# BRANDING THE MUISCA-SELF: INDIGENOUS SINCERITY AMIDST COLOMBIAN MULTICULTURAL COLONIALITY

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## ABSTRACT


**BRANDING THE MUISCA-SELF: INDIGENOUS SINCERITY AMIDST COLOMBIAN MULTICULTURAL COLONIALITY**

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This dissertation has two aims. First, it explores the historical, political and legal apparatuses that have facilitated the formation of contemporary indigenous groups in the proximity of Bogota, Colombia and their recent transformation into branded products of indigenous spirituality. With this framework, it then focuses on how group members attempt to produce indigenous personas who seem to comply with the expectations of their branded form while remaining true to their indigenous-selves; which I found out can be partially revealed as glimpses of sincerity. The two indigenous groups under study are the officially recognized Muisca of the locality of Bosa, an impoverished area in the outskirts of the city of Bogota, and the Muisca of the town of Sesquile, located 45km north of Bogota. Despite the program of ethnic and cultural assimilation towards mestizaje that took place alongside the independence of the country in 1810, the members of these groups have recently claimed to be descendants of the Muisca people who inhabited the area in the pre-Hispanic period, gaining recognition on the basis of an already diluted cultural alterity. Hence, appearing “different enough” from the mestizo majorities to deserve

special treatment from a state that embraces multiculturalism has become their priority, and indigenous spirituality has served this purpose by becoming the widely accepted, branded expression of Muisca alterity. Through fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork, during which I engaged in dialogical interactions and shared affect-charged experiences with Muisca members, I have retrieved various moments of indigenous sincerity and analysed them from a decolonial perspective that uses well-known theoretical frameworks as border theories. By doing so, I have been able to unveil, on the one hand, the apparatuses of colonial domination behind the Colombian multicultural policy towards indigenous people and, on the other, the multiple Muisca-selves that remain concealed behind the brand, and which are constantly re-shaped as members navigate the contradictions between a recently incorporated spirituality and their own approach to indigeneity.

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I have changed all names to pseudonyms to protect the privacy of my informants.

# INTRODUCTION

## UNDESTANDING MUISCA INDIGENEITY, MESTIZAJE, AND MYSELF

The institutional management of indigenous groups in Latin America differs greatly from the relationships between native tribes and institutional powers in the former British colonies of North America. Most of these differences have been motivated by historical processes taking place both pre- and post-colony—processes that continue to delineate the criteria for determining official recognition and the membership of particular members in an indigenous group or tribe today. In the forming United States, the indigenous groups that survived extermination were relocated into reservations, while the children of some tribal families and indigenous individuals who had frequent interaction with the European settlers were subjected to cultural assimilation through enrolment in boarding schools and the requirement to show cultural adaptation during indigenous-settler interactions (Smith 2004). Despite these attempts to culturally assimilate indigenous people, they were clearly labelled as ethnically different from the colonizers, and thus their indigeneity was not obliterated via ethnic assimilationism, as happened in many forming Latin American countries (Den Ouden and O'Brien 2013; Stokes 2012).

In Colombia, for example, two of the outcomes of the formation of the modern nation-state were that indigenous people living near the Andean urban areas were incorporated as racially mixed citizens, or *mestizos*, and that the protected

indigenous lands that were operational during the colonial period in those areas were dismantled with the excuse of guaranteeing equality of rights for all citizens, following the principles of the French Revolution. In most cases, as these indigenous people had suffered from marginalization based on their indigeneity since the time of the Spanish conquest, they had already tried to present themselves as mestizos to facilitate their survival within or near colonial settlements. Thus, the official establishment of mestizaje as the main ethnicity of the Colombian Andes was mostly uncontested by the remaining indigenous peoples, and had to be accepted by the descendants of the Spanish who decided to remain in the country and were required to self-identify as mestizos (Bocarejo 2011).

Consequentially, and as part of this liberal program of governance, marginalization and discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity became invisible and were re-formulated as part of more general concerns like poverty, delinquency, and displacement—even when it was evident that indigenous peoples and African Americans continued to be the most marginalized groups (de la Peña 2005; Van Cott 2007). Additionally, as the Latin American countries were established not by the Spanish settlers and their rightful descendants but by the American-born mestizos who expelled the Spanish, they did not consider themselves responsible for the subjugation and extermination of the indigenous population, detaching themselves from any obligation to compensate them by arguing that the riches of the continent were stolen by the Spanish (Canessa 2006; Rubio 2007). On the other hand, the United States as a political entity was ultimately seen as accountable for the

exploitation of indigenous peoples and their resources, much of which was used to build the modern state (Ellinghaus 2006; Den Ouden and O'Brien 2013; Lenzerini 2008).

While in Colombia the indigenous people living near urban settlements became assimilated both biologically and culturally as mestizos, the members of indigenous groups in the United States were not re-introduced as part of the white ethnic majority after the independence of the country, and thus their official recognition became mostly a matter of demonstrating the continued existence of their groups since the colonial period. Moreover, decisions regarding individual membership were left in the hands of the leaders of each group (Brownell 2001; Lawrence 2004). In most cases, this membership is determined via descent, looking at what has been called the claimant's "blood quantum," or percentage of native blood, taking into consideration both paternal and maternal family lines (Schmidt 2011; Weaver 2001). Therefore, having an indigenous lineage and membership in a tribe dating back to at least the year 1900 (Department of the Interior 2015) have become the main criteria for defining indigeneity in the United States, while cultural alterity is considered to be secondary criteria to further support a claim that is already based on lineage and group history. In contrast, only the indigenous groups located in the lowlands of countries such as Colombia kept their groups and indigeneities unbroken, because they were immediately categorised as indigenous after the independence from Spanish rule and the formation of the modern nation-states. On the other hand, most indigenous people inhabiting the Andean region were assimilated as mestizos and

incorporated as regular citizens (Graham 2014; Knight 1990; Wade 2003). As a result, when Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia reformed their constitutions in the 1990s to promote multiculturalism, many of the indigenous inhabitants of the Andean highlands had already been categorized as mestizos for almost two centuries, and had self-recognized as such for several generations.

But despite the historical differences between the politics of assimilation towards mestizaje imposed on indigenous people in Latin America and the treatment of indigenous and other minority groups in the locations where the theories of liberal multiculturalism developed, such as the United States and Canada (Kymlicka 1995; McDonald 1996; Taylor 1994; Walker 1997), the treatment given to indigenous groups in countries such as Colombia is an outcome of the incorporation of those same multicultural approaches and their focus on the protection of cultural diversity, or alterity. Instead of recognizing indigenous groups as the descendants of those who were dispossessed and exterminated by the European colonizers, the recognition of indigenous people in Colombia is grounded on the supposed desire to protect what has been legally framed as the "cultural diversity" of the country. As a result, the state has freed itself from the obligation to repair the damage that the colonizers caused to the indigenous population, arguing that its obligation is to protect, not to compensate. Moreover, state institutions have perpetuated the thingification of indigeneity by protecting and celebrating an imagined "difference" among a population that experienced centuries of ethnic assimilation in the name of nation-building (Clifford 2001; Conklin 1995; Maybury-Lewis 2002; Redford 1991).

While the recognition of indigenous groups located in the Colombian lowlands and holding both a protected territory and historical continuity was considered unproblematic, recognition of the descendants of the indigenous people who suffered territorial dispossession and assimilation in the nineteenth century became a challenge on several fronts. First, the existence of those indigneities was publicized by indigenous leaders only after the constitutional reform, so their claims appeared to be mostly instrumentalist. Second, instead of having an indigenous-exclusive territory, the members of these groups have shared their living space and lifestyle with their mestizo neighbours for generations, seeing themselves as equally mestizo. Finally, as the project of mestizaje made descent unclear for both indigenous people and the mestizo majorities in central Colombia, blood quantum became an unreliable way to differentiate between indigenous people and mestizos. Hence, the Colombian state decided to provide only restricted rights and benefits to these groups, even if they managed to obtain official recognition.

Among these recently recognized indigenous groups are the *Muisca*, who argue that they are the descendants of the Muisca holders of the indigenous resguardos that surrounded the city of Bogota during the colonial period, and that were dismantled since the independence of the country in 1810. According to the authorized history taught at schools and presented to the public in museums until recently, the Muisca were exterminated by the Spanish, leaving no descendants apart from the mestizos that are now the majority of the inhabitants of Bogota and its surrounding towns (Canessa 2006; Rubio 2007). After the state embraced

multiculturalism, however, some of those deemed to be mestizos have self-recognized as Muisca and have formed more than ten Muisca groups, five of which have been officially recognized (Figure 1). The groups formed as a way to respond to the challenges of adapting to the modern/urban condition, which involves isolation, abandonment, privatization, and financial instability (Rew and Campbell 1999), producing "communities of sentiment" (Appadurai 1990) that gained cohesion thanks to their members' shared experiences of struggle and the affects unfolded by them.


Figure 1: The five recognized Muisca groups. 1. Sesquile, 2. Chia, 3. Cota, 4. Suba, 5. Bosa. Picture: Google maps.

Even though most of the members of these groups have Muisca surnames and have proven that the lands they still inhabit were Muisca resguardos before

independence, the current multicultural policy based on alterity compels them to differentiate themselves from the mestizo majorities according to the expectations of the recognizing institution, their neighbours, co-workers, friends, and even family members who do not self-recognize as indigenous. This legitimization of the cultural domination of indigenous people by the dominant ethnic group on the basis of multiculturalism, which Grosfoguel calls a modern "colonial situation" (2011), has also been exposed by Elizabeth Povinelli (2002) in her work among indigenous groups in Australia, and by scholars including Hale (2002), Chernela (2005), Canessa (2007), and Bocarejo (2011) in Latin America. They argue that, while the most common forms of colonial domination operate by inspiring the colonized to identify with their colonizers, multiculturalism inspires the colonized to identify with an idea of authenticity that is produced by coloniality and which domesticates them so as to facilitate their control and define their agendas according to the needs of the state. In the case of the Muisca, the exercise of this form of colonial control has been extended, as part of what Quijano calls "the colonial matrix of power" (Quijano 2000), from the state itself to the whole of the population via the media, education, and expert opinion; transforming the non-Muisca into either evaluators of authenticity or consumers of alterity who ignore that particular histories of indigeneity produce different (De la Cadena and Orin 2007; Hodgson 2011; Lawrence 2004) but sincere (Jackson 2005) forms of Muisca alterity.

One of the five recognized Muisca groups is located in Bosa, the town adjacent to Bogota were I lived for the first twenty years of my life. During these

years, the town became part of the capital city, following the expansion of its outskirts by the arrival of thousands of people who were internally displaced by an armed conflict with guerrillas and drug traffickers during the 1990s and early 2000s. As far as I remember, most people in Bosa self-identified as Colombian, and either as peasants or urban manual workers, but very rarely in terms of ethnicity. Thus, what gave cohesiveness to this community of neighbours was not sharing the mestizo category, but the common struggle to overcome the extreme poverty that took over the area since it became part of the city and its open grasslands and cultivation plots were illegally possessed by the displaced newcomers. As a result, the locals who used to work the lands that then became the slums of Bosa San Bernardino had to shift into an urban lifestyle and compete with both the city dwellers and the displaced population for the manual, low-paid jobs available in the city. Moreover, despite being aware of the difficult situation, the local administration did not impede the illegal use of the land or the overpopulation and contamination of the area, preferring to keep Bosa as the holder of these problems instead of allowing the displaced people to spread throughout the city.

While I always lived in the urban sector of Bosa and was never a direct neighbour of the families that were dedicated to agriculture before the open lands became an urban slum, I had frequent contact with them in my daily life. Most of their children studied in the public school where my mother worked as a teacher, participated in the weekly Catholic ceremonies and as members of the community action association, and were actively trying to stop the illegal appropriation of the

lands that they had used for farming since the foundation of the town. During these encounters, I learnt that many inhabitants of rural San Bernardino had indigenous surnames but avoided making their indigeneity public because apparently they were offended by being called "indios." However, on a couple occasions a holder of what I assumed to be an indigenous surname told me that they were a descendant of the Muisca, sometimes even admitting to the use of Muisca herbal remedies and the consumption of *chicha*, a Muisca fermented drink made with corn that was banned in the early twentieth century because of its association with "indians" and their cultural and physical degradation (Gros 2000; Langebaek 2007).

But this secretiveness regarding the indigeneity of some inhabitants of Bosa began to be replaced by open, public performances of Muisca alterity during my last years as resident in the area. Between 1999 and 2003, I witnessed street troupes, carnivals, musical presentations, and even protests carried out by a group of people who called themselves "The Muisca Community of Bosa" (Figure 2). It was rumoured among the neighbours that they had gained official recognition as indigenous thanks to the mediation of lawyers and because the director of the Office of Indigenous Affairs, the institution in charge of indigenous recognition, was a friend of the Muisca leader. I heard people living in San Bernardino say that their neighbours had "become" indigenous simply to obtain rights and benefits from the State, or to use their new positioning to regain control over the land while neglecting the interests and needs of other long-term dwellers who are not part of their group. Thus, the Muisca people who were also part of groups such as the community action association began

to face criticism, to the point that they preferred to stop advocating for the common interests of the community and instead focused exclusively on claims based on their indigeneity. Moreover, despite the determination of the recognizing institution that the Muisca of Bosa could be officially recognized on the basis of their surnames and their permanence in the area of San Bernardino since the colonial period, their mestizo neighbours usually denied their indigeneity. To them, the Muisca have failed to show enough cultural alterity vis-à-vis themselves, as they have shared the mestizo lifestyle for generations. In most cases, the mestizos expect to see in the contemporary Muisca a form of alterity that resembles their own idealizations of the indigenous other, usually based on the colonial depictions of the Muisca that were shown to them at school.

Figure 2: Performance by members of the Muisca Community of Bosa in a local park.

Surprisingly, the mestizo expectations of the Muisca were partially fulfilled after the year 2006, when the Muisca group of Sesquile was recognized by the new director of the Office of Indigenous Affairs. This director praised alterity above any other criteria for the granting of indigenous status, closely following the model of multiculturalism adopted by the state since 1991 (Laurent 2005). Unlike their counterparts from Bosa, who demonstrated their indigeneity on the basis of lineage, the leader of the group from Sesquile focused on sharing his knowledge of indigenous spirituality with his neighbours and family members, making people's willingness to incorporate that spirituality into their lives a requirement for membership in the group. Soon enough, the form of spirituality introduced by the group from Sesquile became the founding block on which the cultural alterity of every Muisca group was built, leading to the formation of the Muisca cultural brand. However, even though the Muisca of Bosa have tried to incorporate the spirituality brought by the group from Sesquile into their lives, it has been a difficult process in which mestizo culture and Muisca spirituality have had to be negotiated and forcefully blended, often unsuccessfully.

After witnessing how members of the Muisca group from Bosa self-detached from the community-based associations of which I was also part to instead re-frame their claims in terms of indigeneity, and how some of their neighbours openly criticised their recognition as indigenous to the point of becoming their adversary

stakeholders[1] for the lands of San Bernardino, I became interested in understanding the motivations and affects surrounding the self-recognition of the Muisca of Bosa. More specifically, I wanted to explore how they navigate the frictions between their indigenous and their mestizo selves while dwelling in an over-populated, convoluted, and disenfranchised area of the city of Bogota. Thus, I returned to Bosa in the year 2012 with the intention of initiating the preliminary phase of my doctoral research. During that visit, I discovered that the population density and contamination of the area had increased greatly since the year 2004, when my mother and I had relocated to central Bogota. Probably only ten percent of what was still arable land in 2004 remained unoccupied in 2012, but those few open spaces had become deposits of old rubber tyres, rubble from construction sites, and even regular garbage, while the rest of the area was completely occupied by illegally built houses. Such continued abandonment by the local authorities, despite the efforts of both Muiscas and mestizos to draw their attention toward protecting the rural way of life in Bosa, motivated me to both unveil the colonial means of governance operating towards cultural others such as the Muisca and analyse the subjectivities of becoming and remaining indigenous in a mestizo context. Moreover, knowing that the type of indigenous spirituality introduced by the Muisca of Sesquile had become the model of alterity expected from all Muisca groups, I decided to incorporate this group into my research as a means to explore the particular conditions that facilitated the production

[1] For another case of incompatibility between grassroots associations and indigenous recognition in multicultural Colombia, in this case among the Kogui of northern Colombia, see Diana Bocarejo's "Dos Paradojas del Multiculturalismo Colombiano" (2011).

of alterity in that setting, as well as their own struggle to position themselves as the most “authentic” Muisca.

This dissertation therefore has two interconnected aims. First, I unveil the forms of governance operating behind the expectations of indigenous alterity imposed on the Muisca groups from Bosa and Sesquile, including how the groups have navigated such expectations as a way to gain certain positioning, a political voice, and a sense of belonging. Then I explore the production of the contemporary Muisca subject, focusing on how the need to adapt the indigenous-self according to an expected alterity has shaken the micropolitics of Muisca groups and families, members’ engagement with their affective memories and life histories, and even their own understanding of what it means to be indigenous.

## MY POSITIONALITY: BECOMING A TRUE PARTICIPANT

Upon my return to Bosa in 2012, I introduced myself to Muisca members as a former resident of the area and as an anthropologist, hoping that my twenty years living there could help me built a better rapport. However, the impact that this positionality had among the Muisca was very different from what I expected. Instead of being perceived as someone with a legitimate interest in the Muisca and in the wellbeing of the residents of Bosa, some members categorized me as an evaluator of their cultural alterity, probably as someone hired by their mestizo neighbors, while others categorized me as an academic consumer of Muisca spirituality. As a former

neighbor, I could be interested in exposing the flows of Muisca alterity so as to discredit their argument that the lands of San Bernardino should be protected by the Muisca and kept rural. As an anthropologist, on the other hand, I could be a careless consumer of spirituality who publishes controversial aspects of it simply for her own personal academic benefit, thus damaging the Muiscas' public persona.

Responding to their uncertainty regarding who I was and what I wanted, most members of the Bosa group evaded direct questions about their indigenous alterity unless a leader of the group was also present and guiding the conversation. But despite their supposed lack of trust, I also realised that most members were willing to let me participate in their daily activities and to have conversations about our shared experiences in locales such as the group office, the ceremonial house, the local school, the street and, in a few cases, their homes. I encountered a similar response from members of the Sesquile group, who, despite letting me stay in their houses, eat with them and help them with agricultural work, were reluctant to answer both general questions about Muisca spirituality and specific questions regarding the spaces, things, foods, and songs that are part of Muisca ceremonies.

Fortunately for my research, these early difficulties prevented me from conducting an over-formalized, objectifying and "safe" exploration of indigenous alterity, allowing me to instead loosen the rigid position of researcher to dialogically engage with Muisca people on the grounds of sincerity (Jackson 2005), focusing on our shared experiences and the affects unfolded by them. Moreover, my own life history as a resident of Bosa, the imposition of mestizaje among the population of

central Colombia, and the discomfort I experience when being identified by over-generalizing categories such as “Latino (a)” (Davila 2012), motivated me to explore how the Muisca manage to build a sense of belonging despite the recent formation of their groups after centuries of cultural assimilation. Also, I became interested in exposing the struggle that the Muisca must endure to become “different” enough for the mestizos and the local authorities. Finally, my training as a lawyer enhanced my awareness of the role of the legislation and policies concerning indigenous recognition in the continuation of a colonial form of governance that oppresses indigenous people, even when such laws and policies are aimed at “protecting” them.

After clarifying the focus and boundaries of my research and becoming aware of the need to shift my image from that of an evaluator or consumer of spirituality into one of a true participant and sincere interactant, I decided to re-configure my ethnographic approach. Instead of asking questions that the Muisca could find compromising, I first reflected on my own experiences, affects and emotions while engaging with Muisca people and spaces. With the passing of time, those experiences became the baseline on which I could build sincere interactions with Muisca members. Following Rosaldo (2004), this type of ethnographic re-positioning helped me re-shape my perception of Muisca spirituality, enlarging the scope of what I could learn and know about it. In my case, it was not enough to be reflexive about my positionality and its limitations in order to understand members’ silences and gain their trust. I had to actually immerse myself in the Muisca experience, both sensorially and affectively (Deleuze 1978; Desjarlais 1992; Howes 2006), to become

a true participant who could “know more, understand better and grasp more truly” (Rosaldo 2000) the nuances of becoming Muisca. This decolonial approach of knowing by sensing was fundamental to grasping the glimpses of sincerity that revealed the indigenous-selves of Muisca members behind the public persona that they display in order to resemble external expectations. Thus, by becoming sensorially and affectively aware, I gained the sensibility necessary to recognise aspects of the multiple and fluid indigeneities that emerge from the amalgamations and tensions of a myriad of affects, collective memories, life histories, and a coloniality that still tries to shape indigenous agendas, beliefs, gender roles, and micro politics.

Finally, my unusual positionality as both a former dweller of Bosa and an anthropologist trained in the United States has shaped me into a researcher who embraces contemporary Western theory but avoids falling into the trap of overly generalizing, and therefore de-personalizing, her own research perspective for the sake of an expected objectivity. Mignolo named this form of academic engagement “border thinking” (2011), and introduced it as part of his decolonial research program to explore alternative uses of existing theory to answer questions that are not common in Western scholarship. Through border thinking, I could re-engage with the policies and factual implications of the authenticity discourse—which has been discredited in anthropology as unreflexive and romanticised (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1999)—by engaging with it from a decolonial perspective (Anzaldua 2012; Mignolo 2011) based on sincerity (Jackson 2005). Furthermore, I could effectively

utilize approaches such as the production of collective memory via mythopoiesis (Rowley 2002), the Deleuzian stance on affect theory (1978), and agential realism as it is understood by the new materialism (Barad 2003; Bennett 2005; Coole and Frost 2010), to understand how the Muisca interact with the forms of spirituality that have recently become the signature of their alterity. Thus, while decolonial scholars have so far been mostly interested in using border theories to explore cases of migration from former colonies to the contemporary West (Aldama and Quiñonez 2002; Anzaldua 1987; Grosfoguel 2005; Mignolo 2000), in this dissertation I have extended the scope of this approach to provide the analytical lenses required to understand data regarding an indigeneity based on sincerity and understood through the senses and affect.

An earlier approach to acknowledging the non-western epistemologies of local communities was proposed by Colombian sociologist Eduardo Fals Borda (1984) before decolonial theory and a decolonial research practice for Latin America were introduced by Anibal Quijano (2000, 2007) and Walter Mignolo (2011). Fals Borda presented the concept of “senti-pensar” [feeling-thinking] to explain that, in opposition to the rationality and objectivity that are the foundations of Western knowledge, the members of the rural communities inhabiting the Caribbean coast of Colombia are aware that feelings and thoughts, or the heart and the mind, are inseparable components of the process of knowing the world and oneself. In this dissertation I have also taken into consideration how sensing and feeling guide the decision-making processes of both the Muisca groups and their members. In the case

of the Muisca, decisions regarding the incorporation of certain indicators of alterity, members' self-understanding as Muisca, and even the groups' micro politics, depend more on the affects triggered during collective encounters than on rational calculations aimed at portraying authenticity. For this reason, members avoided my questions regarding spirituality: they were unable to explain, in what they consider to be academic terms, a form of knowing and acting that is fundamentally bounded via sensation and emotion.

However, despite engaging with feeling as a means of knowing, and of approaching the Muisca self in terms of sincerity, I cannot present my research as truly decolonial for at least two reasons. First, it still relies on Western theory, even if on border theory; and second, a truely decolonial approach to the contemporary Muisca should have the Muisca onto-epistemology as its foundation (Apffel-Marglin and Marglin 1996; De la Cadena 2007; Smith 2005). However, this onto-epistemology was not accessible to me as a researcher, either because it was wiped out by coloniality and mestizaje, or because the Muisca want to keep it away from non-indigenous academic enquiry. Therefore, I will only engage with a Muisca onto-epistemology if the Muisca themselves propose further research and are interested in my participation. Meanwhile, I consider that by giving priority to sincerity and feeling over objectification and authenticity, and by consciously using Western scholarship as border theory, I am already moving a step towards decolonizing the research on contemporary indigeneity that is carried out by non-indigenous academics.

## CHAPTER ORGANIZATION

I begin this dissertation by exposing the historical, political, and legal backgrounds that led to the formation of the contemporary Muisca groups of Bosa and Sesquile, as well as to the formation of the Muisca brand, a prototype of spirituality that has become the core of Muisca alterity in multicultural Colombia. Then I present Muisca members' struggle to produce public personas that comply with the expectations of the brand while remaining true to their indigenous-selves, which are only partially exposed through glimpses of sincerity. Furthermore, to better understand Muisca subjectivity via sincerity, I introduce one of the indicators of the Muisca brand, the ceremonial house, and explore how members engage with it and decide on its incorporation to their lives on the basis of the affects and emotions that unfold as a response to the sensorial experiences that take place during ceremonies. Subsequently, I introduce the poporo, another visual indicator of the brand, to help me go beyond the intimacies of the Muisca-self and engage with how the Muisca group, as a collective unit made out of multiple indigeneities, is also altered by the expectations of the brand. In this case, I explore the impact that the use of the poporo by some male members has had on the micro politics of decision-making of their groups, giving special attention to the poporo as part of larger agentic assemblages within which decision-making takes place. Finally, I go back to the broader sphere of recognition and authenticity to examine how much the motivations of Muisca leaders

when forming their groups have been fulfilled since the creation of the Muisca brand has enforced the public presentation of spirituality as a product.

Regarding the thematic division of chapters, in Chapter One I explore how the transitions from indigenous discrimination to mestizo assimilationism in the 1810s, and then from mestizaje to indigenous recognition in the 1990s, have shaped how Muisca people position themselves vis-à-vis a form of multiculturalism that provides them with certain rights and benefits but that is also an extended form of colonial domestication. To explore these transitions and their consequences for the Muisca groups of Bosa and Sesquile, I took into consideration the group leaders' accounts of the process of obtaining recognition for their groups, my own experience of dwelling in Bosa and Sesquile, and the official standpoint on indigenous recognition provided by the Office of Indigenous Affairs of the Colombian Ministry of the Interior. Finally, in this chapter I introduce the Muisca brand as the latest transition that the Muisca have been subjected to in their intent to gain recognition, political positioning, and the respect of the mestizo majorities, and that has re-shaped Muisca alterity into a product authenticated by the brand and consumed by both individuals and institutions.

In Chapter Two, I expose how individual members of the Muisca groups try to replicate the expectations of cultural alterity introduced by the Muisca brand, struggling to reproduce the aspects of this authorized model that are incompatible with their long-held indigenous-selves, in an example of what Maldonado-Torres calls "the coloniality of being" (2007). By giving special attention to the Muisca subject as

it navigates through the process of embracing the brand, I was able to recognize glimpses of sincerity that emerge when unexpected situations take place and members have to re-evaluate their own understanding of being indigenous. Here, I present various ethnographic moments that show how members of the group from Sesquile try to produce an image of themselves as tokens of the brand, constraining the fluidity of their indigeneity and replacing it with a fixed form that has been carefully reproduced since the death of their leader in 2007. Next, I introduce ethnographic moments that show how the leaders of the group from Bosa forcefully require group members to learn cultural alterity and integrate it to their lives, regardless of how incompatible it might be with their life histories as indigenous/mestizos. In all of these cases, the supposedly collective memories of Muisca practices are constructed and introduced as fundamental aspects of members' lives that should be "remembered," despite being new to most of them.

In Chapter Three, I focus on the main tangible indicator of Muisca spirituality, the ceremonial house or *cusmuy*. First, I explore how it became part of the Muisca brand despite originally being the ceremonial house of the Kogui groups who inhabit the highlands of northern Colombia. Then, I analyze how members of the groups from Bosa and Sesquile have responded to the incorporation of the cusmuy as a fundamental part of their indigeneity, discovering in the process that the form of knowledge they use to determine their stance towards the cusmuy is more affective than cognitive. Knowing this, I introduce my analytical approach to affect as border theory to explain how sensorial affectation can unveil instances of indigenous

sincerity. Finally, using ethnographic accounts of cusmuy experiences and conversations, I explore how the affects unfolded by sensorial stimuli in the cusmuy come to integrate member's maps of intensity, or the personal networks that connect present experiences with life histories and collective memories.

Chapter Four introduces another indicator of spirituality that is part of the Muisca brand: the *poporo*. This ceremonial object is used exclusively by Muisca men interested in spirituality, and it is said to balance masculine energies and attitudes by helping develop their "feminine" side, producing an equilibrium that allows them to access the spiritual realm and therefore provide better advice to their groups. As with the ceremonial house, the poporo was introduced to the Muisca groups after the leader of Sesquile learnt about its use from the Kogui of northern Colombia, legitimizing this transcultural incorporation by arguing that poporos appear in the archaeological record of the Muisca territory and in Muisca mythology. In this chapter, I explore the impact of introducing poporos as interactants within agentic assemblages for the micro politics of decision-making of both groups, using agential realism (Barad 2003) as my border theory. Mainly, I found that while female members and other non-poporo users in Sesquile seem to agree that decision making in the cusmuy should be in the hands of poporo users, the presence of the poporo has actually strengthened females' positioning as decision-makers in assemblages other than the cusmuy. In Bosa, on the other hand, the incorporation of the poporo has led to frictions between its users and female leaders, who neutralize poporo users by re-shaping the agentic assemblages in which decisions are made.

Finally, in Chapter Five I return to the political economies of indigeneity explored in Chapter One to examine the extent to which both groups' original motivations for gaining indigenous recognition have been fulfilled since the establishment of the Muisca brand, and at what cost to Muisca members. I explore how the two Muisca groups have taken advantage of their relationships with their consumers to overcome the conditions of abandonment and invisibility to which they have been subjected by state institutions. More specifically, I introduce the Muisca brand as a middle ground that facilitates interactions between Muisca members and the consumers of their cultural alterity, allowing the continuation of these relationships even after it has become clear that the expectations of both parties are based on equivocations. This final section provides a better understanding of the re-positioning of the Muisca as social actors despite having become products endorsed by a brand that shapes them and limits the scope of their demands for the benefit of both coloniality and the neoliberal project. Lastly, this chapter concludes by providing a review of the main theoretical contributions of this dissertation as a cohesive anthropological work.

# CHAPTER 1 - EMBRACING WHO YOU "REALLY ARE": THE FORMATION OF THE MUISCA INDIGENOUS GROUPS OF BOSA AND SESQUILE

## INTRODUCTION

During the preliminary phase of fieldwork, the need to find people who were willing to publically share their experiences as Muisca encouraged me to actively engage in conversation with leaders of both officially recognized and unrecognized Muisca groups. On more than one occasion, our conversation became personal and our roles partially shifted—and they asked *me* about *my* Muisca indigeneity. This kind of conversation only occurred during encounters with members of unrecognized Muisca groups. They seemed to be interested in integrating me into the group, as membership among them is not dependant on having an indigenous family name or living in an area that was part of the colonial indigenous *resguardos*. Resguardos are the areas that the Spanish colonizers designated for *indios* during the colonial period and which, in the case of the Muisca, have been dissolved for more than a century.

During one of those conversations, a leader asked me about my indigenous lineage. I explained that I was probably not Muisca because, even though I do not know much about my family beyond my great grandparents, I know that my surnames are both of European origin. She smiled at me and replied with a question: "What is your blood type?" The question seemed so out of place that it took me a while to answer that I am O+. Then she replied, "I think I could call you our westernized

Pocahontas! That blood you have cannot be more indigenous! What you have to do now is to become aware of your spirituality so you can connect with the ancestors" (Fieldnotes 13/09/2014). Days later, while in conversation with the leader of an unrecognized Muisca group from Suba, I commented that I lived in Bosa for eighteen years and my experiences there motivated me to learn more about the Muisca. He quickly replied: "I see that you finally came back to your roots. This is the call of the ancestors for you to come back and embrace who you really are!" Then he lit a cigar and passed it to me. As I took it, he told me that it would help me clear my spiritual sight and slowly connect me with the Muisca ancestors (Fieldnotes 02/10/2014).

In both cases, the leaders wanted me to become aware of the indigenous elements still present in my mestizo self, using either a biological connector—blood type—or a cultural connector—life history—, even if I never approached them as an indigenous person. These experiences helped me become aware of three moments in which Muisca indigeneity has been shaped by the colonial matrix of power (Quijano 2007) that permeates governance in Latin America, and which has left deep marks not only in indigenous people's sense of selves, but in that of the mestizo majority as well. Despite gaining independence from Europe, governance in Latin America continues to be based on a colonial form of power that is exercised via the marginalization and domination of alterities in relation to a Western model of normalcy that is portrayed as objective. In the specific case of the Muisca of central Colombia, this form of domination unfolds as shifts in the official understandings of indigeneity that are imposed by state institutions to facilitate processes of governance,

and which become expectations that those institutions and the mestizo majorities have when interacting with the Muisca.

Regarding the Muisca, the first shift took place alongside the formation of Colombia as an independent state. To produce a cohesive citizenry, the population faced a process of assimilationism towards cultural mestizaje. As a result, those who became mestizos—including the descendants of the Muisca that remained alive through Spanish colonialism—began to identify with a national identity while feeling uncomfortable with identifying as either white or indigenous (De la Peña 2002; Jackson Jr 2005). The second moment, which led to a shift in how indigeneity was understood as well as its official recognition, began with the constitutional reform in 1991, when the Colombian state acknowledged multiculturalism after two hundred years of mestizo assimilationism (Hale 2005; Sieder 2002; Warren and Jackson 2010). But while indigenous groups were able to gain recognition despite their lack of unmistakable indicators of cultural alterity during the earlier years of this reform, such alterity became fundamental for recognition after the year 2005. Therefore, as some Muisca groups obtained official recognition before 2005 and others afterwards, those who gained recognition before began to be seen as inauthentic for not exhibiting the indicators of alterity possessed by groups that were recognized later, leading to conflicting views of what makes an authentic Muisca group.

Finally, the third shift corresponds to the transformation of indigenous recognition from being mostly a relationship between state institutions and indigenous people, to a wider relationship involving the mestizo majorities, state institutions,

private organizations, and indigenous people, in what I have argued is a form of indigenous branding (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Moore 2003). As spirituality has become the focus of the Muisca brand, the relationships between Muisca people and their potential consumers are also grounded in spirituality, which all Muisca groups and their members are expected to embrace even if they still hold on to the Catholic beliefs of their mestizo past.

This shift from generalized mestizaje to the recognition of indigeneity among people inhabiting central Colombia explains the awkwardness of my conversations with the leaders of the two non-recognized Muisca groups about my own indigeneity. Also, their emphasis on my spiritual awakening can be explained as an outcome of the later incorporation of the Muisca brand. During these conversations, I felt uncomfortable trying to detach myself from the Muisca on the basis of my European family names, as the politics of mestizaje prior to the constitutional reformation instructed the population to perceive each other as ethnically equal, regardless of lineage or skin color. At the same time, I felt that mestizaje had opened the doors to my self-recognition as Muisca since the constitutional reform—making indigeneity a matter of personal choice. These shifts allowed the leaders to re-position me as Muisca and as a potential group member, stating that family name was not a justification for rejecting who I "really" was. Finally, their interest in the spiritualization of my indigenous experience indicates their compliance with the Muisca brand as well as their self-positioning as spiritual products to be consumed by me, perceived as a seeker of my own self-discovery as Muisca.

Hence, in this chapter I explore the impact that the transitions from mestizo assimilationism to indigenous recognition, and from official recognition to indigenous branding, have had in the revitalization of the indigenous Muisca groups of Bosa and Sesquile, in central Colombia. First, I delve into how indigeneity has been regulated by the Colombian state, both before and after the constitutional reform of 1991, giving special attention to the Muiscas' early positioning as mestizo and the circumstances under which they became recognizable indigenous groups. Then, I explore how and why each of the two Muisca groups under study became officially recognized as indigenous, focusing on how they adapted to the shifting views of indigeneity held by the state at the time of their recognition. Here I take into consideration the group leaders' accounts of the process of recognition, my own experience in the territories of Bosa and Sesquile, and the official standpoint on indigeneity in the years 1998 and 2006, when the groups from Bosa and Sesquile, respectively, requested recognition. Finally, I introduce the Muisca brand as the last stage of the production of Muisca indigeneity vis-a-vis the colonial matrix of power, highlighting how it transformed Muisca groups and their members into products that are authenticated on the basis of branded indicators of spirituality and consumed by those interested in this spiritualized Muisca alterity.

## FROM MARGINALIZED MESTIZOS TO PROTECTED INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

After the independence of Colombia in 1819, leaders such as Rafael Nunez and Jose Maria Samper believed that Colombians' racial traits were delimited by topography and overall meteorological conditions. It was believed that the lower, warmer and more humid areas were mostly inhabited by darker colored peoples who were either the descendants of African slaves or the remnants of bands of hunter gatherers (Langebaek 2007). As the assimilation of indigenous groups inhabiting the rainforest seemed both unnecessary and overly complicated, they continued to be categorized as savages, and were legally handled as children, who were incapable of directly negotiating their living conditions with the state (De Sousa Santos and Garcia Villegas 2001). On the other hand, people located in higher and colder regions, mostly near urban areas, were deliberately classified as mestizos regardless of skin colour, lineage, and cultural differences (Gros 2000); this was a means of facilitating the administration of the largest cities of the nascent Colombian state.

The imposed racial and cultural assimilation of the majority of the population as "mestizos" was an outcome of the formation of liberal states in Latin America, inspired by the French Revolution and its principles: *liberte, egalite, fraternite*. To promote a discourse of universal liberties, equality of rights, and cohesion amongst the population, the independent Latin American states chose to culturally unify their citizens by accommodating them under a single category. In Colombia, the legal

figure of the indigenous resguardo was terminated in favor of implementing individual liberties via the privatization of land, forcing their inhabitants to adjust to capitalism. Resguardos were pieces of land that were not appealing for agriculture or urbanization, and which the Spanish colonizers gave to the natives as communal lands. With the dissolution of resguardos, these pieces of land became *terra nullius* (nobody's land), and were either acquired by private owners or kept by the state (Sanchez 1998). Consequentially, most of the previous users of these plots were completely dispossessed after independence (Van Cott 2007) and, reclassified as mestizos, becoming incapable of framing their requests for justice as ethnic discrimination (De Sousa Santos and Garcia Villegas 2001; Gros and Ochoa 1998; Jackson and Warren 2005). Therefore, indigenous mestizos had to find employment as farmworkers for mestizo landowners, or settle in cities and towns and work as cheap labor in construction, cleaning, or as street merchants (De la Peña 2002; Hale 2002). From this moment, Colombia moved from a colonial society organized according to an ethnic/racial hierarchy to a liberal state organized in terms of class, neglecting indigenous presence and indigenous needs by incorporating them into the bottom of a pyramid of social and economic power alongside mestizo farmers, the urban labor force, and the unemployed.

Evidently, this form of liberalism was not an emancipatory project for indigenous people. They continued to be economically dispossessed and excluded from positions of power while still being racialized as lazy, dishonest, idiotic "indios" by mainstream society, despite their official re-categorization as mestizo. Thus, self-

recognizing as indigenous, or simply looking indigenous in terms of either physical traits or adornment, became so disadvantageous to those living in urban settlements or the rural areas of the Andean highlands that they preferred to identify themselves as "Colombians" and to keep any remaining indigenous practices hidden from public view (Klein 1982; Knight 1990; Sieder 2002). With the passing of time, only indigenous practices that were incorporated into the mestizo culture remained active among these descendants of the last holders of resguardos, while their physical traits began to be accepted as part of the mestizo imaginary as they married mestizo partners and re-settled among them. Ultimately, only their surnames remained as proof of an indigeneity that they wanted to erase for being equated with dishonesty, dirtiness, laziness, and treachery. Expressions such as "poor but honest and not indio," "hide the indigenous malice," and "do not be too indio" became common among this impoverished working class when emphasizing their honesty and overall good conduct.

Indigenous/mestizos living in the central highlands near the city of Bogota remained almost completely removed from political advocacy as indigenous for almost two centuries, until some Muisca groups began to revitalize their indigeneity after the constitutional reform of 1991. The constitutional reforms of the 1990s in Latin America were the outcome of more than thirty years of grassroots political mobilization and indigenous mobilization. From the 1960s to the 1980s, indigenous organizations adhered to larger leftist associations that contested the unequal division of farming areas and the subsequent impoverishment of the rural population (Sieder

2002). Until then, the requests of indigenous groups were very similar to those of the peasants and urban workers who did not self-identify as indigenous, and their treatment by the state was the same. But this situation changed in the 1980s, when a combination of factors strengthened indigenous groups in rural areas and motivated them to re-define their claims as different from the more general demands of the working poor (Van Cott 2000). In Colombia, the groups that began this mobilization towards indigenous recognition are located at the borders between the Amazonian lowlands and the southern urban centers, areas where the imposition of mestizaje was less marked than in the center of the country, due to their proximity to groups from the lowlands that remained "indigenous" in the eyes of state institutions and to the lesser political and economic importance of the urban settlements in the south.

One of the factors that stimulated the detachment of indigenous people from the advocacy of leftist movements was the universalization of indigenous rights and the protection of indigenous culture promoted by the United Nations (UN) and the International Labor Organization (ILO) (Hodgson 2011; Niezen 2003). These organizations compelled states to become aware of discrimination against indigenous people, to listen to their particular claims, and to protect them from further extermination or imposed assimilation. Such statements of acknowledgement (ILO 1989; UN 1981) encouraged some local groups to demand special treatment from their countries based on their indigeneity, so that they could position themselves as different from the working class and its agenda narrowly focused on labor rights. They believed that indigenous recognition could broaden their field of social and

political action while becoming a smaller sector, able to claim financial support from their local government independent of the employment system and the leftist unions of workers and associations of farmers. Moreover, leaders of these local groups knew that having a special positioning could allow them to finally revive their indigeneity and to erase the stigma of having an indigenous surname and indigenous physical traits that they had carried for centuries, or for trying to keep the remnants of their cultural otherness.

A second global phenomenon that motivated local leaders to demand recognition and protection as indigenous was the emergence of environmentalism as an international priority, and of spirituality as a personal search that inspired members of the urban middle class to look back at their "indigenous roots." These global matters led to the essentialization of indigenous people as the most suitable guardians of the planet and the holders of a spiritual knowledge that deserves to be protected (Conklin 2002; Tsing 2007; Ulloa 2004). Knowing that their positioning as a valuable asset of their countries depended of their ability to portray themselves as ecological and spiritual, local leaders accepted the burden of having to depict themselves as historically and culturally continuous from the pre-Hispanic period to the present, regardless of their disparate histories, spaces of interaction, or agendas (De la Peña 2005; Murray Li 2000). By these means, indigeneity could be presented as recognizable within a politics of multiculturalism for indigenous people based on cultural alterity.

Finally, poverty and violence also encouraged local indigenous leaders to demand their recognition as a means to ensure a better treatment for their communities in times of crisis (Gros 2000; Laurent 2005). In Colombia, violence surrounding guerrillas and drug traffickers forced the displacement of large numbers of people from the rural areas where both these groups operate, enlarging the already unmanageable levels of poverty within and near urban centers. As a result, the state shifted its attention towards internal displacement and away from what they framed as regular poverty issues, somehow leaving the poor's needs aside while trying to cope with an emergency that has lasted more than twenty years. This disheartening panorama motivated indigenous leaders to pressure the government to acknowledge Colombian multiculturalism and, more specifically, officially recognize indigenous people, so as to ensure their re-positioning as ethnocitizens with special rights and benefits. To make this possible, they demanded participation in the project of constitutional reform known as the *National Constitutional Assembly*, which took place in 1990.

The participating indigenous leaders were inhabitants of the southern Colombian Andes and the Colombian massif, a group of mountains within the Cauca region where some indigenous groups have remained active since the pre-Hispanic period and where urbanization was still minor. Two delegates were elected to participate: Francisco Rojas Birry and Lorenzo Muelas. Reviewing the archives of the Constitutional Assembly, I found the transcript of the talk that Rojas Birry gave to the plenary of the assembly, demanding the re-definition of the Colombian State as

multicultural and, more specifically, the official recognition of indigenous groups as holders of special constitutional rights. Here is my translated version of his introductory lines:

> […] the purpose that has brought us to this historic space of dialogue is to motivate Colombians to put an end to a centuries-old habit of denying what we are, and to grow together in the self-discovery of our identity. For this reason, we believe it is fundamental that the first article of the constitution states that the peoples of Colombia are *multicultural and pluriethnic*. (Rojas Birry 1990)

In this segment, Rojas Birry seemed to be encouraging mestizos to stop denying "what [they] are" and re-discover their indigenous identity after two hundred years of ethnic assimilation. He appeared to be talking not only to the few remaining indigenous groups located in the lowlands, which had been classified as legally incapable based on their "savagery", or to the resilient indigenous groups that refused to give up their indigeneity in the Cauca region, but also to the descendants of those who inhabited indigenous resguardos near larger urban settlements, including the capital city of Bogota. In his introduction, Rojas Birry seemed to be motivating the indigenous/mestizos who had been denying their indigeneity since independence to regroup as indigenous. However, he later re-directed his discourse, framing indigenous people as the holders of a visible cultural difference that has persisted through time, and which is fundamental for their groups' continuity and cultural empowerment. In this segment, he assumed that all recognizable indigenous groups in

the country had at least some of these indicators of indigeneity, without considering the mestizaje ingrained among the indigenous/mestizos of central Colombia. Additionally, he proposed that indigenous people should be entitled to a distinctive legal and political positioning because of these characteristics, as a means to impede their cultural extinction. Here is the second segment of his speech:

> […] Indigenous groups create and reproduce a specific culture that they identify with and through which they are identified by the rest of society. Ethnic groups can be defined as social, economic, and political spaces that have had a long duration in time. Ethnicity is also a protected territory, a language and a particular manner of understanding and reproducing reality; it is also a distinctive social organization and a distinctive manner of production, use, and consumption of goods. All of this builds a sense of belonging and creates bonds of solidarity that strengthen identity. The loss of some of these elements of indigenous identity is the starting point of a process of cultural extinction. (Rojas Birry 1990)

The markers of indigeneity introduced by Rojas Birry, including territory, language, worldviews, the sustainable use of resources, and spirituality, are the same indicators outlined by international organizations such as the UN and ILO as essential for the continuity of indigenous groups: a standpoint based on a politics of multiculturalism with a focus on cultural alterity. It is unclear if Rojas Birry would have included the indigenous/mestizo inhabitants of the former Muisca resguardos as potential holders of indigenous rights, provided that their only clearly recognizable

markers of indigeneity in 1991 were their Muisca surnames, their presence in former resguardos, and a few cultural practices that, by then, had already become part of the mestizo culture.

This ambiguity regarding who can be entitled to protection by the state for their indigeneity was not clarified in the Constitution itself or in the *Exposicion de Motivos* [Statement of motives]—which is the manuscript that justifies a reform of the constitution. However, it can easily be inferred that the delegates imagined indigenous groups as culturally different from mestizo Colombians, following internationally accepted indicators of indigenous alterity. I will return to the effects of this ambiguity for the Muisca indigenous groups from central Colombia after briefly looking at the overall impact that the politics of multiculturalism have had on the social positioning of indigenous groups in the country.

The notion of multiculturalism presented in the statement of motives was originally introduced by political philosopher Will Kymlicka (1995, 2001), who envisioned it as a means to guarantee what he called "equality in difference." Following Kymlicka, the Constitutional Assembly argued that framing all Colombians as equal and as holders of the same opportunities was insufficient for avoiding discrimination against the culturally different, and proposed a legislative change that would take their alterity into consideration. The delegates proposed to recognize and accommodate what they called "culturally diverse" groups according to their current needs and histories of discrimination as a means of ensuring that everyone could have similar opportunities and that their differences would be

respected and celebrated. In the specific case of indigenous groups, they proposed that indigeneity should be officially recognized and that local policies should be adapted to ensure that indigenous people are protected by the state against extreme poverty, marginalization, and displacement, and that their cultural differences be protected and even reinvigorated with the help of state institutions. This decision was reproduced in the constitution of 1991, which in Articles 7 and 13 recognizes the ethnic and cultural "diversity" of Colombia and the principle of equality in difference, specifically stating in Article 13 that "[…] The state will prepare the settings to ensure that equality is real and effective, and will adopt all procedures in favor of discriminated or marginalized groups" (Constitutional Court 1991).

After decades of struggle as second-class citizens, these articles of the Constitution gave indigenous people in Colombia an ethnocitizenship that entitled them to rights and benefits and gave them political and social positioning. Additionally, being indigenous became a platform that allowed groups that had previously been at the margins of society to gain national and transnational support via non-governmental and international organizations, including the United Nations, NGOs interested in indigenous rights, environmentalism, and intellectual property, and private groups interested in spiritual development and shamanism (Asch et al. 2004; Kenrich and Lewis 2004). Meeting the transnational model of indigeneity held by these organizations became both a valuable asset for indigenous people and a requirement, as such models were ultimately accepted by the majority of the

Colombian population and, since 2005, by the official recognizing institution the Ministry of the Interior.

However, even though the constitution of 1991 has been considered the biggest political achievement for Colombian indigenous people of the twentieth century (Sanchez 1998), multiculturalism and indigenous recognition were conceded not only as an outcome of the activism of indigenous leaders, but also, and mostly, because they were beneficial for governance. In the 1980s, the Colombian government began to have disputes with large grassroots associations comprising indigenous leaders, rural leaders, and unions of workers, who were obstructing the execution of neoliberal employment policies and policies concerning the exploitation of natural resources. These policies were endorsing transformations in rural ways of life, re-framing the conditions of employment, and hindering the autonomy of community leaders in favor of the privatization of services and the exportation of raw materials for transnational companies (Laurent 2005). As the activism of these leaders impeded the implementation of these policies—and therefore the execution of multi-million projects related to mining and urban development—breaking the social fabric connecting those sectors became part of Colombia's neoliberal project (Canessa 2007; Gros and Ochoa 1998; Jackson and Ramirez 2009).

By dividing these organizations into, on the one hand, small indigenous groups with separate agendas and some institutional support and, on the other, a scattered mass of rural and urban poor without support but positioned as the most direct challengers of the special status of their indigenous neighbors, state institutions

guaranteed the self-regulation of these “problematic” citizens (Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Hale 2002). Instead of having to take care of requests involving millions of people, the petition of the constitutional assembly to acknowledge multiculturalism and to recognize indigenous people gave the state the opportunity to re-shape those demands into more manageable requests presented by indigenous groups and framed in terms of cultural alterity (Bocarejo 2011) while the demands of the non-indigenous poor remained unattended (Ramirez and Bravo 2002). Consequentially, the economically disadvantaged majorities who did not self-recognize as indigenous became the rivals of indigenous groups in the struggle to access basic survival resources, to the point that they keep questioning the authenticity of their neighbors’ indigeneity.

Hence, despite being considered a victory for indigenous leaders, the neoliberal form of multiculturalism introduced in Colombia was in part detrimental for both indigenous people and the mestizo poor. It facilitated the normalization of the institutional abandonment of the poor by re-directing citizens’ attention towards indigenous people and an idealized cultural diversity based on environmentalism and spirituality (Barry 2001). Moreover, multiculturalism shaped indigeneity under the excuse of recognizing it (Povinelli 2002), and continues to inspect, examine, and assess it because indigenous rights and benefits can only be fully exercised when groups are able to resemble the latest official imaginary of indigeneity—even if it differs from the criteria through which they were recognized in the first place. Following the decolonial theorist Anibal Quijano (2007), indigenous recognition

became an expression of the colonial matrix of power that limits indigenous agency by controlling the types of demands that are expected from indigenous groups and ensuring that those demands are not detrimental to neoliberal agendas. Finally, embracing multiculturalism and producing legislation that protects indigenous groups was also useful for the Colombian state at the international level, as the constitutional reform allowed the country to represent itself as progressive and compliant with the international recommendations on the protection of "cultural diversity" and indigenous rights, regardless of its broader side effects.

## CLAIMING INDIGENEITY: WHO, HOW, AND WHAT FOR?

In this section I will contextualize the contemporary Muisca groups within what appears to be an ambiguous constitutional framework on indigeneity. When the constitution of 1991 was introduced, the first groups that requested official recognition where those whose indigeneity had never been questioned, and who had been considered incapable of legal personhood until then. These groups are located in the tropical rainforests, and meet several of the essentialist markers of indigeneity included in Rojas Birry's speech to the constitutional assembly. Other indigenous groups that requested official recognition soon after the implementation of the constitutional reform were located in the southern part of the Colombian Andes, and had supplied most of the leaders of the grassroots movements that advocated for the acknowledgement of multiculturalism in 1991. The delegates to the constitutional

assembly, Lorenzo Muelas and Francisco Rojas Birry, are members of indigenous groups from the southern Colombian Andes. Despite their uninterrupted self-recognition as indigenous and the discrimination they had endured, these groups still had to demonstrate that, despite their interactions with the mestizo majorities, they still had enough cultural alterity to deserve recognition. In any case, most of the groups from this region that requested recognition were successfully recognized on the basis of their relationship with the lands they inhabit, their surnames, their form of internal organization and, in some cases, their language and spiritual practices (Laurent 2005). Finally, a third type of indigenous group began to request recognition a few years after the constitutional reform. These groups were formed by indigenous/mestizos from the rural highlands of central Colombia and from urban and semi-rural areas within and around the largest cities in the country. The members of these groups self-recognized as mestizo farmers for several generations before embracing their indigenous identity, and fully adopted mainstream ways of life despite having indigenous surnames and inhabiting lands that were colonial indigenous resguardos.

I argue that Rojas Birry included this category of indigenous people in the first segment of his speech. He was both encouraging mestizos to stop denying their indigeneity and challenging the imposed cultural whitening of the native peoples of the highlands that later became the urban centers of Colombia (Chavez 2005). This third category of indigenous people comprised some of the rural and urban workers that initially became unprotected as a consequence of neoliberal multiculturalism: a

small percentage of those who were supposed to remain mestizo and poor, and to therefore make their demands to the state in terms of class. By requesting recognition, these groups brought the indigenous discourse back to cities such as Bogota, Medellin, and Cali, which were believed to be without a local indigenous population because of the narrative of indigenous extinction that was created as part of the project of cultural assimilation and incorporated into the mestizo collective memory since the nineteenth century.

Unsurprisingly, the recognition of groups from this third category has been particularly complicated because of the country's approach to multiculturalism in terms of cultural alterity, according to which lineage and land use are insufficient indicators of indigeneity vis-à-vis the criteria outlined by the UN, ILO, and even Rojas Birry. In addition, changes in the principles used by the Ministry of the Interior to assess indigeneity through time have further complicated the requests. Therefore, groups of the same indigenous affiliation have had to portray different versions of themselves depending on the Ministry's criteria for recognition at the moment of their request, even if other groups were recognized without having to show the same evidence. Despite these difficulties, various urban and semi-rural groups have obtained recognition as indigenous, including five groups that self-recognize as Muisca: the descendants of the colonial indigenous settlers of what is today the city of Bogota and its surrounding towns.

The Muisca groups that have attained recognition so far are located in Suba and Bosa, on the northern and southern outskirts of Bogota, respectively, and in the

towns of Chia, Cota, and Sesquile, located between thirty minutes and one hour north of Bogota. Today, these groups have a total of approximately 7500 members, of which 2700 are part of the Bosa group and 200 are from the Sesquile group—the two groups explored in this dissertation. The Muisca group from Bosa was recognized in the year 1998, while the group from Sesquile was recognized eight years later, in 2006. But despite their successful recognition, the group members' transformation from mestizo farmers into Muisca indigenous has not been an easy task, as they have lived for generations among mestizo neighbors who knew them well and had rarely heard of their indigeneity before. Moreover, their neighbors are aware that their now-Muisca neighbors had only a few, if any, cultural markers of indigeneity that could differentiate them from mainstream mestizo culture before their self-recognition as indigenous.

For example, most members of the Muisca group from Bosa were farmers until the mid-1980s, when the area began to be illegally occupied by internally displaced and other dispossessed people who were unable to buy or rent a property. Before this illegal urbanization, the San Bernardino sector of Bosa comprised a series of partially enclosed fields used for agriculture that were irrigated with the waters of the still-potable Tunjuelito River, which later became one of the most contaminated rivers in Colombia. One of the elders of the Bosa Muisca group commented that the majority of the families living in the area lack formal property titles, but have occupied the land for such a long time that their rights are no longer questioned. This is even more the case for those with the indigenous surnames of the groups who

occupied the region in the nineteenth century under Spanish rule. But as the expansion of the city of Bogota reached Bosa and incorporated it as an urban district, more people began to occupy pieces of land taken from these earlier tenants and to build the illegal structures that form today's slum, forcing the earlier inhabitants of San Bernardino and their families to leave agriculture behind and find employment in Bogota.

In contrast to the changes that took place in San Bernardino, the members of the Muisca group in Sesquile have not yet suffered from the outcomes of Bogota's development. They are the legal owners of parcels of land located on the outskirts of Sesquile, a town with a population of around ten thousand people and which is still too far from Bogota to be incorporated into the urban area. Even though not all the members of this group have Muisca surnames, all of them have lived in Sesquile for several generations, with the exception of one family. As in Bosa, most members were dedicated to agriculture and almost fully committed to their mestizo identity before their self-recognition as Muisca—to the point that most of them showed no interest in their indigenous past and participated in the town's social life as mestizo citizens. Apart from the youngest adults of this group, who are currently working in Bogota, most members and their neighbors continue to have a rural lifestyle, either working on their own land or in the flower plantations that operate in the area, and surviving on very limited financial resources.

Overall, the official recognition of these groups produced profound ruptures in the social fabric of the larger communities in their locations, which used to pursue

common interests before some of their members re-organized as indigenous and became entitled to ethnocitizenship. After their recognition as indigenous, Muisca members had to shift their attention towards projects related to their cultural revival if they were to obtain institutional funding, forcing them to leave the priorities of their non-indigenous neighbors behind. Moreover, they became better positioned as social and political actors, and their interests were legally ranked above those of their neighbors, who began to feel threatened by their rights and jealous of their benefits. These frictions (Tsing 2007) were amplified even further due to the discrepancy between the imaginaries of indigenous people as holders of pre-Hispanic forms of cultural alterity and the contemporary Muisca, who have been largely transformed by centuries of colonial struggle. To the non-Muisca, the fact that some of their deemed mestizo neighbours can now enjoy a special citizenship for becoming indigenous despite failing to match their expectations of indigeneity seems unfair and opportunistic: and even more so as they see group members use their indigeneity to obtain monetary help from state institutions (Merlan 2009).

Back in May of 2014, right at the beginning of my fieldwork, I had a conversation with a female inhabitant of Bosa. As I had told her that I was interested in the Muisca group, I decided to ask her opinion about it. Her response was shocking to me in that moment. I was not yet aware of the complex relationship between the Muisca and their mestizo neighbors. This was her reply:

> […] the problem is that here with these politics of diversity you have to be gay, black or indigenous to have some help from the state -em, for the

> state to listen to you. You know that we are all very poor here, but as we are now just poor -em, poor but not indigenous, we do not have any kind of support from the state (Fieldnotes 02/05/2014).

Days later, I had the opportunity to be part of a meeting with the leaders of the Muisca group of Bosa and some of their non-indigenous neighbors. The objective of the meeting was to discuss whether the colonial sewage system that was still operational in the area should be filled up and replaced with modern pipes. The system is based on canals that connect the river with inner land plots, and has become insufficient due to illegal urban expansion. While indigenous leaders argued that the canals should be maintained because they are part of the Muisca landscape and they have the right to preserve their traditional use of land, their neighbors proposed a modernization of the area to ensure that the contamination is kept under control. After the meeting, which failed to resolve the controversy, one of the non-indigenous participants told me:

> They fight to keep the canals active because they have that project they showed to us. They say they can clean them and make them work. But that is almost impossible! We are too many people living here now. What they want is to get the funding for the project, and now they act as if they had been the best keepers of this place. Ha! When I arrived this was already smelling like shit. I know that now these people from the Ministry of the Environment are going to agree on that project because it is cheaper than

> putting the pipes and they can also show off saying that they are protecting these fake Indians that we have as neighbours. (Fieldnotes 02/05/2014)

In both of these conversation fragments, the inhabitants of Bogota who have connections with the Muisca groups condemn and ridicule them while presenting themselves almost as victims of their recognition as indigenous. They complain because the Muisca groups receive some support from the state that non-indigenous people lack, even if they are as poor, or even poorer, than the Muisca. As outlined before, while multiculturalism is aware of ethnic and racial discrimination and aims to even up the disparities caused by it, this recognition also causes ruptures within communities that comprise both the culturally diverse and the mestizo poor, who end up confronting each other over not receiving the same treatment amidst similar circumstances of struggle. Moreover, those left unprotected have become sceptics of their neighbors' indigenous alterity and disdainful of the disadvantages associated with it beyond their shared struggle as poor. However, I argue that, more than a case of mestizo blindness towards ethnic/racial privilege (Moss 2003), this case reflects the complexity of intersectional forms of discrimination (Andrews 1995; Crenshaw 1983) in a Latin American neoliberal setting that re-frames itself as multicultural. Here, people who once struggled side-by-side for better living conditions have now become opposing parties on the grounds of an indigenous alterity that provides some people with better positioning and benefits at the expense of community cohesion.

Conversely, people who did not have regular interaction with the Muisca showed great surprise when I ask them about the indigenous people living in their town or city. Opinions like these were frequently heard during fieldwork:

> Muiscas? Are there Muiscas still around? I know about the Quechuas, Nasas, even Wayuus who came over here, but there are no natives from Sesquile anymore. I mean, indigenous. What I know is that the Muisca disappeared a long time ago. (Fieldnotes 05/05/2014)

> I believed that there were no more Musicas because I have never seen a Muisca, or someone who claims to be a Muisca. I have always imagined the Muiscas as they are shown in books, with a loincloth and gold necklaces, living in huts and drinking chicha. Those who drink chicha here [nowadays] do not look like that, but maybe those are the Muiscas. (Fieldnotes 05/05/2014)

This lack of awareness of the contemporary Muisca among the mestizo majority is a consequence of the narrative of Muisca extinction that was part of the project of assimilation towards mestizaje. This project began with independence, and continued until the promulgation of the constitutional reform in 1991. According to school textbooks, television programs, and even museum exhibitions, the Muisca were a large chiefdom of highly skilled gold workers who were exterminated during Spanish rule, and whose mestizo descendants became simply Colombian citizens, further intermingling with the descendants of the Spanish colonizers. Therefore, the

image of the Muisca held by the mestizo population is that of the pre-Hispanic "indian," illustrated by the Spanish as semi-naked, wearing white cotton skirts and gold necklaces, and living in large huts. Alongside this general depiction, their only other referents are contemporary indigenous groups from other regions of the country and transnational models of the indigenous person shown on television. In contrast, and despite holding indigenous surnames and looking more "indian" than most mestizos, members of the contemporary Muisca groups adopted a Western lifestyle as a means to avoid further discrimination, leading them to look too modern to be "real" Muisca in the eyes of most Colombians today. Paradoxically, they are also accused of inauthenticity when trying to publically enact the early colonial depictions of their indigeneity—resulting in an almost total lack of autonomy about how to present themselves as indigenous.

In addition to the frictions involving the Muisca groups and their neighbors, other frictions have emerged among the Muisca groups themselves. As described before, the criteria used by the Ministry of the Interior to recognize indigenous groups and to concede ethnocitizenship on their members varies according to local needs in terms of governance and transnational trends on indigeneity. As these trends change through time, the criteria is also adapted, so groups of the same indigenous affiliation are ultimately subjected to different assessments from the Ministry depending on the moment of their request.

In the case of the two Muisca groups under study, the one from Bosa obtained recognition eight years before that from Sesquile, at a time when the

Director of the Office of Indigenous Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior was an indigenous leader committed to the project of indigenous revival. Consequently, this director granted recognition to the group from Bosa on the basis of their surnames, land use, and community cohesion, despite their lack of most of the indicators of cultural alterity associated with Colombian multiculturalism. On the other hand, when the group from Sesquile requested recognition, a step-by-step protocol for the assessment of indigenous alterity was already in place, with precisely the objective of avoiding the recognition of mestizos as indigenous. But despite the strictness of this protocol, the group from Sesquile was officially registered. Since then, state institutions, private organizations, and individuals interested in Muisca indigeneity expect to encounter similar indicators of alterity in the group from Bosa, doubting their authenticity and value as indigenous if they are unable to portray themselves as members of the Sesquile group do.

As a means to avoid direct confrontation or in-situ comparisons, these groups therefore avoid each other during public indigenous gatherings and rarely, if ever, visit each other's centers of operation. As a result, they have not yet formed a Muisca coalition that could boost their presence both politically and in terms of social action. During my year-long fieldwork, I became aware that the group from Bosa was never visited by members of other Muisca groups apart from the group from Suba, and only inactive members from Bosa and Suba ever visited the Muisca group in Sesquile. However, this unspoken agreement of non-involvement has a deeper layer of antagonism, as leaders still compare their groups and try to rank them according to

different criteria to re-assure their positioning as authentic Musica and as valid holders of ethnocitizenship.

After learning about these downsides, I became curious about the rights and benefits actually gained by the members of the groups, as this seemed to be their biggest motivation to continue with the Muisca indigenous revitalization in spite of the disputes between the Muisca and their neighbors, and among different Muisca groups. Surprisingly, I discovered that members of the recognized Muisca groups have very limited access to the constitutional rights granted to indigenous people, and only partial access to the benefits.

In Colombia, indigenous rights are aimed at protecting groups that have tenancy over considerable pieces of land in rural areas, not at protecting groups from urban and semi-urban areas without considerable land tenancy. For example, the right to be financially independent from towns and cities and therefore to receive monetary resources without the intervention of local authorities can only be exercised by groups concentrated in indigenous-exclusive areas, and not by groups making regular monetary transactions with the mestizo majorities. Following the same reasoning, the Constitution gives indigenous people the right to their own system of justice according to their traditions, but urban groups are unable to establish their own legal system because most legal cases would involve non-indigenous people.

Finally, recognized indigenous groups have the constitutional right to be informed and to participate in all decisions related to the use of the lands they inhabit,

even if they do not own them. This right, known as *consulta previa* [preliminary consultation] has been granted to all indigenous groups, without exception. So far, the Muisca group from Sesquile has not exercised this right, but the leaders of the group in Bosa are trying to dismantle some of the state-funded development projects in their neighborhood by claiming that they were not consulted. If their right is granted in court, the construction companies will have to re-design the project according to indigenous requirements. Evidently, despite the fact that legislators had not anticipated claims for *consulta previa* in urban areas, now the Muisca have positioned themselves in such a way that they must be consulted regarding lands that are almost fully built over and mostly occupied by non-indigenous people, creating a problem for local authorities and their development policies.

In terms of the benefits granted to help indigenous people navigate their day-to-day lives, Muisca members have been able to enjoy some of them: namely, partially subsidized medical care, preferential access to higher education, the choice of not having to serve for one year in the military, and a monthly food supply for the poorest families—a benefit that is only available for groups located in Bogota. Regarding medical care, recognized indigenous people only have to pay ten percent of the costs of their treatment if they show a letter from the governor of their group certifying their membership. In terms of education, public universities such as the National University of Colombia have a fixed quota for indigenous people to ensure that at least a minimum number of indigenous students have the opportunity to enroll in higher education. Additionally, some private universities provide discounts in

academic fees. However, very few Muisca members have passed the National University entry exams due to the poor quality of their secondary education, and nobody has used the discounted prices offered by private institutions because the fee is still too high for them to pay.

According to Colombian law, all males who reach eighteen years of age have to serve in the military for one year. Members of recognized indigenous groups who are formally registered in the census of their groups can avoid this obligation if they provide a letter from their governors and a certification of the official registration of their group. This benefit has been granted under the assumption that detaching an indigenous young man from his group could affect the continuity of the group and the cultural traditions of the person and other members. However, the benefit that seems more appealing to the Muisca, at least to those in the group from Bosa, is the monthly food supply. This benefit is not provided nationwide, as it is an initiative of the local administration of the city of Bogota to ensure that children under twelve years old have the minimum food required for normal growth. One hundred and twenty Muisca families enjoy this benefit today, as they are unable to cover their basic dietary needs with only their income.

In addition to these benefits, Muisca groups sporadically receive financial aid from state institutions for the development of projects related to the protection of some aspects of their indigeneity. These projects are usually proposed by the institutions themselves, because it is part of their policies to get involved with indigenous populations. Most of these institutional initiatives aim to introduce forms

of self-sustenance based on their own expectations of indigenous cultural alterity, while indigenous groups let themselves be framed by these expectations to get the financial support. A few NGOs have also reached out to the Muisca with projects on language revitalization, music, and agriculture, and some wealthy individuals have proposed commercial partnerships to benefit from the indigenous image in a market that is craving for alternative experiences and products.

During fieldwork, the Muisca groups were involved in projects related to organic agriculture, bead weaving, pottery, and native music; had a partnership with a private quinoa grower who sells his product to middle-class urban followers of the new age; and were discussing the possibility of working with a wealthy woman who proposed to buy twenty looms for them if they produce "traditional" weavings and allow her to be their commercial agent—even if they had never used a loom before. In contrast, the most immediate needs of the groups—most related to land use, urban infrastructure, building up a political and social presence in their areas, and improving relationships with their non-indigenous neighbors—have not yet been addressed by any of these alleged supporters.

Despite knowing that the rights and benefits enjoyed by the Muisca are limited and tailored by third parties, not having them has still angered those who have not been successful at requesting recognition, those who cannot request it because they are unable to meet the requirements, and those who are not willing to become Muisca because they self-identify as mestizo Colombians. But regardless of the tensions and limited benefits brought by indigenous recognition, the Muisca hold on

to their indigeneity. Beyond obtaining rights and benefits, the Muisca seem to have found a sense of belonging that is more meaningful to them than identifying as Colombians, and which they have been unable to experience for several generations. This sense of belonging as indigenous has, in most cases, been affectively incorporated into members' selves through time and as part of the process of navigating the spatial, political, and social changes around them since they became part of their groups.

## INDIGENOUS MESTIZOS: THE PATH TO RECOGNITION

In Colombia, neoliberalism and the colonial matrix of power have delineated not only the process of official recognition of indigenous groups but also the self-recognition of individuals as indigenous. As the colonial agenda has continued to shape local lives and agencies (Quijano 2000, 2007), indigeneity is only recognized when it favors overall governance and is compliant with the politics of the free market. Hence, as the requests from the Muisca of central Colombia were seen as a challenge to the state's model of urban progress based on the imaginary of Muisca extinction, the official recognition of these groups was particularly challenging, and continues to be questioned despite being in place for several years. Overall, the official recognition of Muisca groups involved assessing their cultural alterity against unrealistic models of indigeneity, creating obstructions in the process of recognition, and subjugating Muisca living spaces to abandonment and invisibilization. However,

five Muisca groups successfully navigated the process and obtained recognition between 1998 and 2006.

The Muisca groups from Bosa and Sesquile had to overcome these obstacles in different ways, depending on their collective histories and the policies that were in force when they submitted their request to be recognized. The members of the group in Bosa, on the one hand, had to endure being abandoned by a state that was reinforcing their self-identification as the poor dwellers of an urban slum at the same time they were trying to move beyond two centuries of forced assimilation as mestizos. On the other hand, the members of the group from Sesquile had to break through their own invisibilization vis-à-vis the invisibilization of their living space, while demonstrating their cultural alterity against a series of essentialist indicators produced specifically to avoid their recognition. In this section, I explore how and why the Muisca of Bosa and Sesquile have socially repositioned themselves via indigenous recognition, taking into consideration the particularities of their geographic and social spaces and the fluctuating perspectives on indigeneity held by the Ministry of the Interior over time. To do so, I take into consideration the group leaders' accounts of the formation and recognition of their groups, my own experience moving around Muisca spaces, members' descriptions of those spaces at the moment of recognition, and the institutional point of view of the Ministry of the Interior regarding each group's requests.

## BOSA: RECOGNITION AMIDST ABANDONMENT

The negligence of the local government of the city of Bogota to tackle the violence, the contamination, the infrastructural inadequacy, and the poverty in Bosa has ultimately normalized the marginalization of its inhabitants. By normalizing their abandonment, the population of Bosa has become tolerant of the illegal occupation of sectors such as San Bernardino, where there is a total absence of institutional intervention or planning. Moreover, the transformation of rural Bosa into an illegal urban settlement has prevented the indigenous/mestizo locals from fully bonding to the land as the descendants of the pre-Hispanic Muisca who inhabited the area, keeping them focused instead on trying to survive as unskilled urban workers. To complicate this panorama even further, the uncontrolled expansion of the city and the lack of institutional initiative to delineate the sector as rural or incorporate it into development plans has triggered the use of this liminal space as a rubbish dump, where plastics are burnt, medical waste is buried, and the rubble from construction sites is discarded—activities that have also become normalized.

I went back to Bosa in June of 2012, eight years after my family and I had relocated from there. The purpose of going back was to meet the leaders of the Muisca group, whose office, I was told, was in San Bernardino, a sector of Bosa that I had never been to. The only information I had about this sector prior to my visit was my mother's comments regarding its rural appearance back in the 1970s, when she worked as a schoolteacher there. However, I realized that my expectations of

encountering open lands, crops, and animals were going to be unmet as soon as the public bus I was travelling in reached San Bernardino. The roads were so unmaintained that the driver had to either dodge massive holes in the asphalt or fall into them, making everybody jump out of their seats and fall again. Those who were standing had to remain alert and firmly grab the rusted metal bars of the bus, as the driver showed almost no interest in making all of those turns and jumps smoother for the commuters. Thick clouds of fine dust rose after every car passed, but I still saw a woman opening a window because, she argued, it was too hot inside of the bus. Among the commuters, I seemed to be the only person concerned about the conditions of the road, the behavior of the driver, and the quality of the air that we were all breathing. While I was feeling hopeless, the other travelers appeared immune to the frustration I was experiencing even before getting off the bus. It seemed that the sense of abandonment of Bosa, and even more so of San Bernardino, had already been fully normalized by its inhabitants in 2012.

As my journey through San Bernardino continued, the landscape worsened. The road was unpaved, there was no pedestrian walking area, and most houses looked architecturally unplanned, half made, and uncared for. Just getting off the bus left me standing on a partially built road, surrounded by a thick cloud of dust that the bus lifted from the ground and by an unexpected smell of rubbish and faeces. As I crossed the road and climbed a small trench, I discovered the source of the smell. It was the Tunjuelito River, where the drainage for most inhabitants of Bosa ends, and which diagonally crosses the San Bernardino area (figure 3). Covering my nose with a scarf,

I kept walking down the road until I reached the San Bernardino school and, on the opposite side, the house that functions as the administrative office for the Muisca group of Bosa. When I was close enough to this indigenous house, I could appreciate that its façade had a mural depicting the profile view of an indigenous man, geometric figures, and corn plants. Apart from the mural, however, the house was no different from other buildings in the area (figure 4).

Figure 3: Tunjuelito River in Bosa San Bernardino.


Figure 4: The office of the Muisca group of Bosa.

Most members of the indigenous group still live in San Bernardino, San Jose, or Villa Celina, all illegally built neighborhoods located on what should be, according to official maps, open grasslands and farms alongside the river. The remaining members live in central Bosa, an area less impacted by institutional abandonment. Currently, the Muisca share these neighborhoods with mestizo Bogotans who acquired some of the land plots without following legal procedures, and with other illegal occupants who live in temporary shelters such as broken cars, tents, or old prefabricated houses. During my short walk from the bus stop to the group's office, I encountered several people who seemed to be internal migrants from other regions of

Colombia, either displaced by the armed conflict or trying to relocate to Bogota with the hope of finding employment.

These early impressions of San Bernardino helped me understand the impact of abandonment on what is now the political agenda of the Muisca of Bosa. Walking their roads and experiencing their surroundings became a rich and meaningful background, within which their words and actions began to make sense to me. In Bosa, indigenous recognition has become a means to ensure that the voice of the early dwellers of San Bernardino, a group of indigenous/mestizos with Muisca surnames who have lived in these lands for at least two centuries, remains audible in spite of the transformation of the area into an urban slum. Moreover, I learnt how the Muisca of Bosa define their indigeneity amidst urban expansion during a conversation with Roberto, one of the leaders. When I indiscreetly asked him about members' motivation to "become indigenous," he could not avoid showing annoyance and replying:

> We have always been indigenous, look at our faces! And we even have the Muisca surnames, at least one of them [silence], or one of our parents has it, em- and we all know each other and our families. Many people think that we have just become indigenous, as you said, but what happens is that before it was bad to say that you are indigenous here. The neighbors could think that you are crazy because people imagine that the Muisca should look like the groups from the Amazon, you know? [silence] like with feathers and different clothing and speaking another language. So as we do not look like

> that, then we are not Muisca enough to them. Also, they only called us indians to make us feel bad, because being indigenous was always a problem em- like a burden, like a stain. But the constitutional reform of 1991 has motivated us to say publically who we are, so we can finally be able to show them that we should be in charge of all these lands. (Fieldnotes 01/09/2014)

In his answer, Roberto makes no reference to culture as an indicator of his Muisca indigeneity, despite the fact that the rights and benefits granted to indigenous people in Colombia are given on the basis of cultural alterity. For him, indigeneity is determined by lineage, permanence in the lands of San Bernardino, and a sense of community. Furthermore, his answer explains how the mestizo mentality against indigenous people led to the erasure of the remaining aspects of Muisca alterity among the indigenous/mestizos in the area, by triggering decades of discrimination towards anyone displaying indicators of indigeneity. While physical traits and surnames were impossible to hide, their holders rejected whatever was left of their indigenous past in order to fit within the challenging urban landscape that encapsulated them. This answer from Roberto also unveils the relational character of Muisca indigeneity through time (Clifford 2001; Murray Li 2002). So, at the time when being indigenous was detrimental, the Muisca framed themselves as mestizo; but as the constitutional reformation made urban indigeneity possible and beneficial, self-recognizing as Muisca allowed them to become the strongest stakeholders for the lands they inhabit. In their case, even the decision to self-recognize was based on

their willingness to recover those lands and their wish to stop its urbanization. Roberto commented:

> A person who was working on indigenous issues called us and told us that he believed we could be recognized as an indigenous group. Then a group of leaders, including myself, reunited […]. We met a lawyer who was an expert in indigenous issues and he told us about the constitutional reform and our indigenous rights; and that we could take better care of the land by being indigenous because we would be respected as a rural group. You know, that the state would help us continue with our way of life [silence]… he told us that, as indigenous, the state should protect us. Some people from universities came too to do research about our surnames, and they certified that we are indigenous. All this happened in 1998. But we did not get the recognition until 1999 because we had to elect the leaders first and become organized administratively. (Fieldnotes 01/09/2014)

By 1998, the Tunjuelito River was already polluted due to the lack of basic water drainage. As the area was becoming overcrowded; the indigenous/mestizo farmers were unable to work on the land and had become part of the unskilled urban workforce. But even though the farming lands were irreversibly engulfed by the city, people's memories of those lost landscapes, the grief of losing their means of subsistence, and the need to survive in a harsh urban slum motivated them to listen to the indigenous advocates, self-recognize as indigenous, request official recognition

and, finally, try to regain control. Regarding the request of recognition, the leader explained:

> […] that happened in 1999, like in September. We made the request to the Ministry, and the lawyer and our indigenous friends who were working in the Ministry at that time helped us. The Director of Indigenous Affairs of the Ministry in 1999 was an indigenous leader, so the office was attentive toward helping indigenous people. That is why we got recognized. And the group soon began to grow in the administrative, political, and social aspects, and many things were done regarding health care, the military service, the food supply. But em- unfortunately, um- unfortunately the spiritual part and other cultural things were not incorporated until much later, and we are still trying to get into that part. (Fieldnotes 01/09/2014)

This answer shows that, to the Muiscas' advantage, it was relatively easy to cross the boundary between indigeneity and mestizaje in 1999. Having an indigenous leader as director of the Office of Indigenous Affairs facilitated the process of recognition in Bosa, mostly because of his awareness regarding the impact of assimilationist policies among indigenous people from central Colombia, and because he agreed with the re-indigenization timidly suggested by Rojas Birry in the first segment of his speech. As a result, despite the fact that the constitution of 1991 protects indigenous people because of their cultural alterity, during his direction there was no fixed criteria to assess this and he had the discretionary power to decide the recognition of groups—favoring the Muisca in Bosa. However, this decision also led

to a further lack of interest among the members of this group regarding the cultural alterity that should, in theory, be the reason for their recognition. This inconsistency was left unattended until the year 2006, when spirituality became a Muisca landmark and its incorporation into the group from Bosa became problematic because of conflicts with the Catholic beliefs of its members—who had never before doubted their indigeneity because of their lack of clear indicators of cultural alterity, but began to do so when they were accused of inauthenticity.

Finally, in February 2015, one of the anthropologists working in the Office of Indigenous Affairs granted me an interview. The officer was very cautious regarding my use of data, and explained that the registration of new indigenous groups was a "hot topic." As I asked him about the "recognition" of the group from Bosa, he immediately clarified that, since 2005, the Ministry is in charge of the "registration" of indigenous groups, not their "recognition." However, he explained that there is no real difference between the two concepts: the Ministry decided to change the term simply as a means to avoid criticism from activists and academics on the topic of indigenous self-recognition. Then, he explained that the change in terminology was part of a formal protocol for indigenous recognition that was incorporated in 2005 as a means to prevent the recognition of more indigenous groups among mestizo people who lacked indigenous cultural alterity.

While walking towards a shelf to pick up the official decree that granted recognition to the Muisca group from Bosa, the officer told me that this group was fortunate for requesting recognition while an indigenous leader was the director and

before the protocol was introduced. As he handed me the document and I began to read it, he commented on its short length compared to more recent decrees, which, according to him, include extensive ethnographic assessments of cultural alterity, genealogy, and land use. But instead of focusing on culture, the decree that granted indigenous recognition to the Muisca from Bosa provided an explanation of why groups in processes of re-indigenization should not be discriminated against and, therefore, should be recognized. Ten of the fifteen pages of the decree provide a justification for the recognition of the group on the basis of its relationality, fluidity, and on the interest of its members to self-recognize, and invited readers to be aware of the impact that mestizaje had on indigenous people from central Colombia.

Lastly, despite the obstacles placed by the colonial matrix of power (Quijano 2007) in its intent to keep the population of central Colombia as poor mestizos even after the acknowledgement of multiculturalism, the Muisca group of Bosa gained recognition with help from the Ministry of the Interior itself. While circumstances such as the normalization of abandonment in San Bernardino and the centuries-long process of cultural assimilation of the Muisca were expected to obstruct the recognition of this group, its members actually embraced these difficulties as encouragement to surpass their categorization as mestizos and finally became recognized as indigenous in 1999. By then, the Office of Indigenous Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior was not yet instructed to complicate the process of recognition by assessing cultural alterity vis-à-vis a general model presented as protocol guidelines, and therefore the Muisca from Bosa became recognized despite their

mestizo background. But as the increase of recognition requests made by newly formed urban indigenous groups began to worry the Ministry of the Interior, a new director was elected for the Office of Indigenous Affairs and a protocol to assess indigenous alterity before permitting "registration" was implemented. The groups from Bosa and Suba were the only urban Muisca groups that achieved recognition before the incorporation of the 2005 protocol; several unrecognized groups from areas of Bogota such as Soacha, Suba, and Fontibon are still trying to be registered, without success.

## SESQUILE: RECOGNITION AMIDST INVISIBILITY

One of the goals of the coloniality of power in Colombia is to keep specific sectors of the population classified as non-ethnic, in spite of multiculturalism. This goal has been based on the assumption of a widespread mestizaje that encompasses all the inhabitants of the central highlands, the location of the main urban centers. While the mechanism used in Bosa was the institutional abandonment of the area to facilitate its transformation from rural to urban, hindering indigenous self-recognition, the means to control ethnic requests in Sesquile was the invisibilization of the town vis-à-vis cultural tourism. Despite the large numbers of tourists interested in the Pre-Hispanic Muisca that visit the Guatavita Lake, a ritual site located near Sesquile, the town itself has been excluded from tour packages and travel guides. The reason for this exclusion is that Sesquile is one of the centers for the production of

export-quality flowers, and most of its inhabitants have worked in flower plantations for the whole of their lives despite the low salaries and damaging working conditions. While a boost in job opportunities in Sesquile would force the flower industry to offer more competitive salaries and reduce their revenue, detaching the inhabitants of Sesquile from the indigenous tourism industry also keeps them mestizo, ensuring the continuation of their exploitation by the flower sector. But despite the roadblocks placed by the local government and the Ministry of the Interior, some of the inhabitants of the town overcame the obstacles and obtained recognition in 2006, thanks to their emphasis on spirituality as the core of their indigenous cultural alterity.

The north of Bogota became the wealthiest sector of the city in the second half of the twentieth century, and its inhabitants transformed the nearby towns into their weekend destinations. According to them, the towns provide purer air, a peaceful environment, and good quality food, delivered by the fine dining restaurants that have opened in the area. The locals of these towns have also benefited from the affluence of visitors, opening their own gift and souvenir shops, hiking and climbing agencies, restaurants and parking places. To keep these towns up to standard, local administrations have spent most of their financial allocations on the maintenance of roads and buildings, and are vigilant in preventing illegal settlements. Sesquile, however, is not a common destination for visitors despite being located near the Guatavita Lake, a famous tourist destination related to the legend of *El Dorado*—itself based on a Muisca rite of passage that was common during the pre-Hispanic and

early colonial periods. Hundreds of local and international tourists visit the lake every weekend (figure 5), as well as the recently built town of Guatavita, where the majority of entertainment and eating options are located. Conversely, Sesquile is a small and quiet town. Most locals work in the surrounding farms or in the flower plantations; men who are not working on the farms are usually independent builders, working in Bogota for small projects of house refurbishment. As in Bosa San Bernardino, most dwellers of Sesquile live in poverty, but their living conditions are much less hazardous than those of their Bosa counterparts.

Figure 5: Tourists visiting the Guatavita Lake.

It was December of 2014 when I first went to Sesquile, aiming to have the preliminary phase of my fieldwork approved by the leaders of the Muisca indigenous

group there. To reach the town, I took a local bus to the north of Bogota and, from there, an inter-city van to Sesquile/Guatavita. The van was clean, comfortable, and almost fully occupied when I got in. All the passengers were tourists, and some were speaking in English and reading about the Guatavita Lake from their *Lonely Planet* guides. The whole journey was smooth, without holes on the road or clouds of dust. But despite being so close to the lake, I was the only person getting off the van in the main square of Sesquile. It was clear that those visitors had not included a visit to Sesquile in their itineraries as they knew nothing about the town and the Muisca group; they were going only to the town of Guatavita and, from there, Guatavita Lake.

I could sense the clean air as soon as I got off the van, and had a liberating feeling of safety. The fog, the cold, the mountains around the town, people's pace and people's chatter, all of these things where infused with some sense of stillness, even melancholy. As in Bosa, in Sesquile I felt oppressed and somehow uncomfortable, but this time I was oppressed by the rural quietness that opposes urban frenzy. The absence of visitors, local factories, retail shops, and investment from the state made Sesquile an invisible settlement of flower plantation workers surrounded by weekend tourist attractions.

I was surprised as I asked the locals who were at the square about the location of the Muisca group and learned that some of them apparently had never heard of it. Finally, after having asked three or four people, a man in his forties told me that he knew their meeting place, and gave me directions. The cusmuy, or Muisca ceremonial house, is located mid-way up one of the mountains that surround the town

of Sesquile. The man told me that I had to walk to the edge of the urban area and then follow an unpaved road until finding a bifurcation leading to a stone-made stairway. The stairs led me to a white hut made of *bahareque*, a mixture of dried mud and grain stalks. The hut had a wooden door, locked with a chain and a lock. Not far from this hut I found another one, then another one and, at the end of the stairs, a much bigger hut near a smaller structure that resembled an igloo. This larger hut, of about ten meters in diameter, was painted white and had a mural depicting a river, mountains, and plants, as well as red and black lines and geometric figures resembling rock art paintings found in nearby towns, and which have been attributed to the Muisca. The igloo-like structure of about four meters of diameter was also painted white and decorated, and was half covered in plastic (figure 6).

Figure 6: The cusmuy of the Muisca group from Sesquile.

Just few meters away from the hut were two women in their twenties, one of them pregnant, sitting on two old and partially broken plastic chairs. As I asked them for the governor of the group, they told me that he was with other leaders doing a cleaning ceremony in the cusmuy, and that I had to wait until the end of the ceremony to talk to him. While waiting, I sat down on the grass and looked at the huts and the vegetation around, feeling as if I were in the middle of a large forest, despite knowing that I was very close to the urban sector of Sesquile. Contrary to what I saw in Bosa San Bernardino, the hamlet of Sesquile were not affected by internal migration, overpopulation, or pollution. Moreover, instead of being only tenants of their lands, like most members of the group from Bosa, the members of the group from Sesquile are owners of small land plots scattered throughout the fully divided, fenced, and privatized area. As I learned that Sesquile does not share the conditions of illegal development, urbanization, and abandonment that encouraged the members of the group in Bosa to self-recognize, I became intrigued by the motivations of the members of the Sesquile group to request indigenous recognition as Muisca fifteen years after the constitutional reform. Rosa, the mother of the first leader, described the group's formation to me while having lunch in her house:

> Everything began when Carlos [the first leader of the group] decided to go to the jungle in the Putumayo region with his uncle, after he finished the military service. When he was in Putumayo, his uncle invited him to drink yage [ayahusca] with an indigenous leader. […] he kept going to the yage ceremonies until the leader began to teach him indigenous medicine. He also

> became a schoolteacher for kids living in the jungle, he was a very good teacher. He made a community there. But um- people were envious and accused him of having business with the guerrillas, and he got a death threat. So he came back in 1996. […] He was depressed back here, but he told me that the yage had let him see his ancestors, the Muisca grandfathers, and that he understood many things about this territory. For example, that we are Muisca and the Muisca are medicine people, you know, spiritual people. […] he used to go up to the mountain in the morning to ask the ancestors what to do, until he decided to start the Muisca group […]. So he went to Bogota to a database and found very old documents about the Muisca people who lived in this territory, and found out in those documents that the surnames that people have here in the hamlets are Muisca. He used that to demonstrate that he was not making up anything, that we are Muisca. […] some families began to go to the mountain to learn from Carlos and to get healed, until the group became strong. All of that began like in 1998. (Fieldnotes 16/02/2015)

In Sesquile, the initiative to create a Muisca group came from a person who later became its spiritual leader, and whose objectives as founder were to teach his neighbors about their indigenous roots and to practice and teach the indigenous medicine that he had learned in the Putumayo lowlands. As these objectives were rooted in his own experience with yage and other medicinal plants, and not in legal advice or political agendas, he focused on teaching his family and friends about their indigenous roots through spirituality. To make this possible, Carlos Mamanche had to

first convince them to participate in one of his meetings, and then had to ensure that they continue participating during the weekends. While group members in Sesquile knew that the official recognition of their indigeneity could provide them some financial relief, medical care, and higher education, such recognition did not occur until seven years later. But despite this delay, most of them remained motivated. Diego, a young leader, gave me his opinion regarding members' motivations for self-recognizing, regardless of official recognition:

> I remember that when I was a kid I was always waiting for the weekend to come, so I could do interesting things like working in the fields, making clay pots, lighting the fire, learning about the medicine, doing things that one could not do in the town, even meeting people from outside who were invited by Carlos. Many families with Muisca surnames, and even a few with other surnames, began to come here because of their kids. Well, most of the adults first came because they wanted healing sessions with Carlos; but as kids we enjoyed being up here so much that it became like a family obligation. And people also came because they had a space to talk about their lives and their problems, and to get some advice from others, you know, as a community. (Fieldnotes 03/04/2015)

Contrary to the group in Bosa, where membership was based on genealogy and the continued use of the land of San Bernardino, Carlos Mamanche required the members of the group in Sesquile to "practice the culture." Members were expected to visit the cusmuy, ingest medicinal plants, participate in workshops, and actively

engage in the revival of Muisca spirituality. The option that Carlos brought to his followers in Sesquile helped them re-gain control over their lives and living space, providing the dynamism that was missing in the town as a result of the invisibilization imposed in order to facilitate the exploitation of its inhabitants as mestizos. To them, it was not official recognition that was at the center of the agenda, but gaining visibility amidst the tourism industry that profits from their Muisca ancestors while excluding them.

Carlos requested the official recognition of the group only after its members were already fully invested in their indigeneity and had incorporated spirituality as part of their indigenous selves. As a result, despite the protocol of 2005, which assessed indigeneity not only on the basis of lineage and land use, but mostly on cultural alterity, the group still managed to obtain recognition due to its spirituality. Diego told me what he remembered about the assessment undertaken by the Ministry:

> I was like fourteen years old, but I remember that everybody was talking about an assessment that was going to be carried out by the government. After Carlos made the request, some anthropologists and geographers came to meet us and talk to us, and to observe our work here. I remember we were all stressed out because we wanted the recognition. It was a long process, like um- more than six months, maybe. But at the end we got recognized. I remember that when they told Carlos that we had been recognized, we all met and did a ceremony, and there was food and chicha, and people were very happy. (Fieldnotes 03/04/2015)

During the interview with the officer of the Ministry of the Interior in 2015, I learnt that the group from Sesquile was one of the first to be registered under the new protocol. The officer explained that extensive fieldwork was done prior the registration, and involved anthropologists, geographers, and lawyers. Also, the decree that granted registration to this group, alongside the groups in Chia and Cota, is very different from the one produced for Bosa seven years earlier. The document has a six hundred page-long ethnographic annex and a statistical annex to back up the claim that the Muisca of Sesquile have enough indicators of cultural alterity and lineage to become ethnocitizens. Despite the fact that these indicators—which include language, living space, gastronomy, religious beliefs, social structure, handcrafts and art, and mechanisms for conflict resolution, among others—seem to deny the relational nature of Muisca indigeneity, the evaluators still conceded registration to the Muisca of Sesquile as an indigenous group on the grounds of their spirituality.

The eight years of work that Carlos Mamanche had undertaken with his group gave it the cohesiveness needed to appear authentic and "different" enough from the mestizo majorities in Sesquile and obtain official registration as indigenous, even after the implementation of the 2005 protocol. Their strong inclination towards spirituality and indigenous medicine was fundamental to make this differentiation possible. After recognition, the members who were unhappy with their work in the plantations, or as builders and cleaners, found alternatives that allowed them to gain income based on the presentation of their indigeneity to different publics. Official registration provided them with the credentials to reach the tourism and

administrative sectors, which had been profiting from the Pre-Hispanic and colonial Muisca heritage without the participation of the local population of Sesquile. Additionally, group members were entitled to the basic rights and benefits given to indigenous people in Colombia, including health services, exemption from serving in the military, a higher chance to be accepted in public universities, and a small food supply. However, the recognition of the group in Sesquile under the 2005 protocol led to discrimination against the urban groups of Suba and Bosa, which were recognized earlier despite showing no clear evidence of cultural alterity. Today, those urban groups tend to be considered less worthy of their rights and benefits, while the group in Sesquile has become the model of contemporary Muisca indigeneity.

## THE MUISCA BRAND: NEW ASSESSMENTS AND NEW BENEFACTORS

Being attentive of changes in how indigenous people have been perceived by others through time has helped me discover that the shifting expectations of individuals and institutions regarding their indigeneity can shape not only the collective self of indigenous groups, but also members' individual selves. Depending on the political and economic circumstances, as well as on broader transnational trends, multiple actors—including state institutions, indigenous advocates, NGOs, and indigenous people—produce models of indigeneity to assess the indigenous groups that interact with them. In central Colombia, for example, what was expected from Muisca groups before their official recognition, at the moment of their recognition,

and in the present is very different. However, all Muisca groups are imagined as able to resemble those models regardless of their different histories and current circumstances. First, the Muisca were incorporated as mestizo citizens since the independence from Spanish rule (Londonio 2005; Wade 2003), remaining mestizo until the constitutional reform of 1991. After the reform, the criteria used to officially recognize an indigenous group as a holder of ethnocitizenship varied greatly depending on who was the Director of Indigenous Affairs in the Ministry of the Interior at the moment of request and on the overall institutional standpoint on multiculturalism during that particular year. Thus, while lineage and sustained land use were sufficient for the recognition of the group in Bosa at a time when Colombia was embracing a progressivist version of multiculturalism (Pineda Camacho 1997), the group from Sesquile had to subject itself to an intense assessment against a protocol for recognition, within which cultural alterity was the main indicator of indigeneity. It was the strong focus on indigenous spirituality incorporated by the leader Carlos Mamanche that counted as enough evidence of cultural alterity to grant recognition and ethnocitizenship to the members of this group, even a year after the implementation of the protocol.

In this section, I argue that the current attitude towards Muisca indigeneity has shifted from being based on the expectations of state institutions regarding their cultural alterity, into a matter of matching the expectations of several actors about what the Muisca can offer and what the actors can give in return—following an open market, neoliberal trend. I claim that the relationships between these actors and the

Muisca are mediated by a Muisca brand. But instead of being produced by the Muisca themselves as a means to label their merchandise, as in *Ethnicity Inc* (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009), this brand is an assemblage of indicators of Muisca alterity produced by the official institution that grants indigenous recognition, the academy, transnational organizations, local indigenous advocates, and even non-recognized Muisca groups. Therefore, the Muisca brand becomes an identifying badge that comprises a series of indicators of Muisca spirituality, and which is used to label Muisca groups and people as products, instead of just pointing at merchandise or services offered by them. Ultimately, the Muisca as products are consumed by a range of individuals and institutions on the basis of their interest in Muisca spirituality and on the usefulness of establishing a relationship that is beneficial to them as consumers, even if it is only partially useful to the Muisca. However, the Muisca are willing to continue trying to resemble the brand because the benefits obtained from their relationships with their consumers are a bonus in addition to the basic rights and benefits given by official recognition, and because the indicators of spirituality that are linked to the brand have in turn become markers of indigenous authenticity among Muisca groups.

This way of defining the indigenous frontier is new, as it interlinks multiple actors either as producers or as consumers of the Muisca brand, emphasizes cultural alterity over lineage and land use, and allows the Musica to engage with cultural markets beyond the limited participation allowed by the state. As a result, even some Muisca groups that have failed to obtain official recognition as indigenous have been

able to place themselves in the market of indigenous alterity by aligning themselves with the Muisca brand, sometimes even better than some of the officially recognized groups. By these means, they have been able to make short-term partnerships with state institutions, universities, and NGOs, which have invited them to participate in their projects and compete against recognized groups for opportunities. Thus, the Muisca have become movable components used by consumers to increase their chances to obtain funding for projects, fulfil obligations regarding the participation of indigenous people in public policy or as part of environmental and cultural projects, or enrich tourism experiences as guides for operators self-identified as ethnic or ecological. Also, they have become the spiritual guides needed by followers of the new age and the objects of study of researchers. In all of these interactions, while the consumers obtain what they seek when they establish a relationship with the Muisca, indigenous leaders have a much-limited capacity to ask for something specific in return, as most projects are framed on the grounds of cultural alterity and are totally disconnected from the financial, political, or social struggles of the groups.

Thinking of Muisca alterity as a form of branding (Davila 2012) has helped me understand that the Muisca collective and individual selves are shaped by many actors, even some who are only temporarily linked to Muisca groups, as well as by experiences involving conflicting beliefs and values and by recently incorporated objects and practices that are presented as recovered Muisca memories. Within these circumstances, the Muisca brand becomes a mediator that produces the footing for interaction among Muisca people and between the Muisca and the mestizo majorities,

as all of these actors recognize the brand and its indicators. On the other hand, the most frequently used analytical lenses to explore how indigenous people manage their alterity tend to point toward them as active strategists amidst the political economies of indigeneity, without really getting involved in the nuanced micro-politics of the production of their alterity.

One of those approaches is the theory of articulation, introduced by James Clifford (2001) and Tania Murray Li (2000). They build on Spivak's concept of strategic essentialism (1990) to argue that the convoluted histories of colonialism have transformed indigenous alterity into a conglomerate of heterogeneous elements, old and new, indigenous and non-indigenous. The visibility of these elements, they explain, depends on the means used by indigenous people to articulate for the non-indigenous majorities and their institutions, performing cultural alterity in order to produce articulating nodes that are beneficial to them. However, this approach does not explain, for example, why the non-indigenous actors of those articulating nodes approach indigenous people on the basis of expected indicators of indigenous alterity, even when such indicators are not noticeable prior to the articulation. During fieldwork, I observed that it was more common for non-indigenous people to approach the Muisca wanting to articulate with them than the other way around, and that those interested in Muisca alterity were usually attracted by the same aspect of it—in this case, spirituality. Also, I became aware that all of the contemporary Muisca groups try to make their spirituality visible even if their indigeneity was not defined in spiritual terms in the past, for example in the case of the Muisca of Bosa. Finally,

the theory of articulation does not consider exploring the extent to which these elements of indigenous alterity are used in purely strategic ways or are actually being incorporated as part of the collective and individual selves of group members. Among the Muisca, I have noted that the incorporation of spirituality has either reinforced group members' indigenous selves—when the incorporation is successful—or has led to members' self-doubt about their indigeneity—when the incorporation is unsuccessful because it opposes the mestizo culture still held by many members.

The following ethnographic clip can be framed either as an example of indigenous articulation or as an example of indigenous branding. It is a relationship between the Muisca group of Bosa and a local public hospital. The hospital allowed patients with minor ailments to have basic check-ups done by an indigenous leader with knowledge in spirituality and indigenous medicine, and also incorporated the indigenous group in a few projects related to mental health and nutrition. Even though this relationship appears to fit well within the framework of articulation offered by Clifford (2001), I learned from a group member that this relationship was not initiated by the Muisca, and that they had not publicized any evidence of being healers before being approached by the hospital. Instead, it seems that the hospital assumed that the Muisca of Bosa had certain "traditional" knowledge in spirituality and healing just because they were a Muisca group. In conversation with one of the practitioners in that hospital, he told me that they had reached out to the Muisca because the Ministry of Health required them to report on indigenous people's use of the hospital and on their participation in collaborative initiatives related to healthcare. He explained that

they decided to contact the Muisca because they knew that they "[…] have shamans, healers, and spiritual leaders" (Fieldnotes 8/05/2014), but he failed to recall how he came to know this, only saying that everybody in San Bernardino was aware of it. However, the Muisca of Bosa only began to reinforce and make visible their version of indigenous medicine after their initial conversation with the hospital, and even had to learn how to treat their members from healers of other groups. Finally, while some members of the Muisca group decided to be treated by indigenous healers, others continued to see western doctors, being accused by their fellow members of "negating their traditions."

After learning more about the relationship between the Muisca of Bosa and the hospital, it became unfeasible to think of it as just the result of a strategy deployed by the indigenous group to obtain benefits from the hospital. In this case, the hospital was the first to approach the Muisca group because staff members knew that the Muisca were healers, even before group members began to display indicators of alterity that could be related to healing. Moreover, the hospital had the biggest interest in the success of this relationship, as it wanted to fulfil its obligation to the Ministry of Health. On the other hand, while the Muisca benefited from the programs on mental health and nutrition, these benefits were given to them without prior consultation regarding their specific needs. Finally, while the theory of articulation frames the performance of cultural alterity as a strategy of indigenous groups oriented towards the production of articulating nodes, this case shows that incorporated alterities are not simply enacted but become sincerely (Jackson 2005) incorporated as

part of member's indigenous selves, even leading to friction towards group members who refuse to incorporate the indicators.

The type of brand that I introduce here is not an identifier of merchandise and services offered by indigenous people (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009), but a unifying, organic entity (Moore 2003) that indigenous people identify with and which serves as a mediator in their relationships with others. In these terms, the hospital in my previous example could be positioned as a connoisseur of the Muisca brand and a consumer of the Muisca, while the group in Bosa would be the product that is being endorsed by the Muisca brand and consumed by the hospital. Differing from the approach to brand proposed by Comaroff and Comaroff (2009), according to which indigenous people are the producers of their brand, I have found that the brand name "Muisca" comprises a relatively stable set of indicators of cultural alterity introduced by a conglomerate of actors who are linked to the Muisca but are not necessarily Muisca. These actors include, among others, the official recognizing body, transnational organizations, other indigenous groups, Muisca leaders, and indigenous advocates. Subsequently, knowledge about the brand and its indicators spreads among the public through different channels of communication, becoming common knowledge even within Muisca groups, which begin to actively reproduce the indicators to secure their positioning vis-à-vis potential consumers. As these indicators are incorporated into the collective self of each group, individual members are also expected to embrace them and make them part of their indigenous selves, producing frictions when some members are unable, or refuse, to reframe their

indigeneity in terms of spirituality. Finally, the brand becomes a common ground that mediates the relationships between the Muisca and their multiple consumers, including state institutions such as the hospital in my example, local NGOs and other organizations with indigenous interests, particular indigenous advocates, entrepreneurs, other Muisca groups, spiritual seekers, researchers, and even followers of the new age movement.

Despite the differences outlined already, my approach to indigenous branding builds from the work of John and Jean Comaroff in etho-prenurialism (2009) and from Elizabeth Povinelli's studies on indigenous alterity vis-à-vis neoliberal multiculturalism (2002). Ethnicity Inc (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009) is a seminal study that explores how indigenous groups have opted for selling tokens of their cultural alterity to obtain income and overall positioning in the cultural market. Despite not being dedicated to branding itself, and of looking at indigenous people as producers and not as products, this approach has familiarized me with the fact that indigenous people can play the neoliberal game of *the entrepreneur*. From there, I have developed a standpoint on branding that detaches brand production from indigenous people and instead looks at them as products that are endorsed by the brand as long as they successfully embrace some of the indicators of alterity that are part of it. By being products, indigenous groups become subject to the demand of their consumers, who engage with them as a means to fulfil their particular needs. Hence, I argue that meeting the expectations of consumers has become a second, informal form of indigenous recognition among the Muisca: a recognition that is

probably as important as their official recognition in the current neoliberal setting, but a recognition that ultimately facilitates their continued subjugation. I have observed that the brand re-directs the indigenous agenda towards spirituality and away from contesting most of the impositions that oppress them on a daily basis.

Povinelli (2002) also explores the struggle of indigenous groups to adjust to the logics of multiculturalism, focusing on how they are expected to display cultural difference to prove that they deserve special protection, but only a difference that is not in conflict with the morals and beliefs of the non-indigenous majorities. Overall, her work reminds us that, even within the apparently inclusive context of multiculturalism, ethnic and indigenous alterity continues to be regulated by those who do not hold it; and is only considered valid if it resembles their imagined, colonial views of the indigenous other. Likewise, the indicators of cultural alterity that shape the Muisca brand are not defined by the Musica themselves, but by several actors who may not be Muisca but are interested in understanding, categorizing, modelling and sometimes even obstructing the recognition of Muisca groups. Therefore, as the brand gains wider acceptance, its indicators of alterity become a dangerous generalizing criteria to assess the authenticity of all Muisca groups regardless of their different histories, agendas, and members' own understandings of their indigeneity, forcing them to hide their indigenous selves if they oppose the expectations of the brand.

Furthermore, the contemporary Muisca are caught in what Cattelino calls a *double bind* (Bateson 1972; Cattelino 2010). On the one hand, the current consumers

of Muisca alterity expect groups and their members to embrace at least some of the indicators that are part of the brand, and categorize groups and individuals who appear unable to incorporate them as inauthentic. On the other hand, the neighbors of the Muisca who have interacted with them before their self-recognition as indigenous, interpret the sudden incorporation of aspects of cultural alterity to the lives of their former mestizo neighbors as inauthentic. Cattelino explains that double binds such as this one are unsolvable, and people caught in them are usually unable to control the terms of their own representation. During fieldwork, I realized that the Muisca try, with moderate success, to navigate this double bind by presenting their indigeneity differently during encounters with their neighbors and with the consumers of the Muisca brand. For example, while the meeting with neighborhood leaders to discuss the future of the irrigation canals took place in the office of the Muisca group and was not preceded by any ceremony, a meeting with delegates of a state institution to discuss a related issue took place in the ceremonial house, and plants were used to spiritually clean the participants both before and after the actual discussion.

Anibal Quijano (2007) explains that the colonial ideology of governance that has been embedded in Latin America since the European conquest, and which he calls *the colonial matrix of power*, has ensured that those empowered by colonialism continue controlling their others by ensuring that they manage themselves for the benefit of the powerful. These means of control squeeze themselves into all aspects of daily life, reinforcing colonial imaginaries of racial and ethnic otherness via the media, education, legislation, and political discourse. The Muisca brand is yet another

example of this management of alterity. Even though current Colombian legislation allows indigenous groups to make claims to the state based on their "cultural diversity," the reality is that the groups' indigeneity continues to be regulated, assessed, and re-shaped even after official recognition (Chernela 2005; Hale 2002). Muisca groups and members are expected to meet the indicators of cultural alterity that are part of the Muisca brand as a means to engage successfully with potential consumers and to receive a benefit from them. But when those connections occur, the expected benefits tend to be related to those indicators and their protection, reproducing them even further instead of helping indigenous leaders move their other agendas forward. This especially occurs when many consumers consider Muisca spirituality to be a true sign of decoloniality, and therefore provide means to enhance it without being reflexive about the colonial imaginaries that actually shape the Muisca spiritual lifestyle. Therefore, while members of the group in Sesquile usually experience the outcomes of their relationships with consumers as beneficial, some of the oldest members of the group from Bosa told me that projects regarding spirituality were invasive of their own ways of understanding spirituality as Muisca and as "god believers," and therefore they avoid aligning with what they interpret as an unrealistic version of themselves.

## UNDERSTANDING THE MUISCA BRAND

The Muisca group of Sesquile requested official recognition as indigenous under the 2005 protocol, demonstrating cultural alterity on the grounds of spirituality.

Moreover, the Office of Indigenous Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior found the version of Muisca spirituality presented by Carlos Mamanche not only sufficient to recognize the group, but also useful as a model to facilitate the assessment of the cultural alterity of other Muisca groups. This inclination towards spirituality was emphasized even further as other Muisca groups had failed to present, or had been uninterested in presenting, other cohesive forms of cultural alterity that could be an alternative to Sesquile's spirituality. This emergence of the "spiritual savage" can be initially placed at the divide between the 1980s and the 1990s, and corresponds with the emergence of the new age movement and the increased interest of the urban middle class in primitive spirituality. Indigenous groups from the Amazonian lowlands and the Northern Sierra Nevada of Colombia also began to visibilize themselves as the guardians of nature during this period, and their spirituality was presented as a cure for the ailments brought by the urban lifestyle.

In particular, the narratives and material culture of the Kogui of the northern Sierra became widely known, and their leaders became respected and trusted by the Colombian population. When Carlos argued that the most important indicators of Muisca spirituality were held by the Kogui, and managed to produce a narrative in which the pre-Hispanic Muisca gave their knowledge to the Kogui so they could take care of it during the Spanish invasion and then return it to the Muisca, the spirituality introduced by Carlos was readily accepted by the mestizo supporters of the emerging Muisca. Having both official and popular acceptance, the spirituality of Sesquile

became a central part of Muisca culture, and soon began to be expected from other Muisca groups.

Opposing the postulates of strategic essentialism, this form of spirituality was not seen by the Muisca as just a strategic construction to gain positioning vis-à-vis their neighbors and to sell spirituality to consumers. Instead, it was understood as a forgotten aspect of their indigenous past that had to be incorporated into all Muisca groups, regardless of their different collective histories. I once heard the leaders of the group in Sesquile comment that the urbanized Muiscas of Bogota, namely the members of the groups in Bosa and Suba, should not have requested recognition in the first place as they have never truly incorporated spirituality, remaining "too mestizo" to be indigenous, even if these two groups were recognized before the group from Sesquile and on the basis of lineage and land use. Other indicators of cultural alterity such as music and dance, clothing, language, food production, and farming techniques therefore became secondary, and only valuable in terms of their connection with spirituality.

Soon after the official recognition of the group in Sesquile and the placement of spirituality at the core of Muisca cultural alterity, actors other than the recognized Muisca groups began to intervene in the production of indicators of spirituality—to the point that it grew out of the control of the group from Sesquile and instead became an independent referential entity formed by a conglomerate of indicators that I have called the Muisca brand. This fluid, adaptable, and permeable set of indicators of spirituality includes narratives, objects, spaces, food, and clothing, as well as specific

behaviors, affects, and performances. While embracing the main indicators has become a necessity for all Muisca groups, for example having a ceremonial house known as the cusmuy, having men entitled to use the ceremonial poporo, blowing powdered tobacco into members' nostrils, singing certain songs, and the use of white cotton clothing during some ceremonies, other indicators are less fixed, entering or leaving the brand depending of the perspective of the consumers of Muisca alterity. The total number of actors that have contributed to the production of the Muisca brand is uncertain, and I do not pretend to unveil them all. Instead, I will simply introduce the few producers that I became aware of during fieldwork and who incorporated some of the fixed indicators that I encountered across various groups.

Undoubtedly, the most influential producer of the Muisca brand has been the Office of Indigenous Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior, the official institution that recognized the group from Sesquile as indigenous on the basis of spirituality. As a result of the somehow unexpected success of the group from Sesquile in obtaining recognition under the 2005 protocol, their spirituality became the foundation of a Muisca brand to which other tangible indicators of indigenous spirituality have been linked through time. Two of those tangible indicators were also part of Sesquile's spiritual package presented to the Ministry, and were used to demonstrate the comprehensive incorporation of spirituality among members of the group. These indicators are the cusmuy and the poporo. With the passing of time, the presence of a cusmuy and poporos in Muisca groups has become compulsory, and their absence is perceived as evidence of inauthenticity even among groups that were officially

recognized before the group from Sesquile. I will explore how the incorporation of these two indicators is negotiated by members of the groups from Bosa and Sesquile in Chapters Three and Four of this dissertation.

Another producer of the Muisca brand is the academy. Anthropologists, sociologists, and historians have published material on the pre-Hispanic Muisca that has been used by contemporary Muisca groups as a guide to build up a credible Muisca spirituality. For example, publications regarding archaeological findings of textiles that show white cotton as the most common fabric used by the Muisca have encouraged the contemporary Muisca to wear white cotton shirts during certain ceremonies, linking white clothing with spirituality by arguing that white represents the willingness to be spiritually purified. Also, contemporary Muisca groups have begun to incorporate the geometric and anthropomorphic figures found in the rock art of the region, and which have been documented by anthropologists, as symbols of their spiritual relationship with the landscape—even if the publications make no reference to the semiotics of the rock art. But probably the most unusual participation of a non-Muisca author as producer of the Muisca brand is that of a Colombo-French woman who self-identifies as a doctor of linguistics and claims to have been able to decipher the spiritual mysteries behind the Muisca language, as well as the correct way of writing Muisca sounds. Despite the scarce documentation from Spanish records about the Muisca language, this researcher has presented a new way of writing the currently accepted word "Muisca," and has attached an esoteric meaning to her proposed spelling. The spelling proposed is *Mhuysqa*, and its esoteric meaning

is “the heirs of the men of MU,” or the first men on earth, according to her (Escribano 2005). This alternative to the Spanish form “Muisca” was first incorporated by some non-recognized groups, then by the Muisca of Sesquile, and more recently by the group of Bosa. Nowadays, these groups’ letterhead paper and logos read “Mhuysqa,” as a statement to indicate that they are willing to decolonize themselves and embrace spirituality, while groups self-named “Muisca” are seen as reluctant to overcome mestizaje. By these means, Mhuysqa became the actual identifier of the brand, as well as an indicator of the spiritual emphasis each Muisca group.

Indigenous advocates and NGOs, both local and transnational, have also become indirect producers of the Musica brand because their imaginaries of indigenous alterity have become part of the common knowledge of local populations regarding indigenous people. Most of these organizations have a discourse on indigeneity that intertwines ecology, spirituality, and healing, producing a somehow holistic model that they expect to see in the indigenous groups they protect. A similar holistic attitude has been incorporated by the Muisca of Chia, Cota, and Sesquile; the urban groups in Bosa and Suba are still struggling to engage with the ecological aspects as a result of the transformation of the lands they inhabit into urban slums. However, they still try to do so because it seems that spirituality and ecology have become inseparable, and not having a clearly ecological approach could make their spirituality look suspicious. In all of these cases, spirituality is presented as the guiding force that connects Muisca people and their living landscape, and Muisca leaders emphasize the need to gain spiritual awareness so as to be able to

communicate with the ancestors, whose spirits inhabit such a landscape. Finally, during fieldwork I learned that non-recognized Muisca groups have become influential enough to transfer aspects of their version of Muisca spirituality to the Muisca brand and, from there, to the recognized Muisca groups that usually dispute their indigeneity. Songs, musical instruments, the use of certain plants during ceremonies, and even mythical narratives and explanations regarding the spirituality of rock art, features of the landscape, and even parts of the body have become indicators that are expected by the consumers of the Muisca brand and are incorporated, at least to some degree, into the spirituality of the recognized groups.

This bundle of indicators, held together by a fluid notion of spirituality and by the name "Mhuysqa," are what I have called in this chapter the Muisca brand. By aligning with this brand, the Muisca have allowed themselves to be submitted to a constant, indirect assessment of their indigenous selves and to an indirect regulation of the scope of their agendas, as they have to frame their demands in terms of spirituality to establish relationships with potential consumers—usually on the expectation that such relationships might provide a financial benefit, the opportunity to participate in a project, or better positioning. By these means, Muisca groups and Muisca people have become products endorsed by the Muisca brand as long as they embrace its indicators, resembling a procedure of quality control. At the same time, the consumers of Muisca indigeneity expect to find the indicators contained in the brand within the real Muisca groups and people they interact with, as what they need is precisely a tacitly authenticated cultural alterity. While some consumers might need

the Muisca to fulfil an official requirement to involve indigenous people in a project, others might want to start a project and have the Muisca as their selling façade, and others might want to have a personal, spiritual experience.

Some of the consumers of the Muisca brand that I encountered during fieldwork with the groups in Bosa and Sesquile were state institutions such as the Office of Social Action of the Mayor of Bogota, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of the Environment, and the Environmental Autonomous Corporation. All of these institutions approached the Muisca because they had cultural and environmental projects that required indigenous participation, and reached out to the Muisca because they knew of their spiritual and ecological orientation. I also met delegates of a pair of non-profit organizations that had received funding to organize workshops among the Muisca on the topics of ethnobiology and sustainable farming. A member of a group of new agers interested in the decolonization of Muisca indigeneity reached out to the Musica of Bosa to offer herself as a volunteer teacher of Muisca language. An entrepreneur convinced the Muisca in Sesquile to let him use the Muisca name and pictures of the group for his project of quinoa farming, arguing that he grows his plants according to Muisca tradition. Another entrepreneur met the governor of the Muisca of Bosa and told her that she would buy several looms for the group if they start a business weaving hammocks with Muisca spiritual motifs. Finally, the group in Sesquile is frequently visited by individuals interested in participating in Muisca ceremonies and in being spiritually cleaned in the cusmuy, giving gifts to the group in return and sometimes even paying them small amounts of money.

As explained above, while the theory of articulation envisions the performance of cultural alterity by indigenous people as a strategy to facilitate the formation of beneficial articulations, the Muisca have embraced Carlos Mamanche's spirituality as a factual element of the Muisca past that was recovered by Carlos to become the core of the alterity of the contemporary Muisca. Therefore, while the actual relationships between the Musica and their consumers are temporal, the incorporation of spirituality is supposed to be permanent, both at the collective and individual levels. But even when most members of the group from Sesquile embraced spirituality, as it was a requirement to join the group, they have become self-conscious and suspicious of their own actions, trying to embody the brand to perfection. On the other hand, members of the group from Bosa find themselves at a crossroads between a spirituality that their ancestors were supposed to have but that they fail to remember, and the mestizo Catholic religion they are comfortable with but which is incompatible with the incorporated spirituality. Undoubtedly, this project of homogenization around spirituality has ignored the internal divisions, collective histories, and current living conditions of the various Muisca groups, producing Muisca collectives that can be kept under control at the expense of scarring, blurring, re-shaping, and fracturing members' indigenous selves.

## CONCLUSIONS

De la Cadena and Orin (2007) have emphasised the importance of historicizing definitions of indigeneity as they shape indigenous groups and their members through time, instead of focusing only on the ethnographic present.

Following their recommendation, I have reviewed the three main shifts in the official treatment of indigeneity in Colombia, exposing how the colonial matrix of power (Quijano 2007) has intervened in the production of policies that impose a limitation on indigenous peoples' capacity to act and a re-shaping of their indigenous selves according to colonial expectations. Ultimately, past experiences of being framed as mestizo or indigenous, or of framing oneself as one or the other, are not simply erased and replaced once a change in indigenous policy takes place. Instead, they are retrospectively assessed, adapted, and re-incorporated by indigenous people as part of their struggle to build a coherent sense of self amidst the fluctuating expectations of their "others."

In this chapter I have explored the impact that the transitions from mestizo assimilationism to multiculturalism, and from there to indigenous branding, have had on the formation of Muisca indigeneities in the town of Sesquile and the neighborhood of Bosa, in the city of Bogota. By becoming aware of these transitions, I have been able to understand that seemingly conflicting characteristics of contemporary Muisca indigeneity still remain in place, as they are the result of the superposition of brand-oriented indicators of Muisca indigeneity over earlier indicators that Muisca people had integrated to their lives for several years. Moreover, I have understood how these shifts have intensified Muisca member's self-doubts regarding their positioning as indigenous and their reluctance to talk about what makes them indigenous, or their indigenous alterity, despite being officially recognized. My argument is that the self-doubts experienced by members regarding

their authenticity as Muisca, and their moments of self-consciousness when performing their indigeneity, are the result of the coalescence of three conflicting sets of indicators of Muisca alterity that the Muisca have had to comply with at different moments of their history as Muisca groups, traces of which they continue to carry as collective and individual memories and affects.

Since independence, and until the constitutional reform of 1991, the Muisca were forcefully incorporated into a mestizo overarching identity known as "Colombianidad." During this period of more than 150 years, the Muisca were declared extinct, and those holding Muisca surnames and living in territories that were inhabited by the Muisca had to adhere to their new categorization as mestizo to ensure that they were treated by state institutions as conventional citizens and not as incapable minors, like the indigenous people from the lowlands. A few Muisca practices, including the consumption of a fermented beverage known as chicha, the incorporation of some Muisca words into Colombian Spanish, and the use of certain herbs as alternative remedies, became integrated into the Colombian mestizo culture and therefore lost their exclusivity to the Muisca. Furthermore, other indicators of Muisca cultural alterity were systematically replaced by a generalizing mestizo framework, and the word "indio" became derogatory to the point of being perceived as a serious offense. This form of assimilationism (Hale 2002; Sieder 2002) was utilized as a means to facilitate overall governance and the production of a national identity, ensuring both the continued domination of ethnic difference via its

invisibilization and the re-framing of their struggle as class-based, following the legacy of European colonialism.

However, the early extermination of the Muisca indigenous afiliation did not prevent the reconstruction of Muisca indigenous groups at the end of the twentieth century. As multiculturalism (Kymlicka 1995) became the pillar of the constitutional reform of 1991, thereby acknowledging the ethnic and cultural diversity of the inhabitants of Colombia, some of the descendants of the Muisca reorganized as indigenous groups and requested official recognition. Despite how unexpected the re-appearance of Muisca groups could have been to the institution in charge of recognition and to the mestizo majorities in the region, five Muisca groups obtained official recognition under the premise that it would facilitate the protection of what the legislators called "cultural diversity." After more than a century of struggle as mestizo poor, exacerbated by internal displacement and violence, the holders of Muisca surnames reorganized as indigenous and became ethnocitizens, overcoming the invisibilization and abandonment to which they were subjected when their needs were managed only in terms of class.

But the outcomes of official recognition were not completely favorable to indigenous groups such as the Muisca. Under the contemporary, neoliberal form of multiculturalism prevalent in Colombia, the subjugation of indigenous alterity to mestizo normalcy has continued under the premise that alterity must be assessed to ensure its protection. To be protected, an indigenous group has to request and obtain recognition from a state institution that assesses indigeneity under more or less

arbitrary criteria as determined by its director and team of experts, which is aligned with the general agenda of governance at the time of the request. On the other hand, the governance of those who remain mestizos, or have embraced their indigeneity but were unsuccessful at joining a "culturally diverse" group, continues to take place in terms of class and on the basis of an entrepreneurial approach that depicts them as guilty of their own poverty for being unable to prosper within a system of free market. Therefore, while the state regains control of the alterities of its population by producing the criteria that makes them deserving of recognition and narrowing down their agentic capacities to aspects related to that criteria, it detaches from the obligation to improve the living conditions of the majority of the mestizo poor, now depicted as free to thrive in, or succumb to, the market.

As the Muisca in Suba and Bosa became aware of the shift towards multiculturalism brought by the constitutional reform, and of the fact that their recognition would depend on a decision of the Director of Indigenous Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior, who at the time was an indigenous leader, they promptly requested recognition. The criteria used by the Ministry to assess the indigeneity of the Muisca in these cases was based on lineage and land use, despite the fact that the rationale behind recognition was the protection of a deemed cultural alterity. In the decree that certifies the recognition of the group from Bosa, for example, the director explained that although the group's evidence of cultural alterity was scarce, this was understandable because of the assimilationist agenda they had been subjected to for more than a century. However, this accepting approach shifted rapidly as the number

of newly forming urban and semi-urban indigenous groups continued to grow and their leaders began to request official recognition—something that the Ministry perceived as a threat. Thus, a new director was designated for the Office of Indigenous Affairs and a much more demanding protocol for the assessment of cultural alterity was introduced in the year 2005. By then, only the groups in Bosa and Suba had been recognized, and the new director expected not to recognize another Muisca group. However, the leader of a semi-urban group from one of the towns that surround the city of Bogota requested recognition and presented a robust enough case to be successful under the new protocol.

Despite the fact that the 2005 protocol was created as a measure to reinforce the boundary between those deserving special protection on the grounds of alterity and the mestizo majorities, this boundary was traversed by the Muisca group from Sesquile, a region considered fully mestiza. Thanks to the emphasis on spirituality introduced by its leader, who infused all Muisca collective encounters with spiritual practices, narratives, and sensorial experiences, the group met the criteria to be recognized as indigenous according to the protocol. From this moment onwards, the Muisca group from Sesquile became the model of Muisca indigeneity, to the point that the two groups recognized earlier began to be seen as suspicious for not having a similar form of spirituality. Thus, a shift in policy that took place at the institutional level impacted not only the indigenous groups requesting recognition after the shift took place, but also those which had already been recognized. The visibilization of the group in Sesquile as the authentic holder of indicators of Muisca alterity led to

frictions among the Muisca groups regarding the sufficiency of each other's indicators, and to expectations among the mestizo majorities regarding their similarities and differences with Muisca people. As a result of these frictions, the Muisca groups became isolated collective units under the constant assessment of other Muisca groups, their mestizo neighbors, and even their advocates and enthusiasts—becoming subjected to an indirect, all-encompassing control of alterity that is part of the colonial matrix of power.

Lastly, the decision to officially recognize the Muisca group from Sesquile on the grounds of spirituality, and the imaginaries that began to crystalize as the expectations of mestizo people regarding Muisca spirituality became exteriorized, formed the corpus of Muisca alterity that later became the Muisca brand. This brand consists of an assemblage of indicators of spirituality produced by the Ministry of the Interior, the academy, transnational organizations, local indigenous advocates, and even non-recognized Muisca groups, stitched together under the brand name "Muisca," or more recently "Mhuysqa." While this brand became an identifying badge to attract potential consumers to Muisca alterity, having indicators of spirituality such as a cusmuy or poporos became a means to re-assure a group's authenticity beyond official recognition and vis-à-vis other groups, as having them became proof of a direct connection with the Muisca ancestors. Therefore, the incorporation of indicators of the Muisca brand into Muisca groups became much more than a means to enact alterity for strategic reasons (Clifford 2001; Murray Li 2002; Spivak 2003). Instead, those indicators have been truly incorporated into the

groups and are supposed to be embraced by group members, as the notion that the Muisca have been spiritual healers since the pre-Hispanic period became generalized even among the Muisca themselves. Therefore, self-doubt arises when, for example, members of the group in Bosa become exposed to Muisca spirituality and find it incompatible with their mestizo beliefs, or when members from Sesquile find themselves doing something that appears to be incompatible with Muisca spirituality.

As the transitions from mestizo assimilationism to indigenous protection, and from protection to branding, took place within a short period of time, the members who have experienced this re-shaping of their indigenous selves have produced versions of themselves that combine elements of the three periods. Despite appearing contradictory and inauthentic to outsiders, these amalgamations are embraced by Muisca people as their sincere Indigenous-selves (Jackson 2005). Knowing this, I have decided to move beyond the analyses of most scholars of decoloniality, who tend to focus on the political economies of indigeneity while occluding attention to its affective, embodied aspects (Middleton and Shneiderman 2008). Instead, I will dedicate the rest of this dissertation to exploring how these sincere indigeneities unfold and the struggle of the Muisca to avoid exposing their differences vis-à-vis the Muisca brand when in the presence of potential evaluators or consumers, including myself.

# CHAPTER 2 - "I ACTUALLY DO NOT KNOW IF I AM MUISCA OR NOT": FINDING YOURSELF WITHIN THE BRAND AS A MATTER OF SINCERITY

## INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism is officially presented as beneficial to sectors of the population that have been historically marginalized because of their cultural differences (Kymlicka 1995; Parekh 2001). Using this assumption, emerging multicultural policies depict cultural difference as something that should be protected by the state and appreciated as an asset for the country. In Colombia, most indigenous leaders believe that their own mobilization and political action was one of the main motivations for the constitutional reform of 1991, which introduced multiculturalism after centuries of ethnic invisibilization (Rojas Birry 1990). This sense of victory was rooted in the illusion that being indigenous could finally become a source of political positioning, financial aid, and overall respect. However, multicultural policies are also planned incorporations of the Colombian state as part of its plan of governance, introduced as a means to manage cultural alterity (Ahmed 2012; Bocarejo 2011; Hale 2002). By having direct control over "diversity" claims, the state has been able to perpetuate coloniality (Quijano 2000), managing the ethnic other according to the needs of the neoliberal state (Hale 2005; Niezen 2009).

The Colombian case provides a clear example of how the politics of recognition are molded according to the needs of neoliberalism. In the first decade after the implementation of the constitutional reform, indigenous people were recognized as per the discretion of the Director of Ethnic Affairs of the Ministry of the Interior. This recognition was usually granted on the basis of lineage, residence, and cohesiveness, not through a systematic assessment of cultural alterity. After 2005, however, the Ministry aligned with the transnational depiction of indigenous people: worthy of protection because of their ways of life that resemble the model of the noble savage (Blainey 1988; Conklin and Graham 1995; Pieck 2006). Under this schema, a requirement to demonstrate cultural alterity was introduced in the form of a protocol. This protocolization led to the production of branded forms of indigeneity that became the baseline for determining the authenticity of similar groups. By these means, the Colombian state found a safe way to demonstrate its commitment to emerging international policies on indigenous rights without risking its own interest in keeping indigenous people under control, both politically and financially (Bocarejo 2011). Therefore, the benefits and support given to indigenous groups began to be directed towards the consolidation of a branded version of them. For example, funding became more likely to be provided for projects regarding sustainable agriculture, well-being, and ritual music and dance, than for projects related to the improvement of living spaces, education, and healthcare (Padilla 1996).

As the protocol to grant indigenous recognition complicated the requesting process, several groups stopped pursuing recognition because they were unable to

resemble the branded version of their group. Moreover, when a group managed to gain recognition through the protocol, groups that were recognized earlier are expected to hold similar indicators of "diversity." In these cases, the previously recognized groups tend to become suspicious because their correspondence with the brand, embodied by the more recently recognized group, is partial. To avoid being accused of inauthenticity, the groups try to incorporate the new elements of cultural alterity, generating tensions at the collective and subject levels, as they try to fulfil the expectations that people have of them (Bigenho 2002; Hodgson 2011; Lawrence 2004).

In the specific case of the Muisca of Bogota, the model used as the baseline for recognition and which ultimately became the Muisca brand was produced by non-indigenous personnel from the Ministry of the Interior. They assembled essentialist indicators of indigenous culture, producing a model of the Muisca that reinforces the transnational image of a spiritual, ecological savage (Gomez Montanez 2009; Ulloa 2004). Such indicators were borrowed from recognized and non-recognized Muisca groups, primarily from the Muisca group in Sesquile—but also from academic publications (Rubio 2004; Londono 2005), mass media, and even other well-known indigenous groups that have become the emblems of Colombian indigenous people. These imaginaries of Muisca indigeneity are easily accessible to the public via the Internet, the new age movement, State offices, and even members of the Muisca groups themselves, thereby creating expectations for the Muiscas' appearance and behavior. When such expectations are unmet, the Muisca group or member is seen as

inauthentic, instrumentalist, and a usurper of the rights and benefits provided by the state.

The Sesquile group's spiritual approach to indigeneity became the baseline for the Muisca brand, as the group gained recognition one year after the protocol was introduced by the Ministry of the Interior. This subsequently persuaded other groups to prioritize the incorporation of spirituality over any other agenda. However, the success of such incorporations at the level of particular members is variable, because they have to negotiate between their particular life histories as Muisca, on the one hand, and the Muisca brand and the needs of their groups, on the other (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Hale 2005; Ramos 2000). This form of management of the indigenous self, which Maldonado Torres has conceptualized as *the coloniality of being* (2007), has become normalized, operating in direct and indirect forms. Directly, it was introduced at the level of the state with the reproduction of the transnational model of the spiritual and ecological indigenous person, while indirectly, it has been reinforced by educators, the mass media, indigenous advocates, followers, and indigenous people themselves (Conklin 1995, 1997; Graham 2005). Under these circumstances, members of the Muisca groups are constantly reflecting on their indigeneity, even doubting their indigenous-selves as they fail—or refuse—to fully embrace elements of the Muisca brand (Igoe 2006; Povinelli 1998).

Exploring this ongoing, introspective reformulation of the indigenous-self requires anthropological frameworks that value informal encounters and shared experiences as intersubjective alternatives to grasp the nuances of Muisca subject

formation, because members tend to avoid exposing their own indigeneities in an effort to protect the positioning of their groups vis-à-vis the brand (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Therefore, a departure from objectivity and detachment, formal questioning and thingification in the name of subjective knowledge becomes necessary (Jackson 2005). Once dialogue and shared experiences become the major sources of ethnographic data, it is possible to grasp the subtle manifestations of sincerity that help us advance our understanding of the indigenous person—even if that understanding has been undervalued by the anthropological traditions based on knowledge production (Mignolo 2011; Smith 1999). As already explained, opportunities to better understand indigenous self-formation can emerge, as in Jackson's *Real Black*, via extended dialogue between the ethnographer and informant, but also as a result of shared experiences and sensorially rich encounters that facilitate a transition from participant-observation to participant-sensation (Classen 1997; Howes 2010; Ingold 2000). This sensory, affective option will be further explored in Chapters Three and Four.

This chapter exposes the struggle of members of the Muisca groups from Bosa and Sesquile to produce a comfortable indigenous-self while attempting to meet the expectations of the Muisca brand. In the first section, I explore two situations in which the coloniality of being, in the form of the Muisca brand, is unintendedly enforced by non-indigenous enthusiasts of Muisca indigeneity as their disappointment is publically exposed when members of the groups do not meet their high expectations. In the second section, I explore how the Muisca brand in the group from

Sesquile is rooted in a set of collective memories based on the deification and memorialization (Weedon and Jordan 2012) of their spiritual leader. While this helped the group secure its positioning as the most authentic, it is troubling to the members' indigenous selves, as their fluidity is discouraged and replaced by fixation. To explore this phenomenon, I focus on moments of sincerity unveiled via communal interactions. In the third section, I engage with how the brand is incorporated into the Bosa group as a set of collective memories that are actively taught in the classroom under the assumption that they are just being remembered—while cultural aspects that were shared at the time of government recognition but are incompatible with the brand are discouraged and forgotten. Here I grasp moments of sincerity via dialogue with group members regarding the practice of learning and forgetting memories (Ricoeur 2004).

## MEETING OUTSIDERS' EXPECTATIONS

Multicultural states perpetuate coloniality by disciplining ethnic difference in the name of protecting it (Gunew 2004; Hale 2002). As protection requires official recognition, the institutional protocols used to assess indigeneity compel the colonized others to portray themselves in a way that is safe and advantageous for governance. For instance, when indigenous groups reinforce their cultural difference to meet the requirements for official recognition, they unintendedly reproduce a branded version of themselves that unifies their differences, thereby allowing their

own objectification and commoditization (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Graham 2005). As the brand becomes known to the public, people interested in indigeneity continue to expand its scope, producing their own versions of it and having their own expectations when encountering members of the branded indigenous group. This constant process of authentication, which resembles the quality control of a saleable good, takes place even among advocates of indigenous people, funding agencies, academics, and members of the indigenous groups under authentication. The mutability of the brand, capable of shifting according to the needs of the neoliberal state and of incorporating the expectations of different people and organizations, leaves indigenous leaders with the task of defining how much of the brand can be safely reproduced by their group. But, as it is impossible to resemble a brand that has a fixed core but constantly shifting branches, the groups always end up being criticised by individuals whose expectations are different from what the group can offer (Hale 2002; Ramos 1994). In this context, accusations against indigenous groups of being fake, too passive, westernized, and/or instrumentalist are common, as are demands that they embrace their indigeneity, overcome mestizaje, and even "decolonize" themselves.

I was particularly stunned by how the term "decoloniality" has been transferred to non-academic conversations about contemporary indigeneities in Colombia. During fieldwork, I was told by non-Muisca enthusiasts that the Muisca should decolonize themselves because they are still bounded by western ways of thinking and that they have to "go back to before the Spanish invasion" and

reconstruct their indigeneity from there. However, people also assume that the branded version of the Muisca, which is in part a product of the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo and Escobar 2013), is a truthful depiction of pre-Hispanic Muisca culture, and therefore they expect all Muisca people to resemble that model. As a result, those interested in indigenous matters are unintendedly coercing indigenous people to deny their past of marginalization and extermination to instead present themselves primarily as noble savages who have somehow freed themselves from the scars of centuries of colonial domination. On the other hand, any indication of struggle to embrace the model because of its incompatibility with the group's collective history of mestizaje is seen as evidence of inauthenticity and an inability to decolonize themselves. This paradoxical understanding of decoloniality has facilitated the reproduction of the coloniality of being even by Muisca followers, who now assess indigenous authenticity on the terms of multicultural neoliberalism.

In the specific case of the Muisca, the group from Sesquile managed to gain recognition after the Ministry of the Interior produced an updated protocol of indigenous recognition that demanded stronger evidence of cultural alterity. The emphasis on spirituality and traditional medicine that the leader of this group, Carlos Mamanche, presented as the landmark of Muisca culture was sufficient to grant them recognition, thereby placing spirituality at the centre of the Muisca brand. Soon after, the Muisca groups that were recognized before Sesquile, including the group from Bosa, began to incorporate spirituality and other indicators of alterity, such as music, language, clothing, and the production of handicrafts, hoping that their authenticity

would remain unquestioned. At the same time, the leaders of non-recognized Muisca groups began to publicize their own spirituality, in the hope of gaining recognition, but also mostly trying to make partnerships with people and organizations interested in the protection of indigenous cultures on the basis of spirituality.

During fieldwork in Bosa, I encountered various situations that revealed the imposition of the Muisca brand upon the members of the indigenous group. In one example, a non-indigenous volunteer with interest in helping the Muisca judged a group of members based on her own understanding of Muisca indigeneity, which followed the widely accepted Muisca brand.

That Wednesday afternoon I arrived at the office of the Muisca group in Bosa during one of their workshops on "Muisca culture." Jeimmy, a high school social sciences teacher and enthusiast of indigenous revitalization—but not a member of the Muisca group—was playing a recording about the myth of the Muisca god Chiminigagua. Her audience was around twenty women, some of them with small children. They all had a piece of paper and some colored pencils, and some of them were drawing. The majority, however, were just sitting there, appearing uninterested. Some were looking at each other's drawings, while others were talking to each other or trying to keep the children quiet. Jeimmy was struggling to make them draw a scene from the myth. From time to time she stopped the recording, explained a key part of the story and gave ideas about how to draw the scene. When the recording ended, she told the women that their homework was to complete the drawing, and

reminded them that there was no language class the following Wednesday. As she finished, I approached her. Then she told me:

> I really do not know how to bring these people closer to their indigeneity. I have told them how sad it makes me to see them so passive here in class um, they do not like to talk about the myths, they say they do not understand what I explain about language, and they prefer to go to the Catholic Church or to watch soap operas than, you know, appropriate what is truly Muisca. I actually embrace my Muisca roots more than they do [opening her arms so that I could see her outfit], and I am far more mestiza. This is just so, so sad. (Fieldnotes 12/07/2014)

Jeimmy was wearing a long white cotton skirt, a white cotton shirt, and several woven bead bracelets with designs associated with indigenous groups from Colombia: rhomboidal patterns, a hummingbird, and an eclipse. As we talked, she walked towards the stairs wearing her knapsack of woven unprocessed wool, an item used by both indigenous people and some university students and young professionals interested in embracing their indigenous roots. As Jeimmy reached the base of the stairs, she came across Mrs Eliza, an elderly member who had participated in the workshop. Jeimmy asked her if she had enjoyed learning about her gods, to which Eliza simply smiled and moved away. I could not avoid noticing her necklace with a double image of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary.

Jeimmy was convinced that Muisca women, who are branded as highly spiritual, would appreciate the information about the Muisca gods that she introduced in her class. Probably, she expected to have a profound conversation about the gods, or at least meet with genuine interest. She was also expecting the women to display the clothing and adornments that had become elements of the Muisca brand because the leaders in Sesquile and of the non-recognized Muisca groups wear them, or simply because they are universal tokens of indigeneity (Forte 2010). Instead, the lack of motivation and generalized confusion of the women disappointed Jeimmy. She accused them of not appreciating their own culture. The women looked embarrassed as they left the classroom and carried that embarrassment with them, to the point that Mrs Eliza did nothing but smile nervously when her indigeneity was confronted by a non-member.

Months later in Sesquile, I witnessed how the correlation between the Muisca brand and transnational trends about environmentalism and traditional knowledge can attract consumers, but can also lead to accusations of a lack of cohesiveness when members' indigeneity is assessed vis-à-vis the brand by those who approach them to learn about Muisca spirituality. Pablo, one of the leaders of the group from Sesquile, was contacted by the instructor of an independent course on sustainability to organize a hike from the center of the town of Sesquile to the Guatavita Lake. All of the students were holders of degrees at the university level and were interested in "alternative lifestyles," loosely resembling followers of the New Age movement. The

purpose of the hike was to learn about the Muisca way of life as an alternative to consumerism.

We walked from the center of the town of Sesquile to Guatavita Lake, a long journey through the mountains that took almost eight hours. We stopped twice to listen to Pablo's speeches about the Muisca and their spiritual relationship with the land. In addition to his regular knapsack, woven bead bracelet, and poporo (a ceremonial object I will focus on in Chapter Four), Pablo was wearing a white cotton shirt, white pants, and a small woven hat that I had only seen him wearing on two ceremonial occasions. He was definitely trying to present himself as a token of the Muisca brand. Before starting, Pablo told the hikers that they should not eat anything until arriving at the lake, because the walk was also a spiritual journey and they were going to receive "medicine" from him. By receiving medicine, he meant that he was going to blow powdered tobacco leaves inside of their nostrils to help them open their minds to the Muisca way of life. When we arrived at the lake eight hours later, we went to the gift shop to buy liquids and eat our lunch. It was almost four in the afternoon and the sun had been strong during the day. I remember being so thirsty that I ran towards the shop, grabbed a small bottle of coke and began drinking it immediately. There were only coke and water available, and I was so thirsty I just wanted to feel relieved.

A couple of hours later I was on my way back to Bogota accompanied by two of the students: one a civil engineer, and the other a social worker. We were talking about the hiking experience when one of them commented:

> There is something I really do not understand about this guy [Pablo]. He forced me to take that powder even if I did not want to, he acted as if he were a shaman, I do not know, like he is above us, right? He talked on and on about indigenous spirituality, being conscious about the earth, all of that. But as soon as we arrived at the shop he just grabbed a coke. A coke! Right there, in front of us. How can a Muisca leader do that! I told him that he needed a bit of consistency (laughter). I hope he got it. (Fieldnotes 22/04/2015)

In this case, Pablo is presenting himself as a leader of the Muisca group that holds the title of most authentic. He made his indigeneity visible using ceremonial pieces of clothing in a context that is not ceremonial, and actually transformed a hiking experience into a spiritual endeavour. I remember that we stopped twice for him to blow tobacco powder inside the nostrils of the participants, and that some of them told him that they did not want to try it. Pablo replied that if they asked him to show them the Muisca worldview but now do not want to follow his leadership, it means that they have no real interest in Muisca spirituality. After that, he blew into their nostrils. However, this controlled performance of Muisca spirituality turned into a disappointment, as students who approached the Muisca to explore alternatives to consumerism found out that its leader drinks Coca-Cola—a product that has become the prototypical symbol of Western consumerism. To the student, drinking coke makes Pablo's indigeneity inconsistent and inauthentic, as assessed against her own ideal of the Muisca brand. I am unaware of Pablo's reaction to the student's reproach, but he surely realized that being the leader of a group that is deemed authentic obliges

him to be constantly self-conscious and to control his public actions to fulfil expectations beyond those of just his group and of his own Muisca-self.

Predicting people's expectations becomes an unmanageable task for the Muisca, due to the permeability of the brand. For example, the teacher Jeimmy might think that the Pre-Hispanic Muisca gods are fundamental to Muisca spirituality, while a leader of the Muisca group in Bosa might understand spirituality as a contemporary bonding with the Muisca ancestors. Similarly, the students of the course on sustainability might think that Muisca culture implies rejecting products that are icons of the West, even though the Muisca from Sesquile have no problem with, for example, drinking Coca-Cola instead of water. The brand's permeability allows its consumers to build their expectations of the Muisca according to their own agendas and positionings. As a result, the Muisca feel dissatisfaction with their indigenous selves, and either try to cover what they see as their flaws, or try to present themselves as members of a Muisca community but not as Muisca subjects, grounding their indigeneity in their group membership more than in their indigenous selves for fear of being seen as faulty tokens of alterity. On the other hand, matching the brand becomes a priority at the group level, not only because they have to validate their recognition using evidence of their cultural alterity, but mostly because the brand has transformed them into objects of consumption that have to meet the expectations of their consumers. Ultimately, it is this imposed, ahistorical construction of sameness (Bayart 2006; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Niezen 2009) that legitimizes Muisca groups as worthy of different treatment by the state and the rest of the population—

not their bonding as a community, their attachment to the land, or their history of marginalization (Gros 2000). These sincerities (Jackson 2005) are invisibilized to avoid incompatibilities with the brand.

## SESQUILE: LIVING AS TOKENS OF THE BRAND

The group in Sesquile provides a model of Muisca indigeneity that is attractive to the state. Opposing the urban groups in Suba and Bosa, whose focus is on social and political action, Sesquile emphasises cultural revitalization and spirituality. As the leaders of the group from Sesquile have shown less interest in contesting state policies than their counterparts in Bogota, state institutions frequently approach them to undertake various projects with a spiritual, ecological emphasis. Alongside official institutions, private non-profit and for profit organizations and individuals visit the group regularly and offer funding for projects on themes that are of their own interest. By this means, the group has achieved the objective proposed by Carlos Mamanche after his return from the Amazon: to organize a Muisca group in Sesquile that provides community support and offers occupational alternatives to exploitative work in the flower plantations of the town.

Carlos learned about medicinal plants from indigenous groups in the Amazon and Putumayo regions, and reinforced his knowledge with some spiritual elements from the Kogui of northern Colombia. It was his ability to heal both physical and emotional pain that encouraged his neighbours in Sesquile to join his group before its

official recognition in 2006. Most of them had been inhabitants of the town for several generations, and many have Muisca surnames. However, having a Musica surname is not enough to become a member of the Muisca group in Sesquile. In addition, members must show interest in Muisca spirituality and must believe in Carlos' ability to heal. Registration was denied to those who did not attend gatherings in the ceremonial house, even if they held surnames and land rights, while a few registered members do not have a Muisca surname but have participated in the gatherings and projects of the group for several years, demonstrating trustworthiness and commitment.

The success of the group in Sesquile to obtain official recognition under the 2005 protocol positioned their form of spirituality as the core of Muisca culture. As a result, other Muisca groups, both recognized and non-recognized, also began to prioritize spirituality. Some leaders became the direct apprentices of Carlos, while others learned from indirect sources. Ultimately, each group embraced a particular version of Muisca spirituality that at least partially resembles that of the Sesquile group, and adapted it to their own particular needs and beliefs. However, Carlos' long-term project of cultural revitalization and mentorship ended abruptly when he was found dead near his house in 2007, only a year after the recognition of the group and the establishment of spirituality as the center of the Muisca brand. It was a violent death: his head was pierced with an awl used for leather stitching. His closest friends told me that the killer pierced his brain to ensure that he could not establish contact with his ancestors.

After this event, the group in Sesquile reached a critical moment. The remaining leaders were unable to inspire the members to continue participating in weekend meetings, and the healing abilities of Carlos' pupils were brought into question. Some of the organizations and individuals who provided support to the group stopped doing so and the leaders of other Muisca groups interrupted their visits, arguing that they had nothing more to learn. With the death of Carlos, the Muisca group in Sesquile had not only lost their leader, but the embodied soul of the Muisca brand. The remaining leaders knew that if they were to continue developing Muisca spirituality beyond what Carlos had taught, the validity of their incorporations would be challenged by other leaders. This situation could ultimately jeopardize the positioning of the group as authentic, opening doors to further questioning of the legitimacy of Muisca spirituality. To avoid this outcome, the remaining leaders of the group decided to replicate the work of Carlos Mamanche, avoiding any further changes to it. By these means, they built up a form of collective memory (Halbwachs 1992) that, instead of evoking a pre-Hispanic or mythical past, deifies and evokes the figure of Carlos Mamanche and his approach to spirituality, as a form of mythopoiesis (Rowley 2002).

Collective memories are narratives of past experience constituted by specific groups and that give them a sense of history, place, and belonging (Anderson 2006). As an analytical concept, it was introduced by Maurice Halbwachs in his work *The Social Frameworks of Memory* (1992 [1925]). His main contribution was the realization that memory is not only a property of the subjective mind, but also a

matter of how groups produce memories of the past based on their present circumstances. By becoming group members, individuals embrace narratives of the past of their groups, even if the recalled events were not experienced by them (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012), while other events are left in the background of the narrative and even forgotten (Nora 1989; Ricoeur 2004). This sorting process reflects the power relations at play in the production of memory, which among Colombian indigenous groups are unavoidably mediated by the colonial matrix of power via multicultural policies. In the case of the Muisca in Sesquile, for example, their past as Muisca has been selectively defined and fixated around very recent events, namely the official recognition of the group and the death of its leader; other memorializable events and experiences that took place before the leader's establishment of the group are excluded. For instance, even though most members of this group have suffered discrimination in a similar manner as their Bosa counterparts, those events have not encouraged political mobilization in Sesquile because they tend to be disregarded at the collective level: members keep prioritizing spirituality over political action (Bocarejo 2007; French 2012; Gunew 2004; Ramos 1994).

The authenticity of the Muisca group from Sesquile was actually reinforced after Carlos' death. After he died, he was deified and memorialized, becoming a sort of mythical figure at the center of the collective memory of the group (Nora 1989). Accounts of his mysterious death are filled with stories of Carlos sending goodbye messages days before his death, digging his own grave near the ceremonial house, and speculations about the spiritual meaning of dying on the seventh day of the seventh

month of the year two thousand and seven. Carlos' mother even told me that when they were carrying his casket from the house to the town, the bulbs in the light posts malfunctioned and the dogs barked and howled. Carlos' tragic and mysterious death has become proof of the legitimacy of his spiritual power: a semiotic zero point for the production of a collective memory for his group (Povinelli 2002). Carlos is remembered in all of the ceremonies in the cusmuy, and projects are executed because Carlos would have "wanted" it to happen. North American songs are sung in Muisca ceremonies without rising suspicion because Carlos taught them, and a Mexican temazcal is part of the Muisca healing practice because Carlos brought it to the group. The consumption of ayahuasca is allowed because Carlos himself used it, and all important decisions are made in the cusmuy so that the spirit of Carlos is present and will enlighten the outcome. The mythopoetic deification of Carlos Mamanche authenticated this trans-culturalization of indigenous spirituality (Forte 2010; Goodale 2006), to the point that all of the practices introduced by Carlos became authentic and accepted by other Muisca leaders, despite their non-Muisca origins.

The deification of Carlos Mamanche has further authenticated the material indicators of cultural alterity that he introduced and which are now part of what I call the Muisca brand. Among them, the cusmuy is the most important. It is a circular ceremonial house that resembles similar houses among Amazonian tribes and the Kogui settlements in northern Colombia. Portable objects with spiritual uses that he introduced are white cotton clothing, the tobacco power known as *hoz-k*, coca leaves, and the poporo, a container used to store crushed sea shells that are chewed with coca

leaves during meditation. These objects and spaces have become visual indicators (Conklin 1997; Hodgson 2012) of the Muisca brand, and are reproduced by other Muisca groups to the best of their ability. In the Bosa group, for example, only a small number of members have visited their cusmuy, and even less have participated in ceremonies and used ceremonial objects. Due to the political and legal priorities of the current leaders of the group in Bosa, their cusmuy is seen more as a monument to alterity than as an actual place of reunion.

The production and legitimation of a Muisca brand based on the model in Sesquile has placed excessive pressure on the members of this group, who feel compelled to re-configure their indigeneity to fulfil the expectations of potential consumers (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). To do so, members tend to prioritize Carlos' teachings over the experiences of abuse, marginalization, and repression that were perpetrated by their cultural others for more than two hundred years (Davila 2001; Graham 2005), as well as their own personal goals as Muisca. To protect the authenticity of their group, members avoid disclosing any aspects of their lives that could risk such status, while at the level of their indigenous-self they face a constant struggle that is not publically exposed. Thus, most expressions of indigeneity in Sesquile are based on the repetition of ceremonies introduced by Carlos and which ultimately reproduce the model of the spiritual savage, serving what Maldonado-Torres calls the coloniality of being (2007), or the colonial domination of the otherized subject at both the cognitive and the experiential levels.

In *Real Black* (2005), John Jackson introduced ethnic sincerity as an alternative for analyzing the deeper shades of people's ethnic selves amidst the inescapable doubts they experience when confronting the expectations of others. In the case of the Muisca from Sesquile, conflicting and challenging situations occur when particular life-histories and present living conditions have to be re-shaped in the image of a deified leader and his approach to spirituality. Although these moments of struggle are unpublicized and avoided, some can be spotted ethnographically. In this section I introduce three ethnographic vignettes that exemplify how the Muisca brand imposes a form of indigeneity that discourages other possibilities of indigenous self-understanding—leading to struggles that become unintended disclosures of indigenous sincerity. In the first, a registered member of the group is reproached when she has to reveal an aspect of herself that is seen as faulty, despite having been registered as a member of the group by Carlos Mamanche himself. The second shows how the priority given to spirituality has prevented people in Sesquile from self-recognizing as Muisca. Finally, the third shows the impact of the deification of Carlos Mamanche and spirituality on how the current leaders of the group publicize their indigenous-selves.

EXPOSING ONE'S FLAWS

In the first semester of 2015, the Colombian Association of Ethnobiology carried out a workshop on medicinal plants with members of the group from Sesquile. As part of the workshop, we were accompanying three members of the Association on a walk along the narrow path that connects the group's vegetable garden with the cusmuy, taking pictures of some of the plants and talking about their uses. I was walking besides Amara, one of the members of the group. Amara is in her late forties, and is the single mother of two adolescent girls. The first time I saw her I could not avoid realizing that her skin was very dark and her hair looked like that of Afro-Colombians. After having engaged in conversation for several days, she told me that she was born in the Cauca region of southern Colombia, and that one of her parents was indigenous from the Cauca region and the other was an Afro-Colombian. She told me that she began following Carlos fifteen years ago, when he healed one of her daughters and herself, and that after several months of work with Carlos he allowed her and her daughters to be registered as members of the group.

At some point during the walk, the members of the Association began to talk about a plant that Amara knew, so she commented carelessly and with enthusiasm: "This plant has another name in the Cauca region." Immediately, one of the members of the Association turned towards her and asked, "Mrs Amara, where are you from?" Amara did not answer and instead directed her sight towards the ground. All the members of the group stopped talking; no one even tried to change the topic. "Yes, where are you from, Mrs Amara?" another visitor asked. The silence continued, and

the leaders of the group seemed to be angry at Amara. Finally, and without raising her head, she replied: “I am from Cauca.” As soon as she replied, the members of the Association resumed their discussion about plants and the other Muisca kept talking with them, but avoided talking to Amara for the rest of the journey.

During the walk, Amara exposed her place of birth to one of the organizations that coordinate workshops and help visibilize the Muisca group of Sesquile at the national level. When in the presence of this type of institution, members who are non-leaders usually remain silent and let the leaders do most of the talking. They know that these organizations expect Muisca members to be individual tokens of the Muisca brand, and fear that something they say or do may be interpreted as evidence of inauthenticity. Ultimately, this is how the coloniality of being sets up limitations to otherwise fluid, sincere indigeneities (Jackson 2005; Lawrence 2004; Povinelli 2002): ensuring that members reproduce the brand in fear of delegitimizing their groups. At the same time, as all the Muisca groups were formed in the last twenty years and their members self-identified as mestizos before embracing their indigeneity, most people still have suspicions about their indigeneity. Amara knows that her place of birth and ethnicity make her a “faulty” Muisca, but she failed to keep that information to herself, exposing a contradictory aspect of her indigenous-self to a larger audience. To make her aware of the group’s discontent, the leaders isolated her in an already embarrassing situation (figure 7).

Figure 7: Members of the group from Sesquile posing for the camera after the workshop.

DISSAPOINTED BY ALTERITY

One Sunday afternoon I shared a bench in the main square of the town of Sesquile with a man in his late forties. We were both waiting for the bus to Bogota. As the bus was delayed, we began to talk. I told him that I had been working with the Muisca group in Sesquile and was exploring how the group formed and how it obtained recognition. He told me that the group was founded by Carlos Mamanche, and that Carlos invited him to participate because his surname is Siatoya. “But I am not indio! em-, I am not like those Mamanches,” he tried to clarify immediately. Then, he continued:

> I know that Siatoya is a surname of indios and all my family has lived here forever, so I guess I could be Muisca. But when I went uphill to talk to them, they were doing something like witchcraft! -em like that guy who has a business in Bogota, -em what's his name, -em the *Amazonic Indian*, right? the guy who sells weird herbs to people and does like voodoo and those things. Mamanche [Carlos] told me to go uphill every weekend to learn to be indigenous and heal myself… But I do not need to learn to be indigenous! I am who I am. But he [Carlos] said that Muisca means doing all that stuff. So I did not return because that is not who I am, I am not Muisca. I do not take those drugs like coca and those other things [silence] it might mean that I truly am just a farmer like everybody else in Sesquile. (Fieldnotes 15/02/2015)

Indigenous groups around the world understand their indigeneity as a distinct relationship with their land and ancestry (Canessa 2007; Hartley 2000; Niezen 2003), and have been officially recognized on those terms. More recently, however, the transnational, multicultural approach to indigeneity began to emphasize cultural alterity as central to indigeneity (Bocarejo 2014; Kymlicka 2000; Ulloa 2004). In Colombia, where indigenous recognition is a collective right, individuals have to be registered as members of a recognized indigenous group to gain positioning as indigenous. The Muisca group in Sesquile has emphasized spirituality as the landmark of their cultural alterity, relocating other indicators of indigeneity such as surname and place of residence as secondary and therefore insufficient to make

someone Muisca. From the response of this resident of Sesquile, I could infer that he was aware of his indigenous lineage via his surname and ancestral residence, and that he had been willing to self-recognise as Muisca when he was invited by Carlos. However, he was not expecting to encounter a spiritually oriented collective where he would be seen as somehow incomplete. Therefore, he preferred to revise his narrative of self (Zahavi 2005) and de-indigenize, returning to the colonial mestizaje that at some point he was willing to overcome. Ultimately, his disappointment in not being Muisca enough despite his life history in Sesquile and his emerging indigenous-consciousness, was revealed to me as an emotive moment of sincerity. By rejecting his indigeneity and paralleling Carlos Mamanche with someone who profits from indigenous spirituality, this resident of Sesquile shared his dissatisfaction with the imposed branding of Muisca culture.

## NEVER GOOD ENOUGH

My last example refers to Juan, one of the pupils of Carlos Mamanche who is in charge of the spiritual medicine sessions that take place in the cusmuy. In the middle of a ceremony for the summer solstice, Juan informed the group that a reporter from an NGO interviewed him about his work in the Muisca group of Sesquile. He proudly told the participants that the interview was published and that it might facilitate connections between the group and other indigenous groups as well as NGOs. At the end, however, he offered an apology because he was introduced as a

spiritual leader in the printed version of the interview. He clarified that he never told the reporter that he was a spiritual leader, and that the reporter probably misunderstood him and had sent the interview for publication without letting him revise it. I found his statement particularly revealing because the other recognized Muisca groups have appointed "spiritual leaders" despite the fact that, in most cases, their knowledge is less than Juan's. He explained:

> […] this group has no spiritual leader. I think none of us has the preparation and knowledge to be a spiritual leader for this group. The spiritual leader here is Carlos Mamanche, and what we do is simply continue his work. I do not do anything beyond what he taught me. Nothing of what I say or do is done from a leadership position that has not been given to me. Mamanche's spiritual knowledge is too great for us to match. (Fieldnotes 01/03/2015)

Since the memory of Carlos Mamanche became idolized, his followers feel incapable of assuming the role of spiritual leaders and prefer to describe themselves as replicators of his work. Their need to maintain an image established in 2006 has forced them to restrain their aspirations of advancing the group in all that is related to cultural alterity, becoming an essentialized form of the brand that was built on the basis of that same group. I was particularly struck by Juan's apology because he is known outside of Sesquile as the spiritual leader of the most spiritual of all the Muisca groups. At the same time, the groups that do not carry the pressure of fully embodying the brand have all appointed spiritual leaders, and those leaders have never shown discomfort with being publically introduced as such. In addition, they

feel free to develop Muisca spirituality according to the changing needs of their groups. In Sesquile, on the other hand, as the current group still benefits from the label of authenticity given by Carlos' spirituality, leaders such as Juan avoid presenting themselves as advancers of Muisca knowledge, fearing that they will be unable to match Carlos' ability to introduce, present, and legitimize cultural practices as authentically Muisca. This approach has impacted Juan's positioning, not only as a leader but also as Muisca. In other words, Juan is governing himself by following a colonial form of his indigeneity, concealing his sincerities and restricting the group's fluidity on the grounds of cultural branding.

## BOSA: NEVER READY FOR A QUALITY CONTROL

While the initial goals of the Muisca group in Sesquile were to reinforce cohesiveness and gain visibility, those of the group in Bosa were to protect its members' use of the land and provide aid amidst extreme poverty. When the lands they inhabited for centuries were gradually transformed into the slums of the city of Bogota, they had to face the challenges of becoming urban and sharing their living space with illegal settlers and informal, highly pollutant factories. Under these circumstances, their recognition as indigenous became an opportunity to reinforce their common roots while gaining enough public positioning to block further urbanization and to claim financial support from the state, as their rural means of subsistence became impracticable. Fortunately for the Bosa group, their request for

recognition took place in 1998, when the policies of the Ministry of the Interior were at its most flexible—mainly because they were not yet aware of the growing numbers of people self-recognizing as indigenous in regions where indigenous presence could complicate governance, such as Bogota. In Bosa, for example, mestizaje was not seen as unfavourable for recognition despite the fact that multiculturalism and its emphasis on the protection of indigenous people on the grounds of "cultural diversity" was already in place (Chavez and Zambrano 2006; Van Cott 2000). Therefore, though many of the elements used by the group as indicators of their indigeneity had been categorized as mestizo culture since the early republican period (Gros 2000), the Ministry did not demand further evidence of cultural difference. Practices such as playing *tejo*—an indigenous game consisting of throwing a metal disc onto a target partially buried in clay—, drinking *chicha*—a fermented drink made of corn—, using herbs to cure minor issues, consuming tubers that are native from the region, and having strong family and intra-family ties—all of which are also common among the mestizo farmers and manual workers of Bogota—were acknowledged as Muisca traditions and encouraged among group members.

Eight years later, however, the new protocol for indigenous recognition was put into place. By 2005, the state had become aware of the growing indigenization of regions that were believed to be mestizo-only for centuries, and decided to decrease the rate of successful recognitions per year. Following the multicultural trend (Jackson 1995; Kymlicka 1995; Hale 2002), this new protocol required indigenous groups to demonstrate elements of cultural alterity that would meet the transnational

imaginaries of indigeneity (Brosius 1997; Forte 2010; Warren and Jackson 2002). However, and against all odds, the Musica groups in Chia, Cota, and Sesquile gained recognition in 2006 under the new protocol, thanks to the work of the leader in Sesquile, Carlos Mamanche. The key for the recognition of these groups was Carlos' focus on spirituality and indigenous medicine, which were presented as the pillars of the Musica way of life. The recognition of these three groups placed spirituality as the main indicator of Muisca cultural alterity and became the foundation of the Muisca brand, which soon began to be consumed by people interested in indigeneity, fundraisers, state institutions, and other indigenous people.

Consequentially, the recognition of the Muisca group of Bosa in 1998 became insufficient as a platform for conversation with the official institutions and other potential allies (Hale 2002) that were now consumers of the Muisca brand (Comaroff and Comaroff). For this reason, the leaders of the Bosa group incorporated spirituality and reinforced other elements of cultural alterity that were not emphasized during the group's first decade, hoping to attract benefactors, gain the respect of other stakeholders, and reinforce their indigeneity. However, these incorporations have shaken members' indigenous-selves, as what Sesquile presents as indicators of alterity is not always compatible with how members in Bosa understand their indigeneity (Castile 1996; Lawrence 2004; Niezen 2009) and their place as political actors. Moreover, the leaders in Bosa fear that aligning with the brand could shift their priorities from political, legal, and financial matters to environmental and

spiritual aspects that, to them, are less urgent than improving the current living conditions of the members of the group.

As a means of embracing spirituality without compromising the original interests of the group, the leaders in Bosa built a cusmuy in 2007 and formed a group dedicated to Muisca spirituality with the help of Carlos Mamanche. A member told me that this group had no more than ten members, who had already been interested in indigenous spirituality and who were already initiated into their spiritual awakening using ayahuasca and other *power* plants. In this way, spirituality became part of the assemblage of cultural alterity of the group without impacting its administrative priorities. Also, as Catholic beliefs are deeply rooted among the members due to centuries of colonial domination, the leaders decided to further strengthen their position by introducing other, non-spiritual elements of cultural alterity. With this approach, the group's image of authenticity has been maintained even if most members are only partially embracing elements of the Muisca brand under the premise that they are recalling memories of a distant past (Halbwachs 1992; Ricoeur 2004).

To incorporate the non-spiritual elements of cultural alterity, the administrative office of the group organized workshops on indigenous dance, music, weaving, language, and crop growing, while those working in the cusmuy designated a spiritual leader and organized a workshop on indigenous medicine. But even though some members showed initial interest and participated in a workshop or two, by the end of the first year only the workshop on medicine remained active. The success of

this workshop was due to the fact that it was the only one not taught in a classroom environment but as a practicum in which member's previous knowledge of medicinal plants was taken into account. The other workshops were run by group members educated in Western universities and by non-indigenous volunteers using school books, their own experience, and online materials as their main guidance, keeping the members passive recipients of information (figure 8).

Figure 8: Group members participating in a workshop.

After five years of struggling to incorporate elements of the Muisca brand, the designated governor of the group in Bosa proposed that the participation of members in workshops should become a requisite for receiving the monthly food

supply given by the local administration to the poorest Muisca families. After successfully securing total control over the food allocations, the leaders introduced the new requirement as if it were a demand of the state when providing the food. The leaders made this decision after realising that the members of the group were only visiting the office and cusmuy when it was time to claim benefits. The sense of groupness that was strong during the first decade after recognition had faded because the collective practices that were customary to the members but had become part of the mestizo cultural assemblage were discouraged in favor of introducing elements of the Muisca brand via workshops, but these workshops were ultimately unsuccessful. I am unaware of the exact moment when this internal rule was implemented, but it was fully in place at the time I began fieldwork in 2014.

In order to receive food, a member of each family has to sign up to attend a weekly workshop at the beginning of the semester. Most workshops take place on Wednesdays because this is the day chosen by the instructors, even though it makes it impossible for working members of the families to participate. As a result, all the participants in Wednesday sessions are stay-at-home wives, while the only three participating men attend the agriculture workshop that takes place on Saturdays. Also, due to the class format of the workshops and the disconnect between the topics taught and the daily lives of the participants, they handle the information that is given to them as something to be memorized for an exam and not as something to be remembered and shared with the rest of their families. The example I provided above, about a workshop in which members had to listen to a recording about Muisca

mythology and draw a scene from a myth, shows the discomfort that members experience in these classes and the disappointment of the instructor. So far, out of the 750 families that make up the group, only one member of each of the 108 poorest families that receive the food supply participate in the workshops, while around thirty members participate in spiritual gatherings.

## ENCOURAGING MEMBERS' PARTICIPATION

The governor has publically tried to persuade members to participate in the workshops because she is aware of the importance of displaying group cohesiveness when rising claims regarding, for example, the tenancy of the remaining lands in San Bernardino. For instance, during a general assembly that I attended in 2014, the governor announced that she was going to request an official census of the members of the group to ensure that all members are officially registered, so they do not have trouble getting healthcare and applying to public universities. She said that all the members of the group had to actively prepare for this census because their indigeneity was going to be assessed in terms of "cultural diversity." The governor communicated information this despite knowing that the census was unlikely because the institution in charge was in a period of financial austerity, but she wanted to use members' expectations as a way to get them participating in workshops. She added:

> […] and how to get prepared? well, here we have a ceremonial house that I suppose you have all visited already. Our spiritual medicine takes place

> there and that can help you remember the Muisca spirituality of your ancestors, right? You can also go with the teacher Jeimmy and explore indigenous language and the Muisca myths; or you can bring back your memories of how to weave knapsacks and make basic herbal remedies. So the best way to get prepared for the census is by coming to the office or to the cusmuy and signing up for a workshop

The audience remained silent until one of the founding members, a man in his seventies, intervened:

> I have to say that we already have cultural things to show. We seem not to value the activities that we used to do in the early years of the group. Those are also cultural activities that we can talk about. I do not believe that the state has any right to define who we are when they discriminated us and even exterminated us in the past. The chicha, the weavings, the reunions, the knowledge of our grandmothers about medicinal plants are also part of our indigeneity.

The governor, knowing that these practices have been generalized as mestizo and are therefore insufficient and even detrimental to the groups, immediately replied:

> That is right. All of that is part of our culture, but being Muisca means much more! Our neighbors also drink chicha and play tejo and use plants. So, what makes us different from them? We have the cusmuy to help us remember our relationship with our ancestors, and we have Diego and Paola

> and Daniel leading the workshops, as well as the teacher Jeimmy. We always have to aim for more than what we have in order to survive extermination, so please join us […] (Fieldnotes 22/10/2014)

In the case of the Muisca in Bosa, practices and objects that have become evidence of alignment with the Muisca brand are incorporated via direct instruction in the classroom, and are backed up by a sense of collective memory based on the notion that such knowledge and practices are not being just learned, but remembered by the group as a whole (Halbwachs (1925) 1992; Weedon and Jordan 2012). Thus, despite the fact that the Muisca spirituality introduced by Carlos Mamanche is new to group members in Bosa, and that it might even differ from their narratives of self (Zahavi 2005), members engage with it in terms of their willingness to "remember" who they are vis-à-vis who they have become as mestizo. Moreover, while group leaders such as the governor try to introduce the brand to its members, submitting to the colonial matrix of power (Quijano 2000) to secure the continuity of the group, other aspects that were part of the daily lives of the members, and which have become engulfed by mestizaje, tend to be discouraged and forgotten (Ricoeur 2004). But this disregard for certain long-term, affectively embedded practices in order to avoid appearing inauthentic has eventually obstructed the incorporation of the Muisca brand among members of the group in Bosa, even though the group itself continues to be presented as a cohesive, authentic unit. In this setting, members struggle to negotiate between the aspects of their indigeneity that should be forgotten and those that are supposed to be remembered, leaving them incapable to produce a more or less unified indigenous-

self that could be empowering (de la Cadena and Starn 2007; Lawrence 2004). This contention between remembering and forgetting was evident in the statements of the governor and the elder member regarding how members should prepare for the census to fit the current requirements of indigeneity and thereby be counted as indigenous.

## BEING PART OF A MUISCA GROUP

When I was already seven months into fieldwork, I began to ask group members that had became close to me if they were Muisca and their opinions about the workshops and spiritual gatherings. I began to do this after several months because I realized that they were uncomfortable talking about their indigenous-selves, especially if I showed too much interest. When asked, most replied that they were part of the Muisca group of Bosa, or part of "the community," while only a few members were confident enough to say that they, as individuals, were Muisca. In terms of sincerity, their preference of talking about their indigeneity as membership rather than as a personal positioning speaks of the self-doubts imprinted on them by the coloniality of being (Maldonado-Torres 2007) as materialized by the Muisca brand. While at the level of the group it was possible to reproduce the brand, even partially, individual members could hardly do so. Overall, their sense of groupness remains robust because it is supported by official recognition and because of their shared history as impoverished dwellers of San Bernardino and as holders of common customs, even if such customs have become mestizo. But on the other hand, members themselves became uncertain of their own indigeneity once spirituality became the

center of Muisca alterity, and their lineage, land tenancy, and mestizo lifestyle became secondary and even disadvantageous. As a result, they try to conceal their points of view from non-members like me, fearing that I may be assessing their indigeneity. However, some members revealed that the incorporation of a collective memory alongside the requirements of the brand has interfered with their sense of selves. The following responses encapsulate the prevalent standpoints, as described by my interlocutors.

The first is the response of Jacinto, the brother of the current spiritual leader. Jacinto is actively involved in the spiritual work that takes place in the cusmuy. He proudly wears white cotton clothing and ornaments that have become part of the Muisca brand. He replied:

> Of course I am a member of this Muisca group of Bosa, and I am now facing the challenge of getting into Muisca spirituality. I am learning how to understand our ancestors using the yage, because the plant helps us remember our Muisca spirituality. We must all remember that according to our ancestors everything moved around the spiritual, -em because all of what you see here depends on the will of the spirits. But most people here do not even go to the cusmuy! They remain unconscious [silence]. I think you need to have a Muisca state of mind to really be Muisca [silence] -em, like in Sesquile, for example. Pedro [the spiritual leader] told me that all the decisions in Sesquile are made in the cusmuy, and everybody receives the hoz-k [tobacco powder] without complaining. (Fieldnotes 18/12/2014)

He is one of the few members who has embraced spirituality and now believes that surnames, land tenancy, and common political agendas are insufficient to make a person truly Muisca—even though his own inclusion as a member was based on those elements. However, he still prefers to introduce himself as a member of the group than as a Muisca because, as he says, "getting into Muisca spirituality" is still challenging for him. He assumes that spirituality was at the core of Pre-Hispanic Muisca culture, becoming a collective memory that should be embraced in the present through the active remembering induced by power plants. His personal interest in spirituality has facilitated his alignment with the Muisca brand, embracing it to the point that he has become sincerely reluctant to validate other members' indigeneity. To him, their lack of interest in spirituality keeps them unconscious, impeding them from having the "state of mind" that is fundamental for being Muisca. Therefore, he believes that as long as other people registered as Muisca of Bosa fail to embrace spirituality, the group will remain less authentic than their counterparts in Sesquile.

The second answer comes from Ana, one of the women who attend the workshops on Wednesdays. She receives a monthly food supply for her family of four and is a stay-at-home wife, like the majority of the female members of the group. She and her husband became part of the group in 2004, both have Muisca surnames, and their families have lived in San Bernardino for at least a century. I was with her when the governor recommended participation in workshops as the way to qualify as indigenous in the census, and I used that event as an opportunity to ask her opinion. She replied:

> Well, I actually do not know if I am Muisca or not [laughs], but yes, I am part of the community. Um… I mean I am Chiguazuque, but after hearing what the governor told us today about being asked cultural things in the next census, I might not be Muisca anymore. Anyway, we have to help the group, you know? like going to a workshop and that, because the group deserves it and we have to answer something in the census. But what Don Pedro does in the cusmuy is like… I find it kind of strange [silence] but anyway I go to the workshop of medicine in the cusmuy, -um I think that one is the best because it is kind of useful. I have practiced the neck massage and the massage for the veins at home. A neighbor used to do massage to my mom before, but she was a grandma and already died, so I am checking if what they do in the workshop is similar. The other workshops… I do not think they are good, they tell you some stories there, um, like stories and strange words and you are supposed to have a notebook and do homework, like a little kid. (Fieldnotes 22/10/2014)

Here, Ana's sincerity is exteriorized as feelings of self-doubt regarding the validity of her indigenous-self due to the establishment of the Muisca Brand and its incorporation in the classroom. She, like the majority of group members, registered her family in the office of the group on the basis of surname, land tenancy, and shared history, but disagrees with the spiritual elements that were incorporated later on. Even though she presents herself as "part of the community," she jokes saying that she does not know if she is Muisca anymore. However, she is aware that the group needs to maintain its status of authenticity and therefore sees her participation in one of the

workshops not simply as a task imposed by the leaders, but as her way to help reinforce the group's collective-self. As a form of counter-memory (Hirsch and Smith 2002), she participates in the medicine workshop because it is the only workshop that can be loosely associated with the practices that died with her grandparents, who were excluded from the schema of collective memory. In this case, sincerity is also exposed when she is unable to embrace spirituality and the cusmuy itself because, in spite of the expectations of neoliberal multiculturalism, Catholicism has become a strong part of her Muisca-self after five hundred years of its imposition. Therefore, even though Ana feels comfortable participating in a workshop on a topic that is of her interest, she avoids any other cusmuy activity that appears contrary to her religious belief, augmenting her suspicion about her own indigeneity.

Finally, Juan Carlos is one of the administrative leaders of the group who recently began to participate in spiritual activities in the cusmuy. He replied:

> Yes, I am Muisca even if I spend my days here in the office and not in the cusmuy. I think that the cultural aspect is a very important one, believe me, but I think that culture is many things, not just the part of spirituality. Not everybody wants to be a priest, right? but in the cusmuy they say that everything related to the group has to be sorted out there. I do not agree with that. Culture is, I do not know, em, dance, music, language, many things. In the cusmuy they say that we are remembering, as if we had it all in our heads but hidden. I like the cusmuy but I don't agree that we all have to be like Pedro, with poporos and chewing coca leaves all the time. That is why we try

to give options to people about what to learn in the workshops. (Fieldnotes 01/12/2015)

Juan's sincerity is revealed through his confident posture as Muisca, questioning the Muisca brand's prioritization of spirituality over group advocacy and political action, the pillars that support his Muisca-self. As a leader who has not let spirituality interfere in his decisions but who is aware of the need to portray "diversity," he still acknowledges the importance of the Muisca brand for the public positioning of the group. However, unlike the other two responses, he recognizes that spirituality and other cultural markers of alterity are taught elements that might or might not be integrated into his indigenous-self, instead of collective memories that "real" Muisca people should feel familiar with. To him, only those who are interested in being "priests" need to be fully engaged with spirituality. Similarly, cultural markers such as medicine, mythology, language, weaving, and agriculture are seen as skills that are fundamental to supporting the group's authenticity but not for every Muisca subject, allowing him to remain confident of his indigeneity despite being mostly an administrative figure.

The first two responses show how the production of cultural alterity to reinforce the authenticity of the group in Bosa has actually convoluted members' indigenous-self. Their initial motivations for self-recognizing—including having a Musica lineage, the tenancy of Muisca lands, and a common history of marginalization—have become secondary, forgettable, and replaceable by the recently constructed memories that have become the core of their indigeneity despite being

unrelated to their actual lives. As a result, members begin to question their indigeneity, or consider themselves and others insufficiently Muisca: they feel guilty when they are questioned about not being attracted to what is supposed to be their culture. Juan, on the other hand, actively protects his own stance on Muisca indigeneity to avoid being criticized by other members, despite having to constantly negotiate between his task of encouraging the incorporation of the branded culture among members and his indigenous-self as an administrative leader. Moreover, all of the examples show how members of the Bosa Muisca group become subaltern to, and imprisoned by, the Muisca brand and the neoliberal form of multiculturalism (Bocarejo 2007; Hale 2002). At this level of the coloniality of being, Muisca members are conditioned to duplicate an external, branded version of themselves that tells them who they are, and which keeps them in a permanent state of disappointment and secrecy as their sincere selves seem not to match the expectations of the brand's consumers (Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Jackson 2005; Povinelli 2002).

## CONCLUSIONS

The Muisca brand is a legacy of coloniality (Bocarejo 2011; Quijano 2000). It is justified by multiculturalism and its promise of protecting indigenous groups as long as they fulfil models of cultural alterity that are blind to the past of extermination and trauma that indigenous people experienced as they were transformed into mestizos (Gros 2000; Sieder 2000). The elements of alterity that constitute the

baseline of this brand were borrowed from the group in Sesquile, which managed to demonstrate an expected cultural "diversity." Their emphasis on spirituality was taken up by other Muisca groups, non-Muisca indigenous groups, and even non-indigenous enthusiasts, who imagine the contemporary Muisca and hope to have their expectations fulfilled during encounters with them. The branded version of the Muisca as highly spiritual has been publicized and normalized despite the fact that spirituality was not a fundamental element of the collective-self of groups like that in Bosa at the time of their recognition. Under these circumstances, all Muisca groups and their members are in the spotlight. On the one hand, the Muisca in Sesquile are expected to be tokens of the Muisca brand while, on the other, the Muisca in Bosa are expected to display enough evidence of alterity to deserve the recognition and protection given by the Colombian state. As a result, uncertainty, isolation, suspicion about non-Muisca, and lack of interest in talking about themselves has become the rule among group members, for whom non-indigenous people have become evaluators.

Under the lens of traditional anthropology, the evasive attitude of group members and their displays of self-doubt regarding their indigeneity could be explained as a sign of instrumentalism (Barth 1969; Jackson 1995; Kearney 2012), or in terms of strategic essentialism as proposed by post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak (2003). Within this last approach, Muisca alterity would be presented as a strategic display meant to advance indigenous positioning in a discriminatory society, and research would focus on how such positioning is achieved, somehow assuming that

such strategic displays of culture remain external to members' indigenous-self. However, as the Muisca brand is not only enacted but also actually embodied by members depending on their particular life histories and experiences, strategic essentialism falls short as an analytical framework to explain these processes of self-formation. Similarly, approaches that depict indigenous groups as cohesive units connected by a sense of sameness (Hall and Du Gay 1996; Sokefeld 2001) or of identity also turn out to be insufficient, mainly because their generalizing baselines are unsuitable for understanding indigeneity as a pluriversality of indigenous-selves.

In this chapter I have introduced an alternative option for exploring indigeneities in their pluriversality. By exposing how life histories and the pressures of the Muisca brand converge to challenge and re-shape indigenous-selves, I recognize the humanness of the indigeneities that would otherwise be mostly explored in terms of their instrumentality. To avoid this thingification of the Muisca, I have responded to the invitation of John Jackson (2005) to explore the ethnic subject through the glimpses of sincerity unveiled during interactions and in conversation. Sincerity has allowed me to engage with deeper shades of people's selves, as it recognizes and demystifies the inescapable doubts that group members experience when confronting themselves according to the expectations of powerful others. I have also engaged with how such doubts lead to constant self-reflexivity on the part of the group members, who need to negotiate their selves and become somehow comfortable with the outcome despite being constantly re-shaped by external actors and circumstances. At the same time, thinking in terms of sincerity has enhanced my bond

with Muisca members, allowing me to become a listening subject who shares experiences and prioritizes understanding instead of being a unidirectional retriever of information about them. Having sincerity as my baseline for conversation with Muisca members allowed me to be seen as someone different than an evaluator of authenticity, and to engage in richer and less controlled conversations about their indigenous experiences.

In the first section of this chapter I engaged with decolonial theory (Maldonado Torres 2007; Mignolo 2011; Quijano 2000) as an analytical framework for unveiling some of the connections between Colombian multicultural policies that aim to protect indigenous people and the continued colonial domination and domestication of cultural differences. For instance, when indigenous groups such as the Muisca obtain recognition, they incorporate and embody a branded version of themselves (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009) that is safe for the state, but which ultimately fails as a platform through which they can work to mitigate their most immediate needs. Furthermore, this form of cultural management is normalized as part of the colonial matrix of power, so that even supporters of the Muisca become suspicious of the indigeneity of group members who fail to embody the branded version of themselves and to reject the elements of mestizaje that were part of their lives for centuries. This form of governance produces both a governable collective other (the indigenous group) and a governable individual (the group member) who regulate themselves as a requirement for being indigenous, thereby reproducing essentialisms (Kymlicka 2014; Rapport 2003). In the case of the walk to Guatavita,

for example, a Muisca leader is authoritatively reminded by a non-member that drinking Coca-Cola is not what Muiscas would do if they are as spiritually oriented as they claim. In this case, even though Pablo was careful enough to present himself to the students according to their expectations, he failed because an action that is acceptable among group members was seen by a non-indigenous person as contradictory to the Muisca brand. Similarly, a social sciences teacher feels empowered by the Muisca brand to question a group of Muisca women for not being interested in their own culture, which she believes she understands better than the Muisca themselves, despite her teachings being alien to the students. This constant assessment of authenticity, similar to that done to marketable products (Jackson 2005), obliges Muisca people to be constantly self-reflexive, ready to adjust to specific circumstances and to set up limits for their public versions of selves.

In the second and third sections I introduced sincerity (Jackson 2005) as an analytical option for understanding the Muisca in their pluriversality, despite the expectations of universality that have been reinforced by the Muisca brand. Overall, I explored how the considerable gap between the authorized model of Muisca indigeneity and actual Muisca people perpetuates subaltern and dominant positionings. Therefore, while non-Muisca become evaluators of Muisca cultural alterity, the Muisca themselves become the objects of evaluation, frustrated by a sense of incompleteness as they can hardly resemble an ideal that over-simplifies their indigeneity by stripping it from its particular histories and its past of colonial extermination and abuse. As part of this never ending program of colonial

governance, the colonized self (Maldonado Torres 2007) is reproduced by being encouraged to "remember" certain things and "forget" others to maintain the group's official recognition. During fieldwork, I became aware of how spirituality and other indicators of authentic Muisca culture are incorporated into the collective-selves of the groups from Bosa and Sesquile. In both cases, the recently acquired practices, objects, and knowledges that make up the brand are being incorporated as collective memories that should be assimilated by group members as "Muisca traditions," while various elements that could have that title are actually discouraged for having become indicators of mestizaje. Within this challenging context, sincerity has been shown to be a useful option for understanding how this production of cultural otherness operates at the level of group members.

For example, as the collective memory of the Muisca group of Sesquile is grounded on the deification of its leader as a means to maintain its status of authenticity, group members find themselves in a constant state of awareness. They have become used to calculating their public actions and conversations so as to depict an acceptable version of their indigeneity, concealing aspects of their selves that seem incompatible with Muisca spirituality or other indicators of Muisca alterity, and being reproved if such incompatibilities are exposed. Does being born in the Cauca region make Amara a lesser Muisca? Despite her fifteen years as member of the group and her embracing of Muisca spirituality that gave her the right of registration, she still doubts her position as Muisca, conceals her place of birth, and is penalised by other members when she makes it public. Similarly, the Muisca brand and its requirements

regarding spirituality disappointed the man sitting on the park bench, who after self-recognizing as Muisca returned to his positioning as mestizo. Despite having a Muisca surname and attachment to the land of Sesquile, his refusal to embrace a form of spirituality that he considered contrary to the Catholic faith made him an "incomplete" Muisca, disqualifying him from validating his indigeneity. Finally, the deification of the leader of the group as a means of reinforcing its authenticity has left the Muisca of Sesquile unable to designate a new spiritual leader, obliging Juan to refrain from any aspiration to occupy the place of his deceased leader as he self-doubts his own leadership capabilities.

In Bosa, membership was initially defined on the grounds of self-recognition, lineage, and group cohesion, while spirituality and other indicators of cultural alterity were added later by members who had a particular interest in medicinal plants. But as spirituality became the main indicator of the Muisca brand, group leaders further integrated it into their group's collective memory, prioritizing authorized indicators over practices actually done by their families in the past. As a result, self-doubt and dissatisfaction are common among the Muisca in Bosa, who prefer to self-recognize as group members rather than as Muisca, because they fail to embrace the Muisca brand as inherent to themselves. Jacinto, for example, despite having been registered on the grounds of surname and place of residence, now argues that spirituality is a requirement for indigeneity. As he himself is just "getting into" spirituality, he has become doubtful of his own indigeneity, although he was confident enough to join the group and self-recognize as Muisca when he became member in the 1990s. Other

members such as Ana are only comfortable with embracing incoming elements of cultural alterity if they resemble practices that were regular among group members before recognition, even though they are currently perceived as mestizo and discouraged, and find it difficult to embrace aspects that seem contrary to their former religious beliefs. Finally, Juan Carlos struggles to remain true to his former indigenous-self by trying to situate himself as a non-spiritual Muisca while still feeling compelled to acknowledge the centrality of spirituality from his position of leader. These moments of sincerity show the struggle among members to become and stay Muisca while re-negotiating their selves amidst the impositions of multiculturalism and its focus on cultural alterity.

# CHAPTER 3 - SENSORIALIZING SPIRITUALITY: ALTERITY, SINCERITY, AND THE MUISCA CUSMUY

## INTRODUCTION

Cusmuyes are Muisca ceremonial houses. They are large, rounded huts without windows and with two doors, one facing east and one facing west. The walls of these huts are formed from several wooden columns connected to each other with bahreque, a mixture of interwoven vegetable fibers and clay. The cusmuyes have bare earthen floors that are usually uneven and sometimes even muddy, when the humidity rises. The only sitting place is a continuous wooden bench attached to the wall, placed to ensure that participants sit forming a circle, while the only source of light is a fire located in the center. The smoke of the fire rises towards the ceiling, slowly piercing through its structure made of palm leaves.

The cusmuy of the group in Sesquile is located on a piece of land in a mountainous area on the outskirts of Sesquile. This plot of land was bought by Carlos Mamanche, the first leader of the group, and the cusmuy was built before they obtained official recognition in 2006. During a conversation with the governor of the group in 2014, I learnt that the design of the Muisca cusmuy is based on the ceremonial house of the Kogui groups in northern Colombia, and that Kogui leaders authorized Carlos to build a similar ceremonial house for his group, arguing that both

the Kogui and the Muisca used similar buildings before the arrival of the Spanish colonizers. After the group in Sesquile obtained official recognition based on a cultural alterity demonstrated via indicators such as the cusmuy, the poporo, and other objects and practices brought by Carlos Mamanche, the cusmuy became one of the better-known emblems of Muisca spirituality. Eventually, as the Sesquile group's emphasis on spirituality became the basis for the standardized Muisca brand, to be considered authentic every Muisca group was expected to have a cusmuy and to prioritize spirituality over other aspects of their indigeneity.

Despite the Bosa group's official recognition eight years before that of Sesquile, the establishment of the Muisca brand compelled the leaders in Bosa to build their own cusmuy and reinforce the spiritual aspects of their cultural alterity, even though the recognition of their own group had been based on lineage, group cohesion, and land tenancy rather than spirituality. With the help of Carlos Mamanche, the leaders of the group in Bosa designed their own cusmuy and built it in a small plot rented from one of their neighbors, right in the middle of the growing illegal neighborhood of San Bernandino. The cusmuy in Bosa is slightly smaller than the one in Sesquile, but the internal layout is the same (figure 9).

Figure 9: The cusmuy of the Muisca Group in Bosa.

However, while the cusmuy in Sesquile is visited on a weekly basis by at least one family member from each household, only a few members of the group in Bosa visit their cusmuy on a regular basis. In Bosa, most members perceive the ceremonial house as a late incorporation that fails to represent their indigeneity, as it is unrelated to their family histories as indigenous and mestizo. Unfortunately, the consumers of the Muisca brand—including state institutions, private organizations, the mestizo majorities, and even other indigenous people—have interpreted the Bosa Muiscas' limited interest in the cusmuy as evidence of inauthenticity and even dishonesty.

Cusmuy gatherings are held at least once a week in each cusmuy. Despite the slight differences between Bosa and Sesquile in terms of ceremony dynamics, the overall experience is very similar. The eastern door is only used to enter and the western door is exclusively used to leave the cusmuy; while people can only enter the cusmuy in Bosa walking backwards, there are no special requirements regarding how to enter the one in Sesquile. Ceremonies related to the solstices and equinoxes are the longest and best prepared, and involve the spiritual cleaning of participants with powdered tobacco (known as hoz-k), the singing of songs and playing of drums and maracas, the burning of herbs in the central fire, the use of poporos by some men, the sharing of a fermented drink known as "chicha," and the discussion of collective issues of problem resolution and overall decision-making. Some ceremonies last a few hours while others take place overnight, extending for more than ten hours during which members have to endure the uncomfortable benches, the limited illumination, the suffocating smoke of the fire, and the dusty surfaces. However, I never heard complaints about the cusmuy layout from those who participated in these encounters, while those who did not participate also refrained from making comments in front of me.

After joining several cusmuy encounters in Bosa and realizing that most of the practices are not explained to new participants, I decided to bring the cusmuy into the center of my conversation with some of the members with whom I had already built rapport. I wanted to know more about the origins and meaning of some of the objects and practices that take place regularly in the cusmuy, because many of them

seemed to signify things that could not be revealed through observation alone. I asked about the origins of songs; the meaning of song lyrics; the use of the poporo; the reason why the cusmuy is dark, has two doors and a fire built up inside; why hoz-k is blown into everyone's nostrils and where this practice comes from; and even why people either visit or refrain from visiting the cusmuy. I wanted to understand how recently incorporated elements could become part of the Muisca-selves of certain members but not others, wrongly assuming that their stance on the cusmuy was based on their understanding of it at the cognitive, linguistic level. But instead of getting answers, most of the members seemed surprised by my questions, and even ashamed. Others seemed angry and defensive. A few of them told me that they did not know much about the cusmuy, even though they were active participants in cusmuy encounters, and most told me that I had to ask those questions of the leaders and not of them.

As the group members were uncomfortable and evasive when I asked questions regarding their activities in the cusmuy, it became difficult to imagine their manifestations of cultural alterity as something more than a representation made for institutions, the neighbors, and researchers like me. Remembering the distrust of my friend from Bosa when she told me that the only way to be heard by the local government in Bosa was to be either "indigenous" or "gay" (Chapter 1), and the evasive responses of Muisca people when asked questions about the cusmuy, I was tempted to give up on my attempt to explore the Muisca self vis-à-vis the Muisca brand. I knew that the responses I was getting from group members in Bosa could

lead me to conclusions that validate the suspicions of the group's neighbours, other Muiscas, and even state institutions regarding their inauthenticity.

Most members of the group in Bosa seemed to be unaware, or at most uninterested, in the narratives and history behind the cusmuy and other objects that had become emblematic of their indigeneity. All in all, they seemed to be struggling to meet the expectations of a multicultural program focused on preserving "diversity." Even more surprising was the realization that most members of the group in Sesquile were also unaware of the meanings and history of what became the main tangible and intangible indicators of their indigeneity, even though most of them were regular participants in cusmuy encounters. These unexpected findings encouraged me to reformulate both my research questions about indicators of the Muisca brand and my analytical framework, hoping to find a decolonial option for addressing the Muisca cusmuy instead of completely giving up my intent to understand how it became part of the lives of the Muisca people from both groups.

In this chapter I engage with Latin American decolonial scholarship from two angles. First, following previous research that exposes the colonial matrix of power (Grosfoguel 2007; Mignolo 2013; Quijano 2007), I unveil how this form of governance influences the production of the Muisca self. I have already argued that the Colombian multicultural project, which authorizes state institutions to recognize indigeneity on the basis of their own models of indigenous alterity, is actually a neoliberal form of coloniality that follows the logics of product branding (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). As already explained, the most recent protocol for the

recognition of indigenous groups in Colombia aims to control and reduce the current re-indigenization of the urbanized groups that were forced into cultural mestizaje and assimilation during the post-independence period (Gros 2000; Hale 2002; Knight 1990; Sieder 2002). As a result, the official recognizing body, and later the consumers of the Muisca brand, offer rights and benefits to groups such as the Muisca—but only if they comply with requirements regarding cultural alterity that can hardly be met after two hundred years of mestizaje, thereby compelling group members to incorporate unfamiliar indicators of indigeneity as if they were long-held traditions (Povinelli 2002). As a result, Muisca members become self-conscious and defensive when asked about those indicators, even doubting their own positioning as indigenous when they disagree with embracing them.

Second, I propose a decolonial alternative for exploring indigenous self-formation vis-à-vis the brand-based indicators of Muisca spirituality. Following the advice of Grosfoguel (2007) and Mignolo (2011), I have detached from Western academic trajectories that implicitly perpetuate the epistemological violence reproduced by discourses of authenticity and essentialism (Henze and Davies 1999; Paradies 2006). Instead, I have embraced the analytical framework introduced by John Jackson Jr. as racial sincerity (2005). This approach to sincerity, already applied in Chapter Two, allows me to recognize that differing affective responses and emotional stances regarding the cusmuy actually reflect the pluriversality of Muisca selves among group members, despite the standardization that resulted from the establishment of the brand. In order to access glimpses of indigenous sincerity in the

cusmuy, I have used Deleuze's approach toward affect (Deleuze 1978) as a border theory (Mignolo 2011). The sensorial, embodied basis of Deleuze's affect has helped me focus on the cusmuy experience itself, instead of relying on its textualization and rationalization. To gain this sensorial awareness, I participated in as many cusmuy gatherings as I was allowed, giving priority to my own sensorially triggered affects (Farquhar 2002; Howes 2006) instead of aiming for objectivity by excluding myself from the horizon of affectation in the cusmuy. After two months of participation, I began to share my sensorial experiences with members of the groups, instead of directly interviewing them. I found out that people were willing to share their experiences in this casual setting despite disliking formal questioning, so that "feeling" became the common footing of communication between group members and me. To the Muisca, talking about sensorial affect became a way of freely sharing their views on the cusmuy and Muisca spirituality without compromising their image of authenticity.

My extended participation in cusmuy encounters was also fundamental in making me aware that the sensorial stimuli experienced by members unfold a variety of affective responses that lead to uniquely complex emotions (Hemmings 2005; Navaro-Yashin 2009). These emotions are produced as participants connect their affective responses with memories of previous affects, their life-histories as indigenous and as mestizos, and even their current living conditions. By having knowledge of these multi-layered maps of intensity (Deleuze 1978), I was able to understand members' standpoints regarding the cusmuy in terms of a sincerity

(Jackson 2005) that conforms to their deeper indigenous selves—even for those who reject the cusmuy and have been accused of inauthenticity for doing so.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section unveils the colonial basis of the establishment of spirituality as the core of cultural alterity among the Muisca, focusing on the materialization of such spirituality in the form of the cusmuy, or ceremonial house. Moreover, this section delves into how the Muisca groups in Bosa and Sesquile have responded to the need to incorporate a homogeneous form of spirituality despite the marked differences between the two groups and among their members. In the second section, I introduce my analytical approach based on sincerity and aimed at revealing instances of sincerity via the senses (Howes 2014) and affect (Deleuze 1978). Finally, using ethnographic accounts of cusmuy experiences and conversations, in the third section I explore how the affects unfolded by sensorial stimuli in the cusmuy come to integrate members' maps of intensity, connecting affect with life histories and collective memories that reveal as many sincere indigeneities as there are members of these two Muisca groups.

## THE CUSMUY AS MATERIALIZED ALTERITY: UPDATING ONE'S SPIRITUALITY TO STAY INDIGENOUS

In 2005, eight years after the recognition of the Muisca group in Bosa, the Ministry of the Interior designed a protocol to unify the process of recognition. According to this protocol, a team of experts selected by the Ministry should visit any

group that is requesting recognition and evaluate its cohesiveness, the presence of a distinctive worldview, the language of its members, the existence of a system of traditional medicine, *usos y costumbres* [translatable as traditions], food, dress, and other elements of indigenous alterity. Even though it is not necessary to demonstrate alterity in all of these aspects, the experts have to certify that any given group is different enough to stand out from the mestizo majorities, and that the benefits given by the state will contribute to the protection of these differences.

Not surprisingly, an indigenous group is now expected to personify one of two generalizing, objectifying models: the model of the indigenous as protector of the earth, or the model of the indigenous as spiritual healer (Forte 2010; Ulloa 2004). These two models have been widely publicised by NGOs and international organizations, as they run alongside contemporary global trends of sustainability and spiritual self-growth. On the other hand, indigenous groups unified by means of lineage and land use and oriented towards political and social action began to be problematized and considered inauthentic. Among those, the recently formed groups located within or around urban areas became the most controversial. For example, the Bosa group's focus on protecting the San Bernardino area from urbanization has always been framed as instrumentalist by their neighbours. After the 2005 protocol, however, further accusations of inauthenticity were added because they appear to be excessively mestizo compared to the Muisca groups were recognized after 2005.

The incorporation of the protocol for assessing alterity impacted the Muisca in Sesquile in a different way. The group from Sesquile was the first Muisca group to

be recognized after the implementation of the protocol. They managed to successfully "produce" alterity despite their mestizo farming lifestyle, which is similar to the mestizo sub-urban lifestyle of the Muisca of Bosa. This contemporary production of alterity was possible because the founder of the group, Carlos Mamanche, brought knowledge of indigenous spirituality from the Putumayo and Amazon regions of Colombia. Additionally, he established a successful relationship with leaders of the Sierra Nevada in northern Colombia. Leaders from the Putumayo and Amazon taught him the use of tobacco and ayahuasca for communicating with the spirits of his Muisca ancestors. Groups from the Sierra Nevada taught him how to spiritually balance places and people, and inspired him to materialize that spirituality in the construction of a ceremonial house, or cusmuy. These inter-cultural exchanges and their later adaptations were validated by the state and other indigenous people as components of Muisca alterity mostly because they matched popular stereotypes of indigenous people as spiritual, but also based on two subtler events. First, the leaders of the Amazon and the Sierra argued that it was Carlos himself who managed to retrieve spiritual knowledge from his Muisca ancestors during the ayahuasca rituals that they had run, arguing that they only helped Carlos to interpret the spiritual messages. Second, as Amazonian and Northern indigenous groups are well known both in Colombia and internationally for their spiritual knowledge (Conklin 2002; Ulloa 2004), the Muisca of Sesquile became somehow imbued with their reliability.

After the recognition of the group in Sesquile, spirituality became the landmark of Muisca alterity among the mestizo majorities, the state, and even some

indigenous people. This emphasis on spirituality encouraged leaders from Bosa to approach the group in Sesquile and propose the construction of their own cusmuy in San Bernardino. Carlos Mamanche accepted the request, and the cusmuy in Bosa was finally built on a rented piece of land that had not yet been urbanized. But as Carlos Mamanche's teachings of Muisca spirituality to members from Bosa were not consistent, the group also relied on the Carare group for alternative spiritual mentoring. The Carare group is one of several private indigenous healing groups operating in Bogota, usually working with ayahuasca and tobacco as their healing plants. Other knowledge has been informally shared among friends from different Muisca groups, including some leaders of non-recognized groups.

This requirement to be "different enough" from the mestizo population in order to be recognized as indigenous is one of the main tactics used by the state to minimize the number of indigeneity claims and domesticate extant indigenous groups in central Colombia. Coloniality has influenced the public's notion of Muisca indigeneity to the point that many residents of Bogota undervalue lineage (surname), groupness, and self-recognition as definitive characteristics of Muisca indigeneity, focusing instead on spirituality. Because coloniality is aligned with modernity's aspiration of generalizing and rationalizing the world, spirituality was rapidly generalized as the standard of Muisca alterity. Today, the Colombian state and the non-indigenous majorities assume that spirituality should be part of the lives of all of the Muisca, condemning any deviations from this standard. For this reason, any difficulties exposed by a Muisca group regarding the incorporation and performance

of Muisca spirituality among its members becomes an indication of inauthenticity. Differences among the groups in terms of past and current living conditions, age of group members, or the original motivations for recognition, are hardly taken into consideration during these assessments against the Muisca brand. Among the Muisca of Bosa, for example, heterogeneity regarding members' relationships with the cusmuy has compromised the group's authenticity, despite the fact that this heterogeneity is the result of the different life histories of the members.

One interaction recovered from the Facebook page of the group in Bosa exposes the struggles of this group to attract members to the cusmuy, and the accusations of falseness they are subjected to as a consequence of that struggle. When the governor of the group in Bosa posted an invitation to a Catholic mass in the cusmuy, hoping to attract older members who had never visited the place before, her post was followed by more than fifty reproving comments. Most of the comments were written by non-indigenous followers of Muisca spirituality and members of non-recognized Musica groups. Here are some of the comments:

> What an abomination, what a dishonesty, what a monstrosity and how sad! Holy Mass? Please be respectful and don't call yourself Muiscas, because you are not.
>
> […] I cannot believe that today, in the middle of this process of awakening of the Muisca nation, people still have these problems of identity. Where is the connection with the source of origin as Muisca? As

> if the grandfathers of the grandfathers of the grandfathers had been to a Catholic mass!
>
> If you call yourself Muisca… now everybody can be Muisca. The only good thing about this is that this makes me a super-Muisca. I have a real connection with the grandfathers, with the chiquys, with the tybas of the mountain.

The people who wrote these comments portray themselves as supporters of the contemporary Muisca and of the Muisca spiritual awakening. One of them self-recognizes as Muisca, while the other two have Facebook posts supporting pro-Muisca organizations and showing conventional indigenous imagery. Since spirituality has become the official emblem of Muisca alterity, however, they perceive the performance of a common mestizo religious practice in the cusmuy as inauthentic, even disrespectful. In this case, supporters of the Muisca have unintendedly aided the coloniality of power (Quijano 2000) by aligning with the Muisca brand, even though they see themselves as "decolonial" and "pro-Muisca." In tune with Trilling's (2009) concept of authenticity as an objectification of alterity, the Muisca brand has turned these Facebook commentators into authenticators, and the Muisca of Bosa into products for consumption. Under these circumstances, a message on social media that converges an emblem of alterity (the cusmuy) and a mestizo practice (a Catholic mass) is sufficient for de-legitimizing the Muisca group in Bosa.

After my initial weeks of fieldwork, I discovered that I was also falling into the trap of thinking about Muisca alterity from an objectivizing and generalizing perspective. I was assuming that group members were embracing or rejecting the cusmuy on the basis of what they knew about its origins and on the compatibility between the cusmuy and their own spirituality. As this type of information seemed to be easily retrievable via structured interviews, I interviewed five members of the group in Bosa. However, I ended up recording a series of failed interviews, upon which I reflected on my fieldwork diary. The interviewees were uncomfortable and confused by my questions. To most of them, I had become an evaluator (Povinelli 2002). I could be a government contractor, a member of a non-recognized Muisca group, or more likely a spy of their non-Muisca neighbours. Trying to re-build my already lost rapport, I informally re-directed my conversations towards other elements of the cusmuy such as the central fireplace and the songs that all members sing during ceremonies. Apart from two or three exceptional situations in which an informant, usually a young leader, gave me some explanation, in all the other cases the members still told me that they did not know how to answer, regardless of how frequently they participate in cusmuy gatherings.

This struggle to retrieve data became a compelling call to revise my approach. Instead of relying solely on observation and interviewing, I decided to participate more fully in Muisca gatherings while refraining from asking direct questions myself. After two months, my own sensorial experiences in the cusmuy became a common footing (Goffman 1981) that allowed me to engage in deeper

conversations with group members. Only then did I realize that members were not embracing or rejecting the cusmuy on the basis of a textual, semiotic understanding of the objects and practices that converge inside. Instead, their stance on the cusmuy was based on their affective responses to sensorial stimuli and how they had come to integrate their particular maps of intensity (Deleuze 1978). The production of this sensorial common ground allowed me to become aware of stimuli that I had previously undervalued, and which were actually crucial to members' cusmuy experience. Also, I learned that, even if several members and I have a similar affective response to a given sensorial stimuli, the emotional outcomes of the affect still vary greatly depending on each person's maps of intensity.

Reviewing my fieldwork recordings, I managed to retrieve a segment that exemplifies how unaware I was of the role of the senses in the relationship between the Muisca and their cusmuy. In July 2014, I was interviewing a young female member of the group in Sesquile while walking from Carlos Mamanche's mother's house to the cusmuy. As that walk takes more than twenty minutes and Juana seemed willing to answer to my questions, I asked her permission and started recording. All of my questions revolved around objects that are used or displayed in the cusmuy and her knowledge about their origins and meaning. I asked her about maracas, poporos, tobacco powder, wooden statues, and about the cusmuy itself. Even though all of these objects were familiar to her, she could not tell me much about their late incorporation as Muisca, or about their meaning in the context of Muisca spirituality.

The objects were simply part of the cusmuy, and Juana interacted with them every Saturday and Sunday.

After an awkward two minutes' silence in the recording, during which I might have been trying to put together a more effective question, Juana said hello to another member and we finally crossed the door of the cusmuy. Then she said:

> Juana: mmm, do you feel the scent of the house? That smell like herbs, mmm, like soil and fire makes me feel like at home…. do you feel it?
>
> Me: um… yes
>
> Juana: this makes me forget all the problems and hurry from outside. It is nice to feel this way.

In my written fieldnotes I made no reference of Juana's comment about the scent of the cusmuy and how she was affected by it. I simply spent a couple of lines writing that she is a frequent participant who, like most members, claims to ignore how and why the cusmuy was introduced and embraced as Muisca. My uninterested "um… yes" extracted from the recording denoted my own sensorial detachment from the cusmuy, where none of my senses had been fully engaged so I could give precedence to objectifying acts of uninvolved observation.

## THE CUSMUY AS A SENSORIAL EXPERIMENT: DE-OBJECTIFYING ALTERITY AND EMBRACING SINCERITY

The concept of *authenticity* has multiple denotations. It can refer to intimate reflexions regarding one's self (Hartley 2012), to the assessment of an object's attributes (Jones 2010; Lau 2010), or to the verification of an object's correspondence with an expected model of itself (Griffiths 1994; Linnekin 1991; Lucero 2006). The first case is introspective and psychological. In the last two cases, the assessment is made by an authoritative figure who is considered an expert. Regarding indigenous recognition, it is expected that contemporary indigenous groups will match a model of themselves that diverges greatly from the historical and social circumstances that actually shaped their indigenous persona. But while the possibility of demystifying the role of authenticity within the process of indigenous recognition is still utopic, it is viable to start searching for alternatives to de-link from Western stances on the authentic at the level of social mobilization and the academy. In his book *Real Black*, John Jackson Jr. (2005) proposes replacing the objectifying focus of authenticity with a more person-to-person, fluid way of understanding racial and ethnic identity. He calls this alternative *racial sincerity*. Jackson argues that sincerity is an option for moving beyond the objectification and generalization produced in the authenticating process, as sincerity is based on a relationship between subjects that are allowed to conform to their deeper selves. Understanding the Muisca-self on the basis of sincerity could therefore recognize the pluriverses of indigeneity that the authenticity model caricatures as inauthentic and instrumental because they do not comply with the standardized ideals (Conklin 2002).

In this chapter, I embrace sincerity as a decolonial option for understanding indigenous self-formation because it challenges both authenticity and objectivity—instead encouraging a dialogical relationship that requires reflexivity on the side of the ethnographer and trust on the side of the informant (Jackson 2005). As a result, the damaging assumption that facts are sufficient for understanding social dynamics is replaced by an open-ended conversation that is aware of both feelings and life histories (Apffel-Marglin 2012). Moreover, this shift towards a more subjective and contextual study of indigeneity could lead to reversing the burden of proof in the field of indigenous recognition. While authentication forces indigenous groups to prove their indigeneity, sincerity goes back to the indigenous subject and liberates him/her from the burden of having to match an external model. In this case, it is not that indigenous groups have to appear indigenous enough to be recognized, but that the recognizing body has to take into account all of the elements that shape the production of indigeneity and therefore recognize plural, and sincere, indigeneities.

During my work with the Muisca, I was initially seen as another evaluator among a large list of indigenous and non-indigenous consumers interested in assessing Muisca people vis-à-vis the Muisca brand. As explained before, this assumption caused difficulties in building rapport, because group members were avoiding my questions and not including me in their conversations. After having re-structured my analytical approach towards sincerity, one of the biggest challenges was to establish a dialogical relationship with members of both groups, but especially with members from Bosa. This dialogism was finally attained after refraining from

direct questioning and focusing instead on reflecting on the affects that emerged as I was exposed to different stimuli during cusmuy gatherings. This reflective process revealed that the embodied, affective knowledge produced via sensorial experience was more determinant in defining members' relationships with their cusmuy than any knowledge at the cognitive level. It seemed that interiorizing "feeling" during gatherings was at the center of members' cusmuy experiences, while from my Western perspective I was undervaluing the senses to the point that I frequently failed to notice many of the stimuli that were happening. To engage with group members based on their sensorial relationships with the cusmuy, I began to join the conversations that took place after gatherings, sharing my own experiences of being affected. After a few conversations, some of the most regular participants began to share their own affects and emotions with me, and I became more attentive to their responses to affectation in the cusmuy itself. All of the data and reflexions presented in this chapter were retrieved from these informal conversations and reflections.

My growing awareness regarding the importance of the senses and affect in the incorporation of the cusmuy into the Muisca indigenous-self motivated me to look for an analytical framework that deals with the sensorial foundation of affect. Although the best option would have been to explore affect from the vantage point of a Muisca onto-epistemology, the impact of mestizaje in the region has obscured the Muisca non-colonial worldviews to the point that they can hardly be differentiated from mestizo ones. Hence, I decided to use a theoretical approach taken from Western philosophy as a decolonial border theory. Using Mignolo's (2011) idea of *border*

*thinking* as the epistemic middle ground between European and indigenous worldviews, I produced a border theory by grabbing useful elements from Deleuze's works on affect but de-linking them from the Western academic trajectories within which they originated. By keeping my focus on sincerity and its subjectivities, I prevented any objectification and universalization that could unfold from Deleuze's conceptual philosophy, while connecting his understanding of affect with participant sensation as a method to retrieve data about sensorial affectations in the cusmuy.

Participant sensation is a multi-sensorial response to participant observation that was proposed by David Howes (2006). It builds from the interest in embodiment expressed by the phenomenologists of the 1990s (Classen 1993; Csordas 1994; Desjarlais 1992; Stoller 2010), who wanted to propose an alternative to the tendency to reduce culture to language and the visual, fostered by the linguistic turn of the 1970s and the visual turn of the 1980s and 1990s, respectively. Scholars including Ingold (2000), Farquhar (2002), Downey (2005), Throop (2010), and Massumi (2002) have successfully engaged with the senses as a fundamental part of their anthropological research, linking sensorial anthropology to analytical models based on phenomenology (Merlau Ponty and Smith 1996) and affect (Deleuze 1978). However, participant sensation goes further by adopting a deeper, full-bodied sensorial engagement from the side of the researcher, involving hearing, sight, smell, and touch. This extended engagement facilitates the formation of a common footing between ethnographer and informant on the basis of shared sensorial experiences that are not rationalized but emotionally reflected upon. Additionally, as participant

sensation is critical of the sensorial constraints of Western anthropology, it has the potential to aid indigenous-based research by prioritizing the fluidity of sensation, emotion, and reflexivity over the fixity of cognition and the scientific method (Quijano 2007; Smith 1999).

The usefulness of affect theory in my research could only be grasped after having become sensorially aware of the affectations that take place in the cusmuy, and after having successfully engaged in reflexive dialogs with group members. As outlined above, the approach to affect that I use as border theory for this chapter comes from Deleuze (1978), which is itself an elaboration of Spinoza. I have adhered to this early, philosophical approach to affect rather than the more recent, ethnography-oriented options such as those of Stewart (2007), Ramos (2012), or Berlant (2011) because Deleuze dissects affect intro three components that are central to my border theory. In his theory of affect, Deleuze differentiates among affectations, affects, and the emotions that affect unfolds. Affectation is explained as the cause of affect. In the case of the Muisca, affectations are the sensorial stimuli that participants experience, to different degrees, in their cusmuys. Variations of lighting, smells, textures, and sounds are common during cusmuy gatherings. These variations emphasise the boundaries between Muisca spiritual spaces and their non-indigenous surroundings, and are expected to be accepted by all Muisca as a result of their spiritual branding. Some examples of sensorial stimuli that have a temporary occurrence during cusmuy gatherings are: the sounds of maracas, drums and singing; the olfactory and tactile responses having blowing powdered tobacco blown into the

nose; and movements related to dance. Examples of stimuli that are always present in the cusmuy, forming a clearer boundary between Muisca spirituality and its non-spiritual surroundings, are the cusmuy's darkness, the visual and tactile stimuli produced by the fireplace, the tactile and olfactory stimuli of the cusmuy's floor, walls, and benches, and the olfactory stimuli produced by the burning of certain plants.

After his account of affectation, Deleuze follows Spinoza and introduces affect in terms of its temporality. For them, affect is a passage, an instant of intensity that is experienced when a person encounters the affectation, producing what he frames as a gain or a loss of personal power. The gain is conceptualized as joy, and the loss is conceptualized as sadness. Deleuze explains that affect tends to materialize as a sudden bodily reaction, usually a jump or a shake, followed by a moment of awareness of one's self as subjected to the affectation. He provides this example: if a person is meditating inside of a dark room and someone suddenly turns the light on, the meditator is going to experience a bodily reaction to the affectation of light and a loss of power. On the other hand, if the person inside the dark room is looking for his glasses, he will experience a bodily reaction and a gain in power when the light is turned on. However, some phenomenologists (Husserl 2012; Merleau Ponty 1996) have argued that the very reaction to a specific bodily experience is dependent on historical habits and the actions immediately prior to the experience. During fieldwork, I became aware of these contrasting sensorial responses, mostly when several stimuli were taking place simultaneously. For example, while I overlooked

changes in smell as I seemed to sensorially prioritize sound, some group members were immediately affected by such olfactory stimuli. Similarly, while the tactile stimuli of the unpaved floor remained unnoticed to me, a group member was constantly affected by its softness. I argue that these differences in the perception of sensorial stimuli are due to the memories of affect of each person, also known as their maps of intensity. The memories of affect I refer to here are similar to what Husserl (2012) calls "historical habits," or past sensorial experiences that are memorialized and induce the prioritization of some affectations rather than others. But moving beyond historical habit, I prefer the concept of "map of intensity," as it helps me explain how affects unfold into complex emotions of acceptance or rejection of the cusmuy as part of Muisca people's indigenous selves.

In his analysis of Spinoza's approach to affect, Deleuze (1978) explains that although emotion is different than affect, emotions can unfold from affective responses when the person experiencing the affect subjectivizes it by connecting it with prior affective experiences. Building on Deleuze, Hemmings (2005) argues that as soon as an affective response takes place, it begins to be personalized and contextualized, aligning with previous affects and their historical context. This is what I have conceptualized in this chapter as *maps of intensity*. These maps connect similar affective components together, as well as the memories of the past instances or events in which those affects unfolded and the collective memories that narrativize, sometimes mythically, those events. Following this analytical line—and in contrast with some approaches in anthropology that label as "affects" (Berg and Ramos 2015)

what I conceptualize here as the emotions that unfold when affects become part of a map of intensity—, I understand emotion as affect contextualized: as an intensity that is owned and recognized (Skoggard and Waterston 2015). Thus, an affect that is experienced as a gain of power, or joyful in Deleuze's terms, soon becomes synchronised with memories of similar affects, their historical context, and their collective understandings—unfolding into complex emotions such as hopefulness, pride, calm, happiness, and so on. On the other hand, affects that lead to a loss of power, or sadness, also develop into more complex emotions such as boredom, guilt, anger, confusion, and ultimately rejection, depending on their interpretation alongside the individual's map of intensity. In the specific case of Muisca members participating in cusmuy gatherings, their affective responses soon become linked to their own life histories as mestizos and later as indigenous, as well as to the collective memory of their specific indigenous group and their current living conditions, forming the affective cluster that informs their attitude towards the cusmuy.

Authors within anthropology and literary studies such as Stewart (2007) and Berlant (2011) also explore affect from the Deleuzian perspective, but they consider the sensorial component, the affective response, and its linguistic elements to be a single affective experience. By these means, they seem to present the linguistic, social component as the core of affect itself, somehow shadowing the affective potential of sensorial stimuli beyond signification. In *Ordinary Affects* (2007), for example, Stewart focuses on what she calls "affective texture," or the linkage between personal intensities and cultural fields of meaning that give sense to, and connect, apparently

unrelated instances of the "American" social life. Ana Ramos, on the other hand, openly challenges works in affect that follow the Spinozist perspective, such as Brian Massumi's *The Autonomy of Affect* (1995). She argues that a "pre-social" formulation of affect dismisses the role of intentionality, producing a gap between affect and cognition that could validate affective racial practices by framing them as unconscious. I argue that Ramos applies affect theory to situations that are different from those imagined by Deleuze and even by Stewart and Berlant. She frames social dispositions and indicators of personhood as affective. In other words, her affects are attitudes that are collectively shared or expected to be shared by members of groups, and which are sometimes even enacted to ensure group affiliation, instead of being bodily responses to stimuli. Therefore, even though her perspective on affect has proven useful when affect is equated to cultural attitudes, I argue that her overall criticism of the Deleuzian stance has been overestimated by extending it to every standpoint on affect.

Overall, using Deleuze's approach to affect as a border theory for the exploration of indigenous self-formation has allowed me to unveil manifestations of sincerity that are otherwise carefully hidden by indigenous people, usually as a means to secure the positioning of both their group and themselves vis-à-vis external expectations. In the case of the Muisca, my focus on the sensorial stimuli experienced by group members during cusmuy encounters and on how they unfold into affects—and later into complex emotions—has unveiled brief but very meaningful expressions of indigenous sincerity. First, I have been able to recognize that sensorial perception

per se is mediated by members' maps of intensity, which comprise their own memories as indigenous and as mestizos as well as their collective histories as part of a Muisca group. Second, I have understood that what determines the incorporation of the cusmuy as part of members' lives as Muisca is not just their conformity with what the cusmuy signifies, but also, and mostly, with *how they feel* when visiting the cusmuy and how those sensations are connected with their larger maps of intensity. Finally, I have been able to recognize that, despite the standardization to which the Muisca have been subjected since spirituality became the basis of their brand and members' doubts about their own indigeneity as a consequence, sincerity can be a reassuring means to recognize and validate both conforming and non-conforming indigeneities as they intersect under the category of "Muisca."

## THE CUSMUY AS A FIELD OF SINCERITY

Muisca spirituality is senses-based more than language-based. It is grounded in a bodily form of knowledge that recalls past experience and affective memory as sources of legitimation, instead of focusing on textual, semiotic validations of its authenticity. Spiritual cleaning ceremonies, the ceremonies of solstices and equinoxes, the confession of offenses against other group members, the collective preparation of medicine, ceremonies of "payment" to the earth, and ceremonies for the New Year are infused with similar sensorial stimuli. Learning Muisca history, mythology and how current practices connect to academic narratives of the Muisca

past is secondary to and even absent from many cusmuy gatherings. When healing is taking place, or when a member refers to his/her spirituality, the focus is on feeling "the spirits of the land" and "the spirits of the ancestors:" an all-encompassing view that differs from the scholarly approach to Muisca religion based on specific deities and a deity-based cosmogony (Rubio 2004). One leader from Sesquile even told me that Muisca spirituality can only be understood by participating in cusmuy encounters, receiving the tobacco powder known as hoz-k and having an open heart that is able to "feel" the cusmuy. But as participation involves being exposed to sensorial stimuli that might be uncommon in members' mestizo past and urban present, the integration of the cusmuy as part of their indigenous-selves is frequently contested, requiring negotiation among incompatible nodes in members' maps of intensity.

Muisca maps of intensity are shaped by the differences between Muisca groups regarding their sense of belonging, the requirements for their official recognition, and their contrasting relationships with the lands they inhabit. While spirituality has been an essential requirement to belong to the Muisca group in Sesquile, the Muisca group in Bosa formed on the basis of social action, and belonging was determined by place of residence and lineage. As a result, the sensorial stimuli that imbue gatherings in the cusmuy in Sesquile have been experienced by members on several occasions since their self-recognition as Muisca, or even before, and are connected to the group's collective memory of Carlos Mamanche and his healing abilities. As these previous affects and collective narratives related to the

cusmuy are part of members' maps of intensity, they provide a cultural-affective context that is usually connected to emotions such as happiness, pride, and calm. On the other hand, the cusmuy in Bosa was not a part of the group since its formation, and members are not required to join cusmuy gatherings to remain members. Thus, sensorial stimuli in the cusmuy in Bosa (figure 10) are experienced as unexpected changes in the ambient background during members' first visits. These changes frequently generate affective responses of a loss of power (Deleuze 1978) that unfold into emotions of discomfort, fear, anger, and distrust, because the responses get connected with previous affects of similar intensity that are part of member's maps of intensity, even if they are not related to Muisca spirituality. Instead, those previous affects are usually connected to the Muisca's current living conditions or to a sense of nostalgia for a better past.

Figure 10. Inside the cusmuy in Bosa.

Such nostalgia, at least in the group from Bosa, is directly related to the transformation of the lands inhabited by members from open farming areas into illegal urban settlements, and how the experience of being in those lands shifted from pleasant to toxic as a result of the expansion of the city of Bogota. In contrast, cusmuy encounters in Sesquile are seen as an enrichment of the Muisca's relationship with the rural lands they inhabit. In this case, sensorial stimuli in the cusmuy are connected to similar stimuli outside, in the openness of the mountains that surround the town of Sesquile, and which generally produce affective responses of a gain of power (Deleuze 1978). As these affects join member's maps of intensity, emotions such as pride, calm, and trust that are attached to their collective history as Muisca begin to unfold, overcoming other possible emotions and other affective connections that could be triggered by similar stimuli but mapped as losses of power, or sadness.

These group-based circumstances, alongside any differences at the level of personal experiences that are also present in maps of intensity and connected to affective responses—including living conditions, work, family life, and histories of trauma and struggle—, are what eventually determine the relationship between an individual Muisca member and the cusmuy. However, despite the fact that maps of intensity are crucial to understanding how the Muisca-self is produced and transformed, members are rarely asked about the cusmuy as a sensorial experience that triggers those intensities, and are instead questioned about what the cusmuy means, its history, and how it was incorporated into the Muisca repertoire of cultural

alterity. This approach has proven to be ineffective for understanding the multiplicity of member-cusmuy relationships, and even less effective for assessing their authenticity. Ultimately, it was by allowing myself to become affected by the cusmuy and share my experiences with Musica members that I was able to extract the instances of indigenous sincerity that reveal the pluriversality of Muisca indigeneity beyond, and in spite of, the generalizations imposed by the Muisca brand.

I was able to unveil Muisca sincerity via maps of intensity at two moments in the process of affect production in the cusmuy: first, at the initial stage of affectation, when I became aware that personal sensorial memories led to variability regarding sensorial awareness between Muisca members and myself; and second, at the subsequent phase of emotionalization, when various affective responses to sensorial stimuli were incorporated into participants' maps of intensity, unfolding the complex emotions towards the cusmuy that members shared with me after cusmuy gatherings. In the next sections, I introduce six ethnographic vignettes that illustrate how affect exposes glimpses of indigenous sincerity through the sensorial experiences of three members of each Muisca group in the cusmuy, as well as segments of the broader maps of intensity that guide their views of the cusmuy and Muisca spirituality.

## SESQUILE AND THE CUSMUY

### "THOSE SOUNDS CAN MOVE SOMETHING INSIDE OF ME"

Paola, her husband, and their three children live in a semi-ruined colonial house near the town of Sesquile. During the week, she stays at home taking care of

the house and her children, and the whole family visits the cusmuy every Saturday and Sunday. She has been a member of the group since before its recognition, and has always been an active member. Paola told me that she believes in Carlos Mamanche's ideal of recovering Muisca indigeneity because it transformed a group of otherwise unrelated neighbors into a new family. She explained that before Carlos reunited the Muisca as a group, many members disliked their surnames and showed no particular interest in building social ties with other holders of indigenous surnames. She also told me that Carlos helped her and her husband get over family problems and health problems, both physical and emotional.

One Sunday evening after a long ceremony in the cusmuy, Paola and I began to talk about Muisca music. I wanted to learn her position regarding some of the short songs that are sung during every cusmuy gathering, and which I realized produced a positive affective response in me, as well as a subsequent emotional state of calmness and introspection. I was particularly intrigued by some of the songs, as they seemed to be transcultural incorporations (Rowley 2002) from indigenous groups from places as distant as North America. Some of the songs refer to animals such as the coyote and the wolf, which are not local to the flat highlands of central Colombia. Other, even more peculiar songs were partially or totally sung in an unknown language. Even though I was particularly interested in knowing how these songs became part of the Muisca repertoire and why they were accepted by members despite their evident disconnection with the Muisca past, I decided not to ask those questions to avoid distrust and instead initiated a more intimate conversation about my experience of

listening to, and singing, some of the songs. As we sat down on the grass besides the cusmuy, I commented:

> There are some songs that I enjoy a lot because they make me feel very relaxed, I don't know, like peaceful during ceremonies. I even try to sing some of them with you guys when I get the hoz-k, but I have not memorized all the lyrics yet. For example, the one that talks about wolves singing to the spirit of fire, and the one of the coyote. But the coyote one is a bit different because it actually makes me very energetic, I feel like standing up and dancing!

I avoided referring specifically to the songs in unknown languages because I was still concerned that she might interpret my conversation as an assessment of the authenticity of those songs as Muisca songs, but I was surprised when it was her who brought one of those songs into the conversation. She said:

> I think each person connects better with certain songs. For example, the one that I like the most is the *intomi* song. The one that says "…intomi, intomi, Intomi wichacha…" Do you remember that one? When I am in the cusmuy after having received the hoz-k and we sing that song, I feel like, em, like so attached to my roots, to the spirits of the land [silence]. I feel that those sounds can move something inside of me and remind me that despite all the problems of my life I should still be happy and proud of being indigenous. I feel calmed… and like everyone and everything

> around follows the sounds. It is like being able to hear the heart of the earth, the heart of all these plants around us and even the heart of our Muisca family. (Fieldnotes 26/07/2015)

When I asked about the translation of the song, she told me that she ignored the meaning and the language it is written in, and explained that all of the members have simply memorized the sounds. Days later, I had the opportunity to ask the leader of education about the song. He told me that it is a song to iktomi, the spirit of the spider among the Lakota people. Apparently, as most members have learnt the song through repetition, they sing it as it sounds to them. Paola, for example, pronounces it "intomi" instead of "iktomi." But despite being wrongly pronounced and historically unrelated to the Muisca, the validity of the iktomi song within cusmuy gatherings is not questioned by the members, and for Paola even infuses a sense of Muisca pride.

In this case, both of us experienced the sensorial stimuli of cusmuy songs as gains of power (Deleuze 1978). However, while my affective responses unfolded into emotions of calmness and introspection linked to similar soothing experiences but not to central aspects of my life history, Paola's joyful response to songs like "iktomi" is emotionally connected to her personal history as Muisca and to the collective memory of the Muisca of Sesquile as a group. At the individual level, she connects the sounds with memories of her own process of becoming Muisca and of being healed, which were also mediated by auditory stimuli in the cusmuy. Moreover, as these songs have been part of cusmuy encounters since Carlos introduced them, they have become normalized as a fundamental part of the healing practice and as part of the collective

memory of the Muisca of Sesquile. Therefore, instead of just listening to and singing the song, Paola and probably most other members of the group feel the song through their bodies and vocalize the sounds as expressions of those feelings, even transmitting their affects to each other (Brennan 2004) as they sing together in cusmuy gatherings. Singing and hearing together reinforces the sense of groupness among members, as they become capable of feeling alike and feeling collectively, spiritualizing not only themselves but also the rural landscape around them, according to the teachings of their charismatic leader Carlos Mamanche.

Despite living in poverty as a rural housewife, being part of the Muisca group has given Paola a reason to be proud of her lineage and her way of life, as well as the social positioning of being a holder of cultural alterity that deserves the protection of the state and the mestizo majorities. Singing in an unknown language actually enhances this sense of difference, making the songs somehow exclusive to the Musica of Sesquile even if their origins are external to the group. Ultimately, only the Muisca of Sesquile can affectively understand songs like "iktomi," link them to their history as Muisca, and transmit those affects to other members. While external participants like me are only superficially affected by the sounds themselves and still expect to decode the songs, members' utterance of the sounds operates more as a means of connecting them with their deified leader, their Muisca ancestors, and the spirits of the lands they have inhabited for several generations. To Paola, the iktomi song has become a hymn to be interpreted by the Muisca family, a family of which she is part on the basis of shared affective memories and not on the basis of a legal registration,

reinforcing her sincerity as Muisca even if non-members declare the songs to be inauthentic.

## “THE CENTRAL FIRE IS THE HEART OF THE CUSMUY”

Martina prepares the food for gatherings that take place on Saturdays and Sundays in the cusmuy. Her eight-year-old daughter and eleven-year-old son usually join her and participate in whatever activity is taking place. Martina is the sole financial provider for her family, and works as a cook in the public school in Sesquile. She is known in the group for being “bitter” and “lonely,” and only visits the cusmuy for certain ceremonies, despite being there every weekend to cook. Her children, on the other hand, spend most of their weekends in or around the cusmuy, playing with other kids or helping with whatever is needed. Martina has been a member of the Muisca group since before its official recognition: like Paola, she first approached Carlos because of his abilities as an indigenous healer, deciding to become a member of the group both because of its focus on spirituality and because of her Muisca surname. One Sunday morning I joined her while she was cooking. Iwas accompanied by Andres, one of the leaders. Andres wanted to know her thoughts on what is means to be Muisca, because her participation in cusmuy encounters was intermittent and he wanted to ensure that she was committed. Andres told her about the importance of participating in cusmuy gatherings, and asked her why she

sometimes does not enter even as she cooks on the charcoal stove located just beside the cusmuy. Martina replied:

> What I find special about the cusmuy is the central fire, but even this fire in the kitchen is important to me as Muisca. If I am near the fire, it is as if I were in the cusmuy, so I do not always need to enter. Carlos told me once that the spirits of this Musica land can talk to us through the fire, and that the central fire is the heart of the cusmuy. I enjoy looking at the fire and feeling the fire -em, I guess that means I am Muisca. The fire in the cusmuy feels better because everything is dark. When I go to the cusmuy, I feel the warmth of the fire, em, the same warmth that I feel in the kitchen, but in the cusmuy I can see clearly its different colors… how it moves. I feel like connected to my ancestors [silence], em, like the fire can talk to me. If I stay looking at the shapes of the fire, hearing the little sparks and feeling its warmth… sometimes I feel so happy, so calmed and protected, like in a dream that even makes me forget my problems. But sometimes I just want to connect with the fire and not get involved in the issues of the group, sometimes things that I do not know about… so I just stay here with my own fire. (Fieldnotes 13/09/2015)

Only after listening to Martina did I begin to reflect on my own affective responses to the central fire of the cusmuy. I remember that before my conversation with her I took the fire for granted, thinking of it mostly as a source of light and heat, not as a spiritual element of the cusmuy. I remember being affected by the darkness of

the cusmuy, by the singing, by the hoz-k, and sometimes even by the smoke of the fire, but the fire itself was usually left at the back of my awareness. Probably I was more aware of the affectations producing losses of power, which managed to hide the soothing sensations that came from looking at the fire. On the other hand, it seemed that Martina's affective memories of her daily handling of fire in the rudimentary kitchens of Sesquile made her particularly attentive to the fire in the cusmuy, to the point that it became a central part of her spirituality as Muisca. From that moment onwards, I began to be more attentive to members' relationships with fire, realizing that several people constantly gazed at it during cusmuy encounters. In conversation with Martina and other members, I learnt that Carlos introduced the central fire as the spiritual heart of the cusmuy, while the elders of rural families in Sesquile used to say that the rudimentary stove of their kitchens was the heart of their homes. Therefore, memories of the affects triggered by the controlled fire inside buildings are present in the maps of intensity of Muisca members, and even more so in the case of Martina, who still uses a rudimentary stove every weekend. For her, the heart of Muisca spirituality is present not only in the cusmuy, but also in the fire she uses to cook food for the group, her extended family.

In her response, Martina associates fire with her sense of belonging as Muisca. She has made spirituality portable and unbounded to the cusmuy by spiritualizing fire itself and her cooking, arguing that her sensitivity towards fire is a clear indication of her indigenous sincerity. However, Andres seems to be both unaware of Martina's approach to Muisca spirituality and overly restricted by the

Muisca brand, placing the cusmuy as the main indicator of Muisca authenticity. For him, Martina's intermittent participation in cusmuy gatherings was a breach of her commitment as member, and so Martina was compelled to explain her relationship with fire as proof of her indigeneity. Like most members of the group in Sesquile, she approached Carlos because of his abilities as a healer, and the connection between indigeneity and healing remains part of the collective memory of the members of the group. Thus, despite of being an introvert labelled as "bitter" and "lonely" because of not visiting the cusmuy regularly, Martina is still able to validate her spiritual healing process through her intimate relationship with fire in the kitchen, which she says helps her remain happy, calm, and safe despite of the problems of her daily life. Ultimately, Martina has brought fire from a frequently overlooked horizon of interaction to the centre of her cusmuy experience, becoming affected by the multi-sensorial stimuli produced by it. When her sight, touch, smell, and hearing are alerted by changes in the central fire and fire in the kitchen, those affectations are interiorized as gains of power that unfold into a sense of empowerment and inner strength.

## "THE CUSMUY IS LIKE THE WOMB OF EARTH"

The first time I had the opportunity to enter into a cusmuy was with the group in Bosa. I remember that my body almost pushed me back outside as I encountered its impenetrable darkness. It was a sunny day, so the sharp contrast between excessive and almost absent light left me almost unable to see my own body. Upon crossing the

door, I suddenly stopped and felt a jump from the inside of my body, a jump that made me self-conscious of my disadvantaged position in that space, unable to move around without fear of falling or hitting something. Thinking about the possible reasons to keep a place of public engagement so dark, I remembered that some colonial Catholic churches in Bogota still dim their lights, arguing that it enhances worship. But the cusmuy experience was different. Its only source of light is the central fire, which partially illuminates a radius of no more than three meters from its center, keeping the sitting benches located against the wall in almost complete darkness. I always experienced a loss of power during my early visits to the cusmuy, and my affective responses to darkness became aligned to previous memories of the dark located in my own map of intensity, as well as to the emotions attached to them. I found myself feeling insecure, anxious, and even confused—probably because as a female living in Bogota, I have associated darkness, and the night, with danger. This emotional package shifted slowly as I participated in more ceremonies and became aware of other sensorial affectations intermingling with the visual stimuli of darkness, forming a more cohesive cusmuy sensorial compound.

Months later, while undertaking fieldwork in Sesquile, I shared my first impressions about the darkness of the cusmuy with Juan, one of the leaders. He told me that the first time he entered the cusmuy in Sesquile his body also reacted with a kick that made him stop for a while, until his sight adapted to the dark. However, he told me that as soon as he became able to at least differentiate people's shapes, he felt

confident enough to move around freely, like in his house in the mountains of Sesquile, where electric shortages are common at night. He commented:

> The cusmuy is, to me, like the darkened home where I used to meet my family to sing and reflect about the day without being distracted by all what happens outside and which is not Muisca. All the noise of the city, the cell phones, the TV, all of that stuff -em, I remember that my family used to sit around some candles and sing and play, even drink chicha during electricity shortages. There was nothing else to do apart from being together, and that is what now brings us all together to the cusmuy [silence]. Carlos told us many times that the cusmuy represents the earth, actually her womb. The cusmuy is like the womb of the earth. And the womb is dark, right? In that darkness, the babies can grow, and become ready for life outside. That is why we should come at least every week, to be born again, to be cleaned from the week's mess. But also to be together, around the fire that reminds me of the candles of my home when I was a kid -em, but yes, the first time is a bit weird. The darkness made me feel sleepy at the beginning, I remember even falling asleep a couple of times. I felt sleepy and like I was being hugged by the cusmuy. I do not know, like wrapped by the shape and the darkness? em, like cradled. Now I am more awake [laughs], but I think we are all still kind of soothed by the cusmuy. (fieldnotes 14/03/2015)

Juan and I experienced the same sensorial affectation to the darkness of the cusmuy, and reacted similarly. However, while his bodily response to the change in lighting led to an affective gain of power that he experienced as soothing and relaxing, I had the same bodily response followed by a loss of power, a sensation of fear and confusion. The affective memories that triggered Juan's response to darkness were certainly different than mine, even before linking them to our dissimilar life histories and collective memories as Muisca, in his case, and as mestizo, in mine. From my conversation with Juan, I learned that his confidence in dark spaces came from the number of times he had already experienced darkness with other people, mostly the family members with whom he lived in rural Sesquile. Therefore, Juan's experience of darkness in the cusmuy became affectively connected to moments of family reunion around candles during which members gathered together to sing and talk. On the other hand, most of what I knew of being in dark spaces came from my family's warnings to stay away from them, from the depiction of dark spaces as dangerous in the media, and from our collective urban culture of mistrust.

As a result of the attachment between affective memories of darkness and his map of intensity, and then to their connexion with concrete cusmuy experiences, Juan felt the cusmuy as a place where darkness is protective and even hugging, inducing him to fall asleep, while I actually became more alert, anxious, and ready to react. Juan also linked his affective response to the darkness of the cusmuy with the collective memories of Carlos Mamanche's teachings, adding a narrative explanation to the darkness itself. According to this explanation, the cusmuy represents a womb

that aids participants in their weekly re-birth from the messiness of the city to the peacefulness of the Muisca land; darkness is the marker that represents both the womb and the dividing line between the urban, mestizo disorder and the rural, indigenous order. Ultimately, the cusmuy and the sensorial experiences taking place inside it became the basis of legitimization for Juan's belonging to the Muisca group of Sesquile. This legitimization occurs on the basis of an embodied sincerity and not on the basis of rationality, and it is grounded on affective connections between past and present sensorial affectations, life histories, and the collective memory of Muisca spirituality enhanced by group members themselves during cusmuy encounters.

## BOSA AND THE CUSMUY

### "WHAT CAN BE SO BAD ABOUT TOUCHING LOOSE SOIL?"

Daniel and his family have been registered as members of the group in Bosa since its recognition in 1998, but Daniel is the only member who participates in cusmuy gatherings on a regular basis. As his family left the area of San Bernardino two decades ago, he has not experienced the outcomes of its urbanization on a daily basis, but frequently talks about memories of his earlier years there, when the area was a semi-rural farming sector of Bosa. From Monday to Friday, Daniel works for the Ministry of the Environment, giving talks on ecology and indigeneity at local schools. On the weekends, he spends most of his time in the cusmuy, either participating in gatherings or with the group of young musicians, of which he is the

director. One evening after a particularly long meeting in the cusmuy, we decided to walk from San Bernardino to another sector of Bosa, hoping to have more chances of finding transportation, which was extremely scarce because it was almost midnight. While walking, I happened to look at my shoes and realized that those few hours sitting in the cusmuy had let them covered in dust. I looked at my jacket and pants to see if they were also dusty, and realized that the jacket, and my hair, had a very strong smell of herbs. While cleaning my shoes with a paper tissue, Daniel commented:

> That dust means that you were in contact with real soil. We have been taught that having soil on one's shoes is not good, but what can be so bad about touching loose soil? Feeling the soil under my feet in the cusmuy… I feel so comfortable. Um, like being able to grow plants inside of a house. It feels softer than a floor, and it has that smell of, like I do not know, uh, like humidity. That is what grounds me so much to the cusmuy. Outside we have the jungle of brick and concrete, right? But here is soft, have you felt that too? It is like, um, like a soft cushion under your feet. I think that only without a floor of concrete can we hear the heart of the cusmuy. You realize that water, plants, and animals are right under us despite the contamination outside. I feel that the floor of the cusmuy, and also the walls made of soft bahreque [clay], make me feel that I am being taken care of. I feel peaceful, secure and optimistic every time I enter the cusmuy…

Even though by that time I had already focused my attention towards the sensorial stimuli in the cusmuy, the tactility of my feet against the unpaved floor and of the rest of my body against the walls was still unnoticed. It was part of a background that I never experienced as an affectation. The feeling of soil, in my case, was totally surpassed by other sensorial stimuli such as the darkness, sounds, and smells. For Daniel, on the other hand, feeling loose soil was central to his relationship with the cusmuy. After cleaning my shoes, I removed my jacket and smelled it. Daniel continued:

> So, you did not realize the herbs either? Um, maybe it is because your family is not from here, you know, farmers. Every time I cross the door of the cusmuy I feel the change. It is like going from hard to soft, from restriction to freedom. The herbs are burnt to clear up the spirit, so we are ready for the rest of the ceremony. I try to close my eyes and connect my heart with the cusmuy. The burnt plants remind me of the sahumerios [aromatic smokes] that my grandma used to do during holy week. (Fieldnotes 05/10/2014)

I would have never noticed the softness of the floor of the cusmuy in Bosa if Daniel had not mentioned it that night, or the similarity between the smell of the herbs burnt in the central fire and the aromatic smoke used in many local houses during the Catholic holy week. After several visits to the cusmuy, I realized that touch and smell were senses of which I was hardly aware, while sight and sound were the most stimulated. This sensorial prioritization can be an outcome of the focus on

observation and speech that still dominates Western “worldviews” (Howes 2006), but which seemed not to be shared by Daniel and some other members of the group in Bosa. His awareness of the softness of loose soil in the cusmuy contrasted with my complete lack of awareness, unveiling how personal maps of intensity can not only compexify affect but also define the range of sensorial perception. From my conversation with Daniel, I could infer that his enhanced tactile perception is related to his attachment to the now-lost rural landscape of Bosa, and specifically to ploughed land, despite the fact that he has lived in urban Bosa for most of his life. Moreover, his perception of the smells produced by burning herbs seemed to be connected to sensorial memories of his childhood, when his grandmother used to perform Catholic rituals at home.

However, neither his affective memories from a mestizo past as a member of a Catholic family of farmers, nor the current environmental destruction of San Bernardino, have resulted in Daniel’s rejection of the cusmuy. I consider this outcome a result of two events in Daniel’s life history: first, he only lived in San Bernardino during his early childhood; and, second, his family is not actively engaged in the Muisca group. By living outside of San Bernardino, Daniel has not yet experienced the outcomes of the destruction of the farming landscape, instead keeping his early memories of a happy rural life in Bosa prominent in his map of intensity. By these means, his affective response to loose soil in the cusmuy is aligned with previous tactile affectations decoded into emotions of joy within his map of intensity—mainly memories of a cleaner and safer San Bernardino where he helped his family members

grow their crops. Moreover, since his family is not currently active in the group, he has been able to detach his interest in spirituality from the discussions of older members regarding whether they belong in the group, thereby freeing himself from the anger, anxiety, and frustration that self-doubt has caused among the Catholic members. In contrast, he has been able to recall an affective memory related to Catholicism and connect it to a sensorial affectation in the cusmuy without finding conflict between them. Overall, for him the cusmuy has become a space of freedom in the middle of a growing city that is sensed as restrictive, a place where the softness of the unpaved floor and walls, and the smells produced by burnt plants, are experienced as a cure for the hardness of the urban streets, reminding Daniel of a past Muisca indigeneity in which people and nature were still closely connected.

## "EVERYTHING IS BROKEN INSIDE"

Andres' grandparents participated in the process of recognition of the Muisca group from Bosa in 1998 and were active members for several years. They both had Muisca surnames, and Andres' family has lived in San Bernardino for more than a century. Following the death of his grandparents, Andres' parents and siblings distanced themselves from the group because of disagreements with Wilson's plans for spirituality. But despite his family's detachment from the group, Andres still works in the administrative office, helping with the management of the monthly food supply. His house, which fifteen years ago was part of a large land plot used for

agriculture and cattle rearing, is now surrounded by other houses, most illegally built. As a consequence of this illegal urbanization, the rudimentary drainage system in the area has collapsed, making the air almost unbreathable due to a combination of the smells of the accumulated waste and the dust of the unpaved road used by cars, buses, and bicycles.

One day, while waiting to meet with the governor in her office, Andres and I began a conversation about why the incorporation of new practices seemed to be preferred over recovering the knowledge held by the elders of the group. I brought the cusmuy to the table because of its late incorporation, but even more because I had never seen Andres participating in a cusmuy encounter. I told him that despite the newness of the cusmuy for the members of the group from Bosa, some members had already incorporated it into their lives, while other members told me that it was contrary to their religious beliefs—so I wanted to know his opinion. He told me that he had visited the cusmuy, but discovered that it was unrelated to his Muisca indigeneity and the indigenous knowledge of his grandparents. He explained that his grandparents were healers, and that it was usual for him to see them use herbal tonics at home, but since the construction of the cusmuy, their knowledge was replaced by the other medicines that were provided during ceremonies. I told him that I had visited the cusmuy on several occasions, and that I had received the hoz-k medicine. He commented:

> The cusmuy is a very strange place. When I entered the first time, I remember how surprised I was by the darkness inside. Um, I think I did

> not expect the place to be so dark and that scared me. I felt very uncomfortable. It was such a sunny day outside and then you just step into that total darkness. I think I jumped out of fear, and sadness. I find the place scary, I don't know, um… and kind of messy. I do not like the dust inside, everything is broken inside. There is no proper floor, or proper chairs, and they use some sort of incense or dry plants that smell very strong. The smell is so strong that I felt embarrassed to take the bus afterwards because I knew that everybody could smell it [silence]. I remember my grandfather picking the medicinal plants himself and then mixing them and boiling them. He had so many like, uh, like glass bottles with things to drink or to apply to the body. But I remember that most of the work was done in the fields or at home, and it was a very friendly activity, nothing in a dark place full of smoke. This makes me angry because I do not even know who is in charge of making the medicines now, uh… those people of the Carare group, I think. Those people are not even Muisca. (Fieldnotes 27/11/2014)

The sensorial stimuli that produced affectations in Andres during his visit to the cusmuy were visual, tactile, and olfactory, and seemed to be linked to other stimuli caused by the environmental changes suffered by those currently living in San Bernardino. For example, while most other participants responded to the affectations produced by the flying sparkles of the central fire, Andres overlooked the fire and instead reacted to the disorder of the place, its darkness and its broken layout. While

the touch of loose soil was a comforting cushion for some members, Andres linked this affectation with a sense of incompleteness. While the smell of herbs reminded some Muisca of their families, it affected him as a loss of power (Deleuze 1978), emotionally expressed as embarrassment. He even seemed unaware of, and unaffected by, the singing—a stimuli that shaped my own cusmuy experience as a non-Muisca. Within Andres' map of intensity, the dirt, dust, disorder, and strong smells experienced in the cusmuy were a mirror of his experiences outside, and both experiences became intermingled as the outcome of changes imposed on the Muisca in Bosa by outsiders. The rural lands that his family had inhabited for centuries had been transformed by illegal builders and even State institutions into an urban slum, where he has to breathe the smoke produced by burned rubbish, the contamination of the river, and the unsettled dust on the road. As for Muisca spirituality, a branded form of indigeneity had replaced the mestizo form of spirituality practiced by his grandparents and by most Muisca people before 2006, imposing the cusmuy as an indicator of authenticity. Within this context, the cumsuy appears to be one more materialization of the coloniality of being (Maldonado Torres 2007) that induces the indigenous other to reject the knowledge of their elders to meet contemporary standards of indigeneity.

Despite the fact that Andres' affective response to the shift from sunlight to the darkness of the cusmuy was the same jump that Juan experienced in Sesquile, his affective response led to a very different emotional construction. Andres' collective memories as Muisca differ greatly from Juan's. The group in Bosa formed on the

basis of social action, and belonging was determined by land use and surname, not by a form of spirituality with the cusmuy as its tangible indicator. Also, Andres' memories of spirituality were intimate and family-based, opposing Juan's understanding of spirituality as something that happens in a public space such as the cusmuy. Thus, this part of Muisca indigeneity was experienced by Andres as a loss of power that unfolded into fear, anger, and a generalized rejection of the cusmuy as part of his Muisca-self. For Andres, sincerity meant contesting the cusmuy as a way of memorializing his indigeneity and his family. He rejects the cusmuy in order to remember spirituality as an intimate experience deeply connected to rural life, thereby contesting at the same time his present status as urban poor.

## "WHY GIVE MEDICINE TO SOMEONE WHO IS NOT ILL?"

Maria sat down next to me during the solstice ceremony in the cusmuy. As we arrived early, we had time to talk before it began. Maria told me that she had married a non-Muisca person and relocated to another sector of Bosa more than ten years ago, remaining detached from the Muisca group until 2014, when she returned and registered her husband and children as "adopted" Muiscas. Since then, she has been a beneficiary of the monthly food supply and has begun to participate in the Muisca sewing workshop and administrative meetings. However, that evening was her first participation in a cusmuy gathering. She told me that it was difficult for her to visit the cusmuy because she lived far from San Bernardino, and the ceremonies

were usually at night and on weekends, time that she preferred to spend with her family. She also told me that she was less interested in the cusmuy than in the sewing workshops because, while sewing was a regular activity in her parents' house, the only place where "something spiritual" took place in her childhood was the Catholic church. Moreover, she told me that before construction of the cusmuy knowledge about natural remedies had usually been kept within the privacy of the house, instead of being publically shared in a space specifically dedicated to healing and spirituality.

At around seven in the evening, the spiritual leader stood up and grabbed a small wooden box, as well as something that looked like a wooden straw. He walked towards us, and stopped in front of the participant who was sitting on my right hand side. He used the wooden straw to take a small amount of tobacco powder from the box, and placed it at the entrance of one of the person's nostrils. Then he blew from the other side of the straw, expelling the tobacco powder into the nose. He repeated the same operation in the other nostril and softly hit the crown of the person's head with the palm of his hand. The man coughed loudly for few seconds and then continued singing with the other participants. I was next. I had experienced the cleaning with hoz-k, or powdered tobacco, several times already. The leader approached me, blew the tobacco powder and hit me with the palm of his hand. The burning sensation travelled from my nose to between my eyebrows and then downward through my throat. I sneezed, felt dizzy and my hands became cold. After a few minutes, however, I found myself enthusiastically singing with the rest of the participants, without a trace of dizziness or pain. Maria received the hoz-k right after

me. I did not notice her initial reaction as I was busy with the response of my own body, but I heard her blowing her nose several times, even after the leader had finished giving hoz-k to everyone. She did not sing afterwards, and looked very tired and uncomfortable. As soon as the ceremony ended, Maria asked me:

> The tobacco is a medicine, right? As far as I know, healing herbs are used to cure health problems, most of them problems with the body, and a few issues of witchcraft. But here they are blowing tobacco into everybody! I do not think that it is very healthy, you know? When he blew that tobacco, wow! It made me so dizzy. It made me so angry. I could feel the whole thing up my nose. Very uncomfortable! Uh, I felt that my body did not like it, it reacted trying to get it out. I felt dizzy, angry. Why give medicine to someone who is not ill? Imagine, um, think that for example when you have menstrual cramps, you use common rue; for hair loss, you use wild rosemary; the dandelion flower helps against parasites. Tobacco has specific uses too. And they just blow tobacco inside of your nose for no reason! That burning sensation and the dizziness, it could only make me angry! (Fieldnotes 21/12/2014)

One of the changes that followed the consolidation of spirituality as the main emblem of Muisca alterity was the conjoining of Carlos' spirituality with the use of medicinal plants. Before the recognition of the group in Sesquile and the construction of the cusmuyes, plants were used as a treatment for specific physical or emotional problems, mostly when people could not afford to go to the hospital. But as the

Muisca brand aligned to the global model of the indigenous as a spiritual savior for all humanity, everybody began to be considered "spiritually ill," and therefore a potential receiver of indigenous medicine. To the new Muisca spiritual leaders, sharing the hoz-k became a means to unify and strengthen their groups around the ideas of spiritual awareness and group cohesion, arguing that the hoz-k helps people clear their minds and hearts. However, not all members have accepted these changes in the Muisca's approach to indigenous medicine. Many of those whose membership was not initially based on spirituality have framed the cusmuy as an attack against their Catholic religious beliefs, while those who were disconnected from their Muisca groups and returned later, like Maria, now experience cusmuy practices like hoz-k blowing as invasive.

During the ceremony in the cusmuy, Maria and I both experienced a moment of sensorial stimulation propitiated by hoz-k blowing, and had a similar affective response to it. Both of us experienced a loss of power triggered by pain, a sharp smell, and a bitter taste. However, the resulting emotions were considerably different. Apart from my previous experiences with hoz-k, I had rarely been exposed to non-Western healing treatments. As a result, my affective responses were not linked to specific, previous affectations related to indigenous medicine. Instead, as soon as the affectation produced by the hoz-k receded other sensorial stimuli took over, including the music that was being played and the warmth of the central fire, which were actually enhanced by the chemicals of the tobacco in my body. Minutes after the pain, I felt energized, active, and joyful. On the other hand, Maria's loss of power left her

to further disempowerment when her affective response was connected to her map of intensities and contrasted against her indigenous-self. After living outside of San Bernardino for ten years, Maria was exposed to sensorial stimuli that she had never associated with her Muisca indigeneity before, destabilizing her sense of belonging. The pain and dizziness caused by what she interiorized as an imposed affectation unfolded into anger, and that anger was legitimized as she realized how different the practice of hoz-k blowing was from the use of healing plants that was common in her family, and which along with weaving she considers part of her Muisca-self. Moreover, the fact that the other members seemed to agree with the practice of hoz-k blowing isolated her even more, despite the fact that her rejection of the cusmuy was based on her sincere standpoint as Muisca.

## CONCLUSIONS

Increased interest in assessing the cultural alterity of the Muisca vis-à-vis the Muisca brand has produced deep transformations among Muisca groups and their members. These transformations have had a direct impact on members' understanding of their indigenous selves, an aspect that can hardly be explored through analytical lenses that focus on indigeneity as a political endeavor, such as strategic essentialism (Spivak 2003) or the theory of articulation (Clifford 2001)—despite the fact that those approaches are based on critical theories. Unfortunately, research on the contemporary production of ethnic and indigenous alterity has been problematized for

its connection to examinations of "authenticity," a notion that is central to the coloniality of power (Quijano 2000) as it continues to exercise epistemological violence on its objectified subjects of study (Conklin 2002; Linneking 1991; Lucero 2006; Teo 2010). In this chapter, I offered an analytical alternative for exploring indigenous self-formation vis-à-vis the branding of cultural alterity. Building up from the decolonial writings of Grosfoguel (2007) and Quijano (2000), I responded to the objectification and homogenization of the authenticity discourse by exploring Muisca self-formation through a more subjective and dialogical approach known as racial/indigenous sincerity (Jackson 2005), using Deleuze's stance on affect as my analytical lens (1978). By these means, I re-directed research on indigenous alterity towards personal experiences of indigeneity, re-dimensioning Muisca alterity as pluriversal, relational, and, therefore, non-authenticable.

In this chapter, my engagement with decoloniality took place at two levels. Theoretically, the decolonial approach to governance helped me recognize how the colonial management of difference still defines indigeneity and has the authority to recognize it politically (Canessa 2007; Gros and Ochoa 1998; Sieder 2002). This allowed me to broaden my scope of analysis by acknowledging how contemporary definitions of indigeneity are part of a transnational politics of multiculturalism that benefits from the standardization of alterity as related to spirituality and the environment (Ulloa 2004). Thus I was able to recognize that Muisca spirituality is a branded version of cultural alterity that was built on the teachings of Carlos Mamanche in agreement with the transnational models of indigeneity that are

available through the media. In terms of my research practice, decolonial scholarship spurred my interest in finding an alternative for engaging with processes of indigenous self-formation beyond authenticity and its thingification of the indigenous subject, but without neglecting authenticity's centrality in the process of indigenous recognition. This alternative is ethnic/indigenous sincerity (Jackson 2005), a subject-based, dialogical option to explore the deeper shades of indigenous selves amidst the doubts they experience when confronting themselves against the expectations of others.

As a means to find these hidden glimpses of sincerity among members who avoid direct questions about spirituality to protect their group's authenticity, I became a regular participant of the gatherings taking place in Muisca ceremonial houses, known as cusmuys. Encounters in the cusmuy are filled with multi-sensorial stimuli that produce affective responses and complex emotions in participants, either in favor or against the practices of Muisca spirituality that take place inside. These affective responses became the common footing for my conversations with group members (Goffman 1981), as well as my passage into their sincere standpoints on the cusmuy and Muisca spirituality. To understand those affects and emotions, I used Deleuze's (1978) analytical lens as a border theory (Mignolo 2012, 2013) as a decolonial option for accessing indigenous sincerity. This focus on sincerity allowed me to unveil a pluriverse of Muisca selves concealed within the standardized requirements of the Muisca brand.

Participants' affective responses to Muisca cusmuyes are triggered by affectations involving smell, sound, visual and gustatory stimuliand tactile experiences. When encountering these affectations, participants experience intensities with a content of joy (gain of power) or sadness (loss of power). These intensities are further contextualized as complex emotions when participants link them to their affective memories, their life histories, and the collective memories of their groups, forming what Deleuze calls maps of intensity (1978). From my fieldwork in the cusmuyes of Bosa and Sesquile, I learned that the awareness of a given sensorial stimuli varies between group members and non-members, as well as among members of the same group, depending on the frequency and historical context of previous similar stimuli encountered by the participant.

For instance, while I was affected by the darkness of the cusmuy, I remained unaffected by the softness of its unpaved floor—which happened to be central to Daniel's cusmuy experience due to its links with his affective memories of the tactile experience of touching loose soil as a child from rural San Bernardino. This and other examples showed me that each group member has a unique sensorial experience in the cusmuy, even when everyone is exposed to the same stimuli. Moreover, despite experiencing the same affective responses as certain members to a given stimuli on several occasions, those responses were not always experienced equally. For example, while I experienced the darkness of the cusmuy as fearful due to my prior affective responses to darkness, Juan was soothed by the same darkness, which triggered his affective memories of family reunions in rural Sesquile—still a common Muisca

practice. These findings show how an indigenous/mestizo sense of the world is still deeply held by the contemporary Muisca in the form of affective memories, showing their sincerity as indigenous beyond their acceptance or rejection of the cusmuy.

Furthermore, I learned that affective responses to sensorial stimuli in the cusmuy unfold into more complex emotions as they become part of an affective cluster that interlinks affective memories, life histories, and collective memories, producing maps of intensity that shape the indigenous-self and define whether or not incorporation of the cusmuy is possible for a given member. The impact of maps of intensity in decisions about whether to participate in cusmuy gatherings was evident in all of the cases presented in this chapter. In Sesquile, where spirituality became engrained in the members' sense of selves since the formation of the group, and where members' relationship with the land is still rural, the cusmuy was fully embraced by Paola and Juan and partially by Martina, who managed to detach from the cusmuy due to her personal relationship with fire. In the Bosa group, on the other hand, where group leaders had to conceal the mestizo collective memories of the group and replace them with fabricated memories of Muisca spirituality, and where members' relationship with the land has shifted from rural to urban, only Daniel embraced the cusmuy by linking its affects with memories of his own childhood in rural San Bernardino rather than with its urban present.

The fact that the Muisca groups in Bosa and Sesquile gained recognition on the basis of different political stances on indigeneity (Povinelli 2002) has made it particularly difficult for members of the Muisca group in Bosa to incorporate the

cusmuy as part of their indigenous selves. While the group in Sesquile was recognized because they demonstrated spirituality as a form of cultural alterity, the recognition of the group in Bosa was based on members' lineage and land use. As a result, the later incorporation of the cusmuy into this group is seen as an imposition that contradicts the members' mestizo standpoints on spirituality: a contradiction that they have to navigate if they are to avoid external accusations of inauthenticity such as those posted on Facebook in response to a Catholic mass taking place in the cusmuy. In Sesquile, on the other hand, the affective responses to sensorial stimuli experienced in cusmuy gatherings are backed up by ten years of similar affective memories. Those memories, as well as the mythopoeia (Rowley 2002) produced around Carlos Mamanche's teachings and the continuity of rural life in the outskirts of Sesquile, have become the basis for the complexification of member's affects into emotions such as pride, happiness, security, and calmness that have become part of their cusmuy experience. All in all, the cases show that members' decision to incorporate or reject the cusmuy is based on profound features of their indigenous selves, even when such sincerities are perceived as evidence of inauthenticity.

# CHAPTER 4 - "WRITING THOUGHTS WITH THE POPORO": COCA LEAVES, CRUSHED SEASHELLS, AND THE MICROPOLITICS OF DECISION-MAKING

## INTRODUCTION

Scholars aiming to decolonize social research have an emergent interest in engaging with indigenous ontologies and epistemologies (Estermann 2006; Meeks and Norman 2010; Mignolo and Escobar 2013; Mignolo 2010). It is argued that such epistemologies could provide analytical alternatives for exploring the agentic relationships between humans and non-humans that have historically been undervalued in Western scholarship. In many cases, however, those alternative epistemologies are not readily available to the researcher, even an indigenous one. Colonization and the following incorporation of Western worldviews among indigenous people has left just blurred traces of the ways of knowing that informed indigenous lives before colonization. As explored in Chapter One, this situation is particularly common in the urban centers of Latin America, where colonization was followed by a politics of mestizaje grounded on assimilationism (Hale 2005, 2002) that lasted until the 1990s, when multiculturalism was incorporated as a constitutional principle. Despite this, most research on contemporary indigeneities in this region continues to underestimate non-humans and their agentic capacities.[2] In this chapter I

[2] But see: De la Cadena (2015), Ewart (2013), Apffel-Marglin (2012), Cosata and Fausto (2010), Londono-Sulkin (2005), Ingold (2000), De Castro (1998), and Povinelli (1995).

propose that even Western philosophy and social theory can offer epistemological alternatives for addressing research questions involving non-Western perceptions of the world. Building on Anzaldua (2012) and Mignolo's (2012) concept of border thinking, I have engaged with elements of Western philosophy to produce the analytical core of a border theory that, by de-linking itself from the limitations of Western scholarship, can answer some of the questions of alternative scholarships.

In Chapter Three, I de-objectified the indigenous other by focusing on sincerity (Jackson 2005) as an option for exploring the Muisca-self without falling into the traps of thingification and authentication that have become so common when studying contemporary cultural alterities. To grasp those moments of sincerity, I focused on the affective responses that Muisca members and I have when exposed to the sensorial experiences that take place during gatherings in the ceremonial house, or cusmuy. In doing so, I gained access to glimpses of members' maps of intensity (Deleuze 1978), or clusters of affective memory that are formed as people associate concrete affective responses with past experiences and narratives. Having such access allowed me to understand that their stances about the cusmuy are based on the sincerity of their indigenous selves, even among those who reject the cusmuy and have been accused of inauthenticity for doing so. Despite the fact that my analytical framework was rooted in elements of Western philosophy (Deleuze and Guattari 1988; Massumi 1995, 2002; Spinoza 2002), I applied these approaches to the senses and affect as a border theory to answer questions of interest to decolonial scholars. This approach has allowed me to unveil the existence of multiple, sometimes

dissonant but in all cases sincere, indigenous selves. It has also helped me become aware of their struggle to incorporate the cusmuy as part of their daily lives since it has become an indicator of the Muisca brand and the core of the Muisca model of spirituality.

Moving forward from how a branded form of indigeneity shapes the indigenous self and how sincerity becomes an option for understanding these incorporations, in this chapter I continue exploring how recently formed indigenous groups navigate the expectations of contemporary forms of coloniality that are legitimized by multiculturalism's requirement of cultural alterity (Bocarejo 2011; Kymlicka 1995; Povinelli 2002; Sieder 2002). Here, I extend my analysis towards the collective, focusing on the extent to which the Muisca brand, incorporated as a way to produce a standardized Muisca indigeneity in the interests of governance, has actually altered the micropolitics of decision-making in the groups from Sesquile and Bosa. I specifically focus on the poporo, an indicator of the Muisca brand that was recently incorporated and legitimized via mythopoiesis (Katsman 2002; Rowley 2002). I look at how the incorporation of the poporo, an object deemed to infuse wisdom and spiritual balance into its users, has re-shaped the groups' micropolitics and unleashed frictions by altering leadership hierarchies on the basis of spirituality—frictions that group leaders have to endure to ensure that their groups continue being perceived as authentic.

To understand the role of the poporo in the production of agentic capacities for decision-making, I use elements of a contemporary, yet Western, theoretical

approach known as New Materialism (Barad 2003, 2007; Coole 2005; Grosz 2004, 2010). This approach became the core of my border theory (Mignolo 2012) of agency, an analytical lens that connects spirituality and decision-making on the grounds of intra-action. By following this approach, I have been able to recognize that agency is not a quality of entities themselves—either human or non-human—, but the result of intra-action within assemblages. Moreover, New Materialism recognizes that entities can affect each other on the basis of their materiality alone (Frost 2011), and that those affects can be transmitted to other entities within an assemblage (Brennan 2004). Finally, New Materialism raises awareness among scholars about the onto-epistemological nature of being, debunking the Western assumption that "being" is independent from "knowing" (Barad 2007) and providing a fluidity that is necessary when dealing with assemblages that involve indeterminate positionings and capacities. However, I de-link from the scientificism that some feminist theorists within the New Materialism rely on to explain the indeterminacy of matter (Blackman 2012; Brennan 2004). Instead, I argue that the onto-epistemological claims of the new materialism could actually de-scientize anthropology by validating ways of knowing that engage with non-human intra-actants (including objects, nature, and the spiritual realm), instead of relying solely on what the "hard sciences" can tell us. Even though this need to acknowledge non-human entities has been presented by various authors (Apffel-Marglin 2012; de la Cadena 2015; Smith 2005), New Materialism has just

begun to be seen as a theoretical option for addressing the non-human as subject in anthropology.[3]

The use of New Materialism as a border theory allowed me to expose how assessments of cultural alterity undertaken in the name of multiculturalism (Hale 2002; Kymlicka 1995; Sieder 2002) are continued forms of colonial essentialism that fail to account for the realities of indigenous life. In the case of the Muisca in Bosa and Sesquile, for example, placing the poporo as an indicator of Muisca authenticity has forced the Muisca in Bosa to undergo profound transformations and adaptations that have fractured the group and forced group members to self-impose a contemporary cultural hybridity (Anzaldua 2012; Bhabha 1994) to meet the requirements of an imagined indigeneity. This occurs because the Muisca brand is blind to group formation processes, their histories and agendas, and instead is introduced as a model of an everlasting indigenous present based on the spirituality of Carlos Mamanche. Thus, by looking at the poporo as an entity that is part of larger agentic assemblages instead of thinking of it as a symbol of the agentic power of its holders, it is possible to realize how its incorporation impacts all of the inter-actants of the assemblages and not just the poporos and their users.

In the first section of this chapter, I introduce the poporo as an object used by male members of the Kogui indigenous group from northern Colombia: a group that

[3] An example of this is the 2012 symposium "What's new about new materialisms?" held at the University of California Berkley, which included a panel about New Materialism and indigenous ontologies.

has played the role of the hyperreal indian (Ramos 1994) by becoming a model of indigeneity based on spirituality and environmentalism. In the second section, I explain how the poporo was transferred from the Kogui to the Muisca in Sesquile, the legitimization of this transcultural incorporation via mythopoiesis (Rowley 2002), and the impact that introducing the poporo had on the micropolitics of decision-making among group members in Sesquile. The third section focuses on the incorporation of the poporo into the Muisca group in Bosa and the frictions (Tsing 2004) that have unfolded between Catholic group members and poporo users, and between poporo users and female leaders who cannot use poporos. Finally, the fourth and fifth sections are dedicated to an analysis of poporos as part of the larger agentic assemblages within which decision-making takes place. Here, I employ key elements of the New Materialism to reveal that agency is relational and the product of assemblages involving human and non-human entities, and that group members navigate those assemblages to re-position themselves as decision-makers in spite of the arrival of the poporos.

## POPOROS AND POSITIONINGS

The poporo is a container made of a dried gourd that is the shape of a bottle with a narrow neck, and which is used to store and carry pulverized seashells. It has a hole at the end of the neck through which the seashells are extracted using a small wooden stick (figure 11). The seashell is then consumed alongside coca leaves by males of the Kogui indigenous group from northern Colombia—the only contemporary users of poporos apart from the Muisca, who incorporated it into their

cultural repertoire in the early 2000s with the consent of the Kogui. To use the poporo, men place the wooden stick it in their mouth to moisten it and then introduce it inside of the poporo to retrieve the seashell powder, which attaches to it. Then, the powder is placed in the mouth to mix with the coca leaves that they are already chewing. Meanwhile, they rub the neck of the poporo with the end of the wooden stick, so that the remnants of the crushed shells attach to it, producing an even coating of shell that becomes thicker with use, reaching radiuses of several centimeters after years of use. Kogui leaders, known as mamos, are always seen rubbing the necks of their poporos when in public, while non-leaders are somewhat less consistent in their use of the object. In any case, every Kogui male receives a poporo during the rite of passage into adulthood, and is expected to carry it in their woven knapsack for the rest of his life (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1950).

Figure 11: The poporo.

Michel Taussig (2009) explains that the poporo is a representation of the female uterus, and its wooden stick a representation of the penis. Likewise, the coca leaves are associated with the female egg, while the seashell is associated with semen. According to Taussig, and corresponding to an earlier ethnographic study by Reichel Dolmatoff (1951), Kogui men use the poporo to gain spiritual and emotional balance by embracing certain feminine attributes that enhance their consciousness. As they amalgamate what they consider to be natural "masculine" attributes such as aggressiveness, bravery, and quick responsiveness with "feminine" attributes such as a desire to nurture, sensitivity, and intuitive responsiveness—which are gradually acquired through poporo use—, kogui men gain spiritual and emotional wholeness. As a result, the more a man engages with his poporo by extracting seashell and rubbing its neck with the wooden stick, the more he is supposed to acquire the feminine aspects needed to gain equilibrium and spiritual awareness, becoming a wise mediator and a decision maker who "thinks according to the spirits" (Ulloa 2004). For this reason, mamos use their poporos almost uninterruptedly during gatherings or ceremonies, while non-leader men use theirs less frequently.

In his study,Dolmatoff (1951) concluded that the poporo is a non-human materialization of the female body and its fertility, as well as an apparatus of self-transformation and empowerment that is always available to Kogui men—replacing and even displacing Kogui women. Moreover, the poporo is seen as a memory device that allows its users to become attuned with the memories of their ancestors while materializing those thoughts in the poporo itself, as they say they "write their

thoughts" in their poporos as they rub the neck with the stick, creating visible layers of hardened calcium. Finally, the consumption of the mixture of coca leaves and seashells relieve men of their physiological need for food during the long walks they have to make through the mountains. Consequentially, the poporo became the baseline of the male Kogui-self, supplying them with food, deep thoughts, and emotional balance. These characteristics placed the poporo as the main indicator of Kogui indigeneity and as a generalized emblem of Colombian indigeneity at the international level.

Since the second half of the 1970s and until today, the Kogui have publicized themselves both locally and internationally as ecological natives, successfully impeding urbanization, the extraction of minerals, and the expansion of tourism in their territories and becoming a well-known group among NGOs, indigenous advocates, and enthusiasts (Ulloa 2004). Recordings of mamos using poporos have been broadcast by the BBC, and photographs have been published by newspapers such as the Guardian and the Telegraph. In 2012, a group of mamos visited France and Switzerland to spread their ecological/spiritual message, further reinforcing their positioning as authenticly indigenous vis-à-vis the transnational, hyperreal Indian. Alcida Ramos (1994) explains the hyperreal Indian as a model of indigeneity based on the interests of both transnational and local organizations and state institutions. This model perpetuates the coloniality of power by producing a contemporary version of the tamed and disciplined noble savage who becomes a perfect candidate to "benefit" from the projects and policies of organizations and institutions. Currently,

as the hyperreal model associates indigeneity with sustainability, spirituality, and environmentalism, the practices of the Kogui associated with those narratives have placed them—and their material culture—at the top of the scale of authenticity, while indigeneities based on political and social action have become suspected of instrumentalism. Therefore the indicators of cultural alterity that the Kogui display to the public and to official institutions, including their well-known poporo, are automatically validated as evidence of their otherness.

But in addition to becoming an indicator of authenticity for the contemporary Kogui, the poporo has also become part of the larger narrative of national identity in Colombia, in this case in the form of archaeological heritage (Sanchez and Wills 1999). Poporos made of gold and gold-copper alloys have been found in most regions of Colombia, and are praised as the best examples of pre-Hispanic metal-work in the country. The presence of gold poporos in the archaeological record throughout the country, and the complexity of their elaboration, have transformed them into a source of collective pride. Golden poporos are exhibited as the main attraction in the Gold Museum in Bogota, are reproduced as souvenirs, and have been depicted in coins and used to represent Colombia in international events. As a result, the sense of pride and trust that people have in the archaeological poporo has been transferred onto the contemporary poporo, adding to the particularly reverential attitude that most Colombians have towards the Kogui as “authentic” enough to resemble the hyperreal model of indigeneity.

## SESQUILE: POPORO MYTHOPOIESIS

Carlos Mamanche, the former leader of the Muisca group in Sesquile, visited the Sierra Nevada in northern Colombia and met the Kogui mamos on several occasions before requesting official recognition for his group in 2006, maintaining a close relationship with some Kogui leaders until his death in 2007. As an outcome of these encounters, the Kogui provided Carlos with knowledge on indigenous spirituality, authorizing him to build a spiritual house according to the Kogui design and to introduce the poporo to the Muisca. There are contradictory versions of the story of who initiated the dialogue, whether a Kogui leader or Carlos himself, but the current leaders emphasize that it was a Kogui initiative. In any case, the relationship between Carlos and Mamo Luca, a well-known Kogui leader, facilitated the official recognition of his Muisca group in 2006, a year after the updated protocol for the recognition/registration of indigenous groups was implemented by the Ministry of the Interior. Thanks to the spiritual knowledge, practices, and objects shared by the Kogui and introduced to the group members in Sesquile, the group managed to demonstrate the type of "alterity" required by the Colombian government to concede the benefits and positioning promised by multiculturalism (Bocarejo 2001; Cannesa 2007; Hale 2002, 2005). Moreover, the image of the Muisca as spiritual and their validation by Kogui leaders facilitated not only their official recognition, but also their alignment with the latest, transnational version of the noble savage (Conklin 2002; Tilley 2002)

and their positioning as authentic in the eyes of the general public and other indigenous groups.

Because of his long and challenging apprenticeship as a medicine man in the Putumayo region and his recognition by the Kogui mamos as a Muisca spiritual leader, Carlos Mamanche himself became an indicator of authenticity for the Muisca and their enthusiasts. As a result, the practices, places, and objects introduced by him became the core from which most of the criteria used to assess other Muisca groups was extracted. Ultimately, it was this return to a criterial definition of indigeneity that led to the production of the Muisca brand, a hyperreal (Ramos 1994) version of the Muisca that all groups aim to resemble so as to secure their social and political positioning, irrespective of being officially recognized or not. Even after his death, Carlos' version of spirituality continued to deepen into the Muiscas' sense of selves, as his life became part of the collective memory of the Muisca group in Sesquile (Nora 1989). This short-term collective memory depicts Carlos as an atemporal ancestor, almost as a mythical figure, despite him being contemporaneous to most members of the Muisca group. In this way, the narratives that Carlos once shared with other members of his group regarding, for example, his own encounters with the Kogui mamos and the uses and origins of the Muisca cusmuy and poporo, became the foundation of a kind of Muisca mythopoeia (Katsman 2002; Rowley 2002) that is regularly shared, reviewed, and upgraded by Muisca members during cusmuy encounters.

It was as part of this mythopoietic regrouping (Agha 2007) of tangible and intangible elements of indigenous spirituality around the unifying figure of Carlos Mamanche that the Kogui ceremonial house and the poporo, the tobacco and ayahuasca from the Putumayo region, the Mayan temazcal, and even the Lakota drum, became indicators of the Muisca brand. Furthermore, as these indicators are connected to the now deified figure of Carlos, the oral accounts of this teachings became the legitimizing narratives that restructured Muisca spirituality as a cohesive whole, despite actually being a transcultural assemblage (Appiah 2006; Forte 2010; Goodale 2006). In the specific case of the poporo, for example, an otherwise fragile validation of its use by the contemporary Muisca based only on the presence of gold poporos in the archaeological record has become a much more resounding narrative. This narrative legitimizes the use of poporos in Sesquile by connecting a pre-Hispanic Kogui people with a pre-Hispanic Muisca people who used poporos and gave them to the Kogui—a narrative that is said to have been taught by Carlos.

This is how the regrouping of the Kogui poporo as one of the main emblems of Muisca spirituality is validated via the mythopoetic narrative. Ezequiel, a brother of Carlos, referred to this part of the collective memory of the group during an interview in the house of his mother, Rosa:

> […] the Muisca grandfathers knew that that was going to happen (the arrival of the Spanish colonizers). They travelled North and told the Kogui that men different from themselves were going to arrive and were going to make them suffer -em, but that after many years the Muisca were going to

> come back. The Muisca left parts of their knowledge under the care of the Kogui, basically the cusmuy and the poporo, because they knew that the Kogui were going to survive colonization. They also gave some knowledge to indigenous people from the Amazon and Putumayo, mainly the use of tobacco and other things that they have not returned yet because we are not ready. […] before Carlos' death, mamo Luca (a Kogui spiritual leader) came to talk to him. He came to give him the poporo because he was feeling him, he was feeling his singing. [silence] Mamo Luca said that he had to return the poporo to the Muisca through Carlos. He gave him a poporo and the authority to give poporos to other Muisca and to teach them how to use it to think better. After that, the mamos gave other poporos to Cota [another recognized group], and Pueblo Nacion [a non-recognized group] got poporos from another mamo. (Fieldnotes 14/06/2015)

The incorporation of the Kogui poporo into the Muisca group of Sesquile, and the validation of Carlos' role as the legitimate carrier of knowledge about the poporo, is explained through a mythical narrative that goes back to the arrival of the Spanish colonizers, and which ultimately presents Carlos as the holder of a special spiritual power. This narrative legitimizes the incorporation of Kogui material culture as Muisca on the basis of a Kogui oral history told to Carlos and later further adjusted to reinforce his deification as someone who can be "sensed" by other spiritual leaders. The narrative also provides a means of assessing the authenticity of every Muisca

poporo in a similar manner to product quality control: as it establishes a link between the mamos who gave the first poporos and every Muisca poporo afterwards.

The relationship between the ceremonial house/cusmuy and the poporo is also narrativized to give a distinctive interpretation to an otherwise circumstantial order of events. Diego, one of the leaders, told me that during a gathering of poporeros [poporo users], he asked about the readiness of the Muisca in Sesquile to receive the poporo. He told me that when he asked that question, the whole meeting was put on hold, and everyone in the cusmuy began to slow down their speech and focus on rubbing their poporos. He told me that after one hour of poporo use and deliberation, they concluded that, according to Muisca oral tradition, the Muisca knowledge given to the Kogui centuries ago could only be returned after the construction of the first Muisca ceremonial house, or cusmuy, because only the cusmuy is a repository of knowledge that is connected with "the ancestral world." Therefore, as Carlos was the first Muisca to build a cusmuy following Kogui instructions, it was precisely the existence of this cusmuy that motivated Mamo Luca to return the poporo and specifications for its use.

Such an account reinforces the positioning of the Muisca group of Sesquile as the most authentic vis-à-vis the Muisca brand that emerged after their own recognition in 2006. The same form of auto-authentication takes place in the particular case of the poporo, as its incorporation is presented as an outcome of their own initiative to build a ceremonial house. Moreover, by producing a mythical narrative that explains the order in which the Kogui emblems were introduced, the

cusmuy and poporo become bundled together in such a way that any Muisca group is expected to have both if they are to be considered authentic. This connection is further emphasized by the spiritual qualities of the poporo being transferred to the cusmuy. Ezequiel addressed this transfer when I asked his opinion regarding Muisca groups that do not have poporos. He answered:

> The poporo is a spiritual tool for men, but also the spiritual support of the cusmuy. Have you seen what supports the cusmuy? The cusmuy has several columns, and each of those columns represent the spiritual columns of the Muisca. The poporos are what give strength to those spiritual columns. So basically, if there are no poporos to sustain the ceremonial house, the group is going to be spiritually weak, and the decisions made in that cusmuy would be based on nothing, on air, and therefore things won't go well. In other words, the poporo and the cusmuy are what differentiate how we make decisions as Muisca from how other people who organize as community groups do, em, for example, we see how even though a community action group decides collectively, its projects have a greater risk of failure because its members do not know how to listen to their ancestors. (Fieldnotes 14/06/2015)

Thus having a cusmuy and poporos became a necessity that goes beyond individual members' spirituality to encompass the success of whole groups. However, unlike the Kogui who give poporos to all male members as they reach adulthood, the Muisca leaders who are entitled to give poporos only give them to members who have

embraced spirituality and proven their commitment for years. Knowing that the members of the group in Sesquile had to agree with Carlos' approach to spirituality and be willing to incorporate it into their lives to be enlisted as members, it is not a surprise that there are more than ten poporeros in Sesquile. However, not all of the Muisca groups formed around a charismatic figure like Carlos. The urban groups in Bosa and Suba became recognized on the grounds of lineage, while some of the non-recognized Muisca groups emphasized other forms of spiritual growth, but ultimately they all had to accommodate the poporo in spite of it being less compatible with other aspects of their existing collective selves.

But being a poporero, even among members of the group in Sesquile, has brought unexpected challenges and responsibilities. During his time as leader, Carlos was the decision maker of the group, freeing other members from the pressure of dealing with difficult decisions. But when Carlos died, it became necessary to elect an administrative representative and to determine a mechanism for decision-making that was compatible with Muisca spirituality. Choosing a representative was not a difficult task; they chose the first governor by voting. However, no single member was willing to assume the responsibility for being the decision maker of a group that had previously based its decisions on the spiritual wisdom of its leader. Their solution was to present any decision to the group as a whole during cusmuy gatherings and to deliberate together until a decision is made. However, when the time came to discuss and decide, most members remained silent apart from the poporeros, who felt the responsibility of giving advice and opinions as the spiritual holders of the columns of

the cusmuy—despite the fact that many of them had no experience in public speaking, decision-making, or even a particular interest in becoming group leaders.

Nowadays, the presence of poporeros in cusmuy gatherings during which matters are discussed and decided has become the rule, while deliberations initiated by members who are not poporo users have become very rare. When such deliberations occur, the speaker seems nervous and even inadequate, and the speech is perceived as a disruptive affectation to an otherwise calm, controlled setting. This sense of inadequacy is the result of the incorporation of attributes of spiritual awareness that the poporeros have acquired through their use of the poporo as fundamental for deliberation and decision-making. Such attributes are, among others, sustaining a meditative state throughout the gathering that involves stillness of the body and poporo gazing, producing a carefully thought-out discourse that spiritualizes the issue at hand and its possible outcomes, delivering a slow-paced speech with a steady tone of voice, and showing an overall control of emotions, even when confronted by other members. According to poporo users, these attributes are the result of balancing what they consider their natural masculine traits with other characteristics such as heightened intuition, a nurturing inclination, and emotional awareness, considered to be feminine and acquirable through the use of coca leaves and the poporo. Therefore, as soon as a conversation involving decision-making or the delineation of a narrative of collective memory is introduced, such as when Diego asked about the incorporation of the poporo, the ceremonial ambience of the cusmuy

is enhanced and a semiotic footing (Agha 2007; Goffman 1981) that can be read as "spiritual" takes over the conversation.

As a result, non-poporo users, including some men and all women, have become self-conscious of their inadequacy as speakers in the cusmuy, and only participate when the issue under discussion concerns them directly or when they know valuable facts that the poporeros ignore. In any case, their speeches tend to be shorter, rushed, and less articulate. Ultimately, the tacit agreement to have the poporeros become the group's decision makers has led to the establishment of a particular intra-group micropolitics for the Muisca group of Sesquile. These micropolitics take the role of decision maker away from the non-poporeros, and produce a male decision maker who, instead of reinforcing stereotypical masculine attributes related to leadership, seems to intermingle them with attributes that group members categorize as ideally feminine or spiritually feminine. However, these attributes are not assumed to be held by the women of the group unless they develop them via spiritual practice—practices that Muisca leaders argue have not yet been returned to the Muisca. Moreover, as the spirituality of the Muisca group of Sesquile became the foundation of the Muisca brand, the same micropolitics are expected from other Muisca groups, generating pressures that unfold into ingenious ways to conform to the brand without losing their own indigenous collective-selves.

**POPORO FRICTIONS**

Roberto Neuta was the governor of the group in Bosa in 2006, when the group from Sesquile obtained official recognition from the Ministry of the Interior. As one of the founders of the group, Roberto was aware that the recognition of the group in Sesquile would demand transformations in his own group, which had prioritized the protection of land plots, the allocation of economic benefits, and the creation of educational and occupational opportunities for young members over the revival of a distinct cultural alterity. The successful recognition of the group from Sesquile under the 2005 protocol of the Ministry of the Interior meant that that group had managed to demonstrate an alterity that deserved the protection of the State, and that such alterity matched the expectations of the recognizing body regarding indigenous people. The 2005 protocol was created as a means to decrease the number of indigenous groups obtaining recognition, as indigenous groups were reappearing in regions of high infrastructural development and their recognition was giving them tools to hinder further urbanization, impacting neoliberal interests. By alleging that multiculturalism was the basis for indigenous recognition, the Ministry restricted recognition to those groups that resembled their ideal of indigeneity, based on both local and transnational models that depict indigenous people as peaceful, spiritual, and environmentally aware.

Thanks to its leader, Carlos Mamanche, the group in Sesquile managed to position itself as highly spiritual, and that spirituality became the overall landmark of Muisca indigeneity: a brand that is now expected from all of the Muisca groups, not only the group from Sesquile. Knowing that the take on spirituality of the group from Sesquile had become the baseline for assessing Muisca authenticity, Roberto and few other members of the group of Bosa began to learn about Muisca spirituality from Carlos Mamanche himself—a process that ended after just a year, with the death of Carlos.

Despite the short affiliation between Carlos and the group from Bosa, he still designed and oversaw the construction of the cusmuy in Bosa according to the instructions of the Kogui of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Carlos also encouraged Roberto to receive a poporo from the kogui leaders and to motivate others to do so, arguing that poporos are fundamental for the spiritual enrichment of the group as a whole. But even though several members of the group of Bosa became interested in Muisca spirituality and visited the cusmuy on a regular basis, most people considered both the cusmuy and the poporo to be external to their indigenous selves and, therefore, optional. Contrary to the group of Sesquile's focus on spirituality, the group in Bosa was built on the basis of lineage, land title, and a shared history of marginalization and cultural mestizaje that had situated Catholicism deep inside members' sense of selves. Knowing that imposing participation in the cusmuy and the use of poporos could trigger self-doubt among group members regarding their indigenous selves, Roberto refrained from visiting the Kogui and

incorporating poporos, keeping spirituality an optional rather than fundamental element of Muisca indigeneity.

In the year 2011, after six years as governor, Roberto was finally replaced by Wilson, one of the young members who followed Carlos Mamanche's teachings and who was interested in incorporating spirituality more fully into the group. Wilson moved spirituality forward in Bosa by travelling to the Sierra Nevada with a few other members to learn about the poporo and to "reclaim" the poporos that their Muisca ancestors had left with the Kogui. As governor, Wilson had realized that most male members of the group rarely visited the office or participated in gatherings; and as he knew that introducing the poporo could build their spiritual awareness, he encouraged other men to become poporeros. Roberto told me that, following his election, Wilson organized a small group of poporeros who met frequently in the cusmuy to reflect on Muisca spirituality with the help of coca leaves and their poporos. Roberto also told me that Wilson began to make decisions for the group in the cusmuy, under the influence of coca leaves and the poporo, in the hope that those decisions would be more concordant with the spirits of the land and the Muisca ancestors. But the shift of location from the administrative office to the cusmuy as the space for decision-making was seen by the non-poporo-users, and primarily by the female administrative leaders, as a form of exclusion and disempowerment. Moreover, the ceremonialism and long hours required to make decisions in the cusmuy with poporeros ultimately slowed down the execution of plans, and shifted Wilson's interest towards projects

related to cultural revitalization and away from the more practical matters that the majority of members were interested in.

The arrival of the poporo to the group in Bosa reinforced its authenticity vis-à-vis the Muisca brand, improving its positioning among other Muisca groups, government institutions, and Muisca enthusiasts. However, while poporeros embraced the role of decision makers in Sesquile, having poporos became a threat to the Bosa group's pre-existing micropolitics. In this group, decision-making had always been the responsibility of a governor elected by voting. However, if the poporeros were to become the ultimate decision makers, the annual election seemed unnecessary, and leaders who are not poporeros seemed unable to fully exercise their leadership. Under these circumstances, if a woman were elected as governor, she would have to bring all of the difficult cases to the cusmuy for the poporeros to decide on spiritual terms, while a male governor would have to become a poporo-user himself to make decisions.

Moreover, the spiritualization of decision-making indirectly facilitated colonial control over Bosa's "difficult leaders," mostly women with a particular interest in social action and the protection of the land against urbanization. Ultimately, this form of branding based on a hyperreal indigeneity became a means to facilitate the execution of neoliberal projects by keeping nonconforming groups at bay, as they are compelled to meet the expectations of the brand regardless of their different agendas. The impact of spiritualizing decision-making in Bosa became evident a few months after the formation of the group of poporeros during Wilson's

administration. David, a young university graduate who was in charge of the documents that were to be sent to the institutions that provide the group with financial aid and funding, told me how hard it was for him to do his work during Wilson's time as governor:

> […] we were supposed to ask spiritual permission in the cusmuy before sorting out administrative matters. I remember that the first time I received hoz-k was because I had to submit an application for a project to the Ministry of the Environment and Wilson told me that the poporeros had to put the project in their thoughts, or something like that. I know that they asked me to go in good faith, but it was very hard for me because getting that tobacco blown inside of my nose is not part of my traditions -em, I think that it is new to all of us actually. I asked my parents and they told me that their parents never used hoz-k. […] another day I had a deadline and they told me that I had to wait until they do a ceremony to check if our request was going to be successful. But the deadline was that day! The spiritual things of the cusmuy and the administrative things that I do here always move at a different pace and the institutions do not give us second chances. It was frustrating and we were losing opportunities because the poporeros had to do ceremonies! Also, what if the poporeros decide that a project is not beneficial for some spiritual reason even if it brings resources to the group? We have too many legal things, administrative things, all types of things that cannot wait for ceremonies in the cusmuy,

> and we cannot be picky about what funding we apply for. (Fieldnotes 08/09/2014)

David's account of his experience as an administrator amidst the integration of Sesquile's spirituality into the group in Bosa unveils the frictions (Tsing 2004) between the transnational ideal of indigeneity adopted by the Colombian Ministry of the Interior and presented as the Muisca brand, and the actualities of a Muisca group that is incompatible with that ideal. While David wanted to get the documents ready and to move the projects forward, the poporeros had to ensure that the projects were compatible with the spiritual principles of the group and with the spirits' will—aspects that could only be learned through deliberation in a ceremonial context. As David explained, the office and the cusmuy moved at a different pace, jeopardizing the completion of each other's tasks. Moreover, this case shows that frictions are not only between local realities and global ideals, but also at the level of history and state processes. The Muisca in Bosa, a group that was deemed legitimate according to institutional requirements in 1998, is now compelled to adapt to a new model of indigeneity that erases its history and particular needs, and that is only compatible with the group from which it derives, namely the Muisca group in Sesquile. In Bosa, the incorporation of the cusmuy and poporo as enhancers of a spirituality that permeates everything in the group generated an unsolvable confrontation between the needs of an indigenous association that has endured mestizaje and marginalization (and that therefore is Catholic, politically driven, and nonconformist), and an ideal of

indigenous purity that seems to exclude non-poporo users and non-spiritual projects as invalid actors and endeavors.

These frictions have produced fractures between the administrative and spiritual members of the group in Bosa and among the various Muisca groups, which now avoid working together on common goals in fear of being assessed by each other against a model that is almost untenable, even by the group in Sesquile. Muisca groups have become busy trying to resemble a brand produced and imposed by the state, indigenous enthusiasts, non-recognized Muisca groups, the mestizo majorities, well-intentioned funders, and even self-imposed by the Muisca themselves. Therefore, while David and other "administrative" members were showing concern about the prominence given to the poporo users as spiritual leaders and decision makers, Wilson and the other members who sincerely engaged in poporo use and spirituality perceived those working in the office as unconscious and opportunistic. Following the teachings of Carlos Mamanche, they reframed their indigeneity as a spiritual self-discovery that could bring them closer to the pre-Hispanic Muisca and away from colonial domination, and thus interpreted the administrative-oriented members as servants of state institutions and coloniality.

But despite Wilson's efforts to re-introduce Musica spirituality in a predominantly Catholic group, only young adults interested in cultural revitalization participated in cusmuy encounters, while the families that had been in the group since 1998 remained loyal to the office and suspicious of his proposed focus on spirituality. Before the end of his second year as governor, Wilson was accused of stealing

resources, abuse of authority, and negligence, even though I could never get further information regarding these accusations. Apparently, the pressure on Wilson was such that he had to resign his position of governor and leave the group, along with the other poporo users and some families that had incorporated spirituality and decided to support him. About a hundred people left the group in 2012 to form an alternative, non-recognized, Muisca group. Immediately after, Claudia was elected governor, and has been re-elected for four consecutive periods. Claudia is a young member who had already worked for several years as an indigenous leader and activist, knows the administrative and legal procedures, and is a devout Catholic.

Months after my fieldwork in Bosa ended, I was in Sesquile helping pile wood for the central fire when one of the poporeros who had left the group in Bosa arrived with his partner. I was very surprised to see him there, knowing how uncommon it is for members of a recognized Muisca group to visit another group and expose themselves to evaluation. It seemed that the frictions that fractured the group in Bosa led to connections between the group in Sesquile and the former poporeros of Bosa. In total contrast to the opinion expressed by David, the poporero told me that Claudia was putting the whole group at risk by neglecting the cusmuy as a space of decision-making and the poporeros as a resource to connect spirituality and administration. He explained that Claudia was acting out of fear of losing her position as leader, a fear that detached her from her ancestors and the order of life. Regarding her stance on the poporeros, he commented:

> Claudia forgot what it means to be Muisca. She forgot our myths and all what we are trying to remember, em, and now she is acting like a politician just because she is scared of giving some power to the poporeros. But she could still be governor with us taking care of the cusmuy. She could do all her projects, and the results would be better because we would have done all the spiritual work to make the projects succeed [long silence]. Some of her projects are not aligned with the spirts because she does not consult with us, putting everyone under risk. You know what happened in her house of medicine, don't you? She went out and brought the Carare group [a group of Non-Muisca indigenous healers] to do Muisca work, our work. Now her house of medicine is in ashes. All burnt! If the spirits were taking care of that project, the fire might have never happened. What I do not understand is why Don Pedro decided to stay if Claudia does not value his work with the poporo. I think he stayed because he wanted to be a leader [laughs], but a leader of what? (Fieldnotes 12/03/2015)

In 2012, Don Pedro was the least advanced poporero of the group in Bosa. He decided to stay as the only poporero of the group after Wilson and the others left. Knowing the importance of having a cusmuy and poporos to meet the requirements of the brand, the governor let Pedro continue using the poporo, and even began to call him the "spiritual leader." However, his leadership is very different from that of Wilson and the other poporeros. He was allowed to open the cusmuy and organize

ceremonies and meetings, to blow tobacco for spiritual healing, and to give advice. However, Muisca spirituality began to be publicized as compatible with Catholic beliefs, and Pedro's input in decision-making became equal to that of any other member. Ultimately, it was not Wilson's vigorous project of incorporation what brought group members closer to the cusmuy and the poporo, but Claudia's strategic version of spirituality, which it led to possibilities and frictions (Tsing 2004) that are negotiated in Bosa on a daily basis.

## POPORO AGENCY: THINGS, NETWORKS, PHENOMENA

As explained in previous chapters, opportunities to better understand the production of contemporary indigeneities emerge when supposedly contradictory indigenous selves are encountered in the field and explored in terms of sincerity (Jackson 2005). While in Chapter Three I explored how members of the Muisca groups engage with the cusmuy on the basis of their affective responses to sensorial stimuli (Howes 2006; Massumi 2002; Stewart 2007), in this section I employ the same approach of sensorial-spatial awareness to understand the role of the poporo as an entity that intervenes in the formation of decision makers among the members of the groups in Sesquile and Bosa. More specifically, I explore how changes in agentic assemblages can reinforce, weaken, or even fully modify the affectations that the poporo produce in prospective decision makers and other group members participating in cusmuy gatherings. By focusing on large assemblages of which the

poporo and poporero are just two intra-actants (Barad 2003) among many, I have been able to comprehend how women, as non-poporo users, can actually mould assemblages to maintain an advantageous positioning within their groups.

My approach is based on the realization that agentic assemblages are not formed only by people, as understood by early theorists of agency such as Bourdieu (1990) and Giddens (1986), but also by objects that affect people (Gell 1998) and are affected by people (Latour 2005). Deleuze's view of agency (1987) has also been particularly helpful, as he recognized that agency does not take place only between tangible entities but also involves space as a channel for the affective communication of agentic capacities. However, it was the New Materialism's acknowledgement of the inseparability of the material and the semantic, the human and the non-human, and even ontology and epistemology (Barad 2007) that allowed me to understand how assemblages comprising people, things, spaces, and even spiritual entities shape Muisca micropolitics and gender stereotypes.

Early approaches to agency in social theory, including those of Pierre Bourdieu (1990) and Anthony Giddens (1986), presupposed an a-priori distinction between subjects/humans and objects/non-humans, giving particular attention to humans as actors while placing objects as fixed recipients of agency. Their interest in understanding the social in terms of a subject-structure binary prevented them from realizing the agentic capacities of things, spaces, and other living species. More recent scholars have tried to overcome this subject/object dichotomy, but some have continued to over-value humans and signs while undervaluing things as matter. One

of those scholars was Alfred Gell. In *Art and Agency* (1998), Gell defines art objects as performative indexes that motivate a multiplicity of responses and interpretations depending on their relations with the people that they stand for, or the artists, as well as with those who are affected by them, or their recipients. Following this proposition, it becomes evident that Gell does not grant art objects a true agency. Instead, art objects stand for their creators, becoming components of the artist's agency.

But this focus on language, representation, and discourse began to change towards a greater appreciation of matter with Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT) and with Deleuze and Guattari's theory of assemblages (1988). Both approaches explore agency in its spatial dimension instead of as isolated paired relations, looking at how transitory congregations of entities can define and redefine micro and macropolitical orders. Latour (2005) applies the concept of agency to non-humans, arguing that when material forms affect people without the intervention of human agency, those material forms possess the agency to cause those effects. Moreover, ANT directs the researcher's attention away from agents as independent units and towards how agency operates within networks of entities, or actants, and how those actants interact with each other. Within this schema, Latour considers non-humans as mediators in networks, able to continually modify relations between actors and to hold unique capacities to act that are not transferrable to other entities.

In a similar line of thought, Deleuze and Guattari (1988) understand assemblages as arrangements of multiple, heterogeneous parts that form agentic

wholes based on the relationality of those parts. Deleuze explains assemblages as a symbiosis that creates agency (Deleuze and Parnet 1987), and argues that all entities—including humans, animals, things, and the spaces in between—have the same ontological status but operate within a hierarchy of affect that is the result of their position in the assemblage. In opposition to Latour (2005), for whom entities lack autonomous properties outside of a network, Deleuze acknowledges that entities hold some sort of "internal" properties that are mobilized in and out of assemblages. These properties, which can either refer to the materiality of the entity or the social, semiotic properties, become exteriorized to different degrees depending on other entities in the assemblage. Finally, Deleuze acknowledges that what holds assemblages together is affect, or the capacity of entities to be affected by the agencies that infuse the assemblage (Muller 2015).

However, while the above-mentioned theoretical insights provide a basis for my thinking about the relationship between humans, things, and spiritual entities, I am drawn analytically to New Materialist paradigms, which were in part inspired by the Deleuzian approach. By acknowledging the interdependence between humans and non-humans, and between matter and language (Barad 2003; Frost 2011), the New Materialism has become the core of my border-theory to analyze Muisca agentic assemblages. Within this framework, agentic intra-action involves people, space, objects, and even the Muisca ancestors and spirits—while matter and space are validated as capable of producing affectations in assemblages independently from the signs attached to them.

## THE NEW MATERIALISM AS BORDER THEORY

As a theoretical trend, the New Materialism encompasses various standpoints that coalesce in the recognition that agency is not a quality of entities, either human or non-human, but a quality of assemblages (Barad 2003; Bennett 2005; Edwards, Coole and Frost 2010). In this section, I focus on five claims of the New Materialism that I use in my border theory of agency in this chapter, looking specifically at how agentic relationships between humans and non-humans determine intra-group micropolitics in the Muisca groups of Sesquile and Bosa.

The first claim is that reality is onto-epistemological, in the sense that practices of knowing and being are mutually implicated and cannot be isolated from each other (Barad 2007). In other words, the New Materialism acknowledges that what we know is dependent on how we know it: on the assumptions that we have and the tools we employ to retrieve and analyze information about the world (Van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2012). Therefore, if a researcher wants to understand agency not as an asset of people but as the outcome of an assemblage, the researcher should be part of the assemblage, becoming capable of "knowing in being" (Barad 2003). In the specific case of feminist theorists including Barad, the purpose of unveiling the inseparability of ontology and epistemology has been to emphasize that what we see as the materiality of gender is not its reality, but only what we see through our instruments of analysis. To illustrate her claim, Barad explained how the same sub

atomic component can be categorized as a wave or as a particle depending on the instrument used to do the observation (Barad 2007). In this case, however, I address onto-epistemology as an overall reminder that by exploring agency as the outcome of assemblages of matter and space, I unintendedly prioritize matter, space, and the affectations produced by them over other entities that I cannot observe or "feel" while being part of those assemblages, but which are waiting to be acknowledged. Authors within the New Materialism have begun to recognize the need for a new concept of matter that also involves the incorporeal (Grosz 2004), but these other entities—referred to by the Muisca as "ancestors" or "the spirits of the land"—will remain unaccounted for unless a decolonial analytical option becomes available (Apffel-Marglin 2012; de la Cadena 2015; Smith 2005).

A second theoretical element of the New Materialism is that entities, as matter, have an agentic capacity that goes beyond language and signification (Frost 2008; Kirby 2014). The argument is that, in addition to the impact that objects have on people for what they signify in discursive terms (Butler 2011), matter itself produces affectations in the surrounding entities and shapes the agentic capacities of a given assemblage. Furthermore, matter is taken to be an active, self-creative force that can produce unpredictable phenomena depending on its relationality with other entities (Edwards, Coole, and Frost 2010). This agentic-realist perspective (Barad 2007), has allowed feminist theorists to unveil that gender, as well as genderized roles and stereotypes, are not simply discursively performed and discursively imposed, but are also changeable depending on the assemblages in which people—as bodies—

participate. This understanding of matter as actant has helped me become aware that the affectations that objects and spaces produce on Muisca people can re-shape not only their positioning in a given assemblage but also the correspondence between certain roles, certain attributes, and a specific gender.

The third claim of the New Materialism that informs my analysis of the poporo is that agency is not a quality of entities but the phenomena that result from the intra-actions of those entities as they form assemblages or, in terms of Karen Barad, apparatuses or phenomena (2003). Therefore, what we commonly take to be "agents" are not holders of agency in either a material or discursive way—making discussions about the agency of objects or agency as a dual relation rather pointless. Following the Deleuzian approach to agency, the New Materialism conceives bodies and other material and immaterial entities as relational, only having an ontological status through their relationships with other entities. Moreover, all matter is seen as able to produce affectations on a given assemblage as the result of their intra-actions, while all assemblages are seen as producing fluid agentic phenomena that changes as new entities join or existing entities exit to engage in other assemblages (Coole 2005).

Another concept used by the New Materialism that informs my analysis of agency in terms of materiality is the transmission of affect, a concept first developed by Teresa Brennan (2004). The New Materialism recognizes that the affects that are produced by affectations, or sensorial stimuli within a given assemblage, can be transferred from the affected entities to other entities—even if those other entities did not experience the affectation directly. This claim provides a framework to explain

synchronies among intra-actants in general, as well as bodily changes and changes in disposition or attitude among human actants. In the case of the Muisca, the transmission of affect helps me explain why not only poporeros, but also non-poporo users, are affected by poporos in a given assemblage, and why all of the participants in a gathering tend to emotionally align with the "atmosphere" of a space of reunion even if not all of them have incorporated the same discourses about such spaces. However, I refrain from engaging with the interest among some scholars of the New Materialism (Blackman 2012; Brennan 2004) in explaining how the transmission of affect takes place, as these authors seem to reduce this transmission to an exchange or transfer of chemicals, excluding other non-biological and non-observable factors.

Finally, I re-introduce here the notion of "maps of intensity" (Deleuze 1978), which is useful to explain how the affects experienced in a given assemblage are interpreted by members of the Muisca groups. Maps of intensity are charts of affect, bodily memories of previous moments of affectation that come back to the fore when a similar affective response is experienced: connecting past and present affects as well as their historical context. As a consequence, when affective responses are integrated into a map of intensity, they are contrasted with other affects within the map, allowing the person to interpret current affects on the basis of prior experiences. Regarding my study of the Muisca, this notion of a map of intensity has helped me understand that affective responses that support specific micropolitics are connected with past experiences, life histories, and collective memories that also support them.

In the Musica groups of Sesquile and Bosa, the places where gatherings take place become the boundaries of agentic assemblages that temporarily position certain members as decision makers depending on the entities that form part of the assemblage. Also, entities such as the poporo and the cusmuy contribute to the production of a decision maker that, despite being based on gender, is imbued with characteristics that challenge stereotypical images of the qualities that male or female leaders should have. As there is no fixity regarding who is a decision maker and how they should behave, the assemblage becomes the fluid environment that, through affectation, positions a person or group of people as the holder(s) of certain agentic capacities, sometimes even unintendedly. Taking into account the history and current priorities of each Muisca group, I present short accounts of some of the experiences that I shared with them as an intra-actant in assemblages in which the poporo was also present. Using the New Materialism as my analytical lens, I show how assemblages containing poporos shape intra-group leadership positions to a variety of degrees depending on the presence or absence of other intra-actants, including group members, visitors, things, and spaces.

## "WRITING THOUGHTS" AND DECISION-MAKING IN SESQUILE

### INSIDE THE CUSMUY

As usual, the group from Sesquile met that Saturday in the cusmuy. On that occasion, apart from getting updates on the previous week's activities, group

members met to talk about their governor and his deficiencies, and to encourage others to become candidates for governor. Some members were concerned about the long-lasting leadership of the Mamanche family, and wanted to propose leaders from other families. The central fire had been started, illuminating the otherwise impenetrable darkness with a shifting yellowish hue. Upon entering the cusmuy, most people interrupted their chatting and silently sat down on the benches, shifting their attention towards the moving, flickering yellow flames. One by one, all of the poporeros of the group arrived and sat down together near the door to chew coca leaves. Then they took their poporos out of their bags, extracted some seashells to ingest and began to rub the poporos with the wooden stick. Some of the poporos were already thick from years of being rubbed with the stick, while others were just starting to build up. The poporeros were deeply focused on their task, looking at their poporos with apprehension while rubbing them with their stick and slowly turning them to ensure that the layers of seashell build up evenly.

They looked calm, contemplative, and absorbed by their performance. Very soon after the poporeros began their industrious poporo rubbing, I noticed changes in the cusmuy's atmosphere and in the attitude of the participants, including the non-Muisca visitors. By looking at the poporos, hearing the sounds of poporo rubbing, and being aware of the movements and manners of the poporeros, most people, including myself, began to share a contemplative attitude that was enhanced by the cusmuy itself in its circularity, central fire, and darkness. Then the governor stood up and blew tobacco powder into everyone's nostrils. I could perceive the whole space as

moving organically and in rhythmic introspection. Some people had their eyes closed, others continued looking at the fire, and some began to sing the songs that have become part of every ceremony.

An hour later, the topic of leadership was addressed. The current governor explained that the main aims of the meeting were to talk about the work of the current leaders, to propose strategies to improve overall leadership, and to decide how the next governor was going to be designated. Before sitting down again, he encouraged all of the participants to give their opinion. Immediately after the governor sat down, Pablo began to talk. At that moment, Pablo was the leader of the young members, a poporero, and a member of the Colombian armed forces. While talking, Pablo keep rubbing his poporo and staring at it, only briefly fixing his gaze on the group. Despite being a fast speaker, an extrovert, and even hyperactive outside of the cusmuy, Pablo spoke very slowly, choosing his words carefully, and with a very controlled tone of voice. He explained the importance of leadership for Muisca spirituality, exposed his concerns regarding other leaders, and proposed that all aspiring leaders should make a proposal and execute it if they become leaders.

After Pablo, Juan began to talk. He is also a poporero. He took a deep breath before starting and then explained his ideas in a very calm, introspective manner. He continued to rub his poporo while speaking and stared it most of the time. He thanked the spirits of the land, his Muisca ancestors, and the cusmuy itself as the material expression of those spirits. Then, he gave his opinion on the matter of leadership. After Juan, another five poporeros communicated their thoughts, including one who

hardly speaks in public outside of the cusmuy. Like those before him, he carefully rubbed his poporo during his speech, and tried to speak calmly and slowly even though he was nervous. Nobody apart from poporo users spoke that day, despite the fact that there were around forty people in the cusmuy. In any case, all of the members who attended the meeting, as well as the three visitors (including myself), listened carefully to the speeches and maintained a very calm, meditative attitude, and everyone seemed to accept that only the poporeros were part of the discussion.

Knowing that spirituality has been central to the formation, recognition, and continuity of the group of Sesquile, it is not a surprise that the cusmuy became the place for collective deliberation and decision-making after their leader Carlos Mamanche died. The current governor of the group told me that, instead of assigning a person or group of people as decision makers, group members meet in the cusmuy weekly to discuss and make decisions. But after participating in several cusmuy encounters, I found out that it is usually poporeros who speak and make decisions, while other members tend to remain silent and agree with what the poporeros decide. I also observed that while the opinion of poporeros tends to be respected in the cusmuy, the dynamics of decision-making vary greatly if a situation is discussed outside of the cusmuy. Therefore, I found out that the agentic capacities and response attitudes that appear to come from specific group members are instead the outcomes of affects produced within larger agentic phenomena (Barad 2011) that include people, the cusmuy, things like the poporo, and possibly even immaterial entities.

As the spatial demarcation of an assemblage oriented towards spirituality, the cusmuy itself becomes an entity of the assemblage, affecting other entities through its materiality and beyond its semantic adscription as ceremonial house. The rounded shape, size, extreme darkness, and materials used for its construction generate affects and trigger evocative emotions among the participants, depending on their level of engagement with Muisca spirituality. In my own experience as a visitor, for example, the roundness of the cusmuy, its darkness, the aroma of burnt herbs, and the clay used for its construction infused me with a sense of harmony, introspection, and privacy, enhancing my focus towards the entities that the central fire allowed me to see: the fire itself, the poporeros using their poporos near the fire, and the four central columns. These and the other entities that are part of this assemblage, such as the powdered tobacco hoz-k, the musical instruments, and the singing Muisca members, constitute an agentic total that affects people differently, reshaping the agentic capacities of both poporeros and non-poporo users. On the one hand, this assemblage praises and validates the poporeros' spiritual interests, stimulating their capacity to act and deliberate on the basis of spirituality. On the other hand, the assemblage produces affectations in non-poporo users that unfold affects of peacefulness, safety, and trust in the spiritual power of the poporeros.

The difference between how this assemblage affects poporeros and non-poporo-users, I have found out, resides in the type of relationship that a given member has with a poporo while being part of the assemblage. Even though outside of the cusmuy the difference between the agentic capacities of poporeros and non-poporo

users seems to shrink, handling and using a poporo in the cusmuy can set poporeros aside from other members and visitors. The action of chewing coca leaves with powdered seashell and then rubbing the neck of the poporo seems to accentuate the concentration, rhythm, and focus of the poporeros: the intentionality behind the rubbing action, explained as a process of "writing thoughts," constantly reminds them to meditate about the issue that is being discussed with great care, trying to be aware of the messages given by the spirits that reside in the cusmuy. Moreover, the conditions of lighting and sound in the cusmuy enhance their concentration on the poporo itself, to the point that poporeros stare at their poporos even when addressing other members. It is actually within the cusmuy, referred by members as "the womb," that the attributes given by the poporo that are categorized by members as "feminine"—or as a balance between masculine and feminine—become more evident. Poporeros seem contemplative, patient, and slow in their movements and speech, almost unreactive to criticisms and accusations. Also, they appear to prioritize overall "harmony" over personal achievement, and appear more empathetic to the needs of other group members and sensitive to the spiritual realm. Through these means, the bodily production of a Muisca decision maker takes place, introducing a leader who is at odds with the stereotypical image of the rural masculine leader in Colombia: a confrontational, direct, obstinate character who resembles the macho model.

At the same time, while all of the participants are affected by the assemblage as a whole, the poporos and their users produce affectations in non-users that infuse a different attitude in them regarding decision-making. Seeing and listening to a

poporero in the cusmuy, in a state of contemplation, is different than interacting with a poporero in another assemblage. In the cusmuy, the participant's attention is focused towards the poporeros and the repetitive motion of poporo rubbing, facilitating the transmission of certain affects (Brennan 2004) from poporeros to non-poporo users, including sensations of stillness and introspection. A woman sitting beside me once commented that poporo rubbing in the cusmuy made her feel protected by the poporeros' wisdom, which she might have grasped by looking at the poporeros' facial expressions, movements, and speeches. However, outcomes such as a heightened confidence in one's thoughts, controlled discursive production, and slow speech are not transmitted unless there is personal use of the poporo and a process of "writing thoughts." Therefore, non-poporo users tend to sustain attitudes of contemplation and receptivity, even feeling relieved of the responsibility of making decisions. Ultimately, they might associate their affects in the cusmuy with other, previous affects that are part of their maps of intensity and their collective memories (Ricoeur 2004), probably affects related to memories of their leader and decision maker Carlos as a poporo user who inspired their trust.

## WOMEN AND THE POPORO

After months attending cusmuy gatherings, I could verify that Muisca women in Sesquile were rarely participating in deliberations. Apart from one or two occasions in which a female member showed frustration regarding a specific issue and

spoke up, they seemed to be happy as contemplative listeners. Wanting to learn the women's insight into their role in the cusmuy, I asked Paola, a member whose husband is a poporo user, if she felt that her opinions were left behind by the dynamics of the cusmuy. She responded:

> We do not need to show off like men do. But thanks to the poporo, even men are speaking wisely. They have become better men, and we have become better women. Most of them were alcoholics, some of them mistreated us before. Now they have learnt to calm down if they want to be respected in the cusmuy. I prefer to listen up than to repeat what others have already said. (Fieldnotes 12/04/2015)

Another female member told me that since Carlos Mamanche gave her husband his first poporo, he has become less violent, more responsible, and more attached to the household. When I asked her about her participation in the cusmuy and why women rarely speak in gatherings, she explained:

> I don't talk in the cusmuy because I am a shy person, I don't know what to say and how to say it. Uh, I do not like it. I prefer to listen and think about the things being said. The poporos help the men do the talking, I guess. They can focus on their thoughts and say things beautifully. Eh, I am fine just listening, and only if I disagree about an important decision would I say something. To me, the cusmuy is a place to rest from my work and from taking care of the kids. I feel free to close my eyes here in the

> cusmuy. We trust in the poporeros; whatever needs to be sorted out does not have to be sorted out by all of us, right? (Fieldnotes 05/04/2015)

At least since the death of Carlos Mamanche, the cusmuy has become the main meeting point for the Muisca of Sesquile. Unlike the groups in Bosa and Suba, which operate from offices, Sesquile has refrained from doing so, thereby ensuring that most matters are discussed in the ceremonial space. Evidently, the habitus of meeting on a weekly basis in the cusmuy and letting the poporeros be the decision makers has become part of the group micropolitics, even when all members are supposedly allowed to participate in decisions. The sense of trust in the poporeros, alongside the affects of heightened introspection among non-poporo users, has become a consensual call to continue this inclination: most of the participation of non-poporo users in the cusmuy is short and very punctual, while the speeches of most poporo users are long and detailed.

While women rarely participate in discussions leading to decision-making, they consider their positioning in the cusmuy as a form of agency (Mahmood 2011) that allows them to relax, focus on themselves, and somehow delegate responsibilities for decision-making to the men, arguing that they have no thirst for attracting attention. Moreover, they claim to have actually benefited from the “feminine” attributes acquired by poporeros, which have allowed women to have more advantageous positionings in other assemblages such as the household and meeting spaces other than the cusmuy.

In less ceremonially ordered assemblages, the poporeros continue their work with the poporo, but focusing on elements of self-discovery that are independent from the micropolitics of the assemblage itself. At the same time, non-poporo users (such as women) might still admire the work of poporeros in assemblages other than the cusmuy, but their agentic capacities are independent from the presence or absence of poporos, and are instead demarcated by the specific agentic dynamics of the new assemblage. As a result, the controlled behaviours expected from poporeros at all times have almost therapeutically improved their family relationships, mostly their relationships with their wives, who express that the poporero has "become less violent," has overcome an addiction, is more willing to share opinions and give advice than to "command," and is more willing to have family time.

However, I noted that women feel uncomfortable when they need to speak in the cusmuy, despite the fact that their opinions seem to be received with attention. I observed that even women who seem confident discussing a matter in public outside of the cusmuy tend to display a heightened shyness when addressing members inside. It is possible that this performance of self (Butler 2011) has become the norm among Muisca women in Sesquile, constraining their participation in deliberations even when the topic under discussion impacts them directly. This form of habitus might have settled so deeply within their maps of intensity that they seem unaware of its existence. As Linda Martin Alcoff (2001) explains, such embodied attitudes become a reservoir of the sedimented memories of micro-interaction, or what I call the map of intensity, facilitating the permanency of a hierarchical social life on the basis of

affect. If this is the case, Muisca women in Sesquile face a constant tension between the benefits of having poporeros in their families, and the outcomes of their silence in the cusmuy when a decision could be adverse for them.

## OUTSIDE THE CUSMUY

I had the opportunity to attend a Muisca meeting outside of the cusmuy, in the living room of Carlos Mamanche's mother's house. By nine in the evening, there were almost twenty members trying to find a place to sit. Some of the poporo users were present, as were many other members who regularly visit the cusmuy on Saturdays. I realized that the distribution of people sitting in the room was different from the regular distribution of people in the cusmuy. All members, regardless of whether or not they had a poporo, were sitting in whichever chair was available. Also, most of them were loudly chatting, walking in and out of the room, and even using their mobile phones. As the governor arrived, everybody sat down and listened. He explained that there was a financial issue with a shop that the group had opened near the Guatavita Lake months earlier, and also that he expected more participation from group members in the production of crafts or food for the shop.

As soon as he finished, a female member explained that only a few people were making something to sell in the shop because most avoided the responsibility, adding pressure to the few who did help out. After explaining her own case regarding the production of bracelets, she encouraged other members to sign up and bring their

products. A poporo user replied to her immediately, on a footing that resembled more a casual chat than a deliberation in the cusmuy—even though he had been using his poporo minutes earlier and still had it in his hand. Several other members gave their opinions, made complaints and proposed solutions, including both women and men with and without poporos. Only one of the regular users spoke while using his poporo, and even though his speech was slower and his words controlled, his gaze was not focused on the neck of his poporo but on the governor and the other participants. In this case, despite the fact that one poporo was in use and several poporeros were present, people engaged in a rather casual conversation in which both men and women expressed their opinions and contributed to decision-making.

The performance of poporeros in this second assemblage shows that the capacity of decision-making is not an agentic characteristic of the poporero, the poporo, or the poporero-poporo interaction. While the dynamics of the assemblage comprising the cusmuy, the tobacco powder, the poporos, the central fire, and group members in a ceremonial setting seems to drive poporeros towards talking and non-poporo users towards listening, the confluence of new entities such as a regular house, its furniture and lighting, the shape of the living room, the presence of cell phones, poporos, a television set, two cats, a dog, the smell of dinner, the absence of a central fire, and the rushed attitude of group members, seemed to place all members as deliberators. Even though there were poporos in this assemblage and two poporeros were actually “writing thoughts” at the time, the affectations on other members and

themselves produced by their use of the poporo seemed to be diminished, remaining mostly at the poporo-poporero level.

In this new assemblage, the poporo becomes an object of self-development with a limited, or at least different, agentic impact on the assemblage as a whole—as happens in domestic spaces, as pointed out by the two women above. Some scholars of the New Materialism (Barad 2003; Coole 2005; Grosz 2010) agree that these changes in what seems to be the agentic capacities of objects or humans as individual entities do not reflect degrees of agency within entities, as those capacities are always embedded in the assemblage and emerge in different ways depending on the entities that form the assemblage and their organization within the assemblage. In this case, for example, a meeting in the house of a female elder and with few entities related to Muisca spirituality does not reinforce the spiritual aspects of poporo use that set men aside as the most appropriate decision makers in the cusmuy.

Almost the opposite of the transmission of affects of stillness and contemplation from poporeros to non-poporo users in the cusmuy, in this assemblage the affects that were transmitted were ones of hurry and informality, inducing the poporo users to reduce the intensity and continuity of their poporo work. One of them used the poporo intermittently while the other, despite rubbing this poporo throughout the meeting, shifted his focus towards other inter-actants instead of staring at his poporo. As a result, one of the poporeros participated in the deliberation from the same footing (Goffman 1981) of non-poporo users, giving an informal, practical opinion without any reference to spirituality. The other poporero, despite using the

poporo and trying to bring the discussion back to the ceremonial footing of the cusmuy, was soon overtaken by non-poporo users and their viewpoints. This new assemblage triggers a temporary reconfiguring of the micropolitics of decision-making in the group—the ratified agency as an open-ended practice that requires specific conglomerates of entities to position some as decision makers and holders of specific attributes. How different would this meeting have been if it had taken place in the cusmuy?

The three moments explored in this section confirm that agency is not an attribute of entities but the result of an ongoing reconfiguring of the world (Barad 2003). Ultimately, the agentic capacities of decision-making remain diffused and bound up with affects, emotions, and affective memories that make them only partially predictable. Moreover, these assemblages show that rather fragile agentic capacities that did not exist before, and do not exist beyond, intra-action, are actually the basis of what—from the outside of the group—is seen as long-held Muisca micropolitics.

## NAVIGATING DECISION MAKING IN BOSA… DESPITE THE POPORO

### OUTSIDE THE CUSMUY

After Wilson and the other poporeros of the Bosa group left and organized independently, most of the decision-making activities that had begun to take place in

the cusmuy while Wilson was governor were re-located to the office where they used to take place before his election. I remember that the governor of the group once invited me to participate in a meeting so that I could introduce myself and talk about my project. I wrongly supposed that the meeting was going to take place in the cusmuy, as it had occurred when I first visited the group in Sesquile. However, the cusmuy was closed when I arrived. I kept walking down the road, towards the house that operates as their office, where several people were organizing a room for the meeting. The space was illuminated by a pair of fluorescent tubes that emitted a strong, white-bluish light. The walls were also painted white, even though the paint had become yellow and dirty after years of use. There were three desks inside. The governor was sitting behind one of them, facing five rows of plastic chairs all already occupied by group members. Andres was sitting behind another desk, serving an elderly member who was asking questions about the monthly food supply. Between the desks, I could see two filing cabinets and, standing on top of one, a 60-centimeter tall statue of the Virgin Mary. I was utterly surprised by this finding because I had not seen any visual reference to Catholicism among the Muisca groups that I had previously visited and worked with. But no one seemed to be praying or particularly interested in the figure, which appeared to be part of an unnoticeable, normalized background: almost like a decorative piece.

There were around twenty people in the office when I arrived, and Pedro, the spiritual leader, was among them. He was sitting in the first row, right in front of the desk of the governor. He was chewing coca leaves while rubbing his poporo,

immersed in his thoughts. He was the only man with a poporo, and the only member wearing all-white clothes. I soon realized that two-thirds of the participants in the gathering were women. Apart from the spiritual leader, people were chatting and coming in and out of the office to use their mobile phones. The office setup and the statue of the virgin imbued me with a sense of familiarity. It could be any office: an urban setting that I encounter on a daily basis. Besides, even though Catholic imagery is not very common in offices, it certainly is in many Colombian households. The only intra-actants that seemed to struggle to find a place in the assemblage, despite being right in front of the governor, were Don Pedro and his poporo. From time to time, he nodded his head as a means to show dissatisfaction with what he has hearing. Opposing the contemplative atmosphere of the cusmuy and its circularity in terms of space and sense of motion, I could almost immediately perceive the office as a rushed space that moves fast and in a linear manner, pointing towards practicality.

After a few minutes, Claudia, the governor, initiated the meeting by greeting us with the expression: "Tcho sua comunidad Muisca" [Good morning Muisca community], and explained the objectives of the meeting immediately afterwards. Don Pedro continued rubbing the neck of his poporo and chewing coca leaves for the duration of her speech. Claudia explained that the reason for the meeting was to finally agree on the date for the celebration of the annual Muisca festival and to decide which families were going to be in charge of it. The volume of her voice was high and she seemed very confident. I even perceived her way of addressing the audience as "managerial." Immediately after Claudia finished, Don Pedro began to

speak. While rubbing the neck of his poporo, he gave thanks to the spirits of the land and the ancestors for having facilitated the participation of everyone in the meeting. As in Sesquile, Don Pedro spoke slowly, using a low tone, and choosing his words carefully. His speech lasted ten minutes, during which he explained the importance of the festival for the Muisca group, encouraged everybody's participation, and proposed a date. While listening to Pedro, I realized that the two people sitting beside me seemed annoyed by the slow pace of his speech, and one of them was attempting to raise his hand so he could interrupt Pedro and move on. Some members were checking their cell phones. Only those with a particular interest in Muisca spirituality were actively listening, even though they lacked the contemplative attitude characteristic of non-poporeros in Sesquile when participating in cusmuy gatherings. When Pedro was silent for few seconds, a woman in her forties began to speak. She explained that the date proposed by Don Pedro was inconvenient because the funding from the Mayor's office for the festival was expected to arrive in a month, and Pedro's date was too close for anyone to prepare a three-day festival. After listening to the opinion and proposals of several members, Claudia decided on a date for the festival among those proposed and asked each family to choose one member to work on the project.

From the perspective of the New Materialism, it is intra-action among entities that defines the agentic capacities of an assemblage/phenomenon and the entities that are infused with those capacities at any given moment (Edwards, Coole and Frost 2010). Being aware of the dynamics of the Muisca brand and that the

spirituality brought by Carlos Mamanche could alter the micropolitics of the group of Bosa in terms of decision-making, the governor re-directed decision-making to the office and away from the cusmuy. By these means, she reinforced the office as the main locale of group deliberation, keeping decision-making as an administrative task. Moreover, to ensure that Muisca spirituality would not overly permeate the office, she incorporated the Virgin Mary into this assemblage. Knowing that the Catholic beliefs of most members of the group would surpass any affectations produced by a poporero and its poporo, she uses the virgin as a kind of counter-affectation to avoid the spiritualization of the office and changes about who can be a decision maker. At the same time, Claudia expects the participation of Don Pedro as spiritual leader and poporo user during office meetings will still legitimize the group's spirituality, despite the fact that most group members praise the virgin for mediating decisions more than the spiritual leader for bringing the thoughts of the ancestors to the conversation. Ultimately, regardless of the presence of the poporo and the virgin, the atmosphere of the office itself and most entities that are part of the office assemblage impede its sacralisation, remaining an administrative setting.

Apart from being a semiotic space, a compound of signs encoding formalism, efficiency, and emotional detachment, the assemblage that operates within the office of the Muisca group in Bosa also shapes the positioning of the governor as the decision maker and the positioning of the spiritual leader as a regular group member. Opposing the cusmuy with its roundness, its darkness, and its warmth, the office offers a straight, angular shape as well as a penetrating, artificial white light and the

interpersonal coldness of an administrative environment. This sense of detachment is amplified by the separation between the governor and the other members, including Don Pedro, who have to address her from the opposite side of her desk, marking the difference between the decision maker and the other members. On the other hand, Don Pedro is positioned almost as a regular member, having a very limited capacity to transmit his spiritually-based affects of contemplation and introspection in an assemblage that assaults entities with stronger stimuli and constant interferences, and where introspection is actually discouraged. In this type of assemblage, the agentic capacities of the poporo as an enhancer of its users' leadership is neutralized, becoming only an instrument for personal spiritual work, while the virgin infuses members with a sense of trust in the governor, as the statue is related to similar responses to Catholic imagery already located in member's maps of intensity (Deleuze 1978).

This type of assemblage allows Claudia to detach from the expected version of the decision maker created by Muisca spirituality and the Muisca brand. In addition of being a woman and not a poporero, Claudia does not embody the gendered attributes expected from decision makers in Sesquile, which are based on the idea of balancing masculinity and femininity through the use of the poporo. Her approach is argumentative instead of meditative, and goal-oriented instead of soothing. The office has permitted a separation between poporo use and decision-making, and ultimately between being a decision maker and embodying specific attributes. Moreover, having the office as the locale of decision-making has uncovered the opinions of most

members regarding the Muisca spirituality introduced by the Kogui, and which barely correlates with members' historically held beliefs. While Don Pedro was using his poporo and addressing the group, only the few members who had incorporated Muisca spirituality as part of their indigenous-selves remained attentive, while others seemed impatient or simply indifferent. In Bosa, only members interested in spirituality visit the cusmuy regularly, and larger gatherings are limited to the celebration of the equinoxes and solstices, unless the administrative leaders encourage members to participate in other cusmuy encounters.

## INSIDE THE CUSMUY

But while the office reinforces the focus of the Bosa group on the practicalities of social action and the protection of members against neoliberal forms of development and consumption, the cusmuy has become a tool for the positioning of the group vis-à-vis state institutions. Two weeks after the meeting to prepare for the annual festival, Don Pedro told me that personnel from the office of the Mayor of Bogota were going to visit the governor to discuss the construction of several residential buildings in land plots that were part of the colonial Muisca resguardo and were currently considered abandoned land. Months before, the governor had had a heated discussion with some of them regarding the same issue, and Pedro wanted to soften the relationship. He told me that in order to transform the defensiveness of the

visitors into a “more beneficial” attitude towards the Muisca, he would meet the visitors in the cusmuy before taking them to the governor.

The team of five delegates was guided from the office to the cusmuy by a member who also helped them find the bench and sit down. As usual, the cusmuy was in total darkness apart from the central fire, which on this occasion emitted a scent of eucalyptus. Apart from Pedro and me, there were six other people in the cusmuy. Five of them were members interested in Muisca spirituality and the sixth was Consuelo, a female leader that I only saw in the cusmuy on this occasion. Don Pedro was sitting in the most illuminated spot, rubbing the neck of his poporo and carefully looking at it. The five members accompanying the spiritual leader began to sing: “water of life, purify me; fire of love, burnt my fears; winds of the sunrise, take me to the sky; mother earth I have come back home, to this cusmuy, to this cusmuy…” Despite being the only holder of a poporo in the group, Don Pedro managed to infuse the cusmuy with a sense of introspection as he parsimoniously chewed coca leaves and rubbed his poporo in meditation, breathing deeply, closing his eyes, relaxing his body. Minutes later I found myself lying back against the wall, intermittently looking at the central fire and at Don Pedro’s hands rubbing a poporo that seemed to speak back to him, my mind entranced by this experience.

However, the first reaction of the delegates was to resist. They resisted being affected by sitting straight, looking at their cell phones, re-reading their printed materials, and even looking at me with an expression of distress—probably hoping that I would support them with a similar expression. But as the singing continued,

some shifted their discomfort into attentiveness. Then, Don Pedro addressed the group, still rubbing his poporo and chewing coca leaves. He thanked the cusmuy for being the house of the ancestors and the spirits of the land for their presence, the "brother fire" for helping everybody focus on their heart, and the visitors for their interest in the wellbeing of the Musica group. All of this was spoken at a very slow pace, following his poporo rubbing. By then, all of the visitors were either reclined against the wall or attentively looking at Don Pedro, and all of the legal documents and cell phones were sitting on the bench. Don Pedro talked for about twenty minutes. He focused on the importance of ancestral land for indigenous people, the importance of the river Tunjuelito for the Muisca, and the connection between people, nature, and the spirits. Then, he invited the visitors to give their opinions. When nobody spoke, he ended the ceremony and told the representatives to go to the office. While we walked out of the cusmuy, I could hear positive comments about the experience, and perceived less tension among the delegates.

Despite the reality that the affects unfolded by the interaction between Don Pedro and his poporo were barely transmitted to other group members in the office, an agentic assemblage involving the cusmuy and the poporo is still fundamental for the group as a means of positioning and authentication. Since the establishment of the Muisca brand, spirituality has become the trademark of the contemporary Muisca and the basis that supports most Muisca claims for external institutions and the mestizo majorities. Being aware that spirituality is a platform for the Muisca to shift the terms of conversation to their favor, and knowing that his reduced agentic capacities in the

office could be an obstacle to approaching the delegates in terms of spirituality, Don Pedro decided to invite the delegates to the cusmuy before meeting the governor. In the cusmuy, Don Pedro gained full control of the conversation and the attention of the delegates, as they were exposed to unexpected affectations that infused them with the calmness and contemplation that Don Pedro required to deliver his message. In this case, it was not only the intra-action among entities themselves but also the transmission of the affects (Brennan 2004; Blackman 2012) unfolded by the interaction between two concrete entities, the poporo and the poporero, that led to changes in the attitude of the visitors who initially seemed unaffected by the assemblage. By doing so, Don Pedro shifted the discussion regarding housing from purely administrative grounds to aspects such as the spiritual value of the land and the need to protect it according to Muisca spirituality instead of letting it be transformed into a peri-urban slum. Once again, this case illustrates that agentic capacities are not qualities of individuals that can be successfully deployed in every assemblage, but the temporary outcomes of an interplay of disparate entities within an assemblage (Barad 2003). In this case, even though Don Pedro's agentic capacities are diminished in the office, he shifted the delegates' footing towards Muisca spirituality in an attempt to facilitate a negotiation in the office.

## THE VIRGIN MARY AND A POPORO

Finally, I had the opportunity to participate in an unusual cusmuy gathering that was encouraged by group leaders as a means to bring members closer to Musica spirituality by dissipating their fears that the cusmuy was contrary to their religious

beliefs. To my surprise, the governor proposed celebrating a Catholic mass in the cusmuy. I learned that the mass was an idea of the governor's in response to a petition from Don Pedro to encourage members to visit the cusmuy. He told me that what he wanted was a Muisca ceremony to celebrate motherhood and to give handcrafted gifts to women as a way to remind them of their indigeneity. Instead, the governor saw the situation as an opportunity to access the cusmuy, and spirituality, from a platform that still allows her to keep her status as the decision maker despite the fact that spiritual wisdom is an attribute of the poporeros according to the Muisca brand.

It was eight in the morning and both Don Pedro and the governor were already in the cusmuy. While she was placing a white mantelpiece and two bouquets of flowers on a table, Don Pedro was putting on a white cotton shirt on top of his normal t-shirt, and then his necklaces and bandanas. The central fire had not been started because several members had argued that they do not visit the cusmuy because the smoke of the fire impacts their health. Instead, several members were lighting candles to provide light. The members who accompanied Pedro in the meeting with personnel from the Mayor's office were also there, preparing their drums, maracas, flutes, and a guitar. Suddenly, Consuelo arrived with the statue of the Virgin Mary from the group's office (Figure 12). It was placed on the table, between the bouquets of flowers. Behind it, Consuelo put a bible, a wireless microphone, and several printed sheets. The priest had not yet arrived, but Claudia told me that she was not worried because he was an "ally priest" who understands the particular case of the Muisca.

Figure 12: The Virgin Mary from the governor' office. In this case, a mass is celebrated in the office.

As members began to arrive, I immediately noticed them trying to find a place near the table instead of near Don Pedro, who was occupying his regular sit on the bench. Even more unexpected was to see most of them making the sign of the cross in front of the statue of the virgin and telling their children to do the same, despite never doing so in the office. I sat down near Don Pedro as he put on his last necklace, pulled the wooden stick out of his poporo to place it in his mouth for a couple of seconds, and then began to rub the poporo with the wet end of the stick. When the priest arrived most members stood up, and Pedro walked fast towards the

table and told him something I could not hear. Then, he exchanged a few words with the governor. In a last attempt to get members' attention regarding the cusmuy as a space of Muisca spirituality, Don Pedro gave a short speech explaining how its shape, internal layout, and darkness are a representation of the spirits and ancestors that watch over the Muisca. But despite being in the cusmuy, having the poporo in his hands. wearing white clothing, and speaking introspectively, he failed to capture the members' attention, and was unable to transmit a contemplative state. For the next hour, the cusmuy became a Catholic church, and the priest became its spiritual leader. During the mass, he talked about the value of motherhood, congratulated all of the women of the group on women's day and praised the work of Claudia as its leader.

In this case, an image of the Virgin Mary that in the office produces few, if any, affectations on the members—apart from a subtle sense of trust—, suddenly becomes the focus of veneration in the cusmuy. As Grosz (2010) described, this prioritization of an entity, in this case the virgin, should not be interpreted as evidence of a higher agentic capacity of the entity itself, but as an indication that agentic hierarchies are contingent on discursive and material aspects that determine their place within clusters of intra-action. From the discursive side, a Catholic ceremony was announced as the main purpose of the encounter, shifting the spirituality of the cusmuy from a focus on the ancestors to a focus on Catholic deities. Regarding materiality, several entities that are not regularly present in the cusmuy were incorporated and placed around the figure of the virgin, producing a totally new assemblage within the cusmuy. Two bunches of flowers, a table covered with a white

mantelpiece, a bible, a microphone, and even the normal darkness and silence of the cusmuy helped to locate the virgin at the center of the assemblage, triggering affects of adoration among most group members.

As the affects unfolded by this new assemblage were decoded into member's maps of intensity (Deleuze 1987) and connected to previous affects experienced during religious adoration, most of them felt confident externalizing those affects by performing acts of veneration such as the sign of the cross, despite being in a locale that some consider sinful. At the same time, any correlations between the cusmuy and Muisca spirituality became secondary, to the point that Don Pedro, his poporo, and the cusmuy as a Muisca ceremonial house were totally obscured within the assemblage, regardless of Don Pedro's efforts to be noticed. Finally, by getting the virgin outside of the office and inside of the cusmuy, the governor ratified her position as decision maker. She reminded Don Pedro and the spiritually oriented members that her role is not supported by Muisca spirituality, as in the case of Sesquile, but by the long-held Catholic beliefs of most members and their trust in her knowledge of bureaucratic procedures.

By conjoining seemly conflicting entities into a single assemblage, the governor managed to bring the Catholic members of the Bosa group inside a place that has become an indicator of a pre-Catholic spirituality branded as authentic Muisca. However, this acceptance of the cusmuy is a temporary one, dependent on each member's map of intensity, life history, and the extent to which the cusmuy is catholicized through the intentional incorporation of entities. Clashes between Muisca

spirituality and what the Musica of Bosa envision as their religious tradition are inevitable, and while a form of inverted or retrospective hybridity is being forcefully introduced in order to meet external expectations, friction remains. For Tsing (2004), these frictions between the global—the Muisca brand— and the local—the mestizo indigeneity of the Muisca—produce a frontier culture made up of fragments and fluidity, of relationalities that ultimately disrupt the neoliberal project of standardization via branding.

## CONCLUSIONS

In addition to promoting equality through difference and acknowledging that the production of national identities in Latin America perpetuated the invisibilization of otherness, multicultural politics in the region have also promoted the maintenance of what state institutions call "cultural diversity." Under this framework, it is expected that officially recognized others, such as indigenous people, display enough alterity to be seen as undoubtedly different from mainstream society and therefore the rightful recipients of exceptional treatment. However, the transnationalization of culture (Kradolfer 2010; Ulloa 2004) has hindered indigenous people's freedom to determine their own difference. A global model of indigeneity has emerged since the 1980s (Gros 2000; Gros and Ochoa 1998; Hale 2002) to provide the baseline through which states, institutions, the media, non-indigenous peoples, and even indigenous people assess their differences. It is expected that indigenous groups be spiritual, hold

a nature-oriented wisdom, be ecological, and even non-violent, regardless of their different collective histories and geographic pressures (Conklin 2002). Therefore, indigenous forms of leadership based on social action and political positioning are now pressured to "normalize" themselves and meet these expectations to avoid being accused of instrumentalism, inauthenticity, and even fraud (Bocarejo 2011).

The production of the collective-selves of the Muisca groups in Bosa and Sesquile was shaped by the institutional requirements at the time of their recognition. In 1998, for example, when the group from Bosa requested recognition, the recognizing body was aware of the impact of colonization and urbanization among the Muisca, and therefore valued indigeneity as a platform for social action. On the other hand, when the group from Sesquile requested recognition in 2006, the institutional position was neo-essentialist, legitimized by the agenda of preserving "diversity," and aligned with transnational models of indigeneity. This latter approach fit Carlos Mamanche's understanding of Muisca indigeneity as spiritual, and motivated him to reinforce spirituality in Sesquile by learning from groups such as the Kogui from northern Colombia—an already well-positioned group. As a result, the group in Sesquile has become the model of Muisca indigeneity itself: a branded hyper-real Indian (Ramos 1994) that is seen as spiritual and therefore wise, contemplative, and peaceful.

Being able to align with transnational expectations of indigeneity facilitated the recognition of the Muisca group of Sesquile, but also set the baseline from which to assess the indigeneity of other Muisca groups on the basis of cultural alterity. An

object known as the poporo became one of the indicators used to assess that indigeneity. The poporo is an object originally used by Kogui men, which was incorporated into the Muisca by Carlos. To validate it as authentically Muisca, a mythopoetic narrative was produced by group members and incorporated as part of the group's collective memory. According to this narrative, the poporo was first used by the Muisca and then given to the Kogui so that they could protect it during the colonial period and return it as part of the contemporary Muisca awakening. Moreover, the poporo and the cusmuy, or ceremonial house, were further connected as indicators of authenticity through the production of an extended narrative that places poporos as the spiritual columns of the cusmuy, and the cusmuy as the core of Muisca collective life. As a result, what initially appeared to be an intimate work of spiritual development done by poporo users with the help of poporos, soon became part of the Muisca collective life, thereby transforming poporo users into the spiritual support for the whole group and positioning them as decision makers.

This capacity to decide on a spiritual basis is, according to the Muisca, acquired through the use of the poporo. Rubbing a poporo and ingesting coca leaves mixed with powdered seashells stimulate in men the acquisition of attributes labelled as "feminine," which they argue are necessary to be spiritually balanced. Also, the action of rubbing the poporo, or "writing thoughts," is said to help them concentrate and reflect on particular matters without being distracted, enabling them to listen to their Muisca ancestors (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1951). The use of the poporo allows poporeros to build a spiritual public persona by embodying a blend of ideal male and

female characteristics that women, as non-poporo-users, cannot acquire. Therefore, women feel inadequate as speakers and decision makers during cusmuy gatherings. Women in Sesquile have normalized such inadequacy as part of what it means to be Muisca women, finding their positioning as advantageous both in the cusmuy (being free from the obligation to participate) and in other assemblages (as men become more approachable). On the other hand, being considered inadequate as decision makers is something that the female leaders of the group in Bosa cannot afford. Despite the necessity of incorporating poporos in Bosa to reinforce the positioning of the group vis-à-vis the brand, having poporos was also a threat to the pre-existing group micropolitics, according to which an elected governor is the ultimate decision maker. As a means to prevent the deprivation of female leaders from their decision-making capacity, the elected governor of the Musica of Bosa detached the administrative and public affairs of the group from the space of the cusmuy and re-located them in an office. Also, she re-shaped Muisca spirituality as an optional, personal choice of group members—thereby allowing it to coexist with the Catholic beliefs of the majority of the members of the group.

The governor of the group in Bosa brought indicators of indigenous spirituality such as the poporo and the use of tobacco [hoz-k] together with Catholic icons and spaces such as the cusmuy and the office, with the intent to produce a Muisca indigeneity that embraces both the expected spirituality and the group's mestizo past. These unusual pairings have led to the formation of assemblages that are only partially accepted and embraced by group members, as they have to negotiate

between the expectations of the Muisca brand and their former indigenous selves. Ultimately, while the Muisca of Bosa have been able to incorporate Carlos Mamanche's spirituality through the cusmuy and the poporo, decision-making continues to take place in the office, an assemblage that the only poporo user of the group shares with a statue of a Catholic deity. At the same time, it becomes suitable to have a Catholic mass for group members in the same cusmuy where visitors fulfilled their expectations about the spirituality of the Muisca of Bosa vis-à-vis the brand. In somehow similar terms, and despite the fact that the group in Sesquile situates poporo users as worthy of their trust in their role of decision makers, this positioning is also dependent on location and on other entities that become part of the cusmuy assemblage. In the cusmuy, poporeros seem to be invested with attributes that enhance their spiritual awareness and facilitate their participation as speakers, while at home or in encounters outside of the cusmuy such attributes recede and women, as non-poporo users, become more actively engaged. As I became aware of the relational basis of decision-making in both groups, I decided to explore the role of agentic assemblages involving the poporo in the establishment of Muisca micropolitics, as well as how group members navigate such assemblages.

Following Mignolo's concept of border thinking (2013), in this chapter I proposed that it is possible to engage with topics and subjects that are usually avoided by Western anthropology, such as the agentic relationships between humans and non-humans, while still using the analytical lenses provided by Western social theory and philosophy. I argue that this is possible if the chosen approach is treated as a border

theory. A border theory can be understood as an analytical framework that provides the essential elements to explain non-Western phenomena when de-linked from the larger paradigms and trajectories within which it originated and which limit its scope. For groups such as the Muisca, which after centuries of colonization via mestizaje are just beginning to look back at their own ontologies and epistemologies, border theories become a viable option to start asking questions that acknowledge the existence of their pluriverses of being, even if their ontologies are not readily available. Therefore, I have taken advantage of the New Materialism (Barad 2003; Coole 2005; Frost 2008) to explore Muisca micropolitics and how they have become mediated by the poporo and other human and non-human entities clustered into assemblages. This approach is based on the notion that entities have an active force that produces agentic phenomena when in intra-action with other entities, but lack agency in themselves, independently of this intra-action. This active force is their capacity to affect and be affected (Blackman 2012; Deleuze 1978; Massumi 2002). Entities, both human and non-human, produce affectations that are intermingled in assemblages and perceived by other entities as affects. Those affects are responsible for both the transmission and the suppression of agentic capacities. Moreover, affects can even be transmitted to entities within the assemblage that were not directly stimulated by an affectation (Brennan 2004).

Taking these standpoints of the New Materialism as my analytical framework, I was able to understand that the formation and legitimization of Muisca decision makers is not just an outcome of the use of the poporo, but the result of

various affectations produced in multiple, spatially demarcated, assemblages. Moreover, I learnt that the presence or absence of entities such as a statue of the Virgin Mary, a bible, desks, a fireplace, and even cell phones can reinforce, weaken of even fully modify the positioning and attributes of a poporero—giving women the chance to navigate their way to decision-making despite not having poporos. Finally, I learnt that assemblages contribute to the production of decision makers who, despite being gendered, are imbued with attributes that challenge stereotypical models of how a male or a female leader should behave, adding indeterminacy to both gender binaries and agentic capacities (Barad 2007).

# CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUDING REMARKS: FROM MEMBERS' STRUGGLE TO GROUPS' SUCCESS

In Chapter One, I exposed the connection between the official recognition of the Muisca groups in Bosa and Sesquile and the aspiration of their members to overcome the abandonment and invisibility to which they have been subjected as part of Colombia's program of governance, which prioritizes development and trade over population welfare (Canessa 2007; Gros and Ochoa 1998). The legal re-structuring of Colombia as a multicultural state in 1991 gave an opportunity to the indigenous/mestizos of the central highlands near the city of Bogota to find a sense of belonging beyond the mestizo *Colombianidad*, allowing them to become better ingrained to the lands they inhabit and among themselves. But being officially recognized as indigenous has also meant complying with the imaginaries of indigeneity held by the institution in charge of indigenous recognition, as well as a tacit obligation to "update themselves" according to changes in those imaginaries, which ultimately reflect internal adaptations of the colonial matrix of power in order to continue its domination over this already disenfranchised population.

While indigenous leaders are aware that these transformations are necessary to meet external expectations of authenticity and carefully try to detach their indigenous selves from these shifting models, non-leaders experience doubts about their indigeneities when indicators of cultural alterity that are incompatible with their

beliefs and lifestyles are introduced by their leaders. In the case of Muisca groups, an official understanding of indigeneity as fluid, relational, and modified by colonization was replaced by an approach to indigeneity as alterity-based, and then by a narrower understanding of Muisca alterity in terms of branding. Seen thought the lens of branding, Muisca groups and members become products which, in order to resemble the brand and become appealing to consumers, must incorporate certain indicators of spirituality into their indigenous lives. Therefore, while most members of the group in Sesquile struggle to become the perfect tokens of spirituality they think they should be, since Muisca spirituality was first introduced by their leader, members of the Bosa group fail to incorporate even its the two most visible indicators, namely the cusmuy and the poporo. Ultimately, the members of both groups become increasingly self-conscious during interactions, trying not to disclose what they perceive as their flaws while doubting their indigeneity despite being registered as members of officially recognized Muisca groups.

In this dissertation, I have approached the Muisca subject beyond the political economies of neoliberal multiculturalism, embracing sincerity (Jackson 2005) as a theoretical alternative that allowed me to recognize the multiple indigeneities that rest under the generalizations imposed by state institutions and the Muisca brand. During fieldwork, moments of sincerity emerged when Muisca members became trapped in situations where it was impossible to avoid exposing the contradictions between the indicators of a branded indigeneity and their own stances on being Muisca. More specifically, I have explored members' attempts to

incorporate the cusmuy as the locale of spiritual interaction, focusing on how the affects (Deleuze 1978) unfolded in that setting become linked to previous experiences that are part of members' maps of intensity and leading to either the rejection or incorporation of the cusmuy on the basis of sincerity. Likewise, I explored the connections between Muisca leadership and the poporo, a ceremonial object described as a personal tool to enhance spiritual awareness that has actually become a key player in defining decision-making roles during group gatherings.

However, I do not want to end this analysis without going full circle and linking my study at the level of the Muisca subject to the larger goals of the Muisca groups as collective units. To do so, I will briefly examine whether the groups' aims of overcoming abandonment and invisibility have been met since the establishment of the Muisca brand, and at what cost to Muisca members. This final segment provides a better understanding of the positioning of Muisca groups as indigenous ethnocitizens, and highlights how the shifting politics of recognition that led to the formation of the Muisca brand have scarred both the Muisca self and the Muisca project, as members are compelled to negotiate their beliefs and the scope of their agentic capacities against a branded version of themselves that continues to serve the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo 2013).

## EQUIVOCATIONS AND OPACITIES

Even though official recognition has played an important part in the re-positioning of Muisca groups as receivers of special treatment from state institutions,

becoming products endorsed by a brand and demanded by consumers has opened new doors for Muisca visibilization and support. While the rights given to the Muisca as indigenous groups have placed them as political actors different from the mestizo majorities, their relationships with a broad range of consumers of the Muisca brand have increased their chances of participating in projects and obtaining funding to help prevent further abandonment and invisibilization. However, establishing relationships with consumers using the Muisca brand as the middle ground of interaction is not a straightforward maneuver for the groups and their members. It requires a constant negotiation of the expectations linked to the brand as well as masking the equivocations that emerge during consumer-product interaction, as they could jeopardize the continuity of the relationships. These equivocations, as well as the "middle grounds" that provide the footing for interaction, have been studied anthropologically by scholars including Viveiros de Castro (2004), Gonzalez Galvez (2012), Robbins and Rumsay (2008), Duranti (2008), and Conklin and Graham (1995). In this section, I will complement their work by introducing the Muisca brand as a middle ground that allows the Muisca to veil equivocations and makes relationships with their consumers possible.

An equivocation is a communicative disjuncture that occurs when interactants think and talk about different things but the interaction remains unbroken because the conversation still makes sense from their respective standpoints. The earliest anthropological works on equivocation derived from studies of perspectivism regarding the relationship between indigenous people and ethnographers. Viveiros de

Castro (2004) explored equivocations in his own relationships with NGOs and indigenous groups in the Amazon, and argued that equivocations are neither errors nor deceptions, but negotiated middle grounds that function as communicative footings. Moreover, he stated that equivocations do not require clarification, but an understanding of the referential alterities that inform interactants' understanding of the world around them, and which are usually based on their life histories and collective memories. This concept of equivocation was extended beyond the ethnographic encounter to explore how communicative disjuncture operates in other relationships, including among members of a particular group, between indigenous and non-indigenous people, and between indigenous groups and different types of institutions. While Viveiros de Castro limited the analytical scope of equivocation to analyzing cases in which the interactants remained unaware of the communicative disjuncture throughout the interaction (2004), the concept has recently been used in cases where the illusion of talking about the same thing is consciously sustained despite the interactants becoming aware of the equivocation (Gonzales Galvez 2012).

*The opacity of others' mind* (Robbins and Rumsey 2008) is another analytical concept that complements equivocation by exposing both the impossibility of knowing other people's intentions and the two outcomes of this impossibility: being in constant doubt, or carelessly trusting others. The term was introduced by anthropologists working on Pacific islands, as they frequently came across situations in which indigenous people were speculating about others' intentions in different types of relationships, and feeling doubtful about the correlation between what others

say and what they think (Robbins and Rumsey 2008; Schieffelin 2008). This concept can be applied alongside equivocation to show that keeping the intentions of interactants imbued with opacity facilitates the continuation of equivocations and the relationships based on them, as people prefer to trust each other in the hope of obtaining the expected results from a relationship instead of breaking the opacity and disclosing the equivocations. In most cases, these opacities define the middle ground or common footing of interaction, shaping the illusion of having a shared understanding or a common goal among people holding different viewpoints. But in order to maintain the opacity, the people involved in these relationships have to avoid disclosing the motivations of their actions and unveiling their goals beyond what is absolutely necessary to maintain the relationship, protecting the middle ground (Duranti 2008) even if it leads to self-doubts regarding their indigenous selves.

Beth Conklin has explored these middle grounds in action during her fieldwork in the Amazon. She observed that relationships between indigenous leaders and benefactors of Amazonian indigeneity are frequently based on the assumption that there is a common goal in the relationship, usually the protection of the rainforest, despite the real agendas of the interactants being contradictory. For example, she observed that while environmental NGOs were seeking to produce a form of sustainable resource management, indigenous leaders were aiming to gain further control over their lands and self-determination with the help of the NGOs. But despite these contradictions, there was a fluid middle ground and a common language that allowed the relationship to continue, in this case the transnational environmental

discourse and the model of the ecological noble savage (Conklin and Graham 1995), a well-known representation of cultural otherness made by authoritative institutions.

## THE MUISCA PRODUCT-CONSUMER RELATIONSHIP

Since spirituality is the core of the Muisca brand, it has also become the middle ground that mediates relationships between the Muisca as products and their multiple consumers. To the advantage of the Muisca of Bosa and Sesquile, being officially recognized as indigenous has automatically reinforced the assumption of their authenticity vis-à-vis the brand, but they must ensure that this assumption remains strong throughout their relationships with consumers. Therefore, it is common for only group leaders to interact directly with potential consumers, revealing just the aspects of their indigeneity that are compatible with the brand, and only to the minimum extent required to gain their trust. To do so, they infuse their spirituality with an aura of enigmatic wisdom that discourages consumers from asking more than what leaders feel safe telling them. On the other hand, group members who are not leaders try to avoid interacting directly with consumers, as they could unveil the opacities surrounding their spirituality by disclosing their own doubts about its incorporation into their lives. Ultimately, while this approach ensures that groups are seen as compatible with the brand, group members experience constant self-doubt, as their sincere indigenous selves have to be hidden to avoid contradictions with the branded form of Muisca alterity.

Guided by the Muisca brand, the consumers of Muisca alterity expect to find spirituality at the center of the Muisca agenda, and establish relationships with the Muisca in order to engage with that spirituality, either as part of institutional projects or as part of a personal journey of spiritual self-discovery. Moreover, they tend to assume that spirituality permeates all aspects of Muisca lives, including their relationship with the land, their relationship with non-Muisca, their intra-group encounters, their political thinking, their craftsmanship, clothing, food, and overall daily activities. However, equivocations arise as the real Muisca have interests beyond spirituality. In these cases, both the Muisca and their consumers try to keep the assumption of a spiritual middle ground even after equivocations become evident. When this happens, the interactants communicate in a very cautious manner, using vague statements that allow various interpretations to ensure that the footing (Goffman 1981; Gonzalez-Galvez 2012) of the relationship is maintained until the consumer is satisfied and the Muisca have received something in return—sometimes something that can help fulfill their ultimate goals.

Relationships that start on the basis of trust usually unfold into settings of doubt, as equivocations are unveiled and the Muisca feel uncertain of the real intentions of the consumers, while the consumers feel uncertain of the resemblance between Muisca groups and the brand. Fortunately for these interactants, the doubts tend to disappear as the interaction becomes more practical, prioritizing outcomes over equivocations and retaining the opacity of the spiritual middle ground. The following are just two illustrative cases of product-consumer relationships that use the

opacities of the Muisca brand as a middle ground amidst equivocations, and that have allowed the Muisca to re-gain both visibility and positioning vis-à-vis state institutions and the mestizo majorities.

One of Carlos Mamanche's main ambitions in motivating his neighbors to self-recognize as Muisca was to overcome the invisibility to which they have been subjected by state institutions as a means to monopolize the tourist industry and ensure the availability of workers for the flower industry. These interests have remained in place even after the official recognition of the group, but institutions such as the CAR, which is in charge of the protection of the Guatavita Lake, have helped the Muisca get their wanted visibility by becoming consumers of Muisca spirituality as it is marketed by the Musica brand. Despite the fact that the CAR never invited the Muisca of Sesquile to participate in projects related to the lake before their official recognition, the Ministry of the Environment compelled this institution to involve the officially recognized indigenous groups in the development of the site as a tourist attraction. Thus, the CAR approached the Muisca to ask for their participation in the production of the narratives that were going to be delivered by official tour guides, and to propose the construction of a replica of a Muisca cusmuy near the lake that could be used as a learning space for visitors. But while the CAR was focusing on the incorporation of spiritual aspects that could enhance the visitor experience, the Muisca were looking for opportunities to become visible as valid holders of Muisca indigeneity among the non-indigenous majorities, and for employment opportunities related to their indigeneity that could liberate them from selling their labor to the

flower industry in Sesquile. Despite this equivocation, and using the Muisca brand and its indicators as the middle ground of interaction, the Muisca managed to become the main users of the cusmuy that was built near the lake, opened a Muisca souvenir shop at the entrance of the site, and some members became official visitor guides, while the CAR fulfilled the requirement of the Ministry that motivated them to approach the Muisca after decades of invisibilization.

Currently, all the Muisca guides in the Guatavita Lake are poporo users who gained experience as public speakers in their cusmuy. Their use of the poporo has given them the confidence needed to successfully address large groups of visitors interested in learning Muisca history. By using their ceremonial white clothes and woven mochilas and holding their poporos while engaging with visitors, they transmit a sense of authenticity that has made them well known and respected by the mestizos who visit the Guatavita Lake. Moreover, they have introduced the cusmuy as a locale of spiritual enhancement, legitimized their collective memories by making them publically known in an official setting, and also have been able to officially label the lake as their sacred site. In most cases, visitors avoid asking questions about the contemporary Muisca, focusing instead on their pre-Hispanic ancestors and the ways they used the lake. Likewise, despite the fact that the Muisca guides introduce themselves as Muisca from Sesquile and provide basic explanations about the cusmuy, the poporo, and their clothing, the rest of their narrative focuses on the use of the lake during the pre-Hispanic period, surrounding contemporary Muisca

spirituality with an aura of opacity that prevents the disclosure of possible equivocations.

The souvenir shop of the Muisca from Sesquile, located just outside of the site protected by the CAR (Figure 13), has become another setting where multiple consumer-product relationships take place. In this case, the consumers are individuals interested in learning more about the Muisca and in buying a small token of Muisca spirituality. Consumers visit the Muisca shop hoping to find votive offerings, woven cotton fibers, replicas of golden figures and snacks made of corn, assuming that the contemporary Muisca still produce those objects as part of their "authentic" Muisca lifestyles. However, the souvenirs that they find in the shop are very different from their expectations. They include woven mochilas made with industrially produced wool, the popular Colombian empanadas, honey collected by the Muisca themselves, Peruvian quinoa grown by a mestizo entrepreneur, and bracelets and necklaces woven by the Muisca using colored plastic beads. Some Muisca women have learnt to weave mochilas from one of the sisters of Carlos Mamanche, and decided to continue weaving as a way to obtain additional income. The empanadas are made by Ana, the wife of the member who apologized for being called a spiritual leader. The apiary is the outcome of a project with a nonprofit environmentalist organization, while the quinoa business is run by an entrepreneur who is friend of a Muisca leader and uses the Muisca name to attract his own clients. Finally, since beading has become an element of pan-indian culture in the Americas, a member has taught the group some beading techniques and members have created their own Muisca designs.


Figure 13: The Muisca shop at the entrance of the Guatavita Lake.

During fieldwork, I worked in the shop for a few days and realized the expressions of disappointment of visitors as they entered and failed to find what they were expecting. However, a Muisca poporero was always there, ready to explain why those products are true representations of the Muisca and their spirituality, even if the intentions of the actual producers, mostly women and children, differ from the poporeros' pre-arranged narrative. Within this narrative, the mochilas are a representation of the universe, the honey and quinoa are produced in accordance with the spirits of nature, and the spiritual thoughts of the Muisca weavers are said to be infused into the bracelets they make. In this case, despite the equivocation between the intentions of the visitors to find tokens of an imagined Muisca spirituality and the

intentions of the Muisca to show and sell their work, the Muisca brand works as a middle ground that allows the continuity of the relationship, presenting an alternative idea of Muisca spirituality that visitors ultimately accept, or at least avoid questioning publically, and which in some cases encourages them to buy what seems to be Muisca merchandise.

Similar relationships take place between consumers of the brand and the Muisca in Bosa, who in some cases have been able to move their political agenda forwards thanks to these relationships. As explained in Chapter One, it was the negligence of the local authorities regarding the illegal appropriation of pieces of land in Bosa San Bernardino and the overall abandonment of the area that motivated the holders of Muisca surnames to self-recognize and request official recognition as indigenous. By becoming indigenous, they hoped to be better positioned as the valid tenants and protectors of the land plots that were already becoming part of the urban slums of Bogota due to illegal occupancy.

While recognition itself granted the Muisca of Bosa the right of *consulta previa* [prior consultation], obliging developers to consult and obtain permission from the Muisca before initiating any work that could modify the few land plots that were part of the colonial indigenous resguardos and still unused for housing, group leaders have also taken advantage of the Muisca brand and its spirituality to gain new supporters of their cause against urbanization. For example, a group of local and international artists with a particular interest in environmentalism approached the Muisca as they knew that the group was going to deliver a public manifesto to

demand the intervention of the local government to prevent the illegal urbanization of the remaining land plots in San Bernardino. The artists were interested in engaging with local indigenous groups and their environmental causes as part of their own professional agenda; because the brand portrays the Muisca as a spiritually-oriented group aiming to protect the equilibrium of nature, they approached them with the intension of joining a spiritual platform that could give them a better position amongst indigenous advocates. On the other hand, when the Muisca agreed to let the artists participate in the delivery of their public manifesto, they were hoping that their presence could persuade the local government and the non-Muisca to accept the group's requests regarding the tenancy and control of the land, finally ending the state of abandonment to which San Bernardino has been subjected for decades.

Despite the dissimilarity of their goals, the artists and the leaders of the Muisca group delivered a manifesto that intermingled the spirituality expected by the artists as consumers of the brand and the political goals of the Muisca leaders, using a nature-oriented, spiritual discourse as a common footing. On that Saturday, more than three hundred members of the Muisca group reunited in an open land plot beside the local school on the banks of the polluted Tunjuelito River. Using professional microphones, speakers, and video recording equipment offered by the artists and other benefactors, including indigenous advocates and environmental organizations, the governor of the Muisca group read part of the manifesto. Then each of the artists read a sentence of the remaining text and, finally, they all declared the establishment of the *Red de hermanamiento de artistas y pueblos indigenas en defensa de la vida, el*

*territorio, la diversidad y el buen vivir* [Network of artists and indigenous peoples for the protection of life, land, cultural diversity, and good living].

The manifesto demanded that there be no execution of development plans in the area, the help of local authorities to prevent the illegal appropriation of land plots, and the right of the Muisca of Bosa to be the main protectors of the remaining open lands of San Bernardino. These demands were contextualized as requirements made by the spirits of the Muisca territory and by nature itself. The governor explained that the inhabitants of Bosa and the developers had to listen to the call of mother earth and to the claims of the spirits of the river, the trees, the rocks, and the air, as they were the ones clamouring for the restoration of the natural order. She also stated that the Muisca have had the spiritual responsibility of taking care of the land of Bosa and its sacred sites since time immemorial, and that therefore they were just asking for the right to continue fulfilling their ancestral duty.

Even though the governor and other administrative leaders of the group of Bosa avoid engaging with Muisca spirituality in their daily lives, making important decisions outside of the cusmuy and without the orientation of the poporeros, spirituality is used here as a middle ground that facilitates the fulfilment of the goals of both artists and Muisca leaders. As a result of these brand-based relationships, the Muisca have built a spiritual platform that positions them highly vis-à-vis other stakeholders to the land plots of San Bernardino, forcing official institutions such as the Ministry of the Environment and the Department of Urban Planning to cease the abandonment to which they had subjected the area and instead try to reconcile the

points of view of the various stakeholders. However, as also occurs in Sesquile, only the Muisca leaders have a clear understanding of how the product-consumer relationships take place, and of the need to locate them on a spiritual middle ground. As a result, most non-leaders found the manifesto both unrealistic and disconnected from their indigenous selves. The words of the governor regarding the role of the Muisca as spiritual protectors of the land appeared unrealistic to members who have endured the contamination of the slum for decades, and most members feared that spirituality could undermine their lineage-based indigeneity, making them inauthentic. As a result, they avoid direct participation in consumer-product interactions, and are reluctant to openly discuss aspects of their cultural alterity with potential consumers of the Muisca brand, fearing the disclosure of their indigenous selves.

The examples outlined in this section show how the Musica brand has been both advantageous and disadvantageous to the Muisca of Bosa and Sesquile. At the group level, the brand has helped the Muisca not only become better positioned within pre-existing political platforms, but to actually create an alternative platform of interaction grounded on spirituality: a middle ground on which their authenticity is taken for granted that gives Muisca leaders control over the rules of interaction. Moreover, this spiritual platform is imbued with a sense of opacity and flexibility that can even absorb the equivocations that arise between the intentions of the Muisca and the interests of their consumers, allowing the continuation of relationships based on equivocations if they still benefit both parties.

However, as regular members of the group in Bosa are encouraged by their leaders to embrace Muisca spirituality, and their counterparts of Sesquile are actually expected to present themselves as tokens of the Muisca brand, they become constantly exposed to the pressures of having to think, look, and act "spiritual," doubting their indigenous selves because they seem incompatible with the expectations of the brand. As a result, Muisca people avoid conversations about their indigeneity, feeling insufficient and sometimes even unworthy of their place as members of a Muisca group. Paradoxically, they also feel inauthentic if they actively try to resemble the expectations of the Muisca brand, as their neighbors remind them of their mestizo past and accuse them of "playing indian" (Deloria 1998).

## CONCLUDING REMARKS: FINAL THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

During my twenty years as an inhabitant of Bosa, I witnessed various changes in how some families positioned themselves vis-a-vis their neighbors and state institutions. Most people living in the outskirts of Bosa self-identified as peasants, being categorized in terms of class instead of what seemed to be a blurred indigeneity. However, they had to become part of the urban labor force when most of the land plots they used for cultivation were illegally possessed and used for housing. Years later, with the implementation of the constitutional reform that embraced multiculturalism and demanded the protection of "cultural diversity" (Bocarejo 2011; Camacho 1997; Kymlicka 1995), some of these families began to re-define

themselves as indigenous, using their surnames as evidence of an indigeneity that had been denied for decades. But despite having successfully obtained recognition as indigenous, the Muisca of Bosa made a further modification to their indigenous persona years later, introducing a form of spirituality that is characteristic of the Muisca of Sesquile, and which seemed to be incompatible with the Catholic beliefs held by most Muisca families in Bosa. From an outsider's perspective, these changes could easily be interpreted as part of the Muisca's own process of indigenous self-discovery. However, after spending some time with members of the group and learning about their formation and agendas, I realized that those changes were actually their responses to expectations of the Muisca held by official institutions, indigenous advocates, and the mestizo majorities.

Moreover, I became aware that the transformations of the Muisca in Bosa from mestizo to indigenous, and then from lineage-based indigenous to spiritual indigenous, have led to frictions between the Muisca and those who were their mestizo friends and neighbors: they now deny their Muisca indigeneity and the validity of their spirituality. As a result, the Muisca of Bosa have become an isolated group opposing the interests of the mestizo stakeholders who were their political allies before recognition and avoiding interaction with other Muisca groups for fear of being labelled as inauthentic. Interested in how Musica members have shaped their indigeneities vis-a-vis these transformations, I decided to ethnographically explore this phenomenon in my dissertation.

This ethnographic study had two aims, a broad one covering the political economies of multiculturalism as they operate in the Muisca case, and a more specific one focused on the indigenous subject. The first aim was to unveil the forms of governance operating behind the expectations of indigenous alterity that shape both Muisca groups and Muisca selves, including how the Muisca have navigated them to gain positioning, a political voice, and a sense of belonging. The second aim has been to understand how this process of indigenous production and reaffirmation operates at the level of group members who have to adapt their indigenous selves to the expectations of the Muisca brand. Regarding the first objective, I used Mignolo's concept of *the colonial matrix of power* (2013) as a theoretical baseline to help me understand how the transnational and local approaches to the governance of ethnic difference coalesce to shape categories of sameness and otherness according to the temporary needs of states and markets. Addressing the second aim required a more complex approach, because even though it was possible to notice the struggle of Muisca people to reconcile their mestizo past and the different shades of indigeneity expected from them over time, group members were extremely careful not to talk about what they perceived as their deviations from the brand, which is the current baseline used to assess their authenticity.

I realized, then, that even though the academy has demystified the concept of "cultural authenticity" by marking it as an untenable analytical category due to the fluidity and relational character of culture itself (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1999), it is still necessary to engage with the authenticity discourse from

the angle of those who are trying to shape their lives according to the expectations of their others. To do so, I re-engaged with the concept of authenticity from a decolonial perspective (Anzaldua 2012; Mignolo 2011), focusing on Muisca members' struggle to recalibrate themselves according to shifting external expectations while also remaining affectively grounded to their life histories. My decolonial option to explore the Muisca in this dissertation was sincerity, a theoretical alternative to authenticity introduced by John Jackson Jr. (2005). Thinking in terms of sincerity means exploring the depths of the Muisca self, mainly those gaps where the frictions, contradictions, and doubts generated by external expectations meet the affective realities of those who have lived with the shadows of a denied indigeneity for generations. Moreover, I adapted elements of social theory and philosophy to elaborate my analytical frameworks or border theories, rewiring them to serve my approach based on sincerity. Overall, in order to meet the aims of this dissertation, I had to dissemble, re-assemble, and interlink elements of various theoretical approaches, making them suitable for analyzing glimpses of sincerity amidst the generalizing and overbearing forces of the colonial matrix of power.

I worked with decolonial scholarship from two fronts, one theoretical (Maldonado-Torres 2007; Mignolo 2009; Quijano 2007) and one research-oriented (Meckesheimer 2013; Mignolo 2011; Walsh 2007). As a theoretical framework, decoloniality allowed me to unveil how the colonial matrix of power operates as a manager of alterity. In the case of the Muisca, for example, it reinforced an imaginary of these indigenous groups as spiritual and environmentally aware using the media,

education, legislation, and political discourse, thereby limiting their options for social and political action to spirituality-related topics. Ultimately, even advocates and other supporters of the Muisca have adhered to that imaginary, encouraging members to reject aspects of their selves that seem incompatible with it. Moreover, thinking in decolonial terms also helped me expose how the coloniality of power has even played a part in the production of the overall social conditions that facilitate the domination of the Muisca for the benefit of the state's agenda, reinforcing the circumstances of abandonment and invisibility to which the groups have been subjected for the benefit of state-funded development projects and the international flower business.

Regarding research, I attended to the call of decolonial scholars (Mignolo 2013, Meckesheimer 2013; Walsh 2007) to work on topics that, despite being somehow detached from the most current academic trends, are fundamental to understanding the lives of colonial others such as indigenous people—and thereby providing results that can be more useful to them than those derived from questions based on those trends. Having this in mind, I only used Western theoretical frameworks so long as they were suitable for exposing and analyzing glimpses of sincerity, avoiding the tendency to place people and their histories at the service of theory production. Moreover, despite the fact that a Muisca onto-epistemology was not available to me, I could still build an alternative option to explore Muisca self-formation and group micropolitics as they are molded through collective experience. This approach allowed me to combine theories on the senses (Classen 1993; Howes 2006), affect and its transmission (Deleuze 1978), agency as a capacity of

assemblages (Barad 2003; Edwards, Coole and Frost 2010), and matter as a valid intra-acting entity (Kirby 2014; Frost 2008) capable of shifting peoples' positionings and even of re-shaping gender norms.

Building on John and Jean Comaroff's view of the commoditization of cultural alterity (2009), I have encountered a remarkable case of cultural branding among the Muisca. However, counter to their stance on branding that places indigenous people as the producers of both the brand and the goods and services commercialized under the brand's name, I introduce the Muisca themselves as products endorsed by a Muisca brand created mostly by non-Muisca. Since the current imaginary of the Muisca is one of a highly spiritual group, and spirituality has become one of the priorities of twenty-first century middle class consumers, the Muisca have become a product desired by both individuals and institutions seeking "diversity." Thus, as the Muisca are in need of visibilization, funding, and positioning, they actively try to resemble the branded form of themselves so as to be trusted by those consumers, and then use the brand itself as a middle ground or footing (Gonzalez-Galvez 2012; Viveiros de Castro 2004) that facilitates mutual understanding during consumer-product interactions, even when the ultimate goals of the Muisca are not spiritual. But resembling the brand requires the constant masking of the historically and affectively formed indigeneities that seem to deviate from it, prioritizing authenticity, and therefore coloniality, over sincerity. The second aim of this dissertation has been, precisely, to unveil and celebrate the particular, multiple, and sincere Muisca indigeneities that are concealed under the generalizing blanket of

the Muisca brand. To meet this aim, I have focused on finding moments and conversations in which glimpses of sincerity become available, such as when Muisca people have to interact with indicators of the Muisca brand, or participate in conversations about their experiences with those indicators. To become aware of those moments, I participated in as many spiritual gatherings as I could so that my own experiences became the footing that enabled my interactions with Muisca people.

The ceremonial house known as the cusmuy, and the container used to carry the crushed seashells that are ingested by some male Muisca members, called the poporo, have become the main visual indicators of Muisca spirituality. They were introduced by the leader of the Muisca group from Sesquile, approved by respected indigenous leaders from other regions of the country, and added to the Muisca collective memory through the production of mythical narratives. As a result, it is expected that every Muisca group have a cusmuy and some poporo users among their male members, and for the members in general to have a personal bond with these indicators. After becoming aware of their importance, I decided to focus on the experiences that group members had in the cusmuy and with the poporo, looking at moments of sincerity that unfold during these interactions. I first concentrated on my own experience as a participant in cusmuy encounters, giving special attention to the sensorial stimuli that take place there and to how those stimuli unfold into affects and more complex emotions. Then, I shared my experiences with Muisca members so they could open up and share theirs with me, building a dialogical ground in which my

positionality changed, so I was perceived less as an evaluator or consumer and more as a participant or friend.

This approach helped me discover that the basis on which the Muisca make decisions about the cusmuy is not the information that they might have about the cusmuy itself and its compatibility with their Catholic beliefs, but the affective responses triggered by the sensorial stimuli that take place there. Instead of being just momentary reactions to sensorial affectation, the affects triggered in the cusmuy are connected to the wider network of affective memory and to the life histories of members, networks that Deleuze named *maps of intensity* (1978). In this case, I used elements of Deleuze's theory of affect as a border theory instead of looking at more recent, anthropological approaches (Ramos 2012; Stewart 2007) because Deleuze dissected affect into three subsequent moments that are fundamental for my analysis: namely affectation, affect, and emotional response. To find glimpses of sincerity during interactions between the Muisca and their cusmuy, I first focused on affect as a bodily response resulting from a sensorial affectation, and only after that did I look at how those affects come to integrate members' maps of intensity. By doing this, I realised that members' standpoints regarding the cusmuy are sincere expressions of their indigenous selves, grounded on their affective memories and life histories and not on what they "know" about their ceremonial house.

During my participation in cusmuy encounters, I also became aware that even though the publically known role of poporos is to enhance the spiritual awareness of their immediate users, they also influence the micropolitics of decision-making of the

Muisca groups as collective units. Here, my border theory (Mignolo 2013) was based on the New Materialism, a philosophical approach to agency and its materiality that I used to explore the shifting agentic capacities of assemblages comprising things (such as poporos), spaces (such as cusmuyes), and people (both Muisca and non-Muisca). While the New Materialism does not take spiritual entities into consideration as part of agentic assemblages—something that could have been an important vector of analysis here—, it considers agency an outcome of the intertwining agentic capacities of entities within assemblages, instead of attributing agency directly to people (Barad 2003, Bennett 2005). This facilitated my analysis of how the poporo, as an intra-actant within assemblages, plays a part in ascribing the role of decision maker among group members. I realised that poporo users become decision makers in certain assemblages even if they have not been elected as group leaders, while in others they are re-positioned as regular members and non-poporo users are more active in decision-making. This occurs because some assemblages facilitate the transmission of affects (Brennan 2004) from poporo users and their poporos to non-poporo-users. Also, spiritual assemblages highlight some of the attributes acquired through poporo use, such as the qualities that are framed as feminine and embraced by males and interpreted as evidence of spiritual equilibrium and wisdom.

However, in assemblages that lack the sensorial setting needed for spiritually oriented encounters, such as those in households, offices, and streets, the relationship between poporo and poporo user remains more personal, and its affects are not transferred among other entities that are part of these assemblages. As a result, despite

the fact that non-poporo-users feel inadequate when giving their opinions and making decisions in a ceremonial locale such as the cusmuy, this sense of inadequacy does not follow them to other assemblages. On the contrary, the use of the poporo by some male members has actually improved the positioning of non-poporo-users in non-spiritual assemblages, as poporo users have softened the authoritarianism of their traditional mestizo masculinities thanks to their poporo use. Finally, when leaders do not want to risk their positioning as decision makers because of the incorporation of poporos, as in the case of the Bosa group where the elected leader is a woman, the assemblages themselves are prepared in such a way that the agentic capacities of the poporo are reduced to a minimum while other elements are heightened, ensuring that poporo use does not lead to shifts in decision-making but is still present in the group as an indicator of authenticity.

Overall, this dissertation has exposed some of the mechanisms used by coloniality to continue its program of domination of the indigenous other even after the formation of the Colombian state and the incorporation of multiculturalism at the constitutional level. In addition to defining general legislation and policy, the colonial matrix of power has extended its means of control over indigenous groups perceived as holders of problematic agendas, such as the Muisca groups of central Colombia, by broadcasting a “safer” model of their cultural alterity among their neighbours, advocates, and enthusiasts, thereby creating an ideal of alterity that is usually mistaken for a true decolonial option and that members must embrace to remain authentic. Within this context, I have focused on unveiling and acknowledging the

multiple indigeneities that have remained hidden under the generalizations of the latest model of Muisca alterity, which I have called “the Muisca brand.” The question that emerged, then, was how Muisca people negotiate the discrepancies between their indigenous selves and the expectations of others, when those expectations have become the foundation of their public persona?

Answering this question from the perspective of the Muisca and not from the viewpoint of their multiple evaluators has helped me prioritize their sincerities and subjectivities over academic objectification. It has also allowed me to recognise the importance of having a wider sensorial awareness as a researcher, one that is not limited to sight and hearing and that allows me not only to sense, but also to feel and share, feelings (Rosaldo 1993). Finally, this decolonial approach has showed me that even though Muisca members try to adapt the brand to their indigenous selves and not the other way around, their selves are inevitably transformed by the brand at the most intimate level. Thus, the Muisca have produced a contemporary alterity that intertwines their life histories and the brand, transforming aspects of their daily lives ranging from their approach to health and healing to their relationships with the landscape, their mechanisms of decision-making, and even their gender roles and norms.

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