Usme: A Space for Hope.
A case study of decolonial resistance and processes of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation in Bogotá, Colombia.

A thesis submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Global, Social and Urban Studies

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis/project is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Andrés Felipe Vargas Mariño

29th of January 2016
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Abstract

The increasing urbanisation of Latin America posits challenges for the rural life, especially for those places around the cities where the land is being transformed from farms to heavily industrialised zones or dense populated zones. Usme is an example of that transformation: a former farmer town that was co-opted by Bogotá, the capital city of Colombia. In 1954 the city took control over the jurisdiction of Usme, and since then the town has been subject to deep transformations that are in conflict with the everyday life of the rural culture of Usme. Among the most negative changes are the construction of the third biggest landfill in Latin America, the mining contracts multinationals have in Usme, and a badly planned housing project. This thesis is a case study of Usme, it provides an account about how the community of Usme is reacting to those challenges by proposing an alternative way to understand the world.

This thesis explores how the aforementioned negative transformations of the land are a consequence of the oppressive side of modernity; coloniality. In that manner, the thesis argues that governments have created an assemblage of Usme as a place that has no productive value unless it is used as a repository of natural resources for the city. This assemblage lies in the modern/colonial idea of development.

But this thesis is not only about the oppression and exclusion of Usme. It also addresses how the activists from Usme challenge the modern/colonial impositions over their land. In that manner, the thesis describes how Usme activists are creating an alternative way to understand their world; one in which the memory of the pre-Hispanic joins with the campesino1’s memory to de-locate modern ideas of science and environmentalism. For the activists, human and nature can dialogue as equals and science is the language used to communicate with nature.

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1 In this thesis the word campesinos refers to the small farmers of Usme. I will use this term as a loanword from Spanish. This is very important, as the literary translation of campesinos into English is peasant, but as it was pointed out by one of my thesis examiners, peasant is attached to feudal systems, and therefore to the past. Instead Campesino, and as pointed out by the social movement organized as La Via Campesina (2011), campesino is the word used to name a broader community of “millions of peasants, small and medium-size farmers, landless people, women farmers, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers from around the world”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Abuelo (a):</strong></th>
<th>Grandparent. In Usme the term is used as a respectful way to refer to ancestors and elders in the community. Also is used to designate leaders of the Muisca community.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aguardiente:</strong></td>
<td>A spirit made of sugar cane ferment and anise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blanco (a):</strong></td>
<td>A person with Caucasian or European phenotype characteristics. Until the XIX century, creole was a word reserved to designate white Colombians. But the term was subverted during the republican period and today Creole is interchangeable with the word Colombian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Botas pantaneras:</strong></td>
<td>Gumboots traditionally used by campesinos in Colombia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chicha:</strong></td>
<td>An indigenous alcoholic beverage made from fermented corn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chicharron:</strong></td>
<td>Deep fried pork belly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chiquy:</strong></td>
<td>Muisca healer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cuatro:</strong></td>
<td>String instrument similar to the ukulele. Has four strings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gomelo(a), or Gomelito(a):</strong></td>
<td>A slang term that refers to young people of the middle and middle upper classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gringo(a):</strong></td>
<td>Citizen of the United States. Sometimes it is extended to Caucasian foreigners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indio:</strong></td>
<td>When the Spanish Empire reached the Caribbean, they thought that they had reached another region of India. Since then, the term has been used to make reference to indigenous population of the Americas, often in a deprecative manner. However, indigenous populations in Latin America have subverted the meaning of the term, and used it in an empowering way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negro:</strong></td>
<td>Word that makes reference to the African descendant person. Originally a pejorative term, it has been subverted in Latin America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pacha Mama:</strong></td>
<td>Mother Earth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>País del Sagrado Corazón:</strong></td>
<td>The Country of the Sacred Hearth of Jesus. It usually implies the surreal absurdity that people grant to national politics in Colombia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quiche:</strong></td>
<td>Also espeletia or frailejón. Endemic plant of the páramo ecosystem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rapear:</strong></td>
<td>Verb. The action reaching altered stated of consciousness by hyperventilating while smoking tobacco.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ruana:</strong></td>
<td>Poncho made of wool. Usually it is monochromatic and very thick. It is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiple</td>
<td>String musical instrument similar to a guitar. It has 12 strings organised in four triplets. Each one of the strings of a triplet must be played at the same time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trompo</td>
<td>A spinning top or whipping top that is put in movement using a cord.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trutuka</td>
<td>Wind instrument made with the horns of a bovine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zorras</td>
<td>Horse drawn cars used in contemporary Bogotá.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zorreros (los)</td>
<td>Drivers of the horse cars. They use the cars to transport recyclable materials.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prologue: The legend of Princess Usminia

Usme Pueblo was founded around 1480 when Usminia, who was the princess of the Muisca Confederation of Bacatá, was kidnapped by Ebeque, the cacique of Ubaque and her lover. Usminia was the daughter of the Zipa Saguamanchica, the highest military and political authority of the Confederation of Bacatá. Since the Zipa did not approve of the love between Usminia and Ebeque, the couple planned to run away together. The plan was risky due to the considerable political influence of the Zipa.

Ebeque was one of the few caciques who opposed the decisions made by the Zipa. He sought the independence of his cacicazgo from the Confederation for a long time, but he maintained his loyalty to Bacatá due to his love for Usminia. However, the impossibility of their love pushed the cacique and the princess towards a desperate plan. Ebeque knew that their actions were very daring, and it would cause a war between the cacicazgo and the Confederation; and Usminia knew that by running away she would not be able to see her family again. But against those odds the couple persisted, and on a moonless night Ebeque finally carried out the kidnapping.

As a result of their actions the couple decided to hide Usminia in a secret place where her father could never find her. Meanwhile, Ebeque had to face the war to come, and for that reason he decided to knock on the doors of the Zaque, the leader of the Muisca Confederation of Hunza, the eternal rivals of Bacatá. They had been the protagonists in a series of conflicts and skirmishes. While Ebeque got ready for war, Saguamanchica went looking for his daughter. He looked in the páramos, in the lagoons, in the rivers. He walked to every single village, and in the meantime his despair and anger grew. Filled with grief he decided to invade the territory of Los Panches, a cacicazgo to the west of the Confederation of Bacatá, where he thought he might find his daughter.

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2 In the oral tradition of Usme there are many versions of the legend of Usminia. This prologue brings together the most used versions of the legend.
3 The military leader of a Cacicazgo.
4 The smaller administrative division of the Muisca territory. They were like state-villages, similar to the Greek polis.
In the meantime, Usminia built her home in a place she called Usme, which means ‘love nest’. On the foundations of that love nest love for Ebeque grew strong, even when he was far away from Usminia, fighting in a war that was beyond anything he imagined. A war that took the lives of hundreds of thousands of men.

For sixteen years the forces of Hunza and Bacatá fought each other. Sixteen years of uncertainty, death and violence! During the war nobody received news about Usminia or Ebeque. Saguamanchica forgot about looking for her, and instead dedicated himself to war. But at the end of those sixteen years the war reached a pivotal battle: approximately sixty thousand warriors of the Confederation of Hunza faced fifty-five thousand warriors of the Confederation of Bacatá. The battlefield was located in the frontier shared by both federations. The battle ended in less than three hours, and like a catharsis it ended the war. Both parties left the battlefield with some sense of victory: Bacatá finally won the war, but Saguamanchica died in the battlefield. Hence, Hunza was at least able to kill the Zipa whose grief started the war.

After the death of Saguamanchica, Nemeque, the brother of Usminia and son of Saguamanchica, became the new Zipa. Nemeque realised that many men had died in the name of his father and sister, and that just made his sorrow deeper and darker. Therefore, instead of continuing a never-ending war, he reached a peace agreement between both confederations and returned the land of the Panches to its original owners. Once there was peace in Bacatá, he received news about his sister: She had been living in a place she called Usme, a place she considered her love nest.

When Nemeque went to Usme, he was unable to find Usminia, but he could feel the love that she imbued in that place. And honouring that love, he officially named the place Usme and it became a pilgrimage destination. Many travellers went to Usme looking for the love of Usminia.

Since then Usme has faced many changes and challenges. But after five centuries of being founded by Nemeque, the campesinos that inhabit Usme today love it in the same manner Usminia used to do it. For them it is their love nest, and they are prepared for a
lengthy struggle to defend it against imposed urbanisation, from mining activity that makes it bleed, and from a state that views it as a repository of natural resources. Usme’s inhabitants are getting their love nest ready for the challenges generated by a neoliberal economic system, and the social, cultural and ecological threats that it posits to their love nest.

Hehehey! Welcome to Usme! Hehehey!

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5 Hehehey is a Muisca expression used to greet a person. It is like a cheerful salutation. Please refer to the glossary.
Chapter 1 – Introduction: Welcome to Usme

The legend of Usminia, shown in the prologue, is important for many of the inhabitants of contemporary Usme; so much so that the community erected a sculpture representing Usminia. That sculpture is located where the Yomasa Creek crosses Boyacá Avenue. In the sculpture Usminia is depicted “totally naked in an offering posture looking towards the rural zone as a liberty symbol and pointing toward the most important resource in the locality: the water that springs from the páramo. The image has pictures of the moon and the sun, and their path is represented by the moon phases and one sun centre which has deteriorated with time” (Colectivo Salvemos la Usminia 2011).

It is a lucky coincidence that Usminia is also pointing towards the most important

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6 The Boyacá Avenue crosses Bogotá from south to north by the occident. It is one of the most important entries into the city and by taking it a person can travel from Usme to Suba (one of the northern localities in Bogotá).
7 The source is in Spanish (Colectivo Salvemos la Usminia 2011). Translation by the author.
archaeological finding in Colombia since San Agustín: the Muisca Necropolis in 'Hacienda El Carmen'; the biggest pre-Columbian cemetery in Colombia. This cemetery has become a pivotal place for the social construction of meaning and emotional bonds with Usme, as Hacienda el Carmen could represent the crystallisation of the history of Usme: first, as a contested territory in the pre-Columbian wars, then in the colonial period, when it was transformed into a catholic centre for evangelisation; and then during the republican period when the government saw Usme as a repository of natural resources; and now when the multinationals and national corporations want to mine the land.

Usme is a place with a rich history of social mobilisation and resistance. A place that has been oppressed by colonial impositions, but has resisted by creating alternative ways to understand the world. Given that the aim of this thesis is to describe this process of resistance — not from the social movement theory proposed by Sidney Tarrow (1998), Doug McAdam (1986; 2001) or Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani (2006) — from the dialogue between academia and the activists that are resisting the colonial oppression in Usme. In that manner this thesis is an attempt to comprehend Usme as a node in what Walter Mignolo (2008) called the genealogy of the decolonial option: a network of alternative ways to become in the world that originates from the energy of discontent generated by the colonial matrix of power. A network of alternative ways of understanding the world generated by the oppression from western modernity over the rest of the world (Mignolo 2007, 2008).

According to Mignolo (2007) the pivotal characteristic of this network is that its nodes are compounded by people who have been able to delocate the Western knowledge from its own genealogy, and reconstruct Western concepts from alternative perspectives that liberate Western concepts from their oppressive potential, and opens opportunities for non-Westerners to be empowered and choose their own destiny. Given that this thesis argues that Usme activists are delocating Western concepts, such as science and environmentalism, and using them to liberate Usme from the modern impositions that aim to transform it into a repository of resources for Bogotá, the capital city of Colombia.

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8 San Agustín archaeological park is considered the biggest pre-Columbian collection of religious monuments and megalithic sculptures in South America, it is part of the Humanity Patrimony list made by UNESCO. San Agustín is located at the south of Colombia, in the Department of Huila.
Western impositions over Usme started in the sixteenth century when an important place of pilgrimage for Muiscas was transformed by the Spanish Empire into a Christian node for the region. Contemporary resistance is not as worried about the Christianisation of Usme as it is about the twentieth century impositions made in Usme under the discourse of development. From the 1920s Usme started to lose control over its own jurisdiction, when Bogotá initiated its domination over Usme. The consequences of this are very visible and have caused hardship for the population of Usme. An increase in the urbanisation of Usme that neglects, despises and negates the rural way of life — key characteristic of Usme; whilst the mining of Usme’s territory and the construction of a landfill of gargantuan proportions have a direct impact on the health of all the inhabitants of Usme.

Given the above, this thesis is not only about the resistance in Usme, but also interactions that modernisation and resistance have with Usme. That is why it is important to describe Usme itself, as a place, in order to describe the alternative way to understand the world proposed by the activists of Usme. To describe Usme as a place, this thesis uses the approach to space proposed by Doreen Massey (2005), which states that place and space are constituted by connections; and the approach to place posited by Kim Dovey (2010), which uses the ontology proposed by Deleuze to understand how these connections create the assemblage of a place. In that way space and place are in a constant process of construction, they are never complete nor stable, instead they are mobile and open to constant change.

The information for this thesis was gathered by discourse analysis and participant observation, and by constructing a social profile of Usme that provides an account of its complexity from a holistic approach. At the same time, this thesis describes Usme as a territory that is in constant change. Usme is deterritorialised by the activists that deconstruct the assemblage of Usme as a place for exclusion, and is reterritorialised in a way that it becomes a place from where modern institutions and development are challenged. This challenge is not made in a violent way; instead, Usme activists are establishing an intercultural dialogue with modern institutions and development, a dialogue in which their perspective is seen as an equal to the modern perspective. In that way Usme is becoming a place for hope: a place that resists ways to inhabit the world that create social and cultural
inequality, and that challenges ways to relate with nature that endanger the environment. Usme is then a place from where alternatives to global capitalism are proposed: alternative ways to relate with nature that have the potential to modify sustainability and development and make them more grounded in the local and equal.

This thesis is divided into eight chapters, and the first one is the introduction. The second chapter follows the modern/colonial research program to describe what the modernity/coloniality project is. This is important because it is from the modernity/coloniality project’s paradigm that the oppression over Usme operates and is legitimised. Therefore, this chapter follows the arguments of Walter Mignolo (2007, 2008, 2009b), Santiago Castro-Gómez (1998, 2005a, 2005b), Arturo Escobar (2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007b) and Anibal Quijano (1999, 2000, 2009); who in their research followed ideas from Gloria Anzaldúa (2007), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1999), Eduard Said (1978), and Franz Fanon (1963) to establish an alternative idea of modernity: modernity is not different from coloniality, they are two faces of the same coin. Modernity and coloniality are both different expressions of the same social and cultural phenomena. That occurs because, on one hand, the colonial dominance of the West over the world was derived from a surplus of resources that allowed Western civilisation to construct their modern genealogy of thinking. Whilst on the other, to legitimise Western dominance over the world, Western civilisation created a sense of superiority: the idea that they are the deliverers of civilisation. In other words, modernity and coloniality are ontologically linked. For modernity to exist it needs coloniality (Escobar 2007b; Mignolo 2008; Castro-Gómez 2005a).

According to Mignolo (2008, 2009b) Western civilisation needs to have total control of their colonies to be able to extract the resources that colonies offered in terms of labour and land. For that reason, Western civilisation created a way to dominate the politics, the economy, the subjectivity and the sexuality and gender of colonial subjects. This way of controlling colonial subjects is termed by Mignolo (2008) the logic of coloniality. According to Mignolo (2007, 2008) the logic of coloniality was (and still is) imposed by the use of salvationist discourses. Those salvationist discourses establish that Western civilisation is not oppressing colonial subjects, but in fact helping them to reach modernity. However, for the
colonial subjects to arrive at modernity, they have to break their historical trajectories and left behind their culture and society and adopt western culture and social organisation. In that manner, non-Western societies and cultures were (and are) delocated from their own historical trajectory to be relocated in the Western historical trajectory as part of the past. Mignolo (2007) and Castro-Gómez (2005b) argue that the delocation to which the colonial subjects are exposed generates a lot of pain and discomfort in the colonial subjects. That pain was named by Fanon (1963) as the colonial wound.

Moreover, Fanon (1963) and Anzaldúa (2007) posited that colonial subjects are located in a frontier: they are not Westerners, but because their historical trajectories are broken, they are neither what they used to be before colonisation, and as a consequence of that they have to deal with the Western and the non-Western way to understand the world at the same time. Thus, their subjectivity is broken in two. However, according to Mignolo (2008) by dealing with two different ways to inhabit the world, colonial subjects are able to delocate Western salvationist discourses and reinterpret them from an alternative point of view. Through that, they are able to resist the logic of coloniality while at the same time creating alternative ways to inhabit the world.

Chapter three describes the alternative way to address space posited by Doreen Massey (2005). From her perspective, space is relational as it is constituted by connections. In that manner space is liberated from the chains imposed by traditional approaches that relegated it to the sphere of representation. These approaches state that space is the ontological ground where ideas are materialised; therefore, it is like an inert semantic vacuum that is waiting to be filled with meaning from history and culture. By stating that space is connections, space becomes something different. Space makes history moves, as meanings, materiality and historical trajectories are constructed by the connections and disconnections of entities and historical trajectories. Space then is analogue to time.

Following that conception, Dovey (2010) stated that places are points where there is a huge density and intensity of connections. On those points, the connections are temporarily stabilised in the form of assemblages. Dovey took the concept of assemblage from the ontology proposed by Gilles Deleuze (1987, 2004). For Deleuze reality is constituted by
assemblages, which are connections that have become stabilised by establishing territories. Assemblages exist because the primary force of life is desire for connectedness. Therefore, all entities that exist are like desiring machines whose purpose is to connect with other machines that also desire to connect. Those machines only acquire an identity by connecting with each other. For example, a car can only be a vehicle if it’s connected to the road, to the fuel that makes it move and to the person who drives it, and to the purpose of transporting something or someone. But if the car is for example exhibited in a museum, it is not a vehicle anymore, it is now an historical piece whose purpose is, for example, to show how a motor works.

In that manner when the car is no longer a vehicle but a historical piece in a museum, it has been subjected to a change in the boundaries of the assemblage. The road, the driver and the function of transport have been expelled from the boundaries of the assemblage. In response the exhibit and the function of explaining the mechanical processes of a motor entered into the boundaries of the assemblage. If the boundaries of the assemblage determine what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) called the assemblage’s territory, and those boundaries are redefined constantly, the assemblage is deterritorialised and reterritorialised all the time. Deterritorialised when the boundaries are broken and the stable connections are separated from the assemblage, and reterritorialised when the connections are stabilised again within new boundaries. This concept is crucial to this thesis, as one of the central points is to describe how Usme is deterritorialised by the activists by expelling the connections imposed by modernity/coloniality, and reterritorialised by connecting with the decolonial perspective proposed by Usme activists.

Chapter four describes the methodology used to gather and analyse the information used in this dissertation. This thesis is a case study: a holistic description of Usme as a place, from where their inhabitants resist the logic of coloniality and the impositions made to their land by creating alternative ways to become in the world. In that process the assemblage of Usme as a place has changed. To gather the information for this dissertation I used social profile, discourse analysis and participant observation as methods.

Social profile is an account of the state of affairs of a place, in a particular moment of
its historical trajectory. A social profile gives an account of the history, the geography, the power relationships, the culture, the social organisation and all of the connections that compound the assemblage of a place. Accordingly, a social profile of Usme allowed me to obtain a holistic comprehension of Usme, and all the little details of the activists’ resistance. Nevertheless, social profile has limitations, and even with their holistic approach, they can only provide an account of the state of affairs of place to the researcher from a particular point of view.

Social profile was a great aid in the discourse analysis of the cultural production of the community and activists of Usme. It allowed me to gain different insights into the videos, leaflets, photos, music tracks, and books I analysed. To analyse them I used an interpretative approach, understanding the cultural production of Usme texts that are constitutive of the social relationship of Usme. In that manner the materials analysed were understood as a product of the social reality of Usme, and at the same time as constitutive of the social reality of it. The discourse analysis allowed me to complement the social profile and make it more robust.

The third method used in the research for this thesis was participant observation. It implies the immersion of a researcher in a community or as a participant of activities, for long periods of time. This allows the researcher to gain an insight into a community or place, which is as close as possible to the community or place’s inhabitants. Given that, participant observation enriched the social profile of Usme. Both tools created a synergy that allowed me to interpret Usme resistance, and the sense of place that Usme activists are positing in their territory.

Chapter five is the social profile that was constructed after analysing the information gathered in the fieldwork. It was constructed by the accounts found in archives about the history of Usme, and includes: newspaper articles, academic journals and books, the oral tradition of Usme recovered by the activists, and the cultural production they made. In that way it was made in a dialectic process between the hegemonic meanings ascribed to Usme, and those that the community of Usme and the activists ascribe to it. At the same time, it was done by understanding Usme as an assemblage. That is, addressing Usme as a point where
there is a huge density of cultural and material connections between living and non-living entities. In that manner Usme is a point where those connections have stabilised giving Usme a particular sense of place, but where that stability is being subverted by Usme activists who are trying to expel the oppressive connections that have segregated Usme from the rest of Bogotá.

Chapter five is divided into two parts: geography and history; not because they are different parts of the assemblage of Usme, but because it allows a more ordered description of it. In that manner this chapter describes the modern/colonial oppressive logic over Usme, and the consequences of that oppression in terms of the exclusion of a community. At the same time the social profile describes: how resistance has emerged in Usme, how the community has refused to give in to modern/colonial oppression, how they have created alternatives, and how, from the colonial wound, they have always posited an alternative.

Chapter six is a description of how the activists have delocated science, ecology and environmentalism from the modern/colonial genealogy of knowledge, and how they have reinterpreted it twofold: first as a way to connect with their territory and their ancestors, and second as a vehicle to deliver their way to understand the world to modern institutions, such as the state and the academy. In that manner this chapter shows how Usme is a node on the global network of decolonial thinking posited by Mignolo (2008).

At the same time, this chapter introduces the importance of the Muisca cosmogony for the activists, and the relationship that they have with it. Like ecology and environmentalism, the Muisca cosmogony is delocated from its own indigenous perspective and reinterpreted from an Usmenian perspective. It provides Usme activism with a spiritual framework that allows the activists to establish alternative ways to connect with the territory. In that manner ancestrality becomes a fundamental piece for the assemblage of Usme that the activists are trying to territorialis. For that reason, memory becomes pivotal for the process of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of Usme. In that manner, this chapter presents three memory devices created by the activists of Usme that allow them to connect with their ancestrality and to deliver their way to understand the world to a broader audience composed by younger Usmenians and people from outside Usme.
Chapter seven expands the description of the memory devices developed by Usme activists and makes explicit their double function: as an alternative way to connect them to the territory that entails an alternative way to understand the world; and as a vehicle used to establish an intercultural dialogue with modern institutions. Hence, Chapter seven dwells on the problematic relation that Usme activists have with modern colonial institutions.

From there Chapter seven details the relationship this memory device has with their territory, as they become a way of resistance against imposition of the development perspective of the government of Bogotá. This happens because the memory devices introduced in Chapter six allow the activists to create alternative ways to connect with their land and nature. This alternative way to connect with Usme is embedded in the repertoires of action used by the activists of Usme to mobilise their demands towards the state, which is pivotal to the process of deconstruction of the logic of coloniality in Usme, and therefore to the process of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation introduced in Chapter Three.

Chapter eight is an in-depth description of the deconstruction of the modern/colonial impositions to Usme, and how from the decolonial thinking described in the previous chapters, Usme is deterritorialised and reterritorialised by the activists; how the exclusion is expelled from the assemblage of Usme; and how the alternative ways to relate with nature are actually changing Usme into a space of hope from where alternative ways to understand sustainability and development are being generated. Those alternatives are the ones creating an alternative assemblage of the place of Usme and are an example of how, from the Global South, it is possible to find alternatives to the problems and challenges posited by a globalised capitalist economy that is threatening communities and ecosystems at a global level.
Chapter 2 – Modernity, coloniality, and the decolonial option

2.1 The modernity/coloniality project

One of the objectives of this thesis is to describe Usme as a place that is in constant change and that has been subject to oppression and exclusion since colonial times; but a place from where the people are resisting that oppression, and in the process they are changing that place. Creating a description of Usme required a lot of effort, not only because it was time consuming and physically exhausting, but also because it implied the decolonisation of my subjectivity, the deconstruction of all the preconceptions and prejudices that were embodied in my Bogotanian middle-class subjectivity. Before going to Usme for the first time in 2009 I did not think about Usme, it was not part of the way I imagined and thought of Bogotá. The
few times I thought about Usme — generally when I heard something in the news — I envisaged a territory full of problems, violence and poverty, and to be honest I was a little bit afraid of the place. However, when I went to Usme I found a totally different place than the one I imagined. On one hand the urban zone that is visible from the important avenue that crosses Usme is surprisingly small compared to the remarkably enormous rural zone. On the other hand, it was unexpected for me to find that campesinos’ and indigenous peoples’ memories and ways to understand the world lay deep in Usmenians’ subjectivities. That not only gives the environmentalist struggles in Usme its kindness, force and character, but also its dissent and weakness.

But even when I was able to see some of the particularities of Usme, my comprehension of Usme was obscured by stereotypes I had about working class neighbourhoods and poor areas in Bogotá. Thus, there was another kind of preconception and prejudice that I had to overcome. Those ones were even harder to overcome because they were embodied more deeply in my subjectivity.

In that way I still remember the thought that came to my mind when I went to Usme in 2009 while working on my undergraduate thesis: *Usme is frozen in time*. For me at that moment it was a place inside one crowded, big, and fast paced South American metropolis where neither development nor modernity had arrived. There are many zones in Usme that lack the urban infrastructure I took for granted in a city like Bogotá: aqueduct and water sanitation systems, paved roads, parks, tall buildings, cars, shops, etc. At the same time, it was a place that looked like the idea I had in my head about a colonial period small village: full of white colonial houses, small roads of stone, campesinos wearing *ruanas* and taking their farms’ production to the town market. At that time, it seemed to me that their everyday life was not as modern as mine; it was backwards in time. But inside the idea that ‘*Usme is frozen in time*’, the dark side of the modernity project is hidden: this dark side is coloniality.

9 Los Llanos Avenue is important for Bogotá because it is the connection of the city with the southwest of the country where Los Llanos Orientales are located.

10 Usme is the second biggest city council in Bogotá, and only 25% of its jurisdiction is considered urban zone.

11 *Ruanas* are wool poncho-like clothes, which are widely used by campesinos in the mountains of Colombia, where the weather is very cold.

12 More on my reflexivity process can be found on chapter 4.
According to Massey (2005) coloniality makes invisible the multiple and simultaneous historical trajectory epistemologies that populate space. In that way my preconceptions of Usme are an example of one of the domination tools used to colonise America: the transformation of space into time, the convection of geography into history (Massey 2005). According to Massey (2005) the Western modernity project created an equivalence between space and time, which allows the negation of multiple historical trajectories. Hence, since the colonisation of America, and the following colonisation of Africa and Asia, the West has been affirming that there are places that are backwards in time.

Following Mignolo (2009a) and Castro-Gómez (2005a) it is arguable that the West negated and hid non-Western historical trajectories, first, by stating that some places were ‘behind’ because they have not received the gospel of Jesus Christ, so those places need to be converted to Christianity to become ‘civilised’. Then, with the secularisation of Western civilisation, it claimed that some places were behind because they had not reached Enlightenment, therefore they were considered by the West as ‘savages’ or ‘primitives’ that needed to be enlightened (Mignolo 2008). And finally, since the nineteenth century onwards the West claimed that some places are behind because they neither have an industrialisation process nor do they have strong economies, therefore those places are considered undeveloped and the West has a mission to assist their development (Escobar 2007a). Based on those ideas, the West created a global colonial dominance over other societies, cultures, places and civilisations. This system negates the multiple historical trajectories that coexist with the Western historical trajectory, merging all of them into one possible historical trajectory, creating an ontological and epistemic dominance that has deep political, civic, economic, and epistemic implications. The shape of this global domination is summarised in what Mignolo (2009b) called ‘the logic of coloniality’. Mignolo (2009b, p. 11) states that this

13 Usually the word America is used to name the United States of America. This is another way to erase the multiplicity of the continent, where not only Western historical trajectories coexist. In that way the continent is divided into many “Americas” and only the US has the right to use the word America, others have to use prefixes and adjectives that make evident their difference (Latin, Caribbean, Afro, Native, South, Hispanic, etc.). For that reason, I use America in the same sense that many non-US inhabitants of America use the word: making reference to the entire continent of America, from Nunavut at the north of Canada, to Patagonia at the south of Argentina and Chile, including the Caribbean.
14 Nor did they follow any other monotheist religion.
15 Even when many non-Western places play a key role in global capitalism by providing raw materials and cheap labour.
logic is deeply rooted in the everydayness of the people living in the contemporaneous world:

The logic of coloniality can be understood as working through four wide domains of human experience: 1) the economic: appropriation of land, and exploitation of labor, and control of finance; 2) the political: control of authority; 3) the civic: control of gender and sexuality; 4) the epistemic and the subjective/personal: control of knowledge and subjectivity. (...) Each domain is interwoven with the others, since appropriation of land or exploitation of labor also involves the control of finance, of authority, states of gender, and of knowledge and subjectivity.

Following the above-posited idea, it is argued that the world is still working under the logic of coloniality, but today it works under the discourse of development. However, the affirmation that we live in a colonial world could sound anachronistic, because some scholars argue that colonial regimes finished in the nineteenth century in America (Roig 1997; Blaufarb 2007; Chamberlain 1999; Bousquet 1988), and in the twentieth century in Africa (Zack-Williams 2012; Chamberlain 1999; El-Ayouty 1971) and Asia (Chamberlain 1999; El-Ayouty 1971; Berger 2004). This is why it is important to clarify the difference between coloniality and colonialism. Mignolo (2009b, p.7) states that:

While ‘colonialism’ refers to specific historical periods and places of imperial domination (e.g. Spanish, Dutch, British, the United States since the beginning of the twentieth century), "coloniality" refers to the logical structure of colonial domination underlying the Spanish, Dutch, British, and United States (US) control of the Atlantic economy and politics, and from there the control and management of almost the entire planet.

The relation between, the above-posited, logic of coloniality and modernity is more than intimate. This was pointed out by Escobar (2007a, 2007b), Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel (2007), and Mignolo (2008, 2009) who made a pivotal statement: coloniality is inherent to modernity, each one depends on the other as there is no modernity without coloniality. Furthermore, coloniality is not only a part of the modernity project, it is modernity itself, but is the hidden and unknown side of it. Mignolo explains this through an analogy: modernity and coloniality are two sides of the same coin (Mignolo 2008, 2009a). Modernity is the visible side of coloniality and its existence can only be explained through
the rise of coloniality. Mignolo (2008) and Castro-Gómez (2005b) suggested that rather than situate the genealogy of modernity in the Enlightenment\textsuperscript{16} it could be traced to the colonisation of America by the Spanish Empire; since it allowed Western civilisation to establish a global network of land and labour exploitation in which the West dominated. It was then that the first form of global capitalism was established (Mignolo 2008; Castro-Gómez 2005b). That global network needed to control labour force and land in non-Western places. For that reason, coloniality has changed along with modernity: first it was supported by Christian theology, then by the ideals of the Enlightenment and modern nation-states, and finally by the neoliberal globalisation agenda.

But the logic of coloniality only works if both the colonised and the coloniser accept it and comply with it. According to Mignolo (2008) this was done through the use of salvationists discourses, which are the visible side of modernity/coloniality. These discourses are based on the Eurocentric idea that the West has reached a more advanced level of civilisation than the rest, and therefore it has the moral task of delivering their way to become in the world to non-Western societies. But this implies the negation of non-Western historical trajectories; and the invalidation of non-Western cosmogonies and practises as alternatives to achieving an acceptable level of wellbeing (Mignolo 2009a). In that manner, the modernity/coloniality project implies the imposition of Western cosmogony over the colonial subjects, who in order to be saved ought to adopt the Western epistemology and cosmology as their own. Castro-Gómez (2005a, 2005b) stated that through the moral task assumed by the West colonial subjects can (and are) forced to be saved, to be ‘civilised’. There are many ways in which the colonial subjects have been forced to accept the Western salvationist discourse: the use of military force, economic and political tactics, theological and/or religious discourses, ethnic and racial discrimination, and scientific and academic epistemological constructions are the most visible ones (Escobar 2005b; Quijano 2000; Castro-Gómez 2005b; Mignolo 2007). This creates a power distinction between Western and non-Western subjects, as the first ones are imposing their cosmogony over the second. This

\textsuperscript{16} The Enlightenment is the period of time that traditionally has been ascribed as the moment when the foundations of modernity were constructed. For a detailed account please refer to: Schmidt 1996, 2003; Himmelfarb 2008; Israel 2001; Edelstein 2010; Baker & Reill 2001; Hyland et al. 2003; Tunstall 2011; Dupré 2004.
way the salvationist discourse produces and reproduces the structure of power that was previously explained as the logic of coloniality, and that legitimises the domination of the colonisers over the colonised\textsuperscript{17}.

The next sections of this chapter will detail how the logic of coloniality has been historically established, from the colonisation of America to contemporary neoliberal global capitalism. This will be useful to understanding how the modernity/coloniality project operates in Usme.

2.1.1 Christianity and the colonial structure of domination

First I will start by looking at the theological structure of dominance that was widely used by the Spanish Empire during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in America\textsuperscript{18}. Given the expansionist character of Christianity it became one of the most important and powerful colonisation tools. Christian expansion was urged by the idea that any person that did not belong to the Christian community was condemned to everlasting suffering, therefore the Christian mission was to save as many people as possible from this fate by delivering the Christian gospel to everyone in the world (Kehoe 2012; Crockett 2013).

After the expansion of Christianity throughout Europe, the Catholic Church established a political system in which membership to the Christian community was not only important but necessary to be part of the society. The Catholic Church was the institution that controlled the civic, the political and the epistemic domains of the human existence: by controlling — legitimating — births, marriages and divorces. By deciding which were legitimate relationships the Church was in charge of the sexuality and gender of the people. Through the belief that the power of the king was given by god, and by the fact that the Church’s head members were closely related to European nobility, the Church controlled the

\textsuperscript{17} One example of this salvationist discourses are the Human Rights. In this regard Santos (2014) points out that the discourse of Human Rights presupposes a uniformity of practices and understanding of what is humanity and of what is human dignity. That is why Human Rights advocates often clash with local perspectives of justice, and often ended up imposing a Western centric vision of justice and human dignity.

\textsuperscript{18} It is important to point out that by claiming the discovery of a new territory, and calling it ‘West Indies’ (later they will call this continent America), they negated the existence of the historical trajectories of the peoples that inhabited that territory before the arrival of the Spanish Empire.
political domain of existence. And by controlling the beliefs and emotions of the people through religious morality, Christianity controlled the subjectivity of the majority of Europeans whose lives were shaped by the fear of an eternal punishment, the promise of paradise, and the deeply rooted belief in their religion as the only possible way to salvation. (Mignolo 2009b; Schorsch 2009; Kehoe 2012; Crockett 2013).

One important characteristic of Christianity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is the belief that Christians were the chosen people and that there was no other valid cosmogony. They were the sons of a god that liberated them from suffering by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This characteristic was especially important for the establishment of the first modern/colonial empires, as this belief allowed them to think that their history and culture was not only the most important, but the only one that was legitimised by god (therefore, the only one that had the right to exist). A pivotal characteristic of Christianity during that period of time was the belief that anyone can be saved if they accepted Christianity, and because of that it was a moral responsibility for Christians to deliver the gospel to everyone who was not a Christian. Since the Spanish Empire was led by the Catholic monarchs it was a Christian Empire, thus it was responsible for delivering the Christian gospel worldwide.

When the Spanish Empire met with American Pre-Hispanic societies the realisation that they had not had contact with European cosmologies led them to assume that their god had forgotten pre-Hispanic societies and that these societies lacked history, culture and language. The Christian god had forgotten them (Schorsch 2009). Given that, the Spanish Empire took the moral responsibility to Christianise Pre-Hispanic societies, and in that way provide them with history and culture. Therefore, the Spanish Empire configured salvationist discourse that stated that by evangelising pre-Hispanic societies they were not only saving them from damnation, but also they were providing Pre-Hispanic societies with language and history. In that manner by Christianising America the Spanish Empire negated and erased the multiplicity of historical trajectories of the pre-Hispanic societies (Castro-Gómez 2005a;

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19 Both of them are still a fundamental feature of Christianity. (Kehoe 2012; Cameron 2008).

20 More information about the history, the cosmogony and the epistemology of Christianity can be found in Cameron (2008), and Crockett (2013). How Christianity was used as a tool for colonisation in Schorsch (2009) and about the history and epistemology of the belligerent militancy in Christianity in Kehoe (2012).
Mignolo 2009b). The salvation of the souls of those people was so important that the Christianisation process was done even forcing Africans and Americans in America to adopt Christianity by force (Schorsch 2009).\textsuperscript{21}

This structure of domination hidden in salvationist discourse took a particular form in the sixteenth century: the domination became racial and ethnic. Assuming that white Europeans were the legitimate owners of Christianity (they were the legitimate sons of god) other races were like adopted children, fostered by Europeans (Castro-Gómez 2005a).

The racial domination of the Spanish Empire over their colonies in America took the form of a strict caste system, where the Spanish were at the top, Africans were at the bottom and American Indigenous were at the middle. During the first stages of the colonies, the caste system negated the mixture between the Spanish and the Indians or Africans, because the last two were ‘stained by the sin’ in a deeper way than the Westerns, since the gospel did not reach either African nor Indigenous people naturally but by means of the Spanish\textsuperscript{22} (Schorsch 2009). They were condemned because they were born in a non-Christian land, they were stained by it. For that reason, they became what Fanon (1963) called the wretched of the earth. For the Spanish Empire American Indigenous and Africans had the weight of their parents’ sins over them, even when they converted to Christianity. Therefore, the Spanish Empire and the Church forbid the marriage and procreation between Spanish and American Indigenous or Africans. According to Ramírez (2009) and Castro-Gómez (2005a) the Church and the Crown considered that there were no Spanish who would create a child who has the weight of the sins of the American Indigenous and Africans. In that way the only true members of Christianity were the descendants of white Europeans, and it was considered a sin to procreate with people from other castes (Castro-Gómez 2005a; Ramírez 2009). Even the white Spanish descendants born in America were considered to be from a less prestigious caste than white people born in Europe (Ramírez 2009). The sons of Spanish who were born in the colonies were called the Creoles, and according to the epistemology imposed by the

\textsuperscript{21} Even when, they considered that Africans did not have a soul (Ramírez, 2009). This will be expanded later on the chapter.

\textsuperscript{22} This also was a negation of African historical trajectories, since there were ancient Christian settlements in Africa even before Europe, especially in Ethiopia, a place with one of the oldest Judeo-Christian traditions (Schorsch 2009).
Spanish to dominate America they were ‘Manchados de la Tierra’ (stained by the land) (López 1998). They could not escape their faith as part of the wretched of the earth, which implies that they were Europeans without civilisation, without history, incomplete White-Europeans (Castro-Gómez 2005a). The situation for the Africans and their descendants carried by force to America was even worse: according to Spanish theology, they had no soul, therefore were not humans but animals. This situation allowed slave trades, as it was not immoral to dehumanise Africans, to force Africans to migrate to America, and cut the bonds they had with their land, culture and society. Their historical trajectory was broken by their ostracism (Castro-Gómez 2005a).

But even when the Church and the Empire forbade marriage and procreation between different castes in America the mixes between castes were extensive. Spanish males used to have many concubines among the indigenous women; and non-Spanish women were often objects of sexual abuse. When the Viceroyalties in America became aware of the mixing they created a more complex caste system in order to solve what they considered a problem. Based on the first three racial castes, Negro (Black Africans), Indio (American Indigenous) and Blanco (White Europeans), they created a ‘blood purity’ rate. The ‘blood purity’ rate depended on the percentage of ‘mixing’ and to each one of the rates they assigned a new caste. There were more than 53 different castes based on that percentage of ‘bloodline purity’, and people were able to move among castes from generation to generation in a process known as ‘polluting the blood’, if: their ‘blood’ became more ‘mixed’, through ‘blood purification’, or if their ‘blood purity’ rate increased. Those processes allowed people to become ‘pure’ and gain adscription to either the Creoles or to the indigenous castes, as long as they did not have an ascendant from the Negro caste. In that case, the person could

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23 This situation changed when the Borbónico reforms were decreed, and with them the African slaves gained not only certain rights, but obligations as well. In that way, the owner of a slave could not amputate him/her, but the slave ought to adopt Christianity as his/her religion. For more information about the Borbónico reforms and its impact on the colonies please refer to: Alzate 2007; Florescano & Gil Sánchez 1974; Pietschmann 1996; Walker 1979.

24 Dichotomies are pivotal to modern/colonial epistemology. The West has created a way to know the world in which everything is constituted by negative pairs: nature-culture, body-mind, thought-praxis, savage-civilised etc. (Mignolo 2008; Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Anderson 2008; Whatmore 2002). This can be seen in the work of Rene Descartes (1968) as it is going to be shown on the next section of the chapter.

25 Those processes had an impact on the next generation.
never become an indigenous person nor a Creole one because the Spanish believed that there was the danger of Saltapatras (someone who jumps backwards). The Spanish believed that when someone has an African ascendant, no matter what the ‘blood purity’ rate this person could achieve, there was always the ‘danger’ that at some point his/her descendants would display African characteristics, jumping back to their Negro ascendant blood purity rate. Therefore, if someone had an African ascendant that person would never be able to become white nor indigenous by the ‘blood purification’ process (Ramírez 2009). Very often people tried to give their children a better future by adding Spanish blood in their ‘mixture’, in a process called by the Creoles “blood whitening”. The most common of the castes resulted from the ‘mixture’ of the four original castes in America were: “1. Mestizo: child of Spaniard and Indigenous; 2. Castizo: child of Mestizo and Spaniard; 3. Zambo: child of African and Indigenous; 4. Mulato or Pardo: child of Spaniard and African; 5. Morisco: child of Mulato and Spaniard; 6. Coyote or Cholo: child of Mestizo and Indigenous; and 7 Chino: child of Mulato and Indigenous” (Ramírez, 2009 p. 108).

According to Ramírez (2009) despite the complexity of the caste system, in Europe the Spanish Empire denied the existence of the ‘mixed’ castes. Consequently, there was a legal gap under the colonial jurisdiction, which only considered three castes in its Cedulas Reales (Ramírez 2009). The legal gap allowed the Spanish Empire to establish control over the civic domain of the human experience. Because even when it was not able to stop the ‘mixing’ of Europeans with Africans and American Indigenous, it was powerful enough to deny legal recognition of the marriages between members of different castes, making illegitimate the sons and daughters born from those unions. In that way, the Spanish Empire maintained control over the reproduction, the gender and the sexuality of the people who inhabit the colonies (Quijano 1999; Castro-Gómez 2005a). Taking into account that the vast majority of the people belonged to those castes — especially to the Mestizo and Mestizo related castes — the legal gap allowed the Creoles to legitimately control the population after the decolonisation process in America (Castro-Gómez 2005a; Quijano 2003).

26 While the ‘blood purification’ process could lead to a ‘pure’ Spanish, or indigenous or African, the ‘blood whitening’ process refers only to the process of becoming a white Spaniard. Given the belief in the Saltapatras people that an African ascendant would never be able to complete a process of ‘blood whitening’.

27 Ramirez (2009) made a chart in which he classified 25 of the 53 castes in terms of blood percentage.

28 Decrees and ordinances made by the King.
But if the caste system allowed the Spanish Empire to control the civic domain of human experience, Christianity allowed the empire to dominate the knowledge and the subjectivity of people. From the Christian point of view, other epistemologies were viewed either as unworthy or as a threat (Kehoe 2012). For that reason, African and American cultural practices were forbidden (Castro-Gómez 2005a). Religious practices, music and chants were stigmatised as ‘devil worship’; ludic activities, games, food, beverages, and ways to get altered states of consciousness were depicted as ‘satanic practices’; ways to dress were portrayed as strange and ugly; architecture, religious temples, and sacred places were either destroyed or replaced by their Christian equivalents (Crockett 2013; Kehoe 2012). Even non-Western languages were forbidden: indigenous (and African) languages were declared illegal and the people were obliged to speak Spanish (Castro-Gómez 2005a; Mignolo 2009b).
2.1.2 Secular modernity and the colonial project

Given the surplus of goods produced by the exploitation of the African and American labour force and the appropriation of land in America and Africa, and even in Asia, European societies had surplus of goods (silver, gold, and other commodities) that opened spaces for the rise of a new wealthy class: the bourgeoisie. This class gained access to leisure time, ludic and scholarly activities, and the use of art as a status symbol. Those spaces and growth in the art market allowed artisans and thinkers to flourish during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The bourgeoisie built up a new ideology that led them to understand the world in a new way, shifting Western epistemology from theocentric to anthropocentric, and relocating the centre of power from the nobility onto them (Hyland et al. 2003). This period of change is identified as the Age of Enlightenment. One of the most important changes to Western epistemology that occurred during the Enlightenment was that humankind was relocated to the centre of the debate. On one hand, theological explanations of the world were re-evaluated and the place for human and god in Western cosmogony changed. The most explicit example of that change is the ontological debate posited by Descartes (1637). Descartes delocated god from Christian theology to relocate it from a rational perspective; the existence of god could only be proved by faith, and how could His existence be proved without proving the existence of humankind. The existence of god depended on the existence of humanity, and the last was proved by the fact that humankind had the ability of thinking: 

_Ego Cogito_. Therefore, Descartes posited that because reason was not a corporeal process it should be located someplace different than the material body: an immortal soul. Given that humans have an idea of god, something they had not been able to observe, then the idea had to come from god itself. That means that Descartes proved the concept of god by using reason, which only proved the idea that the reason method was the way to go (Park 2010).

In that manner Descartes (1637) contributed to the secularisation of the West adding in the construction of the anthropocentric and Eurocentric modernity (Edelstein 2010). Now

29 In some societies, such as the French, this shift led to the destruction of the monarchy, while in others the bourgeoisie allied with the nobility to share power, for example, the British Empire.
humanity was at the centre, not only as the observer, but also as the object of study itself. But with the secularisation of societies, the theological domination of colonised subjects was weakened. Since it was the surplus of wealth generated by colonisation that made it possible for the rise of new classes and therefore the rise of Enlightenment, the Europeans needed to maintain control of the economy and labour of Africans and Indigenous Americans in their colonies (Castro-Gómez 2005b; Mignolo 2009b).

In order to reinforce the logic of coloniality from a secular paradigm, the West created a new version of the salvationist discourse that justified the oppression of colonised subjects. This discourse was expressed in the rational thinking that generalised and legitimised Western values while objectifying non-Western subjects (Medina 2006; Quijano 2003, 2008; Restrepo et al. 2007). Hence, if before Enlightenment the African and American Indigenous were considered less because they were not true Christians, later the secular epistemology reinforced the idea of the savage: people who have not reached civilisation and therefore they are pre-rational, or primitive, societies. Those non-Western cultures were — and still are — observed as less civilised, less rational, and were objectified as scientific objects of study. This means that they became part of the landscape, people that did not have the capacity to control nature, and instead they were part of it (Massey 2005; Said 1978; Urbain & Abadi 2015; Rashid 1997; Krippner 1999; Galtung 1996; Quijano 1999; Castro Herrera 2005; Castro-Gómez 2005b). Because of the dichotomy nature/culture, where Western epistemology stated that humankind must control nature rather than coexist with it, non-Western subjects were depicted as dangerous creatures who lacked the gift of reason and civilisation, and thus lived in a constant state of fear and violence that was a threat to the white Western colonisers (Castro-Gómez 2005a; Quijano 1999; Ulloa 2004; Whatmore 2002). The modernity/coloniality project still depicts the indigenous people as a threat, and this representation can be seen in Western literature and cinema; from Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe to George Lucas’s Indiana Jones and Mel Gibson’s Apocalypto movies.}

30 For information about the changes introduced by Enlightenment in Western culture please refer to: Carroll 2008; Baker & Reill 2001; Tunstall 2011; Hyland et al. 2003; Edelstein 2010; Rüsen & Sinnbildung 2002; Dupré 2004; Himmelfarb 2008; Schmidt 2003; Israel 2001; Schmidt 1996.

31 Apocalypto has been heavily criticized for its portrayal of Maya civilization as a brutal and violent civilization. According to Arden (2006) Apocalypto is very dangerous as it uses a beautifully crafted photography of Maya sites and is filmed in Yucatec Maya language. Thus, it can cast a shadow of authenticity.
non-Western people have been depicted in a demeaning manner, e.g. servants or cannibals.\textsuperscript{32} This is precisely the discourse that has justified in a liminal way the inequality between white and non-white people, even within the confines of Western countries. Examples of this include the ghettoization of African Americans in the US, whose poverty is explained by a lack of hard work and dedication (Wacquant 2004); or the poverty of Aboriginal Australians who are depicted as lazy alcoholics (Moreton-Robinson 2003).

The ideas the Spanish Empire created about non-Westerners were re-enacted by the Enlightenment epistemology from a secular perspective. Following Mignolo (2009a), even when the terms of the conversation between West and the rest were changed, the content remained the same. In other words, the discourse about colonised subjects remained the same, even when the justification provided to this discourse was different. Even the salvationist discourse remained in essence the same, since the Enlightenment Westerns were in charge of bringing civilisation to the savages: The West had the moral obligation of bringing light into non-Western obscurity. However, the gaze that Westerners have about non-Westerners as something from the past was reinforced during Enlightenment, and with it racial and ethnic domination was also strengthened. Pivotal thinkers in the Western tradition laid the foundations of this perspective. Scholars such as Hume (1739), Kant (1798), and Smith (1789) stated that Western Europeans were more developed than the rest. Kant went beyond affirming that the African population (black races in his texts) were more backwards in their development than American Indigenous (to whom he referred to as red races) and the eastern Asian population (yellow races in Kant’s texts) (Kant 1798). Even Karl Marx later on in the eighteenth century — who disagreed with the concept of superiority of race and condemned slavery — stated that colonial societies needed to first pass the capitalist stage to become socialists later. In that manner, Marx located colonial societies at one step backwards that

\textsuperscript{32} This discourse has been underlying Western epistemology since then, but today, with the discourse of the multiculturalism, it has changed the image of the cannibal and dreadful savage into the Pacific savage; that is in community with the nature, because it has not forgotten its roots. But this new vision is also an ethnocentric exoticisation which depicts indigenous peoples as a pristine primitive who by means of his lack of civilisation (and therefore culture) is fused with the natural world (Ulloa 2004).
Western societies in the inevitable historical march towards socialism (Marx 1867; Marx & Engels 1888). In this manner, Western thinkers denied the multiplicity of historical trajectories and reduced history to only one historical trajectory: The Western one. Hence, non-Western societies were (and in many cases still are) reckoned as primitive societies and thus to western science they were a window to the past of humanity (Castro-Gómez et al. 2000). As was pointed out by Santos (2014 p. 22) the secularisation of societies is view as one its biggest achievements, something unavoidable in the liner path that all societies should follow.

Whilst I have mentioned a few of the most important thinkers in the modern genealogy of knowledge, there are many more and the list is extensive. I used the above authors as examples that elucidate the next affirmation: there is a relationship between Enlightenment, colonialism and sciences, including social sciences. In that way the thesis posited by Said (1978) in Orientalism is important. He postulates that the Western Enlightenment project created an exotization of the Orient and its population based on racial and cultural stereotypes that were supported epistemologically by science. Therefore, science became a tool for colonisation, given that by explaining how individuals and societies behave, they could justify Western domination over the world (Castro-Gómez et al. 2000).

2.1.3 The modernity/coloniality and the white imagery

Based on what was posited above, Edward Said (1978) stated that there is a close relationship between modernity and science, because it is used to justify the oppression of colonial subjects; as science allowed Western scholars to create an exotic image of oriental otherness. Likewise, Franz Fanon (1963) stated that colonisation dehumanises colonial subjects to the point where colonised subjects are condemned to inferiority by the colonisers.

33 Santos (2014 p. 22) points out that this secularisation of societies is founded in a contradiction. It sends the spirituality and religious visions to the private sphere, arguing that it is the way to assure freedom of religion. However, by doing it so, it is banning public expressions of religion. Thus, it is preventing people to express freely their religion.

34 In-depth explorations of the influence of coloniality in sciences and social sciences can be found in the book The decolonial shift. Reflections for an epistemic diversity beyond global capitalism (Restrepo et al. 2007), and in Epistemologies of the South. Justice against epistemicide (Santos 2014)
Additionally, Fanon argued that even when violence was necessary to a decolonisation process, the expulsion of the coloniser and the creation of a national state was not enough to decolonise the psyche of the colonial subjects. The mark that the colonisation left on them was indelible, and the colony could reproduce within them. At the same time Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1999) located the colonised subjects in the role of the subaltern. In that manner the colonised subjects are those who have never had a voice and/or have been ignored by the hegemonic approaches to politics and academy. Spivak (1999) extended the idea of the subaltern to women. They are also colonised subjects who have never been heard by hegemonic discourses.

Postcolonial approaches to feminism were also developed simultaneously in the Americas. For example, Gloria Anzaldúa (2007) affirmed that she was three times oppressed by Western society, because she was a Chicana lesbian woman who inhabited a place that was colonized first by the Spanish Empire and then, in the XIX century, by the US. She posited what is perhaps one of the most powerful and empowering ideas for colonial subjects around the world: the idea of frontier (or borderland) thinking. To understand this idea, it is necessary to understand the frontier not only as a physical or geopolitical space. Instead the frontier is “a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary” (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 22). It may have physical consequences, but it lies in the realm of the epistemic. The frontier is then a place for suffering; an open wound that is generated by the clash of different ways to understand the world, and by the imposition of one over the other.

But that does not mean that the frontier is the place where non-Western historical trajectories are erased. On the contrary it is a creative space from where a new way to become in the world is generated. As Anzaldúa (2007, p. 3) would say, a border culture emerges from the blood spilled by the open wound. A new culture emerges from the pain and discomfort in the frontier. According to Anzaldúa (2007) in the frontier, colonised subjects inhabit at the same time two worlds, the modern and the colonised. Therefore, they are constantly changing the framework from where they understand the world. From there, the discomfort and pain. To deal with the situation, colonial subjects invent ways to get those perspectives together; melting them in an amalgam that is neither one nor the other. That is how a new way
epistemology rises: the frontier thinking.

Following those ideas Arturo Escobar (2007b), Santiago Castro-Gómez (Castro-Gómez 2005a; Castro-Gómez & Guardiola Rivera 2002), Enrique Dussel (2000), Aníbal Quijano (2007), and Walter Mignolo (2007) created in the mid-1990s the modernity/coloniality research program. They tried to address the postcolonial theories posited by Anzaldúa, Fanon, Said, and Spivak, and extended them by arguing that the biggest accomplishment of modernity as an oppressive system was the use of sciences and social sciences to establish a geocultural imagery of race and ethnicity where the Caucasian Western population is regarded as neutral. This aided the creation and justification of a global geoethnic division of labour and an inequitable distribution of wealth (capital and raw materials) based on that racial and ethnic imagery (Escobar 2007b; Castro-Gómez 2005b).

In La Hybris del Punto Cero Castro-Gómez (2005) shows that after the Spanish Empire retired from the Viceroyalty of New Granada the white sons of the Europeans (the Creoles) took control over the new nation-state by making a translation of the European Enlightenment thinking without having to account for the particularities of a territory that had been a colony that was inhabited not only by Westerners but by other populations. In that manner they embraced the racial imagery of the neutrality of white Europeans so they could become the ruling class of the New Granada.35

In that way the Creoles abolished the caste system and the slavery of Black Africans, because they were not based in the modern rationality. However, they still thought of themselves as white Europeans, a discourse that was justified by the ‘purity’ of their European bloodline. The Creoles embraced and embodied the European Enlightenment in order to create a distinction between them and the Africans, the Indigenous and the ethnic mixed population. This distinction was used to put the Creoles in an ethnic position of privilege. Additionally, they rejected the Borbónica reforms established by the Spanish Empire before decolonisation and considered a sign of Imperial oppression; reforms intended to modernise the Spanish Empire and its colonies. Among other things, they looked for the

35 After the decolonisation of the Viceroyalty of New Granada, the territory was controlled by the Creoles who changed the name of the Viceroyalty to United Provinces of New Granada. Later the name was changed to the Republic of Colombia.
secularisation of education and the strengthening of universities, the establishment of a free trade zone amongst the Empire and the colonies, the creation of an American army, the; creation of a healthcare system, the recognition of the indigenous population as citizens of the empire, giving them the same rights of the creoles, and the regulation of slavery, giving the slaves some rights, like the right to proper food and rest and the possibility to sue their holders for mistreatment (Alzate 2007; Pietschmann 1996; Florescano & Gil Sánchez 1974). For the Creoles the recognition of the rights of the indigenous population meant a threat to their ethnic domination, which is why they rejected many of the reforms. However, the Creoles considered themselves enlightened Americans, thus they adopted reforms that implied a change in the education and healthcare systems. However, they excluded from the educational system people who were not considered white Americans; for example, in the nineteenth century (and until 1930) the admission process of the University of Rosario had as requirement certification that the candidate’s bloodline did not contain any person who had been involved in manual labour. In other words, the candidate must justify their blood purity (Ortíz Rodríguez 2003). The fact that only the Creoles had access to education created a technocratic bureaucracy that put them in charge of the state’s resources, which aided the Creoles justifying their ethnic domination from a secular point of view: stating that only white people who have reached the intellectual level required to attend universities and to rule the country could attend (Castro-Gómez 2005a).

Additionally, the Creoles took advantage of the scientific geographic expeditions that categorised the fauna and flora of ‘unexplored’ territories, the description of the habits of people who inhabit those territories, and the search for resources that could be exploited and the way to exploit them. But the expeditions also served the Creoles as a method to reasserting the idea that some places were backwards, because it allowed them to relate the colonies with an exuberant biodiversity and a vast rurality, which was compared to the increasing urbanity in Europe. Expeditions depicted rural areas as wild and savage territories that were not totally controlled by humanity, places that were back in time (M. Ancízar 1853; Caldas 1808). This depiction of colonies was exploited by the Creoles twofold. On one hand, since the Creoles were established in New Granadian big cities situated high in the mountains

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36 The University of Rosario was founded in 1653. It is one of the oldest universities in Latin America.
with cold and wet weather, while the indigenous and African populations inhabited the valleys and plains and dealt with tropical weather conditions, the Creoles claimed that they were able to develop as a modern society than the indigenous and African population (Castro-Gómez 2005a). One of the most important Colombian thinkers of that period, Francisco José de Caldas (1808), formulated an academic work that is still famous in Colombia: Del Influido del Clima Sobre los Seres Organizados (The Influence of Weather on Organised Beings). This work posited that the weather in which people live determines their character. In that way the people who live in cold weather, like the weather in the northern hemisphere, were intellectually prominent and hard workers because they have to be resourceful to face the harsh and live in adverse conditions. While the people who inhabit warmer weather were lazy, and not intellectually brilliant because they do not have to face those difficulties. Whilst, the Creoles who mainly inhabit the Mountains of the Andes, where the weather is cold and harsh, were more prone to develop than the indigenous and African populations who according to Caldas inhabit a tropical jungle where they did not have to worry about food and shelter (Caldas 1808). In that way, the Creoles could finally establish their ethnic dominance in the colonies from a secular perspective. However, on the other hand, the idea that some places were backwards was used by the Creoles to justify their lack of input to global scientific knowledge. They posited that given the New Granada was a young nation, it was natural that it was not developed to its full potential. Their task was to create the foundations for a future development and encourage the sciences in New Granada (Castro-Gómez 2005a). In that way, they reinforced the secular salvationist discourse, they had the mission of bringing the light that was already enlightening Europe to America, to New Granada. They had to bring modernity to their young country. In that way, they were taking advantage of the colonial matrix of power, but at the same time they were oppressed by it. They were still the wretched of the earth, they still regarded themselves as less than the West, and they were still in a previous stage of development in the only possible historical trajectory. Their mission was to reach the level of modernity Europe had.

2.1.4 Development, neoliberalism and the modernity/coloniality

During the nineteenth century the independence of many colonies in America, and the
fierce economic competition among the empires, generated the modern necessity of the scientific measure of the wealth of the empires, colonies and emerging states. At the same time the Industrial Revolution created a preoccupation with the scientific measurement of the natural world, which allows Western powers to make more efficient exploitation of the natural resources and labour that increased the production of commodities.

In this context, ‘development’ became the regulating entity to measure the wealth of the nation-states of the world (Escobar 2005b, 2007a). This led to another shift in the Western salvationist discourse towards a scientific compendium of measurements that would provide an account of the wealth and possibilities of economic growth for a country: development, by measuring economic growth, and wealth distribution of the national-states. Based on that measurement, Western nations and empires claimed to offer a solution for the empires to contain the global unrest and discomfort produced by the loss of vital opportunities and the growing and hurtful inequities that industrial revolution and the rise of the bourgeoisie left in the Western nations (Galtung 1996), and that the colonial wound left in colonised countries (Escobar 2007a). Therefore, the development discourse stated that there were a series of measures and procedures that nation-states ought to follow in order to achieve a level of wealth accumulation that allowed them to distribute enough wealth among their citizens for them to have an acceptable way of life. That is, that the nation-states ought to adopt a series of reforms in order to eliminate the loss of vital opportunities and relieve the suffering of the poor.

However, according to Mignolo (2009a) as in previous incarnations of the salvationist discourse of modernity/coloniality, development allows the perpetuation of the colonial matrix of power. It reinforced Western domination over the world in a moment when its colonial matrix of power was threatened by decolonisation processes in America. This reinforcement of the colonial matrix of power by the development discourse started with the empire’s competition for resources. Especially by the rising British Empire (followed in the second half of the twentieth century by the US) that hoped to develop new methods of

37 The term colonial wound referred to the political, economic, epistemological and civic expropriation product of the colonial difference of power, where colonised subjects had to subjugate to the West in all of the human existence domains (Mignolo 2008).
exploitation in America by supporting their decolonisation processes if they accept a series of unfair trade agreements justified by the debts obtained by emerging nations. In that way they expected to easily obtain the materials needed for their industrial revolution. Given that the salvationist discourse was translated into a debt that the former colonies had to pay to the empires, this allowed Western powers to have control over the political and economic domains of experience in the former colonies. In that fashion the emerging nations in Latin America had to follow the directives of the Western powers (Escobar 2007a; Galtung 1996; Martinez-Alier 2002).

During the twentieth century, and with the rise of the US as a major Western power the debt increased through investments that Western powers made in the former colonies. They claimed that those investments aimed to help the emerging nations develop an infrastructure that could support the industrial revolution. This was especially true for the US, which presented itself as a friend of other former colonies. They pushed other nations in America to reach their level of development, while at the same time they took control over the political and economic domains of human experience (Escobar 2007a).

The contemporary version of the development discourse took its form after WWII (in 1945) with the creation of an organisation with the objective of grouping modern nation-states of the world, a transnational non-governmental organisation that has the mission of maintaining the peace between the nations: The United Nations (UN). The creation of the UN coincides with moments in which the level of control the US had over the rest of America began (Escobar 2007a; Galtung 1996). With the creation of the UN the development discourse could finally become the main colonial tool of the contemporary world. A series of techniques and tools, created a scientific toolbox that could give an ‘objective’ account of the wealth of the nations, and the stage they were in the inevitable road towards development.

This created a new division of the world. Instead of colonies and empires, the world was separated into three: the first world, which consisted of the United States and Europe, identified as democratic and industrialised capitalist countries; the second world, which included the USSR and other communist countries; and the third world, to which all colonies, former colonies and non-Western nations belonged. The assumption then was that the former
colonies must develop in order to gain membership to the first or second world. In that way, all third world nations remained as less developed, as if they were behind in the historical trajectory of modernity/coloniality, which was the valid historical trajectory (Escobar 2007a). Because of the division of the Western powers into first and second world, there were two versions of the development discourse.

First, the capitalist version of development, which became well established after WWII when the US launched the Marshall Plan to help Europe recover from the war. This plan had a second objective, which was to fight back the diffusion of communism over Europe. The Marshall Plan worked well for the US, which was able to impose a series of control methods over Europe that resulted in an economical debt with the US. In that manner, the US became the main power of the Western hemisphere. It controlled not only the politics and economy of the former colonies in the Americas, Asia and the Pacific, but also a great deal of the economy in Europe. All of that without the need of occupation of controlled territories. They remained as independent nation-states. However, the kind of control they imposed over Europe never implied observing them as subaltern, nor as people that were backwards. All of them were part of the Western civilisation, they shared the same history, languages and culture. They were all white Westerners. There was no ethnic or racial based domination (Escobar 2007a; Mignolo 2009b).

But communism was not only a threat to the interests of the US in Europe. Since 1930s the other version of the salvationist discourse of development gained endorsement by the emergent poor of Latin America. But the poor in Latin America were not formed mainly of the proletariat as in Europe, they were made up of the African, indigenous and campesino populations, who were working for the owners of huge extensions of land. They grew crops and raised cattle, and they mined the land (Escobar 2007a). Some of the biggest latifundists were US companies that established a tight control of the economy and the politics of Latin American countries; e.g. Chiquita Brand Company (formerly United Fruit Company), that controlled the politics and economy of El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and a great deal of the Caribbean coast of Colombia (Bourgois 2003; Chapman 2009). Consequently, some rural sectors of society felt compelled to communism as a way to alleviate the suffering produced by the colonial wound.
The response from the US was based on the success of the Marshall Plan. In order to prevent the spread of communism in third world countries, the US and first world countries launched aid plans to develop Asia, the Americas, and Africa. This aid was based on the contemporaneous form of the development discourse. It implied the technification of inequality: poverty, misery, democracy and civil liberties, which were transformed into indexes. Because those indexes were made from a modern/colonial perspective, once again the Western countries were located at the vanguard of a unique historical trajectory that non-Western countries had to follow in order to reach the wealth and the freedom that the West claimed to have reached. In that manner, the aid was accompanied by a strengthening of the control that the first world had over the third (Galtung 1996; Escobar 2007a; Restrepo et al. 2007).

The communist version of development at its modern/colonial core does not differ from the capitalist one. The communist discourse states that communist superpowers come to help the oppressed classes to fight oppression and inequality. But in order to do so, non-Western countries had to adopt the communist model. In that way, third world countries must undertake an epistemic translation of the communist model, without taking into account the local particularities of the different nation-states of America, and integrating them into a transnational network of production in which every country had to specialise in producing one commodity. The Soviet Union (U.S.S.R.) controlled the distribution of commodities among many of the communist countries, which is why they became highly dependent on the U.S.S.R. (Mignolo 2008).

Both of those discourses implied that third world countries had to implant a series of reforms and changes of their politics and economy that strengthened the control the West had over the rest. Former colonies had to adopt the modernity and the industrial revolution as the locomotive of their development process. Western powers offered economic and epistemological help to the third world. They taught them how to make industrialised production and offered them economic support for the process, implying changes in the control of the subjectivities and bodies of the colonial subjects. They had to learn the modern way of thinking, and they had to adopt the modern way of life. Traditional ways of production were regarded as unproductive and irrational, they did not have the potential of
mass production, and people who still used them were regarded as primitive (Escobar 2007a; Mignolo 2009a; Anzaldúa 2007; Spivak 1999). This control was fortified in the second half of the twentieth century with the development of birth control and the increasing medicalisation of the West. It was then when the colonial control based on demographic indexes of birth and mortality demanded changes to family composition. Colonial countries were forced to reduce the number of births per woman in order to control the growth of the population so they could better distribute the wealth (Spivak 1999). Given that, the ethnic domination of the West over the rest was translated into indexes and geographies. In that way the modern/colonial idea was that non-Whites were behind because they came from a background that lacked Western infrastructure, and some of them remained in undeveloped and primitive stages because they were not culturally ready to adopt modernity, and remained attached to irrational primitive ways of understanding the world (Mignolo 2008).

The competition between the US and the U.S.S.R. for the control of the third world, led to immeasurable suffering for third world nations. Since they were involved in internal wars between the local Creoles that supported the capitalist’s version of development and the rural proletariat that supported communism’s version. In the second half of the twentieth century both the US and the U.S.S.R., supplying money and weapons, supported the internal wars of former colonies in order to determine which version of the salvationist discourse was going to heal their colonial wound (Mignolo 2009a). In Latin America it led to genocides, mass exterminations, massive migrations, and the establishment of authoritarian regimes and dictators that forced, with implacable force, the modernisation of the former colonies. Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and Paraguay, suffered wars and authoritarian regimes that deepened the colonial wound (Fearon & Laitin 2003). The logic of coloniality was forced and established not from the West, but from people that were considered as citizens of the same country. The salvationist discourse of development aided in the establishment of a new wave of colonisation that did not need empires to occupy the colonies. They embodied their position as subalterns, they embodied their role in the modern/colonial project (Fearon &

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38 For more information about the Cold War please refer to Heller 2006; Hopkins 2007; Johnston 2010. For more information about the impact of the Cold War in Latin America please refer to Fearon & Laitin 2003; Kirkendall 2014.

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Since the 1980s, and with the fall of the U.S.S.R., communist countries have adopted development salvationist discourse. In that way the world was divided once more, this time not in three, but in two: developed and underdeveloped countries (Mignolo 2007; Escobar 2007a). Consequently, underdeveloped countries have repeated the actions of the Creoles in New Granada: translation of the Western economic, epistemic, civic and political epistemology without taking into account the particularities of the local places. In the process they became repositories of cheap labour and raw materials for Western countries’ industries and they turn out to be highly dependent on Western countries’ economic policies (Escobar 2007a); a world without economical frontiers, where Western industries can exploit labour and land from undeveloped countries without fear of any kind of regulation, and sell their production everywhere in the world avoiding any kind of governmental control.

The age of global capitalism had finally established a new set of rules that allowed the logic of coloniality to be perpetuated. Given that some scholars, like Fukuyama (2006) have argued that the balance of forces between communism and capitalism have finally inclined to one side; there was no opposing force to global capitalism, and economic imperialism had a clear path to its hegemony on a global scale. And even when Development discourse has changed during the last 30 years “Evidence of this is found on the ideas of sustainable, integral or human development (…). development keeps intact the idea of infinite growth and unstoppable development of productive forces” (Santos 2014 p. 41). In that way, from a Hegelian perspective Fukuyama argued that the dialectic process of history reached an end: we are attending to the end of history (Fukuyama 2006). However, this position does not take into account the subaltern voice. All of those for whom history has not had a place, the ones that have not been considered as an interlocutor (Spivak 1999). The rise of a new wave of feminism that spoke from the colonial wound, the LGBT movements that claim their right to coexist, the indigenous movements that claim their right to establish an intercultural dialogue with the West, the African descendant mobilisation worldwide that wants to re-establish their historical trajectory, and the rise of the Asian and Latin American countries as important

39 For information about the fall of the U.S.S.R. please refer to Njølstad 2004; Sakwa 2005.
players of global geopolitics are offering different alternatives to modernity. They are opposing the logic of coloniality, in that way, at least from a Hegelian point of view Fukuyama was wrong. The dialectic is still alive, but this time the dialogue is with the subaltern. From the perspective of the modern/colonial research program, this is called the decolonial option, an alternative to the Western way to become in the world.

### 2.2 The decolonial option

Walter Mignolo (2008, p. 249) proposed a metaphor that helps to understand the decolonial option, the modernity/coloniality project is like a hydra with three heads: one head is modernity and its discourse of salvation, the second head is coloniality and its oppression, and the third head is the decolonial option. In that manner the decolonial option is part of the modernity project, like coloniality. However, instead of being a foundational part of the modernity project, the decolonial option can be seen as a residual product of the modernity/coloniality project, a side effect caused by its oppressive nature. If coloniality is constitutive of modernity, and the salvationist rhetoric of the modernity imply the oppressive and condemnatory logic of the coloniality (from there, Fanon’s wretched of the earth), that oppressive logic presupposes an energy of discontent, mistrust and detachment among the ones who react to imperial violence, “That energy is translated into decolonial projects that, ultimately, are also constitutive of modernity” (Mignolo 2008, p. 249). The modernity/coloniality oppression of the four domains of human experience implies that subjects are always forced to accept the logic of coloniality by the use of salvationist discourses. But those discourses do not always make sense from the point of view of the colonial subject, thus the logic of coloniality is not able to exercise total control over the subjectivity of colonial subjects. In their subjectivity the broken historical trajectories remain at least in a liminal way. That is why Anzaldúa (2007) argued that colonial subjects’ minds have to switch modes all the time as their understanding of the world is changing constantly, and their world is understood sometimes from a modern/colonial epistemology, and others.

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40 Original quote in Spanish: “si la colonialidad es constitutiva de la modernidad y la retórica salvacionista de la modernidad presupone la lógica opresiva y condenatoria de la colonialidad (de ahí los damnés de Fanon), esa lógica opresiva produce una energía de descontento, de desconfianza, de desprendimiento entre quienes reaccionan ante la violencia imperial. Esa energía se traduce en proyectos de de-colonialidad que, en última instancia, también son constitutivos de la modernidad” (Mignolo 2008, p. 249).
from the remains of their broken epistemologies. This process of switching modes happens all the time, is a constant feature of the everyday lives of people who inhabit the colonial wound. This process is very tiresome, as it generates an energy of discomfort. At the same time colonial subjects have a liminal sorrow that comes from the loss of their history, they always grieve for the broken historical trajectory. That also generates an energy of discontent, which is where the decolonial option comes from: decoloniality is the energy that does not subjugate to the rhetoric of modernity and does not believe in its salvationist promise.

That is why the decolonial option is open to possibilities that have been hidden by the modern rationality, which colonises and discredits those decolonial possibilities as traditional, barbarian, savage, primitive, mystic, or irrational (Mignolo 2008, p. 250). The decolonial option is an alternative to understanding the world in a different manner than offered by modern sciences and social sciences. It does not look to establish an epistemic control of the world by using categories, disciplines, institutions, and norms. That is why it is not possible to define the decolonial option, because one of the artefacts of epistemic control used by modernity are definitions41 (Mignolo 2008). The decolonial option is also an option to the political options controlled by the modernity/coloniality project. In that way it is an alternative to the domination and hegemony of the macro-stories of Christian theology and the conservative, liberal, or Marxist ideologies.42 It is an option to the left, to the right, to capitalism and to socialism and communism.43

In that way, the decolonial option was generated in the same moment that the modernity/coloniality project was founded. The decolonial shift is a consequence of the establishment of the imperial matrix of power. It occurred when the Spanish Empire met with pre-Hispanic civilisations in America, and when the Portuguese established profit from trafficking humans from Africa to America and the Caribbean. It occurred when the French

41 A definition presupposes the determination of an object, which is controlled through the definition by the uttering of it. It is a praxis towards the object rather than towards the subject, towards the utterance rather than towards the utterer. Instead, the decolonial option turns towards the subject that performs the utterance, it is detached from the idea that the validity of the knowledge depends on the strict following of some disciplinary norms (Mignolo 2008).

42 Secular displacement of the theology.

43 Due to the subaltern character of the decolonial option, that is different to all Western hegemonic discourses, it usually is not addressed even in the most extreme left publications (Mignolo 2008).
and the British Empires colonised Asia and Africa, and then again with US and U.S.S.R imperialism during the Cold War (Mignolo 2008, p. 250). It is occurring again when neoliberal hegemony threatens local practices around the globe (in places like Usme). In that manner the genealogy of the decolonial epistemology can be traced to the epistemic resistance that arises in moments where some kind of imperial oppression is established or reinforced (Mignolo 2008).

Given that the genealogy of the decolonial epistemology is related to the establishment of a colonial matrix of power and oppression, it is not like the genealogy of Western epistemology: a progressive historical line. Instead, it is more like a network where the ties that bind the multiplicity of decolonial options is precisely the colonial oppression that they are fighting back (Mignolo 2008). At the same time, it is different because this genealogy is not limited to individuals — like the classic and pivotal authors of a particular discipline — or schools of thought. Rather than that the decolonial option genealogy also incorporates social movements and practices of resistance. In that way one can trace decolonial thinking from Ghandi to Atahualpa, from the Zapatistas in Chiapas, to the Aboriginal movement in Australia, and the network is very big, loose and rhizomatic, and very resilient. The main link between the nodes is not the construction of knowledge or the share of ideas (although this happens all the time). What maintains the nodes together is the oppression itself, it is the logic of coloniality what unites all the decolonial nodes. The colonial matrix of oppression is shared by all decolonial nodes. That is why the decolonial options rise from the frontier thought: the fact that colonial subjects live in-between epistemologies, and therefore have to switch modes all the time (Anzaldúa 2007). Given that it is impossible for colonial subjects to isolate themselves in an epistemic and cosmoegonist purism. Therefore, on this switching of modes, sometimes colonial subjects are able to detach the logic of coloniality from its historical trajectory. They are able, sometimes, to detach Western concepts or institutions from the Western genealogy of knowledge, to relocate those

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44 It even includes some violent resistance practices, like the jihadist in the first decade of the twenty-first century (Mignolo 2008).

45 In a rhizomatic network there is not a hierarchy that can influence the way in which the information flows from one point to another. Likewise, if parts of the rhizome are separated, the network does not get damaged, it can recover easily, adapting all the time. This term is further discussed in Chapter Three.
concepts and institutions in non-Western cosmogonies. In other words, *frontier thought* takes the imperial rules, and reinterprets them, absorbs them in a different way, it dismounts their power so they can be used in a different epistemological scheme (Mignolo 2008, p. 252).

Given that the decolonial epistemological shift consists of detaching Western concepts from the Western tradition, it is able to detach itself from the dichotomies that are a constitutive part of the modern/colonial epistemology. Thought/praxis, oral/written, body/mind (or body/soul), singular/plural are dichotomies that many decolonial options do not conceive (Mignolo 2009b; Galtung 1996). The dichotomy between thought and praxis, for example, is overturned by decolonial epistemology because for “the decolonial option the so called <<social movements>> produce their own theory, while the production of decolonial knowledge in universities entails its own practice”46 (Mignolo 2008, p. 246).

To explain how the decolonial option delocates Western concepts and institutions from its own genealogy, Walter Mignolo (2008) used the example of Waman Puma. He was an indigenous leader that inhabited Tawantinsuyu (Inca Empire) during the sixteenth century. As a leader he wrote a manifest to be sent to the King of Spain, Felipe III, with the title *Nueva Crónica y Buen Gobierno* (*New Chronic and Good Government*). His ideas were written from a colonial wound perspective, and it was a decolonial manifest where Waman Puma delocated the Western concept and institutions of Christianity and the Spanish Empire, to relocate them from an Inca perspective (Mignolo 2008). His central argument was that a new chronic of the Tawantinsuyu was necessary, because Spanish chroniclers were unable to accurately describe events, situations and many characteristics of the indigenous culture. Instead, Waman Puma proposed that if the chronicle was written from an indigenous perspective, many of those descriptions would be more precise (Mignolo 2008). In addition to the criticism at chronicle, Waman Puma critiqued the Christianisation of Tawantinsuyu, but rather than negating Christianity, he delocated it from its Western historical trajectory, and put it in the Inca historical trajectory. In this fashion, to delocate Christianity, Waman Puma argued that Christian values were embodied by the inhabitants of the Tawantinsuyu

46 In Usme for example, the people “walk their words”, and in that way they are erasing the dichotomy of thought/praxis.
before they met the Spanish. He stated that they already knew and followed the Ten Commandments, that in the Inca’s system of reciprocal help there was established the love for the neighbour, and that the Inca natural law of doing no harm and preventing someone from doing harm reflected the Christian way to behave. Hence they were neither savages nor barbarians. They were Christians before the Christianisation of America. They were Christians before the arrival of Christian gospel to their lives.

Therefore, civilisation was not a gift that the Spanish Empire gave to indigenous people, they had it before the Spanish Empire imposed their epistemology on them. For Waman Puma that fact could be a bridge between Western and indigenous cultures. But for this bridge to be crossed, both cultures had to be able to dialogue as peers. In this manner, Christianity was to Waman Puma what democracy is to the Zapatistas, who delocate this Western liberal concept from its Enlightenment rationalist genealogy, and reinterpret it from their indigenous perspective. Zapatistas argue that they have always been democratic, and that their direct participatory system, where everyone has a voice, and their claim for a world in where many worlds can coexist is even more democratic than the Western version of democracy, and in that way, they are looking for a dialogue with global capitalism that allows them to coexist as peers (Mignolo 2008; McCaughey & Ayers 2003; Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena-Comandancia General et al. 1996).

By delocating Western concepts and ideas from their modern/colonial genealogy, Waman Puma was not only fighting back the modern/colonial oppression, but also creating a node in the network that is genealogy, the decolonial option. Contemporaneous indigenous movements, such as the Zapatistas, are doing the same with concepts such as democracy and even development, they delocate it from the modern/colonial perspective and reorganise it from another cosmology. This is a pivotal point of this thesis, because as I will show in later chapters, I will posit that what is happening in Usme is the emergence of another node in the network of the genealogy of the decolonial epistemology.
Chapter 3 – Space and Time

3.1 Traditional approaches to space and globalisation

As detailed in the previous chapter, the modernity/coloniality project made a convection of geography in history, a transformation of space into time. In that manner, the particular historical trajectories of non-Western places were negated, and some places were not understood as different but as if they were back in time (Massey 2005; Castro-Gómez 2005b). This is a crucial characteristic of the modernity/coloniality project, because it aids the invisibility of the voice of the subaltern and the decolonial options the subaltern could provide. In that manner ideas that come from non-modern places are often neglected as non-rational, primitive or mystic (Castro-Gómez 2005a). This occurred in the case of Usme, where it is very common that the ideas posited by the activists and the community are neglected by modern institutions as unproductive, mystic or irrational.47 That is why an

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47 This is going to be explored in Chapter five onwards.
alternative way to understand space, that liberates it from the convection of history into geography, is necessary for this thesis. It will allow the understanding of what Usme activists are trying to do with their territory.

In this sense, the thesis proposed by Doreen Massey in her book *For Space* (2005), is a powerful way to deconstruct the modern conceptualisation of space. According to her, the modern conceptualisation of space subdues it to history. Space is then like an inert surface that is filled with meanings, it is there where the meanings are fixed:

There is an idea with such a long and illustrious history that it has come to acquire the status of an unquestioned nostrum: this is the idea that there is an association between the spatial and the fixation of meaning. Representation — indeed conceptualisation — has been conceived of as spatialisation. (...) Moreover, though the reference is to 'spatialisation', there is in all cases slippage; it is not just that representation is equated with spatialisation but that the characteristics thus derived have come to be attributed to space itself. (Massey 2005, p. 18)

To Massey the association between spatialisation and representation is part of a series of “unpromising associations” about space (Massey 2005). From Althusser and Bergson to Derrida and Laclau; from structuralism to poststructuralism, the academy has used the concept of space as something that we take for granted. According to Massey (2005), space is a concept that has been traditionally defined as in contrast and subjugated to time: something static that is ‘out there’ waiting for us to be filled with meaning. On one hand, space is a static entity that conquers the inherent dynamism of life;\(^{48}\) and on the other, space is a complete and inert entity that is waiting for the vitalising effects of time (as history). In that manner, the traditional conceptualisation of space states that it is time who sparkles life into space, without time there is nothing happening in space (Massey 2005). Moreover, space has been traditionally thought of as the opposite to time: while time has a lot of heterogeneity (e.g. stages of history) space is a singular entity, while time is open for future events that are difficult to predict, space is closed and defined *a priori*, and while time is movement and full

\(^{48}\) By doing so, that conceptualisation of space allows the triumph of the static concept of *being* over the mobile concept of *becoming*. 
of life space is static and lifeless (Massey 2005).

Hence, space has been understood by modernity as the singular entity of ‘radical contemporaneity’ (Massey 2005). An entity where history transits and inhabits, and that needs history so movement can happen over its surface: space is like a surface filled with historical and sociological notions. History gives and fixes meanings into space; therefore, space is the representation of history. Thus space is subdued to time (Massey 2005; Lefebvre 1992).

This conceptualisation of space has deep political implications. Following Castro-Gómez (2005a) and Massey (2005) it is arguable that one of the most important implications is that by negating the heterogeneity of space and assuming that only time is heterogeneous, Western epistemology could translate spatial heterogeneity into temporal sequences. That allowed Western countries to see themselves as a driving force on a unique timeline of human history (Massey 1991, 2005). Therefore, “[d]ifferent places are interpreted as occupying different stages in a single temporal sequence in the various stories of unilinear progress that define the West against the rest (such as modernisation or development)” (Anderson 2008, p. 229). As it was pointed out in previous chapters the modern/colonial project has situated non-Western nations, cultures and places behind the West in the single timeline from where modernity/coloniality embraces the world (Mignolo 2009b; Castro-Gómez 2005a; Escobar 2007a).

Another important implication of the modern conceptualisation of space is that it does not address many of the implications that this convection of history into time has over the lives of colonial subjects. On one hand, there is the fact that colonial subjects felt a sense of dislocation: wherever the West went to colonise there was a flow of cultural and material entities that affected the local everyday life. Hence, the arrival and imposition of new practices and concepts left colonial subjects in a state of dislocation. They had to adapt to a new way of becoming in the world, therefore they had to be able to adapt to switching modes, becoming in the process foreign in their own land (Anzaldúa 2007). For example, as it was

49 Not in the sense that there are many historical trajectories, but assuming that there are many stages in social development or evolution.
pointed out by Aileen M. Moreton-Robinson (2003), the British colonisation of Australia brought a sense of dislocation of place from Aboriginal people. It changed the way in which humans related to the land: from a horizontal relationship to which there was a sense of belonging determined by spiritual and emotional ties to places, Australia became a territory where the sense of belonging was determined by the capitalist understanding of ownership. Moreton-Robinson (2003) argued that Europeans were depicted as pioneers and ‘battlers’ who were domesticating a ‘savage and wild’ land, which gave them titles and rights over it. In this way, the sense of belonging to a territory was transformed to a sense of land ownership. To complicate the delocation of place felt by Aboriginal Australians, white Europeans created political institutions where Indigenous Australians had no access to the privileged positions to legitimate their control over the land, population and economy of Australia. Once again, it led to an imposition of definition over the Aboriginal communities as a culture that belongs to the past, they are the original owners, the ones that had ownership over the land, but have lost it (Moreton-Robinson 2003). In that sense, British colonisation tried to break the ties that bind people to the land, generating a sense of dislocation, that sense of being homeless in their own homeland (Moreton-Robinson 2003).

That not only happened in Australia, but everywhere the Western colonised. American Indigenous people learnt to eat wheat instead of corn, praise a foreign god, and were displaced from their land. (Massey 1991; Castro-Gómez 2005a). For African people the dislocation was not only subjected to the same processes of imposition of practices and cosmogonies, but also because they were bound to the commodification of their bodies and life. During the sixteenth century Africans themselves became a commodity and were ostracised by massive forced displacement: they were carried to territories far away from their home (Mignolo 2009b; Fanon 1963; Schorsch 2009). Middle Eastern and Oriental people also felt this dislocation as part of colonisation processes (Said 1978; Fanon 1963). This process of colonisation and dislocation continues today, when Western countries, corporations and organisations are engaged in a different way of colonisation: neoliberalism. The imposition of a set of rules nation-states ought to follow in order to develop did not change the vision of former colonies as repositories of cheap labour and natural resources. As was pointed out in previous chapters, with the arrival of neoliberalism, colonialism was
renovated as the salvationist discourse was recycled. But with the increase urbanisation and commodification of everydayness, people who used to be able to grow crops for their own food security, are now obliged to sell their production to multinationals and play by their own rules (Harvey 2005; Chomsky 2011). Or because of the global discourse of conservationist, people have been obliged to migrate from their land or modify alternative ways to relate with nature (Broad 1994; Martinez-Alier 2002).

The above issues are worthy of consideration because — as will be detailed in Chapter five — Usme has been subject to a series of modern impositions that have delocated the community of Usme from their traditional practices and ways to become in the world. This has generated an energy of discomfort from where activism is generated. This sense of dislocation led the community of Usme to look for alternatives to reconnect with their land, to look for ways to become part of Usme again. That entails a deconstruction of modern impositions over Usme, and therefore, a transformation of Usme in their own terms; where Usme activists are struggling to obtain the right to inhabit the city in a particular way.

3.2 An alternative approach to space

Doreen Massey (2005) posited a conceptualisation of space that challenges the conception of space and place made by the modern/colonial perspective. This thesis will follow Massey’s conceptualisation of space and it will be incorporated to address Usme as a place. Given that, it is important to point out that even when Massey criticised the Western approach to space, she also took something from each one of the approaches she addressed: from the structuralist approach Massey took the idea that identities are made up of relations, from Bergson’s (2007) approach she addressed the dynamism of life, and from poststructuralism she grabbed the idea of the constant and vitalising interruption to space. However, Massey (2005) states that those approaches understand space as, essentially, a receptacle of representation; the place where meaning is materialised. Massey’s efforts were focused on liberating space from that essentialism, so space could be conceptualised as open and alive, as something active that changes and moves like history.

Massey (2005) stated three important propositions regarding space. First, space is
constituted through interactions/relations. Second, space is the sphere where distinct trajectories coexist and therefore space is the sphere of the multiplicity. And third, space is never finished nor is it closed, it is always in the process of being made, and it is always changing.

The first proposition regarding space is pivotal to open space for other possibilities and to liberate it from the modern/colonial approaches that confined it into the sphere of representation. The statement that space is constituted through interactions does not only mean that space is a product of interactions/relations, nor means that space is the sphere where interactions happen. Instead what Massey (2005) posits is that space is the relations, connections and interactions themselves. Space is then the connections between the material and immaterial things that constitute reality, and the flows of energy, information and power, that constitute those relations. However it is a key to avoiding the understanding of space as a collection of relations or interactions; instead we must understand space from a holistic perspective as a network made up of relations and connections. It is also important to understand that the relationships that constitute space are not only human.

Space is made up of multiple connections and each one of the entities that is connected has a particular historic trajectory. That is why in the network of connections, which constitute what is space, there are multiple historic trajectories coexisting together. Consequently, space is the sphere of multiplicity. Each one of the relations offers a different historicity and multiple possibilities. This could be clarified with an example: Someone is traveling from their home to their workplace on a bicycle. This person is “travelling not across space-as-a-surface (this would be the landscape — and anyway what to humans may be a surface is not so to the rain and may not be so either to a million micro-bugs which weave their way through it — this ‘surface’ is a specific relational production), [this person is] travelling across trajectories” (Massey 1991, p. 119). Both this person’s house and their workplace are a whole network of relations and trajectories, and while this person travels, they are crossing, and connecting with many other trajectories. The pavement of the road is deteriorated by the connections it makes with wind, rain and the vehicles that circle it. That

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50 This conceptualisation of space resonates with the Deleuzean concept of assemblage, which will be explained later on in this chapter.
road was once bright and new, made with pavement that was crafted in a factory from petrol and other raw materials. That road’s historical trajectory can lead to a connection with new pavement if it is renewed, or its historical trajectory can lead to a connection with plants, if the road deteriorates until the point it deteriorates and grass grows through the cracks in pavement from the rhizome that lies beneath the road. Likewise, germs that inhabit human skin travel with that person from their home to their workplace. At the same time those germs are living their own existence, traveling across the human skin, reproducing and dying, interacting with human cells and other microorganisms. The multiplicity of trajectories is as infinite as the multiplicity of connections therefore space is infinite. Consequently, space is open, never finished, and never complete. Space is always changing, it is dynamic, and it is enlivened because it is the sphere of life.\(^{51}\)

Massey’s conception of space is powerful and it challenges many of the modern/colonial ontological assumptions. If space is connections, then it is not the receptacle of impositions of meanings; history is not imposed over it but interacts with it. Likewise, institutionalised visions of space, like the representation of it in maps, or the limits imposed by nation-states are only part of the connections that constitute space, but not the space itself. Therefore, this approach to space has the potential to deconstruct some of the modern/colonial impositions over places like Usme, that are treated by government and multinational corporations as inert repositories of resources that can been taken and used without any regard over the relations that constitute those places. However, more tools are needed for the methodological address of space and place. In that manner it is important to determine what the difference between place and space is. Hence, it is important to consider the ideas posited by Kim Dovey (2010), who, from a Deleuzean perspective that resonates with Massey’s ideas, establishes the difference between place and space.

Kim Dovey states that “In academic literature space and place are often indistinguishable or are distinguished in ways that best suit the theory, abstracted from everyday life” (2010, p. 4). For him even in Massey’s powerful notions posit space as

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\(^{51}\) From this point of view, the understanding of life is not closed to the biological living entities, it includes everything that moves. This understanding of life is similar to the notion of desire exposed by Deleuze. He stated that everything has desires, therefore everything moves (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). This will be explored in-depth later in this chapter.
something enlivened and totally concerned with everyday life (not only human, but the
everydayness of all the entities that are interacting), there is not any explicit difference
between place and space (Dovey 2010). However, in Massey’s works it is possible to deduce
that she takes places as points where the relations become more intense, like when she says
that a town as a place is a ‘bundle of trajectories’ (Massey 1991, p. 119). This has been
elaborated by Dovey (2010, p. 3) who states that the most “obvious difference between space
and place in everyday language is the intensity that connects sociality to spatiality. Space
may have physical dimensions, but it is the intensity that gives place its potency and
primacy”. This is crucial for this thesis, as it allows a more precise description of Usme as a
place that is different to other places. A place that has its own ‘intensity’, its own particular
way to make connections.

In his book, Becoming Space (2010), Dovey deconstructed the modern/colonial
conception of place (and space) which led him to the same conclusion as Massey (2005); the
understanding of place in western academy has reduced it to the sphere of representation,
making of place something fixed and closed.

Dovey (2010) (following the statements made by Casey (1997)) posits that in Western
tradition the concept of place can be traced as far as classic Greek philosophy, especially to
Aristotle, who gave it an ontological ground: to exist is to exist in a place. However, this
conception of place was replaced in Western tradition by modern/colonial views of place and
space where space became an abstract and objective compendium of measures, longitudes
and latitudes, where place is only an abstract location within spatial coordinates (Dovey
2010). Furthermore, the modern/colonial tradition created a concept of space where space is
merely the framework of time: it is the dimension where time transits, in that way space is
like a Cartesian plane and place is only a point on it.

In the twentieth century this inert vision of space was challenged by Heideggerian
approaches through a “spatial ontology of being-in-the-world” (Dovey 2010, p. 17). This
gave some groundwork to structuralist and poststructuralist approaches that deconstruct this
idea of place as merely a map by introducing the ideas of social construction of place. In that
way, for Roland Barthes (1977) place is a form of mythology, for Michel Foucault (1977)
place is a form of constructed subjectivity, and for Jacques Derrida (1998) place is a text. All of these approaches attempt to address the ways in which identities become entangled in places, most of the time addressing space and place as social constructions. In that manner, those perspectives deconstructed the social construction of place: splitting up the conceptions and preconceptions that construct the sense of place, making them visible and evident. In doing so those approaches explain why places are naturalised and depoliticised, why places are taken for granted, which is pivotal to providing a critical gaze over a place. However, those approaches, which are post-structural and social constructivists, implied the illusion that “with enough deconstruction we might all live a free life in a meaningless field of decentred space. The reality is that everyday life continues – here and now, in this body, in this space” (Dovey 2010, p. 19).

But these post-structural approaches rely “upon a reduction of place to text that bypasses the question of ontology and strips the sense of place of some of its most fertile complications, most importantly its connection to ontological security” (Dovey 2010, p. 17). Furthermore, there is a more considerable problem with these approaches: they are essentialist. Derrida, Foucault and Barthes interpret places in terms of deep and interconnected meanings that are supposed to give an ontological ground to place. In other words, for them a place exists only because there is a social construction of it. Structuralism and post-structuralism consider the sense of place as "deeply rooted in stabilized modes of dwelling (homeland and history) that cannot be changed. This can be referred to the Heideggerian view of place as a primordial ground of being. (...) [This view] conflates the sense and the ontology of place into one seamless whole, a reduction to essence that ignores social constructions of place identity" (Dovey 2010, p. 18). In other words, the essentialist reductionism of place presented by structuralism and poststructuralism relegates, once again, place to the sphere of representation. Thus places become static, closed, and complete. Dovey’s (2010) criticism of the modern/colonial conceptualisation of space is close to the critique made by Massey (2005), and both of them looked for a concept of place and space that liberated them from the epistemological and ontological chains that restrained it from the openness, the incompleteness, and the everlasting movement.

Dovey (2010) stated that Massey’s work is “The best case for an anti-essentialist
theory of place is the avowedly anti-Heideggerian work of Massey in geography. This work centres on the notion of an open, global and progressive sense of place” (Dovey 2010, p. 18). In that manner Massey’s work is important for recuperating the primacy of place as an ontological ground but without being essentialist. In that way the conceptualisation of space (as defined by the relations of multiple identities and histories, and its connections and interactions) is a step towards a conceptualisation of place that can recover the ontological ground of place avoiding the essentialism of modern/colonial views over place. Given that Massey’s works gives place a sense that is shaped by the connections of different trajectories rather than local contingencies, it “privileges routes rather than roots” (Dovey 2010, p. 19).

In that manner, to aid in the construction of an alternative relational conceptualisation of place Dovey follows Deleuze and his assemblage perspective. It implies a breakup from a static, fixed and closed essentialist gaze over place, because it has a different ontological position: one entity is not a “being in the world” but one “becoming in the world” (Deleuze & Guattari 2004). In that way a Deleuzean perspective provides that everything, including places, is in movement and constantly changing. In other words, Deleuze offers an approach that gives an account of the instability of the real world. In that manner, by following Deleuze’s ‘assemblage theory’ Dovey’s create a methodological toolbox to address places. Accordingly, it is important to elucidate the epistemological and methodological tools that the aforementioned approach offers to this thesis. The next two sections of this chapter will focus on that explanation and why it is important to this thesis.

3.3 *A Thousand Plateaus*: a toolbox to understand reality

Reality is movement, everything that exists is in movement, and there is no existence without movement. If something is static, either it appears to be static or it does not exist. In that way there are no static beings but everything is becoming, and constantly changing. That means that nothing is ever complete. This is the most important ontological implication that lies in Deleuze and Guattari’s book *A Thousand of Plateaus* (1987). For Deleuze everything that moves does so because it is alive. And everything that moves does it because it has a desire to connect.
For Deleuze and Guattari (1987) desire is the primary force of life. It is not limited to human experience and it is inherent to everyday life. The desire of a plant for light or a wasp for an orchid is no different from the desire of a person to live in a decent house or in a particular suburb (Dovey 2010). Also, “Desire does not stem from preformed subjects who lack the preformed object of desire; rather it is a process of connection where one [entity] becomes a wasp [or a wealthy person] through this connection” (Dovey 2010, p. 28). In that way, organisms and things are not subject to practices of power so much as they are produced by desires. That is, an entity can only become something by connecting with other entities, and because everything desires to become something, everything desires to connect. Hence for Deleuze power is based on desire, it is the power to become, not power over (control over) other entities. In that way power creates rather than oppresses, thus it is different from the Foucaultian perspective where power is disciplinary (Bonta & Protevi 2004; Deleuze & Guattari 1987).

Desire is the force that compels organisms and things to connect and desire exists in the form of relations or connections. Deleuze calls those connections flows of desire (Deleuze & Guattari 2004; Colebrook 2003). When a human who has the desire to teach connects with a human who has the desire to learn, there is a flow of desire, a relation in which one of the humans becomes master and the other disciple, but only in relation to each other. When a lion connects with a zebra, the flow of desire makes that the lion becomes a predator in relation to the zebra; likewise, the zebra becomes food in relation to the lion. Therefore, desire is an event that precedes being and identity; it is the life flow, the force that puts everything in motion. Usme, for example, is a repository of natural resources in relation to modern institutions,52 but it is a land to be proud of in relation to its activists.53

Desire has two poles, one paranoid (or fascist) and the other schizophrenic (or revolutionary) (Deleuze & Guattari 2004). The first pole “forms whole subjects who cling to their identities in a social production network that must not change and that reinforces the rigid (tribal or imperial) coding and channelling of flows. Faced with the release of encoded

52 This will be explored in Chapter five.
53 This will be explored in Chapters six and seven.
flows in capitalism, paranoid desire turns fascist, that is, desires a State overcoming of the flows and an escape from the world of economy into an autonomous ersatz economy” (Bonta & Protevi 2004, p. 76). In other words, the paranoid pole is the one that tries to codify the flows of desire, to control them, to stabilise them, to stop or control the inherent movement of everyday life and is related with sedentary feelings. By contrast the schizophrenic (or revolutionary) pole of desire is the one who tries to free the flows from any kind of coding or channelling, generating the free movement of things. This pole is related to nomadic affects, those affects that lead to new connections (Deleuze & Guattari 2004).

In order to show how desire is not exclusive to organic beings, Deleuze and Guattari conceived the complex metaphor: life as a machine (Calderón Gómez 2006; Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 2004); that organic entities are just desiring machines. A desiring machine is “an outcome of any series of connections: the mouth that connects with the breast, the wasp that connects with the orchid, an eye that perceives a flock of birds, or a child’s body that connects train set” (Colebrook 2003, p. xxii). As machines, entities are allowed to have some functions and connections before they imagine any produced orders or propose wholes or ends (Colebrook 2003, p. xxii). In other words, desire is a precognitive will; therefore, Deleuze’s concept of desire differs than the more traditional (especially from psychoanalysis) ways of understanding desire in which one desires because one needs to fulfil some kind of need, or because one wants some kind of sensation, like when a child desires an ice cream because he finds it delicious. Thus for Deleuze, desire does not come from a lack of something, “we desire, not because we lack or need, but because life is a process of striving and self-enhancement. Desire is a process of increasing expansion, connection and creation. Desire is ‘machinic’ precisely because it does not originate from closed organism or selves (…)” (Colebrook 2003, p. xxii).

By making connections desire is involved in a process of production of assemblages. The process involves connecting and breaking flows of energy and matter, registering those flows, and then diverting a portion of those flows (Bonta & Protevi 2004). Assemblages are a

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54 This pole of desire is the one that can be more specifically related to the Foucaultian and Bourdieusean perspectives of power.
form of stabilisation of the flows of energy and matter, and one of the key concepts in this thesis; understanding places as assemblages is pivotal to understanding what deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation processes are.

3.3.1 Assemblages

Assemblages are “compositions of desire” (Bonta & Protevi 2004), and they must be seen holistically. Assemblages are constituted by the connections and relationships (interactions) between entities that are connected by flows of desire. However, an assemblage is neither a thing nor a collection of things, rather assemblages are a ‘state of affairs’ of the connections that make up the assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Dovey 2010); they are a state of affairs of a network of relations and connections. "In the most general sense an ‘assemblage’ is a whole ‘whose properties emerge from the interactions between parts’” (De Landa 2006, quoted in Dovey, 2010, p. 29).

However, it is important to point out that an assemblage is not an organised system, "in the sense that its workings are not organic (...) The parts of an assemblage are contingent rather than necessary, they are aggregated, mixed and composed; as in a 'machine' they can be taken out and used in: other assemblages” (De Landa 2006, quoted in Dovey, 2010, p. 29). Assemblages do not have any finality, goal or an order that would control the assemblage as an entire entity. The rules of assemblages are created by their temporary connections, therefore any assemblages are temporary and unstable (Colebrook 2003; Deleuze & Guattari 1987). Dovey (2010) posits a useful example understanding the concept of assemblage:

A street [as an assemblage] is not a thing nor is it just a collection of discrete things. The buildings, trees, cars, sidewalks, goods, people, signs, etc. all come together to be the street, but it is the connections between them that makes it an assemblage or a place. It is the relations of buildings – sidewalk-roadway; the flows of traffic, people and goods; the interconnections of public to private space, and of this street to the city, that makes it a ‘street’ and distinguishes it from other place assemblages such as parks, plazas, freeways (Dovey 2010, p. 29).
Assemblages are dynamic, and their parts can change or disappear, and other parts can come and become part of the relationship network that made an assemblage. This is related to Massey (2005) and her conception of space, where space is made up of relationships and/or connections. There are assemblages made up of relationships between assemblages, like a facade that is an assemblage made up by the relations of the door assemblage, window assemblages, and paint assemblages.

Assemblages are useful to understand the world, in a way that avoids any kind of reductionism because an approach to reality through assemblages "is empirical without the essentialism of empirical science; it gives priority to experience and sensation without the idealism of phenomenology; and it seeks to understand the social construction of reality without reduction to discourse (analysis)" (Dovey 2010, p. 29). The concept of assemblage avoids essentialism by a "concentration on the historic and contingent processes that produces assemblages" (Dovey 2010, p. 29). In that manner the approach to places as assemblages is methodologically useful for understanding the changes in Usme (Usme as an assemblage). It allows this research to understand Usme in a holistically way while at the same time approaching questions about the social production of place without reducing Usme to the sphere of representation. Places are assemblages, and the semantic pole of them is just a part of the way in which the entities are connected inside. There are a lot of other entities, beside humans, that are part of assemblages, and also there is a pre-cognitive side of places, some affects are made of an assemblage.

3.3.2 Rhizomes and trees

The connections that configure an assemblage take two different forms: rhizomatic and tree-like networks or multiplicities. Tree-like networks or multiplicities tend to create hierarchical networks where the flows of energy and materiality travel in a vertical direction from the top to the bottom. They are related to static, centred structures like corporations or families (Dovey 2010; Deleuze & Guattari 1987). On the other hand, rhizomatic networks or multiplicities tend to create non-hierarchical and ‘flat’ horizontal networks. There is not a centre, and the flows of energy, information and materiality can travel from one point to another without passing intermediaries. Given that there is not a centre, rhizomes tend to be
very resilient and adaptable: if a part of the rhizome is broken there is not a major trauma in the other parts. Because rhizomatic connections are not hierarchical, they also open space to creativity, to make new connections and therefore to movement and instability (Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Colebrook 2003).

Assemblages are not made up of only rhizome-like or tree-like networks; instead every assemblage is made up or involved with both kinds of multiplicities. The junctions between two rhizomes, or a rhizome and a tree-like network, are called ‘rhizosphere’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Bonta & Protevi 2004). For example, a faculty of a university could appear to be a very hierarchical tree-like network where the flows of information travel from professors to students, and where flows of energy travel from deans and directives to professors and students. However, there are rhizome networks as well, like the friendships between students, and between professors and colleges that allow an easy and fast travel of information that increases creativity. In that way rhizomes grow, not only through faculty-programmed meetings but in the morning teas or in the coffee that students and colleagues share outside university.

Additional to the properties described, assemblages (thus places) can be smooth or striated spaces. It does not mean that there are different types of space but that there are particular spatial properties. On one hand smooth spaces can be seen as where there is a lack of boundaries or joints, but it does not mean that they are homogenous. They are identified with movement and instability. Striated spaces are, on the other hand, "where identities and spatial practices have become stabilized in strictly bounded territories with choreographed spatial practices and socially controlled identities" (Dovey 2010, p. 22). That is, striated spaces have divisions inside them, like a city that is divided in suburbs. Every real place has a mixture of the two properties.

3.3.3 Tetravalence

From a Deleuzean perspective, all assemblages are a twofold of concepts or properties. They are a mixture of pairs: becoming/being, difference/identity, stable/unstable, tree-like/rhizome-like. Those concepts or properties co-exist in a mixture, they are not in a
dialectic relation, nor are they dichotomies. They are mixed; they coexist simultaneously and in the same assemblages, in the same connections. They are combined like the milk, butter and flour in a cake. Those pairs resonate together into assemblages. There is a dynamism between them (Deleuze & Guattari 1987); "they morph or fold into the other rather than respond to it. In this sense being emerges from becoming, identities from differences. The rhizome grows roots and stems as trees are sustained by forest networks" (Dovey 2010, p. 35). However, modern/colonial metaphysics tend to give prominence to the stable side of the binaries; therefore, in order to criticise the modern/colonial perspective, it is important always to remember that "One side of each pair is consistently and implicitly privileged" (Dovey 2010, p. 35). This prioritisation is the foundation for the conceptual domination that grasps the world "in terms of pre-existing unities; the goal is not to erase one side of the concept but to rethink which side comes first" (Dovey 2010, p. 35).

Tetravalence of assemblages is a key philosophical term, which gives an account of how assemblages are structured. As "They are structured along two intersecting dimensions (…) [The first dimension is] best understood as materiality vs expression, links the material interaction of bodies and spaces with the expression of meaning through propositions, language and representation. This is not a dialectic — assemblages are always at once both material and expressive" (Dovey 2010, p. 29). The material pole of an assemblage is referred to the material parts that configure it, while the expression pole is denoted by the embodiment of ‘codes’ (languages and meanings) that control the forms of expression in an assemblage (Dovey 2010).

The second dimension of assemblages is territorialisation and deterritorialisation. It mediates the stabilisation and destabilisation of an assemblage. This dimension is intersected with the material/expressive dimension because territories are inscribed through a mix of material and expressive boundaries. It is important to point out that the term territory marks the boundaries of an assemblage, and that it is not necessarily referring to territories in the common sense of the word. However, the creation of boundaries is creative rather than defensive; territory is a form of becoming at home in the world (Dovey 2010; Calderón Gómez 2006; Colebrook 2003; Deleuze & Guattari 1987).
3.3.4 Deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation

According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987) the “Territorialisation/deterritorialisation process takes three steps: 1. Establishing a centre of order (which is fragile); 2. Inscribing a boundary around that centre (organising a limited space that protect the ‘germinal forces of a task to fulfil or a deed to do’ from the chaos that is kept outside; and finally 3. Breaching that boundary to venture out”. It is important to remember that from a Deleuzean perspective territories are not conceived of in the modern/colonial way. For Deleuze a territory is merely the boundaries of an assemblage, which are not only defined by material boundaries. It resonates with the definition of space made by Massey, because it established that space is made up of relations, like assemblages, that are made up of connections. Hence, there are connections that mark the boundaries — are the relations who define a place — an assemblage. As Dovey (2010, p. 31) states “The repetitive events of everyday life are the ones who construct a sense of home through familiarity but this sense of home means nothing without the journey, the connection with difference (the process of territorialisation)”. Given that, the first rule of any assemblage is to discover which territory they enclose.

For example, the assemblage of Usme has material boundaries defined by the jurisdiction of it. But these boundaries are stretched by the people who go in and out of Usme. The research completed for this thesis in Usme is in fact stretching the territory (the boundaries) of Usme, due to the embodiment of an additional connection between me as researcher and Usme, and Usme activists, I became part of the assemblage and extended the rhizomatic structure of Usme. But at the same time, as this thesis stretches out the boundaries of the assemblage of Usme, it is also deterritorialising it, breaking the original assemblage, adding more connections, such as the people who read this. However, once someone else reads this thesis, the assemblage of Usme becomes something different — even when it may appear to be the same — it has been reterritorialised.

In that sense, deterritorialisation is produced when there is change in the semiotic material that gives a place their meaning, which could be caused by a new organism coming into the territory, or by old inhabitants leaving the territory, or because there is a substantial change in the social life of a place (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). On the other hand,
reterritorialisation is “the process of forming a new territory, following (and always together with) deterritorialisation. Re-territorialisation is never return to and old territory, and even if a body similar to what was de-territorialized or fled from is reconstituted body, it is not the same body, not the same state, not the same discourse, not the same species” (Bonta & Protevi 2004, p. 78).

It is arguable that some indigenous communities have begun the process of deterritorialisation/reterritorialisation of the assemblages of their cultures and places. Following Gómez-Montañez (2013a, 2013b), Ulloa (2004) and Stewart-Harawira (2005) it is arguable that indigenous communities in South America have made a reterritorialisation of their homelands after five hundred years of modern/colonial rule. In many countries around the globe, the discourse of multiculturalism that comes with contemporaneous globalisation — and the changes in legislation of nation-states that now are trying to include and protect indigenous communities — open a space for a reconstruction of their indigenous cosmogonies. The reconfiguration of the boundaries of the assemblages gives them some alternative sense of belonging because in order to reconstruct their cosmogony they have to negotiate the meanings of their land and other cultural references with academia, the state, Western culture, and their own ideal images about their selves. This process is complex and requires the creation and recreation of connections and disconnections with each one of the discourses that enter in the negotiation.

Additionally, it is possible to argue that in some western places, ethnic tourism is one of the ways in which deterritorialisation and then reterritorialisation processes occur. For instance, Schnell (2003) has found in Lindsborg, USA a community that has exploited their stereotypes as Swedish migrant descendants to undertake tourism. According to Schnell (2003) before ethnic tourism, Lindsborg was a town in Kansas with a big Swedish descendant community, in the 1960s there was an explosion of ethnic tourism in the US that attracted tourists of Swedish descendants. After that, in order to attract more tourists to the town it was transformed into a stereotyped version of Sweden. Now it is called Little Sweden, USA. The change of the place is not only cosmetic, but semiotic too. Before ethnic tourism, the inhabitants of Lindsborg did not feel any different from any other US citizens, as having a
Swedish ascendance was not of particular importance. But after the development of ethnic tourism, the Swedish descendants became worried about their ascendance, and tried to recover their cultural heritage. Now they identify as Swedish Americans. In that manner, what happened in Lindsborg is a deterritorialisation of a US town followed by a reterritorialisation of the place as a Swedish town in the US. The boundaries of an assemblage are not only defined by the connections made, but by the internal uniformities of those connections, by its internal homogeneity. Therefore, assemblages can admit some connections while excluding others, and it destabilises its boundaries. And as any process that destabilises boundaries, any process that increases internal heterogeneity is considered deterritorialisation.

Additionally, the way in which an assemblage is segmented is pivotal to understanding how they create boundaries, how they are territorialised. There are three main forms of segmentation: binary, circular and linear. An assemblage is binary segmented when it is divided into social dichotomies: poor/rich, rural/urban, Western/non-Western, rational/irrational (Dovey 2010, p. 32). Examples of this are retirement villages (young/old), or in the case of Usme the division between the urban versus rural way of life. Circular segmentation is when segments are connected in a hierarchical relation, one encircling the other (Dovey 2010, p. 32). A professional football soccer player is encircled by a club, a club is encircled by a national federation of football soccer, and the national federation is encircled by FIFA. Just as much as Usme’s jurisdiction is encircled by Bogotá’s jurisdiction, which is encircled by Colombian jurisdiction. Finally, there is linear segmentation. This is a division inside the assemblages that classifies the connections as a progression over time. It is independent of contiguous spaces; for example, when a person goes to preschool then to middle school and then to high school (Dovey 2010, p. 32).

These segmentation types are related to practices of power. Hence, binary segments are not only divided but ensure that there is no place for hybridity, like the membership to a club that sets its members apart from the rest of society. Concentric segments can guarantee a resonance between places at different scales and rungs of a hierarchy, like a franchise that resonates with headquarters. Linear segmentation aims to stabilise sequences of identity.
formation, stimulate certain behaviours and construct a sense of hierarchy. Those three segmentation types are interconnected and overlapped in the assemblages, since segments may be lodged in binary, nested (circulated) and sequential relations simultaneously (Dovey 2010, p. 32).

3.4 Places as assemblages

Given that there is a conceptual opposition between stability and movement, there is the danger of falling into the misconception of space as movement and place as stability and in that way finding space and place as opposites, "[t]he concept of place has been widely misrecognized as an organic tree-like concept that organizes spatial meanings around an essentialized stem (…). Place can be identified with the axis of territorialisation along which assemblages become stabilized" (Dovey 2010, p. 36). However, thinking about place as something stable, striated and sedentary is a "self-deceptive and insular view (…) [since] place is an assemblage that stabilizes dwelling but also encompasses lines of movement and processes of becoming" (Dovey 2010, p. 36). Consequently, what is intrinsic to a place, as a particular kind of assemblage, is a field of differences, a rhizome-like multiplicity, from which tree-like stabilised identities are planted.

Places are neither material things nor fragments of imagination, because the materiality of the assemblage is not grounded: the materiality of a place is not by itself that place, but neither is it the semiotic pole. Places are assemblages of spatial practices and meanings, "more than a location or site they are also distinguished by intensity of experience (connections and interactions)” (Dovey 2010, p. 37). They embody certain intensities of interaction and events, and that is what constitutes them as assemblages.

Given that places are in a continuous state of change, they are open, never complete, never finished, made up of relations, and because they always contain rhizomatic networks, they are the sphere of multiplicity, of heterogeneity. In that way, the main difference between space and place is that while space is the whole network of connections that constructs reality, place is a point where there is a high density of those connections, where those connections try to stabilise their interactions, delimiting ephemeral boundaries and creating a
territory to those connections. In that way places are momentary, interconnected to each other, and their parts are not mutually exclusive. There are as many places as there are connections. In that manner Massey, Dovey and Deleuze resonate together, from their perspective it is possible to understand place and space in a counter-Heiddeggerian way; in a counter-modern/colonial way, negating the false naturalism of the ontological premises that understand space and place as the centre of stability, as pure representation.

As was previously mentioned, this conceptualisation of space and place is crucial to this thesis, as it allows a more holistic comprehension of the processes of change that are happening in Usme. It develops an understanding of the modern/colonial impositions over Usme, and the consequences at semantic and material level of those impositions, and how they are part of the assemblage of Usme. At the same time, it allows an understanding of the ways in which the activists are defying those impositions, the alternative they are creating, and how their mobilisation is effectively changing the assemblage of Usme, and transforming it into a different place. One that is empowered and one that is proposing alternatives to become in the world. However, this thesis is not going to make a schematic description of Usme, like dividing the parts of its assemblage, or typifying which connection or part of Usme is part of, for example, the rhizomatic network. Instead, the conceptualisation of space described in this chapter is embedded in the whole analysis and description of Usme, and the way in which the activists are driving a process of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of their land.
Chapter 4 – Methodology

4.1 Research problem

From social science perspective, there is a growing body of literature on environmentalism, the environmental movement and environmental justice, especially in the US, Europe and the rest of the West. However, the literature concerning environmental movements, resistance movements, and environmental justice in Latin America — and other ‘non-Western’ contexts — is not as large as in the West, but there are some good examples, like the work of Joan Martinez-Alier (2002). This is surprising taking into account that the deeper consequences of global warming and environmental injustice are suffered by the people from countries that were former Western colonies. These countries are not ready to face global warming. They lack the economic and technological infrastructure to allow them to adapt to the environmental changes within a global capitalist system; because of this it is probable that food will become unaffordable for the poor populations of those countries, while the natural resources are used by multinationals rather than local populations (IBON Foundation 2009; Gleick n.d.; Martinez-Alier 2002) However, resistance and social movements are trying to rectify this problem, adapting to climate change and struggling against environmental injustice.

Nonetheless, a small but growing body of literature covering these topics has emerged in recent years in Latin America (Martinez-Alier 2002; Archila & García 2003; Ulloa 2001; Tobasura Acuña 2006, 2007; Carrizosa Humañ 1997, 2007; Carvajal 2010). These researchers are starting to enlighten the complex phenomenon of the resistance and environmental movements in non-Western contexts on a global stage, like Zapatismo in Mexico, which is one of the most important and known cases studied in Latin America (Gadea & Scherer-Warren 2008; McCaughey & Ayers 2003; Kuecker 2004; Vargas-Hernández 2007) However, the deeper the research, the more questions arise from it, leaving gaps in the understanding of the environmentalist movements in Latin America. Some of the more recent research in Latin America includes research done in the areas of environmental injustice in urban contexts (Auyero & Swistun 2008); the relationship between the indigenous people and the environmental movements in rural contexts (Roa, 2008; Ulloa 2004); and
resistance movements (Martinez-Alier 2002). It is important to point out that environmentalism in Latin American peri-urban and urban contexts remains unexplored by scholars. Moreover, the transformation of spaces that the resistance movements drive and push on these scenarios, through environmental discourses and the indigenous identity, is still marginally explored.

Given the abovementioned gap, by undertaking a case study, this research aims to provide further information about environmental justice and resistant movements in Latin-American contexts. Case study research provides the opportunity for a contextualised and empirical account of urbanisation and planning processes through a detailed study of one area. It provides the narratives and the material to challenge and critique out-dated understandings of the impact of urbanisation and planning on the everyday lived realities of communities, such as the community of Usme studied for this thesis. It enables a close or otherwise in-depth understanding of a single or a small number of cases set in a real world context. The distinctiveness of the case study also serves as Yin (2009, p. 18) observes, as

An empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g., a “case”), set within its real-world context—especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

In this manner, this thesis provides a description of one case of environmental justice and resistant movements in peri-urban territories: Usme, a poor locality on the periphery of Bogotá. This thesis gives an account on how activists from Usme transform their territories in order to face and resist the pressure that global capitalism puts on their land and everyday life, and how in the process of transforming their territory they are creating a node in the network of decolonial thinking. In this manner, this research addresses the understanding of the complex relationship between environmental movements and indigenous/campesino imagery, giving an account of what indigeneity is for the activists in Usme, and what it means

55 Bogotá has twenty localities or districts; each one of those can be understood similarly to the local city councils in Australian jurisdiction. They have a certain autonomy from the central government, independent budgets, laws and policies. However, they do not have a representative on the senate and even when there is a local council elected by popular vote, the executive power is in hands of the local mayor, who is not elected by vote but is chosen by Bogotá’s mayor.
when they declare themselves as indigenous people and campesino descendants. At the same time, this case study will help us to understand how the urban and rural spaces are symbolically, culturally and politically constructed in Latin America. In a few words, this case study aims to describe and understand the reterritorialisation process that Usme’s environmentalists are making in Usme, and the relationship of this process with the identity of these activists and their vision of the world.

The case study methodology used in this research had five steps or phases. Some of them were completed simultaneously, such as the first and second step. Likewise, the third and fourth steps at some point overlapped. During all of those steps, I reflected on my positionality as a researcher, as a PhD student in Australia, as a middle class Colombian and my relationship with the activists. So I could understand how this influenced the description of Usme that is this thesis. The steps used were: 1) the construction of a social profile of Usme; 2) compilation and analysis of informational pieces created by Usme activists over a period of ten years; 3) Participant observation of public gatherings in Usme; 4) interpretation and analysis of the data; and 5) writing up the findings. This following section of the chapter will describe each one of the methods used in this research.

### 4.2 The case study methodology

Case study research has been understood in many ways, and it is often presented as a particular method or a particular kind of research design (Blaikie 2010). It is very often presented as an approach to research in social sciences that is different to an ethnographic approach, grounded theory, phenomenological approach or narrative (or interpretative) research (Creswell 2013).

However, as was pointed out by Goode and Hat, (1992. p. 331) and Gomm, Hammersley and Foster (2000), case studies, rather than being a particular method or collection of methods, are a way to address social data about phenomenon in holistic way that does not break the unitary character of the social data. This is important for this research as I am using a relational way to address space, as something that is composed of connections (Massey 2005). This thesis approaches places by describing them as Deleuzean assemblages
That is why places have to be understood holistically, as a network of connections. In the case of Usme this may include modern/colonial and decolonial expressions as constitutive of the assemblage. Consequently, this case study will address the deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation process in Usme as a whole. In order to do that this research was done from an intercultural dialogue and an ethnographic perspective. In that way, rather than build a hypothesis and test it in a particular context, I tried to establish a dialogue at the same level with the activists from Usme, and my role as researcher was — more or less — the translation of their relationship with space into academic terms.

But in order to clarify how this was done, it is necessary to clarify what should be generally understood as a case study. First of all, it is important to point out that a case study, as its name implies, is the research of one or a small number of cases. However, the case study is subject to an in-depth analysis: detailed information about a large number of features of a case is gathered and analysed, and there is no concern for controlling the variables to measure the effects of variables. Rather than that, the main concern in a case study is the understanding of the case by itself (Gomm et al. 2000, p. 4) in a holistic way. Hence, an ethnography is an example of a case study. The features studied in a case study research are often studied in a longitudinal or retrospective way, which allows the researcher to provide an account of the historical trajectory of the case, and the case’s changes over time. Because of its way to approach social research, it is not the objective of case study to generalise;56 however, given the in-depth analysis made by a case study; it is possible to theorise from them.

The case study approach is different to other approaches to social enquiry, like social surveys or social experiments, first, because the scope of the research, surveys’ address a large number of cases. Second, because the holistic approach of case study, that does not section reality into small parts but analyses phenomena as a complete whole. Third, because of the aim of experimentation and samples of controlling and measure variables, the quantification of data is a priority for non-case studies. Fourth, because the aim of a case

56 However, some researchers used to compare case studies in order to construct generalisations about different social phenomena.
study is the description of a single (or few) cases, whereas the aim of social survey or experimentation is the generalisation of findings. In that way, whereas the validation of experimentation and survey can be found in their ability to generalise, the validation of case study data is found in their ability to describe in detail the case that has been studied.

Because the aim of this thesis is to describe the reterritorialisation process in Usme: describing the meanings, feelings, epistemologies, historical trajectories, and all the small details that construct the relationship of Usme activists with their land, it was necessary to undertake an in-depth description of that relationship, and a case study was the best way to address the research. It allowed me to establish a trans-cultural dialogue with Usme activists and to create a description of their land — and its transformation — from their own perspective.

4.3 Case study type

The bibliography about case study indicates that there are different kinds of case study, depending on the way it addresses the data they could be factual, interpretative or evaluative (Zucker 2009). Depending on their aims they could be exploratory, descriptive or interpretative (Zucker 2009). At the same time, depending on their scope and their general intentions, they could be comparative or not (Gomm et al. 2000; Blaikie 2010). This does not mean that the different types of case study are mutually exclusive; on the contrary, a case study can be included in many types at the same time. In that way this research is descriptive, in the sense that it aims to describe the process of reterritorialisation in Usme, but at the same time is interpretative, given that my position as a researcher is more one of a translator, and given that any translation is not exempt from the translator biography and way to understand the world, it becomes an interpretative process. It is also a non-comparative case study (although it could be compared with similar cases around the world), rather than trying to create generalisations, looks for a thick description of the case (Geertz 1992).

It is common in case studies that the unit of observation is the case itself. Thus, the observational unit of this research was the reterritorialisation process in Usme, which is what it aims to describe. But to describe that process, it is important to observe some sources of
information that contain the data required to construct the description of the case. Those sources of information are called the units of observation (Barriga & Henríquez 2011). Since a case study is a holistic approach to research, those datasets were addressed and interpreted within and from the context of the case. The main units of observation used in this research have a direct relation with the methods used, they are:

- NGO’s and government’s reports about Usme.
- Previous research conducted in Usme.
- Cultural and academic productions made by the activists, such as:
  - Short movies
  - Books
  - Leaflets
- Casual conversations with activists during fieldwork.
- Casual conversations with people from Usme.
- Participation in activities organised by the activists that include, but are not limited to:
  - Ecological walking
  - Storytelling meetings with senior campesinos
  - Storytelling with Muisca’s leaders
  - Educational activities at schools
  - Rallies for pro-ecological justice
  - Camping
- Participation in activities and spaces created by the government in which the activists participate, such as:
  - Water governance in public forums
  - Archaeological findings in public forums
  - Land planning in public forums.
4.4 Social profile

Social profiles are methodological tools used by sociologists since the first half of the twentieth century. They were especially popular in the US at that time (Sanders 1960). They have been used primarily to take a ‘snap shot’ of some place or community, that provides the information necessary for policymakers, or for action researchers to act in a particular community or place (Sanders 1960; McDermaid & Barnstable 2001). That ‘snapshot’ gives an account of “(a) land use and ownership; (b) economic vitality; (c) community capacity; (d) governmental and political structures; [...] (e) public attitudes; (f) demography; and (g) historical trajectory (McDermaid & Barnstable 2001, p. 3).

In that way social profiles have been a methodological tool widely used by urban and rural planning, ecology, economy, development, and even marketing disciplines, using this tool in order to determine the impact of certain actions in the communities. However, there has been a limited formal use of social profile within the social sciences academia. Given that, there is limited information about social profile methodology and it is not usually mentioned in the social sciences methods and methodology manuals (Blaikie 2010; Creswell 2013; Mills et al. 2010; Zucker 2009; King et al. 1994; Gibbs 2010), and is only mentioned in policymaking and evaluation manuals, where it is often taken lightly, as an easy and fast way to gain insight into a community (McDermaid & Barnstable 2001; Sanders 1960). Nonetheless, due to their capacity to provide ‘snap shots’ of places or communities, social profiles can be useful tools to understand and comprehend community level processes. But to be useful, social profiles must address a place or community in a holistic and complex whole, rather than a collection of characteristics.

In that sense this thesis followed the notion of social profile developed by Yaso Nadarajah and Martin Mulligan (2011), who, from a ‘community engaged’ perspective, explored the local responses to the 2004 tsunami disaster in Sri Lanka and India. Their ‘community engaged’ ‘research can, at one level, be seen as a form of community mapping. However, the word ‘engaged’ signifies that it must be conducted within an ethos of

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57 For detailed information about community engaged research please refer to Mulligan and Nadarajah (2008).
reciprocity, recognising, for example, that local knowledge and ‘external’ expertise can sometimes be usefully combined” (Nadarajah & Mulligan 2011, p. 315). This allows the researchers to obtain more ‘authentic’ findings while at the same time assist the community to find alternative ways to deal with the challenges it encounters, like obtaining new skills in the design and implementation of social research (Nadarajah & Mulligan 2011, p. 315).

From the research perspective posited by Mulligan and Nadarajah (2008), it is necessary to combine different methods and approaches, quantitative and qualitative that could provide the most detailed account of a community or a place. In that sense, Nadarajah and Mulligan (2011) were part of a team of researchers that undertook long-term research of five different places in Sri Lanka and India affected by the 2004 tsunami: Sri Lanka and Seenigama, Urban Hambantota, Thirukkovil, and Sainthamaruthu; and in India, north Chennai.

Their research started as soon as one year after the tsunami and was maintained for approximately five years (Mulligan & Nadarajah 2011, 2012). With the cooperation of local fieldworkers, they were able to integrate different methods such as:

(a) a random survey conducted at a household level, which focuses on community linkages, associations and practices; (b) a collection of community stories that can be subjected to narrative analysis; (c) semi-structured, strategic, interviews with community members and people involved in aid delivery regarding processes of dislocation and reintegration; and (d) community member profiles based on short interviews that can be turned into concise narratives. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with a range of community leaders and representatives of relevant community-based organisations in each of the study areas and interviews were also used to piece together the history of the local area. (Nadarajah & Mulligan 2011, p. 315)

In that manner, they were able to obtain a plural account of those communities, which allowed them to understand the multiplicity of the historical trajectories within a community that in other ways could be understood as more homogeneous (Nadarajah & Mulligan 2011, p. 315). In that manner, Nadarajah and Mulligan (2011) were able to construct social profiles
that are less a ‘snapshot’ of those communities in a particular point of time, but that are an account of the “ways in which they might be able to sustain themselves over time and in the face of a range of ‘external’ challenges” (Nadarajah & Mulligan 2011, p. 315). That is why they were able not only to construct an account of the state of affairs of a community in a particular point of its historical trajectory, but also to understand how those communities are able to resist and face extreme challenges.

That is why social profile was an important method for this research because it allowed me to have a big picture of Usme, as if I had a flying camera over my case study. But at the same time it allowed me to develop a more complete understanding of Usme’s complexity and about the way the territory has been being transformed, not only by and for the activists, but by and for the everyday Usmenian who was not actively involved in the process of reshaping the space in Usme, every day residents of Usme such as the worker who left his/her child in the community child care, the street vendor, the people at a bus station, etc.

In order to construct the social profile of Usme the first step was to construct a preliminary social profile of Usme based on secondary sources. During this step I analysed reports made by the government and NGOs, previous research done within the community, and publications from Usme’s local organisations. This was important to understanding the hegemonic gaze over Usme’s territory, and the publicly recognised problems, and the most important events and symbols for the community in Usme. It will provide important and necessary information for the case study, such as demography (average age, sex ratio, composition of the families, average income, average educational level, ethnicity), history and changes of the place (migration, urbanisation, demography, landscape, relation with the government, social and resistance movements history, and important symbols), problems and issues that have affected Usme (past and present problems). Additionally, it is important to identify which are the social movements, political institutions and other organisations involved in those matters. It is worth pointing out that one of the most central organisations to
this process was Corporación Casa ASDOAS. The social profile provided the primary data for Chapter two and five, and enabled me to set the context for this study. After I finished collecting data with participant observation, I went back to the social profile and reconstructed it, adding the information obtained in the fieldwork, and making different interpretations of the previously analysed data.

4.5 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is a methodology used primarily in the field of linguistics. It considers that social reality is constructed by texts. Those texts are embodied by individuals who perform them in their everyday life; in that way, those texts are performative utterances that constitute social life because those texts allow us to communicate with other individuals, and make connections (Austin 1979; Austin et al. 1975). For that reason, discourse analysis “examines the patterns of language across texts and considers the relationship between language and the social and cultural context in which it is used (…) it examines how the language is influenced by relationships between the participants as well as the effects the use of language has upon social identities and relations” (Paltridge 2012, p. 3). In discourse analysis photos, videos, everyday conversation and any form of communication are also considered a text: therefore, a discourse. Given this any kind of communication can be addressed using discourse analysis.

In this research I used an interpretative approach to discourse analysis. I took data from cultural and academic productions made by the activists, such as: short movies, books, maps, leaflets, and pictures. The process of interpretation of that data was similar to the one used to interpret the data from the participant observation. In that way I used a CAQDAS to organise the information. I looked for connections, relations and hierarchies within the data, and compared these findings with the ones obtained from the participant observation. It allowed me to understand how the public discourse about Usme has been constructed, how it affects the community in Usme, and how the activists’ actions affect this discourse. In that

58 Casa ASDOAS is an environmentalist organisation that looks for the reterritorialisation of Usme and the resistance to the Western urbanisation of their land by defending and preserving the historical memory of the place. Casa ASDOAS will be explored further in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.
way, the discourse analysis allowed me to see another aspect of the reterritorialisation process in Usme.

4.5 Participant observation

Participant observation is the most important method used in ethnography. It was introduced in sociology and urban anthropology by the Chicago School in the 1920s and 1930s (Footwhite 1935). And since then it remains one of the most important and useful ways to collect qualitative rich data about a place or community. Usually it implies extended periods of research time within a community. During the time the researcher spends in a community it is expected that he/she not only takes information from observing, but also from informal interviews, casual conversations, and the analysis of any kind of data that the researcher considers useful to the research, e.g., biographies, life stories, stories of the participants, analysis of documents, etc. (Mills et al. 2010; Hernández-Losada 2013). Participant observation implies a close relationship with the community, in a way that the researcher is able “to live and breathe the everyday realities of the social worlds in which they are interested” (Mills et al. 2010, p. 653). Because of this it is expected that this method will provide a detailed account of the everyday life, social and political structure, and history within a community or a place. But at the same time because of the close bond that the researcher made with the community, participant observation implies emotional distress and the danger of providing biased accounts of communities (Behar 1996; Bourgois 1993; Bourgois 2002; Wacquant 2004).

Usually the researcher enters the community overtly; that means that the community knows who the researcher is and what the purpose of its research is. Because of that, it is usual that the researcher enters the community with the help of someone who belongs in the community. The Chicago School calls this person the privileged observer (Footwhite 1935). This privileged observer introduces the researcher into the community, and helps him/her to understand the everyday life in the community (Wacquant 2004). It is common that the researcher keeps a journal with a detailed account of the events, places, documents, conversations and any useful data that he/she encounters during the fieldwork (Footwhite 1935).
However, in this research, participant observation was not conducted in a strictly ethnographic way. Instead I participated in the public activities carried out by the activists. In that manner as an attendee, I did a discourse analysis of those activities. This was useful to understand how the process of reterritorialization was happening. By attending and analysing the public gatherings, I was able to elucidate the meanings they assign to the land, the old meanings, the new meanings, and the meanings they think they are giving to Usme’s territory. Also, and in relation to identity issues, I could participate in the relationship the activists have with the Muiscas indigenous people, the campesinos in Usme, the way they conceive their genealogy, and their narrative of their ancestrality. The participant observation was also useful for observing the embodiment of their identities, their epistemology in praxis, and the way they participate in the process of reterritorialisation. At the same time, it also became particularly apparent to me that this participant observation was also leading me into connect with people who were sharing their stories orally. Do not directly to me, I was also part of the group who was listening to these oral stories. And these stories influenced the way in my discourse analysis was analysed. This led me to consider for an ethics application to ensure that my work was also ethically approved within the academic processes. And it also became important for me to ensure that the names of the oral story tellers were also protected by using pseudonyms through the thesis.

In order to complete my participant observation, I contacted Casa ASDOAS, not only because they are one of the key activist organisations in Usme, but also because, due to my previous research in the community (Vargas-Mariño 2010), I had built a rapport with them, which saved a lot of time for this research. For this participant observation different activities such as:

- Participation in activities made by the activists that include, but are not limited to:
  - Ecological walks
  - Storytelling meetings with senior campesinos
  - Storytelling with Muiscas’ leaders
  - Educational activities at schools
- Rallies for pro-ecological justice
- Camping

- Participation in activities and spaces created by the government where the activist participated, such as:
  - Water governance public forums
  - Archaeological finding public forums’
  - Land planning public forums.

The fourth and final step of my fieldwork consisted of the interpretation and analysis of the data. All of the fieldwork journals were transcribed and ordered using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). This process allowed me to find the connections between the different clusters of data I found in the fieldwork and in the discourse analysis, compared with the different points of view the activists and the community have, and comparing them with the government’s views and policies, and with my own views. In that manner I was able to gain a comprehension of Usme as a place, and of the way the activists are trying to change it.

After the interpretation of the data I codified the information in order to interpret it. There were no pre-codification or pre-categories to organise the information. I started from a rough codification, which I sharpened along the process: at the beginning I tried to organise the information into some preliminary nodes, and then I looked for similar and equal nodes so I could start to eliminate unnecessary nodes. Subsequently I looked for hierarchies and relationships between the different nodes. During the whole process I created annotations of the information in order to interpret it.

In that sense the codification was a way to organise and navigate the information obtained during the fieldwork. This way to address the data allowed me to build a deep and thick description of the case study, which guided me to understanding the case and to provide

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59 The information obtained during the research was kept safe and confidential in Ubuntu One Server, a cloud hard disk drive owned by the Canonical Foundation. There the information is safe from virus, trojans, worms, hackers, physical destruction, third-party, and even government access.
answers to the research questions. It that way the participant observation allowed me to build a new social profile through a thick description of Usme. It is important to understand that a:

Thick description is (...) set apart from thin description by the former’s attention to the meaning of actions. In the classic example, one boy’s eye involuntarily twitches, while another boy winks. The physical phenomena are the same, but a wink is the stuff of culture, whereas a twitch is not. In researching a culture, the ethnographer must record the winks, not the twitches. (Wilk 2007)

However, the researcher must be really careful and cannot impose meanings to the actions; the researcher must abduct the meanings from the cultural and people’s social context (Blaikie 2010). The people who belong to a particular social space are the ones who really know the meaning of their actions (Fals-Borda & Rahman 1991). In that sense, the researcher’s role is to reinterpret the actions, not by giving them new meanings, but by understanding the actions in the contexts in which they are performed. The researcher should make evident all of the meanings and uses that are condensed in one symbol or action for the outsiders (and sometimes for the insiders) (Turner 1980), which means that the knowledge must be taken from the ground. From this perspective, it is important to think that "The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong" (Geertz 1992 quoted by Wilk 2007). In this sense it is possible to read the actions, symbols, and their emotional pole as a cognitive ensemble, allowing the description of the anthropologist or social researcher to be theory by itself. This position is different to the positivist tradition where the inductive or deductive process requires the creation or the existence of a theory that indicates how the social world works.

4.6 Framing the research

The process of the participant observation was realised in the second semester of 2012 when I spent six months in Usme. I also collected any possible information produced by the activists during that period. I started the transcription of the field journals during the second month of the fieldwork, and I finished it three months after the participant observation was
completed. The codification and interpretation started immediately after the fieldwork was done and I spent six months completing it.

The group of activists that participated in the research were primarily from Casa ASDOAS, as well as some of the activists from campesino organisations and Nación Muisca Chibcha. They opened the doors of Usme for me by inviting me to rallies, walks, word circles, deliberative spaces opened by the government, educational activities at schools, and camping activities. They explained to me all of the cultural practices and meanings of those activities. They also told me the history of Usme and the ways in which they resist. Finally, they let me participate in everyday activities where they told me the preoccupations they had, and asked me for advice on how to undertake social research. I also got to know some activists and environmentalists from organisations different to Casa ASDOAS and even some from outside Usme, but who were very interested in Usme’s problems. All of the participants belong to grassroots organisations, and there were no activists from big NGOs or other high profile groups. At the same time, some government officers who participated in the activities organised by Casa ASDOAS participated in the research, while ensuring that their names were not used. Finally, some community members who sympathise or antagonise with the activists were present for some of the activities organised by Casa ASDOAS or the government, or participated in casual conversations during lunches, brunches or everyday activities in Usme. The names of those people were also changed in order to maintain their anonymity. The documents used in the discourse analysis are recorded in Table 3.1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of informational piece</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Activists</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>Journalists and news agencies</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaflets</td>
<td>Activists</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leaflets</td>
<td>Activists and academics</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photos</td>
<td>Activists</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photos</td>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Photos</td>
<td>Media</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music tracks</td>
<td>Activists</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music tracks</td>
<td>People from Usme</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>Activists</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>Academia</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
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Table 3.1: Documents used in the discourse analysis

4.7 The research as a process of reflexivity and ethical considerations.

Approaching environmentalists from Usme was not an easy job. Based on my previous experience as a researcher, I had encountered some difficulties that could affect the description of Usme that is this thesis. First, I was always seen as an outsider, even after I had spent considerable time with the group and I understood some of their cultural codes. As I have said previously Bogotá is a very segregated city, so there are some stereotypes around the people who live in the different areas of the city. I come from the north of the city, where
most of the people belong to the middle and upper classes. Some of the activists did not like my presence due to the stereotypes associated with the middle and upper classes. For them I never stop being a gomelito and they put a barrier with me based on our class positions. A few of them, the ones who never trusted me, think of the people of the north as their enemy: the supporters of the multinationals and the government; due to the connections of the economic and political elites with the north of the city, and the perception of the south of the city as the forgotten territory. Some of them thought that I am one of those people who do not care about the territory, because I do not live in it, and they believed that I would take advantage of what they offered me.

Second, my main contact with the community was Casa ASDOAS, and even when I had some contact with other groups of activists, my research could have a bias by reflecting primarily Casa ADOAS activists’ points of view. Third, since I left the field very important events have happened in Usme that could affect the process of reterritorialisation. Given the limited time I had to complete this research, and that when I came back to Australia to interpret the information I lost permanent contact with many of the activists who are now co-opted by governmental institutions. For the activists of Usme face-to-face contact is very important, and they told me that they would discuss all the events that had developed since I left the field, the next time I visited them in Usme. Because of that I was not able to gain an in-depth account of those events, at least not from the perspective of the inhabitants of Usme. Nevertheless, they are taken into account, as many of them are the result of their constant mobilisation.

4.7.1 Questions of reflection and reflexivity in methodological process

In case studies, especially when a qualitative approach is used, researchers must be aware of their own limitations, of their own preconceptions and prejudices. One of the key ways to do this is through reflexivity, As Finlay and Gough (2008 p. 1) expressed “[r]eflexivity is a challenge to conventional ideals of science which favour professional distance and objectivity over engagement and subjectivity.” Following a Bourdieusian approach, Hernandez-Losada (2013, p. 4) posited that reflexivity is:
[A] process that encompasses all stages of fieldwork and the production of sociological knowledge, it is a relevant tool for starting to think about my position in relation to research participants. This process allows [the researcher] to consider the power relations that define group membership, as well as to discuss the necessity of rethinking the use of the concepts of insider and outsider as a dyad. These concepts appeal to the idea of the unique and ‘immediate knowledge’ of the social agent about the field, and the ‘absolute knowledge’ of the impartial researcher.

But reflexivity is a hard and difficult undertaking, as it challenges many of the ontological and epistemological foundations a researcher takes for granted (Finlay and Gough 2008). On top of that, there are many ways of engaging reflexively, and this depends on the aims of the process. Reflexivity:

“can be understood as a confessional account of methodology or as examining our own personal, possibly unconscious, reactions. It can mean exploring the dynamics of our researcher- researched relationship. Alternatively, it can focus more on how the research is co-constituted and socially situated, through offering a critique or through deconstructing pretences of established meanings” (Finlay and Gough 2008 p.17).

One way to do undertake reflexivity is to write oneself into one’s research. Weinberg, 2008, p.349 suggests that “we must be able to show within the text the underlying reasons that shape our particular questions in a particular way, we must show the backstage of our research”. But this reflexivity must not be done to avoid biases of the research. On the contrary, ad as it was pointed out by Ruth Behar in her book *The Vulnerable Observer* (1996) it must be a device that allows us to become vulnerable, to get closer to the gaze of the people who are telling us their histories and showing us what their everydayness has upon us. In that way we must be prepared to reverse the gaze, to put ourselves not as a researcher but as someone to whom a community or a group of people are investing in emotionally and trust enough to open a little piece of the way that their historical trajectories and their connections, a little bit of their everyday life.

In this thesis, reflexivity was a process that through every step of this research study. One of the valuable processes was the keeping of a personal journal – and working thoughts
and interpretations through writing and reflecting. The following is an extract from my personal diaries during the research. This extract elicits some of the personal experiences outside and inside the fieldwork that influenced and shaped the processes by which I began understanding Usme:

“How much power do we have as social researchers! When doing our work, very often we become the voice of the participants of our research. We have become the interpreters of their practices, the tellers of their stories, the chroniclers of their histories. In many senses, we are the experts who determine who they are. Many of us consider (at least in a liminal way), that we have the right to speak for our research participants, very often, taking for granted that we know even better than them. That is, of course a false pretention. But it is dangerous, as it reinforces the power that the researcher can exercise over the participants. This power relationship is very difficult to challenge, but I hope that my description of Usme does not fall in taking for granted this right. I hope, that at least, this attempt to describe Usme is humble enough to avoid offering an immobile, complete description of Usme. What I am telling about Usme in this thesis is not the final word about it, it is just a translation of what I learned over there. And as in any translation, there are many things that would be impossible to translate. Moreover, there are many things that I have not been able to fully comprehend. But at the same time, I hope this attempt is good enough to convey many of the things I learned there, I hope that this translation is good enough for others to get a glimpse of what Usme is. And I hope that by reading this description, others would be able to see the space of hope I found in Usme. The journey to comprehend Usme has not been an easy one, but I know that it has changed the way I become in the world. And I am very glad for these changes.”

To be able to write this historical, socio-political, as well as geopolitical, profile of Usme took a lot of effort, not only because it was time consuming and physically exhausting, but because it meant that I had to reflect on and work through my own epistemological grounding and foundations, informed primarily by a colonial epistemology. It meant reflecting on and working through interpretations of the preconceptions and prejudices that were embodied in my Bogotanian middle-class biography. Before going to Usme for the very first time in 2009, I thought that Usme was a territory full of problems, violence and poverty, and I was a little afraid of the place. Moreover, Usme was far away from me, as it was a place
I never thought about before the final year of my undergraduate degree, a place that did not exist beyond the maps, and a place that I ignored every single time I passed through it to go to my wife’s family farm in Los Llanos Orientales. I even have a blurred memory of that kid (which was me) taking photos of the urban zone of Usme from his luxury SUV, while we were stuck in a traffic jam — it was during a long weekend when many people from the middle and upper classes go to Los Llanos to their haciendas and farms. However, when I went to Usme I found a totally different place to the one I previously imagined. On one hand the urban zone, which one can see from the road, is surprisingly small compared to the remarkably enormous rural zone; and on the other hand it was unexpected for me to find that campesino and indigenous identities lie deep in Usmenian’s subjectivities, which not only gives the environmentalist struggles in Usme its kindness, force and peculiarity, but also its dissensus and weakness.

But even when I was able to see some of the particularities of Usme I still had some stereotypes regarding working class neighbourhoods and poor areas in Bogotá; there were other kinds of preconceptions and prejudices that I had to overcome. Those ones were even harder to overcome because they were rooted more deeply into my subjectivity. Those preconceptions are part of the epistemology of the project modernity/coloniality in which I have been born and raised. A project that was co-opted by the Creole elites in Colombia to give sense to their authority, to maintain and expand their privilege and power over the Indigenous, Mestizos and African descendant people that inhabited the Viceroyalty of Nueva Granada at the moment of the independence (Castro-Gómez 2005a, 2005b).

As was mentioned in Chapter two, I still remember what I thought of Usme in 2009 while working on my undergraduate thesis I went there for the first time: *Usme is frozen in time*. It was not like any other place of Bogotá I had ever known. Usme lacked the urban infrastructure I took for granted: aqueduct, water sanitation systems, paved roads, parks, shopping malls, sports facilities, well maintained hospitals, tall buildings, and the whole

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60 The next chapter will explore these aspects deeply through reflection about my positionality in the fieldwork, my preconceptions, prejudices and the difficulties I found within the research (also the preconceptions and prejudices Usmenians had about me, and the dialectic building of rapport, confidence and knowledge about each other).
concrete landscape. Usme looked for me, like a small rural town of the Andes: white colonial houses, small roads made out of stone, campesinos wearing ruanas⁶¹ and taking their produce to the Sunday market in the main plaza of the town. It seemed frozen in time, like their livelihood had not changed much in the last 50 years or more as I was biased by my own way to understand modernity at that time. Behind the idea “Usme is frozen in time” is hidden the dark side of the modern project, colonialism; and the invisibility of the simultaneity of historical trajectories of non-Western epistemologies. In that way my preconception of Usme is an example of one big domination tool that the modernity/coloniality Western project used to colonise America: the transformation of space into time, of geography into history (Massey 2005).

But the neutralisation of my preconceptions is not the only step I had to take in order to interpret Usme. My biography was also an obstacle to building rapport with the community. The fact that I studied at an elite university in Bogotá first, and then at an overseas university, my way of speaking and moving, my manners, my clothes, the fears I felt when I was alone in urban Usme, all of those details placed me as an outsider by many of the community. Even when I had people that welcomed me into the community, especially Hamilton and Maurice (who are important leaders in Usme), for many people it took a long time to trust me. After all, I represented the middle (and for some the upper) classes; the sort of people who live at the north of the city, the people who had segregated the city, and invaded the countryside, the people who constrained the opportunities of the inhabitants of Usme. Some of them resented my presence in Usme. In a conversation with one of them, Jeffrey, I asked why he was so hostile to me, and he told me: “Because it is people like you, los gomelitos who have used Usme as a landfill, taken everything you wanted from us, leaving us only your garbage”.

Luckily, by spending more time in Usme, and with the help of Hamilton and Maurice, Jeffrey and others started to trust me more. By the time I was finishing my fieldwork, Jeffrey had become one of the most helpful participants of the research. While I was able to

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⁶¹ Ruanas are wool poncho-like clothes, which are widely used by campesinos in the mountains of Colombia, where the weather is very cold.
deconstruct my fears, anxieties and preconceptions, the community did the same with me. I was not longer the distant researcher who went to the community to study them, I became to them an ally, because they believe that this thesis will not only show their problems and their anxieties, but also their hopes, their struggles, their acts of resistance and attempts at self-determination.
Chapter 5 – A Social Profile of Usme

We are the people from Usme, from San Pedro de Usme town, inheritors of a myth that is lost in the mists of time: the story of Usminia, the beautiful Zipa’s princess who was kidnapped, and from that we received our name, cause Usme means ‘love nest’. We were an indigenous town, here there are the archaeological remains; and now we are a campesino town, mestizo, that provides other ways of inhabit the great city, we are the rural Bogotá that many disown. (El Pueblo de Usme 2012)

The above quote was taken from Almanaque Agroecológico Pueblo de Usme, an important document made by Usme’s community. It can be understood as a powerful statement that Usme’s community is making about their land, their territory and their struggle. It also reminds us of what David Harvey stated in his book Rebel Cities (2012), that global capitalists made cities the centre of social life, but by doing so, some parts of the population were segregated, excluded, and oppressed; they are what Harvey calls the new oppressed class. Thus, in contemporary times the most important social struggles are those of the people that claim a right to the city, a right to live in a particular kind of city and inhabit it with a particular way of life. In many ways, social struggles in a global era are focused on shaping the cities in inclusive ways, so the oppressed have a right to the city; their fight is to transform cities into places where they can also belong, inhabit, and live. They make a great effort to make cities places where they are not excluded.

62 The translation was done by me. Original in Spanish: “Somos gente de Usme, del pueblo de San Pedro de Usme, herederos de un mito perdido en la bruma del tiempo: la historia de Usminia, la bella princesa del Zipa que fue raptada, y de allí recibimos nuestro nombre, pues Usme significa ‘nido de amor’. Fuimos pueblo de indios, aquí están los vestigios arqueológicos; y ahora somos pueblo campesino, mestizo, que aporta otras maneras de habitar la gran ciudad, somos la Bogotá rural que muchos desconocen.”

63 This document was completed by the community in collaboration with the District Institute for Cultural Patrimony in Bogotá. The idea was to create a booklet that resembles the Bristol Almanac, and that could be distributed and explored in the same way as the Bristol Almanac is. The Bristol Almanac is a little orange booklet of 32 pages published since 1832. Its pages are filled with information about yearly forecast, moon cycles, trivia and jockeys. It is really important in Colombian popular culture, especially in rural areas. Its design has not changed at all since 1910, when the publishers and the sponsors decided to never change it, and today it is still used by local and small businesses to promote their products and services (Castiblanco Roldán 2010).
In that way, when Usme inhabitants claim that they are offering alternative ways of inhabiting Bogotá, they are embracing the rurality the city is neglecting, they are claiming their right to their city. In that way, for them to have a right to the city, they must deconstruct the segregated city and transform it into an inclusive one. They must deterritorialise Usme and reterritorialise it, they must transform their land into a place that is no longer excluded, a place for hope.

This chapter provides a social profile of Usme, a road map into that land that is becoming something else, a place from where their inhabitants claim their right to the city. In that manner, it is important to remember the explanation of social profiles in Chapter four. Following Nadarajah and Mulligan (2011), who stated that a social profile could be more than a ‘snapshot’ of a community, and become a tool to understanding the resilience of a community and how communities “sustain themselves over time and in the face of a range of ‘external’ challenges” (Nadarajah & Mulligan 2011, p. 315). In that sense, this social profile is a powerful tool to understanding how Usme is deterritorialised and reterritorialised by the activists, because it provides an account of the assemblage of Usme. As was stated in the aforementioned chapter, this social profile was completed by combining the discourse analysis of the cultural production of Usme, government documents, academics’ accounts of Usme and journal articles about Usme. It was then reconstructed in light of the findings of the participant observation. However, this social profile is limited by the lack of information about the history of Usme, and therefore it relies heavily upon the oral tradition of the community of Usme.
5.1 The geography of Usme

Usme is locality\textsuperscript{64} number five of Bogotá, and is located at the south east of the city. It ends at the north with the city councils of San Cristóbal, Rafael Uribe and Tunjuelito. At the west it ends with the Tunjuelo River, which marks the boundaries of Usme and the city council of Ciudad Bolívar. At the south there is the city council of Sumapaz, which is nestled in the Sumapaz Páramo. Further towards the north the city councils of Bosa, Kennedy, Puente Aranda, and Santa Fé are located. All of them are what is commonly known as the south of Bogotá, where the poorest population has been segregated and there are high rates of unemployment and subemployment, high rates of crime, a very high population density, and a lack of urban infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals, parks, and roads. It is very common that more than one family inhabit the same house, and the zone has been affected by armed

\textsuperscript{64} Localities are administrative divisions of special districts in Colombia. A locality is governed by the local community board (LCB), who is in charge of the legislative power. The LCB also is in charge of select three candidates for the position of Local Mayor. Then the Special District’s Senior Mayor selects from the three candidates the Local Mayor. In Bogotá there are 20 localities. They are far less independent than Australian’s City councils as they role is to develop the policies dictated by the Senior Mayor Office, and have limited power to create and develop policies that are independent from the Senior Mayor.
conflict more than any other zone of Bogotá.\textsuperscript{65}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{figure4.2.png}
\caption{Localisation of Usme in Bogotá with urban, urban expansion and rural areas. (Source: Observatorio Rural de Bogotá. Image by Observatorio Rural de Bogotá)}
\end{figure}

Usme is crossed by Los Llanos Avenue, which connects the southeast of Colombia with Bogotá, a region called Los Llanos Orientales (the eastern valleys). That region

\textsuperscript{65} The population density in the south of Bogotá is a big contrast with the total density of the city. The average population density of Rafael Uribe, Bosa Kennedy, Antonio Nariño and Tunjuelito is 24,392.6 inhabitants per km\textsuperscript{2}. On the contrary, wealthy localities have a much lower population density. For example, Usaquén has 7422 inhabitants per km\textsuperscript{2}. Bogotá has a density of 4689 inhabitants per km\textsuperscript{2}. Likewise, about 10.2\% of the population of Bogotá live under the poverty threshold and they are most likely to live in the abovementioned localities, (however the population living under poverty has been reduced by more than half since 2009). Likewise, the maternal death rate is higher in those city councils, especially in Santa Fé with 62 per 100,000 births. In Usme it is 36, while in the two wealthier city councils (Usaquén and Chapinero) is zero. In the same manner, the rate of homicides is higher in the south, where for example Santa Fé has a rate of 43.7 per 10,000 inhabitants, in Ciudad Bolivar it is 36.8, while the total rate of Bogotá is 16.9. In the same fashion, the percentage of houses that are overcrowded is 5\% in Usme, 5.2\% and 5.8\% in Ciudad Bolivar; while in Chapinero it is 0.4\% (Bogotá Cómo Vamos 2013) . In the same manner, the victims of forced displacement that have migrated to Bogotá in the last decade has settled primarily in “Ciudad Bolivar (28,813), Bosa (21,067), Kennedy (20,659), Suba (15,251), San Cristóbal (13,003), Usme (12,112), Engativá (8,387), Rafael Uribe (8,199), Uaquaén (4,894), Tunjuelito (3,997), Fontibón (3,671), Los Mártires (3,588) y Santa Fe (2,828)” (Colprensa 2013)}
produces petrol, natural gas, and a big proportion of the cattle consumed in the country. It is a very wealthy region, although the majority of the population live in poverty. But because Usme is the south-eastern gate of Bogotá, thousands of food and goods are transported from Los Llanos through it every day. Thousands of persons cross this land every single day, traveling from Bogotá to Los Llanos Orientales, from the high mountains to the everlasting valley, from the big city to the countryside.

Usme is 85% rural, but the western and northern limits of Usme are mainly urban,\textsuperscript{66} and almost half of the population lives in the rural area (Secretaría de Medio Ambiente & Observatorío Rural de Bogotá 2014). In addition, the urban population of Usme experiences demographic, social and economic challenges similar to the ones at the city councils of San Cristóbal, Rafael Uribe, Tunjuelito and the urban population of Ciudad Bolívar. In that way, the urban population of Usme faces poverty, unemployment, and insecurity. However, the rural zone of Usme does not experience the same difficulties; because even when they are poor, they have: food security;\textsuperscript{67} lower rates of crime and unemployment at the south of Bogotá;\textsuperscript{68} access to a hospital that is not overpopulated (Secretaría Distrital de Planeación 2009; Secretaría de Medio Ambiente & Observatorío Rural de Bogotá 2014; Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá D.C 2012); and a special attachment with a land that offers a different way to inhabit the city. It is this Usme, the one that I am trying to describe in this social profile, an Usme that is threatened in many ways by a city that does not allow the Usmenian way to inhabit Bogotá.

This rural zone is located towards the south and east of Usme, it ends with the urban zone of Usme at Yomasa Creek that is almost at the north of the city council.\textsuperscript{69} Leaving behind the urban zone towards the south and east, there is a large area of forest and crops, from which the most important is the Sumapaz, the biggest páramo ecosystem in the world. At the centre, is Usme Pueblo (the town of Usme). A small town that has an eclectic

\textsuperscript{66} With the exception of Ciudad Bolivar, it still has a little rural zone, precisely around the Tunjuelo River, within the boundaries of Usme.
\textsuperscript{67} Given that they grow their own crops.
\textsuperscript{68} Excluding the city council of Sumapaz.
\textsuperscript{69} The urban zone is located at the north and starts around the La Picota penitentiary, which is located in Rafael Uribe but in the boundaries of Usme.
architecture, which combines a sixteenth century style with a more contemporary — self-made — one: large white houses, at least 2.8 meters high, made of clay bricks. All of them with balconies enclosed by wood banisters painted with green or dark brown varnish. At the centre of these houses are large solars surrounded by interior balconies. In some of those solars there are gardens, or fountains. Whereas those houses were used by Spaniards during the colony and by wealthy people of Usme Pueblo before the middle of the twentieth century, today they are used by Usmenian campesino descendants, who use them not only as residences but also as local shops and restaurants, which led to homemade modification of the houses. Some of them have metal doors instead of the original thick wooden doors, or some have security screens behind the wood window frames, and some of them (especially the ones on the main street) have a lot of banners and posters with the name of the local shop, and advertisements of soft drinks, beer and *aguardiente*.\(^{70}\) Hence, Usme’s architecture has become very eclectic; a place where the colonial architecture is blended with industrial age DIY constructions, and market society’s frantic advertising. Usme architecture is like a colonial Spanish Priest wearing Adidas sneakers and Ray Ban sunglasses, riding a DIY bicycle in a race sponsored by Bavaria\(^ {71}\) and Postobón.\(^ {72}\)

\[^{70}\] The most common spirit in Colombia, considered the national liquor. It is distilled from sugar cane alcohol, and the liquor is flavoured with anise.

\[^{71}\] Bavaria is the biggest brewery in Colombia.

\[^{72}\] Postobon is the biggest soft drink maker in Colombia.
Figure 4.3: House located in the central plaza of Usme Pueblo. It is a house built in the sixteenth century that exposes a series of modifications such as metal doors, electric wiring, and zinc roofing. Today it operates as the most important bakery in Usme Pueblo, and it has advertisements for Postobón and the bank Caja Social. (Source: Panoramio. Image by Farnerbar70)

The main street crosses east of the central plaza. At the south of the plaza there is a sixteenth century church, used by the missionaries to Christianise the indigenous population that lived around Usme. It became one of the main landmarks in Usme, and is the place where the campesinos come together every Sunday for church services. At the same time, every Sunday there is a little fair at the plaza, so the families that go to the church services also stay at the plaza and play games like target shooting with darts and/or air guns, tejo\textsuperscript{73} and for the youngsters pedal car races and a little merry-go-round and a little Ferris Wheel.\textsuperscript{74}

At the north of the plaza there are the local city council offices and the local mayor’s office. Next to them there is a well-known bakery that is a popular landmark of Usme.\textsuperscript{75} It

\textsuperscript{73} Tejo is a traditional sport in Colombia, which can be traced to pre-Hispanic history. Tejo is played by throwing a metal disc to a target placed in a clay surface. The target itself consists of four gunpowder sachets. So when the player hits the target, it explodes.

\textsuperscript{74} They are very little indeed, the Ferris wheel is not taller than a SUV, and the merry-go-round could be placed in the trunk of a middle sized pick-up truck.

\textsuperscript{75} See Figure 4.3.
serves what Usmenian’s consider the best tamales of Bogotá, and one of the tastiest breads and desserts in Usme. This bakery shop is full every Sunday morning, when people go there to eat tamales for breakfast. A little bit further south, the main street is full of piqueteaderos (chopped food shops) shops that sell pique: a mix of meat, potato, blood and meat sausages, and some cattle entrails and guts. All of them chopped (picadas), and fried or grilled. They are served in big baskets, and the families get together to take the food from the basket and eat with their hands. Some of the piqueteaderos also sell hen, which has a tougher meat but its flavour is more intense. Some others sell chicharrón, a dish made of the skin of the pork, which is deep-fried to a very fluffy but crunchy meat, it has a texture similar to a rice cake. These dishes are usually accompanied by Bavaria’s brands of beer, especially Águila and Costeña. Three of the shops on the main street produce and sell chicha, an indigenous fermented drink made of corn. Its production was forbidden in Colombia from 1948 until 1991, but the campesinos and indigenous people kept producing it at home. In Usme, it is very common for campesinos to produce their own chicha in their own homes. It is very common that people remain drinking beer and chicha through the whole weekend, getting really drunk. However, fights or violence among drunken people is very uncommon. Instead they pass the time playing tejo and rana inside the shops.

76 The name “tamale” originates from the Nahuatl language, meaning “wrapped”. It does not refer to only one dish; rather it describes various foods in Latin American countries where maize is a highly utilised cereal in the community’s diet, in combination with diverse ingredients. The tamale is maize dough, filled with combinations of meat, vegetables, fruits, or sauces. Tamales can be sweet or salty, and are wrapped in leaves from corn cobs, banana trees, bijao and maguey plants, avocado trees and, recently, in aluminium and plastic wrap. The invention of the tamale is not attributed to any country in particular because in each region, even within the same country, the preparation varies (Sinclair & Pertierra 2012).

77 In Rana the objective is to throw a small metal disk to a target made up of metal frog effigies. Those metal frogs have their mouth open so the player can throw the disk in it.
At the west side of the plaza there is not a single building, instead, it is used as a viewpoint, this is possible because Usme is located beside a mountain. In that way, from the plaza it is possible to watch the east side of Usme and Ciudad Bolívar. It looks like a quilt made of green, brown and yellowish squares. Usmenians are able to tell the crops that are growing in each one of those patches just by watching them from the distance: peas, corn, strawberries or potato. At the same time, from the plaza it is possible to see some of the most important landmarks for the people of Usme: Tunjuelo River, the cemetery, the Cantarrana dam, and Doña Juana, the biggest landfill in Colombia and the third biggest in South America (SCS Engineers 2007; Ardilla Arrieta 2010).

The cemetery is close to Usme Pueblo, just two-minute walk from the plaza, it was built during the colony and is the resting place of the ancestors of many Usmenians. It is therefore a very important place for the community. Approximately two kilometres towards the east is the Tunjuelo River, and following the basin from the same latitude towards the south for about eight kilometres is the Cantarrana dry dam. It was built in 2005 to control the floods produced by the Tunjuelo River in its low basin when in rain season. When in dry
season it remains almost dry and it is used by Usme and Ciudad Bolívar’s young inhabitants to practice extreme sports. Like a giant skate park, Usmenians practice not only skating but also rappel and what seems an extremely dangerous game: they throw themselves inside cardboard boxes from the highest point of the dam, onto a concrete ramp that has at least 45° of inclination, sliding their way to the bottom of the dam (or till they fall into the water). The dam is really important for the people of Usme, because when it was constructed many families that used to live at the river basin were displaced; and also for the reason that it was a big impact to the ecosystem, given that it flooded local forests and some farms.

Approximately two kilometres towards the north east of Usme’s plaza, crossing the Tunjuelo is Doña Juana, a huge landfill that is filled with all of the rubbish produced by Bogotá, and some other towns around the city. It is huge, its area is almost 600 hectares and about 6.5 tonnes of rubbish is delivered every single day. By 2012 Usme’s activists calculated that it would not be able to receive any more rubbish after 2014. However, the response from the government was to look for environmental permission to expand the landfill, allowing Bogotá’s government to extend the life of the landfill for other seven years (Redacción El Tiempo 2014). The response of the government to the environmental emergency did not take into the account the lives of the people who live around Doña Juana, and it keeps threatening the lives of the people who live close to the landfill. Especially the lives of the people who inhabit the suburbs of Mochuelo Alto and Mochuelo Bajo in Ciudad Bolívar, where the landfill is located. The landfill has been badly managed since its construction in 1988 and it has polluted the Tunjuelo River more than any other source of pollution (Ardilla Arrieta 2010), which affected Usme’s population who used to use the Tunjuelo River to water their crops.

Doña Juana is so big that even though Usme is more than two kilometres away from the landfill, on a sunny and hot day it is possible to smell the gases that the landfill produces. Moreover, in 1997 it exploded, launching more than 800 tonnes of rubbish across Usme and Ciudad Bolívar. The inhabitants of Usme say that the rubbish broke the windows and entered into their houses, it was very hard to clean and it took a big effort from the community to do it. Today Doña Juana symbolises for Usme people, the segregation of a society that decided to build a landfill on the doorstep of some of the poorest inhabitants of Bogotá.
From the central plaza it is also possible to see new buildings of eight or 10 floors that rise in the middle of crops fields and country houses. Built around Usme Pueblo are government subsidised housing,\(^\text{78}\) little apartments that have an area of no more than 65 square metres. They are the first buildings of the policy New Usme, a plan to build houses for people who have been forced to flee their hometowns because of the civil war. The problem is that the policy has a hidden effect, segregating the refugees from the wealthiest zones of the city. For the rural inhabitants of Usme the policy means that the city is finally conquering their land. For them the buildings are not only unsuitable for human habitation (due to their small size), but serve as a living symbol of what is coming to them and they fear living under those conditions: high population density, small houses, and most of all, the loss of their crops, cattle and campesino traditions. That has generated a double segregation for the people who inhabit Nuevo Usme. Not only have they been denied the right to the city, but also, they have been denied the right to be part of Usme. However, there is emerging participation of some Nuevo Usme community leaders within the Usme community, but only to push against the urbanisation of Usme, as they have seen in Nuevo Usme the broken promises of suitable housing and integration to Bogotá.

![Figure 4.5: Ciudadela Nuevo Usme. (Source: 'Los desvelados'. Image by Jennifer Almonacid)](image)

\(^{78}\) The government does not pay for the houses; it helps people to obtain credit at a very low interest rate, if that they comply with a series of conditions, such as being a family of more than one person.
Less than three kilometres towards the east, from Usme Pueblo, is the Muisca cemetery. It was discovered in 2007 when Metrovivienda, the state owned construction company in charge of Nuevo Usme’s construction, found bones and body parts while digging the foundations of the buildings. According to Usme’s community, the first reaction from Metrovivienda was to avoid any statement about the bones. They kept digging without worrying about the bones, as any enquiry then would delay the construction of Nuevo Usme and private investors would lose money. But the community was against the construction of Nuevo Usme, and they found in those bones a way to stop the construction, at least temporarily. Thus they started to push the government to pay attention to the bones discovered, before they were buried again, this time by tall buildings. According to Usme activists there was much money at stake, and as a result of challenging to be heard the activists received threats and were threatened by paramilitary forces for denouncing the findings during that time. But finally, in 2009, a team from the SIJIN was sent to the area to investigate those bones. It was believed that the buried bodies were one of many mass graves created by paramilitary forces during the long armed conflict in Colombia. However, what the investigators discovered took them by surprise: the bodies were buried during the pre-Hispanic period.

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79 Metrovivienda is a state company whose owner is the government of Bogotá. The company objective is to buy land and build houses at a very low price. However, that does not mean that the houses are assigned to people for free. Instead Findeter, a national agency, is in charge of giving poor families a small subsidy so they can buy the properties. The government also helps families to obtain a loan from a private bank, so the families can cover the rest of the property value.

80 Seccional de Investigación Criminal de la Policía Nacional, the forensic team of the national police.
Consequently, a team of archaeologists from the National University of Colombia was sent to the area. Led by Virgilio Becerra, they established that the archaeological finding was one of the most important in the history of the country, as in their exploratory research they found 130 bodies and more than 300 artefacts (Becerra 2010). By 2011 the archaeological team established that the cemetery was larger than they expected, it is so big that nowadays it is considered the biggest pre-Hispanic cemetery in America, and it is estimated that more than 3000 people are buried there (Universidad Nacional de Colombia & Metrovivienda 2008). But the archaeological site is not only important because of its size, but because it is one of the very few Muisca constructions that is possible to study today, given that Muiscas primarily used wood to build their cities (Becerra 2010; Gómez-Montañez 2013b; Herrera Ángel 1993). Unfortunately, the cemetery was badly damaged by the Metrovivienda machinery. The Muisca cemetery has today become one of the most important (if not the most important) landmarks in Usme, and while I was conducting my fieldwork it was regarded by the activist as the most important symbol for their resistance. Because for some activists it proves the link of Usme with the Muiscas, thus it is used by those activists as the proof of their ancestral link with the territory.

Following the Main Street for about five kilometres towards the south from Usme
Pueblo, there is an abandoned train station: La Requilina. It was an important landmark in Usme while it was in use. It opened in 1928 and closed operations three years later when another train station opened on the same line. By 1935, all the railways were lifted away and sold as junk (Santafé 1998). It left a huge void in the everyday lives of Usme’s inhabitants, who took it as a symbol of abandonment by the state, and one of the first stings of segregation during the twentieth century. La Requilina train station became, in recent years, an important place for resistance, as it was there where many oral history circles\(^81\) were carried out. It is also a place from where many ecological walks into the Sumapaz Páramo begin.

At the eastern side of Usme there is an agricultural and ecological park that celebrates the rural way of life. Los Soches agro-ecological park opened to the public in 1996, after a three-year battle against the 1993 declaration of Usme as a zone for urban expansion. As part of that policy special taxes were introduced in rural Usme in order to force campesinos to sell their land at very low prices.\(^82\) In 1996, the community achieved one of the first victories in their long battle, the Los Soches zone was declared a rural zone and the pressure to sell at low prices was removed. As a result of the process in Los Soches the community opened the agro-ecological park. Their visitors are invited on ecological walks in the páramo, and they can participate and learn about rural trades and everyday life activities in the country, such as: milking and herding cattle, raising chickens, harvesting corn and potato crops. Visitors can also learn about environmental practices, and how to adapt their homes to a sustainable way of living. This is why Los Soches is a really important place for Usme, and the activists in charge of the park have a lot of influence among the Usme community.

At the northeast, on west side of La Picota, is the Artillery School of the National Army of Colombia. The school is surrounded by the pits and quarries from where CEMEX extracts a big proportion of the construction materials used in Bogotá. CEMEX gather the gravel from the Tunjuelo River to produce premixed concrete. The Mexican multinational opened operations in Colombia in 1996 after buying local companies Cementos Diamante

\(^81\) Oral history circles are activities where the elders of the community are invited to tell their personal stories about everyday life in Usme. They are going to be explored in Chapter Seven.

\(^82\) About $3600 Colombian pesos (approximately $2 Australian Dollar) per square meter (Rico Piñeres 2010; Santafé 1998).
and Cementos Samper (CEMEX 2014). Since then they have operated an open-air pit at Ciudad Bolívar, in the basin of the Tunjuelo River. The quarry has affected the population that lives in the Tunjuelo River’s basin due to the contamination of the river and the air pollution created through the production of premixed concrete. For the community of Usme the quarry is like an open scar on their land. Likewise, Holcim opened operations in the same area after the army sold them as part of the Artillery School in the second half of the first decade of the twenty-first century. The open-air pits have affected the Tunjuelo River basin causing landslides and floods in Usme and Ciudad Bolívar. Thus the community has struggled against them in a long-standing battle, pushing the government for the closure of the mining complex, but according to Usme’s activists, CEMEX has a contract to mine the field until 2020. Both multinationals have been sued by the community and been found guilty of environmental crimes. In response, the multinationals have built huge walls to cover the quarry from the community’s view, which diminished the aesthetic impact of their operations. It is necessary to climb the mountains to see the pit. In response the community have covered the walls with colourful graffiti that depicts the history of the resistance in Usme.

Figure 4.7: CEMEX open-air pits flooded in 2009. (Source: Fundación Mundo Azul. Image by Fundación Mundo Azul)

83 Activists say that Gustavo Petro, the Mayor of Bogotá, is trying to revoke the concession made to CEMEX, so the multinational cannot operate after 2020.
Mining in Usme — and at the south of Bogotá — did not start with CEMEX. Quarries have been operating for almost a century, when small family companies started to mine limestone to make bricks. Brick factory is the common name that people from Usme give to these quarries. It is very common to find abandoned brick factories all over the rural territory of Usme. They were one of the main reasons for migration to Usme, as during the 1940s and 1950s they became one of the most important sources of jobs for the Bogotá region. However, they generated an incredible level of pollution, not only because they generate huge rates of deforestation in very fragile ecosystems, but also because the burning of the limestone generated huge amounts of air pollution that affected Usme’s population. Because of this, the government of Bogotá declared mining in the zone an illegal activity, and brick factories in Usme officially ceased operations. Nevertheless, CEMEX and Holcim still have permits to mine the zone. In addition to the multinationals operations, illegal mining still
happens, especially during the night. This is why some activists go during sunset to watch over brick factories and take pictures of the illegal operations.

At the northeast of Usme is the Entrenubes Natural Park. The name of the park could be translated as ‘Within the clouds’ or ‘Among the clouds’. It makes reference to the altitude of the park: more than 3000 meters above sea level. The park is surrounded by brick factories and slums, and according to Usme activist in the last four decades it lost more than 50% of its forest due to the settlements made by the people who travelled from the country to Bogotá fleeing civil war. To solve that problem Usme activists have been working with the inhabitants of the slums, teaching them ecological practices, and encouraging them to preserve and take care of the park. This has provided the opportunity for the refugees to be included in the broader community, and to have access to job opportunities, such as park keeper or ranger. It has generated a positive impact on the refugee community, who little by little have gained some space in Usme, San Cristóbal and Rafael Uribe city councils.

At the south of Usme is Sumapaz Páramo. It is the point where the Andes Mountains divide into the West, Central and East Mountains. This location made Sumapaz a strategic place during the history of the armed conflict in Colombia. Today the Highlands Battalion of the National Army maintain control over this point, which was traditionally a guerrillas’ stronghold. At more than 3,500 meters above sea level, the Sumapaz is very cold and humid. It is covered by a fragile mantle of moss and espeletias. It is very quiet and calm. During the day the páramo is covered by very small drops of water that float in the air, it feels like walking inside of a cloud. However, it is very bright, and the fog does not hinder your vision. Instead, it provides a cover for a very bright and burning sun. In the middle of the moss there are thin but large paths, which according to Usme activists were used by the Muiscas to transport goods. Hence, Muiscas used the privileged position of the Sumapaz Páramo to control the trade of the region in the pre-Hispanic era. The ecological walks carried out by the activists in Sumapaz Páramo use the same paths that were used by the Muiscas, as it is very easy to get lost there if one does not follow those paths.

84 In Sumapaz, the guerrillas originated when a group of employees of a huge farm in the páramo decided to take by force the farm and found a little town. It was one of the many Republiquetas (small republics) that were created by the campesino movements in the 1950s.
There are many lakes in the Sumapaz Páramo, which are formed by the water that drops from the moss and the espeletias. Those lakes form many creeks and underground rivers. Many of them become rivers in their path down the mountain. One of the creeks that spring from Sumapaz, is the Tunjuelito creek, the same that later became the Tunjuelo River. That river crosses all Usme at its west side, and it made it possible to create settlements in Usme, since its water was used (and is still used) to water the crops. It is almost omnipresent in the conversations of Usme activists. Its name in pre-Hispanic times was Fucha, which means force. One of the creeks that feed the river still has that name. However, during colonisation the Spaniards decided to rename the river to Tunjuelo. The new name was used to deride the Muisca culture, as the Muiscas believe that there are spirits whose role is keepers and guardians of the waters, they are called tunjos. Because of that the Spaniards decided to mock the tunjos, and called the river Tunjuelo, the little tunjo, making reference to the little power that tunjos had to protect the river (Osorío 2007). Since colonisation the Tunjuelo has been modified in many forms. Not only has it has been polluted by the Doña Juana landfill and mining, but its course has been altered by dams in the first two decades of the twentieth century Bogotá suffered a water crisis. The migration towards the city created a demographic explosion, and there was a rise of a new middle class that demanded access to tap water. For that reason, in 1906 the government gave Bogotá a special jurisdiction over nearby water sources, one of them was the Tunjuelo River. In 1934, the government began the construction of the La Regadera Dam. As a consequence, 3.8 square kilometres of what was La Regadera district were flooded by the waters of the Tunjuelo. The population of La Regadera was forced to sell their land and move towards Usme and Bogotá, and the land surrounding the dam was transformed into a forest of foreign species, such as the Australian Eucalyptus, which forced the local flora and fauna to move with the human population.

But the people of Usme have never lost their bond with the river. For them the Tunjuelo has its own personality, it is alive. They attribute personality and feelings to the river, and they affirm that the river is angry about the interventions made in its basin; it has displayed that feeling in many ways. The first time the river manifested itself was in the

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85 But not over the municipalities around those rivers. Usme did not became part of Bogotá’s jurisdiction until 1956, when the national government decided that Bogotá had the jurisdiction over five of its nearby towns (Cortés Díaz 2006).
1940s. The weather in that decade was very dry and the river water flow was very low, therefore La Regadera Dam was so dry that it could not fulfil the demand for water in Bogotá (Osorio 2007; Santafé 1998). The dam, which was the most expensive construction in Colombia at that time, was a failure. Consequently, La Regadera was abandoned by the government, but the 38-metre-high walls remain. Ever since the river has displayed its fury on many occasions by overflowing, affecting not only the low basin population but also the pits and quarries of CEMEX and Holcim, which were overflowed by water. For the people of Usme, the river is simply claiming what belongs to it.

All of the abovementioned places are connected by small roads and walking paths, always in the middle of crops or forests. Strong winds are common in Usme, and they always come with some rain. The weather is always cold; it does not matter if it is a sunny day or a grey day. Usme is very green, but is a particular kind of green, very greyish, like if you cover a banana plant leaf with charcoal. That colour covers Usme with a cloak of melancholy; it seems to me that the landscape recalls the uncertainty that surrounds a land claimed by the great city as its own. However, there are always thousands of flowers that emerge from beneath the greyish green cloak; little yellow flowers that grow in high numbers; big white, purple and red flowers that grow in beautiful shapes. They are visited by colourful humming birds, with beautiful songs. It is like a reflection of the strength and the hope of a community that is transforming their land into a space of hope.

5.1.1 The state’s discourse about the geography of Usme

The community of Usme is concerned with the way official cartography depicts Usme, and the rural territories of Bogotá in general. First, the most common maps of Bogotá do not depict the rural zones as part of the city. Instead the most common maps of Bogotá, and the ones that are commonly used in schools depict only the urban zone of Bogotá. The city is never depicted with its vast rural zone, which covers 85% of its jurisdiction. Because most of the rural zone is concentrated in the city councils of Usme and Sumapaz, it is very common that only a small zone at the north of Usme is depicted in city maps.86 This is part of

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86 See Figure 4.2. The grey part of the map is the part usually presented as the map of Bogotá. The other zones are generally excluded from them.
the segregation of Usme, and other rural communities, and it aids the government’s intention of urbanising Usme as it creates the image of Usme as an urban zone rather than a rural zone. It also helps the government to hide the mining and the landfill problems from the urban public, as those problems are not officially depicted in public discourse about Bogotá. In that way, the state creates a monolithic discourse about Bogotá as a city that does not have any connection to the rurality. This depiction of the city rests in the modern/colonial epistemology that creates a clear division between urban and rural, where the urban is seen as the centre of civilisation and the rural is seen as the opposite, a place that must be conquered and civilised (Castro-Gómez, 2005a). This is precisely the idea of a city that Usme’s activists are challenging, proposing an alternative city where the rural is not excluded from the urban. Because Bogotá’s government policies are founded on that vision, they have neglected and negated the rurality of Usme, and the alternative ways they propose to inhabit the city. In the words of a state officer: “Rurality in Usme? I don't see any rurality... Five ruanas\(^87\) are not rurality”.

It is against this way to address Usme that the activists are struggling. Challenging government plans, deconstructing the western idea of city, reterritorialising their land and transforming it in to a space of hope.\(^88\)

### 5.2 History of Usme

The reconstruction of the history of Usme has proven to be a hard task. There are few historical sources before the 1930s, and many of the sources are related to the construction of the Cantarrana Dam, the Humboldt Expedition into the paramount in the first decade of the nineteenth century, and the Royal Botanical Expedition carried out by José Celestino Mutis and his students during the late eighteen and early nineteenth century\(^89\). Each of these subjects encompasses a consistent, but small, body of documents that address Usme

\(^87\) Ruanas are ponchos made of wool. They are commonly used by campesinos who live in the Andes Mountains in Colombia. They are different to other ponchos in America because they lack the vibrant colours of other poncho versions, and are usually grey, brown of black.

\(^88\) This will be explored in Chapter Eight.

\(^89\) For more information, please refer to Ancízar 1853; Thiollière 1799; Caldas 1808; Acosta & Calbo 1852; Fernández Piedrahita 1688; Markham 1867; Osorio 2007; Papel periódico ilustrado 1884; Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain 1855; Humboldt 1853.
One of the most important sources for the reconstruction of Usme history is taken from the efforts made by the activists to recover the oral history of their territory; therefore, by listening to Usme’s community leaders telling their land history, I divided it into four periods: pre-Hispanic, Colonial, Republican, and recent times.

**The pre-Hispanic Period**: Information about this period of the history Usme is scarce. The only mentions of Usme were by chroniclers like Lucas Fernandez Piedrahita whose works were published in 1688 by J. B. Verdussen, and who wrote about the war between the Zipa and the Zaque. Nonetheless, the rural oral tradition of Usme tells the legend of Usminia. The local stories also recall Usme as an important Muisca peregrination and religious centre. Their oral tradition has been partially confirmed by the recent discovery of the greatest indigenous necropolis in South America, where it is estimated there are as many as 3000 graves (Becerra 2010; Van der Hammen et al. 2009).

Taking those difficulties into consideration, it is important to state that the legend of Usminia is a foundational legend of Usme, a story that is recalled by Usme’s activists as one of the most important historical facts that shape their land. The legend of Usminia can be cross-referenced with the historical reconstruction of the Muisca culture before the arrival of the colony, especially the reconstruction made by Fernández Piedrahíta (1688), and Herrera Ángel (1993). The most important events that occurred in Usme during this time were the kidnapping of Usminia, and the subsequent war between the Zipa and the Zaque. It is important to point out that the Muisca political structure worked in a similar manner to a Confederation, divided in Cacicazgos, which were independent cities. Each one of the Cacicazgos had a council that was in charge of the decisions in matters of policy and economy of the city. These councils were made up of the heads of each one of the families that live in the city. The council did not make decisions by vote, instead they created circles where each one of the members could declare their positions, and decisions could only be taken when each one of the council members agreed on the decision. That means that if just one of the members disagreed on one policy, it could not be executed. Likewise, the Confederation had a council consisting of the caciques of the cities; each one of the caciques

90 This was explored in the introduction to the thesis.
presented the position of its Cacicazgo. If the Confederation wanted to push a policy, and there was one cacique that did not agree with the decision, he had to return to his local council and detail the position of the other caciques, and try to convince them of the position that the other caciques presented. This ensured that the Muiscas secured unanimous decisions in the Confederation. However, those councils had little power in military decisions that were taken by the leader of the confederation and the caciques, who in time of war acted in a more dictatorial manner (Fernández Piedrahíta 1688; Herrera Ángel 1993).

There were two Muisca Confederations: Hunza Muisca Confederation, led by the Zaque; and Bacatá Muisca Confederation, led by the Zipa. Those Confederations maintained a longstanding war against each other, in which Usme was involved. Around 1480, the Zipa Saguamanchica inherited a wealthy Bacatá Confederation that had a powerful army. He decided that it was in the best interest of the Confederation to expand their dominance over nearby cities and territories. So trying to avoid a direct confrontation with the Hunza Confederation, he invaded the territory of the Panches, another indigenous group related to the Muiscas, but that did not belong to any confederation. The Zipa launched an attack — with an army made up of more than 30,000 warriors — against Panches’s principal city, Fusagasuga; capturing Uzatama, his army commander. Uzatama was forced to accept the lordship of Saguamanchica, and his territory was restored to him, who then became a cacique in the Bacatá Confederation. But the Cacique of Guatavita, a city that was part of the Hunza Confederation felt threatened by the power exposed by Saguamanchica, and declared that it was an infringement of the terms of peace between the two Confederations. So he convinced the Zaque to attack Bacatá. Their plan included convincing Ebeque, the Cacique of Ubaque to betray Saguamanchica and join the Hunza Confederation (Fernández Piedrahíta 1688).

Given that Ubaque was located at the south of Bacatá Confederation, an attack from there could divide the troops of Bacatá, and the defences of the Zipa at the north would be decimated. So Ebeque formed an alliance with the Zaque and attacked the territories of Usme and Pasca, which obliged Saguamanchica to retire some of the troops from the invasion to Los Panches, who took the opportunity to recover their independence, and launched an attack from the west recovering cities of Tena and Zipacon. Saguamanchica’s army fought on both fronts for about sixteen years. At the end of this period, the Hunza Confederation finally
decided to take direct action in the conflict, launching an attack from the north with approximately 60,000 men. In a desperate action, Saguamanchica gathered his troops, about 55,000 warriors, and led the defence at the north. The battle took no longer than three hours, won by the Bacatá army, but the Zipa, and the Zaque were killed in the skirmish. After that, Nemeneque inherited the title of Zipa, and with the support of the council, he reached a peace agreement with all of the parties involved in the conflict. (Fernández Piedrahíta, 1688; Herrera Ángel 1993).

The activists of Usme locate their territory on the conflict by the legend of Usminia. For them the reason Ebeque betrayed the Zipa was his love for Usminia, the daughter of Saguamanchica. As detailed in the introductory chapter, Ebeque and Usminia were deeply in love, but the Zipa did not approve of their relationship. So, Ebeque decided to kidnap Usminia and hide her in a territory he named Usme, which means love nest. They state that Saguamanchica looked for his daughter all across that land, and he never was able to find her. Hence after the war, his brother Nemeque, decided to maintain the name of Usme for that territory and transform it in a religious pilgrim place that honoured his sister, by building a temple with the Corner Stone, from where all the life on the earth was originated (Corporación Casa ASDOAS 2007; Santafé 1998). The memory of Usminia and that war is so important to Usme activists that in 1996 they erected a statue of Usminia in Yomasa Creek, at the north of Usme. This statue represents the hopes and the struggles faced by the community of Usme (Colectivo Salvemos la Usminia 2011).

The Colonial Period: In the Colonial Period Usme became a small village. The information about Usme during this period of time is almost scarcer than the pre-Hispanic period. I could not find many registries about Usme at the National Archive, nor many journals or diaries about Usme for this period. However oral history is a rich source of information about this period of time, and in that way the compilation of oral history compiled by Gerardo Santafé in his self-published book, Usme y su historia (1998) became an important reference. Santafé (1998) claims that Usme acquired political jurisdiction during

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91 The National Archive keeps and extends the collection of public records, correspondence, and documents. Also, it keeps private diaries and journals, correspondence and documents that are now of public domain; as well as some rare books and other important documents to the national history in Colombia.
colonial times in 1650 when the Spanish Crown founded the Church of Usme, in order to Christianise the indigenous population who inhabited Usme and its surroundings. The church was very successful in its mission; therefore, in 1711 Usme was declared Parroquia\textsuperscript{92} and its name was changed to San Pedro de Usme.

San Pedro de Usme was a wealthy agricultural village where the campesinos grew crops of strawberry, potato and quinoa. The goods harvested in Usme made up approximately 40\% of the local market of Santa Fé, the capital of the Viceroyalty of Nueva Granada (Secretaría Distrital de Planeación 2009). But that is not the whole history; oral tradition about this period in Usme tells us that it was primarily used by wealthy Spanish men as gifts — in the form of houses and land — to their concubines. Allowing those men to secure a place where their concubines could raise their families. Hence, they could hide their illegitimate families far enough from Santa Fé to avoid the social and religious punishment that the adulterous relationships entailed\textsuperscript{93}; whilst at the same time access to their hidden families was less than one day of travel. The most important of these stories is the legend of the Celis surname: ‘Las Marichuelas’; which can be traced to the short lecture Una historia que debería escribirse (A Story that should be written), by the historian José Manuel Marroquin (1875). According to Marroquin, Don José Solís y Folch de Cardona — who was Viceroy of Nueva Granada — had an affair with María Lugarda de Ospina, more widely known as ‘La Marichuela’. The veracity of this affair is still a matter of discussion amongst historians in Colombia, because Marroquin used unsubstantiated sources to write about Solís. However, this story remains in the Colombian culture as truth, even more in Usme where the legend is taken beyond Marroquin’s writings. In Usme oral tradition states that the Viceroy

\textsuperscript{92} The Parroquias were one of the main jurisdictional divisions to the territory that were established by the Spanish Empire in the colonies. It was constituted by a small populated urban centre around the church, where the political power was in charge of the Catholic Church representative, the Parroco, who shared his power with a Spanish Empire’s civil representative, the Mayor. (Suárez, 2005)

\textsuperscript{93} In the colonial period, the Spanish Empire created a caste system in its colonies in America. In that system, the white Spanish born in Spain were the most privileged, followed by the white sons of Spaniards born in America. Then the “Indio” category located, being more important than the black African slaves. At the bottom of this system were the people of mixed races like the Mestizos, who were sons of white Spanish and “Indio”. The Mestizos constituted more than half of the population of the Viceroyalty, but its existence was ignored in Spain, arguing that this population did not exist because the union between races was forbidden by god (Castro-Gómez 2005a; Quijano 1999; Ramirez 2009). The ethnic and racial issues play a key role in the decolonisation and reconstruction of Usme made by activists. For that reason, a detailed explanation of this point is provided in Chapter Two.
Solís built a manor house in Usme for ‘La Marichuela’, so he could easily travel to see his forbidden love in privacy. In Usmenian oral tradition the legend goes further, according to it the Viceroy Solís had many other concubines, and for each one of them he built a small manor in Usme. With ‘La Marichuela’ and his other concubines, the Viceroy had a lot of children. He was proud of his offspring, and he wished that all of them could have his surname, but if he gave his surname to any of them the Church would punish him. So he decided to give them a surname that sounded almost like Solís: Celis. That is the way that Usmenians explain the existence of the surname Celis, which is common among traditional Usmenian families. The legend is so important in Colombian and Usmenian popular culture that in the second half of the twentieth century a neighbourhood named La Marichuela was built in Usme, within the boundaries of the manor that the Viceroy gave to his mistress.

It is important to point out that the Spanish tried to deconstruct the indigenous meanings of Usme, and the zone of the high basin of the Tunjuelo River, by changing original names and Christianising the population. For example, the change of the name of the most important river of Usme from Fucha to Tunjuelo, which was described above.

Additionally, during colonisation there was an important event that put Usme, and the Sumapaz Páramo, into the consciousness of the population of the Viceroyalty of Nueva Granada: The Botanical Expedition. A very ambitious scientific enterprise that intended to obtain an account of every single species of fauna and flora in the Viceroyalty in order to determine which of them could be profitable to the Crown. The Botanical Expedition was carried out between 1783 and 1811, and it is precisely in the documents produced by the Botanical Expedition where one can find the single reference about the páramo during the colonial period (Osorio, 2007). The Botanical Expedition was led by José Celestino Mutis, considered one of the most important scientists of the eighteen and early nineteen centuries in the colonies. He was a pioneer bringing scientific education to the Viceroyalty; he created the first medical faculty in the Spanish colonies, and he planned the Botanical Expedition (Alzate 2007; Ortíz Rodríguez 2003). In the texts produced by the botanical expedition, the Sumapaz Páramo is depicted as a place with a unique kind of beauty; moreover, the text gives the first description of the most common plant in the páramo ecosystem, the espeletia. However, the Sumapaz Páramo was depicted as a wild and dangerous place that must be dominated. And
the image that the expedition gives to Usme was one of a little town in the mountainside of the Sumapaz that was backwards in time, a wild territory lacking civilisation, a population that must be civilised by the Crown (Caldas 1808; Acosta & Calbo 1852; Markham 1867). This resonates with the Creoles modern/colonial perspective of the world (Castro-Gómez 2005b; Castro-Gómez 2005a; Quijano 2003).

**After independence:** The Republican Period of Usme can be divided in two: one before and the other after the civil war of the 1950s. Before 1950, especially after the constitution of 1886, Usme remained tied with the Hacienda of ‘La Marichuela’ and the history of forbidden love. But at the same time, it was associated precisely with the sin of the Viceroy. Therefore, Usme was associated with a lack of Christianity: a wild place that the government needed to civilise (Santafé 1998). The way the government brought civilisation to Usme was to actively integrate it into the market economy that the young country was constructing. This was part of a broader process leaded by the Nationalist party\(^\text{94}\), especially by president Rafael Núñes, who called it *La Regeneración* (The Regeneration). The Regeneration was materialized as in the form of a National Constitution in 1886. This constitution returned the power to the Catholic Church, which got in charge of the education in the country. The objective was to ‘civilize’ the indigenous populations, especially those in remote areas of Colombia, by enforcing them to speak Spanish and convert into Christianity, and including them into market economy (Crawford 2009).

In Usme, one of the ways to do this was to increase the trade of goods that came from there to Bogotá, but in order to do that the town started to specialise in potato and onion crops, which resulted in the reduction of dairy and meat production. At the same time Usme was included in the market economy through mining. For the first time in Usme’s history its mountains were actively mined for limestone, and in the first half of the twentieth century, the mining industry in Usme had exponential growth. The boom of the mining industry in Usme caught the attention of many migrants who came to Usme from the Tolima Grande and

\(^{94}\) This party was disassembled after the Thousand Days war. A civil war between the Nationalist and Liberal parties, that took place between 1899 and 1902. The conflict not only ended the lives of about 150.000 people, but also destroyed the public and industrial infrastructure of the country, and led to a deep economic crisis. It also was one of the main reasons for Panama to secede. After the war, many of the Nationalist joined the new founded conservative party (Camelo 2000)
the Cundi-Boyacá regions of the country. During this time, Usme saw a period of unprecedented urbanisation as the mining industry became the biggest source of employment in the town. The families that started to settle to Usme were divided into two groups: those who came primarily to work on the mines; and those who came to not only work on the mines but also to farm the land and conserve a campesino way of life. This saw some of them starting to build the first neighbourhoods towards the north of the town — many of them remained illegal up until the 1970s and even the 1980s — while others bought parcels of land to farm.

Consequently, Usme activists’ related the mining industry with the urbanisation of Usme, for them it was the turning point, they saw young Usmenians work in the quarries, turning their backs on all farming work, they “disconnected themselves from the land, they wanted to live like the people from Bacatá, they wanted a modern life: the rural life seemed to boring for them”. Given that, the activists recall mining as the event that started to undermine campesino memory and identity, after the mining boom Usme was separated into two worlds without any connection. This disconnection was stated by an elder activist, who said in one word circle: “they (her sons) forgot about the ways of their parents, and looked for some new ways of living… the city ways”.

There was another important event during the same period: the construction of La Regadera Dam. Before the construction of the dam in the beginning of the twentieth century, Usme and the rest of the high basin of the Tunjuelo were not under the jurisdiction of Bogotá. They were Parroquias, towns whose jurisdiction was independent from the capital. By then, the exponential growth of Bogotá made scarce the potable water that flowed into the city. At the same time thousands of poor families in the big city began to demand their right to access the aqueduct, a claim for social and environmental justice, because at that time only the

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95 The Tolima Grande is a region located at the centre of Colombia and at the southwest of Bogotá, in the valley between the west and the central mountains of the country. The Cundi-Boyacá region is where Bogotá is located, and it extends to all the territory of the Hunza and Bacatá Muiscas Confederations. It was of great importance during the colony, a territory where many Creoles were settled.

96 Jiménez de Quezada founded Bogotá, as the capital of the Viceroyalty of New Granada in the territory that used to be the capital of the Bacatá Confederation. And as a way to show respect to the original owners of that land, he named it Santa Fé de Bogotá. Thus, the youngest of the activists from Usme, looking to recover the memory of the pre-Hispanic period, still calls Bogotá by its ancient name: Bacatá.

97 This was told by an elder campesino in a word circle at La Requilina.
wealthy Bogotanian families had access to potable water in their houses. The local government of Bogotá, worried about the water situation, thought that the solution was building a press in one of the rivers near the city. The Colombian Federal Government in 1908 issued a decree that gave Bogotá jurisdiction over nearby rivers; however, the city did not have jurisdiction over the municipalities that were in the river basins. Hence, Bogotá had jurisdiction over the Tunjuelo River, but not over Usme (Osorio 2007).

Researchers indicated that the solution was to build a dam in La Regadera district, located in the course of the Tunjuelo River. But it took more than 20 years of deliberation to order its construction. Finally, it was built in 1938, becoming the biggest and most expensive undertaking of Colombian engineering at that time. However, by the time it was built, the studies were already outdated. That coupled with the particularly dry decade of the 1940s ensured the dam was a failed enterprise and Bogotá remained with limited aqueduct services until the construction of the Chingaza and the Neusa dams in the second half of the twentieth century (Osorio, 2007). But the dam changed the river flow, which pushed many people towards the Sumapaz Páramo or towards the urban side of Usme (Osorio 2007; Santafé 1998). The jurisdiction that Bogotá acquired over nearby water sources opened the space of opportunity for Bogotá to take control over nearby populations; strengthening the control that the urban population has over the rural population. The activists from Usme identify the expropriation of the river as the first time Bogotá used Usme as a natural reservoir.

Since then Bogotá started to slowly take control of Usme, not only for the expropriation of the river, but also the construction of the Tenth and Boyacá Avenues that connected Bogotá, which made it easier and faster to travel between Usme and Bogotá. This allowed the urban population of Usme, in the twentieth century, to work in Bogotá. Neighbourhoods such as Alfonso López, Yomas, or La Marichuela started to mimic the working classes neighbourhoods of Bogotá: heavy brick houses with no front yard, painted in multiple strong colours; small windows, covered by security screens made of iron bars. All of the buildings are two or three stories high. Usually the ground floor is used to run a small business. They look like boxes staked without a clear order, rhizomatic, movable, always changing, and full of life. People from these neighbourhoods started to work in Bogotá, establishing new connections with the city and its inhabitants, creating a flow of information.
between Usme and the city. Consequently, urban Usme became an epistemological bridge between rural Usme and urban Bogotá.

The other important event for Usme in the middle of the twentieth century changed the relationship between Usme and Bogotá: the assassination of Jorge Eliecer Gaitán and the beginning of a civil war that is still unresolved. Gaitán was a young but brilliant politician; by militating the Liberal Party he pushed socialist policies in the government. He pushed the congress to debate the assassination of workers by the United Fruit Company in Ciénaga\textsuperscript{98}, he also criticised the plutocracy in the government, and pushed the government for land reform to assist the poor rural population to gain access to land, undermining the power of the latifundium owners. In 1936 he became Mayor of Bogotá, where he implanted socialist policies such as communitarian restaurants, and extended access to public services, such as

\textsuperscript{98} The event is known in Colombia as The Banana Massacre. It was a conflict between the United Fruit Company and its employees in Colombia. The union of workers of the United Fruit Company demanded better job conditions. The situation for the employees was unbearable, because among other injustices, the US Company was paying their employees with bonds instead of money. Those bonds were only cashable at United Fruit Company stores, where the prices of food were very expensive when compared to the prices of the free market. Hence, in November 1928 the workers and their families started a general strike, refusing to crop the bananas, and sitting down on the railway that transported the fruit towards the port, so the company could not take out their product. The company resorted to making the US government put pressure on the Colombian government to stop the strike. The army was sent to control the situation. On the night of the 5\textsuperscript{th} December 1928, General Cortés lay siege to the train station where the workers and their families were sleeping, and at 1:30am he opened the door and read a decree that ordered them to get out of the station and stop the strike, or the army would open fire. The workers and their families did not move immediately, so the army opened fire. It is estimated that about 1200 people were killed that night. For more information, please refer to Arango (1985); Gaitán Ayala (1997); LeGrand (1989).
tap water to all inhabitants of the city (he was the one who finally got La Regadera Dam built). His next government position was as Education Minister, and from there he created a policy to generalise alphabetisation, and fomented the arts by creating the National Salon of Artists. He became the most popular and trusted politician in Colombia; therefore, his party launched him as a presidential pre-candidate, competing against Gabriel Turbay. The division of the Liberal Party allowed the Conservative Party to win the presidential elections with Mariano Ospina Pérez. However, the senate elections gave the Liberal Party most of the senate. Gaitán then became the leader of the party, and the leader of the opposition. In his position he led the “march of the torches” and the “march of the silence”, that were trying to push Ospina Pérez to stop the army and the police enforcing the power of the Conservative government. By then Gaitán had gained the support of most of the population, he became a hero. But on 9th November 1948, he was assassinated while walking outside his office. What happened after the assassination was a turning point for Colombia (Alape 1983).

Moments after the assassination a huge crowd lynched the suspected assassin, but the energy of discontent against the ruling class was at boiling point. At the same time that Gaitán was killed, the Ninth Pan-American Conference was carried out in Bogotá and the United States were lobbying to declare communism illegal in America. In response to that conference came the Latin American Student Congress. The ambience was tense, and the assassination released the energies of those who saw in Gaitán a hero. In the excitement of the moment, the crowd looted and destroyed Bogotá. The tram system was totally destroyed, and the districts near government facilities were looted and burnt down. The police were sent to control the crowd, but many of them joined the crowd; and the rest resorted to shooting people. Approximately 500 people were killed. But the violence did not stop there, in the following days there were riots in other cities and municipalities, all wanted Mariano Ospina Perez to resign the presidency (Alape 1983). The response of the government was to use full force to control the population, and the police and army, led by the Conservative government, resorted to the systematic killing of Liberal Party supporters in the rural areas of the country, the looting of their houses and even the rape and assassination of their families. In response to that overwhelming use of force, people in rural areas began to arm themselves and fight the police and the army. The Liberal Guerrillas and Communist Guerrillas rose from
campesino movements to defend themselves; and they started to proclaim little towns as Independent Republics. This period of civil war is known as ‘The Violence’ (Molano Bravo 1987, 2000).

The most important of these Independent Republics was Marquetalia in the region of Huila, part of the Tolima Grande Region. Marquetalia was led by Manuel Marulanda and Jacobo Arenas, and they were rallying for the government to create better social, educational and health policies. But the response from the government was to send a contingent of more than 2000 troops in 1961. In Marquetalia the population was about 1000 people, from whom only 48 were guerrilla troops. In despite of that Marquetalia was attacked with full force, even using bombardiers (Valencia Tovar 1999). But Manuel Marulanda and Jacobo Arenas escaped to join other groups of campesinos in the south of the Eastern Mountains, and there they founded FARC99, the oldest guerrilla movement in the world. Since then the civil war between the Colombian State and guerrillas has never ceased100 (Molano Bravo 1987, 2000).

In Usme the conflict has manifested in multiple forms. The first one is the stigmatisation of the rural population of Usme as guerrilla sympathisers. On one hand because in the 1950s many people from Tolima and Huila, the region where Marquetalia is located, migrated to Usme, this time not looking for work at the mines, but fleeing from the violence (ASDOAS 2007; Santafé 1998). And on the other hand, because of the connection Usme and its inhabitants have with the Sumapaz Páramo, a region populated with people who have a long history of resistance. It started in the last decade of the nineteenth century, when two persons controlled the land in Sumapaz. In the early twentieth century the community began a struggle for the right to own the land they inhabited. They used passive and legal actions, like denying payment of rent and invading lands. But the government gave ownership of the land to the owners of the latifundium. Even more, the police used to sleep in the haciendas of the owners of the land (Vargas Rodríguez 2014). When ‘The Violence’ started, the community in Sumapaz were threatened by the police, who responded by creating

99 Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Forces of Colombia).
100 After two failed peace talks, in 2012 a third peace talk started between Colombian State and FARC, this third one has been the most promising of the three in terms of how much both parties have advanced.
a Communist Rural Guerrilla. In 1957, after a peace talk process, the guerrillas at Sumapaz reached a peace treaty in which the community put down their weapons and the government gave them ownership of the land. Consequently, a new town was born in the south of Bogotá: San Juan de Sumapaz (Vargas Rodríguez 2014, p. 164). But when FARC became stronger, they made a presence in the Sumapaz Páramo, its strategic position was tactically important for them, taking control of the town by force, it was another battle that the community had to fight, this time without getting involved in another war. After the second failed peace talks in 2002, and with money donated by the US government through the Colombian plan, the army reinforced themselves and the Colombian State was able to regain control over the land in many territories where FARC was established. In Sumapaz, it was translated into the Battalion of High Mountains No. 1, a group who patrols and controls Sumapaz Páramo, but one that also stigmatised the Sumapaz community as guerrilla sympathisers.

Unfortunately for Usme, both the resistance history at Sumapaz and the migration of refugees led Bogotá’s population to thinking of rural Usme as a violent territory, where the guerrillas were supported. A dangerous place not wise to visit. This resonates and reinforced traditional meanings assigned to Usme as a wild place that must be civilised or segregated. That imagery joined the increase of Bogotá’s imports from Los Llanos to slowly deteriorate the economy and way of life of rural Usme. By the second half of the twentieth century Usme became connected with the city but on the city’s terms, otherwise they became more isolated. The nearer they came the further away they were pushed. Usme reflects what Massey (1992) reflected about the Pacific Islands and cross-pacific flying, whereby countries like Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and others became more connected by flights; but because of the consequent reduction of ships, small communities in the islands became more isolated. This was materialised in 1954 when Usme was officially under Bogotá’s jurisdiction (Cortés Díaz 2006), which had a number of devastating consequences for the inhabitants of Usme.

The first one was the above-posited construction of Doña Juana, a landfill of gigantic proportions where all of the rubbish produced by Bogotá is buried. The Doña Juana problem was exacerbated on 27th September 1997 when, due to the poorly planned construction of the

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101 That guerrilla was not related with FARC.
landfill, it did not have enough fumes to expel the methane produced by the decomposition of the rubbish: “The garbage entered through the windows breaking the glass, it was everywhere, at the streets, the roofs, inside the houses… at the hospital, the schools. The stink was unbearable, many got sick”\textsuperscript{102}. As a consequence of this event the urban population of Usme joined the struggle of the rural population. They realised that whatever happens in rural the areas have consequences in urban zones. The young population joined social movements, becoming activists, and they began a process of reconnection with their campesino identity.\textsuperscript{103}

Today, after the government of Bogotá has invested a lot of money in Doña Juana, and tried to correct the errors of the construction, a lot of leachates are still thrown into the Tunjuelo River, the stench is still strong, and the landfill is reaching its maximum capacity. The last government led by Mayor Gustavo Petro, decided to put an end to the problem. First a better waste management system was implemented. The public sector took control of rubbish collection and waste disposal, and it built recycling plants. The Mayor proclaimed an ordinance that established the selection of recyclable material at the source, which could lead to the amortisation of the capacity of Doña Juana. However, landfill is still filling it to maximum capacity, and there is not a clear policy about it.

The second consequence of the segregation was the declaration of Usme as a zone for urban expansion, which is a direct threat to the rural community of Usme. That declaration was issued in the 2004 \textit{POT, Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial} (Territorial Zoning Plan) by the Mayor of Bogotá, Luis Eduardo Garzón, and was the result of a chain of events that started with the declaration of Usme as part of Bogotá’s jurisdiction. In 1954, Usme and five other municipalities\textsuperscript{104} became part of Bogotá. The idea was proposed in 1938 by the Mayor of Bogotá, Germán Zea Hernández, who thought that Bogotá could better manage the economy of those towns, whilst boosting the city’s economy. But the idea took more than a decade to be realised, and by 1954 the urban growth of the towns and the city was fragmented. However, Roberto Salazar Gómez, who was Bogotá’s mayor at that time, saw in

\textsuperscript{102}A conversation with Maurice in the fieldwork.
\textsuperscript{103}This is going to further explored in Chapter Six.
\textsuperscript{104}Usaquén, Suba, Engativá, Fontibón, Bosa, and Usme were the six towns that lost their independence from Bogotá, and became part of the city in 1954 (Cortés Díaz 2006).
that fragmentation an opportunity to boost the construction industry, as Bogotá had the possibility to expand towards the south, the west and the north. Expansion would require the construction of roads, services and housing. Hence, from the 1960s to the 1980s Usme’s urban zone grew fast: new neighbourhoods were constructed and the old illegal ones were legalised. They were also connected to the network of Bogotá’s services of roads, parks, aqueduct, and energy (Cortés Díaz 2006). But what was good news to urban Usme was translated into the forgetfulness of rural Usme. In a short period of time, the rural community was sent to oblivion. Neither the government nor Bogotá’s population cared about the rural population of Usme. Consequently, the rural zone of Usme was condemned by the government to become a repository for the city to expand itself. In the late 1990s and the early 2000s the city was facing the problem of a huge and constant flow of migration of people fleeing from the violence; this flow grew exponentially during the last decade of the late twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century. To solve the problem Enrique Peñalosa, Mayor of Bogotá from 1998 to 2001, planned to declare Usme a zone of urban expansion. Taking into account that the locality of Los Soches was already declared a rural zone, the idea of Mockus would convert the rest of the locality into a densely populated zone that would accommodate the poorest inhabitants of the city. The idea of the mayor was materialised by Luis Eduardo Garzón in the 2004 POT, which transformed that idea into law.

Metrovivienda was the institution that was in charge of the operation and construction began in the same year. Nuevo Usme’s first buildings were built at the west and north of Usme Pueblo, but the housing proved to be another mistake. The houses were tiny and overpopulated, and the Usme City Council was not able to provide the new inhabitants with the services they needed. The hospital was too small, there were not enough places in the schools, and public transportation could not meet demand. Given that the Rafael Uribe City Council was prompted to provide those services to the inhabitants of Nuevo Usme, but given the difficulty for Nuevo Usme’s inhabitants to travel to Rafael Uribe, and negligence from Usme and Rafael Uribe City Councils, Nuevo Usme still lacks access to those services.

For the rural community of Usme the POT was a failure, but the construction continued until the discovery of the Muisca Cemetery in 2009. That discovery halted construction, and became a truce for the Usme community who were struggling against the
urbanisation of Usme. By that moment the Nuevo Usme community had already joined the mobilisation of campesinos in Usme. They opposed urbanisation because they felt cheated by the government that promised a better life but instead gave them a life in a segregated zone, where there is a lack of services and jobs, and where poverty runs rampant. The 2011 declaration of the Hacienda el Carmen as patrimony was a victory for the community, who jeopardised the plans for urbanisation using the Muisca Cemetery both as a justification to stop the construction, and as a symbol of the resistance and the ancestral connection they have with Usme. In the archaeological zone just eight hectares were declared patrimony; there are 32 hectares where there are still plans to urbanise. However, the ICANH,\textsuperscript{105} the National University and some press joined Usme to pressure the government to desist from their intentions to construct in that zone and urbanise Usme.

The discovery also provided an inflexion point for the activists in Usme, both urban and rural activists joined together for the struggle for the right to inhabit a city on their own terms, a struggle against the segregation of Usme, against the growth of poverty. Young and new activists joined elder leaders in the recovery and maintenance of the memory, the oral history and the ancestral ties that they have with Usme. During this process young activists infused the process with new repertories of action, such as street theatre, graffiti, concerts, and the creation of audio-visual content that provides an account of the city they dream about. At the same time, the young activist learnt about the constancy and the patience that a pacific mobilisation needs. They learnt how to confront violence with peace, and segregation with love for their land. That struggle will be described in the next two chapters.

\textsuperscript{105} Colombian Institute of Archaeology and History.
Chapter 6 – The Usmenian way to understand the world, a decolonial option

Franz Fanon (1963) posited that people who have been colonised inhabit the colonial wound. A place where the colonial subject’s historical trajectory has been interrupted, neglected, broken and replaced by the coloniser’s historical trajectory. This rupture of the historical trajectories inflicts a wound that cannot be healed. Thus, colonised subjects live in constant pain. Gloria Anzaldúa wrote what is perhaps one of the most vivid and expressive accounts of that pain in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera* (2007), where she stated that Chicana women inhabit a frontier between the coloniser and the colonised perspectives. It is precisely that frontier that Fanon called the colonial wound, a place where the boundaries between Western and non-Western perspectives are blurred. Where there is a clash between the 'objective' and 'rational' Western disbelief and non-Western beliefs. An everyday battle fought in the self of the colonised subjects, where every day the Western perspective imposes (or tries to impose) itself over the colonised perspective. As a result, the inhabitants of the colonial wound experience a constant epistemological struggle: "Not only the brain is split in two functions but so was the reality. Thus people who inhabit both realities are forced to live in the interface of the two, force to become adept at switching modes. Such is the case with the *india* and the *mestiza*" (Anzaldúa 2007, p. 59). Hence, colonial subjects have to deal at the same time with two epistemologies that are melded in their subjectivities. Sometimes those epistemologies are fused like an alloy; for example, in the religious syncretism of santería (Brandon 1997; Duany 1982; Saldívar Arellano 2009). For instance, when psychiatric notions of mental health are imposed over the shamanic understanding of psychic episodes (Evers & Campbell 2015; Krippner 2002). That is why Anzaldúa claims that colonial subjects have to change modes all the time. They express different thoughts in different ways depending on whom they are talking to: certain kinds of things are shared with a state officer, and others with their peers. And that is where the pain comes from, an anxiety produced by the fact that not all of their thoughts and practices are understood from the hegemonic epistemology. Which in turn avoids the dialogue, and neglects all non-Western knowledge as primitive, savage or irrational. However, this switching of modes is far beyond...
being totally structured, the rules are not totally codified, thus the process is more rhizomatic than one might expect.

Nowadays, in Usme, the colonial wound is expressed by the imposition of modern/colonial, and urban ways to inhabit the land. Thus, the campesinos and activists from Usme, are used to changing modes to deal with the clashes between the urban modern epistemology and their own way of understanding the world. This change of modes in Usme has led to a fusion of the Western perspective with their own perspective: they are merging modern science with ancestral indigenous knowledge; Western utilitarian rationality with campesino memories and attachment to the land; and a rational disbelief with emotional ties that bind them to their land and that cannot be easily understood at a rational level.

In that manner by creating a mixture from the frontier, Usme activists are aiding the reconstruction of Usme as a space for hope, and they are creating a way to understand the world that helps them deal with the pain produced by the colonial wound. That happens because the Usmenian perspective delocates Western knowledge from its own genealogy and reinterprets it from another point of view. This is pivotal to the resistance process of Usme, as with that delocation of Western knowledge they are creating what Walter Mignolo (2007, 2008) called, a node in the web of decolonial thinking. It allows Usme activists to take advantage of the Western genealogy of knowledge, without compromising their critical position.

Given that, what is happening in Usme is the process of creation of decolonial thinking that was posited by Mignolo (2008): wherever the colonial matrix of power is established, the historical trajectory of the colonial subjects cannot be totally broken. It remains at least in a liminal way in the subjectivity of the colonial subjects. In that way, the colonial subjects are able to reinterpret Western discourses, and delocate those discourses from their own historical trajectory. Creating, in that manner, an original and alternative way of becoming in the world that can resist the logic of coloniality.

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106 That was previously discussed in Chapter Two.
This chapter will describe how Usme activists are creating a node of decolonial thinking. How they are building an understanding of the world that has the potential to resist the logic of coloniality. In that fashion, this chapter will explore, first the way in which the Muisca indigenous perspective is mixed with the campesino perspective. Then it will explore how from that mixed perspective, activists have been able to reinterpret the scientific discourse of ecology. Finally, the chapter will describe how Usme activists are creating alternative memory devices that allow them to create new ways of connecting to their land.

The descriptions made in this chapter were based on the interpretation of the cultural production of Usme activists. Especially on the leaflets and videos they produce, and in the conversations I had with the activists during my fieldwork. It is important to point out that the ideas I am expressing in this chapter were openly discussed with the activists, and that I asked them directly about some of the issues discussed in this chapter. However, this description is still my interpretation of those experiences. Some of those discussions are embedded in this chapter as a way to show how the activists of Usme think and express their way of thought.

6.1 The expression of the Muisca’s understanding of the world in Usme activism

In the above section I claimed that Usme activists are creating a node of decolonial thinking. One of the main sources that feed that node is the reinterpretation of the Muisca cosmogony. However, this is very complex given than the Muisca cosmogony is an interesting case of what Hall (1992) called new ethnicities; and its re-emergence is very recent: from the 1990s (Gómez-Montañez 2013a).

The Muisca were one of the few indigenous groups considered "civilised" by the Spanish Empire during the colonisation of America. This allowed the Muiscas to establish a more equal dialogue with the Spanish Empire\textsuperscript{107} than other pre-Hispanic societies. However, that dialogue contributed to the fast and smooth co-optation of Muiscas into the Western culture. Consequently, by the eighteenth century the Muiscas were considered mestizo

\textsuperscript{107} Which does not imply that they regarded them as equal.
campesinos, rather than an indigenous group. Thus, they lost many of the special considerations they used to have when identified as indigenous, especially the fact that their land lost the status of Indigenous Reservation (Gómez-Montañez 2013a, p. 136). Accordingly, their historical trajectory was broken more by assimilation and alienation than by a violent use of force, which could explain why Muisca’s resistance is not acknowledged by current narratives about indigenous resistance in Colombia (Gómez-Montañez 2013a). On the contrary, the Muisca cosmogony remained in the Colombian public imagery as a national symbol that represents the link Colombians have with an ancient civilisation. Hence, the Muisca is regarded by the hegemonic narratives of the Colombian State as part of a national historical trajectory. It is like a claim for ancestrality, a foundational myth for the National State of Colombia, a way to justify its place in the Western world. That is why the Muiscas are attached to the past; there is no room for them in the modern nation. They represent a golden past that had to decay for modernity to succeed. Thus the Muisca is not represented as part of the present in the hegemonic narrative of the Colombian nation, they are not regarded as contemporary indigenous (Gómez-Montañez 2009, 2010, 2013a). Likewise, the breaking of the Muisca’s historical trajectory is not part of the hegemonic narrative, or at least not in the complex way it occurred. For the hegemonic narrative and official curriculum, the indigenous culture was basically wiped out either by illness, war, slavery, or assimilated by the Western culture. And even when the Muiscas is considered as a foundational myth, the indigenous influences to the Colombian culture are not taken into account, and they disregard the history of those cultures. They remain in the past, and they do not have influence over the present. In fact, information about the Muisca culture before the Hispanic period is very limited, and is considered similar to a pre-historical period of time.108

Nevertheless, in Colombia other indigenous groups have maintained a more visible, long-standing struggle against the politics of assimilation pushed by the Spanish Empire since the sixteenth century and by the Creole elites since the nineteenth century. Accordingly, very powerful resistance movements emerged in the South East of Colombia, led by the Nasa and

108 An example of this way to understand the Muisca culture as something ancient that does not have any influence in the present could be found in Museums’ narratives (El Museo del Oro del Banco de la República 2012) or in the work of some historians (Herrera Angel 1993), and in the use of those narratives by the media (El Tiempo 2007).
Misac indigenous groups.\textsuperscript{109} The mobilisation of those indigenous groups have had a great impact on Colombian policymaking. Their efforts were summed to the student movement, the peace talks with M19, Quintín Lame and EPL guerrillas, and the assassination of the presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán, to create a synergy from where the \textit{Séptima Papeleta} (Seventh ballot) movement was born. This movement was successful in including a new ballot in the 1990 presidential elections that gave the Colombian citizens the opportunity to elect the members of a national constitutional congress. This congress was temporary and it had the undertaking to create a new constitution for the National State of Colombia. In that manner in 1991 the new constitution was proclaimed. It stipulated that Colombia was a multicultural and pluri-ethnic state, which ought to protect the indigenous cultures (Colombia 1991). Given the Nasa and the Misac participation in the movement led to the new constitution, they became part of the hegemonic narrative as the political indigenous groups. They became part of the narrative of the nation-state as the indigenous society that is politically active (Gómez-Montañez 2013a). On the other hand, the anthropological narratives created by Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff (1950, 1983, 1987) and the anthropological school he created in Colombia (Langebaek 2005; Pineda Camacho 2012) aided in the creation of the image of the Kogi indigenous group as what Astrid Ulloa (2001, 2004) called the ecological native. Thus, it is crucial to state that the Kogi are the indigenous society who inhabits the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, a glacial mountain range located on the Caribbean coast of Colombia. The cosmology of the Kogi states that the Sierra Nevada is the place from where everything has been created: it is the hearth of the world. In that sense the Kogi are the guardians of the creation and their mission is to prevent the destruction of it (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1987). The strong prominence that since the 1950s the anthropological narrative gave to the Kogi has two consequences. On one hand the Kogi started to be recognised by the official state’s and academic’s narratives as the spiritual leaders of the indigenous world in Colombia. In that manner they are partially regarded as an indigenous society that has enough knowledge to establish a dialogue with the modern/colonial perspective given that they have a small, but nevertheless compelling, voice in the state’s narrative. On the other hand, the

\textsuperscript{109} For more information about these mobilisations please refer to Castillo 2007; Espinosa Arango 2009; Gros 1991; Laurent 2005.
Kogis and their spiritual leaders, the Mamos, are regarded as people who are in a perfect coexistence with nature. Thus their voice is broadly heard and respected by the environmentalist movements and in the official policies of sustainable development in Colombia (Gómez-Montañez 2013a; Ulloa 2004).

Subsequently, when the constitution of 1991 opened the space for a process of reactivation of ethnic identities of indigenous groups whose existence was not previously considered (Gómez-Montañez 2010, 2013b; Sieder 2002), Nación Muisca Chibcha faced many challenges to be recognised as an indigenous group that coexists in the present, as both the academic and official narrative, still located it in the past. They are only valid in the past (Gómez-Montañez 2013b, p. 138). As a consequence, there have been many objections that the ‘Muisca's awakening’ has faced; those challenges came not only from the state and the academy but also from other indigenous groups. Among the most difficult challenges faced by Nación Muisca Chibcha are: first, that they are composed of people who inhabit urban territories in Bogotá and towns around it; and second, the heterogeneous phenotypes presented among them. Their looks are associated with Mestizos (and even White Colombians) but not with indigenous (Gómez-Montañez 2009).

These challenges are founded in the ethnic dominance described in Chapter Two, which created racial stereotypes of the indigenous population in America, and a generalised idea that the indigenous population in Colombia live in rurality. Given that, for some academics, politicians, social movements, and even some indigenous groups, it is difficult to recognise Nación Muisca Chibcha as an indigenous group. They are considered too civilised and too white to be indigenous. That is why Muiscas are challenging the modern/colonial ideas about what it means to be indigenous, they are doing this by detaching indigenous identity from the rural and from the non-white phenotype, which creates a series of tensions with modern narratives. The way in which they deal with those tensions is by claiming that there is a Muisca awakening that was waiting patiently for the right time to come. It was explained by an important Muisca Abuelo in a word circle in Usme:
“Many people have doubts about us. They think that the Muisca had disappeared in to the past. But Father and Mother remained in the mountains. This is the time for the Muisca's awakening, because this is the time when the man has detached itself from the earth. We have been awake because our ancestors called us. We have to stop the damage.” The Abuelo stopped for a minute to light a cigar. Once he started to rapear it, he continued:

“Our ancestors knew that they had to hide and mimic other people, otherwise they would disappear. But they also knew that the knowledge could be lost in the process, so they went to the Elder Brothers [The Kogi Mamos] at la Sierra Nevada, and they left with them our knowledge with the Elder Brothers to be preserved for the years to come; and when the moment was right they should deliver the knowledge back to us. One day, an Abuelo had an epiphany, a growing desire to go to the Sierra Nevada. He did not know why, but he known he had to. So, when he finally went, the Mamos told him why he was there: he was one of the first awakened, he realised of his ancestrality and his connection with the land. Then he came back to Bogotá to look for the others: to wake them to wake us. And here we are, standing on this sacred land fulfilling the natural law: Do not harm, do not let others do harm, and do not harm yourself”.

What the Muiscas claim is the natural law is embedded in a vision of the world in which the most important is to maintain the balance. For them doing harm is altering the natural balance in the space and/or the bodies of the entities who inhabit the space. Accordingly, one is permitted to log a tree to make fire, build houses, or clear space for agriculture, or one is permitted to sacrifice animals to eat them, but only if one asks for permission and gives back. Giving back could be done many ways, for example, if one sacrifices a bird to eat, one must give thanks to the bird, thanks to Mother Earth, and to the ancestors that lie in the land where the bird was sacrificed. Then one must do something that helps to restore the balance. The range of actions that can be made to restore the balance is very diverse. This was explained by Jeffrey, one of the activists from Usme, in a word circle carried out up in the páramo while he passed me a Sancocho bowl:

(…) Guys… you still do not understand what it means to be reciprocal or to maintain the balance. You are attached to quantification of reciprocity, but there are many ways to be reciprocal. The farmers in Usme have maintained this reciprocity for many years that is why
we are still connected with our ancestors, because they have been reciprocal. For example, have you noticed that there is too much Sancocho? We sacrificed three hens to do it, so this would feed far more than we are here. At the north [of Bogotá], where they have forgotten to be reciprocal, they either dispose of the unused Sancocho or it is given to the poor people surrounding rich neighbourhoods. But not as a gift, something that cost some kind of sacrifice, but as a way to get rid of the excess, as another way to toss it. So it is not reciprocal.

On the contrary, in Usme when one sacrifices a bird, we make a lot of Sancocho, and nothing is thrown away. The Sancocho we are not going to eat here is going to be shared with the people down back in the Usme Pueblo. Not as a way to get rid of the excess, but as a way to share the sacrifice of the bird and the happiness of eating with other people. In the same manner, some of it is going to be shared with non-human entities, like dogs. But in the case we don’t have enough to share with the people back in town, we could also plant a tree or germinate a seed of corn that can feed other chickens. Giving back is not a matter of mathematical reciprocity… it is a matter of the reciprocity of your hearth, of being grateful for what you have and finding ways to show you are happy with what nature gives to you. If you’d follow that logic, you’d understand that our fight against the mining and the urbanisation of Usme, is a way to be grateful.

In that manner, the Muiscas, and the activists of Usme understand the world as a place where everyone has a duty to maintain the balance. This idea came in contact with the resistance movement of Usme in the late 1990s when the younger activists, like Maurice, got closer with indigenous movements in Colombia. This period of time is blurred in the memory of younger activists because they started their militancy into Usme activism while at the same time they got closer with the indigenous movement.¹¹⁰ For them the struggle to claim Usme as their land on their own terms, resonates with the struggle of the emerging Muiscas to gain a place in the indigenous narratives of Colombia. Thus, the Muiscas have deeply influenced Usme activists, and the connection they have made with the Muiscas is so close that Maurice

¹¹⁰ In the cultural production made by the activists, there is no register about how they came in contact with the Muisca cosmogony. Instead, they depict the Muisca cosmogony as an influence that was always present in Usme, examples of that can be found in Santafé (1998) and Corporación Casa ASDOAS (2007). However, it was Maurice who told me about how when he, and other pioneers from the younger generations of Usme, got in touch with Nación Muisca Chibcha when they started their historical trajectories as environmentalists. Nevertheless, Maurice never goes in-depth with those explanations and he tries to avoid any conversation regarding that.
has been accepted as an *Abuelo* by the Nación Muisca Chibcha.\(^{111}\) However the oldest activists do not see in the Muisca cosmogony a direct reference and they try to differentiate their perspectives from the indigenous perspectives. This creates a dissensus between the younger and the older activists: while the elders try to differentiate from the Muiscas by recalling their Hispanic heritage, the youngest activists reject the Hispanic heritage giving priority to the Muisca one. In that manner the younger activists look to the Muisca heritage in the older activists’ practices and discourse. They argue that the elders’ Muisca heritage is expressed in their costumes and language; for example, in the preparation and drinking of Chicha. An extract from my fieldwork could illustrate that dissensus:

We were camping in the farm of Don Josue,\(^ {112}\) and he was preparing a bonfire so we could get warm, as the temperature in that evening was below six degrees Celsius, and since we were near the páramo, the air was very humid. I sat down next to the bonfire and I accidentally overheard a conversation between Don Josue and Maurice.\(^ {113}\) They were discussing the involvement of the Muisca community in Usme:

“I do not believe we have much in common with the Indians,” said Don Josue, “I mean my grandparents were Europeans, I believe in the Roman Catholic Church, in the most Holy Virgin Mary and in the Sacred Heart of our Lord Jesus Christ. But you are just following some hippie jargon about worshiping the sun…”

“With all the respect you deserve Don Josue” Maurice interrupted, in a very polite way, “It is not that we are ‘hippies’ ‘worshiping’ the sun. We realise the connections we have with the Muiscas, who are also your ancestors. Or how else you explain that you follow the natural law of the Muiscas, without calling it in that way, but at the end, you always try to reciprocate Mother Nature, to be grateful for your cattle and hens, and with your god for providing the sun and the rain to make your potatoes grow. We are not that different, the Muiscas and the Usmenians, we follow the path of our ancestors… besides” Maurice laughed while trying to

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\(^{111}\) The ceremony in which Maurice was named as *Abuelo* by Nación Muisca Chibcha took place in 2011. Because of timing, I was not able to attend the ceremony. However, it confirmed the role of Maurice as one of the leaders of the activists in Usme.

\(^{112}\) For privacy reasons this is a pseudonym.

\(^{113}\) Later I asked Maurice about this conversation, he then took me to Don Josue. They gave me permission to use this conversation as part of my data.
form the words for its next sentence “this is perhaps the best chicha I have ever tried, and it was done by your family, not by some ‘indians’”.

Don Josue, laughed back, as if he agreed with Maurice’s arguments, and then drank a little bit of chicha and said, “This chicha was done with a lot of love, my wife knew you were going to camp here today…”

In that manner the dissensus among the activist rather than create divisions has proved to be healthy, and has aided the younger activists to build bridges between what they consider their ancestors: on one hand the campesinos, and on other the Muiscas. The influence of this bridge over the activism of Usme has created a particular idea about what it is to be Usmenian and has aided in the empowerment of Usme. Since the bridge has provided the activists with an ancestrality that goes beyond the Hispanic period, it has aided the activist to build an alternative way to connect them with Usme. In that manner, the younger activists, in addition to defending their territory because they live there and their way of life is threatened by the urbanisation and the mining, are defending Usme because it is from there that their ancestors (campesinos and Muiscas) are calling them to restore the balance and to stop the harm.

Additionally, the reinterpretations of the Muisca cosmogony made by Usme activists, have allowed them to create an understanding of their land as something alive. This conception of the space contrasts with the modern/colonial way to understand space, as something closed, and complete. Given that, one of the most important tasks undertaken by Usme activists is the delocation of the scientific discourse of ecology, reinterpreting it in a way that ecology is open for the possibilities of a live place where all entities connect with each other by the desire to reach a level of equilibrium. That is, they are trying to delocate ecology in a way that it can provide an account of the Muisca natural law, ascribing to animals, plants, dirt, water, air, and human-made constructions, a conscious will.
6.2 Delocating science and environmental discourse. The deconstruction of the human/nature dichotomy

Usme activists are aware of the contribution made by science to the understanding of the world. The study of ecology and biology is an important part of their lives, and they consider that science has a significant role contributing to the understanding and ecological conservation of Usme. Likewise, they acknowledge the contributions made by modern environmentalism to the struggle for conservation of nature and to the harmonic relationship between human and nature. However, they are aware that the dichotomy of human versus nature is foundational to the scientific and environmentalist discourses. For them, it is important to deconstruct that dichotomy because for them that dichotomy will not allow a truthfully harmonic and equal relationship between human and nature. As was stated by Maurice during an ecological walk:

*Humankind has not been able to detach itself from the human/nature dichotomy … We, as humans, do not acknowledge that we are all part of nature, that we are not different to the plants or animals. We are all the same, the children of Mother Earth, and there is no difference between humans and other natural beings. The spectacled bear, the eagle, the quiche, the river and the mountains. We are all the same. But we have forgotten that; that we come from the dirt, from the earth, as any other being that exists in this planet. In that sense many environmentalists and activists are no different to corporations and politicians, they think that nature is something we can and we must control.*

If we are not able to separate ourselves from that dichotomy, our efforts to create a healthier environment will fail… We are condemned if we detach ourselves from Mother Nature.

Usme activists are exposing what, from their perspective, is an ontological problem with ecological sciences and modern environmentalism: that humans and nature do not belong to different realms; there is not a difference between the different assemblages that make up space. Animals, plants and minerals are all part of the same world; they are all connected by the fact that they are sons of Mother Earth. In that sense, Usme activists are stating that regardless of culture and society, human is also a natural entity. Humankind is equal to the rest of the nature and therefore it is not for them to control nature.
However, Usme activists instead of setting apart science and environmentalism, incorporate them as an important source of their way to understand the world. Moreover, some of them have graduated or are studying bachelors in ecology, biology or related fields, like environmental conservation or forestry engineering. But rather than being co-opted by modern environmentalism or by the scientific discourse, Usme activists have been able to delocate those discourses. This process is more evident in the case of the modern environmentalism discourse, and it has become a vehicle to communicate their struggles to a broader audience. Before showing how Usme activists are delocating ecology and environmentalism, it is important to understand what those discourses state from the modern/colonial point of view. For that reason, I will follow Joan Martinez-Alier’s (2002) reconstruction of environmentalism and ecology discourses. He suggested three types of environmentalism: the cult of wilderness, the gospel of eco-efficiency, and the environmentalism of the poor.

The cult of wilderness took its contemporary shape about 50 years ago in the US with the foundation of the Sierra Club. It appeals both to an idyllic imagery of a ‘pure’ nature; one that is untouched by humans. The cult of the wilderness posits that the destruction of ecosystems has been caused by human activity. Additionally, since the industrialisation of Western civilisation and the globalisation of market economy, the destruction rate of ‘pure’ places has grown exponentially. The destruction of ecosystems is a threat to all life on the planet, including human life. That is why the cult of the wilderness claims that it is our ethical responsibility to stop the destruction of the ecosystems. Given that, the cult of the wilderness aims to protect and conserve what it considers as ‘pristine’ ‘pure’ natural spaces from human influence, especially from a market economy. For that reason, the cult of wilderness opposes indiscriminate economic growth and development. The cult of the wilderness proposes a biocentric approach to nature rather than an anthropocentric one. But this biocentric approach to nature is done in a transcendental, almost religious, way: all kinds of life, but human, are sacred. Therefore, ecosystems cannot be measured in economic values (Martinez-Alier 2002, p. 7).
The most radical wing of the cult of wilderness opposes any human activity, even small-scale agriculture, arguing that any kind of modification of ecosystems endangers the flora and fauna. That is why one pivotal victory for the cult of the wilderness is the creation of natural parks and natural reserves where no human activity is allowed. This is very problematic, as many of the ecosystems considered unharmed or unaffected by human’s actions, are in fact home to many populations that have been interacting with those ecosystems long before the arrival of global capitalism and market economy. Thus, it is very common that the cult of the wilderness’ stakeholders encounter conflicts with local, rural and indigenous populations. Furthermore, the creation of natural parks often implies the expulsion of the human population that inhabit the areas that are declared as natural sanctuaries (Martinez-Alier 2002; Corry 2015). This kind of environmentalism is supported by many scholars, especially biologist and philosophers and it ”(...) irradiates its powerful doctrines from northern capitals such as Washington and Geneva towards Africa, Asia and Latin America through well-organized bodies such as the International Union for the conservation of Nature (IUCN), the World Wide Fund for nature (WWF) and Nature Conservancy” (Martinez-Alier 2002, p. 3).

The cult of the wilderness has been challenged by a second type of environmentalism: the gospel of eco-efficiency. It is "concerned with the sustainable management or ‘wise use’ of natural resources and with the control of pollution not only in industrial contexts but also in agriculture, fisheries and forestry, resting on a belief in new technologies and the ‘internalisation of externalities’ as instruments for ecological modernisation, backed up by industrial ecology and environmental economics" (Martinez-Alier 2002, p. 14). The gospel of eco-efficiency recognises economy growth as an instrument for human prosperity, but states that economic growth cannot be pushed at any cost, because the destruction of ecosystems has the potential to harm human societies and economies. Accordingly, the gospel of eco-efficient nature does not have an implicit right to exist, and there is not an ethical dilemma about the exploitation of natural resources. However, it is pivotal to take into account the economic and social effects of the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources. In that sense for this kind of environmentalism "[d]isappearing birds, frogs or butterflies
‘bioindicate’ that something is amiss, as did canaries in coalminers’ hats, but they have not by themselves a self-evident right to exist” (Martinez-Alier 2002, p. 5).

Hence, the gospel of eco-efficiency appeals for a scientific approach to the understanding of nature that allows a better management of the natural resources and a proper exploitation of them. It has transformed ecology into a managerial science that aims to minimise the impact that industrialisation has on the ecosystems. In that way, this kind of environmentalism believes that science has the capacity to clean and repair the damage done by human activities and prevent future ones: ecology has the role to clean the mess left behind by industrialisation. Given that the gospel of eco-efficiency does not antagonise global capitalism’s practices of exploitation of natural resources, it became the most important environmental concern (Martinez-Alier 2002). It became a fundamental part of the development discourse, that today not only do we have to look for ways to improve the profits of a nation-state but also do it in a sustainable way. Correspondingly, it has settled a series of tools and methods to measure and control nature. This is why the salvationist discourse of development has had a little change: development in addition to bringing prosperity to third world countries, without affecting nature. In that manner, the gospel of eco-efficiency leads the contemporary environmentalism debate, and it has aided in shifting the market economy towards a more sustainable way to produce, trade and consume. That is why government and corporations are supporting the research and establishment of clean energy sources, efficient agriculture, and a nature friendly use of natural resources.

But even when the cult of the wilderness and the gospel of eco-efficiency disagree on the discourse, in their practices they are not mutually exclusive. Many organisations and activists transit between both environmentalist currents, working sometimes from one discourse and then from the other. In this process the cult of the wilderness has been co-opted by the gospel of eco-efficiency. Since the cult of the wilderness lacks the acceptance that the gospel of eco-efficiency has from governments and corporations, many cults of the wilderness supporters have to transit towards the gospel of eco-efficiency to deliver their claims:
Those whose interest in the environment is exclusively in terms of preservation of wilderness exaggerate the ease with which the economy can dematerialize, and become opportunistic believers in the gospel of eco-efficiency. Why should this be so? By asserting that technical change will make the production of commodities compatible with ecological sustainability, they emphasize the preservation of that part of Nature which is still outside the economy. So the ‘cult of wilderness’ and the ‘gospel of eco-efficiency’ sometimes become bedfellows. Hence, for instance, the WWF and Shell partnership for the plantation of eucalyptus in several places in the world, the argument being that this will diminish pressure on the natural forests and will presumably also increase carbon uptake. (Martinez-Alier 2002, p. 10)

In that manner, global capitalism has been able to co-opt the environmentalism discourses of the modern/colonial world and transform them into part of the salvationist discourse of development.

These two currents are challenged by a third one: the environmentalism of the poor, as Martinez-Alier (2002) called it. This third current was born in the indigenous and campesino communities whose lives have been threatened by the industrialisation and the destruction of the environment. People whose lives has been affected by the displacement, commodification and contamination of sources of water, food and shelter, are claiming their right to a proper environment to live in. This third kind of environmentalism is generated from the ecological conflicts worldwide, and many of them argue:

That indigenous and peasant groups have often coevolved sustainably with Nature. They have ensured the conservation of biodiversity. Organizations representing peasant groups exhibit an increasing agroecological pride in their complex farming systems and varieties of crops. This is not only retrospective pride, there are also today many unacknowledged inventors and innovators, as the Honey Bee network proves in India114. (Martinez-Alier, 2002, p. 11)

114 The Honey Bee Network (HBN) was founded in India in 1988 by Anil Gupta. In the mid-1980s Gupta was looking for ways to aid scientists to understand the challenges faced by poor people on their lands. While conducting fieldwork, he discovered that there was an increasing number of indigenous solutions to the challenges the poor were facing on their lands (Pattnaik & Dhal 2015). But because those solutions were posited by the subaltern, they were not heard by the academy or governments. “So, Anil Gupta & Colleagues started with a message: Minds of the margin are not the marginal minds; shall we join hands in learning from grassroots innovations” (Pattnaik & Dhal 2015, p. 101). In that manner, HBN goals are: “(i) to locate/identify by scouting and registering grassroots level innovations; (ii) to protect the intellectual property rights of the grassroots...
This kind of environmentalism is usually confined to their own countries, and limited to a local impact. However, communities and organisations mobilised around local struggles for the right to environmental justice are gaining momentum. Especially in countries affected by colonisation, as by the hand of the salvationist discourse of development, their economy’s growth creates an increase in the cases of environmental destruction, land expropriation and labour exploitation, and an increasing of the control that companies have over the bodies of the people.

The activism in Usme can be understood as an example of the third kind of environmentalism pointed out by Martinez-Alier (2002). However, this classification is limited, and even when it acknowledges the subaltern potential for resistance to global capitalism and the challenge posited by indigenous practices to the logic of colonality, ‘the environmentalism of the poor’ category could limit the comprehensive understanding of the decolonial possibilities offered by the subaltern. In that way it is important to acknowledge that Usme activism not only challenges Western notions of development and environmentalism, but also posits an alternative way to become in the world. In that sense it is pivotal to state that Usme activism has not only challenged the ideas of development and sustainability by proposing indigenous alternatives, but at the same time they have been able to make an epistemic appropriation of modern ideas: detaching ecology and environmentalism from the Western genealogy of knowledge and incorporating them in their own perspective to offer an alternative reinterpretation of them. For them science is not only a way to understand nature, it is a way to connect with nature, to get closer to it. At the same time, scientific knowledge about nature and environmentalism discourse is an important tool.
to build bridges with Western culture and global society. Subsequently, science and environmentalism allow Usme activists to deliver their message to a broader audience, to deliver their claims to the state, gain some support from civil society and connect with Western organisations that have a more visible voice (like Greenpeace). An example of the use of a delocated scientific discourse can be seen in the way in which Alexander, one of the leaders of the younger activists, talked to a group of university students during an ecological walk:

We were at the basin of the Tunjuelo River, facing Doña Juana Landfill from the opposite shore. It was around 10 am and there was not a single cloud in the sky. The sunlight was so bright that it was harsh to the eyes. The sunshine heated thousands of tons of rubbish that were deposited under a mat of lawn that, under the sunlight, gave the impression of glowing with a radioactive green colour. From that mat emerged tens of metal cylinders from where white smoke streamed. A rancid odour impregnated the air, and it was impossible to avoid or ignore it. Alexander announced:

“There she is in full splendour! Doña Juana is showing herself off… She makes it impossible not to notice her. She is one of the worst health and ecological hazards that the inhabitants of Bogotá are facing today”. Alexander looked at the landfill and took a deep breath. Like if he was an air purifier that was trying to absorb all the gases that Doña Juana expelled. While he did that, his tall and slim figure looked a little bit goofy. He looked lost in his orange squared t-shirt and cargo pants, like they were three or more sizes bigger than him. His baseball cap projected a shadow on his face that hid his eyes. Because of his looks it took a little bit of effort to catch the attention of the state officers and university students that were walking with us that day. So, with the intention of getting the attention of the group, he cleared his throat and continued his speech in a lecturing tone:

“The stink we are noticing, is a product of more than 5800 tons of garbage that, according to the official records, are thrown into her every single day… In fact, more than 8000 tons of rubbish are deposited in the landfill on a daily basis. As a consequence of the decomposition of that astonishing quantity of rubbish, Doña Juana throws more than 20 litres of leachate every second... Do you know what a leachate is?” He asked rhetorically, and then responded to himself: “It is the liquid produced by the decomposition of the garbage that is filtered by
the soil under a landfill, a process known as percolation. Disgusting, isn't it?” He asked another rhetorical question, like a teacher trying to maintain the attention of the class: “Some of you may think that because the liquid is filtered by the soil, it becomes clear. But actually, it contains thousands of micro particles and microorganisms that are a threat to the ecosystem. It is calculated that the mass of a percolate is 50% of filthy bacteria and viruses, and at least 2% of it contains heavy metals, like plum, that are a serious threat to human life”. Alexander looked at us, to see if he still had the attention of the group. Then he took a deep breath and continued:

“Can you imagine? 20 litres per second, it is 10 litres of microorganism, and 200 cm² of heavy metals a second. Like throwing a bucket of bacteria and a can of drink full of heavy metals to the river every second! Normally it wouldn't happen. The leachates are supposed to be contained and treated in the landfill, so they do not become a threat to the lives around it. But given that this is the country of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, everything is done without proper planning. Doña Juana was built on a plot that is not proper for that use, and the engineering behind it was poorly done... like everything in this country… Doña Juana was so badly planned that in 1997 it exploded, filling each one of the neighbourhoods around it with filth”. Alexander said it while pointing with his index finger towards Usme and Ciudad Bolívar urban areas. “That is why they put those fumes, to let the gas escape and prevent future explosions. And then they covered the garbage with that radioactive grass that you are looking at, to make us believe that the landfill is better today [October 2012] than in the 90s, but it won't solve the problem. The landfill is nearly full and it continues to filter leachates into the river; not only that, Doña Juana's fumes expel terrible pollution into the air, and it threatens the lives of the inhabitants of Ciudad Bolívar and Usme”.

He paused to answer some of the technical questions asked by his audience, especially by some state officers who did not know the facts about the landfill. Some of the state officers quoted studies that contradicted what Alexander told the group, but he cleverly answered by showing the results from the research that the activists had conducted in Doña Juana. The discussion was very academic, and there were many technical aspects that excluded some of us from the discussion. But after all the questions were answered, and he was sure of being convinced, or at least created a doubt, in the state officers, he started another speech:

115 This is a common saying in Colombia that is used as an exclamation of dissatisfaction with government policies. It usually implies a surreal absurdity that people grant to national politics.
“The problem here is not only technical. It is ethical. The greed of some politicians who tried to fill their pockets while building a landfill where it doesn’t belong. They did not ask for the permission of Father and Mother who lie in the mountains. If they’d asked for permission, they would know that this plot was not a proper place to build it. There are other spaces that Mother Earth would allow us to use. In a way, doing proper scientific research is part of asking for permission. Due to our lack of respect for this land, for Father and Mother, for the river, for the communities that inhabit here, and for Mother Earth, Doña Juana hill received a load too big for her, a burden so hard that it is killing her. In her despair she decided to share the load with the river… she has to throw the leachates in order to survive! But the river did not ask for that load either, and he became angry, angry at Doña Juana, and angry at us. Since then he had flooded the neighbourhoods in his basin on a constant basis. Not only that, the explosion was also a response from Doña Juana, a desperate cry for justice. She tried to let us know what she feels... The greed, the lack of respect, the disconnection from the land and earth, which are the causes for an alteration in the balance. Doña Juana is hurt, the Tunjuelo River is angry and Mother Earth is sad”.

His speech made sense in the eyes of the state officers, who in some ways understand the connection between Usme's inhabitants and their land. The use of scientific facts and scientific knowledge allowed them to grasp a little bit of the perspective from where Usme's activists understand their territory. The tactic was so effective, that some of them began frequenting the ecological walks, and others started to mobilise resources that could aid the activists to close the landfill. In a conversation with one of the officers I realised that he understood the problem of the landfill not as an exclusive economic and scientific problem, but as an ethical problem that affects the lives of millions of people:

“When I came for the first time to Usme”, said the State officer, “I never imagined that I would become an environmentalist. But what we, as a society, have done here is terrible. We neglected them, we do not listen to them, and they have so many good ideas that could make our work\textsuperscript{116} far easier. I have changed, you know, I tried to recycle and reuse, I try to buy local, and I do urban agriculture as they [Usme activists] have taught me. I tried to minimise

\textsuperscript{116} He was an employee of the Ministry of Environment, Housing and Territorial Development.
the impact that I have on Doña Juana, in our páramo. It is my responsibility as a Bogotanian”.

The use of scientific knowledge as a way to connect with the land, and as bridge with Western institutions is just one of the ways in which Usme activists detach the ecological and environmental discourses from the Western genealogy of knowledge. But as it was stated earlier, they also critique this discourse precisely because it is founded on the human/nature dichotomy. As was stated by Alexander in the story above, there is a "disconnection [of humans] from the land and earth". They claim that disconnection came from the idea that humans are different from nature; that they belong to different realms. That is the modern/colonial opposition between civilisation and wilderness. For Usme activists there is not a difference between humans and nature, both of them belong to the same realm. Likewise, there is no contradiction between civilisation and wilderness, both of them are part of the same ecosystem.

In that way Usme activism invites humans to left the privileged place from where nature is regarded as something that can be measured and controlled. As an alternative, they invite humans to become part of nature, to be another natural entity: like the wind or the sun, like the eagle or the rabbit, like the trees or the orchids. They invite humans to understand that we have an interdependent relationship with the space in which we live, and therefore an interdependent relationship with other natural entities. From the activists’ perspective, it is pivotal to understand that humans are not more important than the spectacled bear that dwells in the Sumapaz Páramo, or the rock that lies at the bottom of the Tunjuelo River. But neither are they more important than humans. All of the natural entities have the same importance, since all natural entities were created by Mother Earth in the same manner, and she established an equilibrium that allows all natural entities to coexist together in the world. Hence, Usme activists invite humans to remember Mother Earth, so they can coexist with all other natural entities and all other human groups. In order to coexist, they claim we must

117 Some words shared by a former state officer in a word circle in Usme.
follow the Muisca natural law. That does not mean that they do not acknowledge the existence of conflicts between natural entities, for them the conflict is part of the equilibrium:

Just like the puma kills and eats the rabbit we can kill and eat other species, but we can be killed and harmed by other entities: for example, the puma can also kill and eat us, so can the fleas or many kinds of bacteria. But also the wind, the earth or the rain can kill us.

But at the same time, Usme activists state that conflicts always have a resolution, and it is in this resolution that the equilibrium is restored:

If the puma eats the rabbit, it is preventing the population of rabbits growing to the point it becomes a threat to our crops or to the small plants that are just starting to look for sunlight.

But sometimes the resolution implies harming parts of the natural entity that is causing the disequilibrium. Therefore, for Usme activists it is natural that the sea, the wind and the earth react violently to the harm done by humans to other natural entities. Natural disasters are a way to resolve the conflict, to stop the harm and restore the balance. Given that:

If humanity wants to prevent being wiped out from the planet, we must minimise the quantity of harm we are doing to other natural entities and make payments to the entities that allow us to live a comfy life. And we shall never use more than we need. We must restore the balance, or others will do it for us.

Some may argue that this discourse is similar to some of the most radical cults of the wilderness discourses, like the Animal Liberation Movement, and actually they have some resonances. However, there is a radical difference. Whilst the cult of the wilderness and the Animal Liberation Movement take animals and elevate them to the human privilege of rights, Usme activists descend from their privileged place in the modern/colonial ontology, and deconstruct the ideas of what it is to be a human being, and also the anthropocentric or

118 A law that was explained earlier in this chapter.
119 Hamilton said while explaining the concept of balance and equilibrium from and Usmenian perspective.
120 Hamilton said while explaining the concept of balance and equilibrium from and Usmenian perspective.
121 Maurice said while explaining the concept of balance and equilibrium from and Usmenian perspective.
biocentric approaches to the world. Humans are not in the world to control nature. Nor are humans the only ones that can save nature, because it can (and it will) be done by the same natural entities that have been hurt. Consequently, natural disasters are created by natural entities to remind humans that they belong to nature, to the land. This way of addressing natural disasters and the relationship with natural entities can be seen in a previous vignette, when Alexander explained that Doña Juana exploded, delivering the rubbish to people’s houses because it was tired of being used as a landfill.

It is arguable that while Usme activists’ perspective deconstructs the human/nature dichotomy by erasing the boundaries between both categories, the Animal Liberation Movement is merely moving the boundary in a manner that the animals are anthropomorphised but still remain under the control of humans. Jonathan Benthall (2014) discusses some of the arguments provided by the Animal Rights Movement, especially the ones based in the anthropological and philosophical corpus of literature. He stated that when Animal Rights activists claim that it is an ethical duty to subscribe to animals the same rights as humans, they do not realise that the concept of ‘rights’ is an anthropocentric one. Given that, it is possible to infer that they are not deconstructing the human/nature dichotomy (or in that case human/animal) because even when they claim to use a more biocentric approach in their struggles, they are still not able to descend from an anthropocentric vision of the world, as they are just separating animals from the natural category and adding them to the human category. This is different to the Usme activists’ proposal descending from the anthropocentric (and biocentric) ivory tower to a more ‘naturecentric’ or ‘earthcentric’ way to understand the world. Some of Usme activists are conscious of this crucial difference in the way to address the human/nature dichotomy, like Maurice, who was very concerned about the shape taken by the protests against the use of horse carts by the recyclers and expressed his point of view in a word circle.\(^{122}\)

\(^{122}\) Until Gustavo Petro became Mayor of Bogotá, there was no official program of recycling in the city, not even separation of recyclables at the source. However, there were some recycling plants that used paper, copper and aluminium. Those plants bought the recyclables from one of the poorest segment of the population in the city. They are called Los Zorreros because they used Zorras (horse cars) as their primary mode of transport. Los Zorreros travelled all around the city in their Zorras trying to reach the rubbish bins before the rubbish
“What is the problem with all of those animal liberation activists? I mean all of those *gomelitos*¹²³ that are following PETA, and some other *gringo*²⁴ organisations”. Maurice asked me in a coffee shop of Usme. The question caught me unprepared, I did not know what I *should* answer, I did not know Maurice's position on the issue, and given that he never stopped to classify me as one *gomelito*, I was worried that the answer could affect my rapport. Thus, I hesitantly answered: “Well… you know... I think they forgot about people, what are they gonna do without *Zorras*? I mean, not all of the recyclers will be able to get a truck…” “Look dude…” Interrupted Maurice, “in some ways it is very good what the animalists are doing. They are trying to restore the balance of nature. They are claiming that humans are equal to animals, that they have the same rights. But they forgot something really important: that we are bound to Mother and Father, that we are part of nature. It does not matter how hard they try to make animals equal to us, if they do not become equal with earth, with the land: the rivers, the mountains, the sea... they do not try to be equal to animals, they are claiming that animals be equal to us, which is different… don’t you think so?”

“What do you mean?” I asked him, “You say that we have to become like the animals. Like hunters and collectors?”

“No! We have achieved a lot since then, Mother Earth has allowed us to evolve so we can have an easier life. What do you think a mother wants for their children? For them to have an easy life, to be happy. She allowed us to grow food from plants and animals, to harvest crops and raise cattle, and from that some species obtained benefits. Like the cattle, that is not hunted by any other species anymore and can grow in numbers, or the Amazon, that was shaped by the indigenous people who inhabited it hundreds and thousands of years ago.

collection companies’ trucks. The rubbish collection companies did not discriminate recyclable material from non-recyclable, so *Los Zorreros* need to move fast if they want to extract the recyclable material. Then they load the *Zorras* with hundreds (even thousands) of kilos of recyclable material. The uprising of the Animal Liberation Movement targeted *Los Zorreros* accusing them of animal cruelty, arguing that the use of horses to transport heavy loads was a primitive, aggressive and cruel practice that endangers the life of the horses. Two of the most popular campaign promises of Gustavo Petro were the prohibition of bullfighting and the use of *Zorras* in the city. Once he was positioned in office in January 2012, his first policy was to ban bullfighting; however, the prohibition of the use of *Zorras* was a tougher challenge as many families depended on them as a source of income. By December 2012 there was still a huge number of *Zorros* on Bogotá’s streets, when the mayor’s office began to replace horse cars for small moto-trucks. (Llano Aguilar 2014; Pacheco 1992).

¹²³ Gomelo, or gomelito is a popular term to refer to the young people from upper and middle upper classes in Bogotá.

¹²⁴ Gringo is a word used in Colombian context that refers to the United States’ population.
Mother Earth also allowed us to build houses, roads, cities… She provided us with enough room and material to build shelter. She also gave us medicine to cure our illness, and in addition she allowed us to decipher some of her secrets. But we behave like brats, always taking more than we need, and taking everything without permission. Our greed and pride have detached us from her, we have altered the balance... A gringo eats five times what he needs! Some of them became poor fatsos that cannot move by their selves anymore… talking about fat creatures: nowadays we have hippos in Colombia! Escobar brought them here,\(^\text{125}\) and they are altering the ecosystem...” He stops, to drink a little bit of coffee, take some air and then continues what he was saying:

“There is an equilibrium in nature, and we are altering it because we forgot we are part of nature, we forgot that she is our mother. We forgot where we come from: Father and Mother who lie in the river, in the mountains. It is not a matter of becoming vegan, it is a matter of eating what Mother allows us to eat, and not anymore. If we listen to the territory, to our bodies, if we walk the words and remember who we are, we will live in peace with all natural entities. It does not imply not eating meat, we have done it always because mother provides us with it, or it does not imply not using the donkey or the horse to share the load. It implies asking the donkey or the horse for their help and checking how much load he can carry, and after the end of the working day return the favour to the animal that has helped us. That is a way to restore the balance. Just as the bee returns the favour to the plant by pollinizing other plants, just as the eagle restore the balance by eating the rabbit, but not over eating all of them. There is an ecological equilibrium we must maintain, we have to respect Mother Earth and acknowledge that we are part of nature.”

He looked me in the eye and told me: “Remember Andrés, Mother, Father, Grandpa and Grandma inhabits the mountains, the rivers, and the wind. They protect us, and they provide

\(^{125}\) One of the many ways in which Pablo Escobar demonstrated his wealth and power was the construction of a private open range zoo in one of his haciendas, not open to the public. To create his personal zoo, he brought to Colombia many foreign animal species, among them hippos. But after his death the zoo was abandoned, and nobody took care of the animals or the complex. Some of the species that successfully survived without any type of human intervention entered the Colombian ecosystem and presented great threats to the natural flora and fauna. That prompted environmental institutions to take action and try to capture or eliminate those species. But due to a limited budget hippos were not controlled. Nowadays they seem totally adapted to the Andes Mountains climate and are successfully reproducing their species in one of the most important agricultural zones of Colombian, which is a threat to campesino communities and ecosystems in Colombia (Von Hildebrand 2010).
us. We must be grateful to them and we must respect them. We must give back. The animal rights activists seem to forget that. It is not a matter of giving rights to the animals, but to giving respect to the territory and all the entities that inhabit it, even the people. I reckon that if we would ask for permission to the cattle and the land before sacrificing it, we would have what they [the animal rights activists] call a more human way of acting towards animals. Which for me, is in fact a more natural way of acting towards animals because it is according to the natural law.”

“Listen… There is a fact we must remember, there is no difference between humans and animals, we all are children of Pacha Mama we all have a mission on this planet. Therefore, we are no different than horses, trees, rivers or the wind. We are all alive, all connected by the soil, by the earth and the land.”

Usme activists are actually separating themselves from the global environmentalism discourses. They are creating an alternative to the modern/colonial understanding of science, and to the modern/colonial understanding of the culture/nature and primitive/modern dichotomies. They are proposing a decolonial option that uses science as a way to understand the world, as long as the scientific can descend from the anthropocentric ivory tower and understand that he cannot control nature. The scientific also has to think about the world in an interconnected holistic way, in which it is not possible to detach the pieces from the whole network.

At the same time, they are creating a decolonial environmentalism that rather than looking to minimise the interaction between human and natural entities or control natural resources, claims that the only way to restore the balance is to follow the Muisca Natural law. That is why their decolonial environmentalism proposed to humans is founded in nature, to realise the multiple connections humans and other natural entities have, to get involved in the process of maintaining the balance but without believing that humans are in charge of the process. It is an environmentalism that is not fatalist, as they do not claim that the end of the world is near or that climate change will condemn all life on the planet, but at the same time it does not believe in the human capacity to control nature. Instead Usme activists are being aware of the human fragility, they believe that if humans do not stop the damage they are
doing, some other entities will. Hence, from their alternative way to understand the world, they state that the solution to contemporary problems is to restore the balance; Usme activists state that it is important to reconstruct the ties that attach people to their territories. This was discussed in a theatre play, performed by the activists in a local high school. In the play they condensed many of the ideas explored in this chapter.

The play was about a farmer who fell in love with the moon, and in order to get her love he looked for many ways to talk to her. Some of those ways disconnected him from his land, which made the moon reject the farmer’s gifts. So in his despair, the farmer asks the moon why she was rejecting his gifts, to which the moon answered:

“Dear Juaquin… I have not talked to you, because you don’t deserve my words. You cut the trees to build this huge tower to be closer to me, but you destroyed the forest to do it. You did not ask the trees, or the forest for their permission to do it. You did not give back. And because of that, you have been disconnected from your ancestors, and from your land… You have disconnected yourself from me, and I don’t want to talk to you anymore”.

“But wait, help me! What should I do?” The farmer asked, to which the moon answered:

“You should remember where you come from. Science, technology are not tools to grow distance between us, they should get us closer. You should not think that they would allow you to control nature, because nature is always overwhelming. But if you use science within the boundaries of a spiritual connection with your ancestors, with your territory and with nature, it would allow you to listen to nature… Your spiritual connection with the territory would allow you to use nature as a way to connect with me; you would be able to comprehend me, to understand me and to respect me. And then I would be able to get closer to you and be the light that shines in your nights, and be with you as your eternal company. Let me be free, and I will be your partner”.

With the purpose of reconstructing those ties, Usme activists propose a series of memory devices that allowed people to realise the connection, to make it explicit rather than latent. It also implies an intersubjective way of understanding the space that resonates with Massey’s notions of space, where it is constructed by connections rather than coordinates. Those memory devices are going to be explored in the next section of the chapter.
6.3 Memory devices in Usme

The memory devices created by Usme activists are grounded in two ideas. First there is no other world than the material one. And second, death only comes when an entity stops its movement, and since the activists’ ancestors continue their movement by dwelling and becoming part of the environment and the memory of their descendants, they are not dead even when have passed away. This is why their ancestors are not like ghosts that are dwelling beyond this plane of existence, nor do they express themselves in immaterial ways. Instead they are attached to the territory and by being contained in the memory of their descendants, the activists consider that their ancestors coexist with them and with Usme in a material and performative way in the present time:

“Hehehey,” Hamilton said to greet me at the bus station.

“Hi,” Answered to his greeting. To which he responded:

“Ok I give up! Please say hehehey, it also acknowledges our ancestors. You know… Father and Mother that lies in the mountains, in the rivers, in the clouds. In all of the little things that make this territory. You think they passed away, but they are here, calling us to be the new guardians of the territory”. He saw the disbelief in my eyes, because he continued:

“I know you do not believe it, but they haven’t ‘passed away’, they are not ‘dead’. They are not in heaven, nor in hell… They inhabit this territory, they keep ongoing moving around us… in the wind, in the water… that is why we can remember them”.

This is something very important for Usme activists and they try to reinforce this point in almost every conversation and speech they make, as they end or start many of their arguments by saying: “we must respect Father and Mother who dwell in the mountains, in the river, and in the territory”.

At the same time, memory, from an Usmenian perspective, is twofold. On one hand it is attached to the territory and on the other it is attached to the bodies of the activists. At the same time memory is a vehicle to connect the activists with their land, and their ancestors with the present time, and not a vehicle to connect the activists with the past. That is why the
activists stated, “we are in the world to remember not to learn” which is another recurrent statement made by the activists. For them the time is like a cycle, not because there is an eternal recurrence of events, but because to remember the past is to bring the past to the present. When this past is brought to the present, then it became something new. In that way by remembering they are reterritorialising memory and history, and by doing that, they are learning how to face their present difficulties, closing the cycle of history. Hence, to remember is equal to learning, and given that by innovating they are remembering in a different way, their process of learning something new must include remembering.

Since their ancestors have a performative role, as they continue in movement, and given that their ancestors are contained in the territory and in their bodies, the activists have developed three memory devices: bloodline, word circles and walking the words. The first helps them to connect with distant generations using their bodies and minds; the second aids them to connect with past generations that can still transmit their knowledge orally; and the third supports them to connect their bodies with the land and the ancestrality that is contained in it.

The bloodline memory device does not work like modern/colonial family genealogies. It is not done by making family trees or tracing past generation’s historical lines. Instead, this memory device operates in a precognitive and intuitive way. And for many occasions this memory device is operated by their ancestors, who put it in movement. Thus, it is the ancestors who call the activists to remember memories. It was explained by Maurice in a conversation after a forum in Hacienda el Carmen:

Look dude, memories are passed from generation to generation through DNA, as if there is some kind of memory bond that unites generations through piles of memories stacked in ourselves. But those memories remain latent; they are buried deep inside of our subconscious. But they are there, and they call us to remember. Sometimes they are like a déjà vu, you know? Like when you feel that you have been in a place before. It is because some of your ancestors have been there before. And sometimes, when you feel that you need to be in some place, it is your ancestor calling you to go there, he or she needs that you remember who you are and where you come from. So all that we do when we follow our hearts, is remembering.
But the modern man has forgotten how to remember, he has lost the connection with his ancestors, and that is why he doesn’t respect the land, the place where he comes from.

The way in which Maurice explained the bloodline as a memory device implies that some of the ties that connect people with their previous generation are linked to space. For him, the memories of the ancestors are important because they have the potential to connect (or to reconnect) us with the land. In that way, for Usme activists remembering is also a way to connect them with the space. But his connection between memory and space is important not in the common Western way to understand the relation between history and space, where space is filled with meaning by history as was criticised by Massey (2005); instead, for Usme activists there is a special connection between space and memory because each one of those is performative.¹²⁶

The second memory device Usme activists’ use is word circles. This memory device is understood in a similar way in which oral history is understood in academia. In that sense it is important to point out that for the academy oral history does not have to be confused with oral tradition. Oral tradition is one in which the history has been passed orally from generation to generation, whereas oral history is a method to obtain information to be used in research (Leavy 2011, p. 4). Usme activists have co-opted this historical research tool to gather information that allows them to pass history to future generations; in that way they are using oral history as a way to establish an oral tradition in the community. Given that Usme activists posit that there should be a link between the elders and the young of the community, where the elders are in charge of passing history and traditions by talking to the young. However, they argue that the link was broken by urbanisation. Therefore, Usme activists have put a lot of effort in rebuilding this link. For that reason, they have adapted focus groups to gather oral history in a way that not only aids them in the gathering of historical information, but also in a way where the elders can directly deliver their oral tradition to younger generations.

¹²⁶ This will be further explored in Chapter Seven.
The word circles are carried out by inviting elder campesinos and school students to a gathering at the historical landmarks of Usme. There, the elders have the opportunity to share memories about their everyday life and the changes that have happened in Usme. These meetings are usually accompanied by the cooking of a traditional meal using traditional methods, and the playing of traditional games like *tejo*. With those activities they hope that the younger generations can reconnect with the oral tradition of Usme. Because there is a lack of information about Usme, oral tradition is perhaps the most important source of historical information. Additionally, they are very important given the performative notion of memory Usme activists have. They believe that this would help younger generations to awaken the latent memories they have in their DNA about Usme, which could lead younger generations to connect with the territory.

The third memory device used by Usme activists is walking the words. For them the act of walking is analogue to having a conversation with the territory, in that way it is a way to remember. That is explained by Jeffrey when he stated: “when one is walking, one is making multiple connections with the land and the entities that inhabit them”. Given that they think about space as something alive, and about the natural entities as something sentient that follow a natural law, walking is a way to communicate with the land. Each step they take is part of a communication system between the land and the walkers. In that manner, it is by walking that they are able to remember their ancestral memories. Assuming the above, the feeling of déjà vu posited by Maurice is common to the activists in their ecological walks. It is by walking that the precognitive déjà vu becomes a cognitive notion about the territory: by walking, the memory is transformed from an introspective and retrospective search, to a performative utterance. By walking, Usme activists are able to enact (or re-enact) their ancestor memories. For that reason, there is a common saying among them: “We have to walk the words”.

As was posited above, the memory devices that Usme activists have developed allow them to connect with their land, to reinterpret it and understand it in a perspective that challenge the hegemonic one. In the next chapter I will expand on those notions by showing them in praxis, and showing how those memory devices are present in all the resistance
actions the activist carried out. At the same time, the next chapter will show how these memory devices allow them to create alternative ways to connect to space, to their territory, which will lead to an explanation of how they conceive their territory.
Chapter 7 – Rethinking Usme from the ‘Usmeka thought’

For Usme activists thinking and acting are one and the same, there is no difference between them. For them, theory is not constructed by induction nor deduction, but by experiencing the reality of their territory. In that manner, thinking and acting are not in a dialectic relationship, but they are presented in a twofold called by activists ‘The Usmeka Thought’. This is summarised by Usme activists as the expression ‘we walk the words’. Usme activists explained this to the children at a local primary school, by showing them a movie that depicts an Usmenian ancestor who lies in the water and talks to the camera in a short monologue:

Come my child and walk the words with me. Only by walking you will be able to understand your territory. Walking is like thinking, walking is like talking. If you walk you’ll learn the ways of your ancestors, if you walk you’ll be able to talk to us. By walking you will hear the voices of the earth, of the trees, of the water and the wind. Your steps are like words; your steps are like thoughts: Usmeka thoughts.

In that sense, as was stated in the previous chapter walking is a way to converse with their territory: by walking they are enunciating that they belong to Usme, they are constructing strong ties to their land, and they are reconstructing the memory and history of Usme. Moreover, by walking they are constructing knowledge, conceptualising their ideas, and constructing an alternative idea about Usme.

This resonates with the ideas posited by Walter Mignolo (2008, p. 246) when he pointed out that the first option provided by some decolonial nodes is the detaching or delinking of Western constructed dualities: subject-object, mind-body, nature-culture, and praxis-theory. He pointed out that social movements create their own theory; a theory that is built from the praxis, from the mobilisation.127 Thus, the decolonial option provides alternatives to the scientific and humanities way to understand the world, and to the epistemologies controlled by the modern/colonial project.

127 He stated as well that the production of decolonial thinking in the universities entails its own praxis (Mignolo 2008, p. 246).
This chapter will address the discourse created by Usme activists as a performative way to resist and to push for the processes of deterritorialisiation and reterritorialisation. In that way, it will reflect how the discourses created by the activists are expelling all of the connections that make Usme an oppressed and excluded place, and include some connections that empower Usme as a place from where alternatives to sustainability and development are offered. To describe this discourse this chapter will expand the memory devices mentioned in Chapter six, and describe how they are enacted, and the impact they have in other repertories of action.

7.1 Memory devices two: The performative role of memory in Usme

From all the actions and practices carried out by Usme activists the most important of all is the one they called “the reconstruction of memory in Usme”. It is not as visible as other practices, like the rallies, the protests at the doors of CEMEX, the graffiti or the annual ecological walk in the Tunjuelo River basin. But it is at the core of any other action. The reconstruction of memory in Usme allows the activists to deconstruct and challenge the modern/colonial way to understand the world that has been imposed on them, and construct an alternative to it, as was shown in Chapter six.

Moreover, from the activists’ perspective memory is not only useful for providing an account of Usme’s history (as a discipline) but about the way in which the activists are trying to reterritorialise the assemblage of Usme. Since their memory is a way to learn alternative ways to connect with their ancestors and territory. In that manner the conceptualisation of memory posited by Assmann (2006) is helpful to understanding how memory works in Usme. Assmann stated that there are two kinds of memory, one communicative and the other cultural. Communicative memory is entailed in the everyday life of subjects and it brings together the lives of the generations that coexist together at the same moment. It is constructed by the everyday social and communicative expressions of the human experience, like dialogue or habits. It can be understood as a collective conscience (Assmann 2006, p. 7) and it is where the norms and values are institutionalised. On the other hand, cultural memory is the one that allows subjects to connect with their ancestors, with distant generations. It is
‘stored’ in many devices, from burial memorials to digital books, so societies or communities can remember beyond the biological limitations of memory.

Assmann (2006), also stated that communicative memory is performative. It only exists if it is performed by community members, because its existence depends on being communicated. Given that it is also relational; it is also made up of connections. So the communicative memory is also mobile, rhizomatic, and always in construction. Likewise, cultural memory can also be understood in a relational and performative way. Relational because cultural memory allows communities and individuals to connect with distant ancestors and with a distant past, and performative because it is not exempt from reinterpretations and rewritings, and because it has to be communicated to be operationalised; like in Usme. In that manner, even when cultural memory connects communities with a distant past, this past can be reviewed and connected in different ways. It is like any other assemblage, which can (and will) be deterritorialised and reterritorialised (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). Because the way in which Usme is remembered has the potential to change the semantic pole of the assemblage of Usme, it can destabilise and/or stabilise the assemblage of that place. This is why in the next section of the chapter I will revisit and re-explore the three memory devices identified in Chapter six. Following the same order, the first one is the bloodline memory device.

7.1.1 Bloodline memory device

In Chapter six it was stated that the bloodline memory device is described by Usme activists as something precognitive, that it is inserted into your DNA, like memories that are passed from generation to generation into the genes and that is often expressed by déjà vu or by desires to go to places, even when the person may not have previously visited. In that manner, this memory device is used as a vehicle for the activists to connect with the land their ancestors inhabited, or to learn from practices from the past. In addition to the vignette posited in the aforementioned chapter, this fieldwork note can also aid understanding this:

Hamilton and I were in the Requilina, a former train station abandoned in the 1930s when the government decided that the train line that connected Usme with Bogotá was not important. I
was going to help him to prepare a word circle. Hamilton asked me to help him because he knew I played in some bands, and he assumed I could aid him to improve the sound of the speakers, as they had been having some problems with that. While he put the chairs in place, I was connecting all the electronic devices. While we were preparing the things Hamilton asked me if I had felt some kind of déjà vu in my life. I told him that probably a couple of times, and asked why he asked about it. To which he responded:

“Well… when you have déjà vu it is because you are remembering something from your ancestor’s memories”. I looked him a little bit confused and replied:

“I read in some science magazine that the feeling of déjà vu is produced when you brain processes twice the images from your brain, or something like this… But it is still a scientific mystery and nobody have been able to explain it”. To which Hamilton answered back:

“Well it may be a mystery because they are looking in the wrong direction. What if you get memories stored in your DNA, what if you could remember some of your ancestor’s memories? If that happens, probably déjà vu is a way to communicate with your ancestors”.

However, to access those memories stored in their DNA activists do not complete a ritual, nor is there any method to it. For them, the process is very intuitive: déjà vues and desires to go to certain places are like the messengers and messages sent by the activists’ ancestors to communicate with them, to make the activists remember the ties that bind them with their land and the practices that can give a balance to their territory. Continuing the conversation I had with Hamilton:

Just think about it… a déjà vu never happens when you want it to happen. There is not a way to make you feel them. Instead, they just happen when something triggers them. Like when you are walking in the territory, and you suddenly feel them. They are like those desires to go to some place that sometimes one feels and cannot explain. Like the hunches of a detective in a TV show… If that is the case, déjà vues are another way to connect us with our ancestors.

Therefore, Usme activists claim to have no control over that memory device, they believe in letting those ‘hunches’ guide them on their personal journeys of ancestral remembrance. Hence, if one of the activists feels an inexplicable but nevertheless
overwhelming desire to visit a place, it is explained by stating that their ancestors are calling them to remember that place. But this entails many methodological problems for Usme activists, which has been used by their opposition to criticise their way of reconstructing memory. For example, state officers claim that the memories remembered by this device are invented. For those state officers it is not conceivable that memories can be passed in what they consider an esoteric way. For them it is only possible to remember what is contained in an individual biography. This was evident in a forum about the LOP, that would determine what zones of Usme would be declared as new zones for urban expansion.

The discussion was going out of control, especially because one very young activist that I have not seen before stated that some of the zones were sacred. To support his statement said that he knew about those zones because their ancestors told him about them. He explained that he felt a déjà vu when he walked on those zones, and then he realised that those zones were endangered by Metrovivienda.

This weakened the position of the activists in the forum, as the state officers used what the young activists posited to state that there was not a reasonable justification for this zone to be excluded as a zone for urban expansion. Later, after the forum, Maurice told me that one of the problems generated by the young age of most of the activists was the inexperience in dealing with the government, as some of them did not know how to confront them looking strong and smart, but at the same time open for maintaining a dialogue with the government. Maurice also stated: “Kids learn some things here, and they think everyone will understand them… but they will realise that some of things they learn here, belong to Usme, and cannot be understood from outside the ‘Usmeka thought’”.

Given that, Usme’s bloodline memory device has not received a positive reception outside the activists’ community. As a consequence, the activist opted to maintain this memory device in the intimacy of the group. It is barely shared with outsiders, and it seems

\[128\] During the fieldwork it was common to see young activists join and then left activism. Some of the activists that left the movement become supporters, and participate in the most important activities, but they do not participate anymore in most of the small activities. A small proportion of the activists left the movement to never be seen again. The forum these young activists participated in was carried out in September, a few months before I came back to Australia. In those months I never saw those young activists again. I do not know if he felt he violated some of the tacit rules of the activists in that forum and felt guilty, or if there were other reasons for him to left the movement.
that they carefully determine whom they share this memory device with. Furthermore, when
they share this memory device they always do so in a way that they involve or engage the
person within the memory device. For example, a group of journalism students from Santo
Tomas University in Colombia were researching Hacienda el Carmen and the archaeological
finding there. They built a good rapport with the activists, some of them went beyond the
journalist rapport to a certain kind of friendship, and so they shared the bloodline memory
device with them. That point of friendship was determined by Usme activists by observing
that some of the students got involved in other activities carried out by Usme activists: they
went on ecological walks and word circles and some of them volunteered to create a
documentary about Usme. When the students were introduced to the idea that part of our
ancestor’s memories lie in our bloodline, they were told that everything they were doing
regarding Usme was not a coincidence, that it was the calling of their ancestors, that they
were involved with Usme because their ancestors led them there: the desire to be in Usme
came from the students’ DNA.

The intimate level at which this memory device is communicated has led the activist
to construct a particular idea of the history of Usme. That idea is not easy to prove by
historical (as a discipline) methods, nor is it part of the hegemonic image of Usme. But it is
empowering: Usme, for the activists is pivotal to the urban life of Bogotá as everything the
city needs crosses Usme. Also, since Usme is rural and they consider that it is the rural life
that supports urban life, their land is a symbol of hope for the city. At the same time, Usme
was one of the most important locations for the Muiscas, Creoles and Spanish during the
colony. In that manner Usme is a place to be proud of, a place that the activists show as
central to the Colombian geography and history. As an example of that, it is pertinent to
recall the quote that opened Chapter five:

129 The students’ research about Hacienda el Carmen was part of a broader project about Nación Muisca Chibcha.
130 I did not have direct conversations with the students, but Maurice told me about their involvement in the
movement. He stated it was beneficial for the activism in Usme that the students learnt the Usmenian way to
understand the world, because they have skills that were beneficial for the movement.
131 When this was happening, unfortunately, the time allocated for my fieldwork come to an end. In my
subsequent communications with the activists we have not talked about those students. Consequently, it is
difficult to know of further involvement of those students in Usme activism, and the result of the audio-visual
projects they were working on.
We are the people from Usme, from San Pedro de Usme town, inheritors of a myth that is lost in the mists of time: the story of Usminia, the beautiful Zipa’s princess who was kidnapped, and from that we received our name, cause Usme means ‘love nest’. We were an indigenous town, here there are the archaeological remains; and now we are a campesino town, mestizo, that provides another way of inhabit the great city, we are the rural Bogotá that many disown. (El Pueblo de Usme 2012)

While the residents of Usme may be deterritorialising, it is important to explain how this deterritorialising of Usme is important by remembering that in this thesis Usme is addressed as the assemblage of a place. That implies that it made up by connections (Dovey 2010). Because of that, and following Massey’s (2005) conceptualisation of space, it is possible to argue that Usme coexists as a multiplicity of trajectories, and it is never complete and is open to change. The multiple connections inside the assemblage of Usme are material or semantic. They create multiple hierarchical structures or tree-like structures (Dovey 2010; Deleuze & Guattari 1987). At the same time, stating that Usme is the assemblage of a place entails acknowledging that it is subdued to processes in which the boundaries that stabilise the connections of its assemblage break and are constructed over and over again (Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Dovey 2010). Any new connection in the assemblage or any connection that is expelled from the assemblage, changes the assemblage: this is known as the deterritorialisation of the assemblage (Colebrook 2003; Deleuze & Guattari 1987). After expelling the former connection from the assemblage, and/or the inclusion of a new connection into the assemblage, the connections are stabilised again. The outcome is a different assemblage, even when on the surface it may look like the same. This process of stabilisation of new connections is called reterritorialisation (Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Colebrook 2003).

Taking into account that the bloodline memory device is actually creating new connections the assemblage of Usme, I argue that it is actually contributing to the process of deterritorialisation of Usme, as a place that confined Usme to exclusion. At the same time,  

132 This is the way in which Doreen Massey (2005) explained what space is.
they are aiding the process of reterritorialising Usme from another perspective. One in which Usme and the rurality are included in the narratives of Bogotá.

But this memory device entails hazards and dangers for the activists. On one hand it could potentially attach a territory only to ancestrality, which could exclude from Usme, other communities who do not ‘originally’ belong to the territory. For example, the people who migrated to Usme in the twenty-first century (under the government funded program ‘Nuevo Usme’) have found many difficulties integrating with the community and the activists from Usme. And even when there have been recent intents to include them in to the broader community of Usme, they are always regarded as something transplanted by force to Usme, something that does not belong there and therefore Nuevo Usme inhabitants have become the symbol of what Usme activists are afraid of. It can be shown by one of the chants they perform in many of the rallies they carry out, a chant that was also performed by the incipient Nuevo Usme activists:

“We do not want to live in matchboxes!

We do not want to live like sardines in a can!

We deserve better, Usme deserves better.

We are the plant that grows under the concrete!

We are the rural Bogotá, and the urban expansion will not pass!”

The activists try to avoid this danger by opening a space of integration for new actors, like me as a researcher, but often it only happens when it can be beneficial to their goals. Additionally, when the activists integrate new connections into the assemblage of Usme, they are often framed into their ancestrality. This can be shown by the explanation that Jeffrey offers about my research in Usme:

133 As is going to be shown later in the chapter, some of the Muisca cosmogony like some of the claims of the Muisca’s community as part of the assemblage of Usme, were expelled from the assemblage of Usme that activists aim to reterritorialise when they enter in conflict with the goals of the Usme community.
Mate, you know why you are doing research about Usme… I mean, it is not a coincidence you came here. It is your ancestors who called you to Usme. It is your bloodline that has pushed you to talk about what is happening here.

Nevertheless, and despite the abovementioned dangers, this memory device brings about the most important notion for the deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of Usme: ancestrality. For them Usme is an ancient territory, linked to the ancient knowledge of the Muiscas that has been partially inherited by the campesinos. For them the modern/colonial project denial of that ancestrality is the reason why Usme has been excluded and segregated. In that way, ancestrality is pivotal to deterritorialising contemporary Usme, it allows the activist to deconstruct the demeaning and derogative meanings and material entities that have been imposed on Usme; and its ancestrality is the key to reterritorialising Usme as a space for resistance to the logic of coloniality. A proud empowered place that the activists’ claim as their own, a place where another way to become in the world is possible.

7.1.2 Word circles

The second memory device pointed out in Chapter six was the word circles made by the activists of Usme. Those word circles are both an adaptation of focus groups and adaptation of the Muisca word circles. In that way it is important to understand what a Muisca word circle is and how it is carried out, and what the outcomes of those word circles are.

Figure 6.1: Muisca Word Circle representation. (Source: private archive. Image by Andrés Salcedo Rojas)
The Muisca’s word circle is for Nación Muisca Chibcha not only an activity but the representation of their social structure. The Muisca’s word circle is depicted as a spiral flower with many levels. The first circle represents the people who are starting their path to becoming part of the Muisca community, and because the Muisca is part of a new ethnogenesis the people who belong to this circle are in the first stages of a self-ethnicisation (Gómez-Montañez 2010). The people who have been accepted as part of the community are located in the flower’s petals, the next circle is towards the centre. The next circle is where the Abuelos are located. They are the wise men and women of the Muiscas. They are represented by the anthropomorphic figures that seem to be hand in hand around the centre of the circle. At the centre of the circle is Pacha Mama (Mother Earth), from whom all of life was created in the form of a web (Gómez-Montañez 2010).

This word circle is operationalised by Muisca’s public practices. In their public performances they usually form circles, which mimic those levels. Normally, when they are going to start a speech the Abuelos are not in the centre, because it implies only facing a few of the people in the circle. However, the people who are new in the community are placed in the farthest place from the Abuelos, while the people whose membership to the group is more institutionalised are located closer to the leaders. At the centre of the circle is the soil, like a symbol of Pacha Mama. Likewise, only those who have been accepted to the group can play the sacred musical instruments used in healing rituals. In those rituals, the Chiquys (Abuelos who have the ability to heal the body and soul of the Muiscas) start to walk around the circle from the inside, Rapeando tobacco and delivering the healing to all the people in the circle (Gómez-Montañez 2010).

In Usme this word circle structure and performative ritual is materialised in a different way. First, Mother Earth, even when it is the most important entity, is not located at the centre. Given that she is everywhere, Usme activists do not put her at the centre, they take her omnipresence in the place for granted. Instead it is memory that is located at the centre of the circle. It is represented and materialised by some artefacts: huge pots from where the sancocho is served, big containers filled with Chicha, spin tops and other traditional toys,
pictures from the past, and sometimes traditional musical instruments like the *tiple*. Those objects are passed from person to person within the circle in a counter clockwise direction. As in the Muisca’s word circle, the activists sit near the elders who dominate the conversations during the whole activity. At the same time, the newcomers tend to sit in the farthest region of the circle, at the opposite side than the elders. However, among them there is always one or two activists who have the role of integrating the newcomers into the discussions and helping them get involved in the process of oral memory by making them ask questions or putting them on the spot by making them use the objects that are in the centre of the circle.\(^{134}\)

Thus, Usme activists are also deconstructing the hierarchical structure of the Nación Muisca Chibcha, and are reinterpreting it in a way that is more democratic, inclusive and rhizomatic. Moreover, for them the problem of membership is not pivotal, for them it is more important that people who assist the word circles can understand, comprehend and remember the oral history of Usme, regardless of if they are Usmenians. In that manner, this is one of the memory devices broadly used by the activists to communicate their version of the history of Usme to a broader audience. It is part of the bridges they are trying to build with the urban population of Usme, and a way to justify and explain their way to understand Usme.\(^{135}\) The next vignette is a description of a word circle carried out in Requilina train station.

\[\text{After helping Hamilton with the electronic equipment, I helped him organise everything for the word circle. Hamilton organised five chairs on the outer side of what was going to be the circle. Those chairs were going to be occupied by five elders of the community that were going to tell stories about their childhood in Usme. When he finished with the chairs, Hamilton placed some artefacts at the centre of the circle: a spin top, a *tiple*, a *ruana*, a picture of the Requilina when it was functioning as a train station, a bolt from the railway and a picture of the steam locomotive. He asked me to help him to bring to the centre some plastic barrels that contain gallons of a *chicha* prepared by the elders who were going to sit on the chairs. I was bringing one of the barrels when students of a local school arrived to la}\]

\(^{134}\) This reconstruction of a word circle in Usme was done after participating in 23 word circles in Usme. Sometimes the structure of a word circle may have slight variations, but this description is the general shape they take.

\(^{135}\) This is going to be explored in a later section of the chapter.
Requilina. Hamilton instructed them to sit on the opposite side to where the elders were going to be seated. When he offered to assist me move the rest of the barrels I asked him about the artefacts, as in the Muisca’s word circles they were not present. To which he answered:

“It is because they represent the memory we are trying to recover. The games campesinos used to play, the music they like, and the garments they use. Memory is at the centre because it is the most important for us”.

I took the opportunity to ask about why he and his fellow activists sit next to the elders. Hamilton replied:

“Well, it is very practical… you know. We are near the elders in case they need our help, they can ask for it without interrupting the circle. And the newcomers are placed there,” Hamilton pointed the students with this mouth, “because in there they can see the artefacts and the elders at the same time”.

I pointed out that it also reflects a power structure among the activists. I expected some kind of discomfort, but instead he answered:

“Of course, the elders are memory alive, so they are the most important. And we have been working hard to record their oral tradition so it won’t get lost. It is natural we sit next to them. Besides, as I told you, that allows the newcomers to have a better gaze over the circle. And also, if you haven’t noticed, we always place someone like Jeffrey next to the newcomers, so he can engage them into the circle”.

As in the case of the bloodline memory device, word circles also point out ancestrality as a way to expel the connections that segregate Usme and incorporate into its assemblage connections that empower the assemblage of Usme. But world circles are not an intimate memory device. Instead they provide Usme activists with an intergenerational connection between the elders and the youngest activists, and of recruiting potential activists and letting them get in contact with the Usmenian way to understand the world. In that manner word circles allow the youngest to connect with traditional stories and practices and reinterpret them in a way that can help them to create alternative ways of connection with Usme. In that
manner, the youngest activists can deconstruct what has been taught to them in schools about Bogotá and Usme, and about rurality and urbanity, which is crucial to the processes of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. I will illustrate that by continuing with the story of the word circle at the Requilina train station:

When the elders finished some of the stories about their childhood in Usme. Carlos, one teenager that was at the other side of the circle asked about the details of one of the stories. That story was about the game of spin top and the wonderful skills the elders used to have in that game. The teenager was really into the story, because when he was in primary school he was considered the best player of the school. He did not believe that the tricks described by the elders could be done with a spin top. One of the elders, Don Álvaro, felt challenged by the youngster. He stood up from his chair, and reached a wooden spin top that was in the middle of the circle. He put the cord around the spin top and launched it to the ground, but just before the spin top reached the end of the cord he pulled it, so the spin top flowed towards his hand, and started spinning there. Then, Don Álvaro put the cord around the tip of the spin top and created an intricate pattern with the cord between his hands. The spin top followed the path created by the cord, and reached his other hand. After that, the spin top still had a lot of kinetic energy, so it was still spinning very fast. Don Álvaro made the spin top move towards his index finger, and with the spin top still spinning put it in the middle of his eyebrows. Then he put the cord again around the tip of the spin top, and made it return to his hand. After than he asked the teenager to open his hand and put the spin top on his hand’s palm while saying: “I bet the lad didn’t expect being beaten by an old man like me”.

Carlos was fascinated by Don Álvaro’s skills. So after the word circle, he asked Don Álvaro to teach him to play with the spin top. Some weeks after the word circle I met him in another activity carried out by the activists. He was collaborating actively with the activists. So I asked him what made him come back. He stated:

“Well, I have learnt a lot about the territory. The elders have a lot to teach us… I have learnt about their ways and I’m proud of growing up in Usme. This land is beautiful, and we have to make sure it survives the urbanisation processes”. When I was finishing my fieldwork, I meet with Carlos again. He was leading a process of urban agriculture in his school. I enquired him about that and he said:
“I am just following the call of Mother and Father that lies in the mountain”.

The word circles not only aid young generations to detach the connections that oppress Usme from its assemblage, but also allows elder generations to remember what they love about Usme, and what is endangered by the modern/colonial impositions. And by witnessing that younger generations have similar concerns, they have reactivated their activism, and renewed it with the indigenous notions brought by the younger activists. As was stated by Don Josue in the vignette I showed in Chapter six, where Maurice and Don Josue talked about their religious differences, reaching a healthy consensus that empowers the assemblage of Usme. Given that, word circles are a vital support for the process of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of Usme.

7.1.3 Walking the words

As was explained in Chapter six, Usme activists think about walking as a conversation with the different entities, and historical trajectories, that constitute the assemblage of Usme. This happens because for Usme activists walking is not only a process of locomotion: when they walk they are not simply going from one point to another. Instead walking is a semantic process in which they are able to materialise and operationalise their memory. In that manner there is a relation between bloodline memory device and walk, since by walking Usme activists are able to interpret many of the messages sent by the ancestors to the activists in the form of desires and déjà vu. The next story, that happened before a public gathering can be an example of that:

Hamilton was waiting anxiously for me at the entrance of the market. I was a little late and I thought that was the reason for him to be anxious. So I apologised for being late:

“Hi Hamilton, I am so sorry mate… I—” But before I could explain Hamilton interrupted me:

“It does not matter; I know the traffic jams of this city… Do not worry, we are still on time”.

“For what?” I asked him.

“For what we have to do.”
“What you mean?” I asked.

“Well, yesterday I was walking, when I felt the need to go walking the old road to Chipaque. We need to go now, before the sunset. There are no streetlights there and if it gets dark it could be dangerous”.

“So we better move. As the gathering is at 6pm.” I told him. It was already 4pm.

The road was far away, so we walked hastily within the urban zone and we kept to the path until we reached a zone where the road was unpaved. And we started to walk onto that road. During the walk Hamilton talked about the national tournament of soccer, teasing me because the team he supports beat the team I support. I was unaware of the events to come. It was already a quarter to 6pm, when we reached a fallen tree.

“This was not like this last week.” Hamilton told me. “It is one of the ways in which the territory talks to us. We have just to follow the signals it provides us to understand what the territory is saying… You see, Andrés, this is why we say we walk the words”. Hamilton walked over the fallen tree, and called me:

“Mate! Mate! Look!”

I followed him and across the fallen there was a vantage point from where we could see down the mountain. “Look there,” Hamilton pointed out with his mouth a point in the mountainside below us where there was an illegal mining operation. About a dozen men were preparing a bulldozer, and big lights for the night to come.

“We are lucky I came prepared”. –Said Hamilton while producing a digital camera from a pocket in his pants. He started to take pictures of the illegal operation. “You see, that was what the territory wanted us to see. That is why it is important to listen to it; that is why we have to walk the words. Walking is like talking with the territory, and to Father and Mother who lie in the territory”. Hamilton explained.

There are many kinds of walks but it is possible to group them in two: First, reflective walks that are used by the activists to connect themselves with Usme; and second, the walks that have the goal of connecting non-activists and non-inhabitants of Usme with the activists’
The main difference is the ritualistic performativity that the second ones have. The first kind of walk is carried out by the activists without any special logistics or preparation. They simply go walking for hours across Usme, sometimes alone and sometimes in groups. They walk in the rural zones, in the forest reservations (especially in the Entrenubes Park), into the old brick factories, into the pits and quarries, and in the urban zone. On other occasions they are involved in everyday walks where they simply go from point A to point B within their territory, like when they go from their headquarters to a school, or from their home to visit relatives, or when they go to buy groceries at Usme Pueblo. The above vignette is an example of a reflective, everyday walk.

For everyday walks to become a reflective form of connection with the territory, they must be not only a mean of transportation but at the same time a contemplative meditation. In that way walking is a method of introspection. But it is an introspection that depends on connections with external entities. In that manner it is a relational introspection, it can only exist if it is connected to the territory. For that reason, part of this introspection process are the feelings of déjà vu the activists claim to experience while walking. Likewise, the activists are able to see special signals sent by their ancestors while they are walking. Hamilton explained this to me, after we came back from the old road to Chipaque:

Walking in Usme is like talking to the territory and to Father and Mother who lie on it. When we are walking we have to be very aware of our surroundings. Our senses must be awake and alert to any signal. It could be a sudden cold wind, a light rain, an animal like the eagle, a fallen tree. Anything could be of significance, it is the territory trying to make us remember, giving us its approval for walking certain areas and alerting us of danger.

The second kind of walks entails ritualization and performativity. It is important to point out that even though these kinds of walks are common, they are not part of the everyday of the activists, or at least they do not think about them as an everyday event. While the first kind of walks are carried out on a regular basis, for example when they go from home to the bus station; the second kind of walks are prearranged and prepared events. They carry out those walks with the objective of making outsiders grasp how they connect with the territory. In that manner the second kind of walks aim to establish a dialogue about Usme with
institutions and groups of people that have an impact on the process of territorialisation of the assemblage of Usme. Given that those walks imply dealing with many stakeholders: schools, universities, independent journalists, state officers, environmentalist organisations, NGOs, and local authorities.\textsuperscript{136}

It is, perhaps, because they have to deal with all of these stakeholders; and because their goal is to show these different groups and communities their way of understanding their territory, that they perform these walks in a very ritualistic way. Hence, Usme activists have decided to present themselves with many of the features ascribed by hegemonic discourse to indigenous and campesino communities. In that way they perform an otherness that help them to make a clear distinction with the modern/colonial ways of performing the body. That is reflected in the rituals used before and after the walks, in some of the clothes used by them, and in the esoteric way in which sometimes they explain their bonds to the territory. The next is a description of how the second kind of walks involved a ritualistic performativity that is not present in the first kind of walks:

During the walks the activists wear clothes and accessories that are associated with indigenous groups in Colombia, such as beaded necklaces made of seeds, and with campesinos, gumboots and \textit{ruanas}. In the same manner, the first step in one of their ecological walks is to make a word circle in order to present a payment to the land and ask their ancestors for permission to walk on the land. That payment starts by saluting the attendants to the walk in Muisca language: “hehehey!” That is usually accompanied by some of the activist’s leaders \textit{rapeando} tobacco, and playing musical instruments traditionally used by indigenous communities in America, especially some kinds of wind instruments such as the \textit{trutuka}, the \textit{quena} and the \textit{anata},\textsuperscript{137} and some colonial string instruments used by campesino communities in Colombia like the \textit{tiple}, \textit{cuatro} and the guitar. After the salutation, the activists’ leaders pray to their ancestors asking for permission and guidance, and sometimes they kiss the dirt or grass. Once this prayer is finished, they proceed to explain the route of the walk, and the ecological and historical facts about the location from where the

\textsuperscript{136} An important example of this kind of walk is going to be explored in the next section of the chapter.

\textsuperscript{137} None of them are traditional instruments in Muisca communities. The trutuka and the anata were played by the Mapuche at the south of Chile, and the quena is still used by Quechua communities in Bolivia and Perú.
walk stars. This process of scientific and historic information about the locations visited in the walks is repeated in each one of the stops made during the walk. After exposing the scientifical and historical facts about the location, it is always remarked that the activists’ ancestors are contained in the territory, that the territory is alive and that they consider that humans are part of nature because they are the children of Mother Earth. Likewise, during the walks the activists reveal details about their way of relating with nature and with their ancestors. In that manner while the walk is moving the activists try to show how the territory is alive, and how the ancestors are accompanying them during the walk. In that manner they claim that during the walking the arrival on the scene of some animals, and sudden changes in the weather are symbols sent by the ancestors, indicating something.

The ritualization of those walks associate Usme activists with indigenous communities. For many outsiders it is difficult to comprehend that they are also identified with campesino communities. For example, one journalist asked Maurice: “Are you looking for some ethnic recognition from the state? Do you want to create a special indigenous territory here in Bogotá? To which Indigenous ‘tribe’ do you belong?” This is a real problem to the activists who do not identify themselves as indigenous, and put a lot of effort into clarifying that they are Usmekas, descendants of both campesinos and indigenous people. They always have to clarify, that even when they are recovering the indigenous memory in Usme, they are not themselves indigenous, that they are also recovering the colonial memory. That they are in the frontier, and in that way they are both indigenous and campesino but at the same time none of them. This is important for the construction. Hence, when the activists are asked if they identify themselves as indigenous, they are very explicit that they are in the middle, living in the frontier where the boundaries between the West and the Muisca are blurred. The next story can be an example of how the activists made explicit their frontier position.

The activists of Usme were celebrating the anniversary of Maurice title of Abuelo that Nación Muisca Chibcha gave him. That implied not only that he was officially accepted as part of the

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138 Gloria Anzaldúa (2007) conceptualised the frontier as the place where the colonised inhabit. A place in the middle of two epistemological worlds, which interact in complex ways. That interaction generates a sense of delocation for its inhabitants.
Muisca community, but also that he was considered a leader among them. For me, it was something very strange as Nación Muisca Chibcha used to gather together in Suba (or at least that was what I believed at that time), whereas Maurice was always in Usme, always trying to recover the memory of what he called his land. In the geography of Bogotá, Suba is like the antipode for Usme, it takes at least two hours to go from one place to the other. At the same time, it was a revelation because I was not aware of Maurice’s involvement with Nación Muisca Chibcha. But at least for the activists it meant a close relationship with the Muiscas and therefore with their ancestrality. Nevertheless, I was confused and a big question came to my mind: Are the memories they were building about the Muisca more important than the ones about the campesinos? At least they seemed more visible.

The next day, a Sunday, there was a forum organised by the mayor’s office to discuss what was going to happen with the Muisca Cemetery. The forum was full of people, many more than in other forums. I counted around three hundred people; at least fifty of them were Muiscas. Even when some of the Muiscas were talking with campesinos and state officers, in general they were segregated and/or self-segregated from the rest of the attendees. But Maurice, the Abuelo, was not segregated as the rest of the Muiscas. He was seated with a group of young activists from Usme. It was possible to feel a quiet tension. Each one of the stakeholders attending the forum had his own agenda, and they disagreed with each other; the state officers, and Metrovivienda, wanted to push for the building of an urban complex in Hacienda el Carmen. The community of Usme wanted Hacienda el Carmen to be declared as material patrimony of the city and build an archaeological park in the same fashion as Machu Picchu; and the Muiscas wanted the zone to be declared as patrimony but they did not want to build a park, instead they wanted the zone to be left untouched, which meant no more archaeological research in the zone.

As the forum continued the tension grew, and what was a calm breeze became a storm. The voices sounded more and more aggressive as each one of the stakeholders tried to push their own agenda: “Grandparents of Usme,” said one Abuelo Muisca, “this land belongs to us as much as it belongs to you. We are brothers because we are the offspring of Father and Mother who lies in the Mountains…”

“We are not brothers!” Interrupted one of the elders of Usme community. “You just want to take this land from us. We have been fighting for this land, we did not let the bulldozers come
and erase the past, we stopped the builders, and we were the ones who put our lives at risk…
And now you come pretending that this land belongs to you?”

When the tension was reaching boiling point, Maurice was put on the spot. As somebody said, using a voice loud enough to be heard but quiet enough not to be identified, “let Maurice, the Abuelo talk”. Everybody then looked at Maurice, and he knew that he needed to be clever if he wanted to gain something for his community in the forum. He was in the back row of the forum filming everything. So he passed his camera to Hamilton, and walked quietly towards the table where the other leaders were sited. He took the microphone used by the state officers in the table, and used a Muisca salutation:

“Hehehey,” he said waving his arms in the air. “Brothers, sisters, grandfathers and grandmothers of the community. First of all, I want to clarify which side I am taking in this forum, as some may be confused. I may be a Muisca, but first I was, I am and I will always be Usmeka. I was born and raised in Usme, and I can only talk in the name of the people of Usme. I am a Muisca because I’m Usmeka, not the other way around”.

“Usme will be always a Muisca territory, but I agree with the elder: We, the people from Usme, put out our necks for this discovery. The brothers from Nación Muisca Chibcha seem to be unaware of our struggle, of our fight. It is our duty to let them know, to show them that this land belongs to us as much as it belongs to them. We have to find a way to negotiate our differences, to coexist together. For that reason, I want to remind the Muiscas that our Abuelos from Usme, our elders, have been defending this territory for hundreds of years… they are its guardians. They have fulfilled their duty otherwise all we could find here would be 20 storey tall buildings. It is thanks to the Usme community that the Muiscas found this important treasure for their memory. So I invite Nación Muisca Chibcha to join our cause, to join efforts with us and defend Hacienda el Carmen. Later there will be plenty of time to decide what to do with it, right know we have to push the government to declare Hacienda el Carmen as patrimony. That’s our duty today”.

The above is just one of many situations in which the young activists are put in the spotlight as people who inhabit both worlds: The Muisca and the campesino. They are often regarded more as judges than as translators, because they are not delivering a message between each one of the communities. Instead, both Muiscas and campesinos are waiting for
them to decide a course of action, and which vision of the world is the most important. However, activists try to avoid this situation, as they did in the story by sitting in the back rows of the auditorium trying to establish a dialogue between both groups. When they are pointed out as the people who can understand both points of view, they show themselves as someone who can effectively understand both points of view but who for that reason cannot decide. Instead, they are in the middle, in the frontier. They cannot choose one side or another, they have to deal with them at the same time, mashing them in a way that it permits new connections, and new ways to conceive what Usme is.

This complexity is made evident to the outsiders by the walks, and it is pivotal to the process of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of Usme. On one hand it allows outsiders and newcomers to see the empowering meanings that the activists are connecting to the assemblage of Usme. That also helps to expel the demeaning meanings that some stakeholders associate with Usme. At the same time, it allows outsiders and newcomers to see that it is possible to establish an intercultural dialogue with the assemblage of Usme that the activists are reterritorialising. As was stated by a state officer in a word circle carried out after a walk:

I never imagined finding this territory within my city. It is beautiful. I cannot believe that it is so sacred for its inhabitants, neither had I known about the rural life of the people from Usme. I can see why they are opposing with such force the urbanisation of their land. Definitely, as a government, we are failing to create democratic spaces of participation. We are not listening to the people. Usme is beautiful, we must find a way to create constructive synergies that improve the life wellbeing of Usmenians, instead of imposing from above projects that will destroy it.

7.1.4 La Travesía, the most important walk of the year

The most important walk to demonstrate to outsiders the activists’ way to understand Usme is the Travesía por el Río Tunjuelo (The Tunjuelo River Crossing). It is an annual event that congregates together many of the environmental and rural organisations around the Tunjuelo River basin. It is a joint effort between environmentalist organisations of the five jurisdictions that cross the Tunjuelo River: Sumapaz, Usme, Ciudad Bolívar, Tunjuelito, and
Bosa. In terms of resources and logistics it is a huge effort. The walk is usually carried out during October, in the dry season. The Travesía starts in the Sumapaz Páramo, in the springs of the river and it follows the basin all the way down to the Bogotá River to which the Tunjuelo River delivers its effluent. Depending on the funding of each year, the walk takes from three days to one week, and it brings together more than one hundred people that together walk the length of the river (73 kilometres).

![Figure 6.2: High Tunjuelo river basin (Source: personal archive)](image)

The idea of the Travesía is to show the impact of urbanisation and industrialisation on the Tunjuelo River. The activists aim to generate some impact by showing how the river is transformed from a clean potable water source, to a polluted and contaminated vector that threatens the lives of the inhabitants of the basin. The activists highlight the role of the quarries and Doña Juana in the contamination of the river. But the most important is probably not the scientific facts, but the aesthetic impact that the transformation of the river has. In that
fashion, walkers can smell the strong stench that the river acquires across its basin, the transformation of its colour and how the contamination affects the river.

![Figure 6.3: Lower reaches of the Tunjuelo River. (Source: Wikimedia commons. Image by Arturo Edison Aparicio Guzman)](image)

Given than the objective of the of the *Travesía* is to generate awareness of the ecological affectation of the Tunjuelo River, and the impact it has over the ecosystem and the human lives around it, the activists emphasise the ecological facts more than the spiritual or historical details of the river, especially activists that come from environmentalist organisations outside Usme. However, Usme activists take that opportunity to share their memory of Usme, and to show and explain alternative ways to connect to the territory. For that reason, they perform the payment ritual, asking the river for permission to walk its basin, at the beginning of the walk. They also invite some *Abuelos* of Nación Muisca Chibcha to join that ritual. During the nights in the camp, they share their stories about Usme, and
Usme’s legends. They also use less explicit but nevertheless very visible ways to show their understanding of Usme as a territory in the frontier. For example, Hamilton used to walk barefoot in the first tract of the walk, the páramo, arguing that in that way he will be in close contact with his ancestors. Jeffrey wears botas pantaneras and ruana, which makes him look different to other activists. When I asked why, he pointed out that his family has worn this kind of clothing for generations and that it is the best to beat the cold and humid weather of the páramo. Likewise, when the Travesía camps in Usme they make sure that some campesinos come in the night to prepare sancocho for the walkers; always remarking that the sancocho was made from local ingredients. They praise those ingredients, especially the potato and the chicken, stating that they are organically produced using traditional methods, for example when Hamilton invited me to eat the sancocho “Hey bro, come here, taste this beautiful sancocho, it is made with real chicken. The ones that grow free on the farm, the ones that get dirty with the soil and eat worms. That’s why they are so big, so tasty. And the potatoes… What can we say about the potatoes? They are simply beautiful. I have grown some of them myself”.

At the same time, they use the annual walk to show other activists and other attendants to the Travesía the historical sites of Usme: La Requilina, Usme Pueblo, the Regadera Dam and Hacienda el Carmen. When the walk passes through these locations, Usme activists explain the oral history they have reconstructed about those sites, and the hopes they have from them in the near future. Hence, they are institutionalising their version of Usme’s history, which is crucial in the process of reterritorialisation. Likewise, and given that the objective of the walk is to expose the ecological problems that have affected the Tunjuelo River basin, Usme activists show and expose the most important ecological affectations in Usme. But instead of focusing only on the ecological aspects of those affectations, Usme activists always put those problems in a spatial and historical perspective. They try to address those from a holistic point of view, in which the affectation is just a node on a web of places and circumstances that connect together to form what could be understood as the assemblage of Usme.
Accordingly, Usme activists use the *Travesía* to build another way of connection between the same nodes. That is, deterritorialise the assemblage of Usme and reterritorialise it from their own perspective, which entails a sense of environmental justice, and the telling of an alternative history and an alternative way of understanding the space that offers the decolonial perspective exposed in Chapter six.
Chapter 8 – Conclusion: Usme: a space for hope

In the last three chapters I have presented a description of Usme activists, the territory they defend, the way in which they conceive the world and the way in which they materialise their resistance. In this chapter I will show how all of these elements work together to change the assemblage of Usme. That is, how all of those elements aid in the process of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of Usme. Consequently, it is pivotal to reiterate what deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation are, and establish how they are related to the modern/colonial epistemologies and decolonial alternatives.

In Chapter three it was established that space is: a) made up of connections (interactions and relations); b) the sphere of multiplicity as it is in space where multiple historical trajectories coexist together; and c) always changing, as the interactions and connections that constitute space are in constant change; always in the process of being made (Massey 2005). But then, what is the difference between space and place? The question is important since the conceptualisation of space used in this thesis seems to be counterintuitive, especially because space is crossed by many boundaries and frontiers that segment it, which does not make it look like a continuum. Whilst constrained by jurisdictional limits, like cities or countries; space is also divided by cultural and social barriers. For example, in Bogotá, people who live at the north of the city barely know about the existence of Usme. Following Dovey (2010), this thesis understood space as the point where the connections that constitute space become very intense: a point where those connections have been, in Deleuze’s terms, territorialised or temporally stabilised. In that manner places are assemblages.139

Since places are assemblages, they are in a constant process of being deconstructed and reconstructed by the material and semantic connections that are broken or included into the assemblage of a place. The process of deconstruction of an assemblage is called deterritorialisation, while the process of reconstruction is called reterritorialisation (Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Bonta & Protevi 2004).140

139 For more information, please refer to Chapter three.
140 For more information, please refer to Chapter three.
Understanding those processes was pivotal to this thesis, as the assemblage of Usme, constituted it as a place that was marginalised from the rest of Bogotá. This occurred because the assemblage of Usme was based in modern/colonial conceptions about the relationship of urban and rural, in which the rural is considered as something that is backwards in time. This preconception was evident to me when I realised that I considered Usme as something “frozen in time”. The implications of those preconceptions are materialised in a government that negated the autonomy of Usme and transformed it into a repository of resources for Bogotá. As a consequence, the government built Doña Juana the third biggest landfill in South America (Ardilla Arrieta 2010), gave permission for open air mining in Usme, and conceived a plan to urbanise Usme in a very bad way, and without having taken into account the rural way of life that is constitutive of its assemblage.

But Usme is not only an oppressed place. The modern/colonial conceptions that have created an assemblage of Usme as an excluded and oppressed place are challenged by activists that try to include new connections to the assemblage of Usme. Those connections are empowering, and they offer alternatives to the modern ways to understand the world; for example, the way in which they understood the relationship of human/nature: a dialogue between pairs. In order to establish that dialogue, the activists propose using science as a vehicle to communicate with Mother Earth. For the activists of Usme, science is not a tool to measure and/or control nature, but a way to read and listen to the signals it provides them, and a way to respond to those messages. In that manner, the activists of Usme are deterritorialising Usme, as an oppressed place. And they are reterritorialising Usme as a node of decolonial thinking.

In order to understand that, it is important to remember what was established in Chapter two regarding decolonial options. Decolonial options are a response from the colonial subjects to colonial oppression. That oppression is framed within the logic of coloniality (Castro-Gómez 2005b). That is, the control of all of the domains of human experience: the civic, because it controls the gender and the sexuality of the colonial subjects;

141 See Chapter five.
142 See Chapter five.
143 See Chapter five.
the epistemic, given that it controls knowledge and subjectivity; the economic, since it controls the land and the labour force; and the political, as it controls the authority (Mignolo 2009b). At this point it is necessary to clarify that coloniality is not the same as colonialism. Colonialism is the historical period in which the logic of coloniality was imposed on the colonies, while coloniality is the form of control that empires performed over their colonies, thus over the colonial subjects. This is important because, as was stated by Mignolo (2008), even when colonialism seems to be a period of history that for the inhabitants of the global capitalist era (at least in the Global North) has been overcome, the logic of coloniality remains and still allows the Global North to control the Global South. The methods may have changed, but the logic behind them remains the same.

An important part of the control and dominance Western societies have established over the world is salvationist discourse. It is supported by the ethnocentric idea that there is only one possible historical trajectory, the Western one. In that manner, all other cultures and societies are regarded by the West as primitive. Moreover, this salvationist discourse posits that it is the mission of the West to aid other cultures and societies to get closer to them, and to advance as fast as possible and reach the historical stage of the West. Consequently, non-Western cultures have been forced to adopt and embody the Western way of understanding the world. Therefore, the salvationist discourse implies the colonisation of the body and subjectivity of the colonial subjects, who as a consequence ended up with a disrupted and hurt subjectivity.

In Usme, the logic of coloniality has been expressed through the salvationist discourse in two ways. One, in the twentieth century using the Christian discourse of salvation, and the other in the 1930s using the discourse of development. In that manner, during the eighteenth century when Usme’s church was built with the objective of Christianising the indigenous population that lived there, the salvationist discourse was focused on ‘salving the souls’ of the Usmenians. Consequently, the local indigenous and Mestizo population was co-opted into the Western epistemology, and some practices and meanings were changed. For instance, the name of the most important river in Usme, which was changed to neglect pre-
Columbian beliefs: the river was renamed to make fun of the legend of the Tunjo, who was for the Muiscas the guardian of the rivers. The Spanish changed the name of the river to Tunjuelo, which means little tunjo. This could be interpreted as mistreating the Muisca’s beliefs.  

But in the first half of the twentieth century, the development discourse arrived to Usme. This new version of the salvationist discourse reinforced the idea of Usme as a repository for natural resources for Bogotá. This time not as a food producer, but as a water reservoir that could solve the problem of water sanitation for the city. Those ideas were materialised with the expropriation of the Tunjuelo River and the construction of La Regadera Dam. In that fashion, the assemblage of Usme as a Christian campesino town started to be deterritorialised. This process continued when in 1954 Usme was declared as part of Bogotá, losing its jurisdictional freedom. The development discourse condemned traditional local practices of agriculture, and cattle raising as primitive and unproductive; and everyday life practices and ways to spend leisure time were also pushed towards a change from rural to urban. Subsequently, local practices of food production started to be relegated and Usme lost its place as an important producer of food for Bogotá, which diminished the possibilities for its inhabitants to find a job in rural occupations (e.g. farmers). At the same time, leisure time was controlled; for example, the consumption of Chicha was heavily restricted and replaced by the consumption of aguardiente and beer. 

Given that, the development discourse deterritorialised the assemblage of Usme as a rural town, then it reterritorialised it as something invisible for the city, something that is not included in the maps; a place that does not belong to the urban project of Bogotá. Consequently, Usme became a repository of land for urban expansion, a place that lies in the past and has to be developed to include it in the modernity. But the development of Usme has not been inclusive: construction of Doña Juana landfill, the opening of the mining quarries, and the construction of Nuevo Usme, have aided the segregation of it. In that manner Usme was reterritorialised from above as a place for exclusion.

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145 See Chapter five.
That assemblage of Usme as a repository of land and a reservoir of natural resources, inhabited by poor people, and destined to the exclusion is what Usme activists are deconstructing and deterritorialising. By claiming an ancestrality and recovering the memory, Usme activists are reconstructing the assemblage of Usme, amplifying its boundaries in a way that it can be empowered, and that can be included in the assemblage of Bogotá. Hence, they are challenging the development discourse and proposing an assemblage in which ancestrality and traditional practices are the most important ways to connect with the land. A place that can be included in Bogotá’s assemblage because it can dialogue as a pair with Bogotá. A pair that has a lot to offer to a colonial country that needs to find ways to overcome the logic of coloniality in order to construct peace. In that manner, the activists are reterritorialising Usme as a place that offers an alternative way to understand the world. A way that by resisting the logic of coloniality, can construct more equal ways of living to all the inhabitants of the colonial wound.

With the purpose of deterritorialising the assemblage of Usme imposed by the modernity/coloniality salvationist discourse, and reterritorialising an inclusive assemblage of Usme, the activists are involved in a process of memory reconstruction of Usme. That process has allowed the activists to realise their colonial subjectivities, to realise that they live in the colonial wound. They have realised that Usme’s inhabitants are segregated because they are regarded as what Fanon (1963) called the wretched of the earth, all of those whose existence has been neglected and/or ignored; all of those who do not have a right to exist. As was stated in Chapter Five, negation of the right of the Usmenian alternative to inhabit the city is expressed in the state’s refusal to accept the rural and indigenous way of life as constitutive of the assemblage of the locality. “Five ruanas are not rurality” was the expression used by the state officers to negate and neglect the everyday life of an entire town.

But being aware of that negation was only the beginning; if the activists want to challenge the exclusion they have to deconstruct that negation, criticise it, make it evident not only to Usme’s population, but to the population of Bogotá and Colombia. Also, it was necessary to build something from that deconstruction, to propose an alternative way to understand Usme, and its relationship with Bogotá and the world. They need to construct a
new way to become in the world. Given that, the involvement of the younger activists with
the Muiscas and with the campesino community was a very fortunate event as it helped them
to realise their location on the frontier between the West and the rest. By this connection they
were able to realise their location in the colonial wound. Not only that, by these connections
they have been able to construct an alternative epistemology from there. In that way the
activists were able to realise that they are neither Muiscas nor campesinos, but that they are
both at the same time; that they are neither urban nor rural, but both at the same time; and that
they are neither Westerners nor indigenous, but both at the same time. Once they had those
realisations, they were able to comprehend that they would never have a complete sense of
belonging to those groups. Thus, they need to deconstruct those categories, and construct a
new one. This new one is a decolonial alternative to understanding the world, an
epistemology that has the potential of resisting the logic of coloniality, by smoothing the
frontier between Western and non-Western (or between modern and pre-modern), and
creating a space of intercultural dialogue where Western and non-Western can discourse as
pairs.

In that manner, the scientific approach of ecology and biology was delocated from the
Western genealogy of thinking and it was reinterpreted from the Usmenian perspective. That
is that the scientific knowledge has the potential of explaining certain phenomena because it
is a way to communicate with Mother Nature; and also can be used as the vehicle used by the
activists to share with modern institutions other ways to understand the world. In that manner,
for Usme activists, science does not imply a rational disbelief, instead science is entailed in a
belief system that establishes a semantic communication with the land and the ancestors of
the activists: doing science in Usme is like walking on Usme; therefore, doing science in
Usme is a way to remember. Correspondingly, the scientific knowledge about Usme is
another way to establish an empowered connection with the land.

The delocation of science plus the memory devices created and used by the activists
are key components of the deconstruction of the semantic pole of the assemblage of Usme. There are tree memory devices created, or modified to be used by the activists: bloodline, a

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146 As was stated in Chapter Three the semantic pole of the assemblage is where the meanings are connected.
very intimate memory device that states that there is a precognitive memory passed from
generation to generation through DNA; word circles, that are a delocation of the focus groups
and the Muisca social structure; and walks, that are twofold, on one hand they help activists
to connect with their land, and on the other are useful to communicate their way to remember
Usme to outsiders. Those memory devices aid in the deconstruction of the semantic pole of
Usme assemblage because they help the activists to deconstruct modern/colonial meanings
imposed over Usme and construct an alternative way to understand what Usme is. In that
way, Usme activists have been able to construct an idea of Usme that differs from the
hegemonic way. While they aid a new way to understand the world, activists’ ancestors are
not part of the past, they are an active presence in the present. They can influence and change
events and help the activists in their process of remembering. Likewise, the ancestors do not
really die, but they go to rest on natural elements such as the river or the mountains. That
adds a biography (or many biographies) to some entities that Usme activists already consider
as sentient. Therefore, those memory devices help Usme activists to consider natural entities
as their own ancestors. In that manner, memory devices help Usme activists to establish
alternative ways to connect with their land, thus a new way to connect with the material pole
of the assemblage of Usme. Usme is no longer what is delimited on a map. Usme is the
sancocho, the ruana, the activists, the eclectic architecture of Usme Pueblo, all of the
practices and materiality that has been remembered by Usme activists, and that the ancestors
are trying to teach them. But Usme is also CEMEX, Holcim, brick factories, Doña Juana;
therefore, there are some things activists would like to detach from Usme. Those things that
they would like to expel from Usme assemblage are those that are not part of the memory
they are reconstructing. As was stated in Chapter Six, this entails the danger of discrimination
and segregation. Given than everything that does not ‘originally’ belong to Usme is seen as a
potential threat, it can generate the segregation of new migrants and alternative ways of
achieving welfare in the community. Usme activists try to minimise that danger by stating
that any visitor or migrant of Usme is there because their ancestors have called them to
remember where they came from, which also extended the assemblage of Usme to all of the
temporary connections with the assemblage. For example, this thesis is also constitutive of
the assemblage of Usme.
On the other hand, memory devices aid in the deconstruction and disconnection from tree-like structures of meanings imposed over Usme, and at the same time, help them to connect alternative empowered meanings of the place. Usme is not only a repository of natural resources and land for expansion. Usme is a place with a long standing rural culture, a religious pilgrimage place for Muiscas, it is the location of the biggest indigenous cemetery in America, home of the most important archaeological discovery of the twenty-first century in Colombia. For the activists, Usme is a place that is defended by a lot of entities, a place full of ancestors and historical trajectories that cross each other making empowered connections. In that manner, they are challenging the demeaning and pejorative meanings associated with Usme; therefore, they are deconstructing the boundaries of the assemblage of Usme, and by establishing alternative and positive meanings to Usme, they are actually reterritorialising the assemblage of Usme.

This reterritorialisation of Usme is expressed in a challenge to the exclusion and oppression that Usme has been subjected to. By reviving a Muisca and campesino memory, Usme activists have been able to revitalise the rural way of life that was threatened by the expansion of Bogotá. Peasant communities are working together with environmentalist organisations, younger urban Usmenians have connected with the rural way of life, and long-standing resistance has found a revitalising push. The alternative ways to understand the relationship of human and non-humans proposed from Usme posits important ethical questions that are very important for a world that is on the verge of climate change. At the same time, the revitalisation and empowerment of the rurality in Usme challenges the contemporary notions of what a city is and who belongs to it. Usme’s community is claiming their right to inhabit Bogotá, but a different kind of Bogotá. One that is not constituted by skyscrapers and densely populated areas surrounded by parks. Nor are they proposing a suburban city; rather than that, they are claiming their right to inhabit the city without having to change their way of life. In that way, they are also proposing a deconstruction of the rural/urban dichotomy, a dialogue between them as pairs. At the same time, Usme activists are creating a space from where the intercultural dialogue between modern and decolonial thinking is possible. Such as the way they could delocate ecology and science, and the way they use them to deliver other epistemologies to outsiders.
Because of all of the aforementioned reasons, Usme is being reterritorialised as empowering and changing the assemblage of a place that has a lot to offer the city, to the environment, and to the inhabitants of Usme. Usme is a node in the network of decolonial thinking, and from this it is possible to learn alternative ways to inhabit that are pivotal to the current global conjuncture. First it offered an alternative way for humans to relate with nature that takes advantage of the scientific knowledge without neglecting grassroots ways of relating to it. On the contrary, the activists of Usme create a twofold of both, that is empowering for communities and opens a space for dialogue between them and modern institutions, such as the state and business that are open for change.\footnote{147 Like those that follow alternative ways to understand capitalism. For more information, please refer to Hancock 2001.} However, the lack of external contact of Usme with the rest of Bogotá and its tendency to frame everything from the ancestrality weakens those possibilities, as it locks inside the assemblage of Usme those potentialities. In that way, it would be beneficial for the resilience of Usme that it gets involved with other communities facing similar challenges. The interchange of information between poor rural communities has proven to be beneficial for the resilience of those communities, and to empower them to have a more visible voice. As in the case of the Honey Bee Network, that has helped rural communities in India and Bangladesh to improve their material wellbeing; and that have increased the capacity of those communities for a fast adaptation to the challenges posited by the market economy and climate change (Martinez-Alier 2002).

As a final consideration I think that the case of Usme, and the way in which it was presented in this thesis aided the thesis posited by the Latin American modernity/coloniality research program (Escobar 2007b), that has been explored in this thesis, because it provides them with more empirical information of cases that are happening right now. At the same time, it shows how the alternative ways to understand space and place posited by Massey (2005) and Dovey (2010) resonate with the abovementioned thesis. This resonance creates a synergy that can provide more detailed accounts of how modernity/coloniality is a force that oppresses many communities around the globe. However, I must admit that this research has created more questions than it has resolved. Potential issues for future research regarding the
assemblage of Usme are: first, if the decolonial option of Usme has the potential to redefine the relationship between rural and urban, changing it into a more horizontal relationship in which the rural becomes something more than the repository of natural resources consumed by the cities. That redefinition could subvert the hegemonic position of the urban life as the preferred way to provide wellbeing for humanity. That could have the potential to empower rural communities and understand them as pivotal to our globalised world. Second, to explore the delocation of scientific knowledge made by Usme activists as an alternative way to understand sustainability and development. It is possible that if science is understood as a language rather than a way to measure and control, it is possible to create better and more useful reforms to the ways of production and consumption on a global level. These would then be reforms that address nature not as a resource or capital; but as a sentient living entity.
Epilogue: Listening to Usminia’s voice.

Our people shall never lose their essence and each one of us know its origin.

Our essence is in the air, in the water, in the fire, in the life of these lands…

And it shall be there.”

(Yaya, 2010)

In 1997, German Rozo built his sculpture honouring Usminia, the princess who was kidnapped by Ebeque; and gave this name to Usme which means “your love nest”. The sculpture German Rozo built was important not only because it acknowledges the Muisca past of Usme (Ospina Gomez, 2008), but also because it recognizes Usminia as a female character. But despite the fact that in Muisca politics, authority and power was maintained in a matriarchal way (Gómez-Montañez, 2009), the memory of Muisca women disappeared in the chronicles; and ironically only the memory about men has been reconstructed.

However, like Usminia, many Muisca women from before the colony remain attached to certain territories. Names like Chia, who was the goodness of the night and the obscurity, are used to name places in what used to be Muisca land. They are a reminder of the importance of the women in the Muisca cosmogony. For them, the universe was created by a woman: Bagüe, the mother of the entire universe. She imagined the universe and it materialized. In the recent words of a Muisca Abuelo narrated to the public in an ecological walk, “Her (Bagüe’s) thoughts were at the same time the work of the universe. Her ideas were materialized while she thought them”. Likewise, Bachue is the mother of all Muiscas. She was born from the waters fully mature, not physically but spiritually. As since the beginning of her existence, she had a deep connection with Mother Earth. Thus Bachue was

148 Translation by the author
wise since she was born. On the contrary, the father of the Muiscas, Qhuzha, was born immature and unwise, since he lacked a connection with Mother Earth at the moment of his birth.

In that manner, for the Muiscas the feminine is related to wisdom and to life, and to the origin of the universe. Therefore, they think that women are naturally wise. But it seems that the colony was able to erase that idea of the feminine, condemning to oblivion all of the Muiscas women. Nowadays, we only have historical accounts of men, warriors and war. It is difficult to portray the role of the Muiscas women. Moreover, the Muiscas of today only sent men to participate in to the word circles in Usme\textsuperscript{149}. So where are those women? Where is Usminia?

As was pointed out before, Usminia remains in the territory. She is in the Sumapaz Páramo Mountains, in the Tunjuelo River, in the land’s wounds created by the mining industry and Doña Juana landfill. The legend of Usminia explains the foundation of Usme, the origin of its name; thus by recovering the memory of that myth, Usme activists are attaching Usminia to the semiotic pole of the assemblage of Usme. They are bringing back a female figure as the most important character of their territory. They assume that Usminia is the mother of Usme; crucial to the process of deterritorialising, central to expelling the oppressive assemblage of Usme.

Usminia is not a dormant remembrance, nor does it belong only to a foundational myth attached to the past. From the Usmenian decolonial alternative, Usminia is once again alive. Since for Usme activists their territory is an entity to which they communicate, and Usminia is the territory, she is actively helping them to empower and liberate Usme. Through the memory devices they have developed, Usme activists were able to realize that Usminia remained latent in many of the everyday practices of campesino woman. Those women participate actively in the deterritorialisation process by preparing, \textit{chicha}, cooking the

\textsuperscript{149} From which I cannot create a generalization. Since, I only analysed word circles carried out by Usme activist, to where the Muisca where invited to participate. Nevertheless, even when in some occasions the Muisca leaders that attended the circles where accompanied by women, they never had an active role in the circle and all the Muisca participation was done by men.
sancocho, telling stories about their land; participating from the margins, not being noted, but always there.

The campesina women of Usme are looked up to with reverence, as they are the mothers and grandmothers of the activists. And even when they participate from the margins, the activists know the pivotal role they play in the reterritorialisation process. - “You must always be grateful with Las Doñas\(^{150}\) for they are always working hard for these processes” – an elder men said in a word circle. It was then when I realized that they are always making possible the walks, the word circles, and all the public activities carried out by the activists. They are the ones who possess the knowledge and the skills to coordinate a kitchen that has to feed dozens of attendants. They are the ones who when something goes wrong know how to find and solve the problem. They are the ones who keep many of the traditional practices, which belong to the intimate world of their families.

In many of the activities carried out in Usme, I saw just a few women taking the leading voice. When they did it, it was after they have finished their task and they knew that the event was running smoothly. But when they took the voice, everybody listened carefully. After all, they were born wiser than any men, since they were connected with mother earth. They use their wisdom to deal with dissent and friction among the activists. Elder women know how to deal with elder activists, how to make them listen to the younger ones’ point of view. Likewise, young women knew how to enable the younger ones to understand what the elders were saying. Many of the discussions I saw on the word circles were always settled down by a woman, who always had the last word. And what they said always was a way to bring together the points of view of the activists. In that manner they are crucial to the decolonizing alternative of Usme.

These campesino women are always at the margins, always busy during the meetings doing all the little things that were needed. Running from here to there, peeling potatoes, serving the food, moving objects from here to there all around the place, making sure that everything works smoothly in the word circles and a walks. For example, in a two-day walk

\(^{150}\) Plural for a very respectful way to say Missus.
carried out in October 2012, after the walk started, they said good bye to a few people and let some containers with water with the activists that were in charge of the logistic of the walk. Then they jumped into a jeep, and took the road down the mountain. When we arrived at the camping site, a beautiful bonfire was already set up. Around it, there was a lot of chicha and some musical instruments. We arrived tired, and to my surprise an elder woman received me with a guava juice that tasted really good. Then they let us to set up our tents while they served a chicken sancocho. They worked the whole day to be ready for our arrival. More than one hundred people were fed by just five or six women. Without them the walk would be a failure.

The campesino women of Usme are always working to empower Usme without taking a central place in the stage; they are always working from the margins. They are hidden by the mist of the colonial gaze; like the Muisca woman whose lives are difficult to picture today. They talk from a little pocket of coloniality that it is still to be delocated, as Usme campesino women are the descendants of a matriarchal society that is nowadays interpreted from a patriarchal point of view. They are regarded with reverence as natural born wise-woman but they are barely heard in public. The voice of those women who consider themselves descendant of Usminia is waiting to take its place and make explicit the woman’s role in the reterritorialisation processes in Usme. That voice is until today a constant and everlasting murmuring, but it could become the powerful and wise words of the land of Usminia. They could remind a patriarchal society that other ways to become whole in the world are possible. This lies in the ways and wisdom of these women.
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