macro to the micro confer new lenses through which to understand how power structures operate at the level of the

body, but this shift in focus also allows scholars to understand better how resistance is lived out through everyday practices, as it was presented with the example of the Muysca Tâ. I consider that bringing the Latin American decolonial feminist perspective of *cuerpo-territorio* into conversation within anthropology and geography provides a foundation for the decolonization of the disciplines, where alternative epistemologies open the possibilities for an active exchange of knowledge legitimization.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

> "The right to the city is (…) a declaration by people that they intend to struggle for a radically democratised city beyond both capitalism and the state, a city where inhabitants produce and directly manage urban space for themselves, through free activity" (Purcell and Tyman 2015, 1133).

The rapid expansion of cities worldwide has considerably impacted urban planning policies and transformed the everyday access that urban Indigenous communities have to their ancestral lands. Whereas researchers have significantly examined processes of Indigenous land recognition in rural environments and some cases of Indigenous migrations to cities in Latin America, as this dissertation has presented, the study of Indigenous people who continue to occupy traditional lands that growing cities have enveloped remains less explored. In this sense, this dissertation offers an innovative analysis of the growing phenomenon of urban indigeneity.

Likewise, as imaginaries of race and nature continue to define the colonial spatial arrangements in urban environments, this dissertation aims to foreground the significance of race in capitalist urbanization, illustrating how urban Indigenous communities continue to be expulsed from their traditional and sacred lands. In the case of the Muysca of Suba, their rights to access sacred natural settings continue to be controlled by local and national authorities, who, in addition to intervening in the landscape with urbanization projects, preclude the possibility of allowing the community to participate in city planning. Notwithstanding these circumstances, the Muysca of Suba continue engaging with decolonial practices of Indigenous revitalization, such as the revival of their native language, defending their sacred wetlands through direct action or through political participation, and challenging the ongoing coloniality of nature, for instance,

through the conservation of urban Indigenous gardens, that seeks to transform their identities and territories.

As concluding remarks, in this dissertation, I propose different lines of inquiry that I consider remain unexplored and which I aim to develop in-depth in the future. First, the conservation of natural sacred sites in urban environments as a mechanism to cope with climate change's impact in cities. In addition to the intangible significance of these sacred places for the survival of Indigenous cultural practices and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), the protection of these urban sacred natural sites represents a means towards safeguarding of valuable sources of ecosystem assets, especially in the urban environment (Pearce 2023). Exploring these natural sites as sacred and essential for cultural survival would respond to the call for research on urban sacred natural sites and their potential as reservoirs of biocultural diversity (Jackson and Ormsby 2017). In the case of the Muysca, while recognized as an Indigenous community, their sacred natural sites have not yet been acknowledged as Indigenous sacred places, while their identity is inherently connected to their territories. The recognition and protection of urban Muysca sacred natural sites would represent not only the defense of the Muysca identity but the conservation of the city's Ecological Main Structure (EMS) and its biodiversity, which is currently endangered.

Another line of potential inquiry emerged as a result of conducting part of the fieldwork during the COVID-19 Pandemic; it is the relationship between the conservation of urban nature, in this case, urban Indigenous ecological arrangements such as the gardens, and mental health in marginalized populations. During the interviews, many community members stressed the benefits of having urban gardens, the *Santuario*

mountain, or other green spaces to cope with the mental stress during the pandemic. Also, these green spaces served as food sources during the pandemic, as this exacerbated inequalities in the food system, delimiting access to food due to different factors, including the loss of jobs or reduced incomes, mobility restrictions, and social distancing, among others (Cattivelli 2022). The potential of urban nature to "prevent or ameliorate risk factors for mental health" (Soga et al. 2021) has been examined by some scholars, but this analysis can be expanded to the impact of these spaces on Indigenous communities' health. For Elizabeth 'Chabelita' Sanchez and Maria Ozuna—women Elders—having their urban gardens mitigated the causes of stress during the pandemic, including the loss of other income sources, the limited access to food due to the strict quarantine in Colombia, and the social isolation.

Finally, within the Muysca of Suba community, participation in politics has been through the endorsement of non-Muysca politicians in local and national public positions. However, for the current political campaign that elects local authorities for the 2024-2028 period, the Muysca of Suba are endorsing a Muysca running for local councilor. The young candidate, who has also served as Muysca authority within the Cabildo for two terms, is running for this local position, mobilizing, among several things, his social media presence and his charisma with the young Muysca population. Paradoxically, not too long ago, he represented a section of the young Muysca that sought a decolonization from the political and administrative Colombian institutions, moving from decolonial to politician.

Some scholars (Monture 1995; Brown 1995) have maintained that as long as the struggles for Indigenous rights, and primarily Indigenous women's rights, rely on the

same colonial state apparatus that has inflicted domination and discipline on them, the process and result will be deeply problematic and contradictory. Others, such as the Kwakwaka'waka geographer Sarah Hunt, affirm that it is nevertheless necessary for Indigenous groups to pursue emancipation from within the state system; she asserts that "surely we must engage with this powerful system but appealing to law alone will not stop the violence" (Hunt 2013). In agreement with Hunt, the Anishnaabe scholar Dory Nason has also recognized that a strategic and cautious utilization of the tools of the State may unveil a path toward indigenous emancipation; nevertheless, this strategic engagement must be thought of and practiced in a way that reinvigorates those traditional knowledges that have been subjugated and erased from the system (Nason 2013). In this regard, the current political engagements of the community present a space that needs examination to further comprehend how urban indigeneity continues to be shaped, experienced, and presented.

Conclusively, it is expected that this dissertation will make important contributions to the understanding of the effects of urbanization in indigenous communities in Colombia and beyond. These contributions are not limited to academia but also extend to Colombian urban policy and national law-making insofar as this research disrupts assumptions of Indigenous identity in the city. While this research is situated in Bogotá, Colombia, it can be used to understand similar processes throughout Latin America and the Global South. This research aims to have policy implications related to the political participation of Indigenous communities in the city in relation to access to communal lands and sacred places that are at risk of being transformed by urbanization practices.

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PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

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