

Almanac of the Future

A STORY OF SUCCESS

Motivational Experience No. 37



**HOW TO KNOW WHERE TO GO
WITHOUT KNOWING WHERE
I'M FROM**

**NARRATIVE AND RESIGNIFICATION
FROM HIDDEN HISTORY**



Understanding and telling history without the blindness of segregation and even ethnic-classist annulment is possibly the most important achievement of Fundación Quito Eterno. In its pedagogical tours through the historic center of Quito, the collective narrates the historical memory through its characters in a different way. In this way, many people experience a reencounter with history and their own origins, overcoming step by step the denial of the part of their identity rooted in their indigenous and Andean cosmovision.

REDISCOVERING THE HISTORIC CENTER OF QUITO

Sharing the concern to make the historic center of the city more attractive and more theirs, merchants, educators and cultural managers have carried out different initiatives and actions since 2002. One of these initiatives, *Quito Eterno* (Eternal Quito), emerged as an educational initiative and offers tours of Quito's historic sites, initially aimed at schools and students, but nowadays to a wider public. The composition of the group, people from the world of education and cultural and

social managers, has not changed much but has grown during the 20 years of its existence; most of them have never completely disassociated themselves, collaborating with the core team of Quito Eterno. By telling the history of Quito, from the territory, meeting in museums, convents and colonial houses, and from its legends and characters, the members discovered in their own flesh to be victims by suffering and practicing the mutilation of a part of their identity origin, provoked by formal education and from a racist discrimination of the society and not infrequently even from the bosom of the family.

NO MATERNAL GRANDPARENTS OR MATERNAL SURNAME

Andrea Fonseca, a member of Quito Eterno for more than 10 years, shares her testimony of overcoming: **"The identity of most of us, also in Quito Eterno, is a mixture of indigenous and mestizo roots. Quito Eterno has been a laboratory for its members; for many years, I suffered a lot, feeling ashamed of my indigenous ancestry on my mother's side of the family. I never mentioned my maternal surname because I was indigenous and I did not want my maternal grandparents to look for me at school because they wore their native dress. This rejection of a part of my origin and my identity has been a product of the discrimination of the indigenous as inferior on the part of my paternal family. I am 37 years old and I am on a long road to overcome the rejection and the feeling of shame for having indigenous roots. Now I feel**

guilt for having denied my own roots for so long, causing pain not only to my maternal grandparents". Something similar has happened to many people in Quito Eterno.



NARRATIVE FROM THE HIDDEN AGENDA

Javier Cevallos, one of the historical members of Quito Eterno, currently in a position of a public manager in the mayor's office of the city, recalls: **"In the early years, teachers and other clients asked us for tours and Routes of Legend, related to classic figures of the official history, such as Manuela Saenz, reducing her image as a companion of Simon Bolivar, overshadowing her role as a woman and political subject. Much less interest was aroused by those characters, created by Quito Eterno in order to narrate the unofficial history, the non-whitewashed, without making invisible the pre-Hispanic and even pre-Inca times, neutralizing the filters of discriminatory racism and classist biases from *La República*".** Some of these historical characters, reinterpreted by actors and mediators of Quito Eterno are the Quilago Princess, the Chichera, Manuela Espejo and the Chulla Quiteño.

Princess Quilago, a *cacique* (tribe chieftain) woman, played by Lucia Yanez, is a black-haired indigenous woman who lived in the 15th century, fighting the Inca occupation, allowing from her interpretation a different range of history, making visible the pre-Inca Andean cosmivision, the belligerence and feminine leadership, the native cultures with their languages, rituals and ancestral knowledge of astronomy, plants and their human condition.

Until before the pandemic, a woman could be found coming from the province of Cotopaxi to sell *chawarmishki*, a remedy drink made from the trunk of the penco tree. This historical figure of the *chichera*, played by Natalia Dávila, still exists today, sitting on a street corner near the House-Museum María Augusta Urrutia, evidencing the goodness of the food and drink, based on corn since pre-Hispanic times. Manuela Espejo, considered one of the first feminists in the middle of colonial life in the 18th century, shows the life of women at that time, without rights,

living in anonymity, without the possibility of a political-public life. The life of Manuela Espejo counteracts this stereotype since, with the books of her doctor brother Eugenio, she becomes a nurse, writes in a newspaper and assumes the defense of her family before the authorities of the Royal Audience that ends in the exile of her brother. While the official history, written by men, completely invisibilizes the extra-mural life of women such as Manuela Espejo, the princess Quilago or the *chichera*, these characters in the routes of legends organized by Quito Eterno, achieve the narration of a re-signified history.

For the time of the Republic, some of the characters and figures reinterpreted by Quito Eterno manage to make visible the hidden part of history: the Chulla Quiteño and also Marietta de Veintemilla, politician and writer, first woman in the presidency of the country, but invisibilized in the official chronicles. The Chulla Quiteño, inhabitant of the city and connoisseur of any corner of the center, who denies his origin,

shining his apparent blue blood, but at the same time mocking the established ethnic-classist hierarchy.



DISRUPTING MYTHS AND RESCUING IDENTITY CULTURE

Quito Eterno, at the beginning a project and an educational bet in the course of time, has become a life project for its members; in 2009 the foundation was born and since then people have dedicated full time to the cause. It organizes tours and routes of legends with their characters, workshops, and to a lesser extent plays and specific projects.

The central axis of Quito Eterno, despite its growth in terms of members and activities has not changed: to narrate the hidden history and help from the resignification in the construction of the singular self with a sense of belonging in the plural us and the territory.

As more critical perceptions germinated around the official history narrated by Quito Eterno, its audience and clientele began to trust the criteria of the cast; a circumstance that requires its members to act with great responsibility, sensitivity and intuition; also with research

work. Telling the story in a different way, without bias or taboos, rescuing culture and identity, disrupting myths and paradigms without ignoring axes such as local development, interculturality and collaborative culture is the mission assumed by Quito Eterno.





RESONANCE DOES NOT DECEIVE

There are testimonies of young people who have participated in activities of Quito Eterno since they were children, who feel a great familiarity and identification with the historic center of the city. Many of them, already as university students, choose as topics for their thesis aspects related to the resignification of history and memory. Undoubtedly, Quito Eterno has gained a space in the city and has become a point of reference in the national and Latin American context in terms of the narration of myths, legends and rituals. With a collaborative spirit, it has provided

support and guidance to peers and similar processes in Tulcán, Pasto and Popayán, opening its doors to national and international volunteers. The Mishki Shimi project, initiated in 2018 has become a Latin American regional meeting space for oral storytelling. On the threshold of the foundation there are people who have become friends of Quito Eterno, bringing their families and friends to share their cherished discovery. Many people, participating in the tours come for a walking plan and leave with a feeling; a very frequent comment is: **"you tell the story in a different way..."** Many feel great gratitude.

The pandemic led Quito Eterno to produce telerutas of legends, "lives" that reached up to a thousand people, attending virtually. **"People, and with this also our public, yearn to return to face-to-face"**, says Lucía Yáñez, member of the collective since 2004 and continues: **"one of our challenges as Quito Eterno is that at the end of the tours there is a space for reflection shared between us and our public"**.



Quito Eterno's activities generate income and sustains itself; raising public funds has not played an important role in its operation. It is interesting to note the balance that the foundation has achieved within its portfolio: on one hand, activities that allow a high fulfillment of the foundational objective but generate little income and others with a higher profitability margin and a less forceful compliance.

MESSAGES TO THE FUTURE

- Starting from the local allows to strengthen the identity of the conscious “self” in the here (territory) and in “the we” (community and culture).
- The here (territory) and the before (history) more than unique, from their particularities are the most authentic source of building identity.
- Understanding and complementing the historical memory from the hidden history opens the way to resignify narrative, culture and identity. Strengthening the sense of belonging to the territory is vital to reaffirm and enrich the collective identity.



Almanac of the Future

The text was elaborated, based on conversations in situ by the Almanaque del Futuro, represented by Jorge Krekeler, (facilitator of Misereor on behalf of Agiamondo) with QUITO ETERNO. I am deeply grateful to those who make this collective and particularly to those who gave me their attention: Lucía Yáñez and Andrea Fonseca, José Suñiga, Natalia Dávila and Javier Cevallos; thanks also to Javier Carrera of the Seed Guardians Network for having facilitated the first contacts.

Autor: **Jorge Krekeler**, jorge.krekeler@posteo.de
Design: **Ida Peñaranda** - **Gabriela Avendaño** Photos: **Quito Eterno**
Translation: **Ida Peñaranda** - **Olaf Niemtschik**

Contact information regarding the documented experience:

Quito Eterno
www.quitoeterno.org
info@quitoeterno.org
Facebook: **Quito Eterno** Instagram: **Quito Eterno**

Red Guardianes de Semillas
(Seed Guardians Network)
<https://redsemillas.org/>

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