WARMIKUNA JUYAYAY! ECUADORIAN AND LATIN AMERICAN INDIGENOUS WOMEN GAINING SPACES IN ETHNIC POLITICS

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WARMIKUNA JUYAYAY! ECUADORIAN AND LATIN AMERICAN INDIGENOUS WOMEN GAINING SPACES IN ETHNIC POLITICS

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

WARMIKUNA JUYAYAY! ECUADORIAN AND LATIN AMERICAN
INDIGENOUS WOMEN GAINING SPACES IN ETHNIC POLITICS

This research utilizes an agency framework to examine the complexities of the participation of indigenous women in local, national, and global spaces of activism. By examining the connections between processes of globalization of indigenous and women’s rights, development agendas, local politics, and gender dynamics in indigenous organizations, this research highlights the connection of ethnicity, gender, and power in an indigenous organization of Cotacachi, Ecuador, and for Ecuadorian and Latin American indigenous leaders and professionals working in national and global arenas.

Four interconnected topics are explored: (1) the understanding of indigenous women’s participation in the history of their organization within a context of interethnic discrimination and poverty that especially affects indigenous women; (2) the relation between indigenous women and the changing demands on indigenous leadership due to reconfigurations of rural livelihoods, the ascendance of the indigenous movement as a political actor, and the sustained presence of development projects; (3) the challenges indigenous women face and the strategies they enact as local leaders in their communities and organization negotiating essentialized constructions of indigenous women’s identity and forms of gender inequality; (4) the transition to local, national, and international formal politics and indigenous activism in which indigenous women’s legitimacy increasingly necessitates both experience in the indigenous movement and professionalization and expert knowledge.

Using an ethnographic methodology including interviews and participant observation, the research explores the participation of indigenous female leaders who, even if their strategies have favored working within the indigenous movement’s wider agenda, are also contesting forms of gender, ethnic, and class inequality they find in their own organizations and beyond. Thus, the research highlights the challenges they face, the strategies they resort to, and the possibilities of articulating a differentiated agenda that reflects their particular interests.
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June 27, 2014
Dedicated to María Parra, Iván Moreno, and all my family, for their love and unconditional support during this journey
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This dissertation explores the participation of Latin American indigenous women in both indigenous organizations and public spheres of political life. In particular, this research follows indigenous women in processes of political organizing from local to national and global sites of political activism. Indigenous women have contributed to the long term struggles of indigenous peoples in Ecuador and in other Latin American countries (Becker 2008). However, their contributions are not always acknowledged and they may be marginalized from indigenous activism (O'Connor 2007). I analyze a number of factors at the different sites of indigenous women’s activism that affect their participation. I am interested in understanding specific difficulties indigenous women find for their activism and how they respond to them while simultaneously challenging structures of inequality and discrimination that work to their disadvantage. I pursue the following line of inquiry: how changing global, national, and local contexts may open possibilities for the increased presence of indigenous women in politics; how they manage traditional gender roles that may restrict their political activism; how they navigate the internal politics of indigenous organizations and how the organizations channel women’s activism; what capacities are acquiring more importance for leadership; what challenges indigenous women face in their relationship with in public spheres beyond their organizations; and finally, how indigenous women are connecting to global activism.

This research makes four main contributions. First, this research fits into a considerable line of scholarly work that analyzes indigenous politics in Latin America. It advances the debates on the gender dynamics of the indigenous movement and its organizations by analyzing the activism of indigenous women, the challenges they face, and the strategies they enact as members of the movement. Second, in this research I analyze the case of indigenous women’s participation in the local politics of the canton of Cotacachi, Ecuador. My findings complicate the generally positive evaluations of the citizen participation in that county by offering an analysis of how the power and discursive dynamics of this public sphere may disadvantage indigenous women. Third, this research strives to offer a panoramic view of indigenous women’s activism by examining different sites of politics: communities; second-tier organizations; local political participation and municipal government; national politics; and global networks of indigenous activism. Finally, it presents a case study of indigenous women mainly acting in global spaces of indigenous activism and advocates for further research at this site.

Although my research started first with a specific focus on the women of one indigenous organization (UNORCAC) in Cotacachi, Ecuador, it later incorporated the cases of other indigenous women in Ecuador and other countries in Latin America who
are active in national and global arenas of indigenous activism. To address those levels of political participation, I analyze the cases of two prominent indigenous women of Ecuador and the experience of the Latin American Network of Indigenous Women for Biodiversity, RMIB [Red de Mujeres Indígenas por la Biodiversidad]. Even if I explore the gender tensions with male companions in the community and mixed organizations, this research works under the assumption that gender is, although significant, only one axis that affects indigenous women’s experience in leadership. Moreover, race and ethnicity may be the axes of domination experienced as more disempowering for indigenous women in public spheres beyond their organizations. Indigenous women’s location in the movement is complex, though. They are not only politicized just as members of the indigenous movement but in their relationship with multiple actors that relate to them qua indigenous women: state institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), political parties, feminist organizations, and fellow citizens involved in local or international development.

For the analysis in this research, I have opted for understanding indigenous women’s involvement in political life as a manifestation of their agency. This agency takes place in specific historical and social contexts that both enable and hinder indigenous women’s participation. Their agency aims to improving the life of indigenous people and addressing specific interests of indigenous women such as: increasing the spaces of their political participation within and beyond their organizations; improving the material basis of their lives; achieving recognition for their knowledge and practices, opening possibilities for education; and fighting forms of violence and discrimination that affect them. In analyzing the responses of indigenous women to the challenges found in diverse political arenas, this research highlights the tensions between accommodation, contestation, and change in gender norms in indigenous organizations but also in racial, ethnic, and class dynamics in public spheres at local, national, and global levels.

Following this introduction, this dissertation is organized into eight chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the theoretical and methodological framework of my dissertation. The first part of the chapter discusses agency as an analytical category appropriate for conceptualizing indigenous women’s political endeavors. This theoretical choice aims to counter conceptualizations of indigenous women as passive subjects. However, their agency is not exerted in a vacuum but in specific historical contexts and systems of inequalities. Therefore, I resort to the concept of intersectionality which gives attention to the interlocking workings of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and citizenship. Then, I examine the changing political context since the last quarter of the 20th century to highlight changes in the relationship between indigenous peoples and the state and the ensuing reconfigurations in the structure of political opportunity. Finally, I characterize the relationship between indigenous women and mixed indigenous organizations using understandings of hegemony and a competing social field. In the second part of Chapter 1, I discuss the feminist methodology used in the research process. By attending to issues
of my positionality, I aim to understand the power dynamics in the process of generating and collecting data. I make use of reflexivity to the extent it helps to illuminate the systems of inequality that indigenous women and I, an urban mestiza, inhabit. In Chapter 2, I offer a contextualization for the case study in Cotacachi, Ecuador, and of indigenous women whose activism is enacted mainly in the local politics within the canton. Along with general information on the canton of Cotacachi and its population, I include a short history that highlights the interethnic relations in the area as well as a characterization of the changing rural livelihoods and politics. This will set the stage to talk about the emergence of the indigenous organization in the canton, the Union of Indigenous and Campesino Organizations of Cotacachi, UNORCAC, and within it, of the Committee of Women of the organization. As Cotacachi is seen as a successful experiment of citizen participation in Ecuador, the chapter includes an overview of the process of citizen participation in the local government and of the Citizen Assembly that coordinates this participation.

Chapter 3 provides further information on the structural forces that affect indigenous peoples with specific attention to indigenous women. It introduces background information on the social, political, and economic conditions that adversely affect the lives of many indigenous women. Along with statistical information on these conditions, I present the memories of the lived experience of discrimination, racism, and exploitation that indigenous women underwent themselves or that have been told by previous generations in their families. In particular, these memories highlight how state institutions, the church, and the mestizo population mistreated indigenous people and exploited their labor. However, in this chapter I also present the perceived changes in interethnic dynamics that indigenous people attribute to the struggle of UNORCAC. I close the chapter with a brief history of indigenous women’s political participation and achievements in the organization.

In order to understand indigenous women’s leadership, in Chapter 4 I reflect on changing elements that define female leadership in the Andes. First, I contextualize this discussion in the analysis of the notion of gender complementarity that is still invoked in the discourses of several indigenous leaders. I summarize the positions of supporters and detractors of the notion in the academic debate and then transition to examine how the concept is used locally in Cotacachi. In order to do so, I introduce the manner in which UNORCAC imagines the structure of its organization as having a male and a female side. I also present how complementarity is understood by a few leaders in Cotacachi, in particular the way in which an indigenous woman questions the validity of the concept for understanding current gender relationships but rescues it as a normative model to which to aspire. Second, I turn to a discussion on changes in indigenous communities that may be affecting indigenous women’s increased presence in community politics. Finally, I compare the trajectories of two female leaders of Cotacachi, in order to tease out the elements that are gaining importance for indigenous female successful leadership.
Then I embark on a more detailed analysis of the dynamics of indigenous women’s activism starting from the local level of the community authority and of UNORCAC as an organization comprising several communities in Cotacachi. In Chapter 5, I examine the barriers that indigenous women encounter for their participation at the local level of their communities and organization and the responses they enact to the challenges they face. I start from dynamics in the family and community which offer a window to traditional gender norms that indigenous women need to negotiate in order to transcend the domestic realm and arrive at the public sphere of politics. In this chapter I analyze indigenous women’s incursion into community authority. Then I address the gender politics of UNORCAC and how the organization tries to align indigenous women with its own views. As members of an organization that depends on development projects, I also address the challenges of indigenous women regarding the dynamics of development and their relationship with development professionals. The chapter will demonstrate that indigenous women utilize a series of tactics and strategies that make possible their participation and through which they contest disempowering dynamics vis-à-vis male leaders and professional personnel of their organizations.

While the material so far focuses mainly on indigenous politics within their own organizations, Chapter 6 will follow indigenous women through the process of citizen participation in the canton of Cotacachi. In this arena, ethnicity, race, and class clearly become more salient, as indigenous women interact with a myriad of actors and organizations that collude in the process of local participation and in the Citizen Assembly of Cotacachi. In this site of participation, a few indigenous women have also ventured to the local electoral politics of the municipality. This chapter shows that although the local scale is conceived as the most propitious for indigenous women’s participation, it is fraught with dynamics that may marginalize indigenous women. It also presents the case of an indigenous woman who was elected for the municipal council and the challenges she faced in this space of formal politics. The analysis takes issue with the very discursive practices of public spheres of citizen participation that disadvantage indigenous, poor, and rural women of the canton.

In order to continue the analysis in other arenas of indigenous women’s activism, I introduce in Chapter 7 the experiences of other Ecuadorian and Latin American leaders who act at the national and global levels of indigenous activism. I discuss the cases of two renowned indigenous female leaders in Ecuador and highlight their political trajectories and the spaces in which they are politically active. Coincidentally, these two women are natives of Cotacachi, but they did not reach national and global political activism by rising through the ranks of UNORCAC and its national and international networks. Instead, they did so through CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador), the main national indigenous organization of Ecuador. In order to account for indigenous women’s activism at the global arena, I present the case of RMIB, the Network of Indigenous Women for Biodiversity. RMIB’s case is unique in
that the main locus of the members’ political participation is at the global forums of environmental indigenous activism. At this level, professionalization and expert high technical knowledge have been critical for the success of these indigenous women. Their activism takes very specific forms related to the negotiations, lobbying, and writing of texts at global meetings of state members of the Convention of Biological Diversity.

Finally, the conclusions in Chapter 8 of the dissertation present the main contributions of this research and a summary of its findings. I close the dissertation with a reference to future lines of inquiry regarding the significance of increased needs of professionalization and expert knowledge for indigenous women leaders in transnational networks of activism.
Chapter 1: Understanding Indigenous Women’s Activism in Mixed Organizations

Conceptualizations of indigenous women as poor, passive, silenced, and violated abound as has been pointed out and thoroughly critiqued (see, for example, Arnold 1997:43-46; Carey 2006; Rivera Cusicanqui 1990:177-178). In such a context, the understanding of indigenous women as political actors has to be undertaken from an analytical standpoint that counters sustained stereotypes of indigenous women’s purported passivity: “Woman is silent as Pachamama is silent” (cited in Rivera Cusicanqui 1990:178). I have opted for using agency as a concept that grapples with different forms of human action. Contingent as all human action is, indigenous women’s activism has to be understood in specific contexts and historical processes, and cannot be understood without attending to systems of inequality such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and citizenship. For this reason I employ an intersectionality approach to ethnic politics and indigenous women’s activism.

In a second section of this theoretical framework, I examine changes in the relations between indigenous peoples and the state, with attention to neoliberal multiculturalism, the ascendance of the indigenous movement, and the role of development since the last quarter of the twentieth century, characterized by some political scholars as a change in the structure of political opportunities. In a third moment of the analytical strategy I turn to a conceptualization of the specific relationship of indigenous women with other members of their mixed indigenous organizations, which are the prevalent form of activism of indigenous women. The final section of this theoretical framework addresses the specific transnational dynamics of indigenous activism and the redefinitions of indigeneity that they import. This combined strategy of linking agency to a changing context of political opportunities and a contentious relation with the indigenous movement will be useful in understanding both the Committee of Women of UNORCAC as well as other indigenous women active at national and international spaces of the indigenous movement. This theoretical framework will have implications for the analyses of other cases of indigenous women’s activism and the internal politics of the indigenous movement.

Understanding Human Action: Agency

In order to analyze the actions and practices of indigenous women in the movement, it is necessary to understand the way in which human beings act and the extent to which they are both enabled and constrained in their action by their culture. Anthropological scholarship on agency provides tools to theorize culturally mediated action. In particular, practice theorists have extensively debated the notion of human agency. The contributions of scholars of practice theory are useful to illuminate the complex subject of indigenous women’s participation in the indigenous social movement.
These contributions enable us to avoid the trap of falling into a dualistic understanding of indigenous women: either as empowered by Andean complementarity, that is, a flexible division of labor in the household, agriculture, animal husbandry, and weaving (Crain 1991; Hamilton 1998); or as particularly affected by domestic violence (Harrison 1989:127-135; Stølen 1987). In what follows, I will interrogate the notion of agency and the ways in which anthropological formulations of the concept are a valuable tool to understand the complex politics of the indigenous women at local, national, and international sites of activism.

There are several theoretical and political tensions in an understanding not only of indigenous women’s agency but of female agency. Therefore, we first need to clearly lay out some of the assumptions that undergird the conceptualization of women’s actions. In general, women are conceived as individuals with less capacity for action:

Individuals who are positioned on the female side of the male/female dualism or on the negative side of any other dualism such as black/white, child/adult, mad/sane are rarely heard as legitimate speakers, are rarely positioned as one with agency (Davies 1991:52).

Women are positioned on the dominated side of the dichotomy and seen as rather passive subjects in Western traditions, a passivity that is even amplified in the case of non-Western women, Third World, or minority women. However, postcolonial feminists such as Chandra Mohanty cogently critique this amplified passivity of women of color, poor women, or women in the Third World as a construction that served the political goal of elevating First World women to the category of liberated (Mohanty 2003; Ong 1994).

Simultaneously, the homogenized representation of the Third World women places them as particularly dominated by their cultures (Narayan 1997). In Latin America, indigenous women are seen as tradition-bounded and, not always but many times, as victims of their cultures. They are understood as the poorest of the poor (Hall and Patrinos 2006) and especially vulnerable to violence (Stolcke 1994; Stølen 1987). In the case of indigenous women, we need to grapple with particularly disempowering conceptualizations based on their victimization by patriarchal states and patriarchal communities. In consequence, one of the analytical tensions that we need to confront in the understanding of indigenous women’s activism is the presence of these homogenized notions of victimization and passivity.

While it is important to question and counter assumptions of the passivity of women, indigenous or other, it is equally necessary not to fall into too readily celebratory accounts of the actions of subaltern groups. In restoring an active agent and the voices of the subaltern, some analyses romanticized the actions of the dominated groups and understood them mainly as expressions of resistance to domination. Abu-Lughod called attention to romanticized understandings of resistance that simplified and ignored other dimensions of power (Abu-Lughod 1990). In analyzing indigenous women’s activism, one needs to bear in mind specific forms of a romanticized understanding of their action.
At the least, I can identify some romanticized notions that undergird the approaches to both indigenous and women’s activism. In general, there is a romance with social movements as sites of progressive politics. There is also a specific romance with the Andean and its forms of peasant communitarism (critiqued by Ferraro 2004; Kearney 1996; Martínez 1999b). In rehabilitating women as agents, there is a romance with women’s activism. And finally, there is a general romance with the indigenous. Being at the intersection of different forms of romanticized understandings, one could easily assess indigenous women’s activism in rather triumphalist manners, as an “amplified” resistance in the face of intersections that amplify domination. The tensions that pull the analysis toward poles of over-victimization or over-romanticization need to be tackled with appropriate conceptualizations of human agency and of the structures in which it takes place.

**On Practice Theory and Agency**

The relationship between structure and action is at the heart of the theoretical concern of practice theorists. According to Sherry Ortner, practice theory is “a theory of the relationship between the structures of society and culture on the one hand, and the nature of human action in another” (Ortner cited in Ahearn 2001:117). One of the most influential practice theorists is Pierre Bourdieu who proposed the concept of *habitus* as mediating structure and action. In positioning the analysis within real activity in a practical relation to the world, Bourdieu aims to avoid both the realism of structure on the one hand, and subjectivism on the other. A habitus functions as “structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organized practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them” (Bourdieu 1990:53). As “structuring” structures, the habitus is a principle of continuity and of actualization of the past, but it does not presuppose a mechanical reproduction. In addition, Bourdieu does not consider that action is under the control of a subjective intention. Although habitus supposes a “universe of possibilities,” in actuality the desires and choices people make tend to reproduce the past conditions that formed their habitus.

Although Bourdieu’s understandings of action constitute a departure from both structural determinism as well as unencumbered subjectivism, feminist anthropologists have identified that his analysis tends to emphasize social reproduction over social transformation (Ahearn 2001:117). Although an infinite numbers of thoughts, meanings, and practices are possible through habitus, there is a minimal probability of unpredictable novelty, as individuals tend to reproduce the existing systems of inequality. Bourdieu ends up negating an intentional subject as the strategies that come from habitus mirror structural limits (Ortner 1996). Negating free agents is not the same as erasing intentionality and the capacity of reflection of individuals and the possibility that their actions change the structure. Other practice theorists have tackled the possibilities of
transformation. Marshall Sahlins pays attention to processes of transformation in his analysis of the encounter between Hawaiian society and Captain Cook. According to Sahlins, individuals bring their cultural understandings from their structures (habitus in Bourdieu’s theory) to these new situations and in this novel situations their practice can produce unintended outcomes (Ahear 2001:119). Also addressing the limited space for resistance and change left in Bourdieu’s theory, Michel De Certeau paid attention to the micro-processes of resistance: those possibilities, through strategies and tactics, of carving out a semi-independent domain of practice.

Without falling into the idea of the free agent, Sherry Ortner advocates for an active, intentional subject, for the mutual determination of agency and structure, and the consideration that structures have an incomplete hegemonic character (Ortner 1996). Moreover, Ortner specifically addresses the issue of female agency, a question rather absent in other practice theorists. For her,

The challenge is to picture indissoluble formations of structurally embedded agency and intention-filled structures, to recognize the ways in which the subject is part of larger social and cultural webs, and in which social and cultural systems are predicated upon human desires and projects (Ortner 1996:12).

In focusing on agency in order to understand indigenous women’s activism, it is valuable to preserve the notion of some sort of intentionality and reflection for the agents. As Ortner recognizes, people’s desires and intentions, plans and plots are embedded in “going about life in particular times and places” (Ortner 1996:12). She resorts to the metaphor of “serious games” to understand embedded agency. The notion of serious games highlights that: (1) social life is culturally organized and constructed in terms of defining categories of actors, rules, and goals of the games; (2) social life consists of webs of relations and interaction between multiple, shiftingly interrelated subject positions; (3) there is agency, as actors play with skill, intention, wit, knowledge and intelligence; (4) power and inequality pervade the games of life in multiple ways.

One of the reasons for which Ortner’s approach provides more space for the agency of subjects stems from her understanding that structures have inner contradictions “that keep a simple reproduction of the hegemonic social order from being a foregone conclusion” (Ahear 2001:120). It is due to the incomplete hegemonic character of structure and the contradictions inherent in the habitus that actors are not completely socially determined. Instead, according to Ortner, actors are loosely structured.

Along with an understanding of agency that rehabilitates an active, intentional subject, Ortner proceeds to inquire about women’s agency in specific. She finds that one of the problems when interrogating female agency is a tendency to see women as identified with male’s games or as pawns in somebody else’s games, or as not having an autonomous point of view. Alternatively, if women have projects of their own, it seems as if those projects do not have a significant impact in the cultural order which is seen
largely as male dominated. Ortner argues that one needs to address the question of how to think about women’s relation to a hegemonically masculinist social order and suggests analyzing women’s, as well as other subalterns’ agency, paying attention to “breaks in reproduction, erosion of patterns, moments of disorder, of outright resistance.” (Ortner 1996:17). In the case of this feminist rearticulation of agency within practice theory, Ortner invites us to emphasize “the creativity of women within the limits of their traditional politics, on the transformation rather than the continuities that ensued” (Ortner 1996:18).

*What is Agency After All?*

Jean and John Comaroff commented that agency is “that abstraction greatly underspecified, often misused, much fetishized these days by social sciences” (cited in Ortner 2001:77). In response to this critique, Ortner provides more specification on this category. In revising the scholarship of agency, Ahearn proposes a provisional definition of agency as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001:112). Although provisional, I consider that this definition points to important elements in the conceptualization of agency: (1) it is socioculturally constituted in its production and interpretation; (2) it is a capacity, that is, not necessarily a fulfillment but an ability to take (3) an action, that is, a type of effect, something done, something performed. Moreover, forms of agency vary from culture to culture and we cannot assume that one specific form of agency, let us say for example resistance to domination, is always and necessarily how agency is understood in a particular time and place: “Every culture, every subculture, every historical moment, constructs its own forms of agency” (Ortner 1995:186).

Because agency varies cross-culturally, Laura Ahearn reminds us to take into consideration what agency means for people themselves, how they conceive of their own actions, and who has responsibility for events (Ahearn 2001:113). In addition to the cultural and historical variation of the forms of agency, Ortner calls attention to another element not necessarily clear in Ahearn’s provisional definition of agency—the issue of a reflecting subject. In order to transcend a free-choosing subject, it is not necessary to destroy the subject altogether. I concur with understandings of the subject as an “intentionalized being with her own hopes, fears, desires, projects” (Ortner 1995:185). The capacity for action, I contend, necessitates an element of interpretation and reflection that subjects engage with, and which cannot be missed from an analysis of indigenous women’s agency. This element is more clearly stated in Ortner’s formulation of agency as “the capacity of social beings to interpret and morally evaluate their situation and to formulate projects and try to enact them” (Ortner 1995:185).

As a capacity for action that takes place within structures of inequality and domination, agency is at times equated with resistance. For the analysis of indigenous women’s agency, I differentiate between agency and resistance, especially because of the
aforementioned tendency to romanticize resistance. The concept of resistance was traditionally understood as “organized opposition to institutionalized forms of power” (Ortner 1995:174) but later acquired a more ambivalent sense—because of the less institutionalized and more pervasive forms of power in everyday life that transform individuals into subjects (Foucault 2003) and because of the less organized but more persistent forms of resistance also enacted routinely (Scott 1990). The ambivalence of resistance also emanates from the subjective ambivalence of action since “the intentionalities of actors evolve through praxis, and the meanings of the acts change, both for the actor and for the analyst” (Ortner 1995:175). Additionally, the internal divisions within the subordinate groups by age, gender, class, status, etc., add to the ambivalence of resistance.

People may do more than reacting to domination, even if their lives are fully shaped by it. When conceived as resistance, people’s actions—or inactions—are seen as rather reactive, in return or in response to domination: “If we are to recognize the resistors are doing more than simply opposing domination, more than simply producing a virtually mechanical re-action, then we must go the whole way. They have their own politics” (Ortner 1995:177). To be specific, Ortner argues that one of the reasons of the air of romanticism of many resistance studies lies on their neglect of the internal conflicts of a group:

[T]he most glaring arena of internal political complexity glossed over by most of these studies [of resistance] is the arena of gender politics. This is a particularly vexed question. Members of subordinate groups who want to call attention to gender inequalities in their own groups are subject to the accusation that they are undermining their own class of subaltern solidarity, not supporting their men, and playing into the hands of the dominants (Ortner 1995:178).

In the case of a mixed organization such as the UNORCAC, as well as the majority of indigenous organizations in Ecuador, indigenous women are sometimes accused precisely of weakening the movement if they do not ally with their men. The analysis of the internal politics of the indigenous movement, however, offers the possibility to assess how the specific demands of indigenous women are being addressed within the movement. Also important for my analysis is the recognition that indigenous women do something more than react to domination. The main reason for my choice of agency over resistance as a theoretical category is that indigenous women’s actions are of multiple nature, and the concept of resistance pulls the analysis toward understandings of action as reactive action to domination or mainly as piece-meal, backstage, part of a hidden transcript (Scott 1985), which runs the risk of over-emphasizing Andean women’s victimization. Even if some of the indigenous women’s forms of agency do take the form of back-of-the-stage resistance, the concept cannot account for more overt forms of
action of indigenous women as political actors in the public spheres of their communities
and beyond.

Responding to the rather harsh critique of the Comaroffs to the concept of agency,
Ortner assumed the task of further “specifying agency.” She distinguishes two modalities
of agency: “one of which is closely related to ideas of power, including both domination
and resistance, and another that is closely related to ideas of intention, to people’s
projects in the world and their ability to both formulate and enact them” (Ortner
2001:78). The first modality of agency is related to more traditional conceptualizations of
power that people have and that enable them to influence other people and events or to
maintain at least a modicum of control over their own lives. In that traditional sense of
power, some positions in a game are thought to “have” more power than others.
Additionally, resistance would fall into this modality of agency as power, because it
includes “everything from rebellion to a middle ground like ‘foot dragging’ to ambivalent
acceptance of dominant categories” (Ortner 2001:78).

The second modality of agency is the agency of intentions – “a variety of
culturally constituted desires, purposes, and projects that emerge from and of course
reproduce different socially constituted positions and subjectivities” (Ortner 2001:79).
With this modality, Ortner points to a form of agency that is not about “bourgeois
strategizing” but neither is it one of “routine everyday practices with little reflexivity.”
From this perspective, people’s lives are organized in terms of culturally constituted
projects, that is, “people seek to accomplish things within a framework of their own
terms, their own categories of value” (Ortner 2001:80). In analyzing the oral narratives of
Kacquikel women in Guatemala, Carey makes a similar point and clarifies that “[t]he
crucial point is not whether or not Kacquikel women succeed in their efforts, but that they
were cognizant of the hegemonies to which they were subject and used this knowledge to
inform their counter-hegemonic strategies” (Carey 2006:16).

Ortner’s specification of at least two modalities of agency provides a range of
maneuver for the analysis of the multiple forms of action in which people may engage. In
particular, the agency of intentions may help us tease out practices of indigenous women
that respond to their own sense of a project that is neither informed just by the framework
of the politics of the indigenous movement nor a reaction to the multiple forms of
domination that frame their lives. Ortner understands agency as purposive behavior, with
certain motivation—a capacity “for desiring, for forming intentions, and for acting
creatively” (Sewell cited in Ortner 2006:136). Although not necessarily fully conscious,
active intentionality differentiates agency from other forms of more routine practice that
proceed with little reflection or planning, that is, from “agentive acts that intervene in the
world with something in mind (or in heart)” (Ortner 2006:136).

The agency of intentions points to the notion of “projects.” Ortner affirms that
“[t]his agency of projects is from certain points of view the most fundamental dimension
of the idea of agency” (Ortner 2006:144). For Ortner, these projects may be goals for
individuals, but are mainly culturally constituted goals within a matrix of local inequalities and power differentials. That is, “people seek to accomplish valued things within a framework of their own terms, their own categories of value” (Ortner 2006:145). Ortner points out that forms of agency are not only organized around the axis of domination and resistance but that agency as pursuit of projects calls for paying attention to the local logics of what is desirable and how to pursue it (Ortner 2006:145).

Conceptualized as a culturally mediated capacity for action that entails reflection of one’s situation and world and the enactment of one’s own projects, agency does not necessarily mean changing the structures of domination—although it does not foreclose that possibility either. That is, agency does not need to be defined in terms of certain specific kind of effects in the world, for instance the achievement of the goals pursued, or emancipatory change. Beyond what is at the end of the day accomplished or not, agency as a capacity for action “infuse[s] life with meaning and purpose” (Ortner 2001:80) as seen, for instance, in how indigenous women themselves understand their activism.

Indigenous women’s own projects vary contextually and some may entail progressive change while others may ally with conservative politics. Although the politics of a feminist analysis may give particular attention to instances of agency that reflect a break with male domination (for a critique, see Mahmood 2001), the cultural constitution of projects also serves not to dismiss forms of agency that seem to correspond to conservative politics (for instance, the adherence to the concept of Andean complementarity in gender relations) as non significant for the analysis. The concept illuminates ways in which we can avoid projecting the feminist scholar’s desire for social transformation and hold to those instances of agency, as negligible as they might be, that reflect a break with structures of domination (Mahmood 2001). I am not suggesting that, by this analytical move, the analysis condones subordination, but rather that it be attentive to the multiple expressions of women’s agency and does not forego those practices that do not align with the feminist scholar’s politics.

I have chosen to understand the political activities of indigenous women in the indigenous movement first of all as a form of agency, both in terms of the modality of the agency of power “in which women accept, accommodate, ignore, resist, or protest—sometimes all at the same time” (MacLeod cited in Gardiner 1995:4), and in terms of the agency of projects in which indigenous women may formulate projects according to their own understanding of what is valuable, even if it does not necessarily pursue emancipatory politics. As political agents, indigenous women need to be located in the political context they inhabit, because their forms of agency cannot be understood without a comprehension of indigenous women’s relation not only to their organization, but to the state and other local, national, and international actors.
While Ortner’s analysis grapples with specifying agency and recognizes the need to analyze the internal politics of subordinate groups, it fails to specify the structures of power and inequality that affect women’s lives and how they are positioned within those structures. Feminist scholars, on the other hand, have tackled and named different structures of inequality that affect women’s lives. Concurring with Ortner in that identity politics may ignore intragroup differences, Black, Chicana, and Third World feminists called attention to axes of power previously neglected by feminist scholarship, mainly race, class, sexuality, and citizenship (Anzaldúa 2007; Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1991). Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” to address the interplay of gender and race for understanding Black women’s experiences of violence, which could not be fully explained exclusively through the lenses of either racism or sexism (Crenshaw 1991):

“Moreover[,] the problem is not simply that both discourses fail women of color by not acknowledging the "additional" issue of race or of patriarchy but that the discourses are often inadequate even to the discrete tasks of articulating the full dimensions of racism and sexism. Because women of color experience racism in ways not always the same as those experienced by men of color and sexism in ways not always parallel to experiences of white women, antiracism and feminism are limited, even on their own terms (Crenshaw 1991:1252).

An intersectional analysis emphasizes precisely the mutually constitutive nature of race, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, and other differences that analyses focusing on only one axis fail to address. Intersectionality, as the metaphor of the intersection suggests, “emphasizes that different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands,” but rather identifies “the complex, irreducible, varied and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation—economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential—intersect in historical specific contexts” (Brah and Phoenix 2004:76).

Intersectionality scholars clarify, nevertheless, that intersectionality is not mainly concerned about identity and the infinite possibilities of overlapping differences. As Barbara Tomlinson argues, “[i]f critics think that intersectionality is a matter of identity rather than power, they cannot see which differences make a difference. Yet it is exactly our analyses of power that reveal which differences carry significance” (cited in Cho, et al. 2013:798). In that line, intersectional analyses have paid particular attention to the role of structures of inequality in the conditions of life of marginalized women, with foundational work done at the intersection of race and gender. Intersectionality is an analytic relevant to the understanding of the experiences of indigenous women in Latin America because it addresses the fact that indigenous women are situated at the intersections of multiple systems of inequality that affect their experiences differentially
in specific places and times. Additionally, intersectionality tackles the shortcomings of the tendency of identity politics to elide intra-group difference (Nash 2008:3) in both the indigenous and the feminist movements as I will explain below (Barrig 2001; Paulson and Calla 2002; Picq 2010).

One cannot look at gender and agency without looking at other systems of inequality. In the Andes, analyses of indigenous women’s lives have situated gender relations in its connections to ethnicity and class, both in the communities and in the nation (Canessa 1997; De la Cadena 1995; Radcliffe and Westwood 1996). The intersection of gender, race/ethnicity, and class helps us understand the marginalization reported for indigenous women in the public domain of politics in the Andes (Bourque and Warren 1981; Canessa 1997; Cervone 2002; Spedding 1997). Intersectionality analyses have addressed the problem of sameness and difference in the internal politics of social movements, as “political intersectionality highlights the fact that women of color are situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas” (Crenshaw 1991:1252). Consequently, indigenous women’s agency needs to be contextualized in an analysis of the politics of their movement, as they have usually preferred to act politically within the indigenous rather than the feminist movement. For that, I turn to feminist understandings of the relation between women, ethnic groups and the state.

Feminist authors have theorized the relation of women with the nation and the state as one in which nations have institutionalized gender difference: “[n]o nation in the world grants women and men the same access to the rights and resources of the nation-state” (McClintock 1997:89). While women are commonly constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation, they “are denied any direct relation to national agency” (90). As Sonia Alvarez argues, women are not constructed as political agents, insofar as the state represents the quintessential institutional separation of the public or political from the private or personal domains of human activity. The State institutionalizes gender power relations by circumscribing the female gender to the latter domain, politically reinforcing the boundaries that confine women socially. The political then, becomes the domain of men and male issues (Alvarez 1990:28).

In their relation with the state, women are conceptualized as non-political or with diminished relation to national agency. Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989:7) have attended specifically to the ways in which women are affected by ethnic processes and their relation to the nation-state (see also Gutiérrez 2007). They established five major ways in which women have tended to participate in ethnic processes in relation to state practices (Yuval-Davis, et al. 1989:7):

(a) “as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities;
(b) as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups;
(c) as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture;
(d) as signifiers of ethnic/national differences – as a focus and symbol in ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories;
(e) as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles.”

Scholars have noted an emphasis on the role of indigenous women as signifiers and carriers of indigenous identity and of national identity in Latin America (Gutiérrez 2007) and Ecuador (Crain 2001; Muratorio 1994:14; Muratorio 1998; Radcliffe and Westwood 1996). In their bodies, choice of costume, language, practices, and socialization of children, indigenous women play a paramount role in the construction of cultural difference. Although prominent in the symbolic representation of indigeneity and of the nation, indigenous women’s participation in the movement and relation to the state has been characterized as marginal: “indigenous women’s interests and views remain poorly expressed in gender policy and claims for indigenous rights; and they are thinly represented in development institutions and networks” (Radcliffe, et al. 2009:196). To understand indigenous women’s activism and their marginalization, I turn to the historical constitution of differential citizenship of indigenous women’s vis-à-vis the state and to their position within the indigenous movement as well as their relationship with the feminist movement.

Reconfigurations of the Relationship between Indigenous Women and the State

The tense and even contradictory position of indigenous women as central for the maintenance of indigenous identity and yet marginalized from indigenous activism and the state is explained by Erin O’Connor as emerging from the history of Indian-state relations established in the nineteenth century state formation of Ecuador (O’Connor 2007). O’Connor argues that the relationship between the Indian and the state has been masculinized and that the overlapping of state, hacienda, and indigenous patriarchies favored indigenous men in their interlocution with the state. Gender was a means through which both inter- and intra-ethnic struggles associated with nation-making took place.

O’Connor argues that the gender system and patriarchy of indigenous communities, although oppressive, were more favorable than those of the state or the hacienda, because indigenous women could count on their communities for a greater capacity for action, respect of their economic functions, acceptance of informal unions, and respect for age and kinship relations. The masculinization of Indian-state relations started with the abolition of the Indian tribute in 1857, which would supposedly turn Indians into Ecuadorian citizens. Nevertheless, in practice, citizenship remained restricted to elite men due to property and literacy requirements. Excluded from a real participation in the nation-state (the literacy requirement was not abolished until 1979 and affected
indigenous men and particularly indigenous women who were not literate), indigenous peoples would find their relation with the state arbitrated by structures of intermediation, specifically the hacienda, until the agrarian reforms of the twentieth century. Indigenous men would transition from child-like status vis-à-vis elite white-mestizos as the representatives of communities and families in the hacienda and the state institutions. In the courts, for instance, state officials consistently favored men over women as interlocutors, or overrode widows’ access to land in favor of young indigenous males’ aspirations to it. In the hacienda, characterized by patriarchal and paternalistic relations with the hacienda owner, indigenous women’s work was not paid or recognized, and they could not access land directly but only as wives of hacienda workers. The actions of state officials and hacienda owners undermined indigenous women’s capacity for direct interaction with the state and for community defense, as well as diminished their relative importance in relation to their male peers (O’Connor 2007:143).

O’Connor also contends that when the liberal state considered women’s issues, indigenous women’s interests were not addressed. The questions that the liberal state was concerned with were directed to the aspirations of middle-class women. The state aimed to make compatible women’s motherly roles with their incorporation to work and to education. Indigenous women’s issues and their role as peasant producers were not taken into consideration. Consequently, indigenous women’s agency in relation to the state was affected since, when women’s issues were addressed, the specific interests of indigenous women were not included. One can argue that this disregard of indigenous women’s issues has been maintained by the state after liberalism. Moreover, some have argued that in Andean states, indigenous issues and gender issues have remained separate, and that neither the policies implemented by institutions concerned with indigenous peoples nor institutions dealing with women’s issues have adequately addressed indigenous women’s issues (Barrig 2001; Hoogte and Kingma 2004; Paulson and Calla 2002).

In the light of my previous discussion on agency, indigenous women, in their relationship with the state, find that their agency has been historically curtailed, as the state has appointed indigenous males to “speak for” families and communities, making indigenous women in effect more domestic and more subordinate to their peers. The political representation of the indigenous has been, then, a male endeavor. Moreover, when addressing women’s issues, the state has included policies that take into consideration those of middle-class women. To say that the relation between the state and indigenous peoples has been masculinized and that the state and indigenous patriarchies are in complicity does not equate to stating that indigenous women are in consequence devoid of agency. This is certainly not O’Connor’s argument, which simply aims to explain a perceived less agentive participation of indigenous women in the current movement. The recognized historical leaders of the mid twentieth century, Dolores Cacuango and Tránsito Amaguaña, would represent a contradiction in a perspective that denies agency to indigenous women within the movement. O’Connor simply points to
how indigenous males have been called to be the political spokespersons by the state, and, as have others (e.g., Picq 2010), O’Connor grapples with the conflictive relation of indigenous women with their movement.

Indigenous women’s agency has to be located within long term indigenous resistance since the colonial period and the development of indigenous organization in their relation to rural syndicates and to the Ecuadorian Federation of Indians, FEI, during the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s (Becker 2008). Although conceived as passive especially before the uprisings of the 1990s, indigenous women have been active in the indigenous movement, and their leadership has been recognized. Furthermore, “[r]ecognizing the central role of women as not exceptional but rather characteristic of Indigenous movements is key to understanding the development of popular movements in Ecuador” (Becker 2008:8). In terms of indigenous women’s capacity for action in their relation to the state, we need to recognize that, even if the state-Indian relationship has been masculinized, the dynamics of indigenous organizing have opened up possibilities for the political agency of indigenous women. The transformations of the state in the late twentieth century once again changed the Indian-state relationship, and the possibilities for indigenous women’s agency.

Not only in Ecuador but in Latin America in general, the 1990s witnessed a shift in oppositional politics in which the political activity of indigenous peoples was emblematic. The ascendance of the indigenous movement has been explained as a reconfiguration of political opportunities (Yashar 2005). According to political scientist Deborah Yashar, indigenous mobilization was possible due to the combined effect of: the democratization of Latin America after authoritarian political regimes; the mobilization against neoliberal economic reform; and, the presence of trans-community networks of support. The political mobilization of indigenous peoples since the 1990s has changed their relation with the state and the understanding of the “Indian question.” However, scholars differ in the assessment of the impact of the changes. Political scientist Donna Lee Van Cott highlights the importance of the constitutional changes in Latin American states, which have recognized the collective rights of indigenous peoples and their inclusion in the nation (Van Cott 2000). However, other scholars see the forms of multiculturalism advanced by the reforms as ways in which indigenous demands are incorporated in domesticated forms (Bretón 2001; Hale 2002). José Antonio Lucero argues that both the proponents and critics of multiculturalism may be correct in their assessments, in that changes may represent breakthroughs for the livelihoods of indigenous peoples but also in that indigenous peoples may compromise with dominant powers. He proposes to see how neoliberalism and multiculturalism have met in the terrain of development, in which NGOs and international actors make decisions on with which indigenous organizations to work or not to work (Lucero 2008:132).

The neoliberal state has specific implications for the mobilization of women (not necessarily indigenous) in Ecuador. Amy Lind found paradoxical results of the neoliberal
reforms for community-based women’s organizations since the 1980s (Lind 2005). Urban low-income women organized around deteriorating standards of living within a context of diminishing state provision. Although women of the barrios gained political power and visibility by participating in obtaining benefits for their communities—in the case analyzed by Lind, child care community services—their participation has been institutionalized by the state portraying it as participation of the popular sectors in development, while at the same time redirecting the management of social welfare to the hands of underpaid women. As a result, poor women in effect absorbed the cost of economic restructuring and were recruited to “mother the crisis” (Lind 2005: 111).

As part of the multicultural state, policies included new ways to incorporate indigenous people in development. Not only the Ecuadorian state and the indigenous organizations but also the transnational networks of development redirected development efforts towards “development with identity” or ethnodevelopment (Partridge and Uquillas 1996). Development networks understood the role of ethnicity first in terms of social capital at the expense of the role of gender, a concept that was seen as foreign to the realities of indigenous peoples. The framework of social capital exalted indigenous women’s role as reproducers of cultures, but resulted in “the construction of implicitly restrictive roles for indigenous women and the elision of gender inequality” (Radcliffe, et al. 2009:196). Radcliffe and colleagues found that the reviews of thirteen grassroots ethnodevelopment experiments across Latin America rarely mentioned women as producers or as leaders but rather emphasized their domestic and reproductive roles (Radcliffe, et al. 2009:203). Moreover, Bedford found that ethnodevelopment projects of the World Bank in Ecuador tried to advance heteronormative arrangements of intimancy among indigenous populations (Bedford 2005).

One of the paramount examples of ethnodevelopment was Ecuador’s Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian People’s Development Project, PRODEPINE. Paradigmatic of ethnodevelopment as it was, PRODEPINE was clearly unable to enact the intersection of ethnicity and gender. The project lacked a definition of gender and its importance for indigenous peoples, and after the first evaluations, gender was incorporated as a “component” with minimal funds for microcredit and education scholarships for women. Although the limitations of ethnodevelopment are proof of a practical marginalization of indigenous women’s issues, the new discourses of gender and development have resulted in an increased visibilization of women’s issues and an impact in the state bureaucracies, electoral policies, and gender governability regarding the topics of education, health, and development. As well, indigenous women are now more visible in their relation to the state.

Nevertheless, Radcliffe argues that “gender governmentality” reinforces the marginalization of the women of ethnic minorities (Radcliffe 2008). For instance, state institutions are usually staffed by white-mestizas, not by indigenous women. Moreover, indigenous women are considered a particularly vulnerable segment of women, together
with rural women, the disabled, migrants, and refugees. Concomitantly, indigenous women are represented as managers of traditional health resources, as particularly affected by violence, and as in need of information on rights. State bureaucracies of gender were considered ill-equipped to attend to the demands of indigenous women, who were seen as better governed by structures of multicultural governability (Radcliffe 2008). In terms of the development projects focused on women, the NGOs and transnational feminist networks were dominant over state projects: in fact, 73% of the projects of gender were under the management of NGOs with a focus on topics of health, violence, and population (Radcliffe 2008:110).

I argue that multicultural neoliberalism changes to a certain extent the pattern that O’Connor identified as a masculinized indigenous-state relation. Although there is a continuation of the marginalization of indigenous women by the state, other actors of importance in neoliberal governmentality, such as NGOs and feminist networks, are now directly interpellating indigenous women as such. Indigenous female leaders are interacting transnationally, not only with community and state agents but also with an array of development actors, some of which, such as the Danish, Norwegian, and Dutch bilateral agencies, supported initiatives of gender internal to the indigenous movement and frameworks based on empowerment (Radcliffe, et al. 2009:202 and 206). A variety of political actors in the contested terrain of development “are reconfiguring indigenous politics in new ways, and thus the current moment [of the encounter between neoliberalism and multiculturalism] is very much one of regime change” (Lucero 2008:132).

The changes mentioned point to what political scientists call the political opportunity structures (Lucero 2008; Yashar 2005) as well as their effect on the constitution of political identity. As with indigenous actors, the construction of the political identities of indigenous women is multiscalar, that is, they “are forged dialogically through social interactions across local, national, and transnational scales” (Brysk 2000; Lucero 2008:23). Radcliffe and colleagues also add the body as a first scale, which I concur is an important site in the case of indigenous women (Radcliffe, et al. 2009; see also Valdivia 2009). A new interplay of international gender and development policy, national-level political and institutional settings, and local development projects is reconfiguring the political opportunity structures (Brysk 2000; Radcliffe, et al. 2009:196). According to Lucero, specific configurations of power relations shape and constrain the possibilities for collective action and “also help determine which identities and discourses can jump scales” (Lucero 2008:23). In accordance, indigenous peoples have learned to make use of the international arena with the resources in terms of rights and funds for their agenda.
Crisis of the Indigenous Movement and the Post-Neoliberal Moment

After analyses that aimed to elucidate both the reasons for the emergence of the indigenous movement in Latin America from the 1970s and the demands of the movement, scholars have started to engage in critical assessments of ethnic politics during neoliberalism (Bretón 2001; Hale 2002) and the contribution or not of the indigenous movement to democratic politics (Zamosc 2007). More specifically, in the case of Ecuador, a number of works have called attention to a crisis of the indigenous movement starting as of middle of the first decade of the new millennium (Martínez Novo 2009). Moreover, some argue that the indigenous movement is going through a moment of “organizational fatigue” that has affected the ability and willingness of the communities to participate in the calls for uprisings and other actions of the movement (Tuaza 2009).

While during the 1990s, the Ecuadorian indigenous movement became a paramount actor that greatly influenced public policies, its involvement in formal electoral politics through the Pachakutik party has had mixed effects. Some leaders have accessed important offices in state institutions and local and regional governments, but this has not necessarily translated into clear improvements for the lives of the people in the communities. For Zamosc (2007), one of the important contradictions of the movement resides precisely in the tension between being a social movement that influences public policies, and the movement’s institutionalization as a political party that participates in public office. Additionally, the democratic orientation of the movement during the 1990s was compromised by its participation in the coup d’état of 2000 that ousted President Jamil Mahuad. This participation contradicted the previous democratic orientation of the movement that struggled for the inclusion and participation in the nation of marginalized indigenous peoples. According to Zamosc, the participation in the coup was a mistake of the movement which showed that actors in the civil society are not democratic per se, but can or cannot act democratically depending on specific factors. This author argues that the participation of the movement in the coup was a political mistake that shows a lack of democratic commitment, long-term political analysis, and opportunistic action of the indigenous leadership.

Despite the fact that the use of national uprisings in 1990 and 1994 had proven to be a successful political strategy, by 2004 the mobilization of the grassroots started to decline and the calls for uprisings to fail (Martínez Novo 2009:24). This was more evident during the term of President Lucio Gutiérrez between 2003 and 2005. The alleged crisis of the movement is explained in part by a strategy used by the previous national administrations since the second half of the 1990s. This strategy consists of dividing the indigenous movement by pitting indigenous organizations against each other in a competition for state resources while simultaneously co-opting indigenous leaders for political office in state institutions. Finally, in spite of having leaders in important
political office, the expectations of communities for improved conditions have not necessarily been met.

According to Martínez Novo (2009), it is precisely an increasing gap between the indigenous leadership and the movement’s bases which shows the current crisis of the movement. There may be a discrepancy between the discourses of the indigenous leadership which emphasize cultural differences, and the desire of the people of the communities for inclusion. Moreover, the leaders are perhaps being transformed into “docile subjects” (Martínez Novo 2009:29) by governmental and non governmental institutions while reaping the economic benefits of projects (Bretón 2009:104). This contributes to a growing distance between the aspirations of the bases for inclusion and concrete improvements in their situation of marginalization, and a co-opted leadership more preoccupied with accessing projects and political office than with deep structural changes.

The crisis of the indigenous movement may be growing deeper in the political scenario that started in 2007 with the ascendance to power of Rafael Correa and the Alianza País movement. Ecuador, Bolivia, and other Latin American countries have witnessed changes in the political system, constitutional reforms, and a new orientation in policies that has purportedly abandoned the neoliberal credo. Part of the turn to the left in Latin America, this post-neoliberal moment in Ecuador has, once again, changed the structure of political opportunity, affecting the organization and mobilization of social movements. The post-neoliberal moment in Latin America is characterized by the idea of an enhanced role for the state in pursuit of development accompanied by the introduction of redistributive policies. The project of growth is based on exports and increased social spending (Grugel and Riggirozzi 2012). The policies include the control of the movement of capital, the protection of internal markets, and the reversal of some neoliberal laws (Martínez Novo 2014:105).

Although the governments of the New Left (sometimes self-identified as twenty-first-century socialism) came to power with the support of social movements including the indigenous movement, several tensions have emerged from the distinctive political character these governments are acquiring. The current process of state formation in Ecuador is characterized by a centralization of decision-making and new forms of managing diversity that have seriously compromised the autonomy of the indigenous movement. Moreover, a new form of indigenismo may be emerging, one that constructs indigenous peoples as passive (Martínez Novo 2014).

In the early years of these new regimes, there were great hopes for expanding the agenda of recognition and participation to one that emphasized redistribution. Changes incorporated in the 2008 Constitution emphasized the symbolic inclusion of the indigenous peoples, including new indigenous rights, but giving a central place to the Andean notion of Sumak Kawsay, or good living, in the new development strategy of the regime and the national development plan. In spite of the auspicious beginnings, a
conflict with the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador has emerged starting by 2009, when the Confederation opposed the proposals for a new law for mining, a new law for water, and the abolition of their autonomy to administer the bilingual education system.

Martínez Novo argues that indigenous rights have suffered a reversal under Correa’s administration. In spite of the expansion of some legal rights and the symbolic inclusion of indigenous peoples, the regime restrains indigenous peoples as actors. First, the movement needed to reassess the political scenario in which the government itself claims to be antineoliberal, because this stance used to be at the basis of the indigenous movement’s political credentials. Furthermore, the indigenous movement expelled some mestizo intellectuals who ended up as important cadres of the government of Alianza Paíz. Additionally, as the government has attracted some medium-level indigenous leaders by distributing state resources and jobs, the indigenous movement has further fragmented, even separating kin from kin (Martínez Novo 2014:111). When the leaders close to the government have showed ambivalence or opposition, the government’s reaction has been strong. Martínez Novo has documented that families having a member on the Pachakutik party (political arm of CONAIE) are losing their jobs in the public sector (Martínez Novo 2014:112). Thus, the strategy constructs indigenous people not as actors but as obedient subjects.

In an assessment of the ethnic project of the Ecuadorian post-neoliberal state, Martínez Novo argues that we are witnessing a regression from the participatory kind of indigenismo that started in the 1970s, to the kind of paternalist indigenismo of the strong, populist regimes and nationalist development strategies that were characteristic of the decades between 1930 and 1970. This time, however, the nation is not a mestizo project but a diverse one that recognizes the symbolic importance of indigenous identity. The process, however, is mined with ambiguities, as some indigenous rights have been granted by the constitution and redistributive programs have been put into practice. The government disciplines indigenous peoples by dividing organizations and distributing resources to those who are aligned with the government and criminalizing those who oppose it. All in all, the post-neoliberal ethnic project seems to aim to construct indigenous citizens as passive recipients of policies rather than as autonomous actors and proponents of policies.

Indigenous Women and the Indigenous Movement – A Minority within a Minority

Within indigenous politics, indigenous women may find themselves, as Manuela Picq argues, “trapped between gender and ethnicity” (Picq 2010). Most indigenous women that participate in politics belong to or have forged their leadership in mixed indigenous organizations, and “organize as Indians, not as women, favoring the identity politics of ethnicity to advance their rights” (Picq 2010:46). Notable exceptions of exclusive indigenous women’s organizations (such as RMIB, the Network of Indigenous
Women for Biodiversity) enact their activism mainly in the regional Latin American and international arenas, showing again the importance of scale. The reason for the choice of indigenous women’s mobilization around the identity politics of ethnicity is complex. This is not to say that gender does not matter to indigenous women, because it matters greatly. It is just to point to the ways in which they articulate their activism.

One of the reasons for indigenous women’s preference for ethnic politics concerns their relation with the feminist movement. Indigenous women partake in the women of color’s, postcolonial, and third world women’s critique of western, white, and middle-class feminism as not necessarily understanding their experiences, representing their interests, or advancing their cause, while ignoring the historical relations of power and discrimination among women, as well as the significance of race, colonialism and ethnicity, among other categories (Gargallo Celentani 2012; Hernández Castillo 2010; Paredes 2010). Oulette wonders what the relative weight of racism and sexism is, especially when indigenous women are discriminated against by women of dominant groups. Some indigenous women argue that “racism is more devastating than sexism:”

I do not call myself a feminist. I believe in the power of Indigenous women and the power of all women. I believe that while feminists and Indigenous women have a lot in common, they are in separate movements. Feminism defines sexual oppression as the Big Ugly. The Indigenous women’s movement sees colonization and racial oppression as the Big Uglies. Issues of sexual oppression are seldom articulated separately because they are part of the Bigger Uglies. Sexual oppression was, and is, one part of colonization of Indigenous peoples (Winona Stevenson cited in Oulette 2002:40).

In a similar vein, Nina Pacari, a famous Ecuadorian indigenous leader, argues that “in the dominant society both the [indigenous] man and woman are discriminated against for their indigenous condition” (cited in Prieto 2005:181). This is not necessarily to say that, as categories of analysis one category, say race, has preeminence over other. Rather, as the Guatemalan Aura Cumes argues “[t]he racism of white and mestizo women weighs as much as the patriarchy of white, mestizo, and indigenous men” (2009:34). Still, indigenous women seem to prefer ethnicity as a category for mobilization. As previously mentioned, the relation between the feminist movement in Latin America and indigenous women has been characterized by mistrust, as feminists have traditionally been seen as coming from urban, mestiza, and middle class origins. Historically, the relation between women from the elite and indigenous women has been framed by the dyads of matrona-sirvienta, propietaria-esclava, or señora-muchacha (Cumes 2009:34). Aída Hernández also questions hegemonic feminisms in Mexico (middle-class, urban feminisms) that represent poor urban and rural women as passive and their organizing as responding exclusively to practical needs. The tendency to see poor women as only interested in practical instead of strategic needs is, according to Hernández, typical of
ethnocentric views of social movements, that establish typologies based on the analysts’ view on the transformatory capacity of social actors (Hernández Castillo 2008:100). Race, class, and ethnicity complicate the relationship between indigenous women and white and mestiza feminists also in Ecuador, and partly explain indigenous women’s option for ethnicity as the main mobilizing identity.

In addition to the different locations of indigenous women and mestiza feminists which may pit one group against the other, the category of gender has been seen as alien and foreign by many in the indigenous organizations. An important statement to make at this point is that, beyond the explicit adoption of the category of gender, many indigenous women are engaged in a reflection of the differential power of men and women in their communities, organizations, and everyday life, and many others are identifying themselves as feminists and finding inspiration in the notion of feminismo comunitario and feminismo popular, community feminism and popular feminism (Hernández Castillo 2010; Paredes 2010). Nevertheless, Alejandra Flores argues that Latin American feminists show less concern to engage with the demand for collective rights, which are “among the priority demands of indigenous women” (Flores 2009:83).

Conceptualized as divisive by indigenous organizations, the concept of gender has been shed by the indigenous leaders who have opted for the concept of complementarity to characterize gender relations in the Andes. Gender, it is argued, entails a confrontation of women with men and weakens the movement. The concept of Andean complementarity is, consequently, a form of strategic essentialism that obliterates power differentials between indigenous men and women. The problem of the essentialization of indigenous identity for political mobilization is precisely that it “fails to adequately recognize cultural difference, social inequality, and gendered disempowerment” (Dean 2003:234). Different assessments can be found on how indigenous women relate to this strategic option. Some posit that it is a discourse prevalent among leaders of the movement and that prominent national female leaders, “including Nina Pacari and Blanca Chancoso, […] abandon the gender path to accept a political career focused on ethnic rights within CONAIE” (Picq 2010:43). Others consider that the discourse of gender complementarity offers a mobilizing force, as it is understood as an ideal state of gender relations, which is used by indigenous women to denounce their reality of violence and exclusion (Méndez Torres 2009). Still others contend that, in their defiance of usos y costumbres, indigenous women move beyond the dichotomy of gender or ethnicity, “and are proposing more creative ways to rethink ethnic and gender identities and ways to build an identity politics that considers diversity within diversity” (Speed, et al. 2006:39).

The discussion on gender and complementary in the indigenous movement shows some of the complexities of the indigenous women’s prioritization of ethnic identity for mobilization, amidst a conflictive relation with the feminist movement, and a strategic but essentialist understanding of indigenous gender relations that may render invisible indigenous women’s interests. To characterize the place of indigenous women in the
indigenous movement, some authors have resorted to the notion of hegemony (Santillana 2012; Stephen 2003) while others understand indigenous organizations as a contentious social field in which men and women are positioned differently due to their specific capitals (Figueroa Romero 2011). Both approaches take into consideration that the differential experience of indigenous women may produce alternative meanings within the movement. These authors emphasize the internal dynamics of the indigenous movement as a space of antagonism, contradiction, negotiation, and dispute of understandings of identity, demands, and meanings. In that vein, I argue that, with respect to gender issues, the achieved consensus may be rather thin.

Not only are indigenous communities spaces of hegemony (Mallon 1995), but indigenous organizations are too. In a context that tends to see Andean communities as ideal spaces of communal life and reciprocity, e.g., the assumption of solid social capital in Andean communities and organizations, the Gramscian concept of hegemony helps transcend romanticized and essentialist notions and brings to light the community as a historical and political space of domination, dispute, and transformation. This is the same for indigenous organizations. Indigenous women select ethnicity as a mobilizing identity because the hegemonic discourse created by the movement “touchas aspects of the lived reality or experience of the dominant and dominated alike” (Roseberry 1989:27). Consequently, indigenous women advance the defense of territories and lands, collective rights, traditional health, critical resources such as water, recognition of their cultural practices, and, in all these elements, they align with the movement, while these issues have not been traditionally addressed by the feminist movement, which has focused on reproductive rights and domestic violence.

Nevertheless, in mixed indigenous organizations, indigenous women may encounter specific limitations for their agency, in the same way other women have found them in their mixed social movements: “while women stand in nominal equality vis-à-vis men, in practice [men] can occupy most of the leadership positions and generally take more advantage [of the organization]” (Arnold and Spedding 2005:37). Here the issue of representation as deposited in male hands may have repercussions on how central or marginal topics that affect indigenous women specifically become. “While the state is responsible for not securing women’s rights, [Manuela Picq] suggest[s] that the indigenous movement is also to blame for pursuing and legitimizing discriminatory practices” (Picq 2010:43). This raises questions about the quality and consequences of indigenous women’s participation in the movement. Without a doubt, indigenous women have been active in the mobilization process, marched in the uprisings, worked in logistics, been the first ones in the frontline against police and military blockages, but “their voices have been silenced once the movement gained political leverage” (Picq 2010:42). Concomitantly, if we concede that this is so, we must infer that indigenous women have “interests,” “demands,” or otherwise goals which go ignored or underrepresented on the agenda of the indigenous movement.
One of the issues that affect indigenous women more than men is that of domestic violence. Although indigenous justice has been seen as a possible venue for addressing violence affecting women, many argue that it is gender-biased and may be leaving unattended indigenous women’s demands for justice (Lang and Kucia 2009). Not only are indigenous women’s demands important, but [also] as important is the process of participation in which one learn how to identify demands, formulate them, negotiate them, and also to oppose the imposition of prefabricated demands that do not correspond to one’s own positions or interests. From the first wave of feminism, participation in social spaces has been as much a demand as a goal, and is the prerequisite to formulate and present any kind of demand (Arnold and Spedding 2005:40).

Indigenous women occupy an ambivalent position in the ethnic movement, as symbolically central, but marginalized in political life, in which they are encouraged to embody ethnicity but discouraged from engaging with a feminist identity. Dolores Figueroa (Figueroa Romero 2011) argues that in dealing with this ambivalent position for their activism, indigenous women become reflexive. The strategies they enact entail both 1) negotiation and maneuvering enabling their actions in the public space, and 2) at the same time, change and conflict with gender configurations, which is not abrupt but a “contested relation that strive[s] through the slow change of strategic actions” (Figueroa Romero 2011:129).

Following feminist analyses inspired in Bourdieu, Figueroa understands that women have moved to non-traditional feminine spaces in the changing context of postindustrial, neoliberal societies that is causing the restructuration of gender regimes. In her analytical framework, it is the disjuncture between socialization and habitus on the one hand, and how people are moving across old and new social fields, on the other, that brings about innovations and critical reflexivity. In the case of indigenous women, structural changes such as male migration, displacements, land reform, and ethno-national conflicts have increased the presence of indigenous women in politics. As women venture in a traditionally male field, conflict can ensue. This explains the contradictory and ambiguous stand of indigenous militants regarding indigenous women’s rights and decision-making processes, and the invisibilization of their contributions. Within the movement, then, indigenous men and women dispute the allocation of resources and leadership positions.

Men fill the higher ranks of leadership in most of the indigenous organizations. Moreover, forms of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital are distributed unevenly among men and women in the indigenous movement, favoring males. Indigenous women are disadvantaged but act strategically to conquer positions in a contentious field. Figueroa gives special attention to indigenous women’s active search for education and training and the forging of networks, as a strategy to acquire
educational and social capital—crucial for their activism at different levels and their engagement with actors beyond the movement. Nevertheless, the accumulated capital that indigenous men enjoy places them favorably in the field of indigenous politics. Moreover, they may resort to forms of social control and symbolic violence to protect their privileged position within the organization:

For example, the dismissal of women’s intellectual capacities, their organizing and persuading skills or capacity to speak publicly, are some of the arguments that male leaders use to deny women the chance to excel and develop capacities in undertaking important political or administrative tasks (Figueroa Romero 2011:147).

Following the insights of scholars working in the Gramscian tradition of hegemony and the Bourdieusian tradition of contentious social fields and forms of capital, I understand indigenous organizations as contentious spaces regarding gender. Although both female and male leaders may concur on the notion of presenting a unified front to the outside by strategically endorsing a discourse of gender complementarity, within indigenous organizations, the relation between male and female leaders may be one of dispute for leadership positions and resources. Indigenous women act within the constraints and possibilities of the gender dynamics of the organization, where their activism may be channeled to specific structures for “women’s issues,” leaving most of the organizational capacity in men’s hands.

*From Becoming Indian to Becoming Indigenous: New Transnational Spaces for Indigenous Politics*

Situating the work of indigenous representatives that lead national, regional, and international organizations entails tracking their political activism from the local to the global and vice versa, as one follows the international indigenous movement—a relatively new global phenomenon (Niezen 2003). The ascendance of the international indigenous movement during the last decades of the 20th century corresponds to changes in the field of power of international relations; neoliberal forms of multicultural governance; and information and communication technologies.

Although the term *indigenismo* has a long history in Latin America, and refers to state policies toward indigenous populations (De la Peña 2005), the English term indigenism is a neologism coined to emphasize the recent conditions of globalization and the international nature of the movement (Levi and Maybury-Lewis 2010). ‘Indigenous’ has replaced other terms such as Indian, native, aborigine or tribal. The identity of ‘Indian’ and that of ‘indigenous’ are defined in a field of relationships with other groups.

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1 Guillermo de la Peña defines *indigenismo* as “the congeries of discourses, categorizations, rules, strategies, and official actions that have the express purpose of creating state domination over the groups designated as indigenous, as well as instilling them with a sense of national allegiance, but which have also carved out an institutional niche for these groups to further their own agendas and advance their demands for citizenship” (2005:719).
What is novel is the scaling-up of the process: ‘becoming Indian’ used to mean constructing an identity in relationship/opposition to societies delineated by state boundaries; now ‘becoming indigenous’ involves a global “relational field of governance, subjectivities, and knowledges that involve us all” (de la Cadena and Starn 2007:3). Indigenism is a new global identity that sets social groups and networks apart from others (Niezen 2003:9).

The global indigenous movement is an ensemble of indigenous activists, alliances, and networks that are sources of ideas, identity, legitimacy, and funds. It aspires to promote and protect the rights of indigenous peoples. Some historically marginalized groups are “‘becoming’ indigenous by joining transnational networks and alliances that promote indigenous mobilization and by demanding the recognition of rights from their respective nation-states and the international community” (Hodgson 2002:1037). This international movement works ‘within’ the system; more specifically, activists of the global indigenous movement participate in various forums of the UN system and other institutions and configure their demands in terms of rights. Indigenous representatives take their complaints to “the highest level possible in international politics. The international movement of indigenous peoples is an emerging form of political resistance” (Niezen 2003:16).

A New Field of Global Relations: The Internationalization of Indigenous Rights

The postwar period witnessed a repositioning of indigenous peoples “from the distant shadows on national politics into the spotlight of international diplomacy” (Coates 2004:231). The emergence of the international indigenous movement has partly responded and been enabled by a new configuration of the global political scene after World War II. As an aftermath of the war, fascism, racism, and discrimination were condemned. States convened in the UN System and developed a Universal Declaration of Human Rights. States agreed on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. This Declaration, in tandem with the 1966 Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, form the international bill of Human Rights.

2 Niezen argues that the form of political resistance enacted by the international indigenous movement cannot be understood using conceptualizations of political resistance of marginalized communities such as those described by Scott in ‘Weapons of the Weak’ (1985). Neither are they overt, confrontational forms of political resistance, such as the armed resistance of the Zapatistas in the 1990s or of indigenous peoples in Guatemala during the 1980s. The international representatives of the indigenous movement use the system to fight the system, namely, they appeal to the international regime of rights endorsed and recognized by states, in order to fight against the abuses of those very states, while at the same time pursuing the development and recognition of international standards of rights for indigenous peoples to be adopted by those states.

3 States agreed on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. This Declaration, in tandem with the 1966 Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, form the international bill of Human Rights.
modernization. The first international organization to be concerned about the rights of indigenous peoples was the International Labor Organization (ILO). Between 1921 and 1989, the ILO established regulations to protect ‘native workers’ from the abuses of the colonial powers. Although preoccupied with protecting native workers, the regulations were still framed with the goal of economic and cultural assimilation of these populations to the state (Niezen 2003).

The 1960s and 1970s was a period of social upheaval. Several countercultural movements, such as decolonization, youth, women’s, environmental, and civil rights demands and corresponding social movements, shook the political scenes nationally and internationally. Intense political mobilization and conflict also characterized this period in Latin America. The spread of insurgent movements was animated by the triumph of the Cuban revolution and the development of student, women, indigenous, and urban social movements; and the rise of new intellectual and religious approaches to issues of social inequality framed the local, regional, and international politics of the time.

As other new social movements did, regional and national indigenous political movements started to take shape in this period. Connections were established among indigenous leaders and the global decolonization efforts, helping to discover “that one’s problems were part of an international pattern, that other indigenous peoples faced similar challenges, and that the broad effects of western industrialization and capitalism had marginalized the traditional owners of the land” (Coates 2004:243). In the 1970s, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations commissioned the preparation of a report on the situation of the indigenous populations⁴ and between 1977 and 1981 organized several conferences on indigenous peoples (Minde 2008).

In 1982, the United Nations formed the Working Group of Indigenous Populations, in charge of monitoring the situation of indigenous peoples. According to Niezen, the annual meetings of the group, as well as other UN forums “are responsible for a coalescing of an international indigenous identity. The instrumental act of bringing people together under a common rubric—‘indigenous’—encouraged the development of a global ‘imagined community’ brought together as much for their visible markers of cultural uniqueness and their oral representation of common grievances as by the literature they produced and distributed” (2003:46-7). This Working Group started to work on a Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 1985.

During the 1980s and 1990s indigenous organizations mushroomed in Latin America, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. At the same time, NGOs started actively participating in local and international political arenas. Once dominated by states and their diplomats, since the 1970s and on, NGOs had carved a space for public involvement in international politics (Niezen 2003). Now states need to sit at the table with several NGOs, some of which represent indigenous interests. Indigenous organizations strived for land, control of cultural heritage, bilingual

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⁴ This is the so-called Martínez Cobo Report, “Study on the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations.” (UN Doc. E/CN.4/Sub.2/1986/7 and Add. 1-4). The definition of indigenous peoples forged by the report is still widely used: “Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system.”
education, inclusion of indigenous in national imaginaries, and the rights of the indigenous peoples to represent themselves (de la Cadena and Starn 2007). Concomitantly, several organizations and groups emerged in Europe and the United States as supporters of indigenous peoples (for instance, IWGIA, Survival International, and Cultural Survival International). These organizations provide assistance to indigenous peoples in their struggles “against national governments, development projects, attacks on their legal rights, and socio-cultural discrimination” (Coates 2004:248).

The adoption of ILO Convention 169 in 1989 constituted a pivotal moment for indigenous activism. In 1957, the ILO had passed the only international standard for Indian rights: the Convention on the Protection of Indigenous Populations. The growth of indigenous organizations and their participation drove the ILO to revise the Convention. The modification of the Convention in 1989 served to discredit the assimilationist agendas and stressed indigenous autonomy and cultural preservation (Brysk 2000:126; de la Cadena and Starn 2007). Advocacy groups for indigenous groups were encouraged to present reports on the adoption of the Convention and some labor movements provided a channel for indigenous demands to be taken to the ILO (Brysk 2000:126). However, one of the problems of the Convention was the difficulty some indigenous organizations encountered on their inability to file their complaints independently from unions (Niezen 2003).

The 1990s represented a high point of liberal internationalism, with a strong global human rights movement—including indigenous and women’s rights—“and the spread of democratic governance across the world in the wake of the collapse of the USSR and the dictatorships in Latin America, and the end of apartheid in South Africa” (Cornwall and Molyneux 2008:3). During the 1990s, several agenda-setting UN conferences gave social movements an opportunity to advance their agendas in favorable conditions, as these conferences were marked by an increasing participation of civil society. At the same time, numerous states ratified important conventions such as the ILO Convention 169 and the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women).

The international recognition of indigenous rights transformed procedures and institutions. The United Nations declared 1993 the Year of the World’s Indigenous Peoples and recommended the establishment of a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Additionally, the United Nations declared 1995-2004 the Decade of Indigenous Peoples. In the 1990s, different draft versions of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples were revised. After more than 20 years in the making, the Declaration was approved in 2007. ILO 169 had ensured the recognition of indigenous groups as peoples with particular cultural traditions, institutions, customary laws, forms

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5 International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs.
6 Among the most important of these conferences were: the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 (UN Conference on Environment and Development); the International Conference on Nutrition in Rome in 1992; the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993; the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994; the Conference of the Final Act of the GATT Uruguay roundtable in Marrakesh in 1995; the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995; and the Conference on Human Settlement in Istanbul in 1996.
of land use and forms of social organization. The cornerstone of the Convention is the informed consent on issues that affect indigenous peoples and their participation in policy and development processes. While the emphasis of ILO 169 on the defense of cultural traditions and the need for informed consent provided indigenous peoples with certain control over decisions affecting them, the 2007 Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples extends the scope of maneuver for it specifically includes the right to self-determination.

The internationalization of indigenous rights, along with the multiple international conferences at the UN and other international forums to which indigenous peoples send representatives have set the stage in which the global indigenous movement acts. Indigenous activists and representatives have been involved since the first meetings of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1982 and continue to participate in the meetings that have proliferated since the last decades of the 20th century. The global movement works within this context, with an emphasis on the legal means of resolving their demands. Some of the strategies used by the movement are: lobbying with individual state delegates using a summary of the indigenous people’s grievances; appealing to the sympathy of the media; using lawyers as advisors; and using the legal logic of the state to oppose the encroachment of the state (Niezen 2003).

The Latin American Indigenous Movement across Borders

By the 1970s, Latin American indigenous peoples began mobilizing and creating organizations at different levels—local, national, transnational. The movement grew out of the struggle for land, to the struggle against racism and discrimination, and to the demand for the recognition of indigenous culture, organization, and forms of government as valid and valuable (De la Peña 2005). In her influential work on the indigenous international movement, political scientist Alison Brysk traces the formal beginning of the Latin American Indian rights movement to the 1971 Barbados Conference of dissident anthropologists who pledged to promote indigenous self-determination (2000:18). Indigenous peoples reached across borders to form regional organizations and transnational pan-Indian organizations, creating a hemispheric indigenous identity (Forte 2010), at the same time that indigenous advocacy groups were founded in the United States and Europe.

These new organizations and networks launched during the 1980s and 1990s a series of national and transnational campaigns. In Ecuador, for example, indigenous peoples staged the first nationwide uprising in 1990, followed by more protests during a decade that witnessed the transformation of the movement in a political actor of

7 Several Latin American countries have ratified the Convention: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela (ILO 2014).
8 Indigenous peoples’ organizing can be traced back even as early as the 1960s. The Shuar Federation of the Ecuadorian Amazon, for example, is a pioneer of indigenous organization, and was formally constituted by 1964.
9 According to Yashar (2005), the emergence of the indigenous movement in Latin America in the neoliberal context of the late 20th century responds to three important factors: the political spaces opened by the process of democratization in Latin America; the mobilization against the neoliberal reform; and, the presence of trans-community networks of support. The emphasis of this section is on this last factor.
paramount importance (Moreno Yáñez and Figueroa 1992). In the Amazon, indigenous organizations fought oil companies, and organized a march toward the capital city for their rights. The 1992 quincentenary marked a high point for indigenous organizations throughout the hemisphere, as they staged a series of demonstrations, coalition-building encounters, and public education initiatives.

The plethora of indigenous organizations in Latin America and elsewhere is intertwined to different degrees with transnational social movements and networks. In Latin America, regional indigenous confederations emerged from the Amazon basin, Central America, and South America, such as COICA, CICA, and CAOI. COICA, the Coordinating Council for the Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin, for instance, comprises the representatives of the regional federations and organizations of the nine Amazon countries. COICA “has come to be seen by foreign funders and international organizations as the definitive representative of Amazonian peoples, with a presence at almost every relevant international forum” (Brysk 2000:98). These regional coordinating councils try to influence international organizations, foreign funders, multilateral development banks, and other actors and forums. Furthermore, some argue that regional organizations such as COICA and CAOI came to light as a response for international bodies demanding an interlocutor at the regional Amazon or Andean levels.

The Latin American indigenous rights movement partakes in the hemispheric and global indigenous movements, such as the International Indian Treaty Council and the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, both originally founded by Native American groups. The alliance between the northern and the southern parts of the continent has developed slowly. Brysk argues that the global native rights movement has been led by the indigenous representatives of the northern hemisphere commonwealth countries, but the Latin American wing has gradually gained space, mobilized more consistently and represented a greater population (2000:101). While in 1982, only two non-North American indigenous groups attended the UN Working Group meetings, an increasing number of Latin American representatives has been attending this forum. The Latin American wing also began to be active in other global movements that have united indigenous peoples from around the world, such as the International Alliance of the Indigenous-Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests, founded by COICA and a Malaysian organization in 1992, as a result of pan-indigenous networking for the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

The pan-indigenous movement has organized and held a series of continental issue-oriented conferences. For instance, CONAIE, Ecuador’s leading indigenous

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10 Brysk (2000:69) distinguishes three ways in which this connection takes place: first, local indigenous organizations mobilize transnationally supported by international actors; second, indigenous organizations link among themselves and with advocacy groups, issue-networks, and foreign publics; finally, a transnational pan-indigenous movement develops “that is global (or at least continental) in its identity, goals, and activities.”

11 COICA is the Coordinating Council of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin. CICA is the Indigenous Council of Central America (a confederation of Central American indigenous rights movements). CAOI is the Coordinating council of Andean Organizations.

12 Personal communication, Ivette Vallejo, former consultant for IUCN.

13 CONAIE, Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador).
organization, cosponsored and hosted in 1995 a United Nations Population Fund conference on Latin American Indigenous Women, which 500 representatives attended. This conference sent recommendations to the Beijing World Conference on Women. More recently, South American organizations hosted the First Continental Summit of Indigenous Women of Abya-Yala, in the context of the Fourth Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples of Abya-Yala in Puno, Peru, in 2009. The very term Abya Yala, a Panama’s Kuna word, has been promoted by the movement to recover pre-Hispanic denominations of the continent which are used to demonstrate continental unity.

Globalization and identity politics have opened opportunities for new forms of contestation. In the case of the indigenous peoples of Latin America, the postwar context has produced a new form of political strategy that acts at different levels of activism (local, national, regional, hemispheric, and global), spirals up and down, but also jumps levels. Although here I have highlighted the regional, international, and global scales, it is important to remember that indigenous activism is multiscalar: “[r]ather than refocusing attention to one level or another, indigenous peoples have mobilized and coordinated at local, regional, and global levels simultaneously” (Martin and Wilmer 2008:585).14

Working at these multiple scales, the movement has achieved notable gains in one generation. Some authors argue that reforms in the indigenous peoples-state relationship in some Latin American countries demonstrate the emergence of a radically new political-legal order and conception of citizenship: one with formal recognition of indigenous cultures and their place in society as beneficial for nation building (Assies, et al. 2002; Maybury-Lewis 2002; Van Cott 2000). In their demand for differentiated citizenship, indigenous peoples have subverted the logic of previous indigenista state policies. In their countries, indigenous movements have gained increased access to recognition, territory, and autonomy, and have expanded the political participation of excluded groups. At the same time, its transnational movement has broadened the resistance to neoliberal economic reforms; fought against the encroachment of indigenous territories and resources by extractivist projects; increased its transnational allies and coalitions; expanded its presence within international intergovernmental organizations; and campaigned for international and national regimes of rights favorable to indigenous peoples.

**New Definitions, New and Old Identity Issues, New Ways of Being Indigenous**

The increased visibility of indigenous leaders and activists in global forums, as well as their use of exchanges and networks made possible by information and communication technologies, has also resulted in new conceptualizations of the current indigenous experience. Once—and still—conceptualized as fully ‘rooted’ in specific localities, indigenous peoples are now ‘routed’ globally, as their cosmopolitanism is highlighted (Forte 2010). Moreover, some argue that “being and becoming indigenous today may very well mean engaging in cosmopolitanism, or at least transnational and translocal lifestyles” (Scarangella in Forte 2010:13). Emphasizing the cosmopolitan

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14 Due to its affiliation to a peasant national organization, (namely, FENOCIN, the National Confederation of Campesino, Indigenous and Black Organizations of Ecuador), UNORCAC is connected to the peasant global movement. It is part of the slow food movement, La Via Campesina (International peasant movement), and CLOC (the Latin American Coordinating Council of Peasant Organizations).
experience of indigenous peoples, however, does not imply a total uprooting. On the contrary, the local is articulated with transnational spaces, and such spaces generate expressions of a broader indigenous identity that includes but transcends local expressions. As Forte aptly argues, “indigenous cosmopolitans can be both rooted and routed, nonelite yet nonparochial, provincial without being isolated, internationalized without being de-localized” (Forte 2010:6).

Among the post-World War II conditions that favored the promotion of indigenous rights, Niezen (2003) considers that assimilation policies failing in their attempts to erase indigeneity were instrumental to the emergence of an indigenous intelligentsia. In particular, he refers to education policies such as boarding schools for indigenous peoples, which, although intended for the assimilation of indigenous populations, ended up brewing inter-tribal identity and connections for subsequent organizing. An additional post-war element is the rise of an indigenous middle class (Niezen 2003). Indigenous intellectuals, as other educated representatives of oppressed groups, have been important to theories of resistance and struggle (García 2005:138). In Latin America as elsewhere, some of these educated individuals emerged as leaders or ideologists of organizations and social movements, and political actors in their own right (De la Peña 2005:731). In Ecuador, for example, an indigenous elite and intelligentsia has emerged around the development of bilingual education programs (García 2005:144). Indigenous intellectuals encapsulate central characteristics of the new understanding of being indígena (García 2005:143), and are becoming models to be emulated by other representatives of the movement, especially when they go global.

In a parallel fashion to the way indigenous peoples have been represented as rooted to localities and are currently being regarded as cosmopolitans, their identity is now being disentangled from (underdeveloped) tradition and associated with aspects of (developed) modernity (Kearny in García 2005:133). According to one indigenous intellectual, “[t]o be an indigenous person in today’s world is by definition to be modern” (García 2005:139). The signs of this modernity are associated to current experiences of connectedness, communications, and cosmopolitanism (Brysk 2000). Information and communication technologies that enable these experiences are seen as symbols of or shorthand for indigenous modernity.

The professionalization of indigenous peoples plays an important role in these new conceptualizations of indigeneity. In some contexts like Peru, it was believed that becoming professional would distance a person from Indianness (García 2005:135). Professional indígenas may be responsible to a large extent for the change in the meaning

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15 To different extents, the lives of indigenous peoples in Latin America can be characterized as crisscrossed by the local and the global and by new definitions of indigeneity that surpassed easy (and inaccurate) dualisms between modernity and tradition, be it an indigenous woman who has never left her ‘local’ community, or an activist of the most global organizations of the indigenous movement. Nevertheless, here I am focusing in the intellectuals because they somehow synthesize and more markedly highlight aspects of new definitions of indigeneity. I am not suggesting that all members of the global movement are or need to be indigenous intellectuals (although the exigencies of global activism are increasingly demanding their professionalization).

16 Not only indigenous peoples themselves bestow transformative power to these technologies. The fetishism toward these technological gadgets is shared with others. Many non-indigenous people from their countries or from the North still find it strange when they see indigenous peoples using these technologies, in part because of the association of indigenous with traditional ways of life, and perhaps in part because of the association of indigenous with poverty.
of indigenous “from ignorance, poverty, dirtiness, and marginality to politics, intelligence, identity, and pride” (García 2005:144). Nowadays, people can be simultaneously professionals or intellectuals and indígenas. These individuals also represent a challenge to the association between ethnicity and specific socioeconomic conditions. In the new understandings of indigeneity, being indígena and being poor have been dissociated.

Telecommunications and the digital revolution have been credited in part for the emergence of the global social movements at this particular time in history. Information and communication technologies, ICTs, facilitate cross-indigenous networking and play “an increasingly significant role in the articulation of emergent forms of indigenous cosmopolitanism” (Landzelius 2006:18). Internet, e-mails, text-messaging, cell phones, blogs, websites, video conferences “create and maintain the linkages that gave rise to the global indigenous movement in the first place, enabling communication between Tuscarora (in New York) and Turkana (in Kenya), Saami (in Finland) and Seminole (in Florida), Ainu (in Japan) and Innu (in Labrador) and all of them with multilateral organizations and international institutions, such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Cultural Survival, the Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee, and so on” (Levi and Maybury-Lewis 2010:12). In Latin America, professional indígenas are also seen as people who can manipulate high tech communication systems (García 2005:145).

Accessing and using information is key to the transnational indigenous leaders. One of the most important roles of the international network of support for indigenous peoples is precisely that of providing access to information as well as representing indigenous peoples in certain ways. Brysk (2000:96) argues that this network “has changed the production, transmission, and distribution of information from and about Latin American Indians. Local activists have been given resources and standing to produce data and images concerning their history, environment, development conflicts, and human rights.” However, the appropriation of technology is uneven among indigenous peoples, as among others, and affects social and political relationships favoring those leaders who are conversant with new technologies, but especially with the networks of support, information, and funds accessible through these technologies.

According to several authors, this is a pivotal moment for the redefinition of indigeneity, as the meanings associated with being indigenous are being transformed. Indigeneity has somehow been dissociated from tropes of locality, tradition, ignorance, or poverty. However, now perhaps even more intensely than before, indigenous peoples are immersed in a tense dynamic “of being categorized by others and defining themselves within and against indigeneity, and its symbols, fantasies and meanings” (de la Cadena and Starn 2007:3. Emphasis added). Indigenous peoples at times draw from and at times work against stereotypes: as instinctive environmentalists, spiritual do-gooders averse to material things, or naturally communitarian leftists opposed to capitalism (de la Cadena and Starn 2007:3). Despite the greater scope of using networks and media to portray their own versions of indigeneity, indigenous peoples still find pressures and incentives to ‘go native’ when they go to the cyberspace, “even (or perhaps especially) vis-à-vis sympathetic constituencies” (Landzelius 2006:17).

In the fashioning and refashioning of indigeneity, the activists and leaders of the global indigenous rights movement are setting precedents that are emulated by other
indigenous leaders, and that combine aspects of former and emergent indigenous identities:

leaders must speak their indigenous language, must have indigenous ancestry, and should wear (or at least own) clothing representative of their community or region, but must also master Spanish, know how to operate a computer, be capable of navigating among international donor agencies, and know how to negotiate with both state and foreign development agents for funding for their communities. In short, indigenous leaders are increasingly defined by their ability to move in both local and global spaces (García 2005:159).

Walking and the Politics of Mobility

Mobility may be precisely a key element in indigenous politics. Indigenous leadership has implied mobility and interconnections beyond the local. Leaders of indigenous organizations usually travel from communities to towns or cities—where the state and its bureaucrats have their offices—in order to petition for and process the community demands. Moreover, the indigenous movement has used forms of protest directly related to mobility. The Ecuadorian indigenous mobilizations have frequently occupied roads filled by indigenous women and men marching, covering a considerable stretch of the road. For instance, the national uprising of 1990 and the walk of 1992 (caminata de 1992) from Pastaza to Quito for land and territory were two landmark events of indigenous activism in the 1990s (Whitten, et al. 1997).

Even though how indigenous cosmopolitanism implies that indigenous peoples are delinked from the local and are routed to the global was discussed previously, one must not necessarily link tradition, particularity, and restriction to the politics of the local, and modernity, universality, and boundlessness to the politics of the global. Power does not necessarily rely on the side of the global and resistance on the side of the local. Geographers have questioned the metaphors that we use to understand the connections of the global and the local. Marston, Woodward, and Jones (2007) interrogate the language we use to describe the transformations brought about by world-scale processes and transnational connectivity. Because globalization implies mobility, transference, and interconnection among different places and people, theorists employ a spatial vocabulary to understand it. Marston and colleagues question the local-global binary and the metaphors used to describe its connection, namely, the scale and the network. First, following Gibson-Graham, Marston and colleagues refuse to give preeminence to the global. Second, they reject any understanding of globalization that relies upon scale and propose instead a “flat” site ontology.

In regards to the global-local binary, Marston and colleagues aim to destabilize this binary. This critique was advanced by Gibson-Graham (2002 ) who pointed to how theorists connected the global and the local in a manner where the global stands for universalism and macro-structural forces, while the local stands for particularism and everyday experience. In this view, power is unevenly distributed with a local that is
powerless and the global which is a force. Gibson-Graham remind us that the local and
the global are not things in themselves, but interpretive frames, and go on to reshape the
political effectivity of the local by analyzing diverse, localized economies. For Marston
and colleagues, the most important element of Gibson-Graham’s critique is de-coupling
power from the global. In that vein, they also jettison scale, because a scalar approach
“tends to rely on a hierarchical language of vertically conceived levels to describe
globalization’s spatial churnings” (Marston, et al. 2007). So conceived, the different
scales overlap and intersect. On the one hand, the distinction between the local and the
global as separate scalar fields remains problematic, because the local is “so
interpenetrated by outside forces that its ontological status as a ‘place’ in opposition to a
globalized ‘space’ cannot be sustained” (Marston, et al. 2007:49). Ash Amin aptly
argues:

Surely a key aspect of transnationalisation of local relations is that we can no
longer make an easy distinction between local and global geographies. How
localized or global, for example, are the associational politics of worker,
imigrant and NGO… groups campaigning for local recognition but relying on
international financial and other support networks? (Amin cited in Marston, et al.
2007:50).

On the other hand, Marston and colleagues argue that the problem is not so much
the inseparability of the local and the global, but how power is thought to be distributed
in this ladder-like imaginary (2007:50). They prefer to use the metaphors of networks and
flows, without, however, abolishing space itself in a sea of flows. Following Ash Amin,
they understand globalization as an “energized network space” marked by “the
intensification of mixture and connectivity as more things become interdependent (in
associative links and exclusions)” (2007:51). Marston and colleagues propose a spatial
flat ontology that recognizes a virtually infinite population of mobile and mutable sites.
The site is defined as “a material localization characterized by differential relations
through which one site is connected to other sites, out of which emerges a social space
that can be understood to extend, however unevenly and temporarily, across distant
places” (2007:46).

As mentioned earlier, scholars of the indigenous movement in Latin America
have coincided in pointing to the multiscalar quality of indigenous activism (Brysk 2000;
Lucero 2008). In this scholarship, however, scale is taken for granted. Taking into
account the critique of the metaphor of scale, it is important to keep in mind that in my
analysis, I recognize that indigenous activism illustrates the inseparability of the local and
the global. Additionally, indigenous leaders move to perform their activism in different
sites. Even though in future chapters I organize the information of this research using
different “scales” (from the community, to the second-tier organization that covers
several communities, to the county of Cotacachi -subnational-, to national and
transnational indigenous politics), I do not want to imply that there is an automatic distribution of power in which the more encompassing the scale of action, the more power the indigenous leader has. In the same vein, it is not necessarily the case that indigenous women who act at the local level have less agency than those who act at transnational forums.

Perhaps instead of “jumping scales,” a characterization of indigenous activism that still implies hierarchical verticality, one can draw from the notion of “purina,” the Kichwa verb “to walk,” in order to understand how indigenous activism traverses different sites. Purina in Kichwa entails not only the literal meaning of walking, but also that of going places, and of a sense of being (Harrison 1989:159-160). Indigenous women of Cotacachi used the verb “to walk” when referring to their political participation: “I have walked with the organization.” Through walking, indigenous people enact their activism and create part of the connections that configure a “site.” The capability to move—or to impede mobility as in a road blockade or take-over of a plaza or building—may be one of the elements central to indigenous politics.

Meanings of walking vary cross-culturally (Ingold and Vergunst 2008). Mobile, embodied practices “have also come to be associated with different ways of being and thinking, and different ethics, aesthetics, and ecologies. Walking has been variously constructed as romantic, reflective, escapist, natural” (Cresswell and Merriman 2011:6). For other indigenous groups, walking is also a way of learning and being. This is the case of the Batek, hunter-gatherers of Malaysia, for whom “walking comprises a suite of bodily performances that include observing, monitoring, remembering, listening, touching, crouching and climbing. And it is through these performances, along the way, that their knowledge is forged” (Ingold and Vergunst 2008:5). In reference to the verb “purina,” linguists have found that it is associated also with the verb “tiyana” (to be, to be located) and have observed a “common element [of] a notion of kinetic or dynamic existence based in the cancellation of the boundedness property” (Mannheim cited in Harrison 1989:159). Purina is, therefore, a verb in Kichwa that carries a metaphor to define existence, but one that implies mobility.

Embodied mobility figures prominently in indigenous activism and politics. “When executed as a mass performance of resistance,” as in the road blockade or a “caminata,” “walkers render a basic developmental competency as a politically willful… act” (Lorimer 2011:25). For indigenous women, “walking” is also a political practice, that signifies “the role of power in the production of mobilities and the role of mobilities in the constitution of power” (Cresswell 2012:649). This notion is consistent with the use of the word made by several of the indigenous women interviewed in this research who do not use the verb “participate” but rather the verb to “walk with the organization” when discussing their political participation. Their kinetic understanding of political participation also serves to comprehend their multi-sited activism, at different sites which are partly created by the dynamic connections indigenous peoples establish with people,
things, and ideas in other sites. Instead of jumping reified scales, indigenous people “walk” with their organizations, becoming politically active in so doing, and traversing and creating different sites with their mobility and action.

Methodology

**Positionality: On the Phantoms that Haunted Me**

*Each of us lives with an allotted portion of institutional privilege and penalty, and with varying levels of rejection and seduction inherent in the symbolic images applied to us.*

Patricia Hill Collins

I have been traveling back and forth from Ecuador to the U.S. during my graduate studies. This pendular movement between the North and my home country in the South has been a quest for knowledge and understanding, one of making sense not of a distant country and foreign people, but of my own. As a Third-World academic in the North, I inhabit multiple worlds. I became an anthropologist in Ecuador, and maintain strong connections and exchanges with the Ecuadorian academic community. Nevertheless, I entered the field enabled by the privilege and resources that I enjoy as part of the academic world of the North. My connection with the North bestows upon me symbolic power and the legitimacy conferred by academic titles (Bourdieu 1984). It also ‘whitens’ me, since in Ecuador, as in other Latin American countries, educational processes for upward mobility may imply social whitening.

When I entered the field, I went back home, but in my case home equals the field just in a very broad sense. I was not doing fieldwork in my home city (as for example Alcalde 2007), and even though I shared nationality and highlander identity with the people from Cotacachi, we are differently located—sometimes diametrically so—in axes of class, ethnicity, and education. This belonging situates me as a partial insider, at best, since my main reason for being in Cotacachi was conducting research. Thus, I entered the field as an academic, single woman, self-defined *mestiza* (see below), from Quito, being educated in the United States.

In Cotacachi, as in Ecuador in general, the relationship between *indígenas* and *mestizos* is fraught with a colonial racist legacy that imbues the encounters between these groups with tension and mistrust. One year before fieldwork, I had negotiated with the women of UNORCAC the permission to do my fieldwork, but at my arrival I still needed to work on the relationship with them and build rapport. While in Cotacachi, I decided to reside with an indigenous community and family. Women of UNORCAC decided that I should live with the president of the Central Committee of Women. The presence of outsiders in the communities of Cotacachi is not uncommon, on the contrary, researchers, expatriates, Peace Corps and other foreign volunteers, and exchange students live both in the city of Cotacachi and in indigenous communities nearby. What is less usual is that
mestizos from Quito decide to stay in indigenous communities. A racial/spatial order in Ecuador equates ‘urban’ and ‘civilization’ (especially Quito and Guayaquil) with white-mestizo, and ‘rural’ with indigenous or Afro, and assigns different concentrations of economic and political power to those groups and spaces (Rahier 1998:422). Rahier’s racial/spatial order works well from a very macro and general perspective; however, as I argue below, it glosses over an important milieu in which the mestizo, the indigenous, and the Afro share the very same space, enacting nonetheless marked racial divides.

As a middle-class Quiteña (person from Quito), my residence and presence in the community did not conform to the expected racial/spatial order. On several occasions, when strolling the paths that led to my community of residence, Kichwa children would greet me “good morning,” in English, to which I responded “Ecuador mamallaktamanta kani,” the Kichwa for “I am from Ecuador.” In spite of the fact that I define myself as mestiza, I was repositioned sometimes as white and sometimes as gringa, by community members accustomed to the presence of foreigners. The ‘proper’ place for mestizos in Cotacachi is the city.17 Nevertheless, the occasional framing of my presence as that of a foreigner did not mean for me the same burden as that of being a “mestiza/repositioned white” (Valdivia 2009).

The relationship between white-mestiza women and indigenous women has been one marked by inequality, racism, and exploitation. As I discovered in my fieldwork both my “whiteness” and its accompanying history of specific labor relationships “haunted” me in the field. I have borrowed the phrase “haunting whiteness” from Valdivia (2009), who has discussed her experience with indigenous communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon and the ways in which her repositioned whiteness haunts her in the field. I would add to Valdivia’s formulation that in the Highlands, the relationship between white-mestizo and indígena comes with the special haunting of the hacienda legacy. Additionally, I want to extend Rahier’s proposal on the racial/spatial order in Ecuador by adding that mestiza and indígena sometimes share the intimate space of the household, while reenacting racial, class, and ethnic boundaries under the very same roof.

On one occasion, I was in a community accompanying staff from UNORCAC. I went walking one of the little roads by myself and ran into an elderly Kichwa woman. She saw me and addressed me to my dismay as patrona (Spanish for master or employer), a word with which she placed me not only in the category of white, but also in the specific history of exploitative relations of the hacienda. Although my family does not belong to the land-owning class in Ecuador, I was repositioned by this woman in a horizon of symbolic domination that she knew—the hacienda. This moment was like a

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17 This racial/spatial order is adequate in general terms. However, not all the rural communities in Cotacachi are inhabited just by indigenous. In the Andean zone of Cotacachi, there are several communities inhabited by both mestizo and indigenous people. Normally these are mestizo campesinos. However, to a great extent the town still equates to the place of mestizo, as well as certain smaller towns such as Quiroga, the head of one of the parishes of Cotacachi. This contrasts with the subtropical area of Intag to the west of the canton, where the majority of the population, whether urban or rural are mestizos.
hall of mirrors in which I saw a reflection of myself through the eyes of another woman, a reflection that I denied or did not want to see—the image of the oppressor. This experience led me to think that, perhaps, when conducting research in the Ecuadorian highlands in places marked by the hacienda history, one needs to think of the hacienda as a metaphor that may still structure people’s relationships with and imaginaries of others.

Many of the women in Cotacachi, especially when single, still leave their communities in search for jobs as maids in Quito and other cities. There, they work for families such as mine, which have exploited indigenous and poor women to deal with household reproductive work (also Alcalde 2007). In his macro portrayal of the Ecuadorian racial/spatial order, applied mainly to the rural/urban divide, Rahier left out the white-mestiza household, an intimate site in which differences are enacted and specific forms of interaction are learned. Many middle-class mestizas have learned to interact with indigenous or poor women in the model of the master/domestic worker relationship:

To the extent that inside a household, social spaces that structure hierarchies are also constructed, not all the insides are equal, neither every person who inhabits the inside does it in the same way, the domestic worker can be outside—she is one indigenous more, and not one of the family—and inside simultaneously (Barrig 2001:47; my translation).

Although not all domestic workers are indigenous, in some Latin American contexts the conception of domestic work is associated with this group, which is seen as inferior, ignorant, subordinated, and dirty (Barrig 2001:43). For women in Cotacachi, then, I may stand as a representative of those who have inflicted painful memories, and operated from a power-laden position as the owner of the house who hired and fired and controlled working conditions for the domestic worker. Barrig argues that the feminists’ silence regarding indigenous issues in Peru during previous decades may reflect their discomfort with the “recurrent presence [of indigenous domestic workers] in the middle-class feminist households” (2001:47). I concur with Barrig that this discomfort may complicate feminist politics for feminist mestizas in Ecuador as well. As a mestiza inhabiting in the house of an indigenous family, I actively and purposefully helped with

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18 This image of the mirror was inspired by Blanca Muratorio’s piece on the tensions that indigenous women in the Ecuadorian Amazon are experiencing in their relationship with wider social and economic changes that bring them closer to the outside/mestizo world, in which she uses the metaphor of a broken mirror that reflects this young woman’s image of herself when trying to conform to alien beauty models (Muratorio 1998).

19 In the case of the US, Patricia Hill Collins proposes the use of the antebellum plantation as a guiding metaphor to interrogate social institutions, and relations of domination and subordination based on race, class, and gender (Collins 1993:30). I argue that, in the Ecuadorian highlands, it may be productive for white/mestiza anthropologists to think of the hacienda as a guiding metaphor that sheds light on our relationship to others in the field.
household chores and activities. This was not only a commitment to countering the history of unequal labor exchange between mestizas and indígenas, but also a manifestation of reciprocity and gratitude with the family who had received me. However, I had mixed feelings when reinforcing gender divides along those lines.

Anthropologists’ identities, as peoples’ identities in general, are multiple and complex (belonging to multiplex communities; Rosaldo 1993:181), and those facets of our identity that become salient in a certain context depend on the “prevailing vectors of power” in that context (Narayan 1993:676). Since aspects of my identity in the field connected me to privilege (in terms of race, class, and educational status), relationships needed to be forged through differences instead of “idealizing the researcher-participant relationship as a space of equality where historical inequalities could somehow momentarily be erased” (Alcalde 2007:148). In addressing the women of UNORCAC, I normally used the formal usted, as a show of respect, and refer to them as señora—señora Lolita, for example. I would use the informal tú only with those women who were younger and addressed me in that way. As a single, childless woman, I was also repositioned as not fully adult, and that was perhaps part of the reason why younger women would relate to me in the more informal and egalitarian manner of the Spanish informal you form. It may also have been that younger women had gone to school or were attending college, and related to me in our shared experience as students.

In order to negotiate the unbalanced power relationship between me, the researcher, and the research collaborators, my long-term residence at an indigenous community and my learning of Kichwa proved to be ways to work through the mestiza-indígena initial mistrust. Besides the negotiation of my social position in the field, an exercise of reflexivity calls for an evaluation of the specific impact of the researcher identity in the research process. The differences between the women of the communities and me provided opportunities to discuss issues pertinent to this research project, such as the differences in gender arrangements, mobility, and opportunities for mestiza and indígena women. Thus, my social location was a useful way to talk about “the workings of oppression in the lives of the women in my research” (Scott 2010:20). I turn now to a reflection on the specific impacts of the gatekeepers who allowed my presence in the field.

Local Politics and Allegiances

I entered the field by a process of formal acceptance that complied with the institutional structure of UNORCAC. Both the Committee of Women and the president

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20 This long-term residence was allowed by the privilege I enjoyed as a member of the academic community of the North and its resources. In my research endeavor, I was very much aware of this privilege and this difference between my life opportunities and those of most people in Cotacachi. As Collins argues, “Racial/ethnic groups, women, and the poor have never had the luxury of being voyeurs of the lives of the privileged.” (Collins 1993:38)
of UNORCAC granted me the permission needed to conduct my research. It became evident early in my fieldwork that my affiliation with UNORCAC placed me on a particular side of a charged political terrain. In 2009, national and local elections were held in Ecuador. In Cotacachi, Auki Tituña, the first indigenous mayor of Cotacachi, who had been reelected for three successive terms, lost the election to another indigenous leader, Alberto Anrango, the candidate supported by UNORCAC. At my arrival, communities were polarized between loyalties to these two indigenous leaders.

Although novel initiatives on citizen participation and local governance were implemented during Tituña’s administrations, in his last term, the former mayor grew apart from important organizations, such as UNORCAC and the Citizens’ Assembly. Nevertheless, Tituña had an important group of political supporters. Moreover, for the first time, the indigenous communities in Cotacachi were also divided between allegiances to Tituña and Anrango. Entering the field with UNORCAC’s permission, and working with the Committee of Women of UNORCAC placed me automatically on their side and with the recently elected mayor.

That UNORCAC granted permission for my research impacted my project in different ways. People that I interviewed were at times critical of UNORCAC, but they still perceived me as rather close to this organization. Since as part of my participant observation, when possible I followed the president of the Committee of Women to the meetings and activities that she had, people started calling me, la hija de la Lolita, Lolita’s daughter. Those with strong antipathies to UNORCAC were less likely to welcome my presence, as they thought of me as strongly connected to UNORCAC. I was not able to totally escape the politically charged local context. For example, a recognized indigenous woman leader, who played an important role when UNORCAC was emerging, refused to be interviewed because she did not want to have anything to do with UNORCAC. Thus, some of the women were more eager than others to be interviewed, depending on their evaluation of my connection with UNORCAC and on their specific allegiance, regard, or disregard for local politics.

During my fieldwork, I lived with the president of the Committee of Women of UNORCAC, a decision that was made by the Committee when I started my fieldwork. This decision shaped my research experience in several ways. It allowed me to “shadow” the president of the Committee in her multiple responsibilities as the representative of the indigenous women of Cotacachi, which helped me understand the demands of her role, the challenges she faced, and strategies she enacted in this formal position of leadership. These observations informed questions I posed to other women. Additionally, accompanying her provided me easier access to several forums in Cotacachi and other locations in which indigenous women enact their political activities. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, living with Lolita also signified to others that I was a close ally to her and by extension to UNORCAC. Some interviewees may have limited some of their responses, even if I explained that I would not share their views with other people,
because of my close relationship with Lolita. That being said, I consider that this arrangement was generally speaking beneficial for my research.

Researcher as Consultant: Research in the Context of a Non-Governmental Organization’s Agenda

After a first eleven-month season in Cotacachi, I exited the field and started working for an international non-governmental organization interested in exploring the political and environmental agendas of indigenous women in the Andean and Latin American region. It is not unusual for academics in South America to work both as researchers and as consultants for governmental and non-governmental organizations. This consultancy job included working with three indigenous organizations, two of them South American (one coordinating the indigenous organizations of the Amazon basin and one the indigenous organizations of the Andes) and a Latin American network of indigenous women working on biodiversity. Some of the results were to indicate training needs in indigenous and women’s rights and in environmental currently hot topics such as climate change. While in this circumstance the kind of relationship I had with the interviewees greatly differed from one built on long-term field involvement, this consultancy work produced “a particular kind of knowledge and understanding of the connections and relationship between the different spaces and layers of power” (Oliart 2008:293).

It allowed me to “scale up,” that is, situate my case study within wider national and international dialogues about indigenous women’s agendas, indigenous rights, and state policies. As Oliart (2008) argues, multi-sited consultancy work may permit an understanding of the processes of circulation, dissemination, and negotiation of political agendas traveling transnationally. It also shows how indigenous women are exposed to multiple discourses and agendas stemming from the government, NGOs, international aid, and multilateral agencies. While the bulk of my information comes from an ethnographic case study in Cotacachi, the consultancy job allowed me to interview national and regional indigenous leaders, who are currently participating in the transnational indigenous movement and in processes of state policy creation and program implementation for indigenous peoples. One of the pivotal contributions for my own project from this consultancy work was directing my attention toward state policies in the region (particularly in Peru and Bolivia) for indigenous women.

As a consultant working for an international agency, I was either supported or burdened by the preceding relationships of the agency with each indigenous organization. The agency has an established environmental agenda and a generally positive reputation because of its significant level of resources. 21 Perhaps for that reason, the three

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21 The agency is IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, one of the biggest environmental global organizations.
organizations were interested in sitting at the table and negotiating the terms of the collaboration. The final agreements consisted of incorporating the consultancy activities in the on-going interests of the organizations. Mostly, the organizations had limited budgets to fund meetings for their members, especially because the logistics necessitated funding international trips and expenses for representatives coming from different Andean, Amazonian, and other Latin American countries.

The relationship with the indigenous women I met through this work differed from that I had in Cotacachi. Certain axes of difference worked to somehow level out the mestiza-indigenous relationship described earlier for Cotacachi. Some of the women were well-known leaders intervening in the national political scenario of Ecuador and other countries. Others were professionals or experts in climate change and pushed their agendas in the intricate webs of global decision-making on the topic. Some women participating in these meetings also came from grassroots experiences and smaller organizations affiliated with the national indigenous organization they were representing. This last group was less familiar with high-level negotiations. However, several leaders in the meetings were national, regional, and global representatives of the indigenous movement and were constantly interacting with high-ranking government and NGO officials.

This experience gave them political clout and a knack for negotiating the terms of their interaction with others. I did not feel that the mestiza-indigenous was as salient in this relationship, but that may be an underestimation on my part, since most of the staff of the agency I was working with were well-educated, high or middle-class mestizos from Latin America or foreign officials from the North. Nevertheless, the indigenous women leaders’ political savvy and expert knowledge did import a leveling factor vis-à-vis a novice on international consultancy like myself. What was clearer in the negotiation that allowed the consultancy work to proceed was the utilitarian overtone of our first dialogues. I became a potential broker of resources, and was able to get appointments with the women’s representatives of the organizations easier than had I just been a regular Ecuadorian student conducting research.

The organizations requested or vehemently demanded certain conditions for the work. They used the meetings for their own purposes as well as for those of the project. One of the organizations required that in the call for the meeting and in any publication to be made, only the logo of their own organization appear, with no logo from the international agency paying for the consultancy work or from the UN-agency funding the project. Two of the three organizations also demanded autonomous allotted time when I and other staff were excluded from participation in the meetings in the organized workshop. Thus, in the case of my study with these three organizations, the agreements involved more overt negotiations on the mutual and immediate benefits of the research process, with concomitant allusions from each side on maintaining cooperation between the agency and the organizations in the future.
There is a general concern among indigenous peoples regarding the personal (professional) benefits that researchers can gain, without a reciprocal or concrete gain for the communities involved in the research process. I concur that there is a potential disconnect between what I gain and what the indigenous organization and women can gain from my research, especially in the case of Cotacachi. While in my consultancy work the indigenous organizations gained concrete opportunities to organize meetings that brought together members from different countries, in the case of my research in Cotacachi the gains are clearer for me than for the women of Cotacachi. My professional career will advance because of this research. In terms of the knowledge generated, I can only hope that my writing can be beneficial to the women of Cotacachi. As a native of Ecuador, I anticipate having the opportunity to present and discuss my results with the women of Cotacachi in the near future. The results will be relevant for the indigenous women of Cotacachi, who were interested in making visible their contributions to the organization and learned about the women who have preceded them in local leadership.

Conclusion

The marginalization of indigenous women in the wider society as well as in indigenous and feminist politics may lead one to believe that their possibilities for action are curtailed wherever they turn. I argue that the concept of agency helps us understand indigenous women’s activism because it highlights people’s action, not only in relation/opposition to structures of power, but also in the enactment of specific projects that they themselves identify as important. In my perspective, it is important to counterbalance a pull toward a celebratory account of any form of action of the subaltern that contests domination. In addition, the possibilities for indigenous women’s action have to be contextualized at the intersection of gender, race/ethnicity, class, and other systems of inequality that affect the lived experience of indigenous women, enabling and limiting their agency. Additionally, I concur with theorizing indigenous activism as multiscalar, jumping scales from the body, to local, to national, to international realms as indigenous leaders engage with a multicultural state, development, and the international indigenous rights, in changing structures of political opportunity.

Finally, I see indigenous women as enacting their activism on the basis of their ethnic rather than gender identity within the movement. Indigenous organizations, I argue, need to be conceptualized as spaces of hegemony and dispute of different forms of capital, in which male and female leaders are positioned unequally and in competition for resources. I partially concur with conceptualizing indigenous women as largely “trapped” between ethnicity and gender, and I consider it important for the analysis to highlight the limitations they encounter for their activism. Nevertheless, I also consider that an emphasis on the restrictions indigenous women face may end up adding to the disempowering narratives regarding women’s passivity. I want to lay out the tensions I
have found in the literature that may have a considerable impact on the assessment of indigenous women’s actions. It is not that I am advocating for an act of balance and considering that the best analysis is one that takes a distance from both over celebration or over victimization, but what I advocate for is an analysis that takes into consideration that overt opposition, accommodation, or complicity are possibilities that need to be understood in the specificities of ethnographic contexts.

Feminist attention to the workings of power between the researcher and the research participants is a valuable tool to examine some of the conditions that affect the research process. Reflexivity enables the researcher to understand the specific ways in which her understanding may be partial (Haraway 1988). It is important to keep reflexivity as a tool to understand power dynamics in the process of generating and collecting data, and also to inform the researcher’s analysis and make her wary of her own biases. However, it is also important that the process of reflexivity does not become one of ‘reflectivity’ – the researcher’s complacency about her own experiences more than focusing on those of the research participants. In this research project, reflecting on my own positionality is useful to the extent that I am part of a system of privilege and oppression through which the relationship with the participants of this project was forged. The difference between the indigenous women and me generated conversations that permitted an understanding of their visions of the systems of inequality that we inhabit and their ways to navigate them.

The methodological strategy for this research combined several techniques. The use of interviews, participant observation, focus groups, and archival research offered the opportunity to triangulate the information (See Appendix 1 for a detailed explanation of the research methods), and this was especially useful in the case of Cotacachi, in which gender dynamics may substantially differ between what is observed by the researcher and what is reported by research participants. Nevertheless, another important caution from an exercise of positionality calls for my paying particular attention to how my own observations may be tainted by specific evaluations informed by my own cultural understandings and personal idiosyncrasies. It is the focus on the women’s and other actors’ perspectives with concomitant caution for my own biases that informed the following analysis.

In the following chapter I will provide an overview of the canton of Cotacachi, its geography, its peoples, and its history in order to contextualize the information of the next chapters. Additionally, the process of citizen participation for which Cotacachi is recognized nationally and internationally will be briefly described. Finally, the chapter will offer a description of UNORCAC, the indigenous organization in the canton of Cotacachi.
Chapter 2: Description of Research Site

Figure 2.1 Cotacachi Mountain and corn field as seen from La Calera community.

**Cotacachi: Geography and People**

Cotacachi is a canton, a town, a mountain. Located in the northern Ecuadorian Highlands, it is the biggest canton\(^{22}\) in Imbabura Province, representing one third of the province. It includes a great diversity of climates, extending from 300 meters to 4,800 meters above sea level (and comprises diverse life zones, ranging from subtropical forests to paramo or plateau-like upland areas. An important part of the natural reserve Cotacachi-Cayapas is located in this region. The area of the canton is 1.809km\(^2\) (698 mi\(^2\)) (UNORCAC 2008).

Cotacachi is also a mountain (4,939 m.), a dormant volcano that lies on the western side of the valley in which Cotacachi is located. This part of the canton, called locally the *zona andina*, or Andean zone, extends from 2,600 meters to 3350 meters above sea level (8,530 feet to 10,990 feet), and is the area where indigenous communities are located. In the indigenous ritual topography of the region, Cotacachi is female – *Mama Cotacachi*, as it is called in the popular lore. There is an ancient, tectonic story of love between Mama Cotacachi and mount Imbabura, or *Taita Imbabura*, the male mountain that gives the name to the province at the eastern side of the valley. The fertile valley of Cotacachi is said to be the result of the love affairs between Taita Imbabura and

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\(^{22}\) Canton, or cantón in Spanish, refers to smaller political divisions inside the provinces of Ecuador.
Mama Cotacachi, as well as their child, Yana Urku, a smaller mountain in the valley. At the foot of Mount Cotacachi, a myriad of indigenous communities are located. The square of rectangular plots of land with diverse crops gives the appearance of a quilt lying at the foot of the mountain, with varying tonalities depending on the crops and the season.

The main town of the canton is also called Cotacachi. It is located 110 km. north of Quito, the country’s capital. The Municipality, main schools, main church, and the offices of public institutions are located there. Cotacachi, the town, is known for its leather crafts. Cotacachi is still, to a great extent, the main town with a mainly mestizo population, surrounded by several indigenous or mixed indigenous/mestizo communities. Additionally, in the last few years, the town has become a destination for expatriate residents from the United States and Canada.

The canton is divided into four regions: the urban area (town of Cotacachi), the Andean zone (mainly indigenous rural communities), Intag, and Maduriacos. The total population of the canton of Cotacachi is 40,036, 77.9% of which live in rural areas, and 49.2% of which live in the rural part of the Andean zone. If the population of the urban area of the Andean area is also considered, then the total population residing in the Andean area adds up to 71.3% of the total population of the canton (INEC 2010b). The municipality promotes the idea that Cotacachi is both a place of high bio- and agrodiversity, and a multicultural space, comprised of mestizo, indigenous, and Afro-Ecuadorian populations, and now also a community of foreign retirees.

Regarding auto-identification according to culture and customs, as stated by the last national census (Table 2.1), the majority of the population in the canton identifies as
mestizo, 53.5%, and a 40.5% of the population consider themselves indígena. Smaller percentages correspond to other populations. The census separated Afro-Ecuatoriano/a, Negro/a, and Mulato/a, populations that in Cotacachi are encompassed as Afro-Cotacacheños/as. These three groups make up 2.7% of the population. The blanco/a (white) population is 2.5% of the population. The smaller percentage corresponds to the montubio/a (groups from some rural areas of the coastal region of Ecuador). The information from the Census regarding language spoken may better identify the foreign population residing in the canton, since the self-identification as white may include some locals and exclude some people from the foreign population. In the parish of Cotacachi, a smaller division of the canton which includes the town of Cotacachi and its surroundings, 360 people report speaking a foreign language. An important number of this total probably corresponds to the community of expatriates that has moved to Cotacachi in the last few years. Cotacachi’s diversity, then, comprises both different groups of Ecuadorian citizens differentiated by their ethnicity and languages as well as foreign residents.

Table 2.1. Population according to self-identification per culture and customs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-identification per culture and customs</th>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>16,235</td>
<td>40.55 %</td>
<td>40.55 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afro/Ecuadorean/ Afro-descendent</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>0.78 %</td>
<td>41.33 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>0.88 %</td>
<td>42.21 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulatto</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>1.09 %</td>
<td>43.30 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montubio (Mestizo from certain rural regions of the Coast)</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>0.52 %</td>
<td>43.82 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mestizo</td>
<td>21,430</td>
<td>53.53 %</td>
<td>97.35 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>986</td>
<td>2.46 %</td>
<td>99.81 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>0.19 %</td>
<td>100.00 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40,036</td>
<td>100.00 %</td>
<td>100.00 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Brief History of Cotacachi**

The first references to “Cotacache” [sic] in early colonial documents include it as an ethnic chiefdom (parcialidad) within the wider territory encompassed by the region of Otavalo and San Pablo. During pre-Inca times and under the Inca presence, the territory of the Andean zone of Cotacachi was known as part of the territory of Otavalo, in the northern frontier of the Tawantinsuyu, the Inca Empire. The territory of the Otavalo was clearly differentiated from the territories of the Pasto ethnic group that was at that time on the current northern border of Ecuador with Colombia, and the territory of the Quitos to the south (Ramírez and Williams 2003). The name of Otavalo was used for all the population surrounding Lake San Pablo. By 1580, the settlement of Sarance, later called
Otavalo (city) was named the capital of the region, after the chiefs of the same name, who apparently possessed the most important political and religious power in the region.

The etymology of the name Cotacachi is also unclear. Some argue that the word comes from the combination of two Kichwa words: Cota from cutana = to grind, and cachi = salt. Although there is no evidence of a place of salt production in the area, presumably some families of the area traded or bartered salt from the salt mines located to the north of the province. For others, the name originated in the Aymara language in which Cota means lake, and cachi, female, being a reference to Lake Cuicocha, a female deity located in the paramo of Mount Cotacachi. This also implies that the dwellers of Cotacachi and Otavalo were mitimaes [forcibly relocated population] brought by the Incas from other parts of the Tawantinsuyu (UNORCAC 2006).

There is no agreement on the length of the occupation of the region. However, some information from the archaeological sites adjacent to Lake San Pablo (towards the south of current Cotacachi and Otavalo) suggests that the occupation may date back as long as 2000 years ago (Caillavet 2000:38). The limited ethno-historical sources regarding this area pose a challenge to scholars interested in the patterns of settlement, demography, and sociopolitical organization of the area of the northern Audiencia de Quito, prior to the colonial forced resettlements (reducciones) in 1580. The available information suggests that by the time of the arrival of the Spanish, the region was organized in territorial and political units later known as parcialidades, headed by an ethnic chief (cacique), and composed of a few to several family groups (ayllu). Some of these units united in bigger regional units or confederations either to ensure access to key products of different ecological regions, or for temporal military alliances (Ramón Valarezo 1990).

Before the colonial policy of resettlement in the second half of the 16th century, the landscape of the Northern Highlands in Ecuador must have resembled the image of a dispersed habitat. In the territory of the Otavalo ethnic group, the population was distributed homogeneously, but with smaller densities in the lower altitudinal areas. The size of the units of settlement varied from small groups of 50 to 200 people in the warmer areas, to 200 to 400 people in the higher lands. The occupation included very high zones, a pattern that was altered with the Spanish preference for the valleys.

During the pre-Inca period, the ethnic chiefdoms of the Highlands maintained a network of exchange with subtropical areas. The highland dwellers obtained prestige commodities such as cotton, aji (chili), coca, and salt, in exchange for the surplus of corn and beans. The Andean zone of the canton and the subtropical zone of Intag may have been connected by this trade by the time of the Spanish arrival. Intag was a supplier of cotton for the region of Cotacachi, in tandem with Axangue and Salinas (Caillavet 2000).

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23 The territory of current Ecuador was encompassed in colonial times by the political and territorial jurisdiction known as the Real Audiencia de Quito (1563-1822), the northern part of the Viceroyalty of Perú and later moved to the Viceroyalty of Nueva Granada.
Later, in the colonial period, the subtropical zone of Intag would produce cotton for the textile mills in the region of Cotacachi and Otavalo. To this day, the Andean zone and the subtropical area maintain a relationship based on the differential products for exchange and mestiza, indigenous, and Afro-Ecuadorian women’s organizations coordinate produce exchanges (intercambio de productos) in some of their meetings.

In the colonial era, the system of the *encomienda* awarded land and control over the labor force to the Spaniards, in exchange for teaching the Catholic doctrine to the indigenous population. In the area of Otavalo, the colonial system included the payment of tribute in the form of blankets of wool or cotton. Several *obrajes* (textile mills) functioned in the area (Jácome 1990). Using records from 1582 regarding the amount of cotton distributed to the caciques of Otavalo for the manufacture of textiles for colonial tribute, Caillavet (2000:139-157) has determined certain characteristics of the ethnic chiefdoms of the region. In terms of the political organization of the region, the document mentions 30 ethnic chiefs responsible for collecting the tribute in their *parcialidades*. Caillavet classified these chiefs in fourteen *pueblos* (peoples) that existed prior to the resettlements. “Cotacache” is one of these pueblos, with two chiefs of *parcialidades*. According to the estimate based on the 1582 document, the 182 people who paid tribute under the Cotacache chiefs, extrapolates to a population of 855 people for the Andean zone of what now is Cotacachi (Caillavet 2000:152). By 1655, the colonial registers count 8 salt producers and 52 tribute payers (Ramírez and Williams 2003).

There were numerous indigenous revolts and uprisings in the Andes during the colonial period. By the end of the 1700s several uprisings took place in the *Real Audiencia de Quito*, in protest of the Bourbon administrative reforms. Several rebellions were directed against the first *numeración* or population census, and the modification of fiscal policies. One of these rebellions started in Cotacachi and spread to the wider Otavalo region (Moreno Yánez 1985) in November of 1777. It was believed that the census was carried out with the goal of establishing duties and tribute, to brand (as cattle are branded) indigenous, and to build in each town a textile mill where all had to serve.

The rebellion of 1777 counters the notion that indigenous women have not been active participants in history. The *cacicas* (female leaders and wives of indigenous chiefs) of Cotacachi feared that duties were established for their young sons (younger than 18 years, who were exempted from taxation), and fiercely opposed the reading of a document believed to start the execution of the registration. Indigenous peoples took over the town, burned down textile mills and haciendas, and killed the son-in-law of the main

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24 The mines of gold and silver of the Real Audiencia de Quito were far from being as productive as the mines of Potosí. The wealth of the Audiencia came from the textile production directed toward the market of Lima and Potosí. The advantages of the Audiencia relied on the difficulties of the European textiles to reach to the territories of the Viceroyalty, the abundance of labor with the knowledge of textile production, and the need to productively use the indigenous labor to generate tribute (Jácome 1990:159).

25 See chapter 7 of Moreno Yánez (1985:152-202) for the uprising of 1777 in the area of Otavalo (corregimiento de Otavalo).
hacienda owner, and a hacienda administrator who was said to be a customs officer and the one who had the mark to brand the indigenous.

People from Cotacachi went to Otavalo, Atuntaqui, and San Pablo in order to ignite the discontent of the population and call them to adhere to the revolt. Several indigenous peoples started uprisings in the area in response to the news coming from Cotacachi. The uprising also spread to Cayambe towards the south. These revolts in the whole area responded to the fear of incorporating younger members of the families into the tribute system. The destruction was directed toward the textile mills and haciendas in Cotacachi and Otavalo, and to the livestock and wool producing haciendas in Cayambe. The rage was directed to the two forms of colonial exploitation prevalent in the area.

In this uprising, women were active participants, as initiators, instigators, and fighters, and were responsible for some of the death and destruction that resulted from the confrontations. In the sentence passed against those involved in the revolt, it was stated that: “Attending to the fact that the indigenous women were moved by natural love, they aroused the peoples to prevent the census which they wrongly conceived of as establishing duties, to enslave their children; even though the riot has caused fatal consequences they could not have foreseen them due to their rusticity and having no connection with the main goal of preventing the census and duty.”26 What is interesting to note is that the agency of indigenous women is diminished by using the notion of “rusticity,” which implies that women could not foresee the consequences of their actions. Additionally, the sentence appeals to motherly love as a justification for women’s rebellion. The memory of this rebellion has not been preserved in the area. The indigenous women of UNORCAC’s committee and I first learned about this rebellion through an invited speaker on an anniversary of the organization. The women were delighted to learn about their fighting predecessors.

The history of the hacienda system in the area dates back to the 17th century. The process of land concentration during the 17th and especially in the 18th century resulted in the consolidation of the hacienda system, which ordered the social relationships and economic activities until the 1960s and 1970s. The exploitation of indigenous labor took the form of the huasipungo. Huasipungos emerged in the 18th century and consisted of assigning marginal plots of land of the hacienda to indigenous families for their sustenance and allowing their use of key resources such as grazing land, water, and firewood, in exchange for their work on the hacienda. The landowner class was at the top of the structure of authority. The system was based on the concertaje, or obligation to work for the land owner, under a system of debt peonage. Additionally, the hacienda system was largely independent of state control (Arias 1983).

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26 “Atendiendo a que las Indias movidas del natural amor, concitaron el Pueblo para impedir la numeración que erradamente concibieron se dirigía a establecer Aduana, para Esclavisar a sus hijos; y aunque el motín ha causado fatales consecuencias no las pudieron prever por su rusticidad y no tener conexión con el principal objeto de impedir la numeración y Aduana, que era lo único que intentaba…” Cited by Moreno Yánez (1985:163-164) (Ortography follows the original).
One of the main hacienda owners in the region of Cotacachi was the Catholic Church. The priests demanded the *diezmo* (tithe), ten percent of the agricultural production. Many older indigenous women still remember the payment of diezmo to the Church. They tell stories of priests coming to get the best of every ten *guachos* (a line in a cultivated plot) of the plots ready to be harvested. Additionally, some of those who worked for haciendas relate exploitative practices that were maintained during the Republican period and as late as the 1970s and 1980s.

In tandem with the exploitative labor arrangements practiced in haciendas and by the Church, the Municipality also forcibly recruited indigenous labor for public works in the town of Cotacachi. Indigenous women narrate that when indigenous people would come to the town to attend church, the men’s hats and women’s shawls were taken away, and they would not be returned until people had finished an assignment, for example, cleaning the town’s streets. These acts not only appropriated and exploited the labor of indigenous peoples but the confiscation of hats and shawls was a painful memory of humiliation, as these pieces of clothing mark indigenous belonging, and, moreover, within indigenous cultures also may differentiate adult status and class. These practices were common as recently as forty years ago. In order to struggle against these blatant forms of discrimination and abuse, indigenous peoples in the area started to get together in the late 1970s to formally organize. Nevertheless, this history of tense inter-ethnic relationships still permeates social relationships in Cotacachi.

The 1960s and 1970s marked the beginning of the decline of the hacienda system and the start of the modernization of the countryside, aimed at land reform in the context of a developmentalist state project. The goal of the reform was terminating the precarious work relationships of the hacienda system. According to some authors (Guerrero and Ospina cited in Ortiz 2004:63), the land reform did not significantly alter the land tenure system in Cotacachi, given that it only affected 3.5% of the land in the Andean zone of the canton. According to 1974 data, 1.1% of the landowners controlled 60% of the land, while 92% of the peasants owned 23% of the land (Ortiz 2004:61). The power of the landowning class was based in this profoundly unequal distribution of land. The agrarian reforms in the area, nevertheless, did ameliorate the precarious work relations in agriculture.

There was, according to Ortiz (2004), a simultaneous process of modernization of agriculture (mechanization and orientation to the external market); the organization of communities to obtain legal titles to the land; and access to land through market mechanisms, which changed the pattern of land tenure in Cotacachi. Nevertheless, there are three cases of struggles for hacienda land that resulted in the communities taking over the hacienda, from which only the community of Tunibamba has kept the hacienda land in the form of communal land.

The larger hacienda properties sold the land of lesser quality and in turn became medium-sized properties that invested in a process of modernization of production. Still,
the small plots of land, known as *minifundios*, comprise the majority of the properties. The average size of the communities is 144 hectares and the average size of the properties within them is 2.88 hectares (Ortiz 2012:112). Property is private with individual or family deed of ownership. However, 30% of properties have no deed of ownership (Ortiz 2012:113). The properties of the indigenous populations have gone through a process of continuous fragmentation with each generation’s inheritance. Of the indigenous families of Cotacachi, 72% own properties of less than 1 hectare (UNORCAC 2006). Data for the Cotacachi canton as a whole show that 31% of the agricultural producing units is less than 1 hectare, 68% have between 1 and 5 hectares, and only around 50 properties have more than 50 hectares (Ortiz 2004: 59). In the Andean communities of Cotacachi, *minifundismo* (small plots) is predominant, except for the zone of Peribuela in the northern area of the Andean communities of the canton.

Currently, at least four types of agricultural production coexist. First, a majority of small producers of corn, beans, tubers, and cereals, are oriented more towards self consumption than the market. These producers combine agricultural activities with wage work outside of the communities. Several of these small producers are poor campesinos whose plots of land are under 5 hectares and do not permit self-sufficiency. This is a campesino sector with high mobility (see circular migration below) but low levels of education or professional qualifications, which has an adverse effect on its incorporation into the labor market. Seventy percent of the families of this group are below the poverty line (Ortiz 2004:88). Within this group of campesinos with limited land, some people have become professional staff in NGOs or in public institutions, or work in permanent jobs in modernized haciendas.

Second, medium-sized agricultural producers linked to local and extra-local markets constitute a group of approximately one thousand landowners (25% of the total of landowners) with properties ranging from 5 to 50 hectares, and control 20% of the land (Ortiz 2004:89). Third, a group of medium to large hacienda owners (50 to 60 owners) devoted to livestock production, and the production of cereals, vegetables, and fruits have properties of approximately 100 hectares and control 60% of the land. Finally, a small group of seven entrepreneurs is linked to the agro-export of flowers or the agro-industry of turkey ranching (Ortiz 2004:64 and 90).

In tandem with agriculture and small handicraft production, the production of leather handicraft and tourism are important economic activities in the area. The leather industry is owned by mestizos and directed toward the national and Colombian markets. Some indigenous people work in the tanneries and leather workshops, but it is a business dominated by mestizo owners and workers. Although the Otavalo market attracts the bulk of tourism to the area, people in Cotacachi see tourism as an alternative economic activity. Many tourists pass through Cotacachi on their way to Cuicocha lake, but some
others are lured by the eco and cultural tourism opportunities offered in the area. In the
canton, an important middle class is linked to tourism, handicraft production, commerce,
services, and public administration. This is a group with better educational levels and
incomes and overly represented by mestizos who reside in Cotacachi town and the
parochial centers. This middle-class group has had a considerable influence in the
municipality (Ortiz 2004:90).

Indigenous peoples of Cotacachi are considered part of the Kichwa Otavalo
people. However, important differences exist between indigenous peoples of Otavalo and
indigenous peoples of Cotacachi. Although Otavaleños are internally differentiated, the
best known nationally and internationally are the transnational merchants and
entrepreneurs. Some Otavaleños’ economic success has transformed them into consumers
who form part of an emergent “leisure class” (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999). They have also
become the owners of property and businesses in the city of Otavalo. Indigenous people
of Cotacachi share cultural practices with Otavaleños but differ noticeably in economic
terms. Kichwas of Cotacachi are mainly campesino and poor, who combine several
economic strategies, as will be discussed below.

Poverty among indigenous peoples is higher in Cotacachi than in Otavalo. Data
for poverty among children and adolescents was 41% for Imbabura, but 50% in Otavalo,
and over 60% in Cotacachi. Moreover, overcrowding (more than 3 people in one room)
characterized 26% of households in Cotacachi, while it was 11% in Otavalo. It can also
be observed that more families receive the state program called “bono solidario,” a
monetary voucher of 35 dollars per month for families in poverty. In accordance with the
levels of poverty, in Cotacachi 7 out of 10 families receive the voucher, while in Otavalo
only 4 out of every 10 families receive it (Ortiz 2012:248). Additionally, indigenous
Cotacacheños have the lowest levels of education in relation to both indigenous and
mestizos of Otavalo, and mestizos and other ethnic groups of Cotacachi (Ortiz 2012:251).
These significant differences regarding social inequality separate Kichwas in Cotacachi
from their counterparts in Otavalo.

UNORCAC has a project called Runa Tupari, the Kichwa for Encountering the Indigenous, in which
families from the communities host tourists interested in experiencing the local culture first hand or in
Andean agriculture. Currently, the Municipality of Cotacachi is also considering different projects to foster
tourism in the canton, based on its great diversity of landscapes, climates, and cultures.
Changes in Rural Livelihoods and the Political Economic Context

Many development interventions still prioritize the agricultural aspects of Cotacachi livelihoods, inspired by agro-ecological efforts and essentialist views of Andeans as mainly peasants. However, as in many other rural communities of the Ecuadorian highlands, households in Cotacachi’s indigenous communities have experienced major changes in livelihood strategies that distance them from a mere characterization as small agricultural producers. Instead, the strategy of small agriculturalists relies on the diversification of livelihoods. In line with wider trends affecting the campesinado (Kearney 1996) in the last quarter of the 20th century, rural producers in Ecuador show a diversification of occupations, multiple sources of income, and increased participation in commerce, services, and construction. Luciano Martínez argues that this change, affecting with more force the mass of poor producers, is not transitory but permanent, due to the fragility of their land resources (Martínez 1999a).

Others concurred that campesinos cannot meet all their survival needs in rural areas due to a series of factors: “limited access to land, the paucity of rural employment opportunities, unstable tenancy patterns, low levels of productivity, low incomes, and lack of credit and technical assistance” (Waters cited in Flora 2006:273). Additionally, parcelization of land in Cotacachi has continued as the population has increased, and prior availability of resources (pastureland, firewood, water, and roads) accessed through work in the hacienda has ended. The small dimensions of plots of land coupled with the limited access to water and the very restricted employment opportunities in their
communities impose economic challenges to the indigenous and campesino populations of the area.

In this context, campesinos migrate to urban areas for jobs. In Cotacachi, 60% of indigenous people migrate for wage work and 35% of heads of household work away from their place of residence (Ortiz 2004:99). This migration has been defined as circular migration because it is based on “the circulation to urban areas for jobs in a context where not all needs can be met in one’s own community” (Flora 2006:273). One feature of circulation is that migrants do not intend to relocate permanently. It is viewed as a bi-local lifestyle that occurs between a rural and an urban area with a dual dependency that encompasses economic, social, and cultural relationships (Flora 2006:271-272). The mobility of circular migration in Cotacachi implies that people leave their communities to work somewhere else during the week and return during the weekends, or that they leave their communities for the day to work in nearby cities and towns, and return to their communities at the end of the day. Circular migration is key for access to remunerated work, which within the communities is limited to seasonal agricultural work in some haciendas. Therefore, in order to pursue most opportunities for wage work, some family members need to leave the community. Economic strategies of the campesinos are diversified, though, as they include the production of agricultural and small livestock for consumption and occasional selling, as well as the production of handicrafts, and commerce. This diversified strategy and the change of occupations is key to the survival of indigenous campesino families (Ortiz 2004:99), given that a permanent job is an exception for most residents of the Andean zone of Cotacachi (Flora 2006: 276).

In this mix of survival strategies, Flora found that the most common activities are the following: agriculture on home plot; housework and agriculture on home plot; handicrafts in home, agricultural laborer; construction worker, domestic help, and handicraft production. This limited range of labor opportunities is directly linked to low levels of education still prevalent among indigenous populations in the canton. Moreover, migration and other economic activities in the area are shaped by one’s gender. Men are more integrated to wage work switching between seasonal agricultural labor and construction work. Flora found that 37% of males worked in construction. Many of them work in Quito where they rent a room and go back to their communities on the weekends. Others work in construction in Cotacachi town or nearby cities such as Otavalo and Ibarra (Flora 2006:276) and return home in the evenings. Regarding agricultural labor, men work in temporary jobs on haciendas and floricolas (agro-industry of flowers). Many young single women also migrate to work as domestic workers in different locations within the province and beyond. Flora’s study found that 27% of female interviewees reported having worked as domestic help at some point in their life (Flora 2006:278). Some young women work in the town of Cotacachi, and some of them go to school at night. Those who migrate to Quito work as live-in domestics. Married women who engage in domestic work generally work on a part-time basis (Flora 2006:276-278).
In Flora’s study of circular migration, 60% of females reported engaging in housework, agriculture, and animal husbandry on home plots (Flora 2006:276). Although both men and women share some of the agricultural tasks, most of the subsistence agriculture is done by women, who are more likely to remain in the community especially after marriage. Nevertheless, men are mainly in charge of the preparation of the land and plowing. Women also make handicrafts, which is an income-generating activity they can engage in within their homes and around household responsibilities. Women’s handicrafts include embroidery, knitting, sewing on a machine, weaving with a loom, and hand-made small jewelry. This handicraft production is done on a piece work basis by individual women who sell their products at extremely low prices\(^{28}\) to the traders at the Otavalo market and to the transnational merchants from Otavalo. According to Flora’s data, a total of 41% of women reported having done handicrafts in their homes. Men also make handicrafts when they are between wage jobs. However more men than women make handicrafts in a workshop: 13.8% of men worked in a workshop in the urban center of Cotacachi (leather-item workshops) or Otavalo (weaving in looms) compared to only 2.3% of women who reported working in a handicraft workshop (Flora 2006:277).

Income levels are generally low in the area. A peon on a hacienda is paid 10 dollars for her or his day of work. A construction worker earns between US 400 and 560 dollars a month depending on his level of expertise. While currently in Ecuador a domestic worker’s salary is established at 420 dollars a month, many women are still hired in informal arrangements and their earnings vary but are normally low, around 200 or 250 dollars a month. A worker in a leather workshop earns 420 dollars a month. The salaries of bureaucrats are currently higher than what used to be prevalent for the public sector before 2007. A low-level public servant earns 600 dollars a month, while a middle-level public employee’s salary is around 1,200 dollars a month. High-level public officials may earn up to 3,000 dollars a month. A técnico of an NGO earns 1,000 dollars a month, and a higher level técnico may earn up to 1,500 dollars a month (Pamela Báez, técnica of the Red Cross).

The gender arrangement of wage labor in Cotacachi has important implications for women’s access to income, due to the fact that men have greater opportunities for wage work than women. The women that participated in my research commented on the difficulties posed by having limited funds of their own, which even impacted their capability to pay for trips to Cotacachi town, where many of their political activities took place.

Although Cotacachi indigenous campesinos leave their communities in order to secure material reproduction, they also do so in order to reproduce their rural indigenous

\(^{28}\) During my fieldwork, for instance, many women produced small decorative thread bracelets. Women were paid one US dollar for every twelve bracelets. These bracelets are sold to tourists at the Otavalo market for one dollar each.
lifestyle. The incorporation into a capitalist world system is a simultaneous act of resistance and the maintenance of indigenous identity (Flora 2006:273). Gabriela Flora argues that Cotacachi campesinos are able to remain rooted to place due to the processes of “circulation”—short term migration to work (2006:271) described earlier—maintaining a simultaneous attachment to place and cultural identity. “Even when land is poor and not large enough to ensure self-sufficiency” (Flora 2006:282), the attachment to land is remarkable “as a cultural recognition as much as an expression of the campesino origin of the indigenous leaders” (Ortiz 2004:89). For that reason, community members still aim to defend their campesino condition, disputing their lands through legal means, as demonstrated by an important project of land titling carried out by UNORCAC (Ortiz 2004:88).

**Cotacachi: a Model of Citizen Participation**

Cotacachi gained momentum during the second half of the nineties as a model of decentralized local government and citizen participation. The process was started in the administration of the first indigenous mayor of Cotacachi, Auqui Tituaña. Tituaña ran for mayor with Pachakutik, the political party of CONAIE (the most prominent national organization of indigenous peoples), in its first participation in national elections in 1996. During the three administrations of Tituaña (1996-2009), a new model for participatory democracy was established in Cotacachi, with a citizen assembly that encompasses the organizations of the canton. Cotacachi has acquired national and international recognition for the process of citizen participation. In the year 2000, for example, Cotacachi won the Dubai-Habitat Prize for governability and citizen participation, among 740 candidates from 126 countries.

Since 1997 groups from the civil society have participated in annual citizen assemblies, the definition of the development plan of the canton (Plan de Desarrollo de Cotacachi) and participatory budgets. The participatory process has been institutionalized in the Assembly of Cotacachi Canton’s Unity (Asamblea de Unidad Cantonal de Cotacachi), an organization that brings together various political actors. Some of these groups have a territorial base (urban, Andean, and subtropical areas); other groups represent different kinds of producers and artisans; others are based on age and gender; and finally, there are representatives of the local municipality. Currently, the Citizen Assembly is comprised of nineteen organizations (AUCC 2011) and constitutes a “public space of dialogue” for the discussion of citizen interest (Ortiz 2004). In every annual meeting of the assembly, hundreds of delegates from the organizations come together to define the most important issues for the population of Cotacachi and arrive at agreements and resolutions which are considered mandates to be addressed by the local municipality.

The process of political participation in Cotacachi has allowed a diverse pool of social actors to have a certain degree of control over the local government, while also
broadening democracy, institutionalizing the participation of the Assembly, and establishing permanent connections between the civil society and the municipality (Ortiz 2004). The participatory process of Cotacachi enabled the budget for development of the canton to double, through the influx of national and international cooperation resources. However, according to the actors, the funding from international and national NGOs has diminished considerably in the last years.29

Although the Assembly has been praised as an alternative for society’s participation, it has also been criticized for limiting the form of participation to the representatives of collectives. This format of participation restricts the involvement of individuals who are not part of a specific organization (Ortiz 2004). Thus, the space available for citizen participation requires that individuals belong to organizations, for which it has been evaluated as a form of corporativist participation (Ospina et al. 2006). This arrangement may present challenges for the participation of individuals as individuals. Nevertheless, the Assembly has opened spaces for the participation of old and emerging actors in the canton.

Regarding the participation of women, for example, four organizations of women from the different zones of the canton are represented in the Assembly: the Coordinadora de Mujeres Urbanas (Coordinating Council of Urban Women), Comité Central de Mujeres de la UNORCAC (Central Committee of Women of UNORCAC), Coordinadora de Mujeres de Intag (Coordinating Council of Women from Intag) and (Coordinadora de Mujeres de Manduriacos (Coordinating Council of Women from Manduriacos). The Central Committee of Women of UNORCAC is the only women’s organization that already existed at the time of the emergence of the Assembly. The other organizations have been established partly as a result of the influence of the Assembly and its demand that in order to participate in the citizen process, one must be part of an organized group.

The local scenario of citizen participation had allowed women of the canton to start or strengthen their organizations and work on an agenda to be included in the municipal plans. At the same time, the inclusion of women’s perspectives had been fundamental to the achievement of the participation of formerly underrepresented groups. The most important elements in the women’s agenda had been health with an emphasis on intercultural health; access to education and diminishing illiteracy; fighting intra-

29 Between 1996 and 2003, more than 30 NGOs and aid agencies worked in Cotacachi. The local government doubled its budget with these resources. In the period between 1996 and 1999, the funds for local development from NGOs were a little over 2 million while the municipality contributed 2.2 million, and the communities 600 thousand dollars. By the period between 2000 and 2003, the funds doubled: NGOs contributed 5.5 million, the municipality 4.8 million, and the communities 1.5 million. (Ortiz 2004:184). However, by 2009 several important projects from state and NGOs had ended and left Cotacachi. By 2009, major funders such as, Ayuda en Acción, PRODEPINE, DRI, and Doctors Without Borders had ended their activities in Cotacachi and closed their projects. Some of the técnicos I interviewed attributed the retreat of international aid funds to the 2008 economic crisis in the USA and Europe. The end of the Doctors Without Borders project had a special impact for the leaders of the Committee of Women of UNORCAC could no longer count with resources that were key to organizing activities with the women of the communities.
family and sexual violence; economic alternatives based on agroecology, handicrafts, and community tourism; access to credit; and participation in the struggles for the defense of natural resources and biodiversity (Arboleda 2006).

**UNORCAC: The Union of Indigenous and Campesino Organizations of Cotacachi**

In the context of the land reforms of 1963 and 1974 and the demise of the hacienda system, indigenous people started to organize beyond the local communities. In the second half of the 70s, a group of young indigenous intellectuals in the northern Ecuadorian Andes founded several organizations, among them, the UNORCAC, Unión de Organizaciones Campesinas e Indígenas de Cotacachi (Union of Indigenous and Campesino Organizations of Cotacachi), in order to secure land, procure basic infrastructure for indigenous communities, and create a system of bilingual education. UNORCAC is an example of what in Ecuador are called second-tier organizations (organizaciones de segundo grado), which are formed by smaller community-based or interest-based organizations and groups. Forty five communities are affiliated with UNORCAC, forty one of which are located in the Andean zone of the canton. Additionally, other organized groups from the communities are also part of the organization, among them, communal water boards (Juntas de Agua), groups of women and youth, groups of midwives and health volunteers, organizations related to the protection and management of natural resources, sport clubs and committees, groups related to tourism, handicrafts, and agroecological production. According to a census conducted by the organization in 2006, 3220 families live in the communities affiliated with UNORCAC, with a total of 15,800 people.

In its beginnings, UNORCAC was founded to struggle against racism and civil rights. One event prompted the final emergence of UNORCAC in 1977. One of the organizing leaders of UNORCAC, Rafael Perugachi, was assassinated by the local police, after an unjustified incarceration and brutal beating. Several men and women recounted to me the mistreatment of indigenous people, and forms of segregation prevalent at the time, such as bus seats reserved to white mestizos, or the inability to enter certain public buildings. The assassination of Perugachi marked UNORCAC as an organization with an

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30 Among the intellectuals that founded indigenous organizations in the province of Imbabura are indigenous women and men who have played important roles in the national indigenous movement and politics since the 1990s, such as Blanca Chancoso, Alberto and Segundo Anrrango, and Pedro de la Cruz. Other important political leaders from the area are Nina Pacari and Auqui Tituaña.

31 The following are the communities affiliated to UNORCAC per parish:

- Imantag parish: Piñán, Guananí, Pucalpa, Peribuela, Quitumba, Morlan, Ambí Grande, Colimbuela, Perafán.

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agenda not only oriented to land demands, but also with an emphasis on contesting the
inter-ethnic relations of exclusion and exploitation and defense of indigenous culture
(UNORCAC 2006). Later on, with the affiliation of UNORCAC to FENOC, 32 the
demands for land and agrarian reform were included.

Almost from its inception, UNORCAC has participated in local politics. In 1979,
Alberto Anrrango, founder of UNORCAC, was elected to the Municipal council, and was
the first indigenous person to hold this political office in the canton. Since then,
UNORCAC has become a fundamental political actor in Cotacachi, largely influencing
the election of mayors in the canton. Anrrango currently holds the office of mayor of the
municipality. The former mayor, Auqui Tituaña, who ran and won three consecutive
elections (1996-2009), was also backed by UNORCAC, although in his last term he grew
apart from this organization and other civil society organizations in the canton. This
determined his loss in the election of 2009 against Anrrango.

During the 1980s, UNORCAC concentrated its efforts on education and the
procurement of basic services and infrastructure for the communities. A program of
literacy in Kichwa that started in 1981 was key in forging new leaders in the communities
and strengthening the connection between the communities and UNORCAC, as a second-
tier, supra communal organization. The bilingual teachers established a permanent
dialogue between the communal authorities and UNORCAC. UNORCAC also obtained
basic infrastructural constructions and services such as roads, electricity, communal
houses, sport fields, daycare centers, small credit opportunities, and health provision. The
funds and administration of the projects to provide communities with the services came
from both public and private organizations 33. During the 1980s, UNORCAC was
considered by the communities as the “municipio chiquito” or municipality for the
indigenous, since it was providing services and infrastructure to the communities in stark
contrast to the municipality of Cotacachi, which had systematically neglected rural and
indigenous communities.

In the 1990s UNORCAC expanded its development agenda. Although it was
founded with a clear ethnic agenda for contesting structures of discrimination in
Cotacachi, UNORCAC has also become a development organization. UNORCAC
negotiated with NGOs for gaining direct and active participation in the definition and
execution of projects and the use of funds. UNORCAC also tried to be the coordinator of
projects that came directly to the communities from diverse development organizations.

32 FENOC is currently FENOCIN, Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Indígenas Campesinas y
Negras, National Confederation of Indigenous, Campesina and Afro-Ecuadorian Organizations. This is a
national organization whose agenda underscores campesino issues such as access to land and water, the
rights of agricultural producers, and food sovereignty. It is linked to the political left and the Socialist
Party.
33 Among these organizations and institutions are: the Development Project FODERUMA, the NGO Centro
Andino de Acción Popular (CAAP), the Ministries of Social Well-Being, Education, Health, and Project
DRI for Integrated Rural Development.
Due to the strength of the indigenous movement in the 1990s and to the UN Decade for Indigenous Peoples (1995-2004), and the process of citizen participation in the canton, UNORCAC increased its access to funding from international cooperation and local NGOs.\footnote{While between 1977 and 1990 UNORCAC had worked with only two or three NGOs at the time, after 1996 UNORCAC coordinated its activities with more than ten different NGOs and state institutions. Among these institutions were: Swissaid (water systems); DRI (credit, infrastructure, production, environment, organizational strengthening); FIA (technical assistance, organizational strengthening); Doctors Without Borders (traditional health; midwives); Heifer (sustainable agriculture); UCODEP (sustainable agriculture); SANREM (research); PRODEPINE (school infrastructure, production, legal mediators, micro watershed management); CESA (irrigation, forestation); Ayuda en Acción (health, education); DINEIB (bilingual education) (Ortiz 2004:103).} UNORCAC oriented its efforts toward economic development, ethno-tourism, natural resource management, agro-ecological production for food sovereignty, indigenous health, cultural identity, and “a strong promotion of indigenous women’s participation in programs and projects” (UNORCAC 2008:25).

The leadership structure of the organization is formed by a president, four vice-presidents representing the parishes where the communities are located, and the presidents of the following interest groups: the Committee of Women of UNORCAC; Health; Education, Culture, and Patrimony; Natural Resources; Sports and Recreation, Credit, Production, and Commercialization; Childhood and Adolescence; and Youth. For the actual management and execution of projects, UNORCAC has hired technical and support staff (the so called técnicos) organized in four areas of work: organizational strengthening, social development, economic development, and natural resources. The technical staff is directed by mestizo workers, who still figure prominently in the decisions of ongoing projects and programs. The indigenous authorities claim that this is a weakness in the organization, but they resort to mestizo professionals because of the limited availability of indigenous professionals from UNORCAC’s communities. However, they hope that as youth achieve higher education, UNORCAC staff will become entirely indigenous.

UNORCAC bases its work on the approach to development known as “Development with Identity.” For UNORCAC development with identity is the pursuit of Alli Kawsay, a Kichwa concept that translates to living well, and has been used in the most recent constitution of Ecuador as an alternative to development based on the equilibrium between human beings, and between human beings and nature (see Hernández 2009).\footnote{The concepts of Sumak (Alli) Kawsay in Kichwa, and Suma Qamaña in Aymara are incorporated in the last constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia, and borrow from indigenous cosmovision and its concept of living well. The ideas and proposals emanating from the concepts are still emerging, and are a topic currently debated by organizations as well as intellectuals.} In the same vein, for UNORCAC, development should not make nature an object of commodification of the Pacha Mama (Mother Earth) and the natural resources she possesses. According to UNORCAC, Alli Kawsay means:

“that the communities access a dignified life, that they satisfy their basic needs, that they maintain their relationship with nature, preserve its natural resources,
and exercise their thinking, feeling, and being part of history as sovereign” (UNORCAC 2008:34).

UNORCAC proposes a holistic approach that is mirrored in four areas of work that structure the activities of the organization: organizational strengthening, social development, economic development, and natural resources. According to UNORCAC, the intersection of the four types of activities makes Alli Kawsay possible. In contrast to traditional development, for UNORCAC development with identity highlights the equilibrium between human beings and nature and counters its commodification. Development with identity is seen as moving beyond the understanding of development as material progress. For the interviewees at the organization, the approach is not only respectful of indigenous cultures but strives to defend, rescue, and promote indigenous ways of life. As many other indigenous organizations-NGOs, however, UNORCAC is to a great extent dependent on the influx of funding from international cooperation, and its political legitimacy relies heavily on the ability to channel projects to the communities.

In the context of poverty, limited economic opportunities, and migration for wage work that characterizes the communities of the Andean zone of Cotacachi, UNORCAC’s power is mediated by the development resources that it can distribute. Among the main projects of the organization are those that give access to concrete and tangible resources. For instance, the project of land titling was very popular, as community members want to formalize their land tenure for both economic and symbolic reasons. Fifty six percent of the families that belong to UNORCAC’s communities do not have titles to their lands (UNORCAC 2008:56). In the same vein, the projects for the construction and maintenance of community water systems for irrigation and consumption are critical for communities with no access to public systems of water. At least twelve communities only have access to water through community water systems; 75% of the water consumed in the communities is not potable; finally, 55% of the communities do not have irrigation water (UNORCAC 2008:57). Other projects provide access to credit in the form of money or small animals. Some of the women could only access credit through the microcredit projects of UNORCAC, because they found the local credit union’s requirements for credit hard to meet.

Communities also receive resources related to agroecological production: products to diversify their gardens; training in agroecological techniques; and initiatives for women’s groups’ production. As community members use a variety of economic strategies, small projects for income generation become part of these diversified livelihoods. Some projects involved the breeding of small animals for consumption and commercialization (chickens, guinea pigs, porks). Others are related to handicraft production. During my fieldwork, a popular project was one in which women were trained in embroidery and the use of the sewing machine in order to manufacture the blouses for the local attire. Finally, some community members are part of a project of
agro and ecotourism called Runa Tupari and receive training for serving the tourists. Along with multiple workshops and training sessions, some community members can also access formal education. A recent project involved scholarships for high school students funded by the expatriate community in Cotacachi. UNORCAC distributes these development resources taking into consideration people’s need as well as whether they participate in the call for activities, meetings, or marches of the organization.

While in this chapter I have provided an overview of the canton of Cotacachi with an emphasis on the situation of indigenous peoples, the process of citizen participation, and UNORCAC, in the following chapter I offer information on the situation of indigenous women both in Latin America and Ecuador. The situation of discrimination and exclusion will be presented using different social and economic indexes. This information will be complemented with indigenous women’s own memories of discrimination in Cotacachi.
Chapter 3: Against the Odds: Women’s Participation in Cotacachi

Somos como la paja del cerro, que se arranca y vuelve a crecer;
y de paja del cerro cubriremos al mundo
Dolores Cacuango

Introduction

The words of Dolores Cacuango that open this section point to the endurance of indigenous peoples, even in the face of processes that have tried to erase them, to exterminate them as if they were bad weeds. Cacuango, eloquent as she was, tells us that indigenous people will come back, stubborn, tenacious, as paja del cerro [grass from the mountain], and will take over. In this chapter I offer antecedents that will help illuminate subsequent chapters, regarding the structural forces that adversely affect indigenous peoples in general, and indigenous women in particular. In tandem with information regarding the situation of indigenous women in several social and economic indexes, I will offer the remembered and lived experience of exploitation and discrimination that have marked the interethnic relations in Cotacachi. However, in order not to victimize the women I have collaborated with, I also offer their evaluation of the changes in their relationship with dominant groups, which they attribute to the political struggles of UNORCACA and the wider indigenous movement. Additionally, I present a brief history that highlights the political participation of women in UNORCACA, a project that women from the Central Committee intended to be for the recovery of their own political participation and achievements. As Dolores Cacuango envisioned, they have endured, against all odds.

Persisting Inequalities: Indigenous Women, “the Most Disadvantaged among the Disadvantaged”

As a result of processes of social exclusion and discrimination that originated in colonial times and continued in the republican era, indigenous and Afro populations are particularly disadvantaged in the race- and class-based inequalities of Latin America. Indigenous peoples represent between 8% and 10% of the total population in the region. However, this population is overly represented in assessments of poverty and indexes of social inequality compared to national averages and dominant ethnic groups (Hall and

36 “We are like mountain hay, even if pulled up, it grows again; and we will cover the world of mountain hay” Dolores Cacuango is one of the pioneers of the Ecuadorian Indigenous Movement. 37 Here I am paraphrasing Sieder and Sierra, when they describe the situation of indigenous women as “the most disadvantaged of this disadvantaged sector [indigenous peoples]” (2010:11).
Patrinos 2006; Hopenhayn, et al. 2006). In the region, seven out of every ten indigenous families are poor, and three of them are extremely poor (Lux de Coti 2010). Ecuador follows that trend. While the 2010 census established the national poverty average (measured by non-satisfied basic needs) at 45.6%, the figure escalates to 82.5% for the indigenous population (INEC 2010a). The patterns of social inequality are not only ethnic but also gender-differentiated: indigenous women are poorer, less likely to access schooling and more likely to be monolingual than their male counterparts, less likely to accumulate (or keep) property, and earn considerably less than the rest of the population (Sieder and Sierra 2010).

Indigenous and Afro populations are also more likely to enter the labor market in unfavorable conditions than other groups, due to labor discrimination and limited access to education. Indigenous and Afro populations in Latin America face problems of unemployment, low-quality employment, and systematic gaps in income, in comparison to non indigenous populations. Precarious, informal, and non-waged work indexes present marked ethnic and gendered patterns. In general, indigenous women are overly represented in commerce (often informal), self-employment, and domestic work (Hopenhayn, et al. 2006:31).

In Ecuador, 88.3% of indigenous women are underemployed. Women represent the higher percentages of informal work for both urban and rural areas. Among rural women of all ethnicities, 85.5% work in the informal sector, while only 5.3% work in the formal sector. Moreover, only 4.3% of the indigenous female labor force works in formal employment (Chisaguano 2008). Additionally, a very high percentage (75.3%) of those indigenous women who are monolingual in an indigenous language are highly likely to be illiterate, and marginalized from the labor market. This differentiated access to quality work affects income levels especially for women, since men represent the higher percentage of the formal sector (Chisaguano 2008). According to the International Labor Organization, indigenous workers in the region make on average approximately half of what dominant groups make and part of this income gap is due to discrimination and quality of schooling (UN 2009:22).

Limited access to education is one of the factors that affect inequality and exclusion for indigenous and Afro populations in Latin America. Although there have been improvements in educational goals for both indigenous and non indigenous populations, the gap between the groups remains. Illiteracy rates escalate to 28% and 12% for indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian populations respectively, in marked contrast with white populations, with a 5% illiteracy rate (León Guzmán 2003). Indigenous populations have lower levels of schooling than those who are non-indigenous. This difference is even more conspicuous when observing gender. Illiteracy tends to be higher especially among indigenous women. While the national average for illiteracy is 6.7%,

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38 According to Chisaguano (2008), only a 2.2% of indigenous women are monolingual. A majority are bilingual: 56.5% of indigenous women.
the percentage of indigenous illiterate is noticeably higher than all other groups: 20.4%. Disaggregated information by gender shows an even higher incidence of illiteracy among indigenous women: 26.7% of indigenous women reported that they do not read and write compared to 13.7% of indigenous men who reported not knowing how to read and write. In rural areas, percentages may escalate. In cantons such as Cotacachi, 41.7% of indigenous women are illiterate, in contrast to 27.8% of indigenous men (INEC 2010a).

The situation of indigenous populations reveals systematic disadvantages regarding access to, promotion within, and permanence in the school system. Indigenous populations average of 2.9 years of schooling below the national figure (10.4 years of schooling nationally, compared to 7.5 years of schooling among indigenous populations) (INEC 2010a). Indigenous women present lower levels of enrollment at all levels of schooling compared to indigenous men, in contrast to what occurs in other groups (León Guzmán 2003). Indigenous women of Cotacachi are an example of this trend: they are the group with the lowest level of schooling in the canton. Indigenous women have 6.2 years, compared with 9.3 years among mestiza women, and 10.3 years among white women (INEC 2010). The difference in education translates to important gaps in income, also generated by the differential access to the labor market, occupational segmentation, and salary discrimination based on race.

The limited provision of infrastructure (such as potable water and sanitation) and access to health services adversely affects the health status of indigenous populations, especially those residing in rural areas. Although the fertility rate has been in decline in Latin America in the last decades, the highest fertility rates are found among indigenous populations (Hopenhayn, et al. 2006:35). In Ecuador, access to health services is limited, especially if gender, ethnicity, and geographical location are factored in. More than half of deliveries in the rural area are made without medical support (León cited in Picq 2009:129). In the indigenous cantons of the highlands of Ecuador, the 85% of deliveries are made without medical attention, while the national figure is 59% (Conejo 1998:10). Infant mortality rates are also higher among indigenous populations. Research conducted in two indigenous communities of Cotacachi (Colimbuela and Cumbas) showed that, while the reported national infant mortality rate was 59 per 1,000 live births, in these locations the figures increased to 83.3 and 66.7 per 1,000 born alive (Conejo 1998:11).

In addition to infrastructural shortcomings and inequities in the allocation of health resources, indigenous peoples still face discrimination in health institutions. Discrimination and mistreatment by health personnel were consistently reported by indigenous women from Cotacachi during my research. In Cotacachi, a considerable percentage of deliveries in indigenous communities is still carried out by midwives: 36% of all deliveries, in contrast to 30.3% by physicians and 33.7% by family members (CRUZ-ROJA n/a:5). The hostility found in the formal health system keeps many indigenous women away from searching for prenatal health attention in Cotacachi. Many of the women I met and interviewed in my work with UNORCAC were midwives. They
stated that, although there have been several initiatives to foster collaborative attention between the formal health system and the work of the midwives, health professionals still act in condescending ways, when they even bother to recognize the work of these informal health providers.

Not only structural violence, but also direct forms of violence adversely affect indigenous populations in Latin America. As some have suggested, it is important to recognize the intersectionality of violence that affects indigenous women, in order to avoid reducing it to forms of interpersonal violence (Newdick 2005; Sieder and Sierra 2010:12). Violence affecting indigenous women has to be understood “in relationship to aspects of identity beyond gender, using an approach that accounts for the ways that identities and systems of domination interact to create the conditions for women’s lives” (Sieder and Sierra 2010:12). Latin American indigenous populations, in general, and indigenous women more poignantly, bear the brunt of violence by a myriad of both state and non-state actors (Sieder and Sierra 2010).

Violence by state actors occurs in different contexts. Firstly, violence is exercised in the discriminatory daily encounters with state institutions, such as the judicial, educational, health, and administrative institutions. Women of Cotacachi related several stories of these painful encounters (see below). Secondly, violence is exercised by state actors when indigenous peoples demand their collective rights, over territory and natural resources. In that vein, the Andean Coordinating Council of Indigenous Organizations, CAOI, has denounced recent violations of collective rights in Colombia, Chile, and Peru, and a trend in the region to criminalize social protest through the employment of rules of exception or emergency and the use of criminal proceedings against indigenous and community leaders (CAOI 2008). In Ecuador, the Attorney General is currently investigating 33 criminal processes that have been started against indigenous persons in 11 provinces of the country, for crimes of terrorism, sabotage, conspiracy, obstruction of roads, environmental offenses, kidnapping, and slander, among others (ECUARUNARI 2012).39 Thirdly, indigenous peoples are vulnerable to increased violence occurring in zones that have been militarized, as the state responds to armed conflict or organized crime.

Non state actors, such as paramilitary forces, guerrillas, and armies associated with organized crime or powerful economic interests may disproportionately impact indigenous women and men. Colombia is a case in point. This country presents the highest incidence of displacement on the continent as a result of the ongoing armed conflict. Although indigenous peoples are a minority in terms of population numbers, they are overly represented in the displaced population. Moreover, gender dynamics

39 This is the case of the process against indigenous leader and former administration official, Mónica Chuji, who was sued by a high administration official for libel, when she called him a new rich. The lawsuit against Chuji was later filed by the judge. Nevertheless, CONAIE, the prominent national indigenous organization, has denounced this kind of state prosecution as a way to intimidate and silence indigenous leaders and opposition (see article “Mónica Chuji: No me voy a ir del país” in Comercio 2011).
affect indigenous women in atrocious manners: “Rape is a tactic commonly used by paramilitary groups against indigenous women in order to accelerate displacement” (Sieder and Sierra 2010:14). Colombian female leaders from that country’s four national indigenous organizations have documented cases of forced displacement and sexual violence affecting indigenous women and endangered indigenous peoples such as the Nukak Makuk. Colombian indigenous female leaders have been able to obtain orders of protection issued by the Constitutional Court. The concerted efforts of the indigenous women from the national organizations and the community organizations resulted in orders of protection for the women affected by armed conflict. Nevertheless the process of implementation of these orders has not come to fruition.

In addition to these direct state and non-state forms of violence, both indigenous and non indigenous women face violence from their own communities and families. According to the last national survey on gender violence against women, in Ecuador, 6 out of every 10 Ecuadorian women (60.6%) have experienced some form of gender violence, i.e., physical, psychological, sexual, or patrimonial violence. From the women who have suffered some form of gender violence, 1 of every 4 has endured sexual violence. Indigenous and Afro Ecuadorian women report higher figures of experiencing gender violence. The higher figure is reported by indigenous women: 67.8%, while among mestizas the figure is 59.1% (INEC 2012). Forms of gender and domestic violence go unreported. A 2004 survey found that only 32% of indigenous women sought help of some kind in cases of physical or sexual violence, and that a handful of them (4.5%) resorted to state institutions created to protect women in such cases (Pequeño 2009:156). Even when indigenous women turn to state institutions and courts or to communal authorities, available evidence suggests they do not necessarily find redress in cases of sexual and non-sexual violence: “[i]n many senses a culture of fear and silence prevails in cases of sexual abuse and rape, as it does in non-indigenous contexts the world over. Although it is difficult to generalize, indigenous justice systems generally do not adequately guarantee satisfactory access to justice for indigenous women and rights when such abuses occur” (Sieder and Sierra 2010:19). Therefore, impunity adds another layer of violence to indigenous women’s experiences.

Formal political participation is another arena of inequality for indigenous and non indigenous women. Quota laws have been established in several Latin American countries in order to remedy the underrepresentation of women at all levels of political office. In the past decades women have gained visibility in the region’s politics. Four women are current presidents in Latin America (Laura Chinchilla from Costa Rica, Dilma Rousseff from Brasil, Michelle Bachelet from Chile, and Cristina Fernández from Argentina). In Ecuador, reforms from 1997 and 2000 have fostered to a certain extent the political participation of women. Nina Pacari, a prominent female indigenous leader,

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40 Workshop with indigenous female leaders from COICA’s member organizations. Puyo, Ecuador, October 2010.
intellectual, and current judge of the Constitutional Court of Ecuador, found that the participation of women at all levels of national politics rose from 5.3% in 1998 to 24.8% in 2000 (Pacari 2004:3).

Nevertheless, the quotas, which were gradually raised to full parity in Ecuador, have not been achieved. By the year 2002, women only represented 14.6% of the congress (Picq 2009:132). The figure is higher for political office at the more local levels, reaching 30%. The majority of those women elected are mestizas. Although indigenous women actively participated in the indigenous uprisings of the 1990s, they are still marginalized from formal politics and indigenous key political office. Indigenous women are virtually absent from the electoral lists of political parties. Thus, some argue that the quota system has failed dismally for indigenous women (Picq 2009:133). Moreover, indigenous women seem to be discriminated against within their communities when they achieve political office, and they receive little help from their families.

Indigenous women’s social location results from intersections of several systems of inequality. They are overrepresented among the poor and the illiterate. They are affected by limited educational opportunity which constrains their employment opportunities. Limited provision of infrastructure and services characterizes some of their communities. Indigenous women find discrimination in the wider society and the state institutions. Moreover, they are affected by forms of violence from state and non-state actors that distress their communities and expressions of domestic violence within them. Finally, they are underrepresented in politics in their communities and beyond.

Although structural forces play against indigenous populations in general, and indigenous women in particular, the indigenous movement has become a major political actor in Ecuador as well as in other countries in Latin America. It is important not to underestimate the impact that the indigenous movement has had in international, national, and local contexts since the 1990s (Assies, et al. 2002; Van Cott 2000; Van Cott 2004; Warren and Jackson 2002; Yashar 2005). It is imperative as well to recognize the enormous symbolic force of the noteworthy presence of indigenous women in the national political scene in Ecuador (Sieder and Sierra 2010). In what follows I explore how indigenous women themselves think about their lived experience of discrimination and the importance of indigenous peoples and their own political organization to gain respect and recognition.

**Memories of Exploitation, Discrimination, and Racism, and the Political Organization in Cotacachi**

Even if indigenous women still find several expressions of social inequality and discrimination that affect their everyday experiences, they also contend that the political struggle of indigenous organizations has impacted the relationship between indigenous peoples and other groups in ways that, although still discriminatory, differ from the
memories of the past, previous to the emergence of their organization. Many of the
interviewees remember the type of interaction between the indigenous and mestiza
populations in Cotacachi as marked with extreme forms of racism, discrimination, and
exploitation of indigenous labor. Indigenous women and other indigenous peoples from
Cotacachi reported having experienced themselves, or having heard from their parents or
grandparents, everyday forms of discrimination as well as forms of unequal treatment in
public institutions (mainly public offices, schools, and health institutions). Additionally,"they reported forms of labor exploitation in the hacienda and Cotacachi town, or enacted
by representatives of the Catholic church, that were still common in Cotacachi even as
late as the 1980s.

Several women who participated in this research remember first hand experiences
of working in the hacienda, or relate the experiences of their parents as hacienda workers.
Women recount different forms of hacienda exploitation, such as long, exhausting
working hours; insignificant or no payment at all; confiscation of belongings; no
recognition of the right to a plot of land after a life-time of service at the hacienda; all of
these, in tandem with forms of verbal and physical abuse. María, a woman who
participated in the first years of emergence of UNORCAC, remembers:

... we saw and we heard a lot of things about the patrones [masters] –nowadays it
is not so much like that- that we lived marginalized by the haciendas, controlled
by the patrones. I am a servant [criada] born in the hacienda of Peribuela. My
parents were from there, and, what did they receive? They [the patrones] just
evicted us. I had a plot al partido. The little piece of land they gave me I was
hoping they didn’t take away from me. If the organization had existed, perhaps I
had not lost my little plot. They just evicted us, and took it away from us. They
made me sow five hectares and I planted wheat, and what? They took all of that
away saying that I do not live there. I told them ‘I am from here, I am from here.
Why would I let my plot go?’ Nothing. They took it away and I had to come live
here [in another community where she resides] (Interview with María Lita).

This woman remembers her father coming back from work exhausted, after
having worked from dawn to dusk, no matter the weather conditions: “in the storms he
used to be working until so late in the afternoon.” The work was especially strenuous
during the harvest time, when he worked until after dark, and came back home “una
lástima (a shame), so tired.” Humiliation and mistreatment accompanied exploitation:
“He said the patron just insulted us; the majordomo insulted us, that because we do not
harvest quickly, everything is wet. It is an abuse.” Many women also mentioned that
indigenous peoples were not always paid for their work, and that when paid, the payment

41 “Al partido or al partir” is a production arrangement in which the owner of a plot of land lends it to a
farmer, who plants and works the land. At the time of the harvest, the production is divided in half: one half
for the owner of the land and the other one for the worker.
42 “Mayordomo” refers to a farm manager in charge of the work and control of laborers in the hacienda.
was ludicrous. Other forms of abuse were related to the control of the hacienda resources. For example, a woman who also participated in the first years of UNORCAC, remembers that when she was a child she used to herd the animals, and that when an animal had entered hacienda pastures, the majordomo confiscated it, or took away the woman’s shawl. Then, when the owner went to recuperate her belongings, she had to weed twenty lines on a planted field, before getting back what was taken away from her.

Forms of exploitation of indigenous labor prevailed beyond the hacienda. That is the case of the use of forced and unpaid indigenous labor for public works. The mother of one of the first women participating in UNORCAC related that the municipal police of Cotacachi used to confiscate the hats and shawls of indigenous people when they left the church after the dominical service, and did not return their belongings until after they had cleaned the streets and sidewalks in Cotacachi downtown. It has been reported as well that municipal authorities forced the indigenous populations to build infrastructure such as the paving (adoquinado) of the city, the pier of the lake Cuicocha, and the road to Intag, the subtropical area of the canton. Not only public authorities but also the Church took advantage of indigenous labor. Using the old system of diezmos y primicias, tithes and first fruits, representatives of the church appropriated the product of the labor of indigenous peoples in Cotacachi. During the time of harvest, the primicieros (people who collected the primicias or first fruits) went to indigenous plots and took the produce of one out of every ten lines planted, and transported it to the convents or parishes. One of the current members of the Committee of Women of UNORCAC remembers:

Since I was a little child, I thought they must have been the owners. They just came and took it away, with no hesitation. When I grew up, I asked why they take things away. ‘Just because it is like that, because the priest is the owner.’ I did not understand that. After a while, that stopped. They used to be the first ones to take things from the plots. It used to be even worse before. That is what my mom and my dad told me (Interview with Susana de la Cruz).

The control of the church was strong and the diezmos and primicias continued to be collected in some communities up to 1984, when the opposition by UNORCAC to this type of tribute became effective (García Bravo 2002:289). Besides the hacienda owners and church representatives, mestizo people also exploited indigenous labor. Some mestizos owned small plots of land that indigenous people cultivated in sharecropping (al partir, or half and a half) arrangements. A woman from the Committee of Women of UNORCAC recalled that her parents cultivated in sharecrop arrangements but did not receive any assistance from the mestizo owners to help grow the plot. They only came at the time of the harvest and then demanded: “do not take that [the produce], because we have to harvest together.” She recalls that the mestizos also asked the indigenous

43 Presentation of Project: “Strengthening the Participation and Political Incidence of the Central Committee of Women of UNORCAC” to the Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha.
sharecroppers to come to clean their houses and gardens, and do other domestic work at their houses.

Along with forms of exploitation of the indigenous labor, indigenous people in Cotacachi experienced overt and painful forms of racism and discrimination in their interaction with state and social institutions. Indigenous women relate that their people were sometimes prohibited from entering the buildings where state institutions had their offices. Women had an even harder time in their interaction with state representatives, with their mixture of racism, patriarchal views, and paternalism. When indigenous women needed to get a service or consult about it in a state institution, sometimes the officials did not even listen to their request. As one interviewee recalls: “Go get your husband so that he explains it well. Go get your husband. I will not talk to you. Go get your husband.” Indigenous people were also marginalized from holding political office beyond the communal context. In the parishes, the smallest political division in the country, for instance, only white-mestizos held public office. A woman who participated in the first years of UNORCAC and later became a communal authority recounts:

Indigenous people used to live marginalized, crushed by the white people. For instance, here, in our parish, only the white, the big ones ruled in everything. The poor Indian, excuse me, silenced. In a meeting they could not speak out, they could never be a dirigente [elected leader]. No! We are human, the indígena also has the right to be something, and not because the other ones are the señores blancos [white masters], we are going to stay still, so that they step on us, so that they rule at their will. No. There is a limit for everything; there is a time for everything. We, the indígenas here and now are rising. Now the white people are settling down. In the parish, an indígena was never the president of the water council, never. Or the president of the parish council, never. Only white people. Whatever they said, we had to do. They sent us to sweep the streets (Interview with María Lita).

For indigenous people, and for indigenous women in particular, health and educational institutions have been the site where they have found direct attacks on and devaluation of their cultural expressions, and forms of discriminatory and hostile treatment: “when we went to the health post [subcentro de salud], all the señoras sat on the bench, in the waiting room. The indigenous women always sat on the floor.” Several indigenous women who attended schools in Cotacachi downtown referred to the unfair mistreatment they suffered: “they [school teachers] thought that the indigenous child was inferior. I personally remember that they treated us as dumb, as dirty [de tontos, de cochinos]. And if we could not do something, they yelled at us, they hit us.”

One woman who participated in the first years of UNORCAC and who currently works for a renowned graduate university in Quito, remembers that when she went to a high school in Quito to continue with her studies, her classmates made fun of her because of her traditional dress. They used to call her ‘diana.’ “Diana?” I replied in doubt when
she told me the story. She explained to me that this meant ‘de anaco.’ This word play points to the long wrapped skirt used in the traditional outfit of women of the zone of Cotacachi and Otavalo, i.e., the anaco. On the other hand, the change of vowels from an open e to a closed i from ‘de’ to ‘di’ is one of the forms mestizos use to mock indigenous accents. ‘Diana[co]’ meant the one who wears anaco, and was a disparaging comment, a shorthand for her devalued ethnicity.

Everyday life was charged with experiences of overt racism and mistreatment. One example often given by indigenous women I met was the unfair treatment on public transportation. Although in Ecuador there were no formal regulations similar to those during the Jim Crow period in the South of the United States, informal norms for the use of public services based on racial and ethnic discrimination did exist in Cotacachi, and these norms relegated indigenous people to second class status. On the buses, for instance, indigenous people always had to cede their seats to the mestizos and had to go to the rear of the bus. A member of one of the women’s groups affiliated with the Committee of Women of UNORCAC recounts:

Now we have respect in the buses, because before, on the buses, they (driver assistants) pushed us, ‘move, move india,’ they said. To the señoras they said, ‘señoras, come here to the front,’ ‘you, india, go to the rear, go the rear, india’ […] We had our sacks, we used to be in the way with our sacks: ‘This kipika [Kichwa for sack or load] we do not accept here, go carry that to the house’ said the driver assistant and made us get off the bus. […] ‘Get out of the way,’ they said and pushed us to the rear, even when we were carrying the children (Interview with Virginia Guaján).

Language and accents have also been an important mark of ethnic difference and thus have been used to discriminate against indigenous populations. The last two constitutions have granted to the indigenous peoples the right to “keep, develop, and strengthen their identity and traditions in the spiritual, cultural, linguistic, social, political, and economic domains” (Constitution of 1998, article 84, and Constitution of 2008, article 57; emphasis added) (IWGIA, et al. 2010). However, before this constitutional recognition, indigenous people were ridiculed when they used indigenous names. Some of the leaders of the indigenous movement in Ecuador did change their Spanish names to indigenous names long before these constitutional reforms were passed, as a form of contestation to the language discrimination. That is the case, for example, of the national indigenous leader Nina Pacari, formerly María Estela Vega, or the former mayor of Cotacachi, Auki Tituaña, formerly Segundo Antonio Males. Nowadays indigenous children in Cotacachi do receive indigenous names. Indigenous women who participated in this research reported the following:
When we spoke in Kichwa, they told us, ‘speak in Christian,’” they said. ‘Do not speak nonsense [tonterías], speak in Christian,’ they said. ‘Speak in Spanish, do not speak in your…’ It used to be like that. [...] It is a good thing that we use indigenous names. Way back then we only used mestizo names [María: why?] Because the mestizos used to say ‘pick a Christian name; do not pick a dog’s name.’ They used to say that: ‘dog’s name,’ --our Kichwa name. ‘Christian name’ was the name of the mestizos (Interview with Virginia Alta).

Above, I have selected examples of forms of exploitation, racism, and discrimination that indigenous women associate with a time prior to the formation of UNORCAC in 1977 and to the general ascendance of the indigenous movement in Ecuador. Indigenous women and others find that interethic relationships have changed in Cotacachi and beyond. Although indigenous peoples still suffer the brunt of the colonial legacy of racism that affects Latin American societies, it is imperative to recognize that one of the gains of indigenous struggles has been the perceived changes in the treatment that indigenous peoples receive. As scholars, we tend to speak of power and how it affects people’s lives, but if we do not see how people themselves understand their situation, we may end up further (or over) victimizing them, and obscuring what they consider their achievements. In what follows I briefly trace the participation of women in their second-tier organization, as they consider it one of their achievements.

Women Recovering Memories of and for Political Participation

When I was conducting preliminary research a year prior to my fieldwork and establishing formal permission to conduct my research, the women of the Central Committee of Women of UNORCAC asked me, in return for their acceptance of my research, to write a history of the Committee. UNORCAC has produced some documentation of its organizational history. However, women felt that those accounts do not include the participation of women and their contributions to the organization. They wanted to rescue and highlight the work that women have done for the organization. Researchers are asked to support people or organizations that they collaborate with in several different ways. I was expecting to be asked to write a project proposal in order to get funding for the women of the organization. I was, to a certain extent, surprised by their petition. Social memory is a process of construction of the past that is undertaken in a constant relation with the needs of the present (Jelin 2002). Indigenous women’s leadership in Cotacachi is, as it is in other parts of Ecuador, “not a consolidated fact but a process in progress” (Cervone 1998:233). A desire to count with a history of their own, a

44 Note the conflation of Christian with Spanish, and with white-mestizo. The phrase “hablar en cristiano” is a saying that is used to refer to proper Spanish in general, but was used to refer to the variety of Spanish from Castilla, “Castellano,” which became the official version of Spanish.
return to the past, is a way for women of Cotacachi to back up and legitimate their political participation in the present. In processes of memory and identity the search for dignity is central (Portelli 1991). Not only in Cotacachi but in Ecuador, the ascendance of the indigenous movement has resulted in an interest in rescuing from oblivion the history and memories of indigenous women leaders. That is the case of indigenous and union leaders Dolores Cacuango and Tránsito Amaguaña who struggled for agrarian reforms for land, education, and respect for indigenous peoples (Miño Grijalva 2006; Rodas 2005).

I found useful Ortiz’s periodization of the recent history of Cotacachi (from the 1970s and on) and I will follow his three-period division (Ortiz 2004:78-86) as a guiding device with the purpose of highlighting indigenous women’s participation in the different periods. A first phase, between 1970 and 1981 is the moment of the formation of indigenous citizenship in the context of conflict with the traditional hacienda power. UNORCAC appeared in a period of transition, after the land reforms of 1963 and 1974, which dismantled the servitude-like arrangements of the hacienda. Even if the struggle for the land did, in part, inspire the appearance of indigenous organizations, in the case of UNORCAC, the assassination of one of the founding leaders of the organization in 1977 triggered the indignation of the indigenous communities, many of which affiliated with the nascent organization (at that time called FECOC, Federation of Communities of Cotacachi). UNORCAC appeared in order to demand civil rights: “equality before the law, fair treatment in courts, right to expression and association” (Ortiz 2004:69). At that time, this orientation toward civil rights was unusual, since most of the indigenous organizations were oriented toward the struggle for the land (García Bravo 2002:290).

The widow of Rafael Perugachi, the leader who was assassinated, remembers how after the death of her husband many communities decided to support the nascent UNORCAC. Her husband was assassinated after an argument with a police officer at a bar. According to his widow, he had defended a comrade from verbal mistreatment by the police officer who was not wearing his uniform. These verbal and other forms of mistreatment and discrimination, as I showed before, were common in Cotacachi. Perugachi was arrested and taken to prison where he was severely beaten. His wife and other people went to the jail to demand his release. When he was finally released he was immediately taken to the hospital, but his internal organs seemed to have been compromised and Perugachi died.

After that [Perugachi’s death], it must have been fate, so that indigenous peoples could get ahead, when my husband died for defending a comrade, my husband died, he was killed. Then I remember that Don Anrango [Alberto Anrango, founder of UNORCAC] told me: “Don’t cry, compañera [comrade], don’t suffer.

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45 A project from the Museum of the Central Bank of Ecuador, an institution that works in historical research and exhibitions, has done research and produced publications in a series called “Ecuadorian Biographies,” which rescues the memory of Ecuadorians, who although not public figures, “have constructed the Ecuadorian nation.”
This organization will one day get ahead; one day, as indigenous people [we will get ahead]. Now that the comrade has died, that is going to be a root, a plant." But I said ‘how?’ And then, later, little by little, little by little, at the funeral comrade Anrango, as he knew the story, had gathered together many, many, many people from the communities and from other provinces. I remember that comrade Mesias Tatamuez came [national labor union leader]. Everybody came and said a lot of things. They talked to the people. They made them understand there, at the funeral. He made people understand that we indigenous people needed to get ahead, and, that [idea] remained in the mind of the cabildos [indigenous community authorities], of all the people, the communities that were listening. (Interview with Digna Perugachi).

In the face of the forms of discrimination prevailing in Cotacachi during the 1970s and the deplorable death of Perugachi, the young leaders and intellectuals of Cotacachi intensified their efforts to build an organization which could fight for an equal and respectful treatment of indigenous peoples. Women participated in the formation of UNORCAC from its inception and even before, when leaders of both Cotacachi and Otavalo together formed the indigenous organization for the province of Imbabura, FICI (Federation of Indigenous Communities of Imbabura) in 1975. In this process, important national indigenous leaders such as Blanca Chancoso46 from Cotacachi started their political involvement. After this process, the leaders of Cotacachi decided to start their own organization that responded to the needs and aspirations of the communities of Cotacachi.

In order to start the organization, female leaders such as Rosa Cabascango and Rosario Bonilla were recruited by Alberto Anrango and other founders of UNORCAC to work in consciousness raising regarding the injustice and discrimination lived by the communities and the need to start an organization that defended indigenous people’s interests. They traversed the landscape of Andean Cotacachi, walking from community to community and talking with people and the cabildos. These women had received formal education—one of them was a professional nurse—and had the capacity to articulate eloquent speeches. Nevertheless, women also accompanied the process of the formation of UNORCAC as comrades, wives, and supporters of those involved as leaders. UNORCAC started with the support of twelve communities. One of the important women leaders of that precursory period remembers that the founding leaders of UNORCAC had to face the discrediting used as a tactic to demonize indigenous leaders and prevent communities from joining the organization:

46 Although an important and recognized leader in Cotacachi, Chancoso has developed her political career with Ecuarunari (the federation that unites the indigenous organizations of the highland region of Ecuador) and acts in the national arenas and organization such as CONAIE. The case of Blanca Chancoso as a leader acting in national and international political spaces will be analyzed in chapter 7.
I used to tell them, “Let’s Unite! Unite to get ahead. Do not stay behind. Unite to get ahead.” To be honest, at the beginning it was sad, it was a disgrace. It used to be frowned upon. For example, the hacienda owners of all Cotacachi, of everywhere, the police, the priests, everybody, when they heard about the UNORCAC, they said ‘they are communists,’ when we went to the service, that is what they used to preach at the service, when we went to the Iglesia Matriz [church in Cotacachi town]. We did not listen. That is how it was (Interview with Rosario Bonilla).

Other women were involved in organizing their own communities and supporting the founders of UNORCAC by gathering the authorities and people from the communities to listen to the invitation of the leaders, “that there is a campesino organization for us, the indigenous.” The first women leaders were also very active when Alberto Anrango ran for political office to be a member for the municipal council in 1979, in the first elections after the return to democracy. Anrango was the first indigenous person to win a seat at the municipal council of Cotacachi. The victory of UNORCAC’s candidate was proof of the momentum the organization had gained. Women worked in the campaign of the candidate, visiting the communities and teaching people, many of whom had never voted before, how to vote for the organization’s candidate. That was the first election after seven years of military dictatorship, and the first time the illiterate accessed the right to vote. Thus, many indigenous women and men voted in elections for the first time in their lives (Cueva 2007:7) Women leaders such as Blanca Chancoso and Rosario Bonilla actively worked in the campaign and in recruiting communities for the organization.

A second phase of the recent history of Cotacachi goes from 1980 to 1996, a period characterized by Ortiz (2004) as one of recognition of political and social rights and of development programs with an orientation to the campesino population, i.e., agricultural development. After two years of being a de facto organization, UNORCAC gained formal recognition by the Ministry of Agriculture of Ecuador in 1980, a legalization process needed to access credit, projects, technical advice and training offered by several organizations with which UNORCAC started to forge connections (García Bravo 2002:291). From its original demands for respect and recognition of the indigenous population, UNORCAC expanded its activities related to rural development, environment, credit, health, and education. During these first years, some of the precursors and founders of UNORCAC also became representatives of the organization. Women precursors were designated as secretaries or treasurers. Besides the precursors and founders, other women started to be recruited for specific projects, mainly for adult literacy and education, and health and nutrition, areas traditionally associated to women.

The project of adult literacy had an important meaning for UNORCAC as well as for people in the communities because it articulated cultural demands for respect to
language and culture (Ortiz 2004:81), and it involved both young, educated men and women from the communities. The access to education has been a demand long desired by indigenous peoples, in their power struggle with the state and hegemonic groups. One of the milestones of indigenous activism in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s was the achievement of bilingual education. In Cotacachi, a cohort of local and national leaders was, to a great extent, the result of a process of access to education during the 1970s and many of these youth worked on the first literacy program in Kichwa ever carried out in the country—the Program “Jaime Roldós Aguilera” between 1980 and 1984 (Yánez 2009). Young women who had finished or were still completing high school got involved in the organization as alfabetizadoras [literacy training personnel].

Important leaders of UNORCAC had been teachers, for instance the current mayor, Alberto Anrango, was the first director of the national Direction of Intercultural Bilingual Education, established in 1988. Women who had high school degrees or very young women, still teenagers, got involved in the literacy project. One of them, Virginia Alta, was a teenager when she received training to participate as a literacy tutor. She remembers: “The organization [UNORCAC] selected among the grownups those who knew how to read and write, and had been authorities in the community, and from the youth, those who were active in the organization.”

In tandem with processes of adult literacy, UNORCAC worked on the foundation of bilingual schools in the communities and the establishment of the first community daycare centers. However, the incorporation of indigenous peoples into education also necessitated a struggle against the particular form of discrimination in schools in the town of Cotacachi. Virginia Guaján, a member of the Committee of Women, accompanied a delegation of UNORCAC to the office of the provincial Direction of Education in the city of Ibarra to complain about mistreatment and discrimination in schools: “When we went to the town, they said ‘we do not want indigenous children here at school. There are schools also in the countryside.’” The delegation also petitioned that indigenous children be allowed to mix the school uniform with their own traditional dress. Indigenous people did not want the uniforms to cover the embroidered blouses typical of their dress and a marker of their ethnic identity. UNORCAC was successful in its attempt and achieved respect for indigenous dress in the schools of Cotacachi town.

During the 1980s, UNORCAC focused on achieving basic services for its communities: water, electricity, schools, sport fields, community houses, among others. People still remember that the organization used to be called municipio chiquito, or little municipality. UNORCAC had become the interlocutor with the state and nongovernmental organizations to negotiate programs and projects for the indigenous communities of Cotacachi. The participation of women in the area of health also dates back to this time. Involvement in programs and projects related to health has been and continues to be one of the main political entries for indigenous women from Cotacachi. A general mistrust and skepticism mark indigenous women’s approach to health services.
and mestizo personnel. To overcome this mistrust, some indigenous women were trained as health promoters to connect the communities with the work of the Ministry of Health, state projects such as FODERUMA,\(^{47}\) or other organizations such as CAAP.\(^{48}\)

Health promoters worked in a variety of issues connected to health: attention to children and mothers, nutrition, reproductive health, recognition and legalization of the practices of traditional healers. Indigenous women in charge of this work visited communities, ‘door to door,’ that is visiting each house in the community. One of the first health volunteers, Rosa Elena Quilumbaquí narrated that she worked as an interpreter accompanying women from the communities to the hospital: “In that way, we were linking the communities to the hospital, because before, they used to be afraid to go, because they did not understand them well [because of language], because they were indigenous. They gave more priority to mestizos.” Flora Yépez, recognized by others as one of the first female leaders, worked in coordination with the Ministry of Health on projects that aimed to diversify and improve the quality of the family’s diet through vegetable gardens. As Rosa Elena, she also mediated the tense relation with health institutions: “Way back then, people did not know anything. They did not want to go to the hospital. They did not know about family planning. They did not want to vaccinate the children. They did not want to go to pregnancy control… Then I formed a group of women that we organized. With that little group I started the vegetable gardens.”

Women started organizing in order to access development resources. The first women’s groups in the communities were associated with projects of health and small initiatives of rural development based on credit, such as chancheras (small production of pigs). One group of women was founded with the objective of accessing credit to work the land of a former hacienda that, after a long struggle, was sold to the community of Tunibamba. Women’s groups in the communities responded to the demand placed by funding agencies of working with women’s groups during the 1980s and early 1990s. In this second period of Cotacachi’s recent history, women participated as health promoters, but the organization of women’s groups in the communities stimulated within

\(^{47}\) FODERUMA or Fondo de Desarrollo Rural Marginado, was a state project (1977-1994) whose objective was to direct the state and international resources to the poorer groups in the rural areas. Much of the intervention of FODERUMA concentrated on providing infrastructure to the communities. At the beginning, this intervention helped UNORCAC position itself as the representative organization of the region. However, FODERUMA’s failure to keep the planned works at various communities jeopardized the legitimacy of UNORCAC. Critics argue that the impact of FODERUMA was limited, because the program left untouched the problem of the need to access economic resources in the communities. Instead, it reinforced a client-type relationship with the state, because it did not promote the development of skills and knowledge among the community members (García Bravo 2002:340).

\(^{48}\) CAAP, the Centro Andino de Acción Popular, was the first NGO that worked with UNORCAC. CAAP worked on training and research on own systems of organization, traditional cultivation systems, and traditional medicine. The results, however, were only partially returned and the process of training did not suffice for UNORCAC taking over the formulation, design, and administration of projects. UNORCAC broke relations with CAAP due to an argument over the administration of the projects (García Bravo 2002:339).
UNORCAC the development of an institutional space for women. Women started to be appointed as representatives of the commission of women and the family.

Amy Lind (2005) connects this renewed interest in including women in development to the UN Decade for Women, the creation of the international women in development (WID) field, and the incorporation of gender issues by NGOs. This incorporation also served neoliberal policies that privatized social welfare and partially transferred them to NGOs. NGOs were assigned responsibilities regarding health care, welfare distribution, and other social services traditionally understood as feminine (Lind 2005:5). In this new institutional arrangement, women were assumed to fit due to their maternal responsibilities and roles in the community life. Lind argues that women “mothered” the structural adjustment and absorbed the impacts of the economic crisis of the 1980s and 1990s. In her assessment, Lind concludes that while women’s political opportunities (for organizing) increased, social welfare privatization also augmented the demands on their work and time. In Cotacachi too, we can observe a trend where women were incorporated into projects according to feminine roles: caring for children and the ill, preparing food, and managing household finances. Women participated especially in projects related to health and nutrition, and less in income generating activities. In Cotacachi this will be particularly salient in the 1990s, as explained below, when several NGOs and their projects included a gender component.

A third period of Cotacachi history, from 1996 to 2002, is marked by local development, decentralization, and participatory democracy (Ortiz 2004:82-86). In Ecuador, the indigenous movement had already become a major political actor, after the national uprisings of 1990, 1992, and 1994. In Cotacachi, the period starts with the ascendance to the Municipality of Auki Tituaña, the candidate of Pachakutik, the political arm of CONAIE (the National Council of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador), which made significant electoral gains in 1996, 1998 and 2000. Tituaña was the first indigenous mayor of Cotacachi, elected with the support of UNORCAC, and as a result of an alliance between FENOCIN (the National Federation of Campesino, Indigenous, and Black Organizations with which UNORCAC is affiliated) and CONAIE (which was supporting Tituaña). His administration opened a new form of participation of the political actors of the canton, and started a Citizen Assembly comprising the associations of the civil society of Cotacachi. These included the already existing Committee of Women of UNORCAC and new organizations of urban women and women from the subtropical areas of Intag and Mandurias.

At the same time, UNORCAC redefined its approach to development as “development with identity.” UNORCAC had increased its relations with multiple development state institutions and NGOs. The organization demanded that “the execution and administration of projects be made with the direct and active participation of the very second-tier organization, as well as the faculty of being intermediary with the development activities carried out in the communities” (UNORCAC 2006:68).
UNORCAC turned mainly to work on the development of initiatives in productive projects, management of natural resources, ancestral medicine, organizational strengthening, and cultural identity.

From 1996 to 1999, the organization Doctors without Borders carried out a project of intercultural health in Cotacachi. Several indigenous who are currently active on the Committee of Women of UNORCAC participated in the project in different manners. Some were trained as health promoters. Others were midwives who benefited from the continuation and expansion of a process of recognition and legalization of the practice of traditional healers. Through the project Jambi Mascari, or Searching for Health, indigenous women had access to an independent location from which they could organize their activities. Jambi Mascari’s objective was to provide a space for indigenous healers in order to connect them to a network of health services in the canton and offer traditional health attention. The project Jambi Mascari, as well as other projects, mainstreamed the ‘gender approach,’ which in practice translated to including and working with women, and supporting their organizational strengthening. A female president of a community in the late 1990s, recalls that Mercedes, one of the main women leaders of UNORCAC who was also working at the time as a development promoter for Doctors Without Borders, “went to the communities to raise consciousness, to motivate them [women].” The process of the organization of women was not necessarily easy. The same female president pointed to the opposition of some male cabildos: “We supposedly were rotten women [dañadas], not busy women [desocupadas], lazy women [vagas], that are trying to corrupt the house, that are busy in not listening to the husband, that is, everything was negative” (Interview with Alicia Guaján).

Previous to 1995, the organization of women within UNORCAC was not formalized. There used to be a Comisión de la Mujer y la Salud, the Commission of Woman and Health, but this office was headed by a designated leader and at the moment did not presuppose a coordination with the groups of women that were emerging from the communities. When Mercedes was designated to the Commission of Woman and Health, she organized the existing women’s groups at the communities, and formed several new groups. This new organizational structure became the Central Committee of Women of UNORCAC, with a board of 13 representatives and 29 women’s groups by 2011. As Mercedes remembers:

Talking with the women, we said, ‘What do we do?’ We are on the directive board, but what are we going to do. Then, one of the problems of the compañeras

49 In chapters 4 and 5, I will analyze some of the elements that explain the opposition to indigenous women’s participation in politics. Here I would like to highlight that in the 1990s, because of the mainstreaming of the gender approach in development, non-governmental organizations started to require gender components in projects. Representing communities had been the prerogative of male leaders who may have reacted by resorting to traditional gender roles that define the house and community as the proper place for women, and political representation and interlocution with outsiders as male endeavors.
was maltreatment in the household, that men did not allow women to participate in the organizations because they said that they follow bad steps [the bad example] and that when women participate it is because they no longer respect their husbands. There was also the topic of health, it was one of the main points, the issue of recognition within the hospital. [The issue] that they do not recognize, do not respect, do not value... that compañeras who speak in Kichwa come, that they come from so far away and that they do not receive an appointment [for medical attention]. Another topic was that of self esteem, that is, in order to start the topic within UNORCAC, first we needed to value ourselves so that we could continue working.

Women’s groups mushroomed due to the mobilization coming from the Central Committee and from important projects (mainly the DFC, Campesino Forestal Development, and the Jambi Mascari from the Doctors without Borders). In the second half of the 1990s, women’s involvement in UNORCAC increased, and women were elected for the organization’s vice-presidency. In the local government election of 2000, Mercedes, who had had a political career in her own community, in UNORCAC, and as the first representative of the Central Committee, ran for municipal councilor. She had also worked as a promoter first for DFC and then for Doctors without Borders. She was the first indigenous woman in Cotacachi to be elected to a position in the local government. Thus, indigenous women’s participation escalated from their participation at the community level organization, the cabildos, to the UNORCAC, and experience with development organizations, and finally to the local government. This relatively fast escalation was possible because of the combined effect of several processes, among which was the process of citizen participation in the canton, the demand for organized groups of women from development projects, and the support of the process of women’s organization from Doctors Without Borders.

In this period, the work with indigenous women continued with the vegetable gardens, tracking the weight and height of children, nutrition and food preparation based on native and local food, health and hygiene talks, and the recovery of traditional health. An expansion of arenas of political participation for indigenous women was being carved, as the Central Committee started defining its role within UNORCAC and had to respond to the process of citizen participation at the canton level. Women from the Committee also coordinated several activities with the municipality during the three administrations of Auki Tituaña (1996-2009).

Ortiz’s periodization of Cotacachi’s recent history goes up to 2002. In what follows, I add a new period to the recent history of UNORCAC. In the last administration of Tituaña (2005-2009), UNORCAC grew apart from the Municipality, as disagreements multiplied between the organization and the local government regarding the role of the Union in the canton’s development. Additionally, in 2007 Rumiñahui Anrango became
president of UNORCAC, the son of UNORCAC’s founder Alberto Anrango. The Anrangos were political rivals of Tituña. The disputes with the Municipality escalated, and by the election of 2009, UNORCAC did not support the candidacy of Tituña for reelection for a fourth term. Instead, UNORCAC launched its own candidate, Alberto Anrango, for mayor. Anrango won the election with the support of UNORCAC and some of the representatives of the Citizen Assembly who had also had frictions with Tituña. Anrango ran with the support of Alianza País, the political movement of Rafael Correa (current president of Ecuador). This time, Anrango was not just launched as an indígena candidate, since his rival was indigenous as well, but Anrango was an ‘indígena comunero,’ that is an indígena from the communities, in contrast to the urban Tituña. Alberto Anrango had also been from el proceso, that is, he had been founder, representative, and continuous supporter of UNORCAC from the beginning. With this distinction, UNORCAC intended to highlight the rural ascription of Anrango and his closeness to the communities while constructing Tituña as middle class and urban, and thus less attuned to the needs of the communities.

During my fieldwork in Cotacachi, between 2009 and 2010 and then again in the summer of 2011, Cotacachi was rife with confrontations between factions that supported Anrango and those who were Tituña’s followers. First, within the Municipality, several officials had entered the local state institutions during Tituña’s administrations and were hostile to Anrango and his team. Second, for the first time, communities split their loyalties between two representatives of the indigenous people in Cotacachi. Tituña was creating a new indigenous local organization, a direct rival to UNORCAC. Some communities supported this new organization, and sometimes the very same community was divided. As I strolled through communities such as La Calera, I saw the banners of Alianza País in some homes, and the wipala, Andean flag used by Pachakutik, in others. Communities are not homogenous in their political ascription. However, indigenous communities of Cotacachi, its cabildos, and UNORCAC had supported Tituña in the three previous elections as the indigenous representative of the canton. By 2009, however, they were divided among the two candidates.

The political divisions also affected women. In the following chapters I will delve into the impact of the political situation on women’s organizations in Cotacachi. Here I would like to add that the last presidents of the Central Committee of Women of UNORCAC (especially the administration of 2008-2010) found a situation markedly different from that of the second half of the 1990s and the first half of the first decade of the 2000s. The resources available for women’s organizational strengthening had diminished considerably, as Doctors Without Borders ended its activities in Cotacachi. This impacted the legitimacy and organizational abilities of the Committee. The Committee has also faced important confrontations with other women at the canton’s level of organization and constant frictions with other members and representative of UNORCAC. I heard several negative comments regarding the women of the Central
Committee and the shortcomings of their political participation. The representatives of the Committee were under attack from several flanks, both from people from their own organization and from other organizations in Cotacachi. In subsequent chapters I will reflect upon the perceived ‘weak leadership’ of the current representatives of the Committee.

**Conclusion: Now They Call Us Señoras**

In this chapter I have given the antecedents that provide a context to understand indigenous women’s participation at UNORCAC. Among indigenous populations in general, and even more patently among indigenous women, social and economic indexes of inequality mark their situation as disadvantaged. Even if these structural factors do not determine the possibilities of indigenous women, they greatly increase the odds of limiting their opportunities. Along with the description of the structural inequalities that affect indigenous populations in Latin America and in Ecuador, I have offered the memories of the lived sense of discrimination that indigenous women have endured.

The local context of Cotacachi has its particularities regarding the history of relationships between mestizo and indigenous populations. While the process of dismantling of the power of the hacienda over indigenous populations had advanced in the 1960s and 1970s, in Cotacachi other forms of exploitation of indigenous labor persisted up to the early 1980s. Examples of exploitation were the collection of tithes and first fruits by the church and the forced labor in public projects in the town of Cotacachi. Along with these forms of exploitation, indigenous people endured everyday forms of discrimination and overt verbal and physical violence. I have presented examples offered by indigenous women regarding bygone times in their life or their parents’ lives in which they experienced these situations.

Nevertheless, indigenous women see a difference in ethnic relations in Cotacachi, which has been the result of both local and national struggles of the indigenous movement. I do not want to minimize the racism and discrimination that indigenous populations and indigenous women still face in their everyday interactions and their relations with the state and its institutions, with NGOs and their personnel, and with the mestizo population. However, I want to highlight that indigenous women find changes to the recognition of and respect toward the indigenous:

> How do I explain it to you? For example, respect is general here for the indígenas. ‘Señora,’ ‘señorita,’ ‘niña,’ [Mrs., Miss, young lady], they call us in the same way than the people from the town, than the mestizos, because it used to be ‘india’ or ‘indio’ (Interview with Flora Yépez).

In the same fashion that it is important not to romanticize resistance (Abu-Lughod 1990), it is also important not to underestimate or undervalue the political gains of
people, especially when they are perceived as a significant change in their lives. In this chapter I have also offered a history of indigenous women’s participation in UNORCAC, as this history was for the Central Committee of Women a project to legitimize their (at the moment questioned) political participation and achievements. The last part of this history, the period after 2008, makes evident that the political momentum of the Central Committee of Women may have passed, as they are facing new challenges to their political activity. I will analyze these challenges and the question of what factors enable or limit indigenous women’s leadership in the following chapters.
Chapter 4: Female Leadership in the Andes: Traditional and New Sources of Power

Entonces las mujeres primero excluidas por ser mujeres, por ser indígenas, por ser pobres, ellas empiezan a desarrollarse, un poco como empezó la UNORCAC, sin mucho apoyo, sin mucho conocimiento de la gente externa pero luchando por unos principios, luchando por una propuesta que teníamos.

Rumiñahui Anrango, president of UNORCAC

Introduction

This chapter explores the attributes of indigenous female leadership in Cotacachi. First, I will summarize the debates regarding gender power in the Andes, especially those about the existence and validity of complementarity, since some indigenous leaders still resort to this discourse on gender relations. In Cotacachi, a handful of leaders refer to this concept but most women leaders do not. The ways in which this concept is utilized locally will be described as will the possible political uses of the term as a category to understand power. Next, a discussion of several factors that have significantly changed indigenous communities will be presented, as these changes have redefined indigenous leadership. Finally, those elements that are acquiring significance for leadership will be explored through the trajectories of two female indigenous leaders of Cotacachi.

Gender and Power in the Andes

In the Andes, the degree of equality in gender relations has been widely debated. The reference to Andean complementarity, that is, a harmonious relationship of mutual interdependency between men and women, is still invoked by leaders and intellectuals of the indigenous movement to characterize gender relations in indigenous societies. The concept of Andean complementarity refers to a specific relation between the male and the female that is not predicated on a total opposition or polarity between a dominant male and a subordinate female. Instead, a fundamental unity exists between the male and the female, “and gender ranking is complex and related to context, not consistently weighted on one side.” (Harris 1978:21). According to this perspective, the conjugal pair, man-and-woman (or chachawarmi in Aymara) is a symbol of fundamental relationships in Andean society, both in cosmology and beyond (Harris 1978). Instead of an analogy in which man is to culture as woman is to nature, in the Andes the contrast is set between the

50 "Then women were first excluded for being women, for being indigenous, for being poor. Then they started to develop, in a similar way than UNORCAC, without much support, without much knowledge from the outsiders, but fighting for some principles, fighting for some proposals we had.”
conjugal pair and the single person: “It is the fruitful cooperation of woman and man as a unity that produces culture, and this is counterposed to an unmarried person as non-cultural; culture is based on duality, and contrasted with what has remained single when it should be paired” (Harris 1978:28).

Some scholars found referents of this conception of gender relations in the peasant household as the basic unit of the traditional Andean economy (Hamilton 1998; Harris 1978:22; Isbell 1976; Nuñez del Prado 1975), and the economic relationship of wife and husband within the household. On the one hand, the household division of labor is thought as flexible, as agricultural and domestic work can be done by any sex. Domestic work is a women’s responsibility but men can perform it if the woman is ill or absent (Harris 1978:30). There is a stricter division for other tasks. For instance, in plowing, men drive the team of bulls while women place the seeds in the ground. This division of labor is seen as needing both the man and the woman and was used as an example when the president of UNORCAC explained Andean complementarity to me. Thus, in the production for subsistence, Andean people observe the principles of complementarity and unity. Ideally, agriculture is carried out by both, and at seed-time and harvest husband and wife should work together.

The economic interdependency between men and women in agricultural production and in household dynamics was seen as the basis for the participation of women in decision making in quasi egalitarian terms (Nuñez del Prado 1975). Women’s decision-making power, thus, derived from their key economic roles and gave them “ascendancy in other spheres wherever the economic factor was important to make effective the decisions and motivations of the household” (Nuñez del Prado 1975:630; my translation). Women managed the harvest and distribution of the production (Nuñez del Prado 1975) and prepared the food needed daily and in ritual consumption (Harris 1978). In the case of the Ecuadorian highlands in particular, Hamilton argued that complementarity relies on shared decision making in the household and shared productive and reproductive tasks for which she labeled these conjugal units as “two-headed households” (Hamilton 1998).

Although in household dynamics the woman seems to be perceived as the dominant one in the conjugal pair (due to her control of the harvest and of food for ritual consumption), scholars have reported that women are excluded or marginalized from the public political realm. Some scholars argue that even if women do not voice their position in assemblies, later the decision is taken in the household, and then men voice the household’s consensual decision in a subsequent meeting (Nuñez del Prado 1975). Others contend that women are marginalized from collective, public rituals (Harris 1978) and meetings regarding the relationship of the community with external agents. Consequently, even if the Andean conception of the conjugal pair in the household stresses unity, complementarity, and egalitarianism, understandings of proper masculinity and femininity are used to exclude women from the wider context of the community’s
political life and its interrelations with others. Therefore, the complexity of complementarity lies in that “social behaviors… conform to and contradict the cultural conceptions” (Bourque and Warren 1981:78).

Important national leaders argue that gender relations of complementarity in the Andes were upset by Spanish colonialism while some scholars claim that the penetration of the market has dislocated this arrangement (Hamilton 1998; Miles, et al. 1997). Still other scholars emphasize that complementarity coexists with hierarchy. As pointed out by authors such as Harris and Nuñez del Prado writing during the 1970s, the importance of women’s contribution to the household and agricultural economy and their management of the harvest do not necessarily translate to a comparable active role in politics. Moreover, authors who conducted their research in the 1980s and 1990s tend to be more critical of the concept of complementarity and observed gender relations as marked rather by inequality in the access to important elements of power and prestige (Canessa 1997; Spedding 1997).

In this vein of analysis, Marisol de la Cadena shows how indigenous women are made more Indian by virtue of a series of factors: women stay in rural communities making possible the migration of indigenous men to the cities, their access to wage labor, and their participation in mestizo privilege. De la Cadena considers complementarity to be an inadequate framework to explain the conflictive nature of gender relations and hierarchy in Chitapampa, Peru (1995:329). Her argument is based on the conception that even though women who have stayed behind in the community have increased access to land, this resource does not comport with the importance it used to have for Andean livelihoods. Following De la Cadena, I argue that the traditional basis of power and privilege in the Andean agricultural communities may have eroded or may be transitioning to incorporate new elements that have become key resources in new contexts characterized by migration, diversified rural livelihoods, the declining importance of agricultural production for the household, and the need to access wages (Chapter 2). In these new contexts, men’s and women’s activities are not valued in an equal manner. Rather, the opportunities granted to men situate them in advantageous positions in the economic and political spheres, while women may have fewer opportunities to access labor, resources, and skills of value. I will return to this point later in this chapter.

The concept of complementarity, as argued by Prieto and others (2006), gives room to both hierarchy and equality and, in different contexts, it is weighted in favor of men or women. Discussing the conception of equality among the sexes, the authors claim that the Andean concept differs from the western understanding of equality: Egalitarian, in Andean relations, is the interchange between two groups of complementarities […where] there is potential as much for hierarchy as for equality, and there is a constant negation between these potential states (Canessa cited in Prieto et al. 161).
In various aspects of communal and organizational life, women are valued. That is the case, for instance, for Andean traditional healers and, in Cotacachi, midwives who are well respected in their communities and beyond. Consequently, the analyses seem to suggest that equality works (if still does) especially in the realm of the household dynamics, traditional agricultural production, and traditional medicine. However, in other areas of social life, women may be marginalized. One of these areas is the public sphere of politics. Furthermore, Cervone claims that “even if complementarity exists in the productive and reproductive sphere, we should conclude that in the field of gender identity constructions, there is an evident discrimination against women” (Cervone 1998:182).

The degree to which complementarity existed before colonialism and to which it has endured in indigenous communities of the Andes is up for debate. It is also critical to consider that indigenous communities are not isolated from the wider national society, with its constructions of hegemonic masculinities and femininities, conceptions of gender relations, and contestations of normative conceptions. It is more important, for my research, to understand the uses of the discourse. Above, I have attempted to briefly present the concept as it has been discussed by scholars. I also have put attention to those aspects which represented a basis of traditional power and prestige for women, and which seem to no longer serve as material or otherwise bases of women’s power. I argue that traditional access to power has given way to new sources of power to which women have had fewer opportunities to access. Before exploring the sources of new power for women’s leadership, I want to show how the concept of complementarity is currently used by the indigenous leadership.

*Complementarity: Strategic Essentialism of the Dirigencia?*

In the national context of Ecuador during the 1990s, the indigenous movement articulated a series of demands for recognition and respect. Key elements in their struggles with the wider society of Ecuador were to revalue indigenous cultures and to fight against racism and discrimination. Cervone argues that in the specific representation toward the wider society, the indigenous representatives in public office do not address gender inequality within indigenous communities. On the contrary, they tend to overlook such inequality. When acting in political arenas that involved the wider society, indigenous female leaders were “not only trying to demonstrate that women are worthy, but that Indians are worthy” (Cervone 1998:232). Consequently, Cervone contends that one of the reasons why women leaders resort to complementarity is to mark differences with the hegemonic mestizo society. Simultaneously, they elevate the indigenous conceptualization of gender relations. These leaders attributed responsibility for the gender inequality to the Spanish *machismo*, and to a resulting mestizo society that
incorporated a discriminatory attitude toward women. In her analysis of the indigenous movement of Ecuador, Renée Minnaar argued that by the late 1990s the *dirigencia* [leadership] proposed that the legal recognition of indigenous cultures and peoples would automatically result in egalitarian gender relations, because these are inherent in the indigenous social organization (Minaar 1998:73). For both strategic and affective reasons, the national male and female leaders of the indigenous movement adopted this essentialist perspective.

The discourse of complementarity is used in Cotacachi as well as in other places in the Andes mainly by *dirigentes* and intellectuals, especially those at the organizational levels in which they represent indigenous peoples to interact mainly with external actors. Most of the indigenous women leaders in Cotacachi do not talk about Andean complementarity when discussing gender relations. Nevertheless, the president of UNORCAC and a few former leaders use this discourse to talk about gender relations. This does not mean that people do not give importance to the conjugal unit, or that they do not conceive of the universe in terms of male-female pairs. In the sacred geography of the area, for instance, a tectonic love goes on between Mount Imbabura and Mount Cotacachi. Taita Imbabura, as it is called, is male, while Mama Cotacachi, whose full name is María Isabel Cotacachi, is female. From their love affairs, it is said, the fertile valley between them has resulted. Plants such as medicinal herbs and also food are also divided in male and female. The anomaly of things that are not paired surfaced in some women’s remarks as they worried about my single status: “it is not a good thing to be alone.”

In rituals, as well, the presence of both the male and the female is highlighted as necessary. Cotacachi is also known for a very particular form of celebrating the Inti Raymi, or feast of the harvest, during the summer solstice. Groups of dancers, the san juanes (called after the Catholic Saint John, San Juan, whose day is June 24th), dance in the central plaza in order to take it over and, when they encounter rival groups, they fight. The celebrations of the Inti Raymi that have lasted several days come to an end on July 1, the “day of the women,” the day women dance Inti Raymi. According to the explanations I recorded, during the Inti Raymi celebrations, men have disturbed and unleashed the forces of nature, with their stomping dance and fighting. Women’s dance needs to close the celebration because through their dancing women appease these loose forces. However, when women commented on their intimate relationships, they did not necessarily view them as based on a unity of the conjugal pair that secured more harmonious relations than those of their mestizo counterparts. On the contrary, they used to complain about family dynamics in which they saw themselves as disadvantaged regarding resources, decision-making, and emotional needs.

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51 In order to highlight the contested nature of the idealized conjugal pair, I want to note that many women thought that it was better to be alone than in a bad or abusive relationship, or that it was a positive thing that I had the opportunity to study and to freely decide where to go.
Historian Joan Scott (1986) has argued that gender is a way to talk about power. Her definition of gender is based on two propositions: on the one hand, gender is a constitutive element of social relations based on perceived differences between the sexes, and, on the other, gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power (Scott 1986:1067). One of the unusual ways in which I heard the talk of complementarity was to refer to UNORCAC’s structure, as basically having a male and a female side. The “male” side of UNORCAC is represented materially by the headquarters of the organization, which is contrasted to the “Jambi,” the “female” side, a building in a different part of Cotacachi town where the office of the Committee of Women and the midwives is located (the name comes from a project of Doctors Without Borders that funded the acquisition of a plot of land and the construction of the oldest part of the building). In an interview with a former leader, he articulated this issue clearly. I had asked him about the nature of the relationship between men and women in the communities. He resorted to indigenous cosmovision, and to the pairs of Taita Imbabura and Mama Cotacachi, day and night, husband and wife, male stone and female stone, male medicinal herb and female medicinal herb, to the communities of the higher part of Cotacachi and the communities of the lower part of Cotacachi, “which are sister communities, right?, but that for San Juan are divided into the high ones and the low ones and become a pair in opposition [that fight], in order to fulfill the ritual.” This former leader explained to me that UNORCAC has a “western” structure, with a president, vice-president, secretary, and so on. However, it has another structure as well. According to this leader, the “female side demanded an equal space.” Thus, UNORCAC is divided in two, into a male side and a female side:

They [women] wanted to have their own space, right? We are not talking exactly about gender, but it is something that encounters that way of feeling, isn’t it? It is not very conscious, but we have the women’s organization of the UNORCAC; all the women end up there: the midwives, the producers [women involved in projects of agroecology], the embroiderers, all the women. Then, parity is just there, thus, it is good to understand that (Interview with Segundo Anrango).
The Committee of Women as such is just one of several “organized groups” that are part of UNORCAC. However, it is perceived as having more importance than other groups of the organization. Moreover, it is conceptualized as the female half of the organization and some of the male leaders thought that this was parity (50% of the representation). They also argued that “gender” is to be translated in the Andean realities of Cotacachi to complementarity. The president of UNORCAC viewed the issue in this manner. For him, the discussion of gender became “fashionable” in the development circles, and for him, gender was misunderstood as “Señora, you are being subordinated in your house, you are only receiving orders, you stand up and do what your husband does.” According to him, that was a mistaken understanding of gender, and UNORCAC promoted instead that men and women be at the same level. He claimed that women have worked on their self-esteem, and now they are members of the cabildos and have become presidents of the communities. He found it outstanding that women led the communities,
in spite of the mistreatment of the husband, in spite of the machismo of many men who
do not know how a woman can get ahead.” He argued that since the executive council of
UNORCAC was at the time composed of six women and seven men, “in UNORCAC
there is indeed gender equity”. On other occasions, he stated that “el tema de género es
un tema más mestizo, que se pide que metamos de manera transversal,” “gender is more a
mestizo topic that we are asked to mainstream [into the projects].”

Male leaders questioned and then dismissed the category of gender as foreign to
the communities and as an imposition of development. Additionally, they conceived it as
a category in which the male-female domination is upturned and women become
dominant. Male leaders contrasted this understanding to the notion of complementarity,
but in their use they implied certain equity and even equality in gender relations. In
asserting that women wanted an equal space, and that they achieved it (as they have their
own space in Jambi or they represent half of the executive council), male leaders are
simultaneously negating the need to revise the gender dynamics within the organization.
Resorting to complementarity suggests that gender equality is an accomplished fact in the
organization. If we agree with Joan Scott’s premise that “politics constructs gender and
gender constructs politics” (1986:1069), then in what construction of politics and gender
is the use of complementarity resulting?

Joan Scott argues that high politics is itself a gendered concept “for it establishes
its crucial importance and public power, the reasons for and the fact of its highest
authority, precisely in its exclusion of women from its work” (1986:1073). Scott is
referring specifically to systems based on the binary opposition between male and female
where male is the dominant element. Furthermore, she asserts that hierarchical structures
“rely on generalized understandings of the so-called natural relationship between male
and female” (1986:1073). However, in the understanding of complementarity of the male
indigenous leaders, women are not necessarily excluded from the political. On the
contrary, they are included, but in very specific—and domesticated—ways (see
discussion in Chapter 5). Portraying gender relationships as naturally unproblematic due
to Andean complementarity serves male leaders to reaffirm a basic form of solidarity
(i.e., gender solidarity) that enables their political action. They intend to present a unified
front to the outside world, not one divided by gender confrontations. In contrast to what
is suggested by the male leaders in UNORCAC, though, gender relations and
complementarity are contested notions in Cotacachi.

A handful of women use the discourse of complementarity in Cotacachi but they
employ it in a different manner than male leaders. In a conversation with Azucena, a
professional woman who worked at the Citizen Assembly of Cotacachi about whether
there is an indigenous feminism, she argued that women have been able to become
visible and that they have done so “without breaking an organizational process,” “without
tearing apart the [organizational] fabric.” But, “one needs to be clear about duality and
complementarity,” she claimed. According to her, nature has created the masculine and
the feminine in human beings, plants, animals, and heavenly bodies (the sun and the moon). She argued that in nature there is no rivalry between male and female, that Pacha Mama (mother nature) gives to both in equality, the same conditions of feeding, for instance. However, among human beings,

women have not accessed education and a number of things, that the machismo of the father who did not send her to school because she was a woman, and besides that, [the idea that] she will get married and stay at home, so what for is she going to study (Interview with Azucena, indigenous técnica of the citizen Assembly).

She resolutely concluded: “when there are conditions of inequality, duality and complementarity cannot exist.” She added that she also questions the idea of the Andean political pair.52 For her, the wife of a leader “is just for washing his clothes, working for him at home, cooking for him, and cleaning up after him.” She argued that when Pachamama created human beings, that was not the objective; the objective was “a pair equal in decision-making.” The position of this specific woman is not necessarily representative of the majority of the women I interviewed. As already stated, I found a direct reference to complementarity just among a few leaders. However, it is presented here to demonstrate the contested use of the discourse of complementarity among the leaders, and the gender difference where male leaders stress idealized versions of complementarity while female leaders highlight that complementarity does not exist currently. The president of the Committee of Women, Lolita, did not refer of UNORCAC as having a male and a female side. She used to explain that UNORCAC is the father and the Committee of Women is the mother. The técnica quoted above, on the contrary, thought that such conceptualization is evidence of the “patriarchal system” in which people think that the president of a big organization must be a man.

Although this woman was extraordinarily vocal about her critique on gender relations, other women in UNORCAC also complained about the inequalities within the organization. Research on women leaders of the Ecuadorian indigenous movement showed that the discourse related to complementarity vis-à-vis gender inequality differed depending on the political scale at which leaders were appointed for office (Cervone 1998). The contestation of gender inequality was more apparent at lower levels of community organizations, that is, where political office was exercised at the local level, with less or no interaction with outside representatives. Thus, those working with grassroots organizations denounced gender discrimination in their relationship with partners, in the household, and regarding their political participation in the organizations (Cervone 1998:189). In contrast, national or high-level women leaders of the movement

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52 This form of political authority is not prevalent in Ecuadorian indigenous organizations; however, organizations such as the CONAMAQ in Bolivia (the Council of Marqas of the Qullasuyu), a regional highland indigenous organization, follow the traditional arrangement in which the husbands and wives occupy political office together.
resorted to strategic essentialism and defended the indigenous in the context of a discriminatory society.

As a second-tier organization, UNORCAC constantly interacts with outside representatives and different national and international NGOs. Since the UN World Conference of Women in 1975, and even more since the 1990s with the Beijing Conference in 1995, UN and other agencies have given attention to women’s status in development. In the 1990s the Gender and Development or GAD approach adopted the category of gender in order to highlight power relations. The GAD approach also called for the mainstreaming of gender in all development projects and programs, instead of ghettoizing women’s projects in specialized offices. It also advocated for women’s empowerment, emphasized differences among women, and drew attention to gender conflict. GAD was adopted especially by non US agencies (Jaquette and Staudt 2007:30-32). In the practice of development, however, the subtleties of gender were lost and men and women continue to be treated as identifiable groups with conflicting interests, where women are invariably the weaker. Donors and agencies often equate the word gender with women. Nevertheless, mainstreaming took place in the sense of requiring that projects have components specifically targeted to women. Funds and resources allocated are usually limited, though, due to the low priority still assigned to gender issues (Jaquette and Staudt 2007:38-44). GAD also emphasizes the need for women to organize, however in practice this sometimes translated to a requirement for women’s groups to be the beneficiaries of development.

Regarding gender, NGOs and transnational feminist networks were dominant over the state in promoting GAD. As much as 73% of gender projects were managed by these actors (Radcliffe 2008). In Cotacachi too, international donors require the incorporation of women in projects. As NGOs that support projects of UNORCAC and UNORCAC itself remain dependent on external and government funding, they need to respond to the donor’s requirement that projects have a component for women. This wider context of development influences the debate around gender issues within indigenous organizations. Cervone (1998) argued that adherence to complementarity is prevalent among national leaders while contestation to gender discrimination is more often found in community and local organizations. However, it seems that even at the local level the positions toward complementarity are also diverse. Postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak (Spivak 1987) coined the term “strategic essentialism” to refer to the temporary suspension of internal differences used by subordinate groups in order to create a sense of a unified identity that supports important political ends. In ethnic and national movements, women are called to leave their differences aside in order to support the wider cause, and in that vein, the indigenous movement presented a unified front while to a certain degree the discussion of gender discrimination was foreclosed by resorting to Andean complementarity. Additionally, around the same period, the failed encounters between
feminists and indigenous women (see below) may have also deterred the debate about gender inequalities in the movement.

Nevertheless, the GAD approach that demanded the inclusion of gender relationships was not completely lost. In the 2000s, a changing relationship between certain strands of feminism and indigeneity, with a proliferation of women’s groups from the grassroots (as I will discuss in the next section) has animated a discussion of gender issues. In such a context, some male leaders may be reasserting and enforcing “traditional” cultural values by resorting to complementarity. Taking into consideration that, as Joan Scott argues, gender is implicated in the construction of power itself, it is necessary to question how complementarity may establish distributions of power—differential control over or access to material and symbolic resources (1986:1069). Furthermore, since gender and power are intimately linked, questioning or altering gender relationships “threatens the entire system” (1986:1073).

It may be in the interests of some leaders to reassert complementarity in order to continue gender dynamics that have previously privileged male leaders as interlocutors with the state and other outside agencies and as decision-makers in terms of indigenous organizations and the development resources that they circulate (I will further develop this argument in the next chapter). On the other hand, other leaders are opening the discussion on gender inequalities in indigenous organizations. The concept of complementarity is not necessarily dismissed by these leaders. It is resignified to become a critical tool to rethink the culture from an emic version of gender equity. Some have found this later competing understanding of the concept among emerging indigenous women’s organizations in Central America (Hernández Castillo 2008:31). Although complementarity does not necessarily reflect the lived realities of gender relations, it may open the space for debate, providing a language to talk about normative relations of equity to which to aspire, and enabling women to reclaim a space of participation in conditions of equality.

The Conflictive Relations between Feminism and the Agendas of Indigenous Women

The feminist movement in Ecuador can be traced back at least to the founding of the Alianza Femenina Ecuatoriana, AFE (Ecuadorian Feminist Alliance) in 1939. The goals of AFE were to incorporate women into political life, to work for global peace, and to be in solidarity with the victims of war (Becker 2003). The feminist movement emerged among educated mestizo women of Quito. The feminism of the first half of the twentieth century differs from the feminism of the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries in its relationship with indigenous women. Feminist white-mestiza women and indigenous women worked in collaboration under initiatives promoted by the Ecuadorian communist party. Important historical figures of the feminist movement in Ecuador such as Nela Martínez and María Luisa Gómez de la Torre were among the founders of the...
Ecuadorian Federation of Indians (FEI), and collaborated with indigenous leader Dolores Cacuango in the creation of bilingual schools in indigenous communities of the highlands. The indigenous leader Tránsito Amaguaña was also one of the founders of the Ecuadorian Federation of Indians (FEI). All these women worked closely under the political banner of the Left (Becker 2003:125-142).

While feminist mestiza women and indigenous women cooperated with each other during the early and mid twentieth century, the collaboration of the feminist movement and the indigenous movement had faded by the end of the century. In the 1980s and 1990s, tensions between the feminist movement and the indigenous movement became evident. The sources of tensions were at least two: one refers to the so-called NGOization of the feminist movement, that is, the participation and cooptation of feminist activists in both government agencies and NGOs that were advancing or were instrumental to neoliberal policies (Lind 2005). The other was related to the exclusion of women of color (both indigenous and Afro) from the mainstream feminist movement seen as middle class, urban and mestizo. Regarding the first tension, some participants of the movement saw the increased visibility for women’s rights, the increased presence of WID (Women in Development) institutions and research programs, the feminist policy-making and advocacy as successes of previous feminist organizing. Others, however, regarded those institutions, projects, and programs as products of westernized gender technocracies that colonized the realities of Latin American women and institutionalized Western knowledge on women and development (Lind 2005:14).

The exclusion of indigenous and Afro women from the mainstream feminist movement speaks to the incapacity of integrating the perspectives and needs of women of color in the feminist agenda setting. Feminist discourse is thought of as belonging to urban white mestizas, not in tune with indigenous realities, and interested only in women’s issues to the detriment of discrimination against indigenous peoples. A group of indigenous and mestiza academics consider that an agenda centered only on women’s or gender relations does not make space for their demands. Moreover, they argue that feminism is not a universal language to express gender inequalities or women’s interests (Prieto 2006:153-154). Some indigenous women are explicitly opposed to formulating their needs in feminist terms, even when they advocate gender equality in combination with the recognition of indigenous peoples (Prieto 2005; Radcliffe 2003).

The way in which indigenous women express their claims suggests certain similarities with the feminism of the women of color and Third World women. Prieto and colleagues argue that indigenous women’s perspective on their needs does not refer exclusively to gender inequality. The way in which indigenous women understand inequality is deeply related to ethnic and racial conflict (Prieto 2005:107) and as such, is aligned with the wider indigenous movement. Nina Pacari, a famous indigenous leader, argues that “in the dominant society both the [indigenous] man and woman are discriminated against for their indigenous condition” (cited in Prieto 2005:181). This
prioritization of the ethnic agenda over demands of equality makes a conversation with national women’s movements difficult. Indigenous women think that feminists limit their agenda to women’s problems, without proper concern for the demands of collective rights prioritized by indigenous women (Flores 2009:83), while at the same time enacting discrimination themselves, for instance, when they hire indigenous women for domestic work (Barrig 2001; Minaar 1998).

In Cotacachi many negative stereotypes are directed toward feminists and indigenous women strategically opt for not using the term feminism to define their work, preferring to frame it as tema de mujeres. Again, those women who define themselves as feminists are the women who have worked in closer relationship with external actors and have been exposed to the discourses of the women’s movement or the development agencies: “We did not talk about feminism yet, because even ourselves, women, were scared to be called feminist, because still, every time that they talk about feminism here, it means women are lesbians” (Azucena, indigenous técnica of Assembly). Indigenous women of Cotacachi have connections with several women’s organizations: the Committee of Women is one of four organizations that form the Coordinating Council of Women of the canton of Cotacachi. These are groups of mestiza or Afro women from the city and other areas of the canton. Through the Coordinating Council, women of the Committee are also linked to national women’s organizations, specifically, via the Assembly of Popular and Diverse Women of Ecuador, a national organization of grassroots women’s organizations with an emphasis on feminism, ecology, and a popular and solidarity economy. In their relationship with these groups, indigenous women leaders of Cotacachi have been exposed to ideas and conceptions, with and against which they are defining their own feminism: community feminism (Paredes 2010):

_We the women who are feminist, it is because sometimes, anywhere in the world, women have been discriminated, forced, and we need to demand and [make] that visible. That is feminism for us: saying that there must be participation of women in the cabildos, but not for sweeping the communal house, not for cooking when the municipal authority visits, but for being there to make decisions, or to be incorporated for being consulted—to say, this project that we are going to do in the community, how much does it benefit women? Does it benefit women or not? Does it alleviate the work they have? Then, for me, that is feminism_ (Azucena, indigenous técnica of Citizen Assembly).

This woman considered that feminism has been conceptualized from “an academic perspective and from western, middle-class women.” One example she presented to me was that the National Council of Women, CONAMU (a former state body for women’s issues), used to contact and work with the mestiza urban women from Cotacachi, instead of working with “urban and indigenous women in equal conditions to
make decisions.” She claimed that community feminism is “making visible our situation with our own identity,” because “indigenous women have been discriminated in almost all spaces but also by the very same feminism, because it is middle class.” Thus, she proposes that indigenous women who have been part of organizational processes start conceptualizing “these paradigms and philosophies that are a struggle policy for us.” This woman’s perspective emphasizes the interethnic and interclass conflict, at the same time that identity is linked to community life. Azucena, who is well connected to citizen organizations, development agencies, and national women’s organizations, was the only one referring directly to the need of building a new type of feminism. This gives her considerable political clout when relating to women activists seeking inspiration from grassroots movements, to staff members of international development agencies expecting to hear ‘empowered’ women, and, not least, to local and foreign scholars fascinated by her well articulated discourse.

Azucena and other indigenous women of Cotacachi have established contact with women’s and feminist organizations in the canton and beyond. Even if they are critical of mainstream feminists, they have strong connections with other mestiza and Afro women self-identified as populares (grassroots or working class) and diversas (diverse) women, in contrast to the middle-class, academic, and technocratic feminists (usually white-mestizas). This may very well represent a change from the previous polarization between indigenous women and the feminist movement. While white-mestizo and urban feminists still prevail in governmental institutions, NGOs, and the academy, since the 2000s, women’s and feminist groups have mushroomed “from below.” Margarita Aguinaga (2012) attributes the new proliferation of women’s and feminist organizations from popular sectors to several factors: the changes in the 1998 Constitution that broaden human and women’s rights; the decentralization of the state and the democratizing reforms in some local governments that included demands from organized women; the appropriation of gender mainstreaming by groups of campesino and poor urban women; the relationships established with the World March of Women and the World Social Forum linking the anti-patriarchy, anti-racist, and anti-capitalist struggles (Aguinaga 2012: 48).

Aguinaga argues that since 2006, there has been a change in the dynamics of the Ecuadorian feminisms. She sees a duality between feminists who participate in the government of Alianza País and multiple groups of grassroots women that question the model of development proposed by Rafael Correa. On the one hand, the category gender is being further mainstreamed in state institutions, although in a context that only permits

53 This woman attended the Conference of the Peoples on Climate Change, in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in March 2010, which was a counter conference to the global climate change conference in Copenhagen, Denmark at the end of 2009. On that occasion, organizations of women forged a “Declaration of the Latin American Community Feminism.” This woman had told me that she was able to get a book about community feminism. This book, Hilando Fino, was written by one of the Bolivian ideologues of feminismo comunitario, Julieta Paredes (2010).
“degrees of participation very much controlled by the state” (Aguinaga 2012:51) and where women’s issues are considered of secondary importance. On the other hand, an increasing number of organizational processes of indigenous, campesino, black, and impoverished urban women have emerged. According to Aguinaga (2012:52):

The tendency of the most popular feminism in Ecuador has grown and is not unified in a single movement, but shows a series of regional and national processes that are advancing to the possibility of feminist encounters that question the government policies and conservatism to women. These feminisms, because they are varied, have a strong decolonizing face, that is, they question themes such as racial and ethnic domination over women and propose community alternatives. And they are strongly popular because the women more affected by neoliberalism learned to join together to confront the economic model and be together to make demands to the state (my emphasis).

The possibility of the encounters envisioned by Aguinaga is based on the common ground found in the critique of extractivism and developmentalism of the current government by diverse women of indigenous, Afro, rural, and impoverished urban groups. Moreover, Aguinaga calls for reflecting on a series of debates that animate current feminisms in Ecuador: what is decolonizing and community feminism; what is the ecological feminism and the defense of Mother Nature; what is social and solidarity economy; what is the care economy; what is food sovereignty and the defense of biodiversity (Aguinaga 2012:53). The feminist agenda “from below” has become more attentive to issues of importance to both to popular and community feminism and to other social movements. Access to land, defense of water, food sovereignty, and the defense of Mother Nature are all topics on the agenda of the indigenous movement. Additionally, groups of women have established alliances with environmentalists and LGBTQ activists. Therefore, I concur with Aguinaga’s assessment of the possibility of building bridges between diverse women.

In Ecuador as elsewhere, feminisms are plural and the category of feminism itself, as well as those of patriarchy and gender, are continuously in dispute. Nevertheless, the proliferation of feminist groups from below and the consequent broadening of the feminist agenda lead me to think of a changing situation in which the previous chasm between indigenous women and mainstream feminists is a simplification, not in tune with the current more diversified landscape of Ecuadorian feminisms. We can no longer speak of an easy separation between feminists and indigenous women, both because there are indigenous feminists and because of the plurality of feminisms “from below”: decolonial, community (comunitario), and popular. Finally, what “mainstream” feminism means is also changing in the context of governments of the Left such as those of Ecuador and Bolivia, which are including indigenous concepts such as Sumak Kawsay and Suma Qamaña in their constitutions. These governments have advanced indigenous,
women’s, and sexuality rights, without, however, properly funding the state institution in charge of implementing the new legislation (Vega 2014).

Changing Leadership in the Andes

Although indigenous women of Cotacachi are usually represented by a few articulated spokeswomen when attending national and international meetings, people within Cotacachi differ in their evaluation of the local indigenous female leaders. I usually heard remarks on “how conflictive the women are,” or that “women do not express what they think.” Some thought that Lolita, the president of the Committee of Women, needed to be more assertive. Many of the remarks I registered considered the representatives of indigenous women at the moment as weak leaders. This led me to reflect on the sources of legitimate power, and the new types of knowledge, actors, and experiences that have become important for leadership, at different levels of political participation. Women’s visibility—or lack thereof—in the political sphere relies on a “network of power relations between Indians, civil society, and the state” (Cervone 2002:182). This network has changed historically. Additionally, the changes in leadership are connected to wider transformations of the political economy of indigenous communities as already discussed in Chapter 2 regarding current rural livelihoods. In the diversified strategies that indigenous communities use for their livelihoods, indigenous women have limited opportunities for wage work, and are incorporated into the labor market in informal or low-paying employment. In tandem with changes in rural livelihood in the Andes, modernization and development have also changed the dynamics of indigenous communities.

The politics of rural development implemented in Ecuador since the mid 20th century were not necessarily directed to indigenous communities as indigenous per se, but as campesinos, even if most of the initiatives were in practice directed toward highland indigenous communities, as poor rural dwellers. It was not until the 1990s that development initiatives were directed to indigenous populations qua indigenous. In the state’s modernizing discourse prior to the 1990s, the culture and economic arrangements of indios were seen as obstacles to agricultural productivity and thus to the modernization of Ecuadorian society. Some of the older women that I interviewed still remember the Misión Andina del Ecuador (Andean Mission of Ecuador), the first development program implemented to integrate the indigenous producers into national life and the market (Martínez 2002) that started in 1964. In the area of Cotacachi, however, an increased presence of state programs, national development organizations, and international aid organizations has coincided with the trajectory of UNORCAC since the late 1970s and has been carried out in coordination with the indigenous organization. Additionally, since the 1990s, the novel and promising process of citizen participation animated from the
indigenous-led municipality has attracted even more development organizations and funds (Ortiz 2004).

At the same time that the agrarian reform, modernization, and development changed the dynamics of indigenous communities in the Ecuadorian highlands, indigenous authority started changing to respond to such transformations. Although the system of priostazgos (cargo system) associated with main ritual celebrations such as Inti Rymi (harvest feast in the summer equinox) as well as the system of padrinazgos (godfatherhood/motherhood) continued to be important, a crucial role for indigenous authorities was to represent indigenous communities in their relation to external agents such as state and development officials. One of the main roles of indigenous authorities is **gestionar** infrastructure and services for the communities. **Gestionar** translates to “negotiate” in English. However, it has a more distinct and precise meaning in the context of the relationship with external agents. In Cotacachi, it refers to the process of long and tedious bureaucratic processes involved in obtaining resources from state institutions. It includes ingratiating oneself with state officials that may be the gatekeepers who have the final say in obtaining benefits for a community and assuring that the works come to fruition.

As representatives of **cabildos**, indigenous men were the ones in charge of these quotidian encounters with the state and its power. In earlier decades, women did not develop the skills needed for this interaction, due to their limited access to education and command of Spanish and to gender ideologies that associated womanhood with home, community, child rearing, and agricultural life. Authority implied this relationship and negotiation with the wider mestizo society and state, from which women were largely marginalized.

Women that I interviewed recalled that this marginalization from authority was not limited to the “public” space of the relation of the community with the mestizo society, but it also occurred within community politics. Women reported that they did not use to participate in community or organizational meetings, and even when they attended, they used not to voice their opinions. Thus, the construction of gender relations in indigenous communities in tandem with women’s absence in the network of power between indigenous peoples, the wider mestizo society, and the state resulted in an invisibilization of indigenous women. The new attributes of the “modern” leader required at least some level of literacy that many women, especially those of older generations, did not attain. As Cervone states, “[w]omen’s illiteracy is transformed into a condition of social and political inadequacy that silences them in public.” (Cervone 2002:182).

Although in some places in the Andes women used to have relative equal power due to their control of resources in the productive and reproductive spheres, they usually seemed to have been marginalized from the political representation in the interface of the community with the outside world. Now that the reliance on a livelihood based on agriculture has given way to diversified livelihoods, the material base once holding
traditional Andean power has eroded. Due to their limited education and to a disadvantaged incorporation into the labor market, women work in low paid jobs and have very limited access to cash. Moreover, their restricted educational opportunities have had an impact on their relationship with the outside world, especially for those with a limited command of Spanish. The ability to interact with diverse external actors had acquired paramount importance for community and second-tier organizations’ leadership and many indigenous women may be at a disadvantage in that respect.

The changing structural conditions that affected indigenous communities since the agrarian reform of the 1960s changed the traditional leadership to forms that made it increasingly important to develop skills to deal with state and other external agents from NGOs and other institutions. Although illiteracy and limited education continue to be a major barrier for the political participation of many indigenous women, the changing dynamics in indigenous communities have opened a possibility for women’s leadership. First of all, as a result of increased circular migration that moves people away from the community, women have progressively occupied positions of authority in the cabildos as more men are absent from the communities on a daily basis. Literacy campaigns and the education of indigenous leaders have also impacted women’s leadership. Historic women leaders who participated in the first years of UNORCAC were educated and some were professional. This was the case of the leaders Blanca Chancoso, Rosa Cabascango and Rosario Bonilla, for instance. In addition, young women and even teenagers were recruited by the organization to participate in the teams in charge of the first state literacy campaigns for indigenous populations. Some of the women leaders started their participation in this manner. The emergence of indigenous organizations themselves, especially of the so called second-tier organizations that comprise several communities in a region, has also open spaces for women’s experimentation with positions of authority. Finally, some development projects have required the participation of women. Various indigenous women’s groups in Cotacachi started under the auspices of development projects or in response to the manifested requirement to be eligible for project benefits.

Exploring the New Elements of Leadership through the Stories of Lolita and Mercedes

During my fieldwork, I lived with the president of the Committee of Women of UNORCAC. Several people related to UNORCAC and other organizations such as the Citizen Assembly prompted me to “help Lolita,” the president, with her leadership duties. I was asked, for instance, to help draft speeches in Spanish, or to make sure Lolita was reminded of meetings she needed to attend. The perceptions about Lolita’s leadership stood in sharp contrast to those of former leaders of the Committee, especially to Mercedes, a woman who enjoyed the recognition of other indigenous women and especially of people outside of the organization. However, due to the context of local political divisions and tensions, she was marginalized by current UNORCAC (male)
leaders who questioned her political alliances. Contrasting the leadership of these two women sheds light on what is considered a good female leader in Cotacachi and by whom, and reveals those elements that are acquiring increased preeminence for indigenous leadership in these local contexts and beyond, to the detriment of those who held leadership in the past or that were circumscribed by community politics.

In one of many conversations, Lolita told me that she has thirteen godchildren, a considerable number in the area. In Cotacachi and other areas of the Ecuadorian highlands, the number of godchildren is still a fairly good proxy to a person’s social recognition and prestige. Lolita enjoys recognition from members of her community and beyond. As the grandchild of a leader who founded her community, she witnessed firsthand how her grandfather dispensed indigenous justice. For instance, he used to give advice to couples in the community who were having marital problems. As she recalls it, Lolita has participated in community organization since her teens. First, she was ñusta of the community soccer team. Lolita spent several years working as a domestic worker in Ibarra and Quito. This work even took her to Chile for a year, when she was working with the family of an Ecuadorian diplomat. Back in the community, and still single, she became the president of a committee that unites nine communities located close or adjacent to lake Cuicocha, a prominent geographical feature in the landscape and a place where several rituals take place. With this committee, Comité Kuichik Kucha, she strived for the recognition of the right of the communities to have a predominant role in the use and management of the natural resources of the lake, against the local municipal administration and the national park in the area. Later, she became the first female president of the cabildo of Moraleschupa, her community. In her role as president of the community, Lolita acquired long desired infrastructure: a dirt road that allowed transportation by car or bus; the power supply and some modest street lighting; the renovation of the communal house; and the construction of a community soccer field. These were remarkable achievements that made evident her capabilities as a community leader and for which she had gained recognition from the community members.

Lolita has been the president of the group of women of her community several times. Both as president of the cabildo and as president of the group of women, Lolita participated in the activities that UNORCAC organized for its member communities. According to the organization’s structure of leadership, to be eligible for a political appointment On the Committee of Women of UNORCAC, a woman needs to be a representative of her community’s group of women. As such, Lolita was elected the president of the Committee of Women of UNORCAC in 2007, a three-year appointment that made her the official representative of the indigenous women of Cotacachi. While as

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54 Ñusta is a kichwa word for a beautiful young woman. In the opening ceremonies of neighborhood or school soccer championships in Ecuador, teams usually parade preceded by a young woman, or madrina de deportes. With a sort of small beauty pageant, one of these women is elected as the madrina de deportes of the championship. Some indigenous female leaders in Ecuador also started as ñustas or Misses, a role that may prepare women for public speech. See for instance the work of Pequeño (2007).
president of the Comité Kuichik Kucha, president of the cabildo, and president of the
group of women of her community, Lolita has an outstanding trajectory, her performance
as president of the Committee of Women was, for many, rather unsatisfactory. Some of
the elements of this disappointment with her leadership performance will be analyzed
below but first I turn to Mercedes’ experience as a leader.

Mercedes was and continues to be a recognized female leader in Cotacachi and is
credited with formally starting the structure of the Committee of Women of UNORCAC.
Mercedes recalled that she has always liked to be involved with the community. When
she was single, she participated in the communal jobs of her community. Upon marriage,
she moved to her husband’s community. There, she saw women who participated in the
organization, and she wondered “What does one need to do to get involved in that?” Her
political trajectory began when she became involved in a community daycare center.
There, she met the women of the community and later joined the women’s group. At the
same time, she became an alternate member in the community cabildo. Later, she was
elected secretary of the cabildo. As a representative of the cabildo, she started to
participate in UNORCAC. First, she worked in a forestry development project, in charge
of reforestation and the promotion of home gardens. Then, she was elected to be part of
the board of UNORCAC, as the representative for women. At that moment, the
Committee of Women did not exist as such. In a few communities, women’s groups have
started in response to health and nutrition projects or to access credit, but there was no
centralized structure specific for women within UNORCAC. Mercedes called on the
existing women’s groups in order to discuss what women needed and what they should
do:

Mercedes: Then, one problem was that of domestic abuse [maltrato en el hogar],
that men did not allow women to participate in organizations because they say
that women follow the wrong path [siguen malos pasos], and that when women
participate is because they no longer respect their husband. There was also the
topic of health. One of the main topics was that of health, of recognition within
the hospital. That they [hospital personnel] do not recognize, do not respect, do
d not value, do not understand [indigenous patients]. The compañeras come from
far away, and sometimes they are not served in the hospital. Another topic was
that of self-esteem, or how to start working on this topic in UNORCAC, that we
need to value ourselves in order to keep on working.

Maria: and why the topic of self-esteem?

Mercedes: because we women were always devalued, in the organization, in the
home itself, that we women were not good for organizational topics, that women
were only good for the house, for taking care of the children, and that we could
not take up other roles because we were not capable of doing so.
With this in mind, Mercedes and other leaders formed the Central Committee of Women of UNORCAC in 1996. Mercedes started new women’s groups in other communities and planned activities with the groups. For instance, they used to organize the celebration of March 8th, the international day of women, and invite guest speakers for the occasion. Around that same time, the Doctors Without Borders project started. The project was for the areas of Cotacachi and Otavalo, covering 51 communities in both cantons. Mercedes was hired as a staff member of this project. She worked organizing mothers on the topics of home gardens, nutrition and appropriate child growth, and preparation of healthy food based on the local cuisine. The project also had a major component on health training, the recovery of traditional medicine, and the recognition of traditional healers, especially midwives.

Mercedes combined her work on the project of Doctors Without Borders with her leadership duties at UNORCAC. She negotiated time in her job in order to be able to act as a leader. Nevertheless, there was a considerable overlap between her two appointments, as she visited communities and interacted with women and midwives. Mercedes also moved up on UNORCAC’s board and became vice-president of the organization. During her leadership, women of UNORCAC started several landmark projects such as the annual seeds fair. Additionally, the gestiones done by Mercedes resulted in the acquisition of the plot for the ethnobotanical garden and the construction of the building where the office of Jambi Mascaric (the project Searching for Health that worked with midwives) was located. It had conference rooms, a kitchen and dining facility, and spaces arranged for traditional health services and the agroecological fair on Sundays. This building became “the office of the women” of UNORCAC.

The process of citizen participation started in Cotacachi in 1996, promoted by the administration of the former mayor, Auki Tituaña, who, although not related to the creation of UNORCAC, was supported by the organization as the first indigenous major in Cotacachi. Mercedes participated closely in this process and has been a representative of the indigenous women in the Citizen Assembly of Cotacachi on and off. In 2000, Mercedes ran for the municipality council and became the first indigenous woman to be concejala, a member of the council in Cotacachi. This was an especially demanding task for Mercedes, as the structure and activities of the municipality were new to her. By 2009 UNORCAC had grown apart from the major Tituaña and did not support him in the last election. Animosities grew between the board members of UNORCAC and Mercedes, as she was identified as a supporter of Tituaña. Although Mercedes has been somehow marginalized from UNORCAC, especially by its president, she has continued to participate in the Committee of Women and maintains strong ties to the Citizen Assembly and to organizations of women beyond Cotacachi, such as the Assembly of Popular and Diverse Women of Ecuador.

Both Lolita and Mercedes are remarkable leaders. Assessed by the infrastructure—still a valued element for leadership—that they have been able to get for
their communities or organizations, both have fared outstandingly. From the point of view of her own community and as a representative of Comité Kuichik Kucha, Lolita’s leadership is widely recognized and cherished. Mercedes’ recognition comes from her performance at a different site—first, that of representative of UNORCAC, and as such, as representative of indigenous women in political spaces of citizen participation and public appointments in canton Cotacachi and beyond. The differences between the leaderships of Lolita and Mercedes are significant, and signal changes in the skills that are acquiring relevance to act in the local political spaces and elsewhere.

To establish a comparison between Lolita and Mercedes, some relevant parameters need to be identified. Here I borrow some criteria from Prieto (1998): first, the leaders’ education and training, the influence of family, and the origin of their leadership will be discussed. Second, their leaderships will be characterized by their location, site, representation, and relations with the indigenous movement and women’s groups and movement. Third, relationships will be established between their leadership and their access to resources, professed gender ideology, and struggle for women’s interests, as well as the tensions between a gender-based and an ethnic-based alignment.

Education is an element of increasingly critical importance for indigenous leadership (García 2005; Laurie, et al. 2003). Both Lolita and Mercedes are literate, but they differ in the level of education each has acquired. Lolita only attended but did not finish the first three years of primary school, while Mercedes did finish primary education, and studied some years of high school but did not finish her secondary education. Limited education had an adverse effect on Lolita’s command of Spanish. Sufficiency in Spanish is fundamental for leadership, because indigenous leaders represent the constituencies of their organizations vis-à-vis a myriad of actors and in forums where Spanish is the dominant language. As for other indigenous women of Cotacachi with limited education, Lolita’s low Spanish language proficiency does not allow her to communicate certain ideas and interact confidently in that language. This contrasts with her ability to deliver articulate and moving speeches in Kichwa. Mercedes, on the other hand, speaks both Kichwa and Spanish fluently. It is not uncommon to find her translating in talks, workshops, or training sessions for indigenous women. Sufficiency in the use of Spanish in public and formal expression is considered a key asset for leadership, and this has been to a great extent advantageous to male leaders, even when some of them still struggle with that language (Canessa 1997; Harvey 1991).55 Both leaders, but especially Lolita had great difficulty with Spanish which affected her understanding of several external actors, especially those who use specific professional jargon such as development workers.

There are some similarities in the leadership trajectories of these two women. Lolita comes from a family of leaders and has enacted her leadership in her own

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55 The dynamics of language and power will be further explored in Chapter 7, when I discuss the political participation of women in the public sphere of Cotacachi canton.
community, where she is very much respected. Mercedes, on the other hand, moved to a
different community when she married, and once there, she started to develop her
leadership trajectory. Both have confronted the opposition of their husbands and close
relatives and have been questioned for not always fulfilling their traditional roles as
wives and mothers. Both have juggled being the main person responsible for the care of
small children, the agricultural plots and small animals, while simultaneously keeping up
with a busy schedule as community and organization leaders. Both women have
participated in and presided over women’s groups in their communities. Both have also
been members of the cabildo, but only Lolita has been president of the cabildo.

However, their trajectories diverge specially regarding their involvement with
UNORCAC and other external actors. Early in her leadership trajectory, Mercedes was
involved in UNORCAC, in the process of citizen participation of the canton, as well as in
large development projects as a staff member. Although Lolita had participated to certain
extent in all of these spaces before her appointment as president of the Committee of
Women, she has less experience then Mercedes in those arenas of political action. Her
experience was mainly circumscribed at the communal level and in her capacity as
representative of a women’s group. Lolita does know how to navigate the intricate webs
of state bureaucracy and the client-patron relations that are to be established with mestizo
representatives of the state in order to obtain services and infrastructure for the
community. However, the dynamics of the leadership at a second-tier organization were
new to her by the time of her appointment to the Central Committee of Women. In
addition, she had also had very limited exposure to the practices and discourses of
development projects from within (as a staff member). Finally, Lolita has not been
elected to public office or ever worked within the local government.

Mercedes’s leadership has benefited from her experiences at multiple levels.
Beyond formal basic schooling, Mercedes has been able to gain valuable skills through
her experience with diverse projects in which she has taken part. Her participation in the
project of Doctors Without Borders was a highlight in her professional trajectory. She has
also collaborated as a local research assistant on several research projects conducted by
national and international scholars. Through her connection to the Citizen Assembly,
she has also been able to network with organizations and people beyond Cotacachi, for
instance organizations of indigenous and non-indigenous women from the country.
Finally, as a candidate of Pachakutik, the political arm of the national indigenous
organization, CONAIE, Mercedes was able to learn important political lessons while at
the same time connecting to other candidates of the movement. Thus, Mercedes’s
leadership has been tested in multiple arenas and has confronted diverse actors, giving
her much more political clout than what Lolita enjoys.

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56 Mercedes has worked closely with Virginia Nazarea and the late Robert Rhoades from the University of
Georgia.
Regarding the relation between leadership and access to resources, one of the recurrent complaints of the members of the Committee of Women of UNORCAC is that of the lack of remuneration for the president of the Committee. All of the dirigentes of UNORCAC, except for the president of the organization, fulfill their organization duties ad honorem. This was considered an important barrier to a proper fulfillment of the duties of the president of the Committee of Women. Lolita did not count on remuneration, which ostensibly affected her possibilities of mobilization. Mercedes, on the other hand, was able to secure a wage as a staff member of development projects while at the same time accommodating her leadership duties. Moreover, in the years when Mercedes was an elected leader of UNORCAC, the organization attracted considerable funding for diverse projects and Mercedes was able to direct some funds for the activities of the Committee. Lolita, on the other hand, regretted that she had to ask for women’s participation but was not able to support women’s transportation to meetings and workshops or offer snacks at meetings.

In terms of their professed gender ideology, neither Lolita nor Mercedes make recourse to the Andean gender complementarity as other leaders of indigenous organizations do. Both women find that gender relations in their organization, communities, and homes are unequal and detrimental to women. However, Mercedes was recognized as a leader who worked for women and confronted male leaders in order to implement women’s initiatives. Lolita usually aligned with the position of the president of UNORCAC, and many actors reproached her for not acting independently. For Lolita, it was important to maintain her loyalty with those leaders with whom she started her political career at UNORCAC, especially in a highly polarized political context.

Mercedes, on the other hand, was considered to be able to articulate a position that was independent from that of the president of the organization and one that represented indigenous women’s specific interests. For both women, it was important to recognize that they “came from the process,” that is, that they had started their political careers in the communities affiliated to UNORCAC and as members and elected leaders of the organization. However, due to her political connections in the Citizen Assembly and beyond, Mercedes counted on the advice of professional indigenous women such as Azucena, the indigenous técnica quoted above, regarding her own views about complementarity and indigenous feminism. Although some considered Lolita as well as other women from UNORCAC rather passive—a general stereotype of indigenous women—her position can also be understood as a complicated location at the crossroad between gender and ethnicity. On the one hand, she strived to maintain ethnic loyalties and the support of the male leaders of the organization within an interethnic context that devalues what is indigenous and indigenous women in particular. On the other, she feared articulating a position that emphasized gender differences but that may had been understood as divisive and thus debilitating for the organization, or in line with a

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57 This and other barriers to leadership will be analyzed in the next chapter.
separatist strategy of “women only” that indigenous leaders tended to identify with “western feminism.”

There are multiple differences between Lolita and Mercedes. Here I have tried to unravel those elements of leadership that give more legitimacy to Mercedes and raise concerns about Lolita’s performance. Beyond the individual styles and personalities of these two leaders, their different leadership trajectories and skills are at the basis of the differential recognition they receive from different actors. Mercedes’s political clout comes from various skills that have allowed her to find “her own voice,” to use both Spanish and Kichwa confidently, to understand the mechanics of development projects, to exercise leadership beyond the community level, to create networks of allies beyond UNORCAC, and to articulate a discourse of gender difference while still maintaining her identity as representative of indigenous women.

**Conclusion**

The debate on women’s power in the Andes centered on the discussion of gender complementarity, whose proponents suggested that gender relations in the Andes allowed women to influence decisions (Hamilton 1998; Nuñez del Prado 1975). Nevertheless, those analyses rested on a material base in which women have control over agricultural production in communities largely dependent on this activity. Some of these analyses, however, already pointed to the limited participation or marginalization of women from the political spheres that connected the community with the outside world and its representatives (Canessa 1997; De la Cadena 1995; Harvey 1991). The representation of the community vis-à-vis the state and the society was a male prerogative. Additionally, the marginalization of indigenous women from politics takes place in the wider context of a patriarchal and profoundly discriminatory society. Nina Pacari, a renowned intellectual of the indigenous movement reflected on this topic:

... in the struggle for land, for instance, the women took on the defense of the possession in which the community was located, while the men faced the legal procedures and confronted the criminal proceedings, because under the non-indigenous logic, “the man was more respected.” Then, the confrontation had to be between equals, between men. (Pacari 1998:63; my translation).

Changes in rural livelihoods have transformed indigenous communities in the Andes. During the 1990s, the ascendance of the indigenous movement and its participation in electoral politics contributed to deepen the changes taking place in indigenous communities, as their representatives won several spaces at the local (municipal) government and higher structures of state power especially since the 1996 elections. This scaling-up of indigenous power has had important implications for female leadership as well. The construction of leadership in Kichwa societies has morphed from
the more traditional forms of social and political prestige, which even if still playing
certain role in leadership (for instance the number of godchildren that Lolita has), are
giving way to new elements acquiring increasing salience. It seems that the absence of
men due to migration out of the communities has opened up the possibilities for women’s
entrance to positions of power and representation of the community with the outside
world. In this context, as Cervone has found “formal education, experience in interethnic
negotiations, and, most recently, participation in development projects, have all become
pivotal criteria for community affirmation of local as well as national leaders” (Cervone

Many of the attributes of the new leadership pose important challenges to the
participation of women. That is the case of formal education and the associated language
skills. Mercedes has achieved a higher level of education and confidence in Spanish than
Lolita, although both of them feel anxious about making mistakes when they voice their
opinions. Education is a key cultural capital for the interethnic interactions required for
leadership, especially in their role as representatives with the mestizo society and other
actors. Scaling leadership up from the community level to second-tier organizations and
beyond also requires understanding the intricacies of the world of development
organizations and projects, or other social movements such as the women’s movements,
that is, of a myriad of actors beyond the state. Finally, the recognition from external
actors depends on the capacity of indigenous women to articulate a discourse that
emphasizes gender difference, even when that discourse can place them at odds with their
own organizations. In the following chapter, the obstacles to women’s participation will
be further analyzed, as well as women’s responses to those barriers and motivations for
their participation in spite of the multiple doubts cast on their capabilities for leadership.
Chapter 5: Women Who Walk: Indigenous Women of Cotacachi and their Political Participation

Shina Purijunchik, Ashaguta Yachajunchik
(By Walking, We Learn a Little)
Fabiola, Woman from Cotacachi

Introduction

Indigenous women in Cotacachi are political actors at various levels. Some women start their political trajectory in the low ranks of both the community and the second-tier organization, UNORCAC. Others are more active at the local government level (Municipality) or in the process of citizen participation (Citizen Assembly). Although indigenous women have been present since the inception of UNORCAC in the late 1970s and at the beginning of the process of citizen participation since 1996, they still face several barriers to their participation, to which they have responded with more or less success with a variety of strategies. Participation in politics may imply personal costs and additional demands on women’s time. Nevertheless, women still take on this responsibility, for a variety of reasons. In this chapter, I explore the barriers that indigenous women face at different levels of local participation; the strategies they use; and the motivations they express for their participation. The levels I analyze are the family and community; the cabildo or community authorities; and the second-degree organization, UNORCAC. A close examination of the specific barriers, strategies, and motivations at this level is necessary in order to problematize the contention that the local level of political participation may be the most auspicious for women’s participation (Ranaboldo 2006:63). I argue that local politics are still fraught with elements that thwart this group’s participation, and that adversely affect indigenous women. Still, in spite of different types of barriers that aim to “domesticate” indigenous women’s politics in the public space, indigenous women are present at the different levels of political participation with more or less success in articulating and pursuing their demands, using both strategies and tactics, organization and ruse (de Certeau 1984).

Family and the Community: Barriers to and Strategies of Indigenous Women

Something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict or prevent the thing’s motion or mobility.

Oppression, Marilyn Frye (1983)

One of the main arguments of Marisol de la Cadena (1995) when she asserts that women are more Indian is that women’s mobility beyond the community is more
restricted than that of their male counterparts. This is true for the women of Cotacachi as well. Both indígena and mestiza leaders commented on the restrictions to women’s mobility. The political participation of women as members of the community cabildo, as representatives of women at UNORCAC or at the Citizen Assembly, or as elected members of the municipal council demands that women attend a series of events, meetings, and training opportunities. For women who like to be out of their homes, the adjective andariega, “fond of walking”, is used to try to restrict their mobility. Several negative connotations are attached to being andariega. One is that of being lazy. Not only husbands, but other women such as mothers, sisters, or neighbors, have accused women who participate in politics of it. For example, Lolita shared, “My husband told me that I spend the time strolling, that that is because I’m lazy, that I do not want to do the house chores.”

These tactics of shaming tap into local ideals of proper femininity: women stay at home; they care for their husbands and children; they work in the house, fields, or community; in short, the proper place for women is the private sphere. Women relate that they are reprimanded not only by men but also by the very same women in their families with more traditional views on femininity. The sister of one woman sided with her husband in an argument, claiming that the woman was crazy, that “dejaba botando la casa y a los hijos” (she left the house and children abandoned). The blaming of indigenous women leaders for the tragedies of their families is pervasive. One instance of this was the death of the husband of the president of the midwives. Her husband was a construction worker and his death was the result of an accident in which he fell from a building. Nevertheless, one man commented that his wife had neglected her husband, because of her multiple commitments as the president of the midwives. He mentioned “las mujeres callejeras, ¡qué van a cuidar del marido!,” [the street/wandering women do not take care of the husband!]. Another leader, who was a former president of a cabildo, recalled that when she was young and went to organization meetings, her father was angry at her, thinking that she was “en otras andanzas” (in dubious affairs). He used to tell her:

*You are a woman; you must be here with your mother, together working in the house, helping to do the household chores, helping with the animals, helping to wash the clothes, helping to cook. Where do you come from? What were you doing out of the house? Carishina (man-like/tomboy), you are like a man. Only men can go out of the house to do anything or arrive later.*

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58 Tú eres mujer; tú tienes que estar con tu mamá aquí juntas en la casa ayudando, apoyando a hacer las cosas de la casa, ayudando a los animales, ayudando a lavar la ropa, ayudando a cocinar. ¿De dónde vienes? ¿Qué vienes haciendo afuera? Carishina, estás como los hombres. Solo los hombres pueden salir afuera a hacer cualquier cosa o llegar más tarde.
This man also used the adjective *carishina*, from the Kichwa cari = man, and shina = like, like a man, which is used against women in several contexts in which they transgress female gender roles. *Carishina* could describe a girl who is physically active, similar to the idea of a tomboy. *Carishina* also refers to women who do not know how to cook or do other household chores. In this context, *carishina* refers specifically to the idea of *andariega*. The accusation of *andariega* is not limited to neglecting traditional gender roles and proper (domestic) places for women. This adjective is especially harmful and hurtful because it casts doubts on women’s morality. “Has de tener mozo,” (you probably have a lover) is a comment meaning that the woman may be having an affair. Not only Cotacachi women leaders, but other women in the indigenous movement have reported being accused of having affairs with the male leaders. Picq (2009) found the same complaints in women who are active in the national indigenous movement. Indigenous female leaders affirm that domestic conflicts and even violence arise from this specific association of women being out of the home and active in organizations, and their supposed infidelity. Therefore, slut-shaming is used to castigate those who transgress the idea of the appropriate place for women (domestic, i.e., house, fields, community) and whose political commitments demand their absence from the domestic and community spaces and continuous attendance to meetings and events in the canton of Cotacachi and beyond. One mestiza woman, who at the time of my fieldwork was the canton coordinator of the women’s organizations of Cotacachi (comprising indigenous women, mestizas, and Afro women from the city and other rural areas), commenting on her busy agenda, jokingly said: “buscaránme otro marido” [you’d better start looking for a new husband for me]. A técnicas from UNORCAC commented that, “When we go work with them, the first thing is ‘first I need to see what my husband says; if he wants, then, yes; if he doesn’t, then, no.’ Then, they still do not have that decision-making power.”

Women’s mobility is not only questioned by their husbands and by women in their families or communities. For female leaders who are married and have children, their political activities enter in constant conflict with their domestic and maternal roles. Even if children may be considered as passive subjects, they may significantly affect the way in which women evaluate the personal costs of their leadership. Some women expressed their concern when their children complained about their absence from home. Many took their small children with them to the meetings. On one occasion, I asked why one of the members of the Central Committee was absent from one of their meetings, and I was told that her adolescent son has said that she was wasting her time with UNORCAC and was neglecting her home and fields. The president of the women of UNORCAC had similar issues. Her nine-year-old daughter and seven-year-old son at times protested her being out of the house. As in other parts of Latin America, indigenous women of Cotacachi invest motherhood with high value (Craske 1999; Stevens 1973). Some leaders felt pressure from their families, both spouses and children, as well as members of the extended family and community to conform to traditional gender norms, namely, being a
good woman equals being a devoted wife and a self-abnegating mother, and staying within the community confines, where women perform their role of the “hard working woman” in their fields and for the community. Too often, women get chastised for their disruption of traditional gender roles, just for the very sheer mobility beyond the house, fields, and community confines, required to carry out their leadership responsibilities.

Nevertheless, traditional gender roles are not the only factor that restricts women’s mobility to participate politically. Several female leaders commented on the economic cost of transportation. Women commuting to the town of Cotacachi and beyond usually relied on personal funds. Women who do not have an independent income depend on the money they can get either from husbands, the community’s organization, or UNORCAC. At the level of the community, when women are representatives in the cabildos, some funds are collected recognizing the need for the leaders to go to the town or other spaces of political decision making, especially when they are negotiating benefits or infrastructure for the communities. For others, the spending on transportation needs to be assumed as part of their political responsibility with their community, and many leaders both male and female complained about the onerous demands of being a cabildo representative.

One especially contentious issue connected to this lack of resources for transportation was related to a recurrent protest of the members of the Committee of Women. In several instances, the women of UNORCAC requested that the president of the Committee be paid a salary for her organizational work. Due to issues of funds mismanagement in previous administrations, the members of UNORCAC had decided that the appointed leaders work ad honorem, except for the president of the organization. All other representatives do not receive payment (around fifteen leaders). Women of the Committee contended that their president should also receive a payment due to the multiple responsibilities that she needs to assume, including attending a series of events and meetings. However, the conflict over payment was never resolved during my fieldwork. Lolita, the president of the women, had been offered a small “recognition” to be used toward transportation, but when she was told that she would receive ten dollars per month, she found the proposal rather offensive and preferred to decline the offer. The women’s expectation was for a salary, not for a token recognition. Lolita depended on her own and her husband’s income for these expenses. She commented that she and her husband had arguments about her not being paid, and he argued that at UNORCAC she was sacrificing herself for nothing. He had told her that if at least she were working for the community, i.e., being a cabildo leader, instead of the organization (second-tier organization), then he would understand, as the benefits for the community are more tangible and immediate.
“Tengo que ir a ver a mis vacas”

In their homes, fields, and communities, indigenous women have extensive responsibilities. The changes associated with circular migration (Flora 2006) have resulted in the reassignment of responsibilities to the women who stay in their communities. Men and young single women look for wage work beyond their communities, many of them as construction or domestic workers respectively. A process of “feminization of agriculture” associated with a general decline of the campesino economy (Larrea, et al. 2006:37) has increased the burden of agricultural activities and the care for livestock for women (especially those married) and others (young people and elders) who stay in the community. This reconfiguration of livelihoods places significant demands on the time of women, whose subsistence agricultural work subsidizes the local economy (Larrea 2009:58).

Some women complained that, even if they do the work at home and tend the animals, it is still their husbands who make decisions, especially those that affect the family economy. Women resort to using the limited income that they generate by selling small animals, from their handicrafts, or from the “bono solidario,” a state subsidy for the poorest in the form of a monthly payment of 35 dollars. A técnica of UNORCAC expressed:

… in general, in an important percentage, the money management is done by the husband and women manage very little. Sometimes the husband comes and leaves barely enough for water, electricity, groceries, and that is it. If the child gets sick and other problems that can happen, the señoras have no way to solve it but by selling the animals. That is something serious that I have seen59 (Cristina Villota, técnica of UNORCAC).

Women leaders face the need to juggle those multiple responsibilities. The increased burden of agricultural responsibilities has not changed the traditional assignment of household chores to females. Cooking, for instance is still one of the main elements associated with female responsibilities and identity in the Andes (Weismantel 1988). Many women leaders complained that they wake up earlier to leave breakfast ready before they leave for activities or meetings related to their leadership. Also, during meetings women mentioned at times that they needed to leave because they had not left anything at home for their children or husband to eat. The president of the committee of women of UNORCAC, Lolita, was repeatedly late to several morning meetings because she needed to cook breakfast, walk the children to school, and feed the animals.

59 … por lo general en un buen porcentaje, el manejo del dinero lo hace el marido y ellas muy poco manejan. A veces el marido viene y les deja con las justas para el agua, la luz, les deja con víveres y pare de contar. Si el chiquito se les enfermó y otros tipos de cosas que se pueden dar, las señoras no tienen cómo resolver a no ser que vendas a los animales. Eso es lo grave que he visto yo.
Among the women who participate in UNORCAC’s projects are the “agroecological producers.” The organization has several projects based on the notion of agroecology. Some have to do with home gardens and diversified products aimed to improve children’s and family nutrition; other are geared toward the production of small domestic animals, mainly guinea pigs, poultry, pigs, and sheep, a number of whose offspring have to be passed to new beneficiaries from the communities. Some women are part of an initiative to produce organic golden berries and blackberries. Additionally, in annual events sponsored by UNORCAC, such as the Fair of Seeds, women are portrayed as the guardians of agrobiodiversity because they are seen as the ones who conserve the native seeds. Midwives, as well, grow some of the medicinal plants they use. It is not a coincidence that women play such a significant role in these projects. In practice, it is women, to a significant degree, who are at the community to take the responsibility of planting, weeding, irrigating, and harvesting the gardens and plots. Several times, I interviewed women while they were attending to these reproductive-productive responsibilities. Their leadership responsibilities just add more to their already busy schedules as agriculturalists.

For instance, caring for small animals and for herds was considered one of the most demanding activities. Lolita was constantly worried about the caring of her cows, and the need to herd them daily. This was an activity that she enjoyed, as she wandered through the community, but that was at odds with her need to be away, in Cotacachi town or visiting other communities that belong to the organization. In 2010, a sustained drought affected the availability of grass and consequently Lolita needed to herd the cows farther and farther from home. Since her children were still relatively young, they could not help her with this daily responsibility. On one occasion, her ox had fallen into a ditch, but Lolita was at a meeting in Cotacachi town. Her daughter called her in desperation asking her to come back to the community. Other community members had been trying to help the ox out of the ditch until they finally rescued it. Lolita recounted that the community members were angry at her for not having been there, while her husband argued that this happened because she was attending the meeting.

*Tactics at the Family Level: Accommodating to Traditional Roles*

_The weak must continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them_  
Michel de Certeau

Lolita told me that in some Kichwa songs, advice is given to women when they marry: “(Your in-laws) are going to be stingy to you. You left your father and your mother. Now your husband is like your father. You have to put up with it.” At the level

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60 Te van a mezquinar. Ya dejaste a tu papá y a tu mamá. Ahora tu esposo es como tu papá. Tienes que aguantar.
of the family, their domestic responsibilities at home, and as agriculturalists, women display a variety of tactics that help them “put up with it.” I draw from the distinction between strategies and tactics made by Michel de Certeau (1984). Strategies necessitate a “subject of will and power” that has a “proper place” from which to establish relations with an exterior and produce a “calculus of force-relationships” (1984:xix). In contrast to this organized and intentional activity to contest power, tactics are rather opportunistic. Tactics are a calculus that operates without a proper place--they “insinuate [themselves] into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance” (1984:xix). Tactics depend on time, on seizing opportunities. For de Certeau, many everyday practices are tactical in nature, and depend on “clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, ‘hunter’s cunning,’ maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike” (1984:xix).

That women are able to move out from the private spaces of the home and the community to the public spaces of their political participation is predicated upon a series of small tactics that acknowledge the power of the husband to control their mobility. Considering that most of the women I interviewed were or had been leaders of formal organized structures in their communities and beyond, their acquiescence to traditional gender roles may seem at odds with their political roles in public arenas. At the micro level of the family and community, indigenous women display their agency in ways that do not necessarily resist gender power configurations, in the sense that they do not oppose them overtly. This does not necessarily mean that they condone them either. The song to which I referred above is an example of how the relative power between husband and wife is conceptualized. For those adhering to traditional gender roles, husbands are still seen as having the final authority in families, with the capacity and the right to control their wives and children. The household, then, is to a certain extent the “place of the other,” the place of the authority of the father.

In order to deal with their absence from home, women leaders resort to several tactics that do comply with traditional gender roles. In the previous section, I explored how women’s participation was curtailed by the necessity to fulfill their household and agricultural duties and comply with the image of the abnegated wife and caring mother. In addition, women negotiated their leadership activities taking into consideration when the husband was present or absent from the house. During days in which her husband was at home (in the in-between time of the end of a construction contract and a new one, for instance), Lolita was more likely to stay at home and miss leadership activities. Other leaders left early from one of the meetings because her husband had told her: “volverás pronto m’ijita, porque voy a estar acá temprano” [Come back soon, my little daughter (form of endearment), that I will be back here early].

The maternal role is another element dealt with in an opportunistic manner. It is not uncommon to see indigenous women carrying their children on their backs. Several women leaders who had children, especially if the children were babies and toddlers,
took them to the meetings. Carrying the children on their backs is a widespread practice, and one can observe women going about their daily activities with a small child on their backs. Lolita for instance, was president of her community with a baby on her back and a toddler at her side. Sometimes women rely on relatives or other people to take care of the children, but babies and toddlers are usually with their mothers. However, foreign development workers and volunteers used to evaluate the presence of children as negative for women’s participation. They consider children’s proper place to be at home or at school, while in Ecuador and more generally in Latin America, children are present at several events and spaces with adults. One development worker from a Spanish aid agency thought that this practice was detrimental to women’s participation:

[indigenous women] come to the activities or meetings with their guaguas [children]; they have no choice. I know that for them it is very normal, and they must be accustomed to that. But I wonder if they could share that [responsibility] a little, because whether you want it or not, while a woman is at a workshop, she must also pay attention to whether the child cries or not, that they have to step out [of the meeting], that they need to breastfeed the baby. I do not know. They [indigenous women] take it as if it were the most normal or natural thing in the world. But from my perspective, seen from the outside, this woman would make the most out of the workshop or activity, had she only taken care of herself and not of her child, too. (Montserrat Arranz, Xarxa).

Indigenous women’s agency incorporates traditional roles, or works from within these gender configurations. At times, women humor their husbands, so that they are on good terms when they inform them that they need to attend activities that require them to travel for more than a day at a time. Somehow, that women ask for permission reinforces the role of the husband as the patriarch of the family. In that sense, these micro tactics are forms of accommodation to dominant values. Nevertheless, they “should not be viewed as the simple acceptance of dominant ideals or of the partner’s power” (Alcalde 2010:35). As Alcalde argues, accommodation and resistance are not necessarily exclusive and distinct, and acknowledging this ambivalence prevents us from romanticizing resistance (Abu-Lughod 1990; Alcalde 2010:35-6). Nonetheless, at the same time I argue that these tactics cannot be dismissed because they work from within dominant patriarchal values. These quotidian accommodations to and negotiations with established traditional gender roles ultimately allow women to take their public leadership roles, and these political roles do transgress the traditionally “appropriate” place for women. Therefore, a foot in the door of “the public,” depends upon accommodations in “the private.”

My findings are consistent with those of scholars who argue that although in Latin America gender roles are being transformed and the place of women in society is being redefined, in many cases men’s gender responsibilities at home have for the most part remained untouched (Craske 1999:14). While women have taken on new public roles, for
many women in Cotacachi, the household may still be a stronghold of male privilege. Thus, women have to humor their husbands in order to negotiate their absence from home. Also invested in maintaining a respectable position as committed wives and mothers and hard-working campesinas, women leaders add to their traditional gender responsibilities the new responsibilities stemming from their political activity. Nevertheless, many women reported that their husbands are “comprensivos” [understanding] and not only let them participate but also “help” them at home when they have to leave.61 Still, women’s political participation is predicated upon adding to women’s care and agricultural responsibilities, in a context of absent husbands and other young adults due to migration. Considering that women’s time is not elastic, their political participation requires a considerable time commitment that may significantly extend their working day.

In Cotacachi indigenous women leaders find ways to somehow circumvent the restraining forces of traditional femininity without, nevertheless, dismantling them altogether. Some of the interviewees participated even when their political activities caused fights with their husbands that ended in physical violence. One woman who had been an important UNORCAC women’s leader recalled: “asi me machuque, me iba,” [even if he smashed me, I left (to go to activities as leader)]. I have also heard from others that this woman had experienced increased domestic violence during the thick of her political activism. Other women too participated even if it took risking their physical integrity, especially when their presence in a meeting or activity was indispensable. Although not necessarily a situation reported by the majority of the interviewees, physical violence was seen as a possible outcome of tensions of indigenous women leaders with their husbands. Once in the public sphere, though, women face a new series of challenges to which they respond with other tactics and strategies that will be analyzed below.

**Becoming Cabildos: Walking for the Community**

*Cabildos* are the community authorities, traditionally comprised of five representatives: a president; a vice-president; a secretary; a treasurer; and a trustee (síndico). Women have been increasingly more present in the *cabildos* at least in the last decade. Although the data are unclear about when the change took place in the communities, interviewees agree that nowadays women do participate, not necessarily in equal terms, but most report a consistently increasing rate of female participation. At the UNORCAC’s archives, scattered data exist about the number of women who have been in *cabildos* (Table 5.1). Nevertheless, in the last decade several women have become

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61 I do not have definite data on why some men and households are more permissive than others. Some data from my interviews, however, suggest that men who are younger or who themselves have been leaders tended to be more permissive than older generations.
presidents and vice-presidents of cabildos. In Ecuador, the quota laws of 1997, 1998, and 2000 (Del Campo and Magdaleno 2008:283-4) required the progressive incorporation of women in electoral processes. However, only a couple of interviewees established a connection between the quota laws in place in the country and the perceived increased participation of the women in the community cabildos, not only as presidents and vice-presidents, but also in relation to attending meetings and voicing their opinions.

Table 5.1. Number of female leaders in community cabildos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>12 female out of 46</td>
<td>26 n/a</td>
<td>5 female out of 46</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>11 female out of 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-President</td>
<td>17 female out of 46</td>
<td>36 n/a</td>
<td>15 female out of 46</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>16 female out of 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Síndico</td>
<td>12 female out of 46</td>
<td>26 n/a</td>
<td>12 female out of 46</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11 female out of 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>30 female out of 46</td>
<td>65 n/a</td>
<td>30 female out of 46</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>22 female out of 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>28 female out of 46</td>
<td>60 n/a</td>
<td>21 female out of 46</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>23 female out of 46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data gathered with the assistance of Alberto Lima, UNORCAC.

Most interviewees see the increased participation of women as an important achievement. Some pointed to the influence of specific development projects that required or encouraged women’s participation. Others referred to the absence of men from the communities due to processes of circular migration. The triggers of the increased female participation are more likely multiple, but indigenous women are indeed more active in the local spaces of political participation, that is, as community authorities in the cabildos.

Interviewees reported that in the past it was more usual to have women as secretaries or treasurers than as the other more powerful representatives. Young women were assigned these responsibilities, especially when they were literate. But the higher positions such as president, vice-president, or síndico were assigned to male representatives. Moreover, most of the interviewees agreed that the participation of women both as representatives in the cabildos and during community assemblies used to be relatively limited. In the community assemblies, the voice of the male household-head predominated. According to a former female president of a cabildo and member of the Committee of Women:

*In the [community] assemblies, when we used to participate, I used to think, that we [women] are here participating. We had voice but not vote. The husband had to come to the assembly to vote. When the husband was absent, [the woman] could not decide, she did not have decision-making power. [Women] used to say: “you [the husband] better go to the meeting because they do not take us into consideration, we cannot decide, then, you must go to the meeting because they do not take into account what we [women] say.)*

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62 Entonces en las reuniones cuando sabíamos estar participando, entre mí yo decía, pero si estamos aquí participando, nosotros teníamos voz pero no voto, tenía que venir el marido a la reunión para que vote.
The commentaries of the women from Cotacachi contradict what has been reported from other places in the Andes in which indigenous women either directly (Hamilton 1998) or indirectly (Nuñez del Prado 1975) participate in decision-making at the community level. Various leaders recalled that it was common that women did not voice their opinions at the community assemblies. Many relate that several husbands at the community did not like it that women went to the community meetings. Some women used to say that their lack of participation at the community assemblies was due to their husband’s disapproval: “No, mi marido sabe hablar diciendo, ‘vos, ca, qué estás abriendo boca? ¡Vos, ca, qué estás hablando, diciendo!’” [No, my husband reprimands me by saying, ‘you, why are you opening your mouth? You, what are you talking, saying!’]. Nevertheless, some women leaders remember that they used to voice their opinions instead of just being there, sitting and watching: “Sea que hable bien o hable mal, tengo que siquiera algo opinar” (Whether I speak correctly or not, I have to express some opinion). Additionally, many interviewees commented that women’s work for the community mingas (organized communal labor) used to count as half of that of a man’s. However, most also think that even if the practice of discriminating against women’s participation survives especially among older generations, things have changed for the better for women’s participation.

Nevertheless, it is important to point out that women are less represented in the “juntas de agua,” or water boards, which are of paramount importance for communities that depend on communal water systems for their consumption and agricultural needs. A técnica of UNORCAC opined:

_What happens is that in this very machista society, it is a bit complicated, unless we have good participation of women inside the cabildos, so that a compañera become president. But, while we were in this situation in which the majority of the cabildos are men, it is hard that they see a woman as having the capability to become one. That same problem exists in the juntas de agua that we have. From all the juntas with which we work, only one compañera was president, 14 juntas were working, and only one was [a female] president and nobody else. At the end, the señora, when she ended her appointment, was not in a good position, because everybody bothered her until the end, that the financial report, the activities, that a woman does not know about water, that she does not know about this. Then, the_
woman was over. Then, as I said to you, some steps have been taken, but the machismo is entrenched (Cristina Villota, técnica of UNORCAC).  

Strategies When Being a Cabildo: Responding to a Reluctantly Accepted Role

Being elected a cabildo representative is something that some women accept rather reluctantly and, for some, rather than a personal choice, it is a decision imposed on them by the community. One leader recalls that the first woman to be elected secretary at her community accepted the position with great hesitation:

*Then the humble, crestfallen comrade said: “no comrades, I won’t be able to do it! What will I do there, and in the midst of all the men.” She said, “no, no, I won’t be able to do it; instead of causing a bad impression, I rather not accept”.*

Other women told her that she should have the experience of being a cabildo for one year. People encouraged her to take the challenge. At the end of her one-year appointment, the community was pleased with her performance. Women who have been cabildos felt that they needed to prove themselves as presidents of cabildos. On the one hand, they had to engage in extensive negotiations with their husbands, as described above, for the tactics to deal with traditional gender roles. On the other, they needed to counter the doubts usually cast on women’s capabilities for leadership as well as to overcome their own personal fears. In contrast to other members of the cabildo, the president needs to face any problem that arises in the community as well as serve as community representative in activities with UNORCAC and other organizations and outside agents. The community president’s responsibilities are highly demanding, as they usually entail the series of procedures called “gestionar obras,” that is, navigating the bureaucratic structures of the state and NGOs in order to gain something for the community, usually needed infrastructure.

As women’s capabilities for leadership are often put into question by other community members, women who are cabildo presidents usually double their efforts.

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64 Lo que pasa es que aquí en esta sociedad bien machista, medio complicado es, a no ser que al interior de los Cabildos tengamos buena participación de la mujer para poder llevar una compañera a la presidencia. Pero mientras estemos todavía en esa situación de que en la mayoría de los Cabildos todos sean hombres, difícilmente se le ve con capacidad para que una mujer entre. Ese problema mismo se da con las juntas de agua que nosotros tenemos; o sea, de todas las juntas con las que estamos trabajando, una compañera fue presidenta, estaban trabajando 14 juntas y solo una era presidenta y del resto no había nadie más y al final la señora al terminar su periodo salió bien mal ubicada porque todo el mundo le fastidió hasta el último, que el informe económico, las actividades, que una mujer no sabe del agua, que no sabe de esto, no sabe de esto otro, entonces se le acabó a la señora. Entonces como te digo, a nivel interno se ha dado ya los primeros pasos pero todavía es bien difícil, el machismo está bien arraigado.

65 Entonces la compañerita humilde, cabizbaja decía: “no, compañerías, yo qué voy a poder! Yo que voy a ir hacer allá, y en medio de todos los hombres.” Dice, “no, no voy a poder; en lugar de quedar mal, no acepto.”
This strategy usually puts strains on the family dynamics. One president recalled that her responsibilities required that she arrive late at night, and she did so several times with her children accompanying her. Coming back at night took a toll on the children’s health. The arguments with her husband at home escalated until he launched the ultimatum: “los guaguas o la comunidad,” “our children or the community.” Distressed with the situation at home, the president decided to discuss her situation with the other members of the cabildo. The vice-president proposed that she resign her position, and then he would take her place as president for the rest of the term. “Resign?”—she was not certain about the option. In a community assembly she put into people’s consideration whether she should resign, but the assembly did not accept it. They told her, “‘compañera, you have to finish, you have had good work initiatives. You are doing fine. We know and we understand about your family, but it is only one year. Make the effort.’ Everybody told me that. Then, they raised my morale. I felt stronger. I accepted. All right.”

Several women have achieved outstanding accomplishments as presidents or other members of the cabildo. As discussed in the last chapter, Lolita was a recognized leader in her community, as she was able to obtain several long-desired infrastructural projects. Other leaders, Alicia for example, concentrated on organizing events and workshops for the community. She complained that when the cabildo does not achieve something tangible, people believe they have not done anything. She made a point of explaining to the members of her community the processes through which infrastructure and other benefits are obtained, so that people knew that certain works may have been obtained by a past cabildo, but are built in later administrations. It is interesting to note that one strategy used by women to be able to work as cabildos is that the community mediates, to a certain extent, domestic conflicts as they support the women and may talk with their husbands to ask for their acquiescence with the community’s desire (Townsend 1999).

**The Women of UNORCAC: Walking With the Organization and Fighting Domestication**

Several women I interviewed referred to their participation using the Kichwa verb purina, which means to walk. “Shina purijunchik, ashaguta yachajunchik,” “by walking, we learn a little” is a phrase which refers to learning through their participation. Historical leaders talked about the ways in which they literally went to different communities when they were first creating the UNORCAC, wandering through valleys and highlands, and getting to know at the same time, the indigenous communities that now form the organization. Other leaders also used phrases such as “he andado con la organización,” literally, “I have walked with the organization.” Purina in Kichwa has the double sense of walking and learning (Harrison 1989; Muratorio 1998), and suggests a phenomenological understanding of learning. Therefore, the importance of understanding
the ways in which women thwart the multiple restrictions posed to their mobility through accommodations within the very “place of the other,” i.e. that of the father/husband or with overt defiance to their husband in the face of possible physical violence. Other scholars have also called attention to the language of movement, of “getting out of the house,” that women use to talk about their political participation: “The house, the home, becomes restrictive, limiting, disabling. Inside is stagnation. Outside are opportunities to join with other women, to participate, to organise” (Townsend 1999:69).

At the level of the canton, indigenous women of Cotacachi join, participate, and organize with other indigenous women through the Committee of Women of UNORCAC. This is a structure within the indigenous organization that comprises 29 community women’s groups; the association of midwives and health volunteers; the representatives of the group of agroecological producers; and women who are cabildo members. The Committee’s decisions are made by a group of fifteen representatives, but the president of the Committee has extensive responsibilities as the representative of the indigenous women of Cotacachi canton. Similar to how other indigenous organizations have created Secretariats of the Woman and the Family, UNORCAC has carved a specific space for women in the organizational structure. Some argue that the designation of secretariats of women and family are preferred by indigenous organizations to counter other possible designations such as secretariat of gender, because those are considered to generate division and be based on a (feminist) worldview alien to indigenous peoples, which separates the women from the indigenous movement (Méndez Torres 2009:59). In addition, these structures many times extend the maternal role of women to the political organization and circumscribe their work on topics such as health, education, and nutrition.

The indigenous women that I interviewed had their own perspective on the barriers they face for their political participation at this level. They acknowledged their disadvantaged social position manifested, for instance, in low levels of formal education or problems in the command of formal registers of Spanish (Harvey 1991). However, they also pointed to the specific gender dynamics of the indigenous organization, as well as other forms of gender inequality and racial discrimination in institutions of the wider civil society and local government. Within their own organization, they express that they do not always participate in important decisions regarding the activities of the organization—a process of decision-making largely controlled by male leaders with the input of the professional staff of the organization. Indigenous women are also disadvantaged in that they continue being beneficiaries of projects, rather than being involved in the formulation and management of development projects and their resources.

I argue that indigenous women of UNORCAC encounter processes of “domestication” when they enter the supposedly public space of an indigenous organization. To a certain extent, the politics of participation and negotiations that I have examined earlier with respect to both the home and the community take place in a more
intimate, familiar, “at home,” in short, domestic realm. However, in their participation in UNORCAC women relate to a different realm of political relations, since the organization is the representative of the communities in their relation with other national and international institutions and organizations. Thus, I contend that indigenous women leaders are domesticated by their indigenous organization in several ways, and that they enact forms of bargaining with patriarchal domination (Kandiyoti 1988). The concept of patriarchal bargains “is intended to indicate the existence of set rules and scripts regulating gender relations, to which both genders accommodate and acquiesce, yet which may nonetheless be contested, redefined, and renegotiated. Some suggested alternatives were the terms contract, deal, or scenario; however, none of these fully captures the fluidity and tension implied by bargain” (Kandiyoti 1988:288; endnote 1). Although both in their communities and in their organization women encounter different rules and scripts that regulate gender relations, they find ways to navigate the restrictions of “domestication,” “with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression” (Kandiyoti 1988:274).

In scaling-up their political participation to the level of UNORCAC, a second-tier organization beyond their own community, indigenous women leaders encounter processes in which they are “made domestic.” “Domestic” has several connotations, which help explore the kind of dynamics between the women of the Central Committee and UNORCAC. One of the meanings of domestic is that of “indigenous, made at home or in the country itself; native, home-grown, home-made,” as well as “pertaining to one’s own country or nation; not foreign, internal, inland, ‘home’” (“domestic,” Oxford English Dictionary). Domestication of women’s political participation in the organization entails extending the domestic roles to their work in the organization. Thus, women found themselves in charge of typically domestic activities, such as preparing, organizing, and distributing food. In the 2011 Inti Raymi celebrations, UNORCAC organized the children’s takeover of the Plaza, which takes place before the major celebrations of the ritual. Children are given the opportunity to enact this ritual and be somehow shielded from the violent encounters that sometimes explode between rival dancers. Within UNORCAC the commission of education was in charge of treating the participating children with food after the celebration was over. A small argument broke out between the commission of education and the Committee of Women. The representative of the commission had taken for granted that the women from the Committee would take the responsibility of distributing the food for hundreds of children that participated in the activity. Women of the Committee openly protested this assumption and the fact that they were not consulted. Nevertheless, in spite of their initial reluctance, the new president of the Committee of Women and the other members took on the task, perhaps to save face for UNORCAC, in an event that was staged at the main square of Cotacachi town. Although unwillingly, women found themselves enacting traditional female roles, and in
particular, domestic activities such as feeding, and, in so doing, “tolerating
domestication” (Poloma and Garland 1971).

Besides the meaning of making something domestic or belonging to the house,
domestication as a verb is also defined as “to tame or bring under control; *transf.*
to civilize” (“domestication,” Oxford English Dictionary). As women become political
actors within UNORCAC, tensions sometimes arise between the women of the Central
Committee and other leaders in the organization. Sometimes, these tensions originate in
women’s departure from the organization, when they seek advice or assistance from
allies outside of UNORCAC. “Se van con otros,” (they leave with others) mentioned a
male leader of UNORCAC while disagreeing with women on seeking advice from an
indigenous *técnica* from the Citizen Assembly, instead of consulting with the leaders and
staff members from the organization. According to the same leader, this separation sends
the message of a divided UNORCAC, and, for him, UNORCAC should present a unified
perspective to the outside.

Among the women of UNORCAC there were discussions over whether they
should act in esprit de corps or align with outside actors. UNORCAC male leaders and
professionals used to be uncomfortable when the women of the organization consulted
with people in other local or national organizations. Moreover, at certain moments, the
allegiance of the Committee of Women becomes central to political events, and the
(male) leaders actively seek to align women with the organization. This was the case in
the election of representatives in 2011. UNORCAC changes its leaders every three years.
In this particular election, Azucena, an indigenous woman who was close to the women
of UNORCAC but worked for the Citizen Assembly of Cotacachi, ran for the presidency.
She was enabled to do so as a current member of the *cabildo* of her community. From the
perspective of some women, the candidate met both UNORCAC’s requirements of
belonging to the community authorities and the credentials of being a professional with
ample experience in the process of Cotacachi’s citizen participation and the world of
development.

The women of the Committee were divided in their alliance with the organization
or the support of an indigenous female candidate who had worked with them closely.
When the male president at the time decided to run for a second term, allowed by
UNORCAC’s bylaws, the members of the Committee of Women were called to support
those leaders with whom they had become representatives of the organization. Moreover,
through several comments, mainly associating Azucena with a rival indigenous
organization, leaders worked to discredit her. The process was a great disappointment for
Azucena, who once counted with the support and enthusiasm of the women of the
Committee. After this election, women of the Committee were clearly divided between
those who decided to maintain a coordinated action with UNORCAC’s authorities and
those who thought that women should act in more autonomous ways. All in all, the
process made it patent that women were significant players in the internal politics of the organization.

After the election process, the reelected male leaders of UNORCAC took specific measures to “realign” the Committee of Women with the official perspective, and thus “domesticate” their participation. For starters, Lolita, the president of the Committee of Women, was under great pressure before and during the election process. She received constant calls from both parties to ask her who the Committee was endorsing and to advocate for one or the other candidates. Lolita was a proponent of coordinated action and the Committee ended officially supporting the male president for his rerun. Once the election process was over, additional political moves ensued. UNORCAC’s leaders exerted some influence in the selection of the new members of the Committee of Women. For instance, although the Committee encompasses several women’s groups, the core of the Committee consists of fifteen representatives from these constituencies. UNORCAC leaders close to the newly reelected president concocted a strategy to ensure that a critical amount of the new members of the Committee supported the president of the organization, so much so that the new representative of the agroecological producers, was, for the first time, a male representative—one very close to the reelected administration.

Additionally, the president of UNORCAC made some suggestions to sever the ties between the Committee of Women and national women’s groups. Specifically, UNORCAC questioned whether the Committee obtained any benefit from its relationship with the Assembly of Popular and Diverse Women of Ecuador (AMPDE 2014). The link with this specific group was established through the intermediation of the Citizen Assembly, and may show UNORCAC’s efforts to bring the Committee of Women into line with UNORCAC leaders and distance it from Azucena and others working at the Citizen Assembly. Thus, the process of making women “passive,” “without a voice,” “docile,” or “not able to articulate their own position,” requires considerable active effort by male leaders and UNORCAC’s professionals. The case of Azucena shows yet another facet of processes of domestication, one of “taming” the possible alliance of the Committee of Women with a rival candidate, and bringing it “under control” by also ensuring that the new members of the Committee be aligned with the group that continued in power.

Development with Identity but with Limited Participation

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66 The Assembly of Popular and Diverse Women of Ecuador is a collective comprised of women’s organizations from “popular sectors,” that is working-class women who called themselves diverse because they are from both urban and rural areas, from the coast, highlands and amazon of Ecuador, and include “indigenous, black, mestiza, chola.” They have been active in analyzing the processes of law creation in the National Assembly of Ecuador, and are active “in the construction of popular feminism towards the Good Living” (AMPDE 2014).
As in other indigenous organizations in Ecuador, UNORCAC combines its work as part of the indigenous social movement, specifically, as a member of the FENOCIN (National Federation of Campesino, Indigenous, and Black Organizations), and work as a development agent for the communities. The professional staff members at UNORCAC are in charge mainly of the development projects. As women become leaders in the organization, they also enter a world of projects, proposals, reports, and activities related to development. Most women are familiar with “proyectos,” the basic development unit, as many projects target women. Nevertheless, they are less familiar with the workings of the development apparatus (Escobar 1995).

Scholars have critiqued the politics and practices of development because of the recurrent processes that tend to adversely affect women. Some of these scholars focus on how development planning overlooked the productive role of women (Boserup 1970) or detrimentally changed, for women, customary access to resource use and ownership and allocation of labor (Carney and Watts 1991), while others point to the connection between processes of modernization and capitalist development and the concomitant association of women with the sphere of social reproduction (Nash and Safa 1980). Others, following the tradition of understanding development as a regime of knowledge and disciplinary power (Escobar 1995), demonstrate how the discourses of development constitute mechanisms of power that represent Third World women in particularly disempowering ways (Ong 1994) or organize the development planning and projects along expert knowledge that mystifies participants.

UNORCAC, as are many other indigenous organizations, is an OSG, organización de segundo grado, or second-tier organization, an organization comprising several communities. In Ecuador, Bretón (2001) has argued that, since the 1980s, rural development has been “ethnicized.” Bretón links this change to a reaction of neoliberal multiculturalism to the ascendance of the indigenous movement and especially to the national mobilizations during the 1990s. According to Bretón, neoliberal regimes managed and contained the indigenous platform by supporting demands for cultural recognition while obliterating any proposal that could affect the logic of the accumulation model. At the same time, he contends, these regimes channeled limited resources to indigenous communities in order to buffer the social cost of structural adjustment and to keep the indigenous leadership busy with the limited interventions of development projects. Bretón demonstrates the way in which NGOs have concentrated their efforts in the parishes with the largest indigenous populations and coordinated their efforts with the local OSGs. He harshly criticizes the effects of this association, and contends that the dependence of the OSGs on development resources has affected the indigenous leadership by turning it into a technocratic one, more busy with obtaining projects than with demanding the state fulfill its social obligations toward indigenous peoples. Bretón has coined the term “ethnophagy” to call attention to processes of ethnodevelopment that divert the efforts of the indigenous leaders from the more radical questioning of the logic.
of capital accumulation and marginalization from the state towards an assistance model of intervention based on the number of projects and the magnitude of resources to be redistributed.

Within this wider context of the cooptation of indigenous leadership in ethnodevelopment, specific gender dynamics position men and female leaders in different ways in the practices observed in OSGs that relate to development planning and projects. Processes of professionalization and expert knowledge have become increasingly important in development in general and “development with identity” in particular (Bondi and Laurie 2005; Kothari 2005; Laurie, et al. 2005). People inhabit different locations in the development apparatus, with different kinds of expertise and bases for their legitimacy. Access to expert knowledge in indigenous organizations is usually differentiated, as the case of UNORCAC shows. The interface between OSGs and the world of development with identity is predicated upon the expert knowledge of UNORCAC leaders and staff, or lack thereof. Both male and female indigenous leaders of UNORCAC agreed with the fact that the organization needs to “preparar cuadros”, prepare both indigenous men and women to take on not only political roles, but also professional roles in development. All of the técnicos (professionals) who manage projects at UNORCAC are mestizo men and women who design, plan, and execute such projects. However, while the president and other male leaders of UNORCAC were more familiar with the processes involved in the project cycle, indigenous women were usually confounded by them.

In terms of the development apparatus, then, indigenous women of UNORCAC are, by virtue of their limited opportunities for professionalization, less likely than men to acquire the necessary skills to become brokers of development, that is, to occupy the strategic interface of different worldviews and knowledge systems that bring together the local with broader realms (Olivier de Sardan 2005:173). Consequently, women leaders cannot access strategic positions of development brokerage and are, as a result, alienated from decision-making in the attainment of projects by UNORCAC. The ability to position oneself as a broker within the development apparatus plays a significant role in the leadership of UNORCAC as well as the broader Cotacachi context. Those who establish themselves as development brokers in the organization are supposed to represent the needs of the local populations to the structures of national and international aid and can gain political capital from being “the key actors in the irresistible hunt for projects carried out in and around [African] villages” (Bierschenk in Lewis and Mosse 2006:12). Brokers are not passive actors who just follow normative scripts; on the contrary, they display different forms of agency. From a mundane materiality, they are a group of social actors who specialize in the acquisition, control, and redistribution of the development resources. This mobilization of resources for the communities on whose behalf the brokers act or assume the position of representatives also serves the brokers themselves. The process of “speaking for” somebody helps to create a political subject.
position for the broker: brokers “reinforce their position in the local arena (and, on occasion, in the national arena as well). A link is thus established between development brokerage and patron-client systems” (Olivier de Sardan 2005:174).

The women of the Committee protested this kind of hierarchy: “We are only called for the signature,” that is, the representative of the Committee of Women of UNORCAC needs to sign and thus endorse a project proposal already developed by the professional staff of the organization. Women of the Committee pointed to their lack of participation in the process of project proposal preparation and the search for funding and complained that the decisions for projects and activities are made by the male leaders, usually with considerable input from the mestizo professional staff, the técnicos. They do not get to be brokers of the development process and do not control this interface between UNORCAC and national and international NGOs and aid funding. Women are usually first notified that “a project for women will come,” when the project has already been approved and funded. Then, they are involved and recruited for the project’s implementation, especially for issues of execution of the projects and sometimes even for rather menial activities such as “entregar convocatorias,” or distributing the call for participants.

The dynamic of the disempowered role of the women in the development politics and practices of UNORCAC place the women of the Committee in a rather ambivalent relation with the male leaders, but especially with the técnicos. Even if as leaders of the organization women of the Committee are higher in the hierarchy than the técnicos, in practice, the técnicos usually have more decision-making power, by virtue of their professional credentials and because of both paternalistic and outright discriminatory interethnic relations. Keeping indigenous women away from the roles of brokers of development marginalizes them from the management and distribution of development resources that help others establish their local political power. All in all, the control of development resources helps certain actors establish themselves as political subjects in local arenas, even if the development process as an aggregate may work towards depolitization (Ferguson 1994).

According to técnicos I interviewed, they search for projects and write the proposals according to the strategic plan of UNORCAC, as well as respond to calls for project proposals sent by the NGOs with which UNORCAC works. They argue that the strategic plan was developed through an ample process of participation, and that they work within the priorities established therein. One of the main técnicos argued that they only let women know about a project when they receive notice that it has been approved, in order not to generate false expectations. He contended that it would be rather ineffective to consult people at every step of the process of the project, starting with the writing of proposals. Nevertheless, this exclusion fails to train indigenous women in acquiring the skills of preparing and presenting projects and in understanding and navigating the local and global networks of development aid. Some women of the
Committee argued that they do not necessarily need the knowledge of designing projects, but that they should have their own técnico that works with them in doing specific projects for women that they consider relevant. They did recall a couple of técnicos in the past who were very close to women’s political processes, but at the time of my fieldwork, women of the Committee did not have a técnico specifically assigned to work with them. They were usually mystified in terms of the management of projects, and, from time to time, called técnicos in to update them about the progress of projects, without their actively participating in the decisions made by the técnicos. For instance, in a visit of representatives of Xarxa, a Spanish NGO that funds some of UNORCAC’s projects, a woman from the Committee commented: “nos hace falta mucho empoderamiento. Todavía nos dan decidiendo las cosas de mujeres, por desconocimiento o por falta de formación en género, en derechos de las mujeres” (We still need empowerment. They still make the decisions for us, due to [our] lack of awareness or due to the lack of training in gender, or in women’s rights).

**Mainstreaming the Gender Approach**

The women of the Committee understood their specific importance within development projects enamored with Andean indigeneity. As Bretón argued (2001), development and aid agencies favor working with indigenous populations, in spite of the fact that in some of the same regions, other populations are sometimes poorer and more marginal than their indigenous counterparts. Nevertheless, this process of “ethnicization” of rural development in Ecuador runs parallel to processes of gender mainstreaming in international aid. Many NGOs and aid funders have set specific gender (read “women”) requirements for their projects, for the consideration of women’s needs and their participation. Women of the Committee are cognizant on this type of prerequisite: “it is because of us that this project came.” Usually, when funders visit, they always want to see what women do and how the project is helping them. Not only in these specific visits, but in general, when other groups, e.g. national and international students; other allied organizations; and state officials, come to visit UNORCAC, women are appointed to showcase the embodiment of development with identity, i.e. traditional healers. Thus, women see their importance in “attracting” funding for the organization.

In the internal structure of UNORCAC, the Committee of Women is understood to be a part of the “social area.” According to one of the professionals of UNORCAC:

*The social area is the area of the women. There they manage the topic of nutrition, the topic of indigenous medicine, midwives, health volunteers. The topic of (indigenous) justice; the topic of culture; sports is also there... Recently, the projects for children under five years. Education has not been worked so much, except for environmental education that I will tell you about later. That is the social area.* (Hugo Carrera, técnico of UNORCAC).
Accordingly, the presence of women is associated with specific topics and areas within the organization, some of which have a direct connection with traditional roles for women, such as care activities, as well as those that represent indigenous identity. For this same técnico, women of the Committee became “actors” in UNORCAC because of the very same “enfoque de género,” “gender approach,” set as a requirement by the projects:

*And of course, the actors [in UNORCAC] change, right? At the beginning, the main actors or the only actors were the communities and their cabildos, right? They were territorial actors. The NGOs caused these thematic actors to emerge, and the main one were the women. That is, the women, because of the process of the project, the gender approach, began to organize as women [empezaron a formarse como mujeres], began to be an important actor, but not a territorial one—a thematic one, instead.* (Hugo Carrera, técnico of UNORCAC).

This técnico argued that even if women had participated in UNORCAC since its beginnings, it was the gender approach in development that had the greatest impact for their emergence as political actors. The women of the Committee agreed with this statement, but only partially. Women reclaimed their participation since the formation of the organization, and to that end they required that I collect a “history of the women of UNORCAC.” Nevertheless, they were aware of how access to project funds affected their process of organization. As Lolita put it: “Si hay proyecto, levantamos; cuando no hay proyecto, caemos,” “when there is a project, we rise; when there is no project, we fall.” Development funds did have a domesticating effect, in the sense that when the leaders of the Committee had more resources, they could offer “incentives” for participation. For instance, they paid the transportation costs of women who attended their activities and also offered food for attendees. Both the leaders of the Committee and attendees did mention that without that “reconocimiento,” recognition for the attendees, participation decreased. Because of the previous dynamics of providing women with this “reconocimiento,” an expectation has been set. Lolita complained that she could not always secure these conditions for the attendees. Due to diminishing funding, the Committee found it harder to offer the same conditions and saw the participation decline.

Not only the funds but also the requirements demanded by development projects affect women’s participation. Projects of nutrition, projects of health, projects of microcredit, among others, have required the beneficiaries to be organized in a women’s group. In the same vein, a professional working for the Citizen Assembly argued:

*Let’s see, I think that the gender topic is an influence of the NGOs and I can tell you some examples as: “we are going to support the community microcredit but they [women] will have to organize themselves in a group.” The 95% of the groups of women I think started that way, at least in UNORCAC. The commission seems to me that had other political dynamic, and that that tool is ok, but it*
then “we are going to support the women but there have to be groups,” that is why the rhythm slows down, the project disappears or ends, the potency of the influence of the women goes down, because there is no one to bring them together or who help them because it was the project that did that\(^{67}\) (Jomar Cevallos, técnico of Citizen Assembly).

Then, to a certain extent, the structure of the Committee of Women of UNORCAC, which comprises the women’s groups of the communities, is dependent upon a process that originated as an external requirement. Luciano Martínez Valle (2003) has critiqued such forms of induced social capital characterizing them as spurious, when they originate as a demand of the funder for development projects. While I may contest the notion that induced social capital necessarily wrests strength from the organization, it is true that the resources afforded by development projects have been crucial for the activities of the women of UNORCAC and that lack of resources tends to negatively affect the participation of the women of the communities in the Committee’s activities.

Perhaps a linkage between the redistribution of the “development revenue” and the participation of women points to a very specific and limited form of understanding participation within development projects. Técnicos sometimes control the distribution of this revenue but at the same time collude with the organization’s patron-client networks. For example, an indigenous promoter reported that in selecting beneficiaries, the organization takes into consideration who has attended the activities and calls made by UNORCAC. Many of the events and activities that UNORCAC organizes depend upon a good turnout. Participants are required to sign attendance sheets, which are used by the project managers to “document” participation in projects and justify adequate use of funds. Good attendance is, from the perspective of the projects, a measure of the success of the activities. In many of the activities of the organization, women were in fact the bulk of attendees. When I talked to promoters and técnicos, participation had the specific—and limited—meaning of attendance. Women’s participation, read “attendance,” or lack thereof, was not devoid of consequences, though. Those women who participated in the organization’s activities and events were rewarded with easier access to the development revenue, from getting a little present in the Christmas celebration to a better possibility of receiving a loan or being assigned as a beneficiary of a new project.

\(^{67}\) A ver, yo creo que el tema de género es una influencia ONGsista y te podría mencionar algunos ejemplos como: “vamos a apoyarles en las cajitas comunitarias pero tienen que organizarse en grupo”. El 95% de los grupos de mujeres creo que nacieron por ahí, al menos en la UNORCAC. La Comisión me parece que tuvo otra dinámica política y que está bien esa herramienta pero que no se quede ahí, yo tengo la percepción de que se quedaron ahí. Entonces “vamos a apoyar a las mujeres pero tienen que haber grupos”, entonces por eso es que cuando baja el ritmo, desaparece o acaba el proyeccto, bajan la potencia de la influencia de las mujeres porque no hay quien les aglutine o las ayude porque era el proyecto el que hacía eso.
Therefore yet another dimension of the domestication of women’s participation takes place within the dynamics of development projects: instead of participating as decision-making agents in the design and management of projects, women leaders and women from the communities are positioned within locations of the development process in which their involvement does not entail acquiring skills or resources that could serve them to become political agents. They are defined as “beneficiaries of projects,” or are recruited for logistical activities necessary after the decisions have been made by técnicos or male leaders. Additionally, women’s participation is impacted by the available development funds, as it allows female leaders to offer “reconocimientos” in the form of offsetting transportation costs and offering food in workshops. Finally, the técnicos and leaders other than the women of the Committee generally made decisions about projects, and controlled the “development revenue.” Even within the limits set by an ethnicized development, actors position themselves in different ways. Some leaders do learn skills that allow them to make decisions about projects and control the available—even when limited—resources that development circulates, while others are relegated to implementing those decisions. Politics is a fundamental part of development: some become development experts; others remain as beneficiaries, noticeably, poor women of color.

_Ganando Espacios: Tactics and Strategies of Women’s Participation in UNORCAC_

Although limited by the structural constraints of the disempowering dynamics they encounter in UNORCAC, women of the Committee are not devoid of agency. Several of the current and former members mentioned learning as one of the main motivations for their political participation. This desire for learning was reiterated as one of the reasons for participation in UNORCAC’s activities. As I will mention below, through their participation in the organization workshops, the schools for political training, or by managing projects and activities, women learn and, that way, some of them somehow palliate their aspirations to have had an education. As seen in the barriers that women find in UNORCAC and in their relationship with the técnicos, the leaders may be limited in their possibility to acquire the expertise associated with development brokers, but women do see possibilities for gaining knowledge and skills.

Several of the women leaders I interviewed mentioned a desire to learn as one of the reasons for their participation in UNORCAC. This was the case of Eugenia, a renowned midwife in the area and president of the organization of indigenous midwives in Cotacachi. One of the painful memories of her childhood was related to her not attending school. Her father, an impoverished peasant, did not send her to school until she was nine years old. However, once there, it was hard for her family to provide the required material: the very basic notebook, pencil, and eraser. She also missed classes in the afternoon in order to graze animals. Her teacher told her she had too many absences.
Eugenia enjoyed studying and her teacher offered to take her to her house and send her to school and then to high school. Eugenia’s mother did not agree and warned her that if she decided to do that, she could never go back to her family. Eugenia stayed, but due to the poverty of her family and the idea that school was not critical for women, she could not advance beyond the second year of primary school. However, Eugenia learned to be a midwife from her grandmother who was a great connoisseur of medicinal herbs. She also observed and helped her own mother when she was delivering her own children. But it was not until Eugenia lost her own first child that she made the decision to become a midwife. Eugenia worked in a hacienda during her pregnancy, and she attributed the position of the baby to the exhausting labor of harvesting and carrying the produce. When she was in labor, the midwife told her that her baby was in a breech position, which can make for a potentially dangerous delivery. They were far away from any hospital and because of that the midwife told Eugenia that the baby was not going to make it. After this devastating experience, Eugenia decided to learn to become a midwife. She had seen other women die in labor. When the midwife went back to visit her for a follow-up, she requested to learn.

Eugenia thinks that women from the communities need to acquire knowledge “para poder salir adelante como mujeres” (to be able to get ahead as women). She considers that going to UNORCAC’s workshops and activities help women learn and acquire knowledge, even if it is just a little. For Eugenia, when women just stay at home, they miss the opportunity to understand. She commented:

*I like to attend workshops because I like to share the experiences from other places. With that, I have learned. This way we women can get ahead. Otherwise, without knowing anything, we can [simply] obey the husband, the family, and be within the house. Because I say, I have learned going to the organization [UNORCAC], to workshops, to meetings, to talks. Always [learn], even a couple of ideas, in order to defend ourselves as women, or to share with other women and give that experience so that the compañeras gain strength, so that they can get ahead in the family.*

In the interviews with the women of the Committee, learning was mentioned as one of the main drivers of participation in the organization. In highland communities of Bolivia, Medeiros found a similar desire for understanding and a local definition of development as the right ‘to knowing where to go’ (2005). Medeiros argues that people from the community of Arque define development as “that which enables to understand

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68 Me gusta recibir talleres porque me gusta compartir las experiencias de otros lados. Con eso he aprendido. Así podemos salir las mujeres para adelante, sino, sin saber nada, podemos obedecer al marido, a la familia y estar dentro de la casa. Porque yo digo, por eso yo he aprendido saliendo a la organización, a unos talleres, a reuniones, a charlas. Siempre, aunque sea unas dos palabras, para poder defender[nos] como mujeres o para compartir con otras mujeres y dar esa experiencia para que las compañeras tengan fuerza, para que puedan salir dentro de la familia.
how does the world in which we live function and thus to know how to move in that world” (2005:xx). For her, this interpretation signals the desire to appropriate hegemonic forms of knowledge “that allow citizens of a state not only to understand the rules by which they can assert their right but also to understand how those rules are made” (2005:xxi). She establishes a link between this quest for knowledge and citizenship within a “long history of discrimination, disenfranchisement and exclusion from hegemonic forms of knowledge” (xxi). Medeiros recognizes that despite good intentions, development projects “reproduce power/knowledge conditions of not knowing where to go” (2005:xxi). In Cotacachi, similarly, I have laid out how the expert knowledge of técnicos is not easily accessible to women, and thus, they are not able to become development brokers. However, women see the possibility of acquiring some knowledge, both in the workshops organized within the context of development projects, or by the organization, as well as through the learning process necessary to become a leader. This was a significant motivation for participation, in a specific context of poverty, ethnic discrimination, and traditional gender norms that have excluded many leaders of the Committee of Women from formal education.

Women of the Committee understand the need for knowledge in order to get ahead and also to become better leaders. In Cotacachi, there are similar understandings of what Medeiros found for Arque, Bolivia. For instance, women reported that one of the reasons that some husbands oppose women going to meetings is that “los maridos dicen que van a abrirles los ojos” (husbands say that women’s eyes will be opened), meaning perhaps that they will understand their subjugated condition within the family or the community. Women see the knowledge they can acquire as an opportunity to “superarse” (get ahead), “capacitarse” (get training), “aprender algo” (learn something). Luz, a health volunteer, was not able to study because her father died when she was twelve years old, and her mother alone could not pay for her education. Nevertheless, she had “liked medicine since [she] was a child, in order to help people.” Already married and with their children grown up, the opportunity to become a health volunteer arose with the presence of the project of Doctors without Borders in Cotacachi. She consulted with the staff about whether she could participate, as she felt “a little old for that.” Then she decided to sign up for the training:

*Then I go out to courses (training), and since my children were already big, then I was the one who said “I will go and that is it, whatever my husband says, I am the one who wants it, and I will get ahead.” Since then, I started [her training as health volunteer].*

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*Entonces yo salgo siquiera así en cursos, y como ya tenia mis hijos grandes, ahí sí yo fui la que les dije “aquí sí me voy porque me voy, aunque mi marido me diga lo que sea, yo soy la que quiero, y yo me voy a superar.” Entonces desde ahí comencé ya.*
As mentioned in the previous section, women of the Committee are at times alienated from the workings of UNORCAC as an organization that is both a political actor in the canton as well as a sort of development organization for the communities. The women leaders were aware that their participation was limited by their inadequate understanding of the dynamics of development work. Nevertheless, women of the Committee argued that they needed to manage the projects for women, even if at the beginning they made mistakes, so that they could learn how to do it. Women did manage some activities, such as the cajas de crédito. “Cajas” referred to a project of microcredit that provided small funds to organized groups of women from the communities. When the funds came, UNORCAC thought of depositing them in a local savings and credit cooperative. However, women refused that possibility, as they saw the transactions of the cooperative as too bureaucratic. Women had the support of Heifer, the NGO providing the funds, as its staff shared the belief that the cooperative was not an “alternative” kind of banking and, thus, backed the women in their idea of managing the funds by themselves.

Some of the técnicos were skeptical about women’s capacity to manage the cajas independently. Lolita, the president, recalled that one of the main técnicos asked her derisively, “¿usted podrá?” (do you think you can?). Lolita, as other leaders, contended that they needed to manage the project by themselves even if they made mistakes. Although women of the Committee did have problems managing the cajas (accounting issues, default payment issues, etc.), they considered it an achievement of the Committee to have this project under their control. Women from the Committee and from the communities “querían que haya una facilidad,” that is, women wanted to have easier access to credit, since, in their experience, the cooperative did not want to give credit to women. Lolita and other members of the Committee were apprehensive to manage “platas que no son mías” (money that is not mine). Nevertheless, the members of the Committee saw the control of the cajas as a very specific way in which they could manage meaningful development “revenue.” As with other client-based uses of development resources, the small funds also served to consolidate the Committee of Women’s political power. Additionally, women of the Committee also gained a very tangible economic benefit, as they got preferential access to credit for their work in the Committee, something they saw as a compensation for the unpaid nature of their political activities. Nevertheless, it is also important to note that other leaders and the técnicos doubted the capacity of the women and in the last months of my fieldwork did hire a recent college graduate who had previous experience with microcredit, in order to help with issues of accounting. It was a combination of the women’s will and the donors’ understanding of it as an “alternative” to a cooperative that led to the Committee of Women managing this specific project. The example of the cajas shows how women of the Committee desired and ventured to learn about the management of a project, especially when they saw concrete benefits serving their practical needs.
Beyond the practical access to development resources, women thought that other important learning processes were enabled by their political involvement. Several reported the possibility of getting to know different communities within Cotacachi, of travelling to other places in the country or abroad, of benefitting from “intercambio de experiencias” (exchange of experiences) with women’s organizations from the country, or of “learning to speak”—that is learning the appropriate ways to deliver discourses. Some younger leaders also commented that it was not until they had to serve as dirigente (leader) that they in fact started using Kichwa in a more active manner. They would use Kichwa to talk with older women, to translate for those who were monolingual, to speak in the meetings held in Kichwa, or to deliver public speeches. Moreover, for some of them such as Eugenia or Luz, participation in UNORCAC opened the possibility to somehow fulfilling an unmet desire for education, as the organization frequently offers training workshops on a variety of topics: Andean and western health, nutrition, agroecological techniques, small animal husbandry, indigenous rights, environment, handicrafts, embroidery, among others, depending on the particular focus of the project and its funding agency.

In addition to learning through specific workshops, women of the Committee have also participated in schools of political learning, organized by the Citizen Assembly of Cotacachi. The purpose of these schools is to form leaders for the organizations. In the schools, women receive information that can help their leadership duties. For instance, during my fieldwork a new school of leadership was organized as part of a “productive” (income-generating) project whose goal was to manufacture and commercialize corn beer. The objective of the school of leadership was, according to the indigenous técnica from the Assembly: “form leaders who later participate in UNORCAC, the municipality, or the Assembly.” Among the themes that the school intended to cover were the Sumak Kawsay (Gudynas 2011),70 the new rights in the Ecuadorian Constitution of 2008 which guarantees “the right to live in an environment free from violence”; self-esteem; plurinationality; collective rights; women’s rights; indigenous justice and women; information on the organizations that exist in the canton; grass-roots organization; and participatory budget models. Additionally, the técnica commented that the relations between women and men were going to be analyzed, because they are supposed to be “pataka pataka” (Kichwa for “equal”), but in reality “na shina” (Kichwa for “[they are] not like that”).

The schools include observation trips in which the participants of the school visit other organizations in Ecuador to learn from their experience. During my fieldwork,

70 Sumak Kawsay, good living, life in plenitude, is a term with multiple meanings that are currently being debated especially in Ecuador and Bolivia and points to a critique of development based on capitalism and its relationship with nature. The concept of Sumak Kawsay differs from western well-being and is based on the indigenous cosmovision, and it is directed to the preservation of life, and not only includes material well-being, but “other values at play: knowledge, social and cultural recognition, codes and ethical and even spiritual behaviors in the relationship with society and nature, human values, a vision of future, among others” (Gudynas 2011).
some women leaders were attending a leadership school exclusively for indigenous women. Lolita, the president of the Committee had attended one of the periodic meetings of the school in Riobamba, province of Chimborazo, in the central highlands of Ecuador. There, she met a famous indigenous leader, Cristina Cucuri. As part of their school, they attended a meeting in which there were government officials. Lolita explained that the indigenous women of the local organization had taped their mouths when they went to the meeting. Then, Cucuri addressed the audience in Kichwa, saying that what the government officials were presenting did not reflect what the women had asked, that they spoke with “those technical words” and do not speak in Kichwa. She said that since Cucuri was speaking in Kichwa a lot of people left because they could not understand or perhaps were not interested. Later, some people started translating, and the officials did not like what they were hearing, that the proposals presented did not originate with the indigenous women, but were invented by the officials. Lolita commented that in Chimborazo (the province where this event took place), indigenous women “sí se paran duro; no tienen miedo de hablar,” “women do stand up [for what they want], they are not afraid of speaking out.” Lolita was deeply impressed by this performance, and admired the way the women from Chimborazo expressed to the authorities their complaint on the limits of the dialogue and of projects that do not reflect indigenous women’s interests. She related the story to other indigenous women in Cotacachi and all expressed their admiration for the bravery of the women of Chimborazo.

Establishing Allies to Position Women’s Agendas

Sometimes the actions of the Committee of Women members were not structured, or organized, i.e., a strategy, but a reaction to the specific feeling of disempowerment generated by the dynamics of development. A few times during my fieldwork, women of the Committee discussed the need to have more information about the projects. They convoked the técnicos managing specific projects and demanded a report of the progress of the project. In this way, the women wanted to establish themselves as leaders and the técnicos as accountable to them, in a relationship that was fraught with high doses of distrust. Although this tactic may have served to establish the Committee’s leadership, it did not greatly change that the major decision-makers of several projects still were the técnicos. Nevertheless, actions such as the call for these reports may be seen as acts of “ideological resistance that challenge the dominant definition of the situation and assert different standards of justice and equity” (Scott 1985:290). Thus, although the end result did not greatly affect women’s decision-making, the call for reports demonstrates their intention to challenge the unequal relationship generated by development expertise.

In their interviews, several técnicos of UNORCAC expressed that women were hard to work with or that they were conflictive. Women used to frequently complain, and perhaps their complaining was a tactic to somehow counter the asymmetrical relation with male leaders and técnicos. Mercedes, a former president of the Committee,
expressed that a former president of UNORCAC told her, in a very scatological form, that women from the Committee “joden como la diarrea,” (pester like diarrhea). Mercedes argued that it is not easy to “gain spaces” in the organization. She said she believed that “de joder, en joder, ibamos ganando espacios poco a poco, que las mujeres no solo son para ser secretaria y tomar nota” (pestering and pestering, we were gaining spaces gradually, that women are not only for being secretary and taking notes). Given the tense relation between the women of the Committee, UNORCAC’s male leaders, and the técnicos, women have resorted to external allies that support their agenda.

One of their main allies was Azucena, the indigenous técnica from the Citizen Assembly. This técnica helped the women propose and write projects. She has also been active in informing women of UNORCAC about opportunities for training and for meeting other women’s organizations of the country. Additionally, she has organized and been involved in several leadership schools. According to her,

> From this process of the schools of leadership, the women’s needs and demands have been identified, because those were organizations of women, not individual women, but organizations. Thus, the need to strengthen the women’s organizations. In that context we gained funding from Xarxa, with the Council of Barcelona, a project for two years, where we worked the topic of what the women’s rights are, of the diffusion of women’s rights, of what institutional strengthening is, organizational strengthening for each organization. Then, it is a two-year project, that really contributed to women’s organizations sustain themselves in time, and that they can continue participating in the decision-making spaces or in the spaces that the Assembly has.

Working with this técnica has also allowed women of the Committee to access experts in topics of interest. Specifically, several times during my fieldwork, a lawyer, knowledgeable in indigenous rights, came to Cotacachi to provide training sessions or help with the preparation of the “Ley de la Buena Convivencia,” “Law for the Good Living Together,” a project aimed at providing a more culturally sensitive version of the law against domestic violence. It is noteworthy to mention that UNORCAC has its own lawyer, but the women of the Committee found more support in the lawyer contacted through the Assembly than from the organization’s own lawyer regarding the project of the alternative law against violence. Additionally, women of UNORCAC were linked to the Assembly of Popular and Diverse Women of Ecuador, AMPDE, a women’s organization comprising working class and campesino women. Although the relationship

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71 “Xarxa” is the way that the organization Xarxa Consum Solidari was called in Cotacachi. Xarxa is an NGO from Catalonia that works in Bolivia, Senegal, and Ecuador in, supporting fair trade. In Ecuador, Xarxa supports UNORCAC “en su lucha por garantizar el derecho a la alimentación de la población campesina” (in its struggle to guarantee the right to feeding) and with the Citizen Assembly, “con proyectos dirigidos a distintos grupos de mujeres que conforman la coordinadora cantonal de mujeres” (with projects targeted to different groups of women that belong to the canton women’s coordinating body) (Xarxa 2014).
of the women of UNORCAC with the AMPDE was mediated by the Citizen Assembly, it helped the Committee in accessing information and hiring trainers in topics related to gender, women’s rights, food sovereignty, law proposals or regulations relevant to the organization such as the proposed law about water, the law against violence, natural resources, and social security.

The women of UNORCAC have from time to time benefited from the help of técnicos within UNORCAC who have supported their initiatives. They mentioned an aid worker from Holland who helped them with an assessment of women’s needs and with establishing parameters for microcredit. Some técnicos have worked with the midwives to help them set up a Committee of Health within UNORCAC that highlights the work of the women and other health agents. These técnicos were friendly to the agendas of the female leaders of UNORCAC.

The alliance with these people and organizations was sometimes forged in opposition to UNORCAC’s leadership, but women found in their allies ways to circumvent the organization’s disregard for their concerns, or the lack of some specific staff member who can help formulate projects and initiatives.

Conclusions

Indigenous leaders of the Committee of Women of UNORCAC face a series of challenges in their political participation as leaders of cabildos and representatives of the women in UNORCAC. Some of these challenges speak to structures of inequality and discrimination that place the women leaders at a disadvantage while others are specific to distinct spaces of participation. While these challenges constrain women’s effective participation, they do not completely inhibit it. Through a series of tactics and strategies, women navigate the intricate webs of gender dynamics at home, low expectations for female leaders at cabildo organizations, domesticating processes at UNORCAC, and disempowering encounters with development and its experts. In spite of all, they manage to become political actors.

The challenges for the leaders start in their very homes. Their political activities imply their absence from homes and communities, places where they are expected to perform their duties as wives, mothers, and agricultural workers. Women leaders face derogatory epithets such as andariega or carishina that work to restrict their mobility, question their role as mothers and wives, and damage their reputation. In order to circumvent these restrictions, women leaders resort more often than not to accommodations that comply with traditional roles: they wake up earlier to be able to fulfill their domestic responsibilities; they humor husbands; they take small children with them; they come back home just before their husbands arrive. Their leaving the home in order to organize with other women comes, at times, with great personal costs in terms of
strained personal relations at home, extended working hours, and fatigue. Nevertheless, their accommodations to traditional gender roles make their public activities possible. A foot in the door of the public life of politics is predicated, to a large extent, on women leaders’ accommodations to their domestic roles in the private sphere of the home and the communities.

Once in the public spheres of political life, women of UNORCAC find other difficulties. Interviewees report that the number of women in the community cabildos has not only increased but women have also gained presidencies and vice-presidencies when they used to be mostly represented in secretaries and treasuries. Female leaders receive commentaries that cast doubts on their competence for leadership in the cabildos, and women usually accept this appointment reluctantly. They feel compelled to outperform their male counterparts in order to be taken seriously. Several former female presidents interviewed referred to the importance of obtaining desired infrastructure as a measure of successful leadership. In order to negotiate the time commitments of their leadership duties, sometimes women resort to the community to intercede in the partner or family strained relations. Even if there is a reported increase in women’s participation in cabildos, women are practically absent from the water boards, a structure of paramount importance in communities with no public water systems for consumption and agricultural activities.

In their transition from community leaders to a larger organization, UNORCAC, indigenous women face processes of “domestication” of their political activities. The position of the Committee within the structure of UNORCAC is complex. Although UNORCAC comprises several “organized groups” from the communities, including groups of production, natural environment (the water boards, for instance), and youth, the women of UNORCAC with the traditional healers, mostly midwives, are by far the most visible. Women of UNORCAC are domesticated in several ways. They find themselves reenacting their domestic roles in an amplified manner, for instance, preparing and serving food at UNORCAC’s activities.

More important, nonetheless, is the Committee of Women’s capacity for acting in an independent manner. UNORCAC attempts to align women of the Committee with its official position and finds it objectionable that women look for consultation and assistance from outside allies. Members of the Committee of Women ended up divided between those who support a coordinated action with UNORCAC and those who strive for a more autonomous approach. Additionally, UNORCAC’s leaders and professionals understood participation, in a rather limited manner, as attendance to UNORCAC’s activities and events. Women usually form the bulk of attendees, showcasing UNORCAC’s constituencies. This does not translate, however, into increased capacity for decision-making.

Domestication also takes place in the context of development projects. Women of UNORCAC are mystified by the workings of development projects, which require skills
and knowledge usually held only by técnicos. Thus, women of the Committee usually do not manage the resources made available by development in spite of how they affect the Committee of Women’s capability to organize activities. Attracting women from the communities to participate in the Committee’s activities rest upon its capacity to give “reconocimientos,” that is, to provide food in workshops and compensation for transportation costs. Some local actors even suggest that the very existence of organized groups of women in the communities is a result of different projects’ requirement for a gender component or specifically for working with such groups.

In spite of all these barriers to their participation, indigenous women leaders find their “walking with the organization” to be meaningful and they consider that little by little they are “ganando espacios” (gaining [political] spaces). Women “learn a little” with their political participation. Many leaders of the Committee of Women of UNORCAC saw their desires for education truncated in their childhood. For them, their participation is a possibility to learn. First, they learn about varied topics in talks, workshops, and courses offered by UNORCAC to its constituencies. Although not conversant with development projects’ workings, women have been able to gain the management of a few projects, as exemplified by the microcredit project. Women of the Committee also access the opportunity to attend leadership schools and be exposed to the experiences of other organizations of women in the country and even abroad. There, women meet other leaders in whom they find models and inspiration. But women also strategize by finding allies that support them in the face of their own organization disregard of some of their concerns. With the help of allies, técnicos in UNORCAC or the Citizen Assembly who back the interests of indigenous women, the members of the Committee find ways to respond to their own agendas.

Nevertheless, the extent to which their political participation transforms relations between genders remains an open question. Kandiyoti coined the term patriarchal bargains to point to the possibility of change in the rules and scripts that regulate gender relations. Both genders accommodate and acquiesce to these rules and scripts, but they can be contested, redefined, and renegotiated (1988:288). In their homes, women leaders’ actions may often accommodate and acquiesce to traditional gender roles, but the main goal of such actions is to be able to leave the private sphere and enter the public sphere of political life. Not only for indigenous women but for most women of the world, formal politics is still a relatively new terrain of action. Pressured from family members and others to go back home, the very decision to become a public figure (cabildo, member of the Committee of Women of UNORCAC, representative of the Andean women in the citizen Assembly), is in itself a defiance to domesticity, and, consequently, to the purported proper place of women. To restrict their actions only to a gender dimension, nevertheless, loses sight of how indigenous women navigate a context of discrimination and racism. In the next chapter I address some examples of discrimination that women of
UNORCAC find at the canton level of political participation, in their relationship with other organized groups of citizens and the realm of formal local politics.

Figure 5.1. Representatives of the Committee of Women officially receive infrastructure for a community market from (male) municipal authorities and foreign and local NGO técnicos.
Chapter 6: The Political Space of the Canton: Shortcomings of Citizen Participation in Cotacachi

Subordinate groups sometimes cannot find the right words or voice to express their thoughts, and when they do, they discover they are not heard. [They] are silenced, encouraged to keep their wants inchoate, and heard to say ‘yes’ when they want to say ‘no’.

Nancy Fraser

Introduction

In this chapter I follow the political activities of the women of UNORCAC beyond their communities and UNORCAC to the local politics of Cotacachi canton: the process of citizen participation, or Asamblea Ciudadana de Unidad Cantonal and the local government. At the canton, indigenous women of UNORCAC interact with other women’s organizations, other civil organizations, and the local municipal authorities. I first explore the connection of women of UNORCAC to the municipal government and the structures of citizen participation in projects of intercultural health and domestic violence. Then, I analyze the shortcomings of the public sphere of citizen participation by examining discursive practices that disadvantage indigenous women vis-à-vis other groups in the canton politics. Finally, I briefly refer to the participation of indigenous women in the formal spaces of the municipal government.

Trials of Intercultural Health and Political Visibility

UNORCAC has worked to revitalize indigenous traditional medicine. From being legally prosecuted and practiced underground until the 1980s, midwifery has become not only recognized but celebrated in Cotacachi. The “mamas parteras” (respectful local term to call the midwives) are key actors in Cotacachi’s attempt to enact its proclaimed “interculturalidad,” especially since the ascendance of the indigenous movement in the country and the presence of indigenous mayors in the canton of Cotacachi. Since the 1980s, UNORCAC has coordinated efforts with the state and nongovernmental organizations to recognize and support the work of local traditional healers. First, working with the Ministry of Health, the indigenous midwives were recognized as legal health practitioners, which ended the persecution of their practice. Previously, midwifery was practiced clandestinely because midwives could be charged with illegal practice. Health volunteers also started working with groups of women in the communities, and were even pivotal to the beginning of organized women’s groups in the communities. It

72 In Ecuador, “local government” is usually understood as the municipality or canton level (third level of political division), but can also refer to the parishes. In the context of this dissertation, the term must be understood as referring to Cotacachi municipality.
was, however, the impact of an extensive project of Doctors Without Borders that elevated the status of traditional healers in Cotacachi, which started working in Cotacachi in 1996. The project named Jambi Mascari (Searching for Health) aimed to recognize and include the traditional health practitioners in the network of health services available in the canton focused on preventive community health. After Doctors Without Borders, the international Red Cross, especially the Spanish Red Cross, took the lead in the promotion of traditional health since the 2000s.

Many current leaders of UNORCAC participated in the project; some were officially hired as project staff, “promotoras.” Others participated in the project because they were healers: midwives, hierbateras (healers using herbs), fregadoras (massage healers), cuy pichajs (healers who use the guinea pig) and yachajs (shamans or healers, usually male). Finally, an important group of women became health volunteers. Currently, 23 midwives of Cotacachi are officially recognized by the Ministry of Health.

As a canton-level initiative, the area of health was part of a decentralization process in which the Municipality of Cotacachi required a transfer of the competencies of health from the national to the local level (Ortiz 2004:143-144; Vega 2007). Part of the municipal development plan since 1996, the local system of health promoted an intercultural approach, “salud intercultural,” which strived to coordinate western and indigenous health (UNORCAC 2014).

Midwives and health volunteers are associated with the Comisión de la Salud (health commission), part of the Committee of Women of UNORCAC, and have been one of the most important actors in the system of intercultural health in Cotacachi. However, the encounter of indigenous and western medicines has not been an easy one. After all, health institutions figured in my interviews as a site of particularly heinous racism.

During my fieldwork, the Red Cross and UNORCAC’s health commission organized several workshops that aimed to “sensibilizar al personal de salud” (make the local health personnel receptive to traditional health care). Several initiatives to coordinate indigenous and western health were being discussed. One was the creation of a “vertical delivery” room available for those pregnant women who, in the hospital, would prefer this kind of birth process practiced by indigenous midwives. Additionally, in efforts to increase and improve maternal health, the public hospital of Cotacachi (Hospital Asdrúbal de la Torre) and the midwives have developed a system of referral and counter-referral, so that those cases in which complications of labor could arise are

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73 For UNORCAC, intercultural health entails first the recognition of indigenous health knowledge and practices. Second, in the canton of Cotacachi, the intercultural health system includes the idea of the harmonization of traditional and western medicine, with the possibility of being complementary rather than in competition with each other. The system fosters preventive health as the population has access to health services in the hospital, sub-centers of health, and communities, with the traditional healers and midwives.

74 In a room for vertical delivery, the woman can choose to give birth standing, squatting, or kneeling while receiving care from a doctor, a nurse, and a midwife. Family members are allowed to be present. It may also include arrangements of dim lighting and warmer temperature considered more appropriate to the Andean conception of birth as a more friendly and family oriented event.
sent to the hospital in a timely manner. In normal pregnancies, the pregnant woman could be referred to the midwife. In practice though, the system has proven difficult to implement, as the mayor of Cotacachi recognized: “we have a group of midwives that is working in connection with the Hospital, even if from the Hospital side there is not a good understanding of what indigenous health really is. They want to manage it in the western way. There is no good coordination.”

The Municipality of Cotacachi claims to have increased maternal health coverage through the intercultural system. However, several actors and the very traditional healers are critical of the system. In general, the health personnel in the public institutions of the canton remained skeptical or dismissive of indigenous health, when not plainly derisive. For that reason, the Red Cross project organized workshops about “indigenous cosmovision and health” specifically targeted to these personnel, in order to raise their awareness and acceptance. From the perspective of a staff member of the Red Cross project,

the allopathic medicine was never interested. The attitude was always limited to the commitment of encountering so that the two [medicines] know each other and harmonize. But, could I articulate something that has a structure, that has funding, that has everything, with a process that is more social, more of cosmovision? The two [simply/just] coexist. (Jorge Pazmiño, former Red Cross técnico).

The disdain for indigenous health was evident in practices that thwarted the efforts to “harmonize” the two systems. For instance, the referral and counter referral system devised to articulate the two medicines worked, according to the midwives and Red Cross critics, rather unidirectionally: “For instance, I, as a midwife, would take a letter of referral of my patient to the hospital, but they did not counter refer to me. Or my letter of referral, they took it and they threw it in the garbage. Then, how could we call that process articulation?” (Jorge Pazmiño, former Red Cross técnico). Another attempt at articulation was the collaboration of health personnel and midwives during birth. The idea was improving the obstetric practice through a “humanized birth” with the input of the midwives. However, “when the articulation is tried, I approach, they tell me ‘help me,’ but at that moment the midwife is confined to being a nurse assistant, and ‘hand me the gauze,’ but she [the midwife] cannot even touch the baby” (Jorge Pazmiño, former Red Cross técnico). The midwives also complained that the doctors were not really interested in learning what they could teach them. They especially protested the economic unfairness, that the health personnel would get paid for their services, while the hospital wanted midwives to participate without a “reconocimiento econômico” (economic recognition).

Nevertheless, in June 2013, the Hospital Asdrúbal de la Torre of Cotacachi won the Pan American Health Organization and World Health Organization prize in the “Sixth
Competition for good practices that integrate gender equality and equity, and interculturality in health.” According to the news on the official website of the Pan American Health Organization, PAHO, the initiative consisted of integrating the indigenous health agents into the network of public health services in Cotacachi, and has led to, in the last years, maternal and neonatal death being reduced to zero, “accomplishing greater trust from the indigenous population and an increase in institutional birth, strengthening a friendly and quality service based on the respect of cultural customs, traditions, and beliefs” (OPS 2013). The PAHO website does not report, however, what a local newspaper included in its piece: the president of the Committee of Women of UNORCAC declared that the work that the midwives do is not remunerated, and that they are concerned about that, as the midwives also assist in other jobs in the hospital, beyond birth. “She added that in the Assembly of the Canton’s Unity of Cotacachi, they decided to activate the intersectoral committee of health, in order to impact the public policies and there the economic recognition issue will be raised” (Hora 2013). Perhaps the international prize would increase the acceptance of the skeptical in favor and recognition of the work of women. It has certainly helped indigenous women to position themselves as rightful and knowledgeable practitioners of health.

Moreover, one of the impacts of the long work on intercultural health has been the visibility of indigenous women in the canton of Cotacachi and even beyond. Their experiences in the health system have projected them to the canton-level political space. The first indigenous woman who was elected to the municipal council in 2000 was also a promoter (promotora) of the project of Doctors Without Borders, and one of the women who established the Central Committee of Women as a structure within UNORCAC. As has also been found by other researchers (Méndez Torres 2009), their participation as health representatives has been key for female leadership in indigenous organizations: “indigenous women frequently become politically active in the civil mobilization as representatives of health elected in local, provincial, and national federations” (Radcliffe 2008:124). Local actors in the politics of Cotacachi coincided in that the topic of indigenous health concedes exceptional visibility to indigenous women: 

_I think that the topic of [political] participation was centered in the health area; even if they were not midwives, all of them came from the grassroots of the health topic. For example, Mercedes was health promoter, and the other compañeras are always close to the health topic. Then, I think that the topic of health is something very important for the Andean woman_ (Jorge Pazmiño, former Red Cross técnico).

A mestiza woman who has been member of the municipal council of Cotacachi concurred: 

_I think that the Andean zone, moreover the Central Committee of Women, has its particularity, its own proposal, its own work, and I think that even if initially the_
group of women managed health, the component of ancestral medicine has now given them more organizational strength. Furthermore, I believe that nowadays they have it as a topic proposed by themselves and of themselves [propio de ellas], and elaborated from the women, in the health sector (Patricia Espinoza, member of Cotacachi municipal council).

The case of Cotacachi shows how specific topics permit the participation of indigenous people in the decentralized governmental structures of multicultural neoliberalism (Radcliffe 2008), especially indigenous health and education. Women of UNORCAC, specifically midwives and health volunteers, have become visible in the local politics as a result of their involvement in health. Through their presence, the midwives transform the health system in an “intercultural” health system, not only benefitting the community but also Cotacachi canton in its efforts of inclusion. Perhaps because they are seen as the knowledgeable actors for the topic of traditional medicine, it is easier for indigenous women to position themselves favorably vis-à-vis other groups in the canton. This may be the reason why several indigenous women who have served as health representatives in their organizations have also further continued to take on leadership activities. Nevertheless, with all the recognition they get as traditional healers in Cotacachi, redistribution (of economic resources) is still a pending issue. Their demand of being paid for the services they provide, as the other health personnel at the hospital are, is yet to be met, even when research conducted for the Ministry of Health has recommended so (González and Corral 2010:71). Overall, intercultural health is one of the topics with the potential of launching indigenous women into political life.

**Cotacachi as a Model for Intercultural Attention for Violence against Women**

Before starting my fieldwork, I had heard of a pilot project that consisted of an innovative intercultural approach focusing attention on violence against women. In specific, it was an attempt to strengthen indigenous justice in order to respond to domestic violence. The project was supposed to create a culturally-sensitive set of regulations that could offer an alternative to the national law addressing violence against women, law 103, which was seen as having an urban and mestizo bias. In a 2007-2008 work report for the Andean region, UNIFEM (now ONUMujeres) spoke of a conference that brought together women from nine Latin American countries to share experiences of indigenous women’s access to justice. According to the report, “visible results are the Law of Good Treatment and the Regulations for Good Living Together [Reglamento de la Buena Convivencia] adopted in Pando (Bolivia), Sucumbios, and Cotacachi (Ecuador), which combine the notion of traditional justice with the modern norms. They are documents written and accepted by the community, that women can employ if needed, to prevent and punish violence against them.” (UNIFEM 2008:7).
The experience of Cotacachi was presented by Miriam Lang from UNIFEM as “an innovative practice for the [Andean] region” (Runakuna 2008). Before the beginning of my fieldwork in 2009 through today, Cotacachi has been portrayed as a successful example of the application of indigenous justice to cases of domestic violence. For instance, in a September 2013 manuscript entitled “Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres: Buenas Prácticas en la Justicia de Género” (Women’s Human Rights: Good Practices in Gender Justice),75 the Guatemalan Otilia Lux de Cotí, current chief executive of the International Indigenous Women’s Forum, includes the Reglamento para la Buena Convivencia from Cotacachi among a few other Latin American successful strategies that increase indigenous women’s access to justice and promote the human rights of indigenous women (Lux de Cotí 2013).

As auspicious as the representation of the project “Reglamento de la Buena Convivencia” looks in the descriptions made on an international scale, the situation on the ground was far from living up to the portrayal. There were significant difficulties with the project, and, by 2009, it had come to a complete halt. Although UNORCAC had supported processes for the training of mediadores comunitarios (community mediators) and had offered training workshops in indigenous rights, the topic of indigenous justice has not figured prominently in the topics that mark the organization’s identity. During my fieldwork, UNORCAC was at times directly opposed to the project and at times unenthusiastic about it, in spite of the position of the Committee of Women about the project. Here I give an account of who were the major players, and where the women of UNORCAC stand amidst them.

The process of the Reglamento dates back to 2005 when the results of the first year of operation of the municipal Center for Attention for Women and Family of Cotacachi were presented. This Center received cases of violence against women, children, and youth. It was part of a project for the “integral development of the women of Cotacachi Canton,” that had been conceived by mestiza women, and women in the municipal council. This initiative was co-funded by the former state institution CONAMU76 (National Council of Women) and the municipality. The former director of

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75 “The judicial reforms to promote gender equity and the governmental efforts to improve the access to justice for indigenous women, such as the Defensoría de la Mujer Indígena (Ombuds office for the Indigenous Woman), strengthening of indigenous rights, and access to gender justice in Quiché, Guatemala. The Comisarías de la mujer indígena (Commissariats for indigenous women), the Reglamento de la Buena convivencia (Regulations for Good conviviality) in Cotacachi; the law of good treatment in Sucumbios, in Ecuador. The shelter houses in Peru. The centers for health for indigenous women, the House of the Indigenous Women, the indigenous tribunal of Cuetzalan, Puebla, in México. The commissariats for women in Bolivia. These institutions and multicultural policies for indigenous women open alternatives to deal with the discrimination, the gender oppression. In spite of the created mechanisms, [they] do not necessarily guarantee the access to justice for indigenous women in all spheres, particularly regarding criminal justice (Lux de Cotí 2013:3).

76 The Consejo Nacional de las Mujeres was dissolved and became in 2009 the Comisión de Transición hacia el Consejo de las Mujeres y la Igualdad de Género (Transition Commission to the Council of Women and Gender Equality).
the Center told me that after the first year of service, the results showed that, regarding cases of violence, “a very high percentage, a 41% [of the cases of violence against women], were indigenous women” (also see Nájera Sarzosa 2009:143).77 The staff of the Center invited several organizations to the presentation of results, among them, UNIFEM officials, with the intention of garnering additional support for the project. UNIFEM was interested in an initiative that would address the specific needs of indigenous women and the multicultural adviser of UNIFEM expressed her interest in supporting further work. The project had identified that indigenous women saw law 103 (the law against violence against women) as “very mestizo, very repressive, eight days in jail. They themselves [indigenous women] came with food or the blanket, and then the second day, they asked the superintendent to free [the husband]. That is, there should be a sanction from the same communities, strengthening the techno-political role of the cabildo” (Interview with former director of the project).

The multicultural adviser affirmed that UNIFEM could fund the initiative starting in 2006. According to the director of the Center at that time, the representative of UNIFEM had expressed that: “I think that it is necessary to do an alternative situation to law 103.”

The idea came rather from there. She told us that she had worked in Mexico with the Zapatistas, in the community law for the women. And we said, how could we link that to [what happens] here. It would be logical that the power goes back to the ñaupadores,78 to the godparents, in order to punish intra-family violence, not only mediate but punish (sancionar) (Interview with former director of the Center for the Attention of the Woman and the Family).

Only when UNIFEM confirmed the possibility of funding, the staff of the Center, presided over by a mestizo woman, thought that it was time to get UNORCAC involved: “we need to enter through UNORCAC, logically.” They contacted the president of UNORCAC and representatives of the women and started working with six communities. For the elaboration of the Reglamento, several workshops with indigenous women were held regarding their understandings and experiences of violence. According to the director, it was women who decided what to punish and how to do it. She emphasized that beyond forms of physical, psychological, and sexual violence, the Reglamento included measures regarding economic violence, paternity, infidelity, and participation in

77 Using data available at the Center of Attention of the Woman and the Family, Nájera presents the following statistics: from all the reports of domestic violence in Cotacachi between January 2005 and December 2007, 53% correspond to the Andean zone of Cotacachi canton, 40% to the urban zone, and 7% to the subtropical zone. The Andean zone refers to the communities of UNORCAC. (Nájera Sarzosa 2009:143). Thus, the data showed that indigenous women were the group reporting more cases of domestic violence.

78 A ñaupador, from the Kichwa ñaupak (who gives the example) is a ritual specialist, who directs religious rituals, such as marriage, or the delivery of the rooster to the captain. It is used in Imbabura and Cañar provinces. (Fernando García, personal communication, February 18, 2014).
political life (see also Bonilla and Ramos 2009:137). Once the Reglamento, was written, the draft was presented to the cabildos of the six participating communities. Then, funds were assigned for the publication of a small document entitled Sumak Kawsaypa Kati Kamachik, the Kichwa name for the Reglamento. With that concrete result, the multicultural adviser of UNIFEM was able to secure funding for the next three years, 2009, 2010, and 2011. The next step was a process of "socialization" of the document with the cabildos and the communities of UNORCAC, with the signature of an act of commitment to implement the Reglamento by the cabildos.

In 2009, several events disrupted the plans of the project. There were elections in UNORCAC and a new group of representatives came to power. In the general assembly where they were elected, the outgoing representatives of UNORCAC presented the results of their administration. There are contending versions regarding whether or not in that general assembly the Reglamento was officially approved by UNORCAC. According to the indigenous woman who worked for the project as a promotora, the Reglamento was officially approved at the 2009 general assembly. The president and other members of UNORCAC, however, affirmed that the text of the Reglamento was only read and the assembly was informed, but it was not approved as such.

In that same year, the municipal elections were held. A new indigenous mayor supported by UNORCAC, Alberto Anrango, won the election, defeating Auki Tituana, the previous indigenous mayor since 1996. The campaign and election were stormy and the transition between indigenous mayors proved difficult once Anrango won the election. At the beginning of my fieldwork, people and communities were polarized between the supporters of the former mayor and the new one. The local politics had an immediate result for the Center of Women and for the project of the Reglamento. The director of the Center was hired and paid by the municipality as the "local counterpart" for the project. After the former mayor lost the election, the director decided to resign, and so did the two indigenous promoters. People I spoke with interpreted this action as a demonstration of their allegiance to the former mayor. Around the same time, the psychologist of the project died. This made the lawyer the only staff member left at the Center, and resulted in a halt of the project of the Reglamento during the transition between mayors.

At this moment, UNORCAC voiced several objections to the project. UNORCAC questioned the extent to which the Committee of Women had been effectively involved in the process. Although two of the members of the former Committee knew about the progress of the project in general terms, most of the current members did not know much.  

79 According to the promotoras of the project in a conference held in Quito in 2008, the Reglamento established that the cabildos need to punish the following cases that hurt "the community good conviviality and family harmony: sexual violence, including violence within marriage, and arranged and forced marriage; gossips, from both men and women; infidelity of both men and women; impediment to participation of women, boys, girls, and adolescents; the violation of economic rights including prohibition to work; diversion of family assets and money; equity in inheritance; the irresponsibility in paternity and maternity, including the non recognition of the offspring by the fathers." (Bonilla and Ramos 2009:137).
about it since they began their political office when the project was in its second phase. Although members of the Committee had attended meetings with the project staff, they contended that they were not well informed. UNORCAC stated that even though the promotoras working in the project were from the communities, their presence was not enough to be taken as representative of the indigenous women of UNORCAC. The issue of the proper channels of approval and representation was also raised. UNORCAC stated that the Reglamento had not been approved either by the general assembly or by the majority of cabildos. Moreover, UNORCAC argued that the project “does not respond to the reality of the communities.” They argued that the Reglamento was not applicable because each community has its specific forms of punishments, and that the Reglamento should be adjusted for each community.

The lawyer of UNORCAC explained to me several practical issues for its implementation: the Reglamento was to be incorporated in the community bylaws, but changing them necessitated a bureaucratic process that involved the Ministry of Agriculture, under which the communities are officially recognized. Moreover, he contended that indigenous justice in Cotacachi is not necessarily the first recourse to solve disputes, and many members of the communities prefer to go to the ordinary legal system. He also mentioned the opposition of many cabildos to the Reglamento, seen as a “law for the women.” Additionally, he put into question the moral authority of the cabildos to judge domestic violence, a point also mentioned by women of the Committee. He recognized that, even if he had participated in some meetings on the project, he no longer attended the meetings because his superior at UNORCAC told him not to waste his time in a project that was not directly managed by the organization. In general, UNORCAC and several cabildos were reticent to support the project.

Nevertheless, the women of the Committee were not against the idea of the project per se. They rather recognized its relevance and expressed their concern for the paralysis of the progress of the project. However, very few understood how the project had been implemented, where it stood, and what was left to be done. In a meeting after the resignation of the director and the promotoras, representatives of UNORCAC, UNIFEM, the municipality, and the Citizen Assembly convened for the final report of activities of the outgoing director. The goal of the meeting was also to decide how to continue with the remaining activities of the project and who should be in charge of the project activities in the few months left before the end of 2009. After a heated discussion of the shortcomings of the project regarding the lack of participation of UNORCAC and its women, the feasibility of applying the Reglamento, and the role of the different stakeholders, indigenous women were once again called to give their view. None of the six representatives of the Committee who were present had spoken so far. The perspective of the Committee was important because the target population of the project was women from the Andean communities of the canton. At that point, the mestizo who
directed the project said: “I would like to listen to Lolita. Lolita does not say anything. She has attended but she does not say anything.”

The belligerent way in which she demanded that Lolita, the president of the Committee of Women, talk, put Lolita on the spot in an uncomfortable manner. Lolita explained that it had been true that the Committee had not always participated, but she wanted the work to be better coordinated. Then, Mercedes, another woman of UNORCACA with more familiarity with the project, mentioned that the staff of the project had communicated with the Committee, however, “it is a mistake that we spoke once and they think it is already understood. We have to explain in Kichwa as much as possible.” She also mentioned that Lolita began her presidency during the second phase of the project and this was the reason why she was not well informed. Additionally, she commented that “we have not followed-up as we should have. We have let [director of the project] decide.” She opined that the project needed to continue. Then, an indigenous woman, who had been an assistant in the project, but was not a representative of the Committee of Women of UNORCACA, argued that the new representatives of the Committee did not know about the topic of violence. She argued that the project should go to UNORCACA, to the Committee of Women, but that “we are not professionals, technically, to make projects. That is a shortcoming. And thank you to the urban women for having helped us.” In this commentary she aligned herself with the staff of the project with which she had worked rather than with the women of UNORCACA.

The discussion turned back to the issue of who should be in charge of finalizing the project during the two months left. Mercedes proposed that Azucena, the indigenous técnica of gender issues of the Citizen Assembly, be in charge. Then, the (male) president of UNORCACA said that the Committee “has authorized me to say that Azucena be in charge”. The former director, an urban mestiza woman did not agree, because Azucena was a técnica of the Citizen Assembly, not a representative of the Committee. Mercedes responded that it was true that what was desired was that the Committee be in charge of everything, but that “we women have not managed a project.” The representatives of the Municipality said that they seconded the Committee’s proposal. One of the mestiza women proposed that one of the indigenous promotoras of the project should be in charge because she had experience on the attention of domestic violence. Then the representative of UNIFEM, an indigenous woman herself, said to the mestiza woman:

*with all due respect, let’s keep a low profile. A shortcoming has been not to empower the [indigenous] woman, [a shortcoming of] both UNIFEM and the Municipality.*

Once it was agreed that the técnica of the Assembly be in charge of the project, the women of UNORCACA were asked to decide which of the two indigenous assistants should stay. They went out of the room and deliberated in Kichwa. Their decision was in favor of the assistant other than the one who had thanked the mestiza women for their
help with the project. After the meeting was over, the women of UNORCAC, the técnica of the Assembly, and the representative of UNIFEM stayed longer. They complained about several issues: how one of the indigenous assistants had sided with mestizas and was usually criticizing Lolita; how the urban women “siempre les menosprecian” [always look down on them]. They pointed to the way in which both the former director and the promotora had suggested they were not capable of taking on the project or addressing the cases of domestic violence. The representative of UNIFEM encouraged them to make the project work.

After the impasse of the transition between mayors, women of the Committee got involved with the project more significantly than before. They addressed several of the activities left for year 2009. Although UNORCAC’s president and técnicos gave low priority to the project, the women continued supporting it. By 2010, when new staff for the project was selected, the new president of the Committee of Women also became a promotora for the reopened Center in order to make sure to be close to the management of the project. Nevertheless, prior to 2009, the case of Cotacachi was already internationally acclaimed. UNIFEM organized an international encounter entitled “Indigenous Women and Ancestral Justice,” that brought together initiatives of nine Latin American countries (Lang and Kucia 2009). The different experiences were included in a publication in which women are generally portrayed as the agents of change in indigenous justice. For instance,

different organizations of indigenous women have been preoccupied for generating alternatives that confront the patriarchal visions of justice and gender violence. In different regions of Mexico and Latin America we observe organizational processes committed to encourage and promote the rights of indigenous women to influence the institutional spaces of justice, inside and outside the communities (Sierra 2009:17).

Nevertheless, before 2009, women of Cotacachi were not necessarily organized to change indigenous justice. The extent to which indigenous women have been able to reinvent tradition and change indigenous justice in Cotacachi has been limited. There were, to be accurate, cases of actual use of the Reglamento in two communities, Calera (the home community of the two promotoras) and San Antonio de Punge, to solve issues of domestic violence. Beyond these two communities, the Reglamento has not been applied. All in all, this accomplishment seems rather small contrasted to the ways in which the project was publicized as a “model for the Andean region.” Moreover, the origins of the proposal were not endogenous to UNORCAC, but sprang from conversations between the staff of the Center and the representative of UNIFEM. Another staff of UNIFEM interviewed about the agendas of indigenous women in South America commented that:

The topic of ancestral justice is rather new and is being promoted by the cooperation [international NGOs and intergovernmental institutions], the NGOs,
or by women who are being trained in international treaties, international instruments, [such as ILO] Convention 169. It is women who come from other spaces and incorporate those topics. (Sissy Larrea, UNIFEM).

The impasse of the project in the transition between mayors made patent the lack of involvement of the members of the Committee, who were held responsible for knowing about its progress. A project that was supposed to be for indigenous women and managed in close coordination with the Committee was in fact managed by an urban mestiza woman who had perhaps misunderstood the processes of information and decision-making in UNORCAC. However, the lack of involvement of the Committee may have also been affected by the low priority that UNORCAC’s male leaders and técnicos gave to a project whose funds they were not directly managing. Moreover, UNORCAC sided with the newly elected mayor, and tended to disregard the projects in which the previous administration (under the rival indigenous mayor) was invested. More importantly, the impasse brought to the surface latent tensions between indigenous and mestiza women. One of the ways these tensions were manifested was by questioning the capacity of indigenous women to run a project. In contrast to their role in intercultural health as the bearers of traditional knowledge, in the case of the project of the Reglamento, women of the Committee were regarded as not having the technical and managerial skills first for running a project and second for providing attention to cases of violence. As the new representative of UNIFEM contended, the project did not empower the women leaders, even when they were interested in addressing indigenous justice and gender violence. Nevertheless, the project of the Reglamento para la Buena Convivencia is portrayed beyond Cotacachi as one of the successful initiatives for realizing the rights of indigenous women.

Coordinating with Other Women: “Las Compañeras No Se Manifiestan”

The commentary “the comrades do not speak their mind” was supposedly expressed by the representative of the urban women’s organization, when she was demanding to hear the position of the women of UNORCAC at a meeting of the four women’s organizations of canton Cotacachi (the Committee of Women of UNORCAC – Andean zone; the organization of urban women from town Cotacachi; the organization of women of the zone of Intag; and the organization of women of the zone of Manduriacos). Since 1996, with the election of the first indigenous mayor in the canton, Cotacachi started a process of citizen participation with an annual assembly of the canton’s civil organizations. The citizens have organized themselves in the Asamblea de la Unidad Cantonal de Cotacachi, AUCC, Assembly of the Unity of Canton Cotacachi. Its goal is to “fraternize, concert, and plan in a participatory way the future of the Canton, whose decisions are based on principles of respect, solidarity and tolerance of the pluricultural
and multiethnic existing diversity, without simply becoming a channel for demands” (AUCC 2013). Not only did the process of citizen participation convene existing organizations but it also led to the creation of new ones (Ortiz 2004). In the mid-1990s, the Committee of Women of UNORCAC had already begun its process of organization and recruited a dozen of groups of women from different communities belonging to UNORCAC. In contrast, other women in the canton, namely urban mestizas, and later mestiza and Afro women from the subtropical area of the canton, started their own process of organization as a result of the Citizen Assembly’s requirement that the participants be part of a formal organization. The Citizen Assembly did not work with individual citizens but only with those who represented or belonged to one of the canton’s organizations.

Participation in the AUCC represented for the women of UNORCAC a series of challenges, many of which boiled down to the issue of language and discourse. This is a relevant issue, as language and power are intimately associated. Moreover, in this specific arena of their political life, women of UNORCAC found that language was a critical tool for inclusion and exclusion. In the “public sphere,” discourse plays a critical role, as a public sphere is a “space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction” (Fraser 1990:57). As in other public arenas, the issue of language and discourse in Cotacachi is of primary importance. In the annual assembly, usually taking place around November, parts of the sessions included simultaneous translation between Spanish and Kichwa, as an acknowledgement of the “pluricultural and multiethnic” composition of the population of Cotacachi. There was, indeed, an effort on the part of the AUCC to provide as much translation as possible, especially in the introduction and establishment of the annual assembly. Nevertheless, the majority of the event was in Spanish, and in the debate, the simultaneous translation was lost. Here I will specifically focus my analysis in the more limited public sphere of one of the coordinating bodies of the Assembly: the Coordinadora Cantonal de Mujeres de Cotacachi, or Canton’s Coordinating Council of Women, hereafter Coordinadora.

The interaction of women from mestiza, indigenous, and Afro-Ecuadorian ethnicities proved to be difficult, starting from the very premise of language. The struggles between the different groups of women were based not only on the issue of language per se, that is Spanish or Kichwa, but also on the discourses of citizen participation, development, the state, rights, and international cooperation that were relevant to the debates of the Coordinadora. As the communicative interaction among these women shows, language is “both a site of, and a stake in, struggles of power” (Fairclough 1989:15). In the meetings of the Coordinadora, as in other public spheres,
access to and participation in the power forums of society is dependent on knowing the language of those forums and how using that language power enables personal and social goals to be achieved (Candlin in Fairclough 1989:ix).

I have mentioned in Chapter 4 that among the elements that made a difference in indigenous women’s leadership is their proficiency in Spanish and knowledge of specific registers of standard and formal Spanish used in public discussions. In public spheres such as the Assembly, this proficiency provided an important advantage to some leaders. This is true not only in Cotacachi, but in all of Ecuador, where Kichwa and the forms of Spanish and its pronunciation used by indigenous populations are devalued. Moreover, indigenous women are seen as the least proficient in Spanish. The interaction of different women at the Coordinadora started within a wider social context that devalues the language of indigenous people and their command of Spanish. These inequalities of communication work to the advantage of mestizas and middle class women, and to the detriment of indigenous and poor women. Moreover, the references to the inability of some women of UNORCAC to master certain forms of Spanish were, I contend, a way to manifest forms of racism that were supposed to be absent from the form of participatory, pluricultural democracy practiced in the Assembly.

Both mestiza técnicas of UNORCAC and an indigenous técnica of the Assembly asked me to help Lolita, the president of the Committee of Women at the time, with writing and practicing speeches for public events in the canton: “Que la Lolita practique en voz alta para que mejore la pronunciación” (Have Lolita practice loudly so that she improves her pronunciation), requested a mestizo técnica. Lolita had only received primary education up to fourth grade and her command of formal Spanish was rather limited. Notwithstanding that she was able to deliver beautiful speeches in Kichwa, and probably as a result of commentaries such as those told to me, Lolita was nervous to speak in Spanish in public events. Other indigenous women did not necessarily face this issue, as their personal life trajectories and levels of education had granted them full bilingualism and the associated prestige of fluency in both languages. Nevertheless, a considerable number of the women who belonged to the Committee, and the two most visible women leaders, namely the president of the Committee and the president of the midwives, had difficulties with Spanish. In contrast, Martha, a young woman of UNORCAC, regularly acted as master of ceremonies in the canton’s events, as she was articulate in the formal registers of both languages. Younger generations of indigenous women had fewer problems with Spanish, and even some of them did not feel comfortable with their level of fluency in Kichwa.

During the meetings of the Coordinadora, some women tended to take more turns than others. Both the president of the organization of the urban women as well as the

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81 In Cotacachi, some organizations are based on the territory divisions. This applies to the women’s organizations in the Coordinadora. The organization of urban women refers to those who live in the city of
indigenous técnica in charge of gender in the Assembly used to participate more often than other women. Indigenous leaders who have had previous experience in the Assembly as well as a close relationship with the indigenous técnica also expressed their views more frequently. Many times, new women leaders from UNORCAC did not express any view during these meetings. And sometimes, some of them called attention to the fact that development técnicos as well as representatives of international aid agencies use “términos técnicos” (technical terminology) instead of modifying their speech to address an audience that may not be familiar with that terminology. Both the mestiza president and the indigenous técnica had university degrees as well as ample experience with the world of development and the process of citizen participation in the canton. Azucena, the indigenous técnica many times acted as simultaneous translator in order to clarify some of the discussions to the women of UNORCAC. Although the differences in proficiency in Spanish and level of education were known, mestiza women acted as if these differences did not exist, and sometimes showed signs of annoyance when a translation into Kichwa was necessary. Sometimes they even expressed openly that translation was not necessary because they thought other women could understand what was said. As Fairclough reflects, people in power tend to assume that all are familiar with the dominant forms of a discourse, and if a person fails to participate following the dominant conventions, and gives a poor or weak or irrelevant answer to a question, this is likely to be put down to her lack of the requisite knowledge or experience, her uncooperativeness, and so forth; the possibility of miscommunication because of differences in discoursal conventions rarely suggest itself. People may thus be denied jobs and other valuable social ‘goods’ through misconceptions based upon cultural insensitivity and dominance (1989:48).

The interpretation given by mestiza women to the more limited participation of the women of UNORCAC due to language and discourse constraints was precisely one that did not recognize the communicative inequalities but instead blamed the indigenous women for “not speaking their minds.” Rather than acknowledging inequalities that may compromise the idea of equal participation, mestizas commented on the inability of women of UNORCAC to “have their own voice.” Here, I do not want to imply that the inequalities present at the public sphere of the Coordinadora are limited to a communicative inequality, but they certainly start at this very basic level. The notion of the lack of voice was not limited to the silence of indigenous women. It also referred to

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Cotacachi. They are referred to as “las urbanas.” However, the women participating in the organization are also mestiza women. In a similar way, indigenous women of UNORCAC are referred as “las andinas,” because their communities are located in what is called “zona andina” (Andean zone) of the canton. In the case of the women of the zone of Intag or Manduriacos, they may be mestiza or Afro. In my description, then, I use urban with the meaning of mestiza, as the women of Cotacachi do.
lacking an autonomous position vis-à-vis UNORCAC and its male leaders, or presenting proposals for political initiatives in the public sphere of citizen participation.

For Nancy Fraser, a critic of Habermas’ notion of the public sphere, “[o]ne task of critical theory is to render visible the ways in which societal inequality infects formally inclusive existing public spheres and taints discursive interaction within them” (Fraser 1990:65). Fraser calls attention to the fact that, although public spheres are supposed to be open and accessible to all, and that in theory inequalities of status should be bracketed, “declaring a deliberative arena to be a space where extant status distinctions are bracketed and neutralized is not sufficient to make it so” (1990:60). Instead, exclusions and conflicts seem to be constitutive of public spheres. Although the organizational structures of the Citizen Assembly of Cotacachi are supposed to foster participation on equal terms, we need “to look also at the process of discursive interaction within formally inclusive public arenas” (Fraser 1990:63).

In Cotacachi, at the canton level, women of UNORCAC enter into a public sphere in which some local actors view them as “the masses of the movement,” incapable of articulating their own voice beyond the position of their indigenous organization. Some actors in Cotacachi mentioned to me that they did not like the president of UNORCAC to speak for the women of the Committee instead of Lolita, the president of the Committee herself. For these actors, women of UNORCAC do not have their own voice. Urban women, for instance, consider themselves as being more politically active than women of UNORCAC. Women of UNORCAC as well as other actors I interviewed made reference to what a mestiza has once said about their own political participation in contrast to that of the women of UNORCAC:

_I do not agree at all when they say for instance that, if thirty women from the Andean zone come and five [urban women] come, they are in equal conditions because the urban women will contribute more; this is not so much like that, because all people, all have their knowledge, their wisdom and from their realities they can tell us their stuff; that we see them humble, that we see them Kichwa-speaking does not mean that thirty of them will think less than five_ (Irma Torosina, president of the Citizen Assembly).

Women of UNORCAC commented on this infamous quote as one of the examples of urban women’s “menosprecio” (contempt) towards them. The leaders mentioned that the mestizas have said that women of UNORCAC can fill a stadium, but that they [mestizas], even if only five, make more “incidencia política” (political impact). This commentary also points out other problematic issues inherent in a public arena which supposedly brackets the inequalities among their participants. Women of UNORCAC maintained that their organization was not equal to that of the mestizas in terms of representation. In the eyes of the women of UNORCAC, their organization had a longer history that preceded the formation of the Citizen Assembly and represented 29
groups of women from the Andean communities, while the organization of the urban women was created as a result of the public space opened within the Citizen Assembly, and their organization only represented a handful of organized urban women. They were calling attention to the differences in the relative weight of the populations represented. The mestiza women appeared to counter this questioning of their representation by attacking the indigenous women’s perceived lack of autonomy from UNORCAC. They did it in the unfortunate manner related above, as noted by a técnico who works for the Assembly and directly pointed to the racism explicit in this kind of commentary:

For instance, the expressions or commentary that we the urban are five and we think more than thirty of the other, that we are four but we are not sheep. Then, there is a load of superiority or a load of racism, and of confusing—that I think is still more prevalent among the urban—that education must prevail, such as “I have higher education or I have studied, or I have managed projects, I have better capabilities or I am in a superior grade than the rest.” Among the Andean and rural [people], there is not much talk about those things, more of the face to face, of solidarity… of experience, of leadership, of leading… of other kind of course, and that does not mean that it is wrong (Jomar Cevallos, técnico of Citizen Assembly).

The differences of power and legacies of racism and discrimination still present in the Ecuadorian society thwart processes of participation, as exemplified by the Coordinadora of Women of Cotacachi. In her critique of the notion of public sphere, Fraser seems to be pointing to forms of exclusion that limit participation, but that are not as overt as the ones I have previously related. She calls attention to “discursive interaction within the bourgeois public sphere [which] was governed by protocols of style and decorum that were themselves correlates and markers of status inequality” (Fraser 1990:63). That is, Fraser directs attention to interactions that mask inequalities of power in the protocols and styles of communication. She argues that “deliberation can serve as a mask to domination” (1990:64). Deliberation in the regular meetings of the Coordinadora takes place in a context of inequalities that involved ethnicity (mestizas versus indígenas or Afro), class (more educated versus less educated), location (urban versus rural) and gender (male leaders versus female leaders). To a certain extent, assumed consent has depended upon processes of communicative inequality and language mystification.

For linguist Fairclough, power in discourse has to do with the ways in which powerful participants control and constrain the contributions of non-powerful participants. He distinguishes between three types of constraints: “contents, in what is said or done; relations, the social relations people enter into the discourse; subjects, or the ‘subject position’ people can occupy” (Fairclough 1989:46). Starting with the last constraint, that of subject position, urban women see themselves as the creators of proposals for political impact, while women of UNORCAC are placed in the site of the
‘mute,’ not able to articulate their position. Consequently, urban women see themselves as the true political actors in the Coordinadora. One important element of the power in discourse is that it translates to power behind discourse, that is, wider situations, institutional or social struggles (Fairclough 1989:70).

In each yearly canton-wide meeting of the Citizen Assembly, all the organizations of Cotacachi convene to discuss important issues for the canton and produce a list of resolutions that are passed to the Municipality and are expected to be included in the agenda of the local government. Prior to the convention, the Assembly’s permanent staff starts a process of consultation to determine some of the themes to be discussed in panels. In the Assembly, there was a panel on ‘gender issues’ in which the Coordinadora of women had a leading role. Each organization of women met in advance to define their own agenda for the meeting of the Coordinadora and then for the general Assembly. The general Assembly takes place during a weekend, with various events: guest speakers, meetings of “mesas de discusión” (topical panels), a presentation of the resolutions of the different mesas, and a plenary session. The Coordinadora was in charge of the panel: Políticas Públicas con Enfoque de Género y Derechos Humanos (Public Policies with a Gender and Human Rights Approach). A guest speaker had been invited to talk about “public policies with a gender approach.” She was a mestiza from Quito working in that city’s municipality. She explained the history of public policies for women in Latin America, and the definition of terms such as “public policy,” “institutionalization,” and “gender mainstreaming.” Additionally, she referred to the legal framework, both international and the one granted by the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution. Finally she explained how gender mainstreaming is played out in Quito’s municipality. Once again, the “technical terminology” used by the guest speaker did not take into consideration that the language used was alienating to many of the participants. One participant in the meeting did express that simultaneous translation in Kichwa was not being given, but while the guest speaker delivered her talk, nobody translated to Kichwa.

After the talk, representatives of each of the women’s organizations of the Coordinadora presented their motions to the group. All the groups agreed that an organizational structure should be created in the municipality, a “department [dirección] of development for the woman and the family” which would work in coordination with the four women’s organizations of the canton, would participate in approving the annual operative plan, and would oversee the departments of the municipality to ensure gender mainstreaming. However, the president of the urban women disagreed and explained that the structure had to be more comprehensive, a department of human rights that would also attend other vulnerable groups such as migrants, the elderly, people with disabilities and so on. The two other resolutions were to create a municipal bylaw to guarantee the access of indigenous women to justice through the Reglamento de la Buena Convivencia, and “to demand to the municipality and parish juntas of Cotacachi that all the processes of planning, budgeting, and public policy-making be done by convening all the organized
 Late in the afternoon, when the resolutions had to be written on a big piece of paper to be presented in the plenary session, many of the women from the communities were leaving in the buses hired by the Assembly in order to return home. Most of the ones staying and actually writing the resolutions were urban women. Resolution number one was to create a department of human rights, prioritizing the motion proposed by the urban women. Urban women had advantages that allowed them to influence to a great extent the resolutions of the whole Coordinadora of Women, while rural women, both from the Andean zone (indigenous women of UNORCAC) as well as subtropical areas of the canton (mestizas and Afro) were at a disadvantage. Women of UNORCAC expressed how they sometimes felt inadequate. One woman from UNORCAC made a motion to have a leadership school for women, and although during the meeting this proposal found a lot of support, it was not presented as one of the final three during the next day’s plenary session. Two spokeswomen presented the resolutions, one mestiza in Spanish and one indígena in Kichwa. Both of them were nervous about presenting and both were new leaders.

The issue of confidence or lack thereof in one’s ability to deliver public speeches was an important factor that tended to benefit the urban and the educated, but the issue of “speaking out” was one that was perceived as especially lacking among indigenous women. An old leader, who was active in organizing the women of UNORCAC, recalled that when she began to participate in the organization, they first started working in “el tema de la autoestima, de hablar, porque les daba mucha vergüenza” (in the topic of self-esteem, of speaking out, because they were very ashamed [of doing so]). In the interviews, some women also expressed that when they were children and they saw a mestizo, they would not talk. While the relations of mestiza women and women of UNORCAC perhaps do not utterly replicate the past, they still reproduce dynamics that silence the latter. While not always overtly racist, urban women act in paternalistic ways that actualize discrimination and inequality, “de querer dar pensando, querer dar haciendo a las mujeres rurales” (of thinking and doing in the name of rural women):

*both urban men and women have influence and more skills in advocacy, in management of the municipality, in the budget; but in that, there is also a very paternalistic conception, that the urban [people] have to help or do things for the Andean [women] or [the women] of Intag, and that upsets the ones of Intag or the Andean [women] (Jomar Cevallos, técnico from Citizen Assembly).*

Although democratizing and participatory in spirit, public spheres such as those opened by the process of the Citizen Assembly of Cotacachi still reproduce forms of language (in the broadest sense) and performances that are advantageous for the urban mestizo. This is not to say that the Assembly has not devised ways to address the issue of language, providing simultaneous translation in the annual meeting (even if not
consistently), but that the communicative inequalities go beyond this solution. Language is not only a means of communication, but also a main element for defining identities and enacting them in public spheres. As Fraser argues:

> public spheres are not only arenas for the formation of discursive opinion; they are arenas for the formation and enactment of social identities. This means that participation is not simply a matter of being able to state propositional contents that are neutral with respect to form of expression. Rather, … participation means being able to speak ‘in one’s own voice,’ thereby simultaneously constructing and expressing one’s cultural identity through idiom and style (Fraser 1990:68-69).

Women of UNORCAC have their own interests and views, but the way they express them does not fit well with the idiom and style of the participatory venues available in the canton. Moreover, even when women of UNORCAC clearly express their views, they are “unheard.” For instance, during the panel of Public Policies, they proposed a leadership school, but this proposal was not included in the final resolutions. Therefore, the issue of “having an own voice” cannot be reduced to the inadequacy of Kichwa women’s competence in Spanish. It is neither a problem of not having an agenda of their own, or proposals that go beyond UNORCAC’s official positions and views. Public spheres in Cotacachi still reproduce communicative interactions that result in processes of shaming of some people’s idioms and style, particularly, those of indigenous people. Here I have emphasized language: the devaluation of Kichwa and limited command of formal Spanish places indigenous women at a disadvantage. However, other practices of indigenous women were also interpreted as a lack of serious commitment to their participation in the public sphere. For instance, the way women of UNORCAC frequently embroider or weave during public meetings was taken by some outsiders as a lack of attention to or interest in what is discussed. Additionally, some foreign aid workers and volunteers found the way indigenous women bring their children with them to the meetings as particularly oppressive. Other mestizos and outsiders found the meetings of the Committee rather lengthy and disliked the need for several meetings in order to make decisions. The issue of having one’s own voice, therefore, depends on the extent to which public spheres promote diverse idioms and styles that allow people to express themselves in their own voice, that is, their discursive ways based on their own identities and cultures, instead of exclusively the discursive ways of the dominant.

**Strategies in the Public Sphere of Citizen Participation**

That women of UNORCAC face these challenges in the Coordinadora and other public spheres of the Citizen Assembly does not mean that they are in fact silenced or devoid of an agenda that they can articulate at this level. As mentioned before, women of UNORCAC have found important allies in the Assembly. Azucena, the gender técnica of
the Assembly was also a member of a community *cabildo* and member of an indigenous community. She was a supporter of the Central Committee of Women’s initiatives. Additionally, the Citizen Assembly was the locus of leadership schools in which women of UNORCAC participated. Thus, this propitious context has helped some female leaders to acquire tools for their political action in their own organizations. Some women in UNORCAC have close ties with the Assembly and her *técnica*, and, as narrated earlier, sided with her when she ran for president of UNORCAC. Besides the técnica, women of UNORCAC also found common ground with other women, namely rural women from the subtropical area of the canton as well as some mestiza women who did not share the views of some leaders at the time. Staff at the Assembly sometimes highlighted the division between the “urban” and the “rural,” as for instance in the passage above which referred to the racism of the urban. In the public sphere of the Assembly, the spatial and class divide separated the representatives of the urban, mestiza women from the rest. The women of the zones of Intag and Manduriacos were mestiza or Afro-Ecuadorian, but their interests were closer to those of the women of UNORCAC as they shared structural problems that limit the provision of basic services in the rural areas of the canton, whereas urban women tend not to be concerned with the lack of basic infrastructure and services because the urban zone is better served in that regard. The proposal of the women of Intag in the annual Assembly was to provide a hospital to Apuela, the main town in the subtropical area. Although this proposal was not included in the final three proposals that were read in the plenary, it was included by the Assembly in their website. Additionally, class and idiosyncratic differences also separated urban women among themselves, and some of them disagreed with the discriminatory attitudes described above.

Besides this strategic alliance with other rural women, or the alliance with some mestiza women, the women of UNORCAC contest urban women’s domination in the public sphere of the Coordinadora in several ways. One was to challenge the representation of the urban women’s organization. Women of UNORCAC argued that they represent a much more significant constituency than that of the urban organization. Moreover, they contended that the urban organization was not representative enough of the urban women of Cotacachi town in order to be able to speak on their behalf. This was a strategy that put into question the legitimacy of the urban women’s organization and also the idea that the four organizations of women should have the same weight in the Coordinadora. Doubts cast on their legitimacy were met with urban women’s argument that they are more politically active than the rest of the organizations. A formal solution to the issue of representation has not been devised by the Coordinadora, and the four organizations still stand in formal equality, in spite of the weight of the populations represented.

Women of UNORCAC also play the ethnic card to their own favor. Some of the projects that the Assembly applies for are specifically targeted to indigenous women.
Moreover, the international development organizations that work in Cotacachi emphasized working with indigenous and rural women. Other actors show a similar interest. A bank owner, who ran for president of Ecuador in the last election of 2013, visited Cotacachi in 2010, during a national tour promoting the “bank of the neighborhood program” associated with his bank. His visit was part of a sort of early political campaign, long before he declared his intention to run for the presidency. He had asked to meet with the Coordinadora of Women of Cotacachi as part of his visit. During the meeting, he expressed that he had heard a lot about UNORCAC and wanted to know who the president was. Lolita clarified that she was the president of the women of UNORCAC. He wanted to know what Lolita, as representative of the indigenous women of Cotacachi had to say. Lolita took advantage of the situation and explained the structure of the Committee of Women of UNORCAC and expressed the need for improving the economic situation of the communities, giving education to the children, and having training workshops for women. Urban women were irritated because of the attention given to the women of UNORCAC. One of them said: “we are from the urban zone, but we also have needs.” Women of UNORCAC understand and use to their advantage the fact that many NGOs and funding agencies are interested in working with indigenous and rural women. Several projects managed by the Citizen Assembly are specifically directed to indigenous women, and the indigenous técnica of the Assembly also actively looks for projects for indigenous women. For instance, the proposal of the women of UNORCAC to create a leadership school was not forgotten. It was incorporated into a project for the production and commercialization of chicha de jora (special corn beer), specifically designed for women producers from the Andean communities of Cotacachi.

The issues of discourse, idiom, and style are also contested by women of UNORCAC. They explicitly requested that the leadership school be in Kichwa. They also suggested that the instructors hired for the leadership school be indigenous women. They explicitly mentioned that they did not want to have a mestiza instructor who was usually hired for training in gender issues. They wanted Cristina Cucuri, an indigenous woman from the central highlands and leader of an indigenous women’s organization, to be one of the instructors. Thus, women of UNORCAC were pointing to who is a better fit for their needs, and disqualified a professional mestiza because of her inability to speak in Kichwa, but also because they consider that mestizas tend to have a condescending attitude toward indigenous women. For the new project of chicha de jora, the assistant staff members hired were Kichwa-speaking, and women of UNORCAC participated in the process of selecting candidates for the positions available. Additionally, during some of the meetings, women of UNORCAC did speak in Kichwa when they needed to clarify a point. Those who were more conversant with the topics or understood better acted as informal translators. Although still disadvantaged by the shortcomings of a public sphere that benefits those who are competent not only in Spanish but also in the jargon of
development, women of UNORCAC managed to make the Coordinadora and the opportunities opened by the Assembly useful for their own interests.

The Experience at the Local Government – the Concejalas

UNORCAC has been an important political actor in Cotacachi since its foundation, with the capacity of affecting the electoral outcomes in the canton. Alberto Anrango, the current mayor, was the first indigenous concejal (member of the municipal council) in Ecuador, elected in 1979 (Chuji 2013). UNORCAC has established alliances with different political parties from the left. In 1996, in an alliance with Pachakutik, UNORCAC supported Auki Tituña, the first indigenous mayor of the canton, and one of the first indigenous mayors of Ecuador. The three consecutive administrations of Tituña opened and consolidated a process of citizen participation that was formalized in the Citizen Assembly of Cotacachi. UNORCAC showed its power to balance the election for or against a candidate once again in 2009, when Tituña lost the election to Alberto Anrango, who was supported by UNORCAC. Only after 2000, have indigenous women started to participate in formal politics. In that year, Mercedes was elected the first indigenous woman to be a concejala in Cotacachi. After her, two other indigenous women have been elected, one in 2004 and one in 2008.

These three indigenous women were elected as candidates of Pachakutik, the political party associated to the national indigenous organization CONAIE. Although Mercedes was projected to canton-level politics through her work as health promoter and representative of the women of UNORCAC, she was officially a candidate of Pachakutik, a party with which UNORCAC was allied for the elections of 1996 and 2000, although UNORCAC is not a member of CONAIE. The same was true for the indigenous woman candidate in 2004, also elected as a Pachakutik candidate. However, in 2009, when UNORCAC had rescinded relations with Pachakutik and launched its candidate in an alliance with Alianza País (current party in power), it did not actively support an indigenous woman candidate for concejalía. With the exception of Mercedes, UNORCAC has not been the force behind the presence of indigenous women in formal local politics. This is not to say that UNORCAC has actively excluded indigenous women as candidates, but rather that it has not made it a priority to place indigenous women on the municipal council. The indigenous women elected as concejalas have

82 In 2009 UNORCAC elected new representatives. Several representatives who came to power were political adversaries of the alcalde Tituña. Even if Tituña had received the support of UNORCAC the three times he ran for mayor, during his last administration he grew increasingly distant from UNORCAC. People from UNORCAC told me that he had even claimed that in the last election, he had not won due to UNORCAC’s votes, but because of the votes of the subtropical area of the canton. That was the last straw for people of the UNORCAC, who decided to launch their own candidate against Tituña. They also had the support of the Citizen Assembly staff members, who had also run into problems with Tituña’s administration in his last period. UNORCAC’s candidate, Alberto Anrango, won the 2009 election.
come from the ranks of the communities with ties to Pachakutik and to the former alcalde Tituaña.

Although indigenous women have been increasingly elected to the presidency in the community cabildos, their participation in the municipal government is limited. According to an urban woman who has served as concejala, the participation of indigenous women in the canton-level politics has been influenced by processes of leadership training that were organized by women at the Citizen Assembly in coordination with concejalas. Additionally, mestiza women associated with Pachakutik have been involved in lobbying for female candidates. The urban concejala explained that women on the list had to be present in a specific alternate order:

*It would have been very difficult for a woman to arrive [to the council] if, from the very call for elections, I wouldn’t have demanded to be the first candidate in the list that came for Pachakutik, if we gave it to a man [the first place in the list], we women would have lost the possibility to be [in the council] and we wouldn’t have won. Then, only if the alternatividad [alternating process] was repeated the way we needed it, then I, woman, accompanied by a man for urban representation, and also a woman was included as the principal candidate for the rural representatives, that made that the two of us [an urban mestiza and an indigenous woman] be in the municipality council* (Patricia Espinoza, concejala, Cotacachi).

The manner in which the list of candidates is organized is of tremendous importance for the outcome of electoral processes. Since the constitutional reforms of 2008, Ecuador adopted a system of parity in the election of legislators and local authorities in order to counter gender inequality in the electoral process. The system of parity established that the lists of candidates must be made up of 50% of women and 50% of men, organized in an alternate and consecutive manner on the list of the principal and substitute candidates. Before these reforms, it had been established that women were included normally as candidates for the less important public office or as substitutes for a principal candidate (Archenti and Albaine 2012). The urban concejala who won a seat in the 2008 election pointed to the fact that no other list of candidates from other parties was established in that strategic manner, and the result was that only her party was able to place female representatives in the municipal government. She considered that maintaining women in that political arena was important:

*All the things we have done have been thought out, so that we can obtain that permanent presence of women, which makes a different construction within the municipality. Talking about the topic of interculturality is very important, seeing that the ordinances go with gender approach, generational, and intercultural approach, that wouldn’t be possible if we didn’t count with those spaces, because otherwise we easily lose the possibility of incorporating those approaches to the*
ordinances, that is the legal and juridical part (Patricia Espinoza, concejala, Cotacachi).

Because of the political rivalries between supporters of the two indigenous mayors, I was not able to interview two of the three indigenous concejalas. However, one of them, still active on the Committee of Women and in the space of the Citizen Assembly, related the difficulties that she had in this “new space of the electoral politics.” She remembered that:

This has been another hard space, at least for me. Super hard. It was the first time that an indigenous woman entered the public municipal thing, as indigenous woman. Then, it was hard to take on that space. And one looks so novice, one doesn’t know the structure, because back then, it [politics] was much closed, we said a world apart. Then, since [the process of] citizen participation, it started opening more. We started learning. However, taking on [being a concejala] was difficult. There were no other women to help me, or drive me, or advise me “follow that path, you are doing well, or you are wrong.” Then I asked some compañeros leaders what do I need to do: “yes, yes, we must work, we’ll see.” There was no clear proposal, [such as] saying “we are going to follow this, and as a woman you have to fight for this topic.” Thus, we got lost in the way. However, it has been a step taken. And now there are indeed more women who want to participate (Mercedes, former concejala of Cotacachi).

Other indigenous women of Cotacachi agreed that scaling-up is not necessarily an easy transition for indigenous women beyond the local level of their communities and organizations. Only three indigenous women have been concejalas starting in 2000. Two of them were not launched into politics as representatives of UNORCAC and did not count on the institutional support of the organization. But even when the candidate was a representative of UNORCAC, she could not count on effective assistance from other leaders or técnicos of the organization. This disregard may indicate a lack of mechanisms of UNORCAC to support women who have gone beyond the organization to the local government and to create with them agendas for their political impact at the municipal council. It may be the case that the space of the Coordinadora of Women within the Citizen Assembly has become more important than the municipal council for women’s political influence. The lack of support of indigenous organizations to female candidates in the local governments may also be found among other organizations. An indigenous professional woman, who has been part of indigenous organizations in the highlands and who worked as a development expert opined:

The participation of [indigenous] women has stayed more at a local level. There are more in the local government, the parish councils, the municipalities. And at the higher level there are only a few. They arrive through some spaces, for
instance the law of participation. Indigenous women arrive [to higher office], but they do not know what to do once they are there. By not responding to the demand of the people, they are disapproved by their own organizations and the women themselves. There is no training or co-responsibility by the organization (María Andrade, UNIFEM).

Indigenous women seem to be increasingly active especially at the local levels of participation (Ranaboldo 2006), in spite of the difficulties they find once in office. Nevertheless, in Cotacachi, a model of citizen participation in the local government, indigenous women may find that they have very limited support once they access the formal politics of the municipality. However, because my information was limited to only one of the three indigenous concejalas, it may be too early to arrive to conclusions, as indigenous women are making incursions at this site of politics in Cotacachi.

Figure 6.1. Members of the Central Committee of Women of UNORCAC showing their support for Intag’s struggle against mining. Photo by Unidos por Intag Cotacachi (Cotacachi 2014).

**Conclusions**

Indigenous leaders of the Committee of Women of UNORCAC face a series of challenges in their political participation at the canton level space, both in the public sphere of the Citizen Assembly and in the local government. Indigenous women have participated in the initiatives of a decentralized and intercultural system of health, in which they are recognized practitioners of traditional Andean medicine. This recognition
allows some of them to make incursions into politics at UNORCAC and at the local government. However, their experience with the Reglamento de la Buena Convivencia made patent the limited involvement of the Committee on the project. The impasse and tensions on the ground widely differed from the portrayal of the Reglamento as a successful example of indigenous women addressing domestic violence through indigenous justice. The project did not actively engage the members of the Committee in the management and control of the process. Moreover, the project revealed tensions among indigenous and mestiza women.

In the public sphere of citizen participation in Cotacachi, indigenous women meet with other women’s and local organizations. In their interactions, language and style benefit those who speak formal registers of Spanish, have formal education, have previous experience in local government, and are conversant with the jargon of the state and development. Due to their structural location as rural, poor, and indigenous, several members of the Committee of Women are marginalized by the taken-for-granted conventions of communication in the canton. Women of the Committee meet with other organized groups of women in the canton and have to express themselves in a language and style other than their own. This inequality affects their ability to articulate their positions. In particular, urban mestiza women construct indigenous women sometimes as lacking a voice of their own, or, at others, as lacking a proposal independent from UNORCAC. Simultaneously, mestizas construct themselves as the true proponents of political initiatives for women in the canton.

In the face of these inequalities of communication, part and parcel of a wider context of discrimination and racism against indigenous people, their languages, and cultures, women of the Committee have found ways to turn the resources available in the citizen Assembly to their favor. For instance, they take advantage of development agencies’ demand to work with indigenous and rural women. They use their network of allies in the Assembly to tip the balance in their favor, as they count on the support of Azucena, the técnica de género, an indigenous woman from the communities herself. They align with other rural women and some mestiza women to counter the domination of mestiza, urban, formally educated women. Additionally, they call into question the representation of the urban women’s organization, arguing that it does not even represent a significant part of the urban women of Cotacachi town.

At the different levels of their political participation, indigenous women find different challenges. Some of these challenges are a direct consequence of their structural location as poor, rural, and indigenous. Others are related to their gender. Still others, as presented in this chapter, are associated with the communicative styles of the public spheres in which they act. Indigenous women of Cotacachi, thus, act within a set of concrete constraints which put them at a high disadvantage vis-à-vis male indigenous leaders as well as other non-indigenous actors. Their leadership capabilities are put into question by their communities and organization, and their voice and agency denied by
other actors of the canton. Nevertheless, women of the Committee still manage to circumvent some of the challenges they face and achieve goals that they define as important. A few indigenous women are scaling-up to formal politics and becoming elected authorities in the local government. However, in Ecuador, several indigenous women are climbing up the political routes to national and international politics and indigenous activism. They usually serve as inspiration for others. It is worth then, to follow the trajectory of some exemplary indigenous women beyond the local level.
Chapter 7: Beyond the Local: Indigenous Women Routed to the Global Village

Because the whole world was watching, marginalized citizens were able to transcend the limits of their own states.
Alison Brysk

Los pueblos indígenas, mujeres y hombres estamos incidiendo en diferentes niveles, local, nacional, regional e internacional, exigiendo la participación plena y efectiva y en igualdad de condiciones para que nuestras demandas sean tomadas en cuenta en la elaboración e implementación de los programas, proyectos y políticas que los estados, instituciones tanto estatales, agencias de las naciones elaboran sin la participación de nosotros y nosotras.

Luchamos en defensa de nuestros territorios, tierras, por la defensa de nuestra vida, por las futuras generaciones, por la pervivencia de los pueblos indígenas, desde diferentes escenarios y debemos reconocer todos estos esfuerzos de toda esta generación que han venido y siguen luchando para la eliminación de todas las formas de discriminación contra nuestros pueblos, utilizando todas las formas y métodos para debilitar la lucha indígena. Pero seguiremos resistiendo como lo hemos hecho desde la colonización.

Florina López, coordinator of RMIB

Introduction

Indigenous women are not only active in local indigenous organizations and communities, but also intervene in other public spaces of indigenous activism and formal politics. Although in previous chapters, the focus has been on the women of UNORCAC, transitioning from the local realm to the national and international realms of indigenous women’s activism necessitated the inclusion of the experiences of other indigenous women leaders not from UNORCAC. In this chapter I will discuss how indigenous women are called to respond to different discourses emanating from the local and national state institutions, the national and international indigenous movement, and the international development agencies. I argue that as indigenous women move up to national and international spaces of activism, the demand for education and professionalization increases, favoring those leaders with higher educational capital. I will first refer to the history and relevance of the presence of indigenous women in the transnational indigenous movement. Then, I will present the case of two Ecuadorian indigenous women prominent in national and international arenas of political life. Finally, I will analyze the case of a group of indigenous women that enact their activism mainly in global environmental arenas of indigenous activism.

83 Indigenous peoples, women and men are influencing different levels, local, national, regional and international, requiring the full and effective participation and in equal conditions so that our demands are taken into account in the development and implementation of programs, projects and policies that governments, both state institutions and agencies developed without involving us (masculine) and us (feminine).

We fight to defend our lands, territories, for the defense of our lives, for future generations, for the survival of indigenous peoples, from different scenarios and these efforts must recognize, this whole generation who have come and fight for elimination of all forms of discrimination against our people, using all forms and methods to weaken the indigenous struggle. But we continue to resist as we have done since colonization.
**Becoming Indigenous Women in the Global Village**

Indigenous women have been present in the global indigenous rights movement since the very first meetings of the UN Working Group in 1982. Their networks were formed independently from the Latin American feminist movement, in conjunction with the transnational indigenous movement (Alvarez, et al. 2003:567). Some of them have been especially prominent in global and regional political scenarios influenced by the UN decade on indigenous peoples and the pre and post Women’s Conference in Beijing in 1995. The case of Nobel Laureate Rigoberta Menchú, for instance, attests to indigenous women’s presence in global scenarios, as does that of Mirna Cunningham, a Miskitu intellectual from Nicaragua, who was the previous chair of the UN Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues (2011-2013). Nina Pacari and Blanca Chancoso are renowned Ecuadorian indigenous leaders who have been active in UN Forums as well as in the Latin American indigenous rights movement, as will be discussed below.

There is no clear agreement on when the regional meetings of indigenous women started. Nevertheless, some scholars report that the increasing participation of indigenous women in transnational scenarios may have been animated by the preparatory process for the Beijing UN Conference on Women in 1995. At that time, some indigenous organizations carved out spaces within their own structures specific for indigenous women when the preparatory initiatives for Beijing and accompanying financial resources became available (Espinosa 1997:246). The Beijing Conference was, however, disappointing for indigenous women. According to Choque and Delgado-P, the delegation of indigenous women who traveled to Beijing did not attend the conference, “that initially, rejected their presence. Such delegation [of indigenous women] attended the parallel NGOs conference and was not heard at all by the official UN Women’s Conference itself, which learned about indigenous women denouncing their exclusion” (Choque and Delgado-P 2007:180). Indigenous women did not feel included either in the delegations of the women’s movement or in those of the governments (Cabezas González 2012:53). Moreover, they declared that the strategic goals of the Beijing platform emphasized gender discrimination and equality at the expense of topics that indigenous women defended. Those topics were related to the “inequality between nations, races, social classes, and genders,” or to the detrimental effects of the neoliberal model. At the same time, indigenous women critiqued that cultural differences were deemed as the causes of their marginalized situation (Valladares de la Cruz 2008:49). In spite of the shortcomings of the Beijing Conference, it made possible subsequent encounters of indigenous women from different parts of the world, and thus enabled their exchange of experiences and demands.

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84 Both of them happen to be natives from Cotacachi. However, they did not develop their political careers through UNORCAC but with other indigenous organizations, especially ECUARUNARI and CONAIE, as will be explained below.

85 Latin American second-wave feminism had their origins in organizations of the Left and one of its shortcomings was being oblivious to ethnic/racial inequalities. This tendency, coupled with the middle-class extraction of the feminists, marked a chasm with other popular and indigenous women’s organizations that still represents a challenge to the feminist movement.
The 1990s marked a clear emergence of indigenous women as “active subjects of processes of regional construction” (Cabezas González 2012:47) within a hemispheric pan-indigenous discourse that appealed to the territory of Abya Yala: “indigenous militancy can be described as having reached a higher level of continental coordination both in the North and the South; in territories of the Peoples of the Condor, Peoples of the Eagle, and Peoples of the Quetzal and the Jaguar” (Choque and Delgado-P 2007:187). Indigenous peoples have organized a series of continental summits and encounters which have been key spaces for the coordination of the transnational movement and associated organizations and networks. Indigenous women have participated since 1995 in several encounters and summits (Acevedo 2010; Valladares de la Cruz 2008). Concomitantly, new networks and organizations have appeared. For instance, the Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indígenas (Continental Connection of Indigenous Women) appeared in 1993 and has organized seven encounters of indigenous women from 1995 to 2011. In 1999, the International Indigenous Women’s Forum also emerged in order to organize and promote the indigenous women’s participation in the UN Conference Beijing+5 in 2000 and in Beijing+10 in 2005. Two continental summits of indigenous women have been organized by South American coordinating bodies of indigenous organizations (specifically by CAOI) and took place in 2009 and 2013.

The continental encounters and summits, the multiple regional meetings, and the preparatory meetings for the UN Conferences foster the increased participation of indigenous women and the building of strategic alliances in order to “consolidate the indigenous women’s organizations, increase their participation and visibility in the international arena, and build their capacity” (Valladares de la Cruz 2008:50). Not only the indigenous women’s meetings but also the continental indigenous summits have become spaces for debate, negotiation, and agreements around the hemispheric indigenous project. There, indigenous peoples build and articulate their political proposals, goals and strategies, establish networks, reflect on the past, and think toward the future (Burguete 2007). In the words of Blanca Chancoso,

The purpose of the Summit of Women is to encounter each other to exchange the analyses of our countries’ realities, and from there make an impact in all the spaces. And also work for women to exercise their rights with broader participation (cited in Cabezas González 2012:46).

Indigenous women are participating in indigenous regional and transnational organizations and forums in various manners and with different intensities. Responding in part to the demands of international organizations and NGOs for the inclusion of women and a gender perspective in projects, organizations such as COICA and CAOI have created in the last few years organizational structures for indigenous women. Some of the prominent leaders of national and local organizations are then routed to the global scale as interlocutors with transnational actors and networks. Other women have vast experience in international forums and travel extensively to diverse meetings. They enact their political activity primarily in the transnational indigenous movement and associated networks. In what follows, I analyze the case of two prominent indigenous women from Cotacachi who act mainly in the national and transnational movement. Later, I will present the experience of the Latin American Network of Indigenous Women for Biodiversity, RMIB, a network acting mainly in the global environmental arenas related
to the Convention of Biodiversity’s Conference of the Parties and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The legitimacy of indigenous women at these transnational spaces rests not only on their leadership and role as representatives of national or regional organizations, but increasingly on their expertise in specific topics of debate on the international agendas.

**Women of Cotacachi Active in National and International Arenas**

Although not necessarily coming “from the process of UNORCAC,” that is, from UNORCAC’s ranks, some indigenous women of Cotacachi are active participants in the national and international political arenas. The two most prominent are Nina Pacari and Blanca Chancoso. Pacari, in particular, is recognized as one of the most notable women of 20th century Latin America (Tompkins and Foster 2001). Both Pacari and Chancoso were launched into national and international sites of activism in connection with CONAIE and with its political arm, Pachakutik, and although both have participated in local indigenous organizations, they did not carve out their political lives scaling up the ranks from UNORCAC to FENOCIN, and beyond. This contrasts with the current women leaders of UNORCAC, who maintain their activism mainly at the local level. Blanca Chancoso, however, was connected to the founding process of UNORCAC. As related by the current mayor of Cotacachi when asked what indigenous women of Cotacachi have jumped to regional or national political spheres:

> Of course, not from the very communities but from the urban area, indígenas as Nina Pacari, for example. Yes, she was from the urban area. Well, her dad had money, so they could educate her well, and she has held high office. Well, there is also the compañera Blanca Chancoso who has been in the struggle from below. Not the case of Nina, because she was educated and had her high office. She started to hold the defense of the indigenous people. On the other hand, Blanca was from below. I have to recognize that she was poor like me, but she was urban but connected to the communities. And now I see that some young indigenous women have focused, have gone to high school, and some of them are working in bilingual education in the Provincial Direction of Bilingual Education, they are working in indigenous health, and in other institutions (Alberto Anrango, mayor of Cotacachi).

Not only has Pacari been one of the most important indigenous leaders in Ecuador, she was also the first indigenous woman elected to Ecuador’s National Assembly as well as one of the first two indigenous persons to be minister, when she presided over the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2002. Pacari is an extraordinary woman and leader and the way she became a national and international figure is telling. Education opened possibilities for Pacari that women of the Committee of UNORCAC have not had. Pacari was one of the first indigenous children to go to school in Cotacachi. As an urban, educated, and middle class indigenous woman, Pacari “learned to negotiate the dominant culture while developing a strong sense of ethnic pride” (de la

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86 The majority of the current leaders of the Committee of Women of UNORCAC have only three or four years of primary education. However, younger generations of women are high school and college graduates.
Pacari studied at the Universidad Central of Quito and became a lawyer. During her university studies, Pacari met other young indigenous intellectuals with whom she participated in the Cultural Workshop Causancunchic (Kichwa for We are living/We are alive) that helped her revalue her indigenous identity. She officially changed her Spanish name María Estela Vega, to her Kichwa name, Nina Pacari: “Sí, Nina es fuego, sí, Nina es luz, sí, Nina es calor y Pacari es amanecer,” (Yes, Nina is fire, yes, Nina is light, yes, Nina is warmth, and Pacari is dawn) (Bulnes 1990).

Her early political formation took place in the Federation of Indigenous and Country Peoples of Imbabura, FICI, an indigenous organization of Imbabura province. Nevertheless, she started practicing as a lawyer in Riobamba, a city in the central Andes of Ecuador. There, she became a member of the indigenous movement of Chimborazo.

At the request of the communities of Chimborazo, she became a member of CONAIE, as “a legal advisor to help manage the land and territory administration. I was the first woman to hold this position” (Pacari in de la Torre 2008:281). That was in 1989, a year before the grand national uprising of indigenous people in which the indigenous movement emerged as a critical political actor in Ecuadorian politics (Guerrero 1993). In 1994, Pacari played a leading role in the drafting of an alternative proposal to a new agrarian law which was being crafted by the neoliberal government of Durán Ballén in a context of structural adjustment. The indigenous movement responded with a national uprising that forced the government to negotiate the law. Pacari was active as a negotiator in the talks and the government had to concede to some of the indigenous movement’s demands for the defense of collective lands and a continuous agrarian reform (Becker and Hinojosa 2001:221).

Pacari was also one of the founding members of Pachakutik, the political party of CONAIE. In 1997, she represented the province of Chimborazo in the National Constitutional Assembly, which wrote the historical constitution of 1998, officially recognizing Ecuador as a pluricultural and multiethnic state. Later, in 1998, Pacari became the first indigenous woman to be elected to the National Assembly and there she was elected vice-president of the Assembly. She was also a firsthand witness of the tumultuous years between the end of the 1990s and 2005. The indigenous movement participated in the mobilizations that ended the administration of neoliberal president Mahuad. In the next election, when Pachakutik established an alliance with the party Sociedad Patriótica and came to power, Pacari was one of two indigenous ministers, occupying the Ministry of Foreign Affairs until Pachakutik abandoned the alliance. In May 2007, she was elected judge to the Constitutional Tribunal, current Constitutional Court, being one of the judges of the highest level of the state. Pacari has also represented Ecuador and the indigenous movement internationally. Between 2005 and 2007, she was a member of the United Nations Permanent Forum of Indigenous Affairs.

Pacari has to her credit multiple “firsts.” Perhaps less famous, but also one of the “historical leaders of the indigenous movement,” as the founding members of CONAIE are sometimes referred to in Ecuador, is Blanca Chancoso. For Chancoso, her formal education as a teacher has been important for her political career. She also participated in FICI in the 1970s and became the general secretary of ECUARUNARI in 1979, an umbrella organization that coordinates indigenous organizations of the Ecuadorian highlands, affiliated to CONAIE. Chancoso has been a director and supporter of the famous leadership school for indigenous women, Escuela de Formación de Mujeres
Líderes Dolores Cacuango (School of Training of Women Leaders Dolores Cacuango) (Figueroa Romero 2011). She has been a consultant to the indigenous movement and to international organizations and figures prominently in the transnational indigenous movement of Latin America. She is also a member of the international council of the Wold Social Forum (Hoy 1999). Recently, Chancoso has joined others as first members of the Ethics Tribunal for the Rights of Nature and the Mother Earth, which held its inaugural session on January 17th, 2014, in Quito, Ecuador, and is presided by the environmental activist Vandana Shiva (Global Alliance 2014). The political and professional careers of Pacari and Chancoso have been exceptional, and their accomplishments raise the question of what factors propel indigenous women to positions of political power in the movement and national and international arenas of decision-making. For that, I turn to the experiences of indigenous women of regional and continental organizations.

*Indigenous Diplomacy: From Dirigente (Leader), to Professional, to Expert*

To a great extent, the participation of indigenous women in transnational forums showed their allegiance to the agendas of the indigenous organizations. One staff member of UNIFEM conceives the agendas of indigenous women in the following manner:

> The participation of the women [has been] in the traditional topics: land, territories, water, food sovereignty, but not in the topics specific to women. [In] the process of Bolivia, of the Bartolinas, the presence is important, but in the traditional topics. The topic of women’s rights is relatively new. Their topics of struggle were the same ones as the men’s. (Sissy Larrea, UNIFEM office in Quito).

Several indigenous women scale up to the international arenas of indigenous activism through their mixed (both men’s and women’s) organizations. However, several global arenas of discussion and decision making are still largely dominated by indigenous men that head the most important indigenous Latin American councils, that is, COICA, CAOI, and CICA. Male leaders are still prevalent in the high offices of these organizations (presidencies and vice-presidencies). As a result, the boards of supranational coordinating bodies are heavily represented by males. For instance, in 2010, only two of the nine representatives of the Amazon indigenous organizations that come together in COICA, were female. Similarly, only two out of seven representatives of the Andean organizations that belong to CAOI were female. Moreover, in both cases, one of the women was the representative for the secretariats or committees for the women and family. As a staff member of the NGO Norwegian People’s Aid, who has experience working with indigenous organizations in South America, put it,

> There is limitation to the participation of the women in the organizations themselves. The organizations are masculine and the roles that the women occupy are secondary. And the women almost do not participate in these joint spaces [the Amazon or Andean coordinating council], because the main [female] leaders are busy in leading their women’s organizations (Natalia Wray, NPA).

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87 Bartolinas refers to the National Confederation of Peasant and Indigenous Women of Bolivia “Bartolina Sisa,” one of the most important women’s organizations of that country.
However, women’s scaling up to transnational activism is not only dependent on how the authority structures of indigenous organizations ends up catapulting male representatives to higher international organizational structures, but is also increasingly dependent on processes of professionalization and the development of expert knowledge (Laurie, et al. 2003). Professionalization (having professional degrees) is needed in the new spaces, but at the same time, indigenous women still need to present their indigenous credentials in specific ways (for instance, dress, language, and leadership in local and national organizations). Consequently, for indigenous women both educational and leadership credentials are important:

*The higher their degrees, [the more] that helps them [indigenous women] defend themselves in this symbolic outside world. They are indeed more respected; that is why I insist on professionalization. One must invest in that. The abilities of leadership are also important. Even if they are técnicas, they must have gone through a process of leadership, [of political] office, that gives them legitimacy within their own ethnic group, [more] than only being técnica. We, mestizas, do not need that* (Sissy Larrea, UNIFEM).  

Indigenous leaders are, thus, in need of showing their credentials at multiple levels. For their own organizations, they need to “come from the process,” that is, to have the experience of leadership in indigenous grassroots, second-degree, or national organizations. But the demands of indigenous activism at the global forums increasingly require preparation at a professional level, which, for many indigenous women, has been out of reach. Many organizations support the training of indigenous women, for instance in schools of leadership, as seen in the case of Cotacachi. Nevertheless,

*Projects should prioritize the professionalization of indigenous women, not [only] training. I think it is time to take one more step... I think that a long time we have been offering training courses for indigenous women, which is important. That allows you to reach to the women who can’t read and write. But I think that it is time to favor scholarships, scholarships for bachelor degrees for indigenous women, otherwise we will not bridge that gap. We say that indigenous women should be in a different position or that there should be more women in politics, but they need that. Informal training improves your capacities, but it does not give you a degree. This must be remedied.* (Sissy Larrea, UNIFEM)

Thus, indigenous women that are active at global arenas of political office, indigenous activism, and development usually necessitate a compound legitimacy: they need to be recognizably indigenous (on their identity performance), they need leadership experience in indigenous organizations, and they increasingly require professional degrees. In workshops I organized with Latin American women leaders from COICA,

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88 Mientras tienen títulos más altos, eso les permite defenderse en ese mundo simbólico de fuera de su espacio. Sí son más respetadas, por eso insisto en la profesionalización. Se debe invertir en eso. Las destrezas de liderazgo también son importantes: aunque sean técnicas tienen que haber pasado por un proceso de liderazgo, un cargo, eso les da legitimidad dentro de su mismo grupo étnico, que sólo ser técnica. Eso a nosotras las mestizas no nos pasa.
CAOI, and RMIB in 2010 and 2011, indigenous women expressed their understanding of what the processes of professionalization and “capacity building” entailed. The women of the three organizations differed in their level of involvement in the transnational indigenous movement, which is reflected in the way they conceive of their training needs. The Amazon leaders at the workshop were the less experienced at the transnational level. Moreover, the workshop was the first regional meeting organized by COICA exclusively for the female representatives of the nine member organizations of the Amazon basin. Some women of CAOI have had more experience at international levels than their Amazon counterparts. In contrast, RMIB enacts its activism mainly at the transnational level as will be explained later in the chapter.

The women of the three organizations coincided in elements needed for the strengthening of indigenous women’s leadership. They emphasized the importance of continuous processes of political training and of the schools of political training for women that are promoted by several indigenous organizations. They also manifested the need to learn about international legal instruments relevant to indigenous peoples, such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007, ILO Convention 169, and the Convention on Biological Diversity. In addition, indigenous women added the need to know about women’s rights such as the CEDAW and the Convention of Belém do Pará (Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women). All groups agreed on the need to understand the state and its public policies that affect indigenous peoples and women. They mentioned the necessity of having agendas of their own in order to negotiate with the state and other organizations. Some leaders, mainly those of the Amazon, also expressed the need to learn basic skills for their interaction with the world of development such as the process of designing project proposals and getting funds.

The members of CAOI, who have recently been active in organizing the last two summits of indigenous women in 2009 (Puno, Peru) and 2014 (La María, Colombia), explicitly articulated the need to acquire a regional view for what they call “indigenous diplomacy,” in order to approach indigenous issues and be able to act on the regional Latin American and the global levels. In the following passage, a staff member of CAOI, reflects on the importance of the regional, in this case Andean, vision for the leaders of CAOI:

I would say that one of the challenges, even for male leaders, is having a regional vision. There are compañeras who have a very good profile but they are focused on the national [level]. I think that is the challenge for all of us who are in these

89 I worked as a consultant for IUCN between August of 2010 and May of 2011 in the project Strengthening the Environmental Agendas of Andean and Amazon Indigenous Women and Their Interaction Networks, and organized three regional workshops in Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, with indigenous women who were representatives of the indigenous organizations that belong to COICA, CAOI, and RMIB. The information of this and following parts of the chapter was collected during that project.

90 A caveat to this statement is that there are famous indigenous women from the Amazon region, such as Patricia Gualinga from Ecuador, or Josien Tokoe from Surinam, who have participated in transnational forums. However, even if the national Amazon organizations have representatives for women’s issues, they have not acted internationally in their identity as indigenous women per se.
articulations. I think that the advantages of Miguel and Humberto\textsuperscript{91} when founding the CAOI were that there was a process of exchange of experiences, and there were compañeros who stayed in the countries, in the organizations [of other indigenous organizations than their own]. I think that those elements were good for learning... That made possible that a whole generation of leaders at the regional level, from the grassroots but also from the national organizations, encounter each other, meet each other, and share. That allows the Kichwas of Ecuador to meet with the Quechuas from there [Peru and Bolivia] and become interested in their problems, or with the Aymara of Bolivia. That process helps us, the generation who helped to build and found the CAOI, to easily understand the context and meet the compañeros. I feel it is a challenge, beside having a good understanding of specific topics, but the regional vision is a challenge for anybody who is going to be in the coordinating office off the women [of CAOI], or in other topics, or in the very same General Coordinating body of the CAOI. I do not think it is different if they are men or women. That vision I think is a key topic, because qualities... the compañeras have many, and I particularly admire them (Luis Vittor, técnico from CAOI).

The indigenous women leaders of CAOI expressed that they need special training to understand the different international spaces and institutions where they can insert their claims and exert political influence (“hacer incidencia política”). Specifically, they mentioned the mechanisms of participation in the United Nations, with the different working groups of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Affairs, and the Organization of American States, OAS, and regionally, the Advisory Council for Indigenous Peoples of the Community of Andean Nations, CAN. Moreover, the coordinator of the Women of CAOI in 2011, Nancy Iza, found it useful to work with an applied methodology, which included presenting cases of violations of indigenous rights to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. According to Iza, the methodology used was based on a practical application of rights knowledge, such as learning the specific steps to bring a trial to an international court. Thus, she opined that the training on rights for indigenous women has to include mechanisms of enforceability of those rights, spaces for reporting the violations of rights, procedures for claims, and so forth.

The knowledge of topics and forums related to environmental activism marks one of the major differences among the women of these three organizations. For women leaders of COICA and CAOI, the topics are relatively new and their knowledge limited while the members of RMIB are conversant with the international arenas related to current environmental issues, such as the Convention of Biological Diversity, traditional knowledge, climate change, REDD mechanisms (Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation), or the impacts of the IIRSA (Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America). In both COICA and CAOI, male leaders have been the active representatives on environmental issues. Due to the very specialized nature of some of the environmental debates, some indigenous leaders have difficulty with their advocacy. In topics such as climate change and biodiversity:

\textsuperscript{91}Miguel Palacín, Peruvian indigenous leader, and Humberto Cholango, Ecuadorian indigenous leader, both active members of CAOI. Both visited each other’s organizations in order to learn from the process of indigenous organizations in countries other than their own.
I think there the compañeros [male leaders] have many limitations and I imagine that many compañeras [female leaders] probably have double limitation because they are women, for the jargon used; if it is difficult to understand for me, I imagine for them, too. That is a very difficult aspect and I think that there are very few compañeras involved even at the Latin American level, except for some that are in the network [RMIB], who are there always. (Luis Vittor, técnico de CAOI).

The members of RMIB are identified by other indigenous organizations as the experts on topics of biodiversity. Members of RMIB also pointed to their need to understand the formal and informal mechanisms of negotiation at the international level, but, in contrast to the women of the two other organizations, they are active especially at the forums related to the Convention of Biological Diversity. In what follows I turn to the case of RMIB, not an indigenous organization per se, but a network of indigenous women who are affiliated to different Latin American organizations or are loosely linked to indigenous organizations, that is, they are not necessarily designated representatives for those organizations, but nevertheless act in their capacity as experts in environmental topics.

**Indigenous and Experts: Las Chicas Superpoderosas**

Analyzing the resolutions of the Beijing Conference, Espinosa (1997) found that almost all references to indigenous women were subsumed in issues related to the environment, such as the protection of indigenous women’s knowledge and practices related to biodiversity, their intellectual property rights, their experience in collection and production of food, in the conservation of soil, and so on. This is in line with a trend that represents indigenous peoples as innate ecologists who desire to maintain a traditional or alternative way of life in close contact with nature. Astrid Ulloa classifies global environmental discourses on the topic in two main discourses: a biocentric discourse and a modernizing discourse. In the first one, indigenous populations are seen as an integral part of nature, and in the second one they are seen as in need of expert help to achieve sustainable development (Ulloa 2005:172). The call to indigenous peoples to participate in environmental endeavors assumes that they will prioritize conservation. This has been called the ‘pristine myth’ by Assies and colleagues who argue that the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and other international groups simply consider indigenous affairs to be ecological affairs (Assies, et al. 2002). It is not fortuitous, then, that among the indigenous women who are best positioned in international arenas are those who have developed expert knowledge in issues of biodiversity, and have articulated a discourse that links those issues with indigenous women’s specific perspectives. Some indigenous women have positioned themselves precisely as experts in topics of indigenous peoples, biodiversity, and climate change. This is the case of RMIB, a network, rather than organization, of indigenous women working on environmental issues.

The Latin American Network of Indigenous Women for Biodiversity, RMIB, is a group of professional indigenous women who have become specialists in topics of biodiversity, and more precisely in the Convention on Biological Diversity, CBD, and its
implications for indigenous peoples. RMIB is the Latin American branch of a global network that appeared in 1998 as a response to a call for the participation of indigenous women in the formulation of policies regarding the conservation of biological diversity, as they are assumed to possess knowledge on the sustainable use of resources and local ecosystems and biodiversity. The global network of indigenous women for biodiversity is part of the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity, IIFB (IIFB 2014). RMIB members are recognized by other indigenous organizations as experts on the CBD. Moreover, their main focuses are the articles 8(j) regarding in-situ conservation and indigenous traditional knowledge (CBD 2014a), and article 15 regarding the access to benefits of genetic resources (CBD 2014c). Therefore, the network promotes the recognition and respect of traditional indigenous knowledge, innovations, and practices that promote the conservation of biodiversity.

RMIB’s spaces of political influence are forums such as the biennial global environmental meetings known as Conference of the Parties, or COPs (CBD 2014d). RMIB is also part of the Indigenous Forum on Climate Change, which participates in meetings of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and in the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. They also belong to the World Caucus of Indigenous Women. In addition, RMIB members attend the international congresses of the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature), and participate in forums on protected areas, forests, and indexes of traditional knowledge.

RMIB strives for the participation of indigenous women in the formulation of policies and projects on indigenous territories and their biodiversity. The network has organized several encounters for the exchange of information and experiences regarding indigenous knowledge and biodiversity. Additionally, their members have offered regional training processes for indigenous women of Central and South America on the Convention of Biological Diversity:

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92 “The IIFB is a collection of representatives from indigenous governments, indigenous non-governmental organizations and indigenous scholars and activists that organize around the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other important international environmental meetings to help coordinate indigenous strategies at these meetings, provide advice to the government parties, and influence the interpretations of government obligations to recognize and respect indigenous rights to the knowledge and resources.” (IIFB 2014).

93 The article 8(j) of the Convention of Biological Diversity refers to Traditional Knowledge, Innovations and Practices. It states that “Each contracting Party shall, as far as possible and as appropriate: Subject to national legislation, respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge, innovations and practices and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge innovations and practices” (CBD 2014a).

94 Article 15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity regarding Access to Genetic Resources states that it aims to regulate the access to genetic resources and the fair sharing of the benefits that result from the commercial or other use of the genetic resources (CBD 2014c).

95 The Convention of Biological Diversity was adopted after the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. The Conference of the Parties, COPs, is the governing body of the Convention. It currently meets every two years. There have been eleven COPs since 1994. They intend to advance “the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of the genetic resources” (CBD 2014d).
During all 2010, we worked in five sub-regional workshops through the Secretariat of the CBD, in agreement with the Spanish government (AECID, Spanish agency for aid and cooperation). The first workshop was in Buenos Aires, Argentina (February); then followed the one in Guatemala (March), Brasilia (June), Colombia, and now we are going to Guyana. We did the Latin American preparatory workshop for the COP X in Panama. It is a very active work. Of course, there is the other workshop in Montreal, which was at the Latin American level (Workshop with RMIB, January 2011).

The members of the network consider that the CBD and other environmental topics are not necessarily widely known by the biggest Latin American indigenous organizations. They see as one of their achievements the diffusion of the CBD, which they consider a useful legal instrument, especially in those countries with no legislation on the issues of biodiversity and indigenous peoples or where international legal bodies on indigenous rights have not been ratified:

*The CBD is invisible at the level of the organizations. It is not in their agenda. ... We have been able to influence with our actions: with the workshops, the inter-regional issue. ... It would be good to know how we have influenced at the national level, with many difficulties with the very parent organizations. ... The CBD as an instrument of international reach is not well known. If it is known, it is on the basis of what we are doing.* (Workshop with RMIB, January 2011)

The women of the network have been able to position themselves in the global arena of environmental activism in a very specific niche, that of experts at the intersection of the CBD, indigenous issues, and gender. It was because they led the gender plan of the CBD in the COP XVIII in Bonn, Germany, and because they were able to rescue the working group on the article 8(j) from disappearing, that they were named *las chicas superpoderas*, the power-puff girls, by some of their colleagues. It is important to note that RMIB is a network, not an organization, and that their legitimacy has been called into question. The members of RMIB are not necessarily official representatives of national or regional indigenous organizations. However, the members have been able to overcome such questioning because of the specificity and relevance of their expert knowledge. Regional indigenous organizations such as COICA and CAOI are now interested in fostering relations between RMIB and the women of their organizations. As one of the members argues,

*They have finally understood and accepted that in the face of the lack of legitimate representatives, RMIB, thanks to its persistence and commitment with the Indigenous Peoples, is effecting a positive work in the defense and respect of our rights as human beings and of the mother earth* (Member of RMIB).

It was in the COP X in The Hague, Netherlands, that their leadership on the topic became evident:

*In the mixed meetings, it is said that men have to be the heads. An achievement of COP X in The Hague was that the brothers recognized that the Network of Women was leading the process at that meeting. The majority was women and it was a good point for us* (Coordinator of RMIB).
Nevertheless, the members of the network recognize that it is important to strengthen the connections and collaboration with the big regional indigenous organizations, since spaces such as the UN Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues give priority to those indigenous organizations. Moreover, members of RMIB argue that less experienced participants in the Permanent Forum do not have a good understanding of environmental issues, the associated legal bodies, and the standing of different states on the matter. This is where their knowledge becomes valuable. For them, the participation in the Permanent Forum provides a venue to connect to indigenous organizations and to be informed of local experiences on conservation or environmental struggles that are useful to give substance to RMIB’s proposals. They are trying to forge a collaborative strategy between indigenous leaders and indigenous experts on environmental issues, in such a way that the more professional or technical staff do not take on political roles. The coordination has been easier when common grounds have been found, for instance regarding the more recent debates on climate change and the proposal for a moratorium on REDD initiatives.

Not only indigenous organizations, but also other international actors recognize the expertise of RMIB. The Secretariat of the Convention of Biological Diversity and several NGOs such as IUCN consider RMIB an indigenous organization adequate to interact with due to its expert knowledge. Some state officials also take into consideration the formulations of RMIB in their declarations in the COPs:

In the Secretariat [of the CBD], the network is known as the advisory body for the article 8(j). Now, not officially, it is known as the focal point in the topic of women in the CBD (Workshop of members of RMIB, January 2011).

The success of RMIB resides in their understanding of the processes of lobbying and negotiation in the high level meetings, such as the COPs, and in knowing how to ensure that a specific proposal gets to be incorporated in the final written resolutions of official meetings. According to the staff in charge of indigenous peoples and local communities for the Secretariat of the CBD,

I think that the Latin American indigenous also have gone through very interesting metamorphosis in the last decade when it comes to 8(j). If I can reflect back, seven, ten years ago, they were making declarations, sometimes general declarations about their rights, but they won’t contribute into the detailed text during negotiations. Especially during the last three years, we also had a good opportunity to work with Florina [general coordinator of RMIB] and the Indigenous Women’s Biodiversity Network with a three year MOU [memorandum of understanding] that was funded by Spain to do sub-regional capacity building. This allowed to really move them from a position of making sometimes grand hollow declarations to actually working on text negotiations of international law in great detail. And to see community women develop...this was a big jump forward. To see how community women are actually sitting down, negotiating texts of draft decisions which will guide the work for the next couple of years. This is a giant step forward for the Latin American region. It really shows that the political sophistication has advanced quite a lot in recent history. This has allowed them to be very effective, particularly in various regions, like the Andes.
Not just to lobby for their rights, which is very important, but to take to the table what they can bring: to local management of protected areas, to have the recognition of community protected areas through IUCN and now through the CBD also (interview with John Scott, staff at the Secretariat of the CBD).

The members of RMIB realize that, for their political incidence to be effective, they need to include specific texts and formulations in the official declarations at the end of the COPs. In a similar way, Annelise Riles reports that Pacific women’s NGOs understand their participation at the UN meetings as intervening in the official documents that result from these meetings: “They learned that, as one person put it, ‘the only way to counter a text is with a better text’” (Riles 2000:13). For that, RMIB lobbies both with members of other indigenous organizations and with state representatives before and during global environmental forums. Lobbying with indigenous leaders entails mainly introducing the differentiated needs of indigenous women. With national delegates of their countries, on the other hand, members of RMIB may or may not approach their national government representatives. Nevertheless, the representative from Paraguay had a successful experience in a meeting with the official representative prior to the COP, in which she informed the representative of decisions of previous meetings, the topics to be analyzed and negotiated in the following COP, and the ideas that indigenous women of RMIB and other indigenous organizations would like to see incorporated in the official position of the state. Prior to and during the COPs, RMIB identifies the states and officials that may support their proposals and suggest specific phrasings to be incorporated into the text:

Politicians do not like to read. You have to go with very clear things: this word, not the other; what is what we, as the network, as the Indigenous Forum, want to be included. Sometimes it is a word that changes the whole meaning of the text (Workshop with RMIB, January 2011).

These processes allow us to locate the instances of government. We know that some governments are hard and are going to be so until the end. Canada is like that. But we know that Guatemala, Bolivia, Mexico... we can locate them with the strategy of using the chat [communication through internet]. [We can] send the statements so that it can be a margin, a point of agreement, and see where we can coincide (Workshop with RMIB, January 2011).

What they liked was order: “for this article and for this subsection, this word must be changed.” Many of them are also new and they do not know. You need to give them the explanation. Another thing that we noticed was that they asked for our opinion: “what do you think of such article?” One has to be very attentive to know how to answer. (Workshop with RMIB, January 2011).

Both their expert knowledge and the understanding of how to negotiate with state officials have made the members of RMIB sources of consultation and support for other indigenous women with less experience in international forums. Moreover, both COICA and CAOI have manifested their interest in establishing connections between their women representatives and RMIB.
RMIB, as other experts, acts as a broker between global and national or local spaces. They have access to information generated in the global arenas and bring them to local and national indigenous organizations. This is a challenge for RMIB due to the novelty of topics such as climate change and REDD (Reducing emissions for deforestation and degradation), and to the lack of resources of the network to replicate information at the national and local level. Nevertheless, it is precisely the capacity to move between the local, the sub-regional, and the global, which represents one of RMIB’s strengths:

_They have a broad network that covers most of Latin America, certainly most of the Spanish speaking Latin America. Maybe this gives them an edge when they are interfacing with the UN system, which needs to interface with the Latin American region. Other organizations like COICA represent a sub-region within the region [Amazon]... Also the RMIB, the network, would allow us when we deliver capacity building to actually devolve it to local community and indigenous organizations, which could then organize workshops in sub-regional levels. They have the ability to move from the regional level to the sub-regional level very smoothly... For instance, if we use COICA as the regional network, their strength would be in the Amazonian region, but not in the other regions. So it was also... what made them useful to interface with us was as a regional network with the ability to work internationally, and also at the sub-regional and community level. This diversity of being able to move between these different levels made them one of the preferable organizations to work with_ (interview with John Scott, staff at the Secretariat of the CBD).

Due to the highly specialized nature of the environmental debates in which RMIB participates, they contend that they require specific training in mechanisms of negotiation; technical training in current environmental topics; knowledge of international legal instruments; and organizational strengthening as a network. In spite of their experience, members of the network contend that, for a better political advocacy (incidencia política), they need to understand the processes of lobbying at the global meetings in which they act. They require training from a professional with experience not only in the topics but in the processes of negotiation in high-level global meetings, somebody “with ample knowledge of the formal and informal mechanisms of negotiation in these spaces.” This is especially the case for UN meetings, where they have less experience than in the CBD meetings.

_We still need the political skill... to see that negotiation is not always... one thing is the plenary, and another thing is the hallways. We need to be attentive to what happens in the hallways and have a plan B and C. We still need that_ (Workshop with RMIB, January 2011).

_One of the tasks that is a priority: strengthening the compañeras in the advocacy issue (incidencia política); training us about advocacy: how to do it, what it means, what the appropriate space for advocacy is, lobbying techniques, advocacy techniques. We have been admonished many times. When you're in a formal meeting, you cannot disturb the state representatives who are engaged in a discussion. Perhaps we do not know what the moment for that is. Learning the_
techniques of negotiation, lobbying, right times to do it. We lack the training ... it
is important for different levels: how to get to the actual impact on the countries
themselves. In our experience, this has happened to us many times: we do not
know the right time. When the discussions have passed, we are just arriving. We
do not know at what point we must act (Coordinator of RMIB).

Global environmental negotiations demand a continuous process of highly
technical knowledge. In contrast to other organizations such as COICA and CAOI, RMIB
does not count on hired technical staff and devotes considerable effort to self train its
members on new environmental topics. For instance, RMIB is building a new expertise
on climate change, and for that has attended several technical meetings, in order to
participate in a global workshop of REDD mechanisms. RMIB advocates for the
establishment of a group of experts on climate change and indigenous populations,
including the topics of mitigation, vulnerability, and adaptation to climate change. They
also need more information on the specific vision of indigenous women on climate
change. Additionally, they manifest the necessity of understanding the implications of
new developments under the CBD, such as the Nagoya Protocol on ABS (Access and
Benefit-Sharing on the utilization of genetic resources), and the implications of article
10(c) of the CBD regarding customary use of biological resources (CBD 2014b). At the
time of the workshop they were thinking of preparing themselves to act in the meetings
about forests, as 2011 was the UN year of forests.

Another element of their special needs is the analysis of the implications of the
documents that are generated by the working groups of the CBD, the COPs, the
Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples, and other spaces of advocacy. They require the
advisory service of a person who is updated on the development of these documents and
declarations and who can show the legal and political implications of the texts: “a
strategy of training in how to analyze the documents. Some are legal terminology, and we
need to know what to expect.” RMIB also considers that the analysis of texts has to go
together with the development of their own stance previous to their attendance to
different meetings:

I can conclude that the network lacks political work strategies to negotiate their
position as network. Sometimes we do not have defined positions on the issues; we
go with what the [Indigenous] Forum dictates or what other people dictate. We
have not sat as network to analyze the issues. We need a technical team to analyze
documentation: legal, political, environmental impact, political, economic,
environmental issues... and see our position as network. One example is
regarding the protocol on access to genetic resources. It is the struggle of all.
Though there won’t be much difference, but there is some [from the women’s
perspective], to negotiate with the brothers of the same Forum. (Workshop with
RMIB, January 2011).

Finally, RMIB recognized a very specific way of linking with the local that would
strengthen their advocacy: they need to collect or conduct case studies of traditional

96 The article 10(c) of the CBD states that each contracting Party shall: “Protect and encourage customary
use of biological resources in accordance with traditional cultural practices that are compatible with
conservation or sustainable use requirements” (CBD 2014b).
knowledge that fosters biodiversity, or case studies on vulnerability and adaptation to climate change:

*I think that we have a lot of experience and often talked about doing case studies, each has experience in your country. I think doing case studies, counting on the experiences of each of us, of what has been achieved... maybe we ourselves do not know. That is lacking and is a good strategy to reach [our goals]. [The indigenous caucus of] Asia has that strategy: all that they deliver, they have arguments... I have proposed it many times, but we've not done it (Workshop with RMIB, January 2011).

It has been requested as essential, not only because it is telling about experiences but because it strengthens a position. It is talking with results, with referents. This helps to support what is being done. These case studies are important to place the positions, the work of indigenous women. (Workshop with RMIB, January 2011).

We have asked that case studies be made to show the real effect of climate change, and to also show what it has to do with the loss of biodiversity and migration. (Coordinator RMIB-surt).

The high level of expertise of RMIB’s members in the CBD has made them influential actors in the global environmental arenas of indigenous diplomacy. Their political savvy has been developed in their attendance to high-level meetings. There they have become conversant, to a great extent, with the mechanisms of formal and informal advocacy. Concomitantly, they have developed the ability of influencing the writing of final declarations and texts. Although not an official organization but a network, RMIB has built up the expert knowledge to position itself favorably in the global spaces of indigenous environmental activism, and be recognized as one of the best choices to “interface with” in order to work at the Latin American level, because of its capacity to move between scales “swiftly.”

**Conclusions**

In this chapter, I have followed the activism of indigenous women beyond the local level of Cotacachi and focused on the cases of two prominent Ecuadorian indigenous women and the case of a network of indigenous women active at the level of global environmental activism.

These indigenous women clearly show the redefinition of indigeneity beyond the tropes that root them to the local level. Their activism is clearly multi-sited and traverses the local, national, and global levels. At the global arenas of activism, indigenous professionals are playing the leading role. Indigenous women, then, are compelled to learn to navigate intricate webs of global, regional, and national organizations, diverse forums, NGOs, funding agencies and so forth. Increasingly, they need not just be valid representatives of the movement, but also professionalized to consolidate their knowledge on indigenous and women’s rights, ITCs, and the latest environmental debates in Latin America and beyond.
The agency of indigenous women has been analyzed by many scholars, but the analysis has focused mainly on local struggles and movements. Less scholarly work has followed actors who are mainly working in the global arenas and has analyzed the specific challenges they face in their political advocacy at that level. Although portrayed as a form of “political sophistication,” more research is necessary to determine whether participation understood as writing texts is indeed a political advancement or a way to harness indigenous activism in the procedural norms of global institutions. It is also important to understand the push toward professionalization (Laurie, et al. 2005) and how indigenous leaders negotiate the sometimes blurred spaces of political leadership and technical expertise on environmental issues, as their effective political advocacy increasingly rests upon expert, up-to-date knowledge of global environmental debates.

In many regional indigenous organizations, the global and regional forums of indigenous activism have still been the domain of male leaders. Nevertheless, since the 1990s indigenous women have been more active in the variegated networks of the pan-indigenous movement. Indigenous women are participating in a new global ‘field,’ characterized by the internationalization of indigenous rights and of women’s rights, emerging redefinitions of indigeneity in its relation to cosmopolitanism, processes of professionalization, extensive networks of support and funding for indigenous peoples, widespread use of information and communication technologies, and global forums that require expert knowledge. As the cases of Nina Pacari, Blanca Chancoso, and RMIB show, professional indigenous women are better positioned to navigate the global networks of indigenous activism, and need to be conversant with topics associated with indigenous people’s rights or still connected to indigeneity as the case of environmental issues illustrates. Indigenous women follow global routes but are still marked by their roots, as they are called upon to represent authentic cultures and pristine natures.
Chapter 8: Conclusions

We were dancing on the night of the 31st of June on Saint Lucia’s day. The celebrations of the Inti Raymi were coming to an end and so was my fieldwork in Cotacachi. In the main plaza, indigenous women, young and old, and mestizas like me and others who were linked to UNORCAC danced to the music of a small group of musicians and seconded a young woman who periodically shouted, “Warmikuna, juyayay!” “Long live, women!” We danced in a rotating circle changing from one direction to the other every once in a while. Inty Raymi dancing emphasizes the group, the whole, and as we danced, turned, sang, drank, and shouted, we also became part of something bigger than ourselves. The exhilaration of the moment reminds me of the idea of “power with” (Rowlands 1998), the power of organizing, and the cry “Long live, women!” of a collective sense of agency, identity, and dignity.

As my reflections on the activism of indigenous women come to a close, I want to emphasize the sense of pride that indigenous women of Cotacachi and other organizations have regarding their political participation. Evaluating the extent to which the political activism of indigenous women alters processes and structures that reproduce the subordinated position of women is a complex matter. For starters, some scholars argue that “the involvement in politics of subversion is in itself empowering, even if it fails to transform immediately dominant power relations” (Parpart, et al. 2002:7). In that vein, the change on an individual woman’s consciousness is already an outcome to be
celebrated. However, conscientization does not necessarily lead to politics let alone progressive politics. Nevertheless, another element in the complexity of evaluating indigenous women’s activism lies precisely in how we define progressive politics. This is a complex terrain in which some feminists have been accused of ethnocentrism in their classification of women’s movements as more or less transformative depending on whether they address practical or strategic interests (Molyneux 1985).

More than providing definite answers to whether or not indigenous women’s participation in politics changes gender or other forms of subordination, the contribution of my research lies in the effort to tease out the ways in which indigenous women’s activism takes place at different spaces, the obstacles they find at each space, and the way they respond to those obstacles.

Contributions of this research

This research makes four main contributions. First, it coincides with a considerable line of scholarly work that analyzes indigenous politics in Latin America by examining the gender dynamics of indigenous organizations. Ortner (1995) exhorts us not to sanitize politics and suggest a way of working that explores the internal politics of social movements. In response to Ortner’s exhortation, I analyzed the gender dynamics of an indigenous organization in the highlands of Ecuador with an emphasis on the experiences of indigenous women leaders in the movement. This analysis points to complex negotiations through which indigenous women advance their agendas and occupy new positions of formal representation in local, national, and global organizations of the indigenous movement. It pays particular attention to the challenges indigenous women face and the strategies they enact in their increased political participation vis-à-vis their own organizations and in relation to state and non-state actors.

Second, in this research I analyze indigenous women’s participation in the local politics and the process of citizen participation of the canton of Cotacachi, Ecuador. In doing so, this research builds upon a tradition of scholarship regarding Cotacachi as an exemplary case of citizen participation in local politics (Arboleda 2006; Larrea, et al. 2006; Ortiz 2004; Ortiz 2012). Although Arboleda argues that the process of women’s participation in Cotacachi “is the most solid and relevant from all that exist in the country” (Arboleda 2009), my findings complicate the generally positive evaluations of citizen participation in this canton. The ethnographic strategy of my research has made patent that indigenous women face important obstacles in the public sphere of citizen participation. Moreover, my research points to the dynamics of power and language in the forums of citizen participation in Cotacachi that result in the silencing of indigenous women’s voices.
Third, this research strives to offer a panoramic view of indigenous women’s activism by examining different sites of politics: communities; second-tier organizations; local political participation and municipal government; national politics; and global networks of indigenous activism. While several scholars have argued that indigenous activism is multiscalar (Brysk 2000; Lucero 2008; Niezen 2003), most research tries to establish the connections of one specific site (local, national, international) with the other sites. For instance, although several ethnographies link the explanation of the local social movements to national and global processes and conceptualize its connections as mutually constituted, they do not necessarily follow the members of such movements to those different sites of indigenous activism. Even if multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995) proposes we follow the people, for practical and funding reasons this is not always possible. I was enabled to arrive at the global arena of indigenous activism only through consultancy work for an environmental agency, with the limitations the role of consultant imported to the research process.

Even if incomplete and fragmentary as it moves through different sites of indigenous activism, my dissertation addresses the multi-sited quality of indigenous women’s political involvement by using the information from local (represented by women of UNORCAC), national (in the case of famous leaders Pacari and Chancoso), and global arenas of their political participation (exemplified by the work of RMIB on global environmental debates). This dissertation “scales up” not necessarily in the sense of studying dominant groups, but in a different sense of starting at the local sites of the home and the community, and then following indigenous activism to national and global sites.

Finally, this research introduces an examination of a network of indigenous women (RMIB) who act mainly in arenas of global indigenous activism related to environmental debates. Global indigenous activism demands specific knowledge of indigenous and women’s rights, information and communication technology and up-to-date knowledge regarding environmental debates. When analyzing the global scale of indigenous activism I noted a dearth of literature regarding indigenous women. Except for a few studies (Burguete 2007; Cabezas González 2012; Gómez 2012), the activism of indigenous women at the regional (Amazon, Andean), Latin American, and global arenas is a topic that has not been sufficiently explored. Here, I contribute to this emerging field by introducing the case of RMIB. The question of the significance of the activism of indigenous women in the transnational indigenous movement and at global forums needs further examination. Important issues for future inquiry include whether the activism that takes the form of intervening in the writing of global declarations represents a case of political sophistication or a way in which the indigenous movement’s demands are harnessed by international bureaucratic logics.
Summary of main findings

In what follows I summarize the main findings of my research. The lives of many indigenous women are greatly affected by structural inequalities that constrain the lives of indigenous peoples. Information on poverty, illiteracy, limited access to income, illness, violence and discrimination still demonstrate that indigenous women are in a disadvantaged social location. These structural factors although not completely constraining, continue to greatly limit the opportunities for indigenous women. Additionally, in my work indigenous women evoked forms of blatant racism and discrimination that correspond to a period that they assigned as previous to the foundation and political activism of UNORCAC. These memories included mistreatment on public transportation and public institutions, the appropriation of indigenous people’s products by the Church, forced public labor in Cotacachi downtown, and the discrimination of indigenous children at school, among others.

Nevertheless, indigenous women sense a change that they attribute to the influence of UNORCAC and the indigenous movement. Now, in their words “they call us señoras.” In the memories collected to construct the history of their involvement in UNORCAC indigenous women rescue their sense of agency. Indigenous women of Cotacachi participated in the very foundation of the organization by inviting communities to organize and fight discrimination against indigenous peoples. Once the organization was established, some indigenous women also contributed as tutors in literacy programs. In the area of health, they have been a pillar in achieving the recognition of midwifery and traditional medicine and supporting agroecology in their gardens and plots. Before the formal creation of the Committee of Women, indigenous women were appointed as secretaries and treasurers of the organization. A high point of the women’s organization was the work of the Committee during the second half of the 1990s up to the mid 2000s. Through the Committee of Women, indigenous women’s groups joined under a new structure aimed at organizing the women of the communities. In their view, this is the most important women’s organization in the canton with a substantial number of constituent groups.

There is a perceived increased of female leadership since the 1990s. From secretaries and treasures of the cabildos, indigenous women have moved to presidencies and vice-presidencies. They have also escalated the ranks in UNORCAC as vice-presidents. They have taken part in the canton’s citizen participation. Some have made incursions into the electoral politics of the local governments. The factors that have created the conditions for the increased presence of female leaders are multiple. Changes in rural livelihoods, circular migration, the ascendance of the indigenous movement, the beginning of local citizen participation, the presence of numerous development agencies and projects, and neoliberal multicultural transformations are all elements of the changing structure of political opportunity. In this context, indigenous women have opted for organizing along the lines of the identity politics of ethnicity. The racism and
discrimination of Ecuadorian society complicates alliances with urban and mestizo feminists. Moreover, as indigenous intellectuals have indicated, feminism has not engaged with their interests on collective rights and territories. In Cotacachi, feminism is seen as divisive, supposedly aiming at a domination of women over men or the separation of women from the organization.

Their participation in the indigenous movement, however, is not exempt from tensions either. The debates on complementarity show how some leaders of the movement use complementarity in an essentialist way that effaces gender inequalities detrimental to indigenous women. Some indigenous women, nevertheless, use complementarity as an ideal model of gender relations that has been upset, and bring the issues of indigenous women’s marginalization in the movement back to the discussion. As we saw, Azucena, the indigenous técnica from the Citizen Assembly, was very vocal about her rejection of complementarity as something currently existing.

In comparing the leadership of Lolita and Mercedes, I showed the transformations in indigenous leadership and the elements that are acquiring more salience to succeed as a leader. While Lolita enjoyed the social prestige of being a godmother of multiple children and having acquired important infrastructure as a president of the community, she was perceived in UNORCAC and the canton as a weak leader. Lolita knew well how to tip the patron-client networks of the state in order to get desired infrastructure. Mercedes, in contrast to Lolita, was seen as one of the main female leaders of Cotacachi. Unlike to Lolita, she has a secondary education, even if she did not finish high school. Both women had been cabildo leaders, but Mercedes navigated the politics of UNORCAC, the citizen participation, the local government, and development projects differently. Mercedes was a promoter for the project Doctors Without Borders and there she gained an understanding of the dynamics of development projects. She was also a researcher in a considerable research project in Cotacachi. Moreover, Mercedes has an extensive network that includes local and external actors. Additionally, she was close to the administration of the former mayor and was able to coordinate activities between UNORCAC and the municipality. Mercedes was instrumental in the formation of the Committee of Women and is credited with energizing the process of the organization of indigenous women. She ventured later into the formal politics as a concejala. Mercedes is articulate in both Kichwa and Spanish to a great degree. Her leadership shows the importance of education, understanding the workings of development, and being able to relate interethnically to a myriad of local, national, and international actors. Mercedes’ recognition also depended of her capacity to showcase indigeneity but also on her capacity to articulate a position that emphasized gender difference, even if or precisely because that position placed her at odds with UNORCAC, which was read as an independent position, i.e., having a voice.

In becoming active in indigenous politics in their communities and beyond, indigenous women face a series of obstacles to which they respond with opportunistic
tactics or organized strategies. First, as indigenous women take on political office, they contest forms of traditional femininity and motherhood. Their absence from home due to their leadership encounters epithets such as lazy (vagas, desocupadas), men-like (carishina), wanderer (andariega) that discredit them. Indigenous leaders may find the opposition of their husbands, their children, and other members of their families to their political involvement. In their homes, women leaders’ actions may often accommodate and acquiesce to traditional gender roles, for instance, when they wake up earlier or leave meetings earlier in order to have food ready for the family. Indigenous women may not necessarily break with gender norms, but they certainly stretch them and bend them. The complexity of evaluating whether their activism transforms gender subordination lies in that, while in this accommodation they may seem to reinforce gender norms, these accommodations enable them to leave the private sphere and enter the public sphere of political life. They sometimes pay a personal price in terms of the strained relationships and extended load of responsibilities without a significant re-accommodation of household chores.

Through these accommodations, nevertheless, women find a way out of the domestic realm and organize with other women and other actors. Increasingly present as presidents and vice-presidents of cabildos, indigenous women accept this office at times reluctantly fearing not performing adequately as their capacity is put into question. However, both as cabildo members and in the community assemblies, women are being increasingly vocal in their demands. Sometimes the community mediates the conflicts that arise between female leaders from the cabildos and their husbands, as when one president was discouraged from resigning and animated by the community to continue her role as head of the community. Many women in cabildos still consider that acquiring needed infrastructure is one of the main measures of their success.

From the politics of cabildos to the second-tier organization, indigenous women scale up and enter still another facet of their political activism. The Committee of Women is one of the most important organized groups that form UNORCAC. The relationship between the Committee of Women and the rest of UNORCAC is complex and symptomatic of the tensions of the indigenous movement’s internal gender dynamics. Once in the public sphere, indigenous women encounter processes that I have called domestication. These processes start with women being asked to take the task of preparing and serving food. More importantly, they extend to aligning indigenous women with the official position of the organization, and in the process, they may divide women between the supporters of a concerted action and those opting for an autonomous one. This may entail curtailing ties with allies and networks of the Committee. Alongside processes of domestication, indigenous women may not engage in the decisions made in the organization’s projects by the technical staff. Increasingly dependent on expert knowledge, the projects are largely managed by the técnicos. Indigenous women feel
disempowered by the dynamics of development projects, as they are only “called for the signature” and not treated as actors with the capacity to make decisions.

Nevertheless, one of the motivations for indigenous women’s participation in UNORCAC is precisely a desire for learning. Women participate in the workshops and trainings offered by UNORCAC in order to acquire some knowledge, especially because many of the current members of the Committee saw their aspirations for an education truncated early in their lives. In addition to appropriating hegemonic forms of knowledge, women achieved the management of the microcredit project, directly taking on the decisions on how to distribute those funds. Indigenous women, then, are able to “learn little by little.” Women of the Committee consider that they are “gaining spaces” progressively. Part of their political learning comes from their participation in leadership schools, where they learned from the experiences of women of other organizations in the country or from abroad. Women have tapped their allies within (responsive técnicos) and outside UNORCAC in order to gain support for their initiatives.

Following indigenous women to multiethnic and multiclass public spheres of the canton makes even clearer that we cannot restrict the analysis of indigenous women’s activism only or mainly to the gender dynamics of indigenous organizations. In the canton politics, as in other public spheres in Ecuador, indigenous women need to navigate a context of discrimination and racism that may end up silencing their voices. Indigenous women have been called to participate in decentralized “intercultural” health system in Cotacachi due to the legalization and recognition of midwifery and other indigenous health practices. Several indigenous women have become politically active as their role as traditional healers projects them into the canton and confers on them visibility. In spite of their knowledge being recognized, and the fact that they are incorporated in the canton’s health system, they do not receive a payment as the health personnel do. At the same time, the health personnel’s skepticism persists.

In other canton-level initiatives that involve indigenous women as the main beneficiaries, the Committee of Women’s decision-making was limited. The Reglamento de la Buena Convivencia showed the tensions between the different actors involved. Intended to be a culturally-sensitive and alternative approach to the attention of domestic violence, the project was largely managed without the participation of the Committee. However, when the project came to a halt, the members were held accountable to know about its progress. The case of the Reglamento revealed latent tensions between the mestiza director of the project and women of UNORCAC who thought that the director looked down on them. The project was also affected by the rivalries between the former and new mayors. First, the personnel of the project were seen as close to the rival to UNORCAC’s candidate for mayor. Second, UNORCAC did not give the project priority because the funds were not under its control. Therefore, the Committee of Women’s interest in the project ran against the indifference of UNORCAC. On the other hand, the personnel of the project may have not understood adequately the dynamics of decision-
making within UNORCAC, and proceeded to work rather independently from the organization. At the end of the day, a project whose main beneficiaries were indigenous women ended up marginalizing them in its very management and decisions.

At the canton’s level of participation, the challenges indigenous women face for their activism are significant, since they point to dynamics of the public spheres of political life in Ecuador that may, even when participatory in spirit, end up marginalizing indigenous and poor women. The interaction and communication conventions in the public spheres of politics are still dominated by the mestizo, urban, and educated, due to dominant language and style conventions that favor them. Indigenous women’s difficulties with the language conventions of the public sphere of citizen participation in Cotacachi are read as an inability to speak their minds or to have an autonomous women’s position vis-à-vis their organization. The interactions among women of different organizations still reproduces discriminatory dynamics, as urban mestiza women think of themselves as the true political actors of the Coordinadora of women’s groups in the canton. Moreover, they use their advantages in terms of competency in formal registers of Spanish, education, and experience in local government and development to introduce their proposals in the resolutions of the annual assembly of the citizens of Cotacachi.

In this uneven field of political participation, indigenous women resort to several strategies. Cognizant of the tendency of aid agencies to work with indigenous people, rural dwellers, and women, indigenous women take advantage and present their interests to the representatives of these agencies and other actors interested in supporting their process. Their ally, the indigenous técnica of the Assembly, was also instrumental in channeling indigenous women’s proposals in the mechanisms of citizen participation and in the projects that the assembly carries out. Indigenous women also allied with other rural women from the canton and with mestizas that did not share the view of the representative of the urban women’s organization. Indigenous women also countered the domination of urban mestizas by questioning the representativeness of the urban women’s organization. Indigenous women also countered the domination of urban mestizas by questioning the representativeness of the urban women’s organization to speak for the urban women of Cotacachi town.

Except for a few exemplary cases of indigenous women that have transitioned from Cotacachi to the national site of political participation, most indigenous women of Cotacachi still act at the local level. The indigenous women who have scaled up were educated women who participated in the process of the foundation of national level organizations such as CONAIE. The leaders in the national and the global indigenous movements represent a new kind of “modern” indigenous leadership (Garcia 2005) acting in dynamic networks of regional, hemispheric, and global indigenous activism and breaking with tropes of tradition, poverty, and ignorance. In Ecuador, Nina Pacari and Blanca Chancoso are prominent leaders of the indigenous women and both are historical leaders of the movement that became active in the 1990s. Pacari is one of the historical leaders, has been elected to the assembly, and is currently a judge in the Constitutional
Court of Ecuador. Chancoso directed a famous school of leadership for indigenous women. She is currently very active in the regional and hemispheric meetings and summits of indigenous peoples and women, and is connected to environmental activism through the new Ethics Tribunal for the Rights of Nature.

Global arenas of indigenous activism are largely dominated by men. In the case of the Amazon and Andean coordinating councils of indigenous organizations, the boards are comprised of the presidents of each national member organization. Since the presidencies of these organizations tend to be represented by men, indigenous women do not get to this scale, but serve as representative of the “women and the family” structures within the coordinating councils. Nevertheless, several indigenous women still participate actively in the regional, hemispheric, and global arenas of indigenous activism and have responded to the demands generated by environmental forums for the participation of indigenous people. RMIB, the Latin American Network of Indigenous Women for Biodiversity, acts at the global level qualified by their expertise in topics of biodiversity, indigenous knowledge, and the Convention of Biological Diversity. The challenges that the members of RMIB face greatly differ from those of the Committee of Women of Cotacachi. RMIB lobbies state officials at global meetings on the environment and try to influence the final text of the official declarations of such meetings to include the perspective of indigenous peoples and women. Their effective political influence is predicated upon knowing the formal and informal mechanism to influence decisions at these global meetings. They also require constant training in highly technical debates on the environment and climate change. Nevertheless, they have positioned themselves as the experts on environmental issues for indigenous activism in Latin America and as the structure that is able to interface with the national and local levels of activism. Although women of RMIB are seen as sophisticated political actors, they are also immersed in processes of professionalization and expert knowledge that may harness indigenous activism into specific notions of development (Laurie, et al. 2003).

Indigenous women are now and have been in the past active participants in the indigenous movement. At different scales of their political participation they find specific challenges. Some of these challenges are a direct consequence of their structural location as poor, rural, and indigenous. Others are related to their gender. Still others are associated with the communicative styles and professional credentials they need in the public spheres in which they act. One of the constraints to their activism is that the structures of indigenous organizations are still presided by male leaders, who are then projected to international levels of indigenous activism. Although the relationship of the state and indigenous peoples has been for a long time masculinized, changing structures of political opportunity since the 1990s, constitutional reforms and processes of neoliberal multiculturalism, gender mainstreaming and ethnic approaches to development, and changes in rural livelihoods may have opened new spaces for the participation of indigenous women.
The change to post-neoliberal regimes in Ecuador and other countries of Latin America is, once again, altering the structures of political opportunity in the twenty first century. While governments of the New Left have passed progressive legislation that includes new indigenous and women’s rights, at the same time several tensions are evident between the state and social movements, and within social movements as some align with and some oppose the current regimes. In Ecuador, a main contradiction between the current regime and social movements has developed in relation to extractivist projects related to oil production and mining. Additionally, critics of these regimes are concerned about the escalation of what has been called the criminalization of social protest. The current scenario is complex. For instance, in spite of some success in women’s and sexual rights, including the broadening of the definition of the family, heteronormative notions guide social redistribution (Lind 2012). Moreover, decision-making is increasingly centralized in the state, fostering a process understood as a form of repatriarchalization (Aguinaga 2012) and a new management of diversity in which indigenous subjects are constructed as passive recipients (Martínez Novo 2014).

For the indigenous, feminist, and other social movements, the political landscape is now mined with uncertainties. In Cotacachi, for instance, the municipal indigenous candidates who ran with Alianza País lost against an independent movement led by a mestizo candidate coming from the citizen assembly, in the elections of February 2014. Tensions in the canton have escalated regarding mining in the subtropical area of Intag, uniting different local actors who have left some of their differences behind in order to support the struggle against extractivism. Rural livelihoods are also changing due to the presence of the expatriate community. Cotacacheños see with ambivalence the influence of this community. On the one hand, expatriates are causing an increase in the price of real estate in the town, displacing locals who cannot compete with the prices paid. On the other hand, the presence of expatriates opens local opportunities for much wanted wage work, as they require health and other services. Both the national and local changing contexts demand further research in order to see how indigenous women are positioning themselves in these new political scenarios. The emergent coalitions between organized popular and diverse feminisms with environmentalists, sexual diversity activists, and the indigenous movement may also be broadening the space for maneuvering for indigenous women.

All things considered, however, the structural inequalities that have affected the lives of indigenous women still put them at a disadvantage to participate at the different sites of activism. Still, indigenous women take the challenge and participate. They serve as an inspiration for younger generations who, as the young woman dancing in Santa Lucía did, will celebrate their predecessors with a cry in their voice: Warmikuna, juyayay!
Appendices

Appendix 1: Research Methods

Ethnographic and feminist research designs share an interest in giving special attention to the voices and experiences of people, and, in my research design, the emphasis is on the interpretations, perceptions, and understandings of indigenous women about their participation in diverse formal and informal political arenas. The methods used elicited data on the participation of women in their indigenous organization; their historical achievements; the factors facilitating or limiting their participation; their current political agenda and priorities; and the strategies they used in different forums. An ethnographic research design was used in Cotacachi, and interviews and participant observation were the main research methods used in that location. In the consultancy work, a qualitative research used focus groups and interviews as the main methods employed with the three international indigenous organizations. Additionally, archival research was used to collect documents and publications issued by all the indigenous organizations involved in this research.

Cotacachi: Interviews

Interviewing was one of the main methods of data collection. Un-structured and open-ended interviews were preferred over more structured methods to allow participants to comment on their views, perceptions, interpretations, and understandings, and to acknowledge that they possess valuable knowledge to teach to the researcher (Agar 1980:69). Thus, open-ended and semi-structured methods have the potential to affect the power dynamics between the researcher and the interviewee, allowing the latter to gain a certain amount of control over the interpretation of the information and the topics discussed in (and certainly left excluded) from the interview.

In Cotacachi, I conducted a total of 86 interviews. From these, 33 were current and former indigenous dirigentas (organization and community female leaders) and 22 were indigenous women who were not leaders. Interviewing women who were both past and present leaders and rank-and-file members of the communities was intended to represent variation on women’s experiences regarding participation, or lack thereof, in projects and politics. Additionally, a total of 31 interviews were conducted with indigenous male leaders, mestizo and indigenous staff at UNORCAC, officials of the Municipality, staff at the Assembly of Citizens of Cotacachi, and staff of NGOs working on or funding projects for indigenous women in Cotacachi. These interviews were important for understanding other actors’ perceptions and stereotypes of indigenous women’s capacity for political participation, their needs, and the effects of violence in women’s lives.
Conducting interviews with diverse actors allowed understanding the variations on viewpoints regarding indigenous women’s participation that are informed by particular locations from which the participants speak. The interviews with indigenous female leaders, government and NGO officials, and staff members of organizations provide the context to understand the local political arena in which indigenous women act. The interviews were either taped or digitally recorded when permission was given by the participant. Most of the interviews were conducted in Spanish, but some interviews with indigenous women, especially with older women or those who preferred to be interviewed in their language, were conducted in Kichwa with the assistance of a native research assistant.

Consultancy work: Interviews

The research conducted in the context of the consultancy work was a qualitative research that combined different methods: in-depth interviews with key informants, focus groups with indigenous women of each of the three indigenous organizations, and the compilation of documents published by the organizations or posted on their websites. Due to time constraints for this consultancy work, especially in small field trips to Peru and Bolivia, the interviews were conducted with specialized informants (Bernard 2006:200). I conducted a total of 32 interviews with specialized informants including indigenous women who were current leaders in their organization or who had had an important trajectory within the organization; indigenous male leaders; and so-called “institutional actors,” who were officials of international agencies or state organizations who work with initiatives involving indigenous women.

I conducted these interviews in Spanish and English (for leaders from English Guyana and Surinam, and staff in Canada), and in Portuguese with the assistance of a staff member from the agency. The interviewees were from Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Panama, Brazil, English Guyana, Surinam, and Canada. All of the interviews except for two were digitally recorded, with the participant’s permission. When the participant did not feel comfortable with the recorder, I took notes during the interview and expanded the notes afterwards. The interviews took place in Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, visiting the offices of the indigenous organizations, or during short fieldtrips when I also directed the workshops with the organizations and forums on indigenous rights, state policies, and indigenous women. Local assistants were hired to help organize meetings and set up appointments for the interviews in Peru and Bolivia. Four of the interviews were conducted through Skype, with interviewees who were members of or worked closely with the network of indigenous women, and were familiar with the use of this technology. These interviewees were located in Canada, the United States, Panama, and Bolivia.
The transnational and Latin American nature of the consultancy work forced me to deal with issues discussed in the literature on global, multi-sited ethnography (Burawoy 2000; Kearney 1995; Marcus 1995). The global and transnational politics of indigenous peoples constitute precisely one primary example of contemporary changes that have increased transnational connections, or flows of people and ideas, and caused the stretching of organizations and identities (Burawoy 2000:34). For Marcus, multi-sited ethnography is an exercise of mapping, that is, of defining the connections among sites, and it is this connection that defines the argument of the ethnography (Marcus 1995:105). The author offers several techniques for this type of ethnography, such as “follow the people.” Not only was I concerned with following the movement of particular subjects (indigenous women in their participation in national and global arenas), but I was part of the creation of their movements, by organizing international workshops and forums as part of my consultancy work. I became a ‘developer,’ and, as Medeiros argues, an ethnography of development is necessarily multi-sited “for it involves the study of different places, contexts, and moments of the encounter between ‘developers’ and ‘developees’” (Medeiros 2005:xiv). While I was working with the agency, I was beholden to the organization to support their goals. However now, in the role of ethnographer, I have taken a step back to analyze my involvement and roles during my employment.97

Indigenous leaders who participate in transnational politics travel extensively in order to attend different meetings. This is a main part of their responsibilities. Thus, on the one hand, by traveling to different locations, I could understand some of the relations of these women with several governmental and non-governmental actors and organizations, as well as the demands that strain these women’s lives and time as they attend multiple international meetings. On the other hand, what became clearer to me, in my new identity of consultant and applied researcher, was the implication of my involvement in a world of expert knowledge production. It is easier for academics to dispel the knowledge produced in applied contexts with specific institutional agendas, than to declare that our research agenda translates into immediate benefits for our professional careers and that we can only hope that at a certain point, it may benefit those participating in the ethnography.

Interviews within the context of this consultancy work differed from those in Cotacachi in several ways. Interviews in Cotacachi were scheduled after a period of time in which my continuous physical presence and interaction ensured at least some degree of rapport with the interviewees. One of the practical concerns with multi-sited ethnography is the possibility of engagement at each site. Instead of a connection built on sharing the same space and time, my relationship was mediated by the previous relation of the

97 The agency gave permission to use the results and data of the consultancy work. In my experience, other institutions do not allow the researchers to use the information for their own academic and research purposes.
agency and its staff with each organization and in some cases by new communication
technologies that allowed interviewing people in distant locations. Just out of an on-site
fieldwork experience, I was stepping into the unfamiliar terrain of multi-sited research,
and felt uncomfortable with the limited engagement of my work in following these global
relationships. In terms of the information generated with these interviews, the multi-sited
character of this research does allow a mapping of a “field” of relationships and
connections that women navigate. I was able to gain a panoramic view of the networks in
which the indigenous women leaders are implicated, at the expense of the depth that long
involvement in a single site allows. Nevertheless, as I mentioned, the women and
officials have specialized knowledge of the topics of indigenous participation in
environmental and other national and global forums, and it is this knowledge that the
interviews were aiming at. Thus, even if the interviews touched on general aspects of the
political participation of these leaders, they tended to concentrate on particular expert
knowledge of environmental debates stemming from the participants’ unique experiences
as regional or transnational female indigenous leaders.

*Participant observation*

As noted before, residing at an indigenous community and living with a family
eased my entrance to the field. My decision to live in a community and my desire to
improve my Kichwa helped me to ingratiate myself with the indigenous members of
UNORCAC and the communities, and to negotiate the tensions arising from my mestiza
identity. Participant observation involves not only observing the behavior and activities
of people but also engaging in the day-to-day activities of participants in the research
setting (Schensul, et al. 1999:91). The range of participation may vary from complete
observer, usually in public settings, to complete participant, fully engaged with the
people and their activities, even becoming a complete member of the group (Angrosino
2007; Spradley 1980). During fieldwork, the intensity of my participation varied with
time and involvement, and was contingent on specific situations. I lived with a family,
was integrated into the life of the community and the activities of the organization, and
engaged especially with Kichwa women participating in leadership and projects at
UNORCAC. Although I actively participated, my identity and activities as a researcher
were still acknowledged, for which I was never just a full participant, but a participant-as-
observer (Angrosino 2007:54-56).

Although it was a serendipitous arrangement not planned in the methodology, I
took full advantage of living with the president of the Committee of Women, and, when
allowed, accompanied her to all the activities, events, and meetings that she attended as
part of her role as the women’s representative. I also participated in UNORCAC’s
activities, especially those aimed at women. I attended the monthly meetings of the
Committee of Women, activities of the midwives and health volunteers, meetings of the
micro-credit or agroecological production projects, encounters between UNORCAC’s women and women from other mestiza and afro organizations in the canton and beyond, and community and organization assemblies. As rapport increased between people in UNORCAC and me, I was invited to take a more active part in UNORCAC’s activities. Therefore, I participated in the strategic planning of UNORCAC or fully helped with the organization of the Inti Raymi (the celebration of the solstice and harvest in June).

As I followed the women to the diverse political arenas in which they were active, I also partook in activities related to the municipal government and canton-level organizations, such as periodic meetings of the Citizen’s Assembly of Cotacachi and the annual general assembly of Cotacachi citizens. Participant observation allowed me to observe the interaction between indigenous women and a myriad of actors with whom they interrelated—local officials, NGO staff members, indigenous peoples from other parts of Ecuador, foreign volunteers, researchers and students, and feminist and non-feminist organized women, among others. In these encounters, I paid attention to decision-making processes and the involvement or displacement of the indigenous women’s voices in those processes. Along with my attendance at these events, I also participated in the day-to-day life of the women and the community: baptisms, weddings, funerals, religious and secular rituals, birthdays, and inaugurations of infrastructure, among others. The location of my participant observation was not only or mainly Moraleschupa, where I resided, but also the town of Cotacachi (where the headquarters of UNORCAC and also the indigenous women’s own office were located), and several communities from the canton where the participants lived.

As a research method, participant observation allows an understanding of the context and social relations that frame the women’s and other members of the communities’ views and ideas expressed in interviews and other talks with the ethnographer. When conducting research on gender dynamics, participant observation may prove critical to understand discrepancies between discourse and practice. In this research project, participant observation provided a source of information to be contrasted with interviews (Fernandez and Herzfeld 2003:96). For instance, indigenous leaders may speak of an egalitarian, complementarity-based version of gender relations in the Andes, while their daily interactions contradict such an ideal. Participant observation also granted the opportunity of informal talks on gender relations, or let me witness people’s commentaries that sometimes touched sensitive subjects (Spradley 1980). I recorded my observations in daily field notes (Sanjek 1990).

Workshops and Focus Groups with women from international indigenous organizations

For the consultancy work, a 4 to 5-day workshop was held for each of the three indigenous organizations, bringing together indigenous female leaders from the different countries affiliated with the organization. For the Amazonian organization, this was the first meeting of its female leaders. The workshops included a training section on
indigenous and women’s rights, focus groups, time for autonomous meetings of the members, and, for two of the organizations, the development of strategic plans for activities in the coming years.

Focus groups are a helpful methodology when working with specific groups that are familiar with certain topics of interest to a research project (LeCompte and Schensul 1999:129). Participants in this project had similar experiences as knowledgeable leaders of the national and international indigenous movement, and focus groups were relevant to discuss shared understandings as well as specific (national, local) perspectives arising from the particular location of these women as female leaders in their organizations.

The topics discussed included women’s experiences of participation in indigenous organizations; the factors promoting or limiting their participation; gender policies within the organization; strategies for political incidence; discussion of agendas or strategic plans of the organizations from a gender perspective; current priorities and interests of the women in the organizations; and environmental agendas from the perspective of women.

**Archival Research**

Archival data generated by the organizations, its projects, and information posted on their websites was source of secondary data (Bernard 2006:507; Schensul, et al. 1999:202). In Cotacachi, projects at UNORCAC usually generate periodic and final reports. Nevertheless, the organization does not keep an organized archive of these reports and many of the reports have been lost or perhaps were misplaced. Although I was able to access some documents, for the most part, retrieving reports, evaluations, diagnostic papers, strategic plans, and other documents in the offices of UNORCAC was less feasible than I had thought at the beginning of my project. For instance, the information about how many women had been members of the community authorities (cabildos) was scattered and incomplete. I was able to access some data about the participation of women in Cotacachi politics through information generated by the Citizen Assembly. In particular, I gathered some publications about women leaders in the county.

For the three international indigenous organizations, the information available through publications or the Internet was more extensive than in the case of Cotacachi, precisely because of their transnational nature. One of the organizations did not have a website but periodically posted information on a blog. The publications and websites allowed gathering information about the formal stance of the organization on issues related to the rights of indigenous peoples, environmental debates, relationship with the state, and forum and projects in which the organization was active. Although the emphasis of the consultancy work was on the topics of biodiversity, climate change, and water, I also gathered information about the structure of the organization and their position, when available, on gender issues.
Data analysis

Interviews, field notes, and information from focus groups was analyzed by an open-coding process in which themes emerge from the analysis of the texts (Bernard 2006:463). The analysis focused on both shared beliefs and conflicting discourses among the different actors (Clifford 1990:59). Data analysis paid special attention to commentaries on the participation of indigenous women in several areas of formal and informal politics; on the processes of decision-making that affect projects and initiatives directed to women; on the interactions between women and different actors; on gender dynamics in the households, communities, organization, and local politics; on the barriers and strategies that women use for their participation; and on discourses regarding the roles and capabilities of indigenous women.

Although I started the analysis guided by Moser’s gender roles identification which includes women’s reproductive, productive, and community roles and a focus on women’s strategic and practical needs (Moser 1993), the differentiation between strategic and practical needs was not clear-cut. For instance, although the interest in micro-credit could be seen as a practical need, the insistence of Women of the Committee on managing the project was rather a strategic one, having to do with decision-making. Ultimately the analysis of data was organized around barriers and strategies for political participation and the scale at which they took place concentrically from the house and community toward greater scales. Nevertheless, this was a strategy for organizing the information, because explanations take into consideration that the local, national, and global interact in complex ways.
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Vega, Luz Marina


Vega, Silvia


Warren, Kay B., and Jean E. Jackson


Weismantel, Mary J.


Whitten, Norman E., Jr., Dorothea Scott Whitten, and Alfonso Chango


Xarxa


Yáñez, Fernando


Yashar, Deborah J.

Yuval-Davis, Nira, Floya Anthias, and Jo Campling


Zamosc, Leon

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María S. Moreno Parra

PLACE OF BIRTH
Quito, Ecuador

EDUCATION
B.A. Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador
  Anthropology, 2002
M.A. University of Kentucky
  Anthropology, 2008

GRANTS AND FELLOWSHIPS
2012  Ecuadorian Studies Travel Grant from the Ecuadorian Studies Section of
  LASA, for travel to the 2012 LASA Congress. May 2012
2010  Dissertation Enhancement Award (University of Kentucky)
2009  Lambda Alpha Graduate Overseas Research Grant
2009  O’Dear Award for Graduate Research in Latin America (University of
  Kentucky)
2009  Bonnie J. Cox Dissertation Research Award (University of Kentucky)
2008  Susan Abbott-Jamieson Pre-Dissertation Research Award (University of
  Kentucky)
2005-2007  Kentucky Graduate Scholarship
2005-2007  Fulbright International Student Scholarship

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE
Warmikuna Juyay! Ecuadorian and Latin American Indigenous Women Gaining Spaces
  in Ethnic Politics: dissertation research. Cotacachi, Ecuador, July 2008, August 2009-
“The Cultural Approach Sells”: Negotiating Development and Identity in Otavalo,
Identidades juveniles: un estudio de caso en dos colegios de Quito: undergraduate thesis
  research, Quito, Ecuador, 2001.

PUBLICATIONS
2014  Regalos, vigilancia y comunidades imaginadas fallidas: ayuda Cristiana global y
  desigualdad en el patrocinio de niños en los Andes ecuatorianos. Gifts,
  Surveillance, and Frustrated Imagined Communities: Global Christian Aid and
  Local Inequalities in the Ecuadorian Highlands. Íconos. Revista de Ciencias
  Sociales 49:123-139.


**PRESENTATIONS**


2011 Memorias políticas de mujeres indígenas en Cotacachi. Paper presented at the Fifth Encounter of the Ecuadorian Studies Section of LASA. Quito, Ecuador, June 1-3.


TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Spring 2013 Introduction to Gender and Women’s Studies in the Social Sciences. Gender and Women’s Studies Department, University of Kentucky. Instructor.
2011-2013 Introduction to Gender and Women’s Studies in the Humanities. Gender and Women’s Studies Department, University of Kentucky. Teaching Assistant.

Fall 2009 Ecuador Seminar. Trent in Ecuador International Development Studies, Trent University. Instructor.


CONSULTANCY AND APPLIED RESEARCH


ACADEMIC AWARDS

Winner of the Roseberry-Nash Student Paper Award 2009, Society of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology with the paper “Gifts of Surveillance: Global Christian Aid and Local Inequalities in Child Sponsorship Projects in Otavalo Valley, Ecuador.”

SERVICE TO THE PROFESSION


PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

American Anthropological Association/ Society for Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology/ Association of Feminist Anthropologists/ LASA Ecuador