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Hidden Histories of Indigeneity in Urban Andean Ecuador: Transubstantiation, Ceremony, and Intention in Quito

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Abstract

Students of the South American Andes have long noted the extraordinary force of objects to traverse cosmic and psychic distances, fill (or empty) the living with power that is often exhibited through public dance, and serve as 'transactors' in senses socioeconomic, psychic, cosmic, and geographical. In this article I examine substances and actions involved in a modified version of Holy Communion that took place in June of 2012 in a working-class neighbourhood located at the outskirts of Quito, Ecuador, to celebrate the nativity of St. John the Baptist. I argue that this act was specifically designed to expand the celebration of the Eucharist in a way that allowed a type of transubstantiation whereby the relatives and friends of former hacienda peons were able to transform their physical bodies into something some believed had long been hidden from them—their right to live in the city as persons of their own making, ones who could legitimately adopt the identity and corresponding histories, territories, and political rights of indigenous persons.

Key words: Ethnography, Ecuador, Indigeneity, Ritual, Ethnogenesis

Introduction

... moderns tend to think of native theatre as nature itself.

There is history in the play now, as there was then.

-- *Richard C. Trexler, 'We Think, They Act' (1984, p. 216)*

One common characteristic of what can otherwise be widely diverse worldviews of indigenous South Americans is a recognition that the powers inherent in the 'natural' world can profoundly affect human beings when they encounter in the landscape stones, volcanoes, glaciers, caves, springs of water, rainbows, hail, animals, and countless other phenomena (Dean 2010, Whitten 1978). Small natural and manufactured objects can also serve as powerful agents of communication and problem solving. Seashells, llama fat and fetuses, lead figurines, coloured foil, seeds, leaves and chewed wads of coca, coloured candies, confetti, balls of black camelid wool, incense, account books, images of saints, and even identity cards are placed on home altars, kept under lock and key, arranged on ceremonial tables, and often ritually burned. Objects may answer questions about illness and future events, or be squirreled away and brought out later to cause healing or harm to others (Allen 1988; Bastien 1978, 1992; Bolin 1998; Candler 1993; Corr 2010; Guzmán-Gallegos 2009; Wogan 2004). Food and drink also figure prominently as powerful substances, contributing significantly, according to Rachel Corr (2002, 7) to 'academic discussions about indigenous peoples, historical consciousness, and identity politics' (See also Weismantel 1988; 1991).

While it is tempting to find consubstantial meanings located primarily in what Europeans identify as a metaphysical realm, R.T. Zuidema proposed in 1988 that 'the pragmatic grounding of Andean cosmology [is] in political and social organization rather than in the supernatural' (Dover 1992, 8). In a related vein, Peter Gose has maintained that social class and cultural expression intersect in the Andes as a form of practical reason and intentionality (Gose 1994, x, 7). Although Zuidema was speaking primarily about pre-contact and colonial societies and Gose to a contemporary rural scenario, I suggest that these generalisations also apply to an urban, 21st century urban Andean context where what has been called 'neo-indigeneity' (Fine-Dare 2013) is performed in intercultural space in ways that highlight intention over essence, and local memory over the study of received 'official' histories.

I support this suggestion by means of an ethnographic examination¹ of the micromateriality (Hann 2014, S182) of urban ceremonial performances designed to reform or at least shake up

¹Because research for this paper was conducted over the course of several years I have accumulated a long list of people to whom I owe debts of gratitude. As many of these have been listed in other publications, I will simply dedicate this paper to the memory of three Cotacollao residents and friends who were very generous to me and who my husband Byron Dare and I miss very much: Luz María Semanate Semanate, Pedro Morales Lamiña, and Miriam Morales Simbaña.

certain received understandings of the past. One explicitly stated goal of revising, for instance, certain understandings of the racialised and gendered body within ceremonial contexts is to transform configurations of the body politic that have crushed persons of complex phenotype, ancestry, and intention into categories of being constrained by a crucible of state ideologies of selective inclusion and exclusion.² Indigenous cultural ‘heritage’, for instance, is targeted for inclusion when it is anticipated to be a source of tourism revenue, but excluded when attempts are made to link indigenous heritage to territorial claims and water rights.

I also suggest that policed boundaries between persons and territories categorised as indigenous and non-indigenous in the Andes have often been maintained by interpellations not only devised by the state through ideological-cum-marketing strategies, but also, and largely unwittingly, by local people themselves. This often occurs when people participate in state-sanctioned activities that sharply suggest, through performance, what it means to be ‘authentically’ indigenous in ways that can backfire when public performances are read by outsiders, or those holding elite power, as ‘folkloric inventions’. For example, Ecuadorian intellectuals are particularly sensitive to what they see as displays of cultural inauthenticity because of a history of romantic invention of a national past designed to counter Peruvian/Incaic hegemony, one that has indoctrinated generations of schoolchildren with ‘truths’ about a ‘Kingdom of Quito’ formed by a Kitu ‘Kara/Schyris’ settlement repeatedly demonstrated to have no ethnohistorical or archaeological grounding (see Benavides 2009, Espinosa Soriano 1988, Salazar 2001).

Although I take seriously the caveats and critiques posed by biological anthropologists, archaeologists, and other scholars focused on materially-grounded truth-claims, my focus in this paper is on the nature of counter claims posited and enacted by people who have neither had the resources to carry a burden of proof for ‘who’ they are, nor been able to counter accusations that they are little more than ‘wannabe Indians,’ a criticism commonly directed to indigenous city-dwellers. My focus is therefore more on ‘intention’ than ‘invention,’ as the latter concept carries the dual load of internalised and externally imposed negativity that runs the risk of contradiction by essentialist claims to primordialism grounded in colonialist strategies of control. To demonstrate the nature of these counter claims, I compare two performances that have taken place in Cotocollao, a sector of northwestern Quito, the capital of the Andean nation of Ecuador.

² The act-image of crushing is important throughout the Andes. It refers to destructive, as well as to creative, transformation, such as when dancers stomp deliberately (*zapatear*) on hard ground, turning it into dust, to assert connection with time and place, living and dead. See Sillar 1996 for a fascinating discussion regarding the conceptual connections in the Andes between crushed preparation of clays, freeze-dried foods, beer, and tombs.

The Historical Stage: Cotocollao

The Cotocollao sector is comprised of many named neighbourhoods, or *barrios*, and is well known for its archaeological history. The broader cultural landscape in which Cotocollao is situated is, by some accounts, an area to which northern-expanding Incas moved southern Andean—perhaps Aymara-speaking—‘volunteers’ (known in ethnohistoric accounts as *mitimae*) sympathetic to the Inca imperial cause (or bound by it) to live among those not so impressed or compliant. A robust curiosity regarding putative Inca or Aymara ancestry has contributed to various attempts to unfurl lost and hidden sources of memory and history. Residents of various communities surrounding Quito (see Mesías Carrera and Salomon 1990) have plumbed archives, oral histories, old photographs, anthropologists’ field notes, and even engaged in shamanic séances to illuminate the past. In the urban parish of Cotocollao the fact that church and other archives were destroyed in fires resulting from earthquakes, accident, neglect or alienated by theft has also fueled alternative historical and cultural quests such as revitalised music and dance performances.

Members of an urban proletariat and service class variously marginalised and subjected to disdain (Cotocollao was for many years known disparagingly as *el barrio de los indios*, the ‘Indian’ neighbourhood), many residents find themselves in the midst of a grey social uncertainty regarding just ‘who’ they are or are allowed to be. Although many of them draw attention to a felt *Runa* (Kichwa for ‘indigenous’) heritage by growing long hair and wearing hats and other clothing associated with indigenous life, this has not resulted in the broader sociopolitical recognition they seek, more often attracting discrimination in schools and other public arenas.

What these urbanites suspect is that the state would prefer not to recognise their indigenous status as this would entitle them under the Constitution to water, territory, and cultural rights that the state does not wish to award. Not only would this be costly for the government, but it would be difficult to enforce among dispersed populations in the city whose identities cannot be enforced, policed, or bounded as comparatively easily as they can in the countryside and tropical forest.³ This ‘neither fish nor fowl’ experience can also be exacerbated by attitudes coming from some Quito Basin speakers who believe many self-described Cotocollao *indígenas* to be *mestizos* (‘mixed’ persons) in disguise. As one member of the provincial Kitu Kara indigenous organisation asserted during an interview: ‘there are no real *indígenas* in the city limits of Quito who are not migrants from the provinces.’ He also felt strongly (echoing governmental and mainstream sentiment) that no one should be considered to be an indigenous person who did not speak Kichwa (Fine-Dare 2014b).

³ See Kirk Dombrowski’s important discussion of the relationship of indigenous culture to politics, which link together the issues of indigenous claims, the ‘normalization and naturalization of Native marginality’, and the issue of ‘having a culture’ (Dombrowski 2014, 186–87).

I have indeed met few people raised in Quito who speak Kichwa (*Runa shimi*).⁴ At the time I first conducted fieldwork in this area in the early 1980s, almost no one with whom I spoke had any interest in acknowledging they had an indigenous history, and many of denied that they understood any Kichwa at all.⁵ They also claimed that what I identified as decidedly *Runa* masked dance performances were done purely for Catholic devotion, nothing more or less, and certainly not as a way to express occulted indigenous ancestry (Fine 1991).

Muriel Crespi (1981), José Yáñez del Pozo (1988), and Barry Lyons (2006) have described in detail ways that Republican era hacienda life in the Ecuadorian highlands was centered on the promise and burden of celebrations. These involved dance costuming, special food preparation, and offerings of live birds and other goods to hacienda and church authorities. In the area surrounding Cotacollao festivities took place at the respective hacienda chapels, or down the volcano flanks to the Catholic church in Cotacollao, which is built on precontact rubble. When I first conducted field research in the 1980s, these dances were still held on a regular basis, organised by families connected to particular sacred images they kept in their homes and/or by ecclesiastical brotherhoods (Fine 1991).

Framed by the Catholic liturgical calendar, these performances may be viewed as expressions of elaborate social institutions accompanied by the kinds of food and alcohol exchanges, debt accumulation, and social-honor creation and circulation well known in the literature on Latin American cargo systems (for example, Cancian 1965). Missionary theatre was devised to make certain the economic flow of ‘devotional’ practices would go in one direction, towards the priests, while power went in the other. I now turn to two of these performances, one of which has been liberated from priestly influence, while the other is still tied in interesting ways to the church. I suggest that these different types of performances provide materially-distinct if interrelated opportunities for expressing resistance to state and ecclesiastical power through uncovering hidden histories. While the Yumbada enacts a historical and cosmological time that ‘always already’ exists outside of colonised and Christianised power, the celebration of St. John the Baptist allows transformation by means of syncretically ‘infiltrating’ what has been an intercultural yet hierarchical space since the colonial era. While neither can effect transformation alone, contemplation of the experiences of those who participate in both add important dimensions to understanding life in the 21st century for indigenisation projects in the urban Andes.

⁴ ‘Quito Quichua’ is a broad category applied to Kichwa-speakers or those of demonstrable indigenous ancestry within and surrounding the limits of Quito, the capital city of Ecuador, located at approximately 2,800 meters (9,200 feet) just south of the equator in the Province of Pichincha. The Ecuadorian government roughly identifies the Quito Quichua scope (comprised of 80,000-100,000 individuals as of 2008) as encompassing around 64 communities in the canton Quito parishes of Nono, Pifo, Pintag, Tumbaco, Pomasquí, Calderón, and Zámbriza, and several communities in canton Mejía. According to the Kitu Kara organization, which represents most of the Quito Quichua, forty percent of their lands are still not legalised (Fine-Dare 2010, 1).

⁵ Because Quichua is rendered more commonly today as ‘Kichwa’ in Ecuador, I do not follow here the older convention as reflected in the Human Relation Area Files except to refer to the ethnic label of Quito Quichua.

The Yumbada of Cotocollao: ‘Dance of the Mountains’

The Yumbada dance/theatrical complex is found throughout the Quito Basin and in a few other highland provinces. It features men (and increasingly, women, girls, and boys) dressed in one of four different kinds of costumes who, except for a trickster-like monkey figure, carry long hardwood lances and wear beads, feathers, and baskets that directly index trans-Andean culture and power. Yumbo is a multivocal term that can refer to a Yumbada dance personage; a now-extinct Chibchan-speaking cultural group once situated on the western Andean piedmont near the road that passes from Cotocollao to the Pacific Ocean; and to pre-Colombian and perhaps early colonial traders who moved goods from the tropical forest through the Andes and on to the west coast (Salazar 2001, 76–77).

Many Yumbada dancers associate with pre-Inca archaeological sites located in western Pichincha province, primarily the site of Tulipe (Jara Chávez 2007). In addition, Yumbo can be employed as a gloss for an indigenous person of non-Kichwa ancestry. I have had many conversations with Yumbada dancers who think that ‘Yumbo’ is a more appropriate ancestral cultural affiliation for residents of northwestern Quito, considering their proximity to non-Kichwa speaking peoples of the western cloud forest slope. Rather than state a desire to recuperate a ‘Kichwa’ or ‘Runa’ ancestry, residents of this area will sometimes state that they are or want to become ‘Yumbos.’

A drum and flute player (the *mamaco*) sets the tone and beat for the dancers, who adopt the names of male and female mountain deities while channeling power from tropical and cloud forest zones (Borja 2009; Fine-Dare 2007; Salomon 1981; Williams 2007). Shamanic killing and healing enactments are part of the theatre and power of the Yumbada, which has links to southern Andean *chuncho* dances and pre-colonial military drama (see Figure 1). Additional power associated with the Yumbada is thought by some dancers to come from La Yumba, a female spirit associated with springs and waterfalls and believed to directly punish perpetrators of the domestic violence that plagues this urban sector (Fine-Dare 2014a).⁶

⁶ Many Yumbada dancers in this region state firmly that they dance for devotion to St. Sebastian, an image that is kept in the home of mestizo descendants of one of the powerful former hacienda owners in the area. A large rift developed around 2008 between one faction of the Cotocollao Yumbada, which was devoted to St. Sebastian, and the faction associated with the assumed leadership of the dance complex, which was increasingly distancing itself from all references to and affiliations with Catholicism (see Fine-Dare 2014b). As of 2015, however, attempts have been made to close the divide both interpersonally and through written exegesis on poster and brochure materials published by the Municipality of Quito.



Figure 1: Figure of St. John the Baptist in his new costume for the 2012 festival.
(Photo K. Fine-Dare.)

The sight and sound of colourful whistling, swaying, percussive centred Yumbada dancers occupying urban spaces is extraordinary enough to warrant the amount of ink that has been dedicated to its description, from Salomon's extensively cited 1981 piece to the steady stream of papers flowing from the keyboards of Ecuadorian college students. Reasons the dance flourishes after a near disappearance in the 1990s are several, but perhaps can be most parsimoniously characterised as the result of a convergence between an Internet-fuelled awareness of international indigenous rights movements; an unstoppable and easily affordable practice of posting on social media multitudes of photos and videos, some of which document Yumbada dancing by Ecuadorian migrants living in Spain; and policies linked to state decentralisation, one consequence of such has been the doling out of funds to satellite municipal offices for the development of potential tourist attractions focused on 'ethnic folklore'.

The Hummingbird Collective

Most of those with whom I have worked reside in or have ties to a small neighbourhood located on the far northwest side of Cotacollao that was once a hacienda that distributed land to some of its former servants following the 1964 national agrarian reform. This

neighbourhood is populated by a wide variety of people, including middle class residents of condominiums built for the Teachers' Union;⁷ migrants from many regions of Ecuador and from Cuba, Colombia, and Haiti; and 'local natives' or *naturales de aquí*, people formerly connected to one or more of the many haciendas that once ringed agriculturally attractive Cotacollao. The majority of those discussed in this paper are members of Casa Kinde (pronounced *kin-deh*), 'Hummingbird House', a loose collection of families who legally incorporated in the early 2000s so that they could apply for cultural grants, and municipal project funds.

In the early 2000s some Kinde members began dancing with the Yumbada of Cotacollao. In 2008 they put together a small museum exhibit in their local cultural center based on Yumbada symbols and costuming and began working discussion of Yumbos into their alternative elementary school lessons and community lectures. As significant as the Yumbada is to the Kindes, partly because the healing practices of a matrilineal ancestor ties them to La Yumba, older members are also very devoted to Catholic-based ritual observances. While this Christian orientation may seem incongruous with a 'nativist' attachment to the Yumbada, it is worth noting that to "become indigenous" through costume and dance is to have the 'hidden history' of being *Runa* revealed (regardless for now of whether the deeper nature of that history follows Chibchan, Quechua, or Aymara routes). It therefore signifies a way to unravel (and thereby attempt to re-braid) the colonial- and hacienda-based sources of amnesia regarding violence, oppression, and poverty. The Catholic Church has played a central role in this, particularly as it has been variously linked to and independent from the Ecuadorian state. Indigenous people have responded to what has often been a violent hegemony in various ways, from outright rejection⁸ to what Corr (2002, 21) has identified as the appropriation and transformation of Catholic signifiers 'into local symbols of identity and social life'.

I now turn to the celebration of a Catholic saint to provide an example of this kind of an appropriation, and to examine the possible meanings and motivations for such. I extend, however, the interpretation beyond the symbolic, as I believe ritual participants not only reflect exegetically and actively on historical events and the causes of ongoing inequalities, but also tie ceremonial acts and symbols to particular transformative strategies and intentions.

⁷ A powerful motivational factor for some of the 'neo-indigenous' activities described here is related to this housing. Not only was a supposedly permanently protected chunk of the forest surrounding Quito destroyed in building these condominiums, but a water source considered sacred and ancestral known as La Yumba was filled in and capped off, taking away the kind of territorial patrimony to which indigenous people are entitled under the Ecuadorian Constitution.

⁸ See MacCormack (1991, 185) regarding the decision to offer Andean products to the gods and the dead when the corruption of priests was rejected during the Christianised indigenous resistance movement known as *Taqui Onqoy*.

June 24: The Nativity of the Rescued Saint

I was peeling something like my five hundredth potato when Manuela, the festival sponsor (*priosta*), motioned. I rose stiffly from the spot where women, kids, and sometimes men processed endless piles of garlic cloves and potatoes, grateful to do anything else. ‘We’ve got to get San Juanito’, she whispered, pressing into my hands a plastic bag stuffed with something soft and light. ‘Hurry!’

The shadows had grown long as we climbed a set of stairs into the home where the small statue of San Juan (St. John the Baptist) permanently lived. It was also the home of Manuela’s elder brother, Francisco (‘Tío Pacho’), who since the early 2000s had been teaching young people how to play the flute, sew dance costumes, wield the whip, call and respond, and properly *zapatear*, or ‘stomp it’ in preparation for an array of late summer, dry-season ceremonies commonly held throughout highland Ecuador (see Wibbelsman 2009). Tío Pacho nodded for us to approach. As his wife looked on, he fumbled with work-gnarled hands to unsuccessfully extract coin offerings dropped onto the bottom of the saint’s box. He finally closed the wooden door. ‘I give up’ he shrugged. ‘These must belong to San Juanito’.

Manuela lifted the heavy box from the table. A small procession of relatives followed Manuela and the rose petals I scattered from the bag back up the street to an outer room of the *priosta*’s home where San Juan would receive prayers, flowers, and other offerings over the next few days. The living saint had first to be rejuvenated. As her daughter-in-law’s father and I looked on, Manuela removed San Juanito’s hat and the embroidered white outfit in which one of her two older sisters, Luz María (‘Mama Lucha’), had dressed him when she served as *priosta* in 2011.⁹ After clothing San Juan in a new celestial blue satin garment, Manuela returned to his tonsured head a tiny black fedora decorated with a mirror in the front and multicoloured ribbons that streamed behind (see Figure 2). A remarkable miniature of the hats worn by San Juan festival dancers (*danzantes*,¹⁰ also known as Roselas), the fedora gave a decidedly ‘local’ touch to San Juan’s saintly garb. ‘He is beautiful’, she whispered as I took photographs, ‘and very powerful. He can make many things happen; I have seen them myself’.¹¹

⁹ I spent many hours with head cook and chicha master Mama Lucha during the 2012 festival. Working in a new cook shack improvised from stacked concrete blocks, I helped her fill three fifty-gallon blue plastic barrels with the hot chicha we brewed in huge metal pots made from sprouted corn flour, herbs, spices, and heavy rounds of brown sugar. Although I was unaware of her illness, Mama Lucha was to die just a few months later from the lung cancer that many suspected was caused by spending most of her life tending a cooking fire in closed spaces.

¹⁰ ‘Danzante’ does not mean the same thing as ‘bailarín’, both of which can be translated into English as ‘dancer’. As was explained to me in the field, *danzante* is someone who dances as part of an organised group that has a goal or ‘purpose’ (*intención*).

¹¹ I also draw attention to this fedora because it represents in miniature the many transformations of objects and meanings that have taken place in the Americas since (and perhaps before) the 15th century. A little hat with ribbons may, for instance, evoke the headgear of *matachines* dancers, the ribbons on which imitate feathers of the Aztec dancers pulled into Christians versus Moors military theater, a type of theatrical genre that has influenced Rosela as well as Yumbada dancers (Scolieri 2013, 52–54).



Figure 2: Festival sponsors, dancers, and priest conducting ceremony outside the chapel before mass for St. John the Baptist. A gourd bowlful of chicha sits on the ritual table. (Photo K. Fine-Dare.)

Although dressing statues of religious figures in new garments has been common practice for centuries, the focus on St. John's miniature hat takes on additional significance in an Andean context. In an article focused on 'pebble play' at the powerful southern Peruvian site of Qoyllur Rit'i, where people travel in pilgrimage for the June 24 nativity observances of St. John the Baptist, and that coincides with the pre-Christian summer solstice observance of Inti Raymi, Catherine Allen describes the ubiquitous presence of miniature houses, corrals, livestock, and other objects that are traded, played with, and

. . . are viewed as tiny storehouses of prosperity and well-being. They are carefully tended—"fed" and even on occasion clothed—and ritually manipulated to bring their keepers the well-being they represent. Usually these miniatures are bestowed by super-human agencies—a mountain lord, the earth, or the lightning. (Allen 1997, 75–76)

The power of these miniatures does not inhere in the objects themselves, but rather through the ways they connect people to what Allen elsewhere calls 'circulating currents' of life force (*sami* in Quechua; see Corr 2002 regarding the concept in the Ecuadorian Andes) that helps

transform human labor into the flexible bonds of *ayni*, or reciprocity (Allen 1988: 226). These connections are lubricated and empowered by shared substances such as meals, chicha, and coca leaves. The aspersion of chicha or other liquid on the ground (*ch'allay*) during most ceremonial occasions also makes manifest the social contractual acceptance of the gift at the same time that it is offered to the earth (Candler 1993, 10, 30–34).

The Cotocollao San Juanito connects to micromateriality and local history in another way. Like the image of San Sebastián believed to have been found unloved and in a dark hiding place by hacienda serfs (*huasipungueros*) who dedicated him to the Yumbada, this image of San Juan is similarly reported to have been 'rescued'. While working as a construction labourer, a relative of Manuela's found the image abandoned in an old building in the colonial centre of Quito. The story goes that he hid the saint in his coat until he arrived at his rural home, thereby rescuing him from certain oblivion. In this location the European saint—whose official Catholic hagiography describes him as a non-drinker who was later beheaded—could be revived as an indigenous dancer wearing a hat with a shaman's protective mirror. San Juan's primary role would be to heal others, partly as a result of his hagiographic identification as a healer, but also because of the way he escaped harm because of this localised recuperation, rescue, and even rebirth.

'All Theatre Begins at the Altar'¹²

Two days later, escorted by her husband Miguel, many relatives, and several masked dancers, Manuela carried San Juan several blocks down the steep, paved road. The entourage stopped in a vacant lot across from the neighbourhood chapel where other family members and neighbours had assembled. The French priest contracted for the occasion waited outdoors where a pre-Mass ceremony was to be conducted by Manuela's children. On bare earth sprinkled with flower petals, tables had been set up on which, as Manuela's oldest son explained, the 'basic elements' of Andean indigenous life had been arrayed: loaves of festival bread, *mote* (hominy), chicha (maize beer), and water¹³ (see Figure 3).

¹² Trexler (1984, 192).

¹³ This practice is very similar to that of setting up a home altar in parts of rural Ecuador that parallels and replicates the sacred table laid out for mass. In rural Salasaca, Ecuador, Chicha is almost always set out on the *santa miza*, which 'continues to be the setting for the creation and renewal of social relationships within the community' (Corr 2002, 5).



Figure 3: The priest lifts the chicha during the mass for St. John the Baptist.
(Photo K. Fine-Dare.)

When it was time for Mass, men and women carrying heavy Yumbada lances and the elemental substances led the group into the chapel. Manuela set San Juan next to the wooden bowl of hominy below the altar on which the oven bread, a large split gourd full of chicha, and traditional paraphernalia for Mass had been arranged. The priest, who had worked for years among the Maya of Guatemala, spoke to the congregation about indigeneity, cultural diversity, and the rights of all to live a satisfactory life. Manuela and Miguel then briefly addressed those assembled in the packed chapel, after which their son and daughter in law

spoke about the importance of returning to indigenous roots despite the legacy of hacienda servitude and the attempts of the state to enforce *blanqueamiento* or ‘ethnic whitening’.¹⁴

The celebration of the Eucharist began with the priest elevating the wine and wafer for all to see. He set those down, and then lifted a bowl of chicha (see Figure 4) and the baked festival bread. Instead of the priest giving wafers to those taking Holy Communion, the *priosta* distributed chunks of festival bread from a wooden bowl as her husband distributed drink.¹⁵ Although some people appeared to be confused by the change in gender and Communion offerings, the ceremony was concluded without incident, as everyone hugged and shook hands with those for whom they wished peace, and dozens went up to the *priosta*’s home to observe dances, drink chicha, and be generously fed.



Figure 4: Yumbo dancers outside the La Delicia Quito Municipal center, 2007. A female dancer dressed as a Yumba holds together two chonta palmwood lances in the center.
(Photo K. Fine-Dare)

¹⁴ Although this topic might seem somewhat unusual, it was consistent with what Catholic Mass in the New World often promoted, peace and social agreement between male and female, the living and dead, and people of different class and cultural backgrounds (Gutiérrez 1991, 62–63).

¹⁵ Abercrombie (1998, 364) notes that chicha has long been served throughout the Andes as a ‘sacramental beverage par excellence’, serving as ‘the indians’ [sic] communion wine used in their own versions of the mass’. Corr reports that slices of raw potato serve as a type of communion wafer during a ceremony that takes place after a burial in rural Ecuadorian Salasaca. A ‘metaphor for the Eucharist’, potatoes send the soul off to a new life while ‘priests’ sprinkle chicha on participants as if it were holy water (Corr 2002, 14).

To *comulgar*, or participate in Holy Communion, was a key Catholic sacrament of deep concern to clerics charged with managing indigenous fealty in the Americas. In the 17th century the Bishop of Quito, Alonso de la Peña Montenegro, wondered if it was right to punish Native people for not attending Mass since it was not their fault; they could not do so because of the forced labour regimes that required work on Sundays. He also asked if it were not cruel to enforce the required ‘purification’ through fasting before taking Holy Communion on those for whom hunger was likely so much a part of their everyday lives. Still, he maintained, because it was absolutely necessary that Indians participate in the sacramental rites, ways had to be found to accomplish the rituals with sincerity (De la Peña Montenegro 1771[1663], 426–27).¹⁶

The kind of transformation that supposedly took place during the ‘great mystery’ of faith performed at Catholic Mass, or *misa*,¹⁷ when one ingested what Aquinas and other clerics would call the ‘accidents’ or superficiality of the truer substance of Christ’s body, caused other consternations to Europeans. The faith required to mystically ‘see’ the substance of Christ in visions guided by God and his grace was checked by fear that similar sightings could just as readily be falsely imposed by the devil, particularly in the form of substances about which clerics were particularly suspicious. One of these was *coca*, which was banned from Ecuador by the 18th century and only figures tangentially today in Ecuadorian indigenous ritual practice (although some report it is on the rise).

Another suspicious substance was the maize beer discussed above, known in Spanish by the generic term *chicha* and in highland Ecuadorian Kichwa as *aswa*. This heretical drink presented such a threat to the parish priest in 2008 that he snatched a whole container of it from the hands of a woman outside the Cotacollao church on the day of Corpus Christi, dumping it onto the ground. This act led to the Yumbada of Cotacollao permanently severing itself from what Carolyn Dean has called the ‘visual vocabulary of triumph’ of Corpus Christi (Dean 1999, 8–22), significantly increasing the shamanic display and actual public healing elements of the performance during subsequent years.

Hidden Histories: Matter, Meaning, Intention

Neo-indigeneity involves engagement with memory, focusing its projects on what has been forgotten and what is deemed necessary to be rewritten. More so than perhaps any other

¹⁶ See Rebecca Earle’s study of the ways that colonial era Catholic priests stuck fervently to the insistence that the ‘sacramental transformation’ to Christ’s body could not be achieved by ingesting other than wheat and wine. Furthermore, Native peoples could not become civilized unless they ate European foods (Earle 2012, 17, 149).

¹⁷ *Misa*, the Spanish word for Mass, is based on the concluding words of the Roman Mass: *Ite, missa est* (‘Go, the dismissal is made’). To Kichwa-speaking ears (Kichwa does not have an ‘e’ vowel), ‘*misa*’ could not have sounded all that different from *mesa*, the Spanish word for table, which became indigenized as the array of sacramental objects carefully arranged—and often burned—as offerings by practitioners variously labeled as witches, sorcerers, or shamans (see MacCormack 1991, 27–28).

groups seeking to re-present themselves publicly, and built on what are often private rearrangements of home and interpersonal relationships, many indigenous urbanites like the Kinde find themselves squarely engaging with history as both adversary and as a source of renewal. The memory is not only found locally—grounded in family, friends, acquaintances, teachers, employers, and even strangers—but also throughout the region, the nation, and from an international discourse stream in which indigeneity has become a key concept of debate and discussion (Fine-Dare 2013).

For longstanding residents of the Cotacollao area, historical memory has taken several forms, ranging from field research and publications on the Cotacollao Formative archaeological culture (Villalba 1988), to its reputation as a site for colonial *encomienda* grants and Republican era haciendas and rural retreats, on to the rapid urbanisation following mid 1960s agrarian reform underwritten partly by *ex-huasipungeros* selling their state-granted allotments for ‘peanuts’ to developers, thus circulating their wages back via housing rentals to a new owner class (Fine 1991).

In 1979 the first president elected by a democratic vote in decades, Jaime Roldós Aguilera, delivered part of his inaugural speech for the first time in Ecuadorian history in Kichwa. His short-lived presidency adumbrated a new era, one built on an Ecuadorian indigenous movement building steam (Hurtado 1980: 304–11; Whitten and Whitten 2011, 117). By the late 1980s the old category of *indio* had expanded to include a variety of specific indigenous ‘pueblos’ with distinctly geographical and rural foci. Anticipating the 1992 Columbian Quincentenary, the indigenous-focused publishing house Abya Yala published a booklet entitled *Pueblos del Ecuador* in which no specific mention was made of Quito Runa or Kitu Kara. Peoples of provinces such as Pichincha were lumped into a category called ‘Quichua Nationality of the Ecuadorian Highlands’. The closest mention of the community in which the Kinde live was this:

The *indígenas* of Pichincha inhabit dispersed *comunas* [communal landholdings] in small population centers forming marginal zones in the city of Quito. Their subsistence base is in the products they cultivate, following an agricultural vocation based on ‘the land.’ This subsistence is combined with industrialized products of low nutritional quality, such as soft drinks, noodles, cookies, and crackers (*Pueblos del Ecuador* 1986, 7; translation mine).

Since the 1980s these negative and non-specific characterisations of Quito Basin indigeneity have expanded to include today’s online identification of ‘Kitu Kara’ peoples, but still no mention is made of anyone in the city but the few *comuna* residents who live south of the Kinde. It is this invisibility, this ‘hidden history’ that Manuel and his siblings attempted to address via the 2012 celebration of San Juan.

Counter ‘Reformation’?

In an important piece on confraternities and the ‘cult of the Eucharist’ in Mexico, Clara García Ayuardo (1994, 86–87) discusses the strategy encouraged by the Counter-Reformation to encourage followers to believe in the power of visible images of saints to establish their truth. Perhaps by drawing followers into a Mass dedicated to the image of San Juan it was hoped that the saint’s presence would encourage the congregation to follow the unexpected words and practices delivered around him, perhaps effecting a type of ‘Reformation’ of received beliefs about the nature of history, identity, and power.¹⁸ From where I sat in the audience the confusion about what was going on was obvious, particularly when the priest invited a Haitian immigrant to come up front to speak to the congregation. The choir had been preached to; people were eager to leave.

Manuela’s family returned home directly following Mass to dish up and publicly distribute an elaborate feast of chicken soup, rice, pork, and fresh fruit. As scores of visitors lined the sidewalks to eat from Styrofoam plates and bowls, masked dancers moved rhythmically through the middle of the street to bring gifts to Manuela and Miguel, ranging from baskets of fruit to cases of beer. The dancing and drinking went on long after dark; despite the mess, everything was cleaned up perfectly before Monday morning, as per municipal regulations and as if nothing had happened. But did a transformation of consciousness occur as a result of the transformed Mass? Was the transubstantiation goal of turning non-indigenous bodies into indigenous ones via the ethnographically ‘indigenous move’ of drinking chicha (while listening to homilies of resistance) achieved?

Without conducting follow up interviews, which I had no chance to do as I was too deeply involved in carrying out the festival myself, there is no way of knowing for certain. I can only recount what was told to me by the architects of the event. My first opportunity to discuss outcomes took place sometime around midnight, when Manuel and his younger brother came into the latter’s apartment, where my husband and I were lodged. Manuel had been drinking quite a bit—despite attempts to make only beer and chicha available during the festival, things had gone down the path they often do, lubricated by boxes of wine and bottles of beer and cane alcohol. Manuel wept as he talked about the events of the festival, and how difficult it had been to communicate his intentions and views to those who had attended the Mass and the street festival. Aware that the San Juan festival had roots in imposed and often violent strictures of Catholic-underwritten hacienda bondage, he and his siblings had hoped that the event could be ‘decolonised’ (his word), by stripping it of competition, excessive inebriation, machismo, and the elements that give onlookers an excuse to criticise ‘drunken Indians’.

¹⁸ In an editor’s note to an article written by the late Muriel Crespi, Norman E. Whitten, Jr. muses that the ‘paramount importance’ given to celebrations of St. John the Baptist in northern Ecuador is ‘... because the concept of baptism itself stresses a process of status transformation from savage (sinner) to civilised (absolved Christian). Immersed Indians should (but don’t) emerge *blanco* as they accept the One Truth Faith...Hence the fiesta of St. John symbolizes both transformation and continuity’(Whitten in Crespi 1981, 502, n. 9). In the case of the Kinde-sponsored festival it appears that the opposite was sought, that whiteness would become indigenized through worship of San Juan, something noted by David Guss as a particularly Andean ‘opportunity to momentarily reverse both economic and social oppression’ (Guss 2000, 27).

Feeling acutely aware that as eldest son he held the most responsibility for what had gone on that day, Manuel expressed regret for the hubris, for the failed attempt to prevent drinking, and for perhaps going too far in his attempt to fight back against the historical and political forces that would have his family ‘whiten’ themselves in order to be acceptable to each other and to the state. He told me how confused and even angry some of his family members were a few years back when he had quit a good job to grow a ponytail and dedicate himself to community education and cultural revitalisation. ‘I was on my way to being “whitened”’, he said, ‘but I let them down when I decided that instead of being white and moving “up”, I wanted to be a Yumbo’.

Sometime later in the summer I learned that Manuel had been badly beaten up at a festival that had taken place two weeks following his mother’s San Juan festival. He told me in a Facebook message that he never really knew exactly who hit him, or why, but that this fiesta was sponsored by one of the relatives who had disagreed with the path he had taken. Clearly, he said, he ‘still had a lot to think about.’ Perhaps the assault was in retaliation for the transformations this man had made to an entire Christian-based frame of reference, the primary source of comfort of which was located in the denial of an other— rather than this—worldly orientation. Although he would not have put it this way, his taking on of the Catholic Church, as well as the expectations of many Ecuadorians about the ‘proper place’ his family should occupy socially, was an attempt to change what James Ferguson (2007, 385) called a ‘topography of power’ (see also Whitten and Whitten 2011, 167–68, 182–83).¹⁹

I submit that despite Manuel’s interpretation of having failed to accomplish all he and his siblings and cousins intended for the 2012 festival, they have indeed changed the topography of power of north western Quito by means of carefully-calculated material strategies. In addition to appropriating Catholic sacramental acts, they paint murals, give dance performance workshops, make films, take photographs, create museum exhibits, and conduct ethnographic interviews with elders. They go on pilgrimages to sacred places ranging from the tropical forest to the Pacific coast, to the churches in colonial Quito, and to mountain caves and spring sources deemed to be sacred. They sell chickens they have raised and organic produce they have grown in greenhouses for which they received municipal support to middle class people in a popular Friday farmers’ market run by the city. They design posters, give talks throughout northern Ecuador as well as in Mexico, Columbia and Peru, run an after school program to provide a haven for kids living in situations of domestic violence, post statements about what it means ‘to be Kitu Kara’ on Facebook and YouTube, and work to preserve their access to high altitude water sources. They place their deceased relatives in public, highly decorated niches in a cemetery a mile away that has long been designated for ‘the poor’ and ‘for Indians’ (Pederson 2008).

¹⁹ Circe Sturm’s work regarding the concern of what she calls ‘racial reclamation’ and ‘connecting with...hidden...histories’ among the Cherokee has been instructive in thinking about the similar circumstances in Cotocollao (Sturm 2010, 33).

In 2012, before Mama Lucha died, her family made certain that she and her sisters Manuela and Augustina ('Mama Gucha') and brother Tío Pacho finally received the benefits of a state-sponsored literacy program. Although they said they didn't learn to read and write very much, they were proud to have their photo taken in mortarboard hats displaying their certificates of accomplishment. In 2015 one of the Kinde members created a film regarding musical revitalisation that was shown in the prestigious Casa de la Cultura in Quito. Following the attention she received from this film she was hired by a national television station in 2016 to produce and narrate a series of film shorts focused on indigenous, African Ecuadorian, and other small Ecuadorian communities. In 2016 and in collaboration of indigenous consultants, two non-indigenous Cotacollao residents wrote and performed a puppet show regarding the indigenous roots of the Yumbada that received a great deal of attention in the national media and on Facebook.

In addition to the public performance aspects of cultural reconfiguration, the Kinde group quietly maintains an oppositional discourse regarding the consumption of distilled alcoholic drinks, which they believe contributes centrally to intimate violence in the neighbourhood and the further erosion of equality between the sexes. The gendered symbol of this resistance inheres in the production and ritual gifting of chicha, which is made by women who have been following Mama Lucha and Manuela into the cook shack (see Figure 5) to make the beverage that continues to symbolise an essentially liquid materiality of Andean right living and right relations, sometimes translated as *sumak kawsay* (Fine-Dare 2014a).



Figure 5: María Luz Semanate preparing chicha for the festival of St. John the Baptist, June 2012. (Photo K. Fine-Dare)

Dancing with Purpose

If, as James Clifford has pointed out (following Althusser) new identities and concomitant uses of material culture are interpellated or ‘called out’ by a host of factors including poverty, territorial degradation, new and ever more subtle forms of racial exclusion, and increased violence connected to a global drug trade that lodges itself in small, impoverished neighbourhoods, what assurances can there be that what is drawn out in protest can do anything meaningful to stem the tide of inequality, poverty, and exclusion? How do the actions of what some derogatorily call ‘*cholos*’ affect, for better or worse, the struggles of those lionised as ‘legitimate Indians’ in rural and tropical forest areas, who face massive territorial losses and the damaging incursions of mining and petroleum interests? Rather than answer these questions by cynically saying that structural power is the only kind that exists, Clifford poses the following:

Assuming a more complex, less determined global landscape, we can see the restorative and forward-looking practices of indigenous activism as implicated in colonial and neocolonial (capitalist) structures, but not ultimately determined by them. This is a realist claim supported by the inventive survival of peoples long condemned to death by teleological visions of history. But it is also a wager on the future. (Clifford 2013, 301)

Marshall Sahlins (1999) suggests something similar by pointing out that the demise of the indigenous world is not necessarily upon us just because ‘traditional’ Native Alaskans now drive around in snowmobiles. Kinde members have recently financed a pickup truck to get their organic produce to other markets, and have acquired a MacBook Pro to be able to produce films. As their name suggests, the image invoked by members of the Kinde collective when they are asked about the connection to their indigenous past and their hope for an indigenously inflected future is the hummingbird, which appears on their Facebook page, on stickers applied to their organic produce, and on the uniforms they make for their cultural centre volunteers. The rapid and purposeful movements of the hummingbird inspire the motto that appears on posters, graffiti, and local museum exhibits: ‘Somos un pueblo en movimiento, somos un pueblo danzante; Danzamos con intención’ (We are a people in motion, we are a people who dance; We dance with intention).

In many ways this paper has been an exercise in demonstrating the complex and often-painful ways that interculturally-based ethnogenesis has been taking form in urban Ecuador since before the hacienda system broke down. Contemplating the many implications in the notion of ‘an indigenous structure of conjuncture’ elaborated by Norman Whitten (Whitten and Whitten 2011, 183–84; see also Abercrombie 1998, 23), I am reminded that to take any kind of rigid ‘anti-essentialist’ stance undermines the intentionality of Quito Runa to become realised for the indigenous persons to whom they believe their history points, and that they feel themselves to be. Their intention is not to ‘invent’ but rather to ‘dance’ purposively. The end, however, is to achieve something very much different from the kind of rigid notion of indigeneity promoted by Spanish missionaries dedicated to the idea of a ‘self-contained’ and ‘self-winding’ culture. This racialised cultural space was located in a ‘separate, lower,

cultural sphere' the missionaries—and their modern counterparts—believed they could manage by giving indigenous people the illusion that they were in control of their lives and representations (Trexler 1984, 215–16). The resulting idea of a bounded essence to indigeneity has plagued projects for indigenous recognition around the globe, perhaps making it less easy for interlopers to 'be' what they 'wanna,' but in the process sometimes distorting the knowledge- and practice-based flexibility at the historical heart of indigenous survival. That the Kindees and other residents of Cotacollao have resisted and reframed both essentialist and cynically porous notions of authenticity, however incomplete, has been a remarkable feat.

I opened this piece by making reference to respective observations made by Zuidema and Gose regarding the socially grounded (if Durkheim-inspired) and pragmatic orientation of Andean cosmologies. In a later work, Gose addresses the issue of essentialism, stating that any notion of such much be based on Andean, not Western, logic:

When Andean people differentiate social entities they tend to do so according to their logic of moieties, not the Western model of 'cultural identity.' No matter how violently they may sometimes assert difference, they do so relationally so that it becomes a prelude to a productive relationship within a larger unity. Instead of demanding recognition for their cultural difference in an essentializing fashion, Andean people have demanded inclusion in (and their right to modify) the broader formations of Christendom and republicanism. Ironically, then, it is precisely because Andean people do not assert radical cultural difference that they are culturally different from those in the grip of neoliberal identity discourses. (Gose 2008, 326–27)

Perhaps the greatest challenge posed to the Kindees and to others engaged in similar discussions regarding identity and being in the Americas is to find satisfactory ways to incorporate the praxis of indigeneity into their lives without being consumed by insidious racialised discourses that mask the multiple dimensions of personhood where gender, sexuality, age, experience, and social class intersect (Whitten and Whitten 2011, 198). As Manuel told me in a 2011 interview, 'I want to be a Yumbo only in the ways that I want. I am not an "Indian" all the time, and don't want to be told I should be'.

It is true that most urban indigenous residents of Quito no longer speak an indigenous language (although many are engaged in learning Kichwa). Nevertheless, they have succeeded in accumulating, reinterpreting, and transforming key philosophical and agentive concepts linked to indigenous intellectual and spiritual traditions. These have served as anchors in finding ways to assert their personhood and sociocultural attachments without further erasing the multiplicity of historical and ontological factors that continue to make them—and allow them to make themselves—into who they are and aspire to be. The consciously-orchestrated ceremonialism of their lives references interpersonal connections and the powers of the places in which they live perhaps more than they signal something occult and metaphysical. Instead of ingesting wine and wafer so that they might become metonymically transformed into Christ, the congregation ate elemental Andean foods so that

they might become different kinds of social persons, ones with the potential of becoming more *Runa* than any outsider can accurately perceive, and in ways that will forever defy exact classification.

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