Este artículo examina los derechos indígenas durante el gobierno de Rafael Correa, (2007 hasta el presente) en Ecuador. Dicho trabajo sostiene que este gobierno está llevando a cabo un proceso de reforma del estado que conlleva una centralización en la toma de decisiones y un énfasis en la extracción de recursos naturales con la finalidad de financiar un estado más fuerte. Dicho proceso está reduciendo la autonomía de los movimientos indígenas y ha ocasionado choques con sus organizaciones debido a que importantes recursos naturales, están localizados en los territorios en los que habitan. Los académicos que han estudiado los regímenes post-neoliberales en sus primeros años, sostuvieron que la ciudadanía post-multicultural se caracterizaba por combinar lo ganado en el periodo neo-liberal -el reconocimiento y la participación-, con un mayor énfasis en la redistribución. Trabajos más recientes, han señalado las exclusiones derivadas de formas particulares de entender la etnicidad, así como de la falta de autonomía de la sociedad civil en estos regímenes centralizados. En el caso de Ecuador, la ciudadanía post-neoliberal ha dado lugar al retorno de un tipo de indigenismo que construye a los indígenas como receptores pasivos de las políticas gubernamentales.

[Amazonía, Andes, Ecuador, etnicidad, pueblos indígenas]
and participation with a greater emphasis on redistribution. More recent studies have discussed the exclusions produced by particular ways of understanding ethnicity and by the lack of civil society autonomy in these centralized regimes. In the case of Ecuador, postneoliberal citizenship has meant the resurgence of a type of indigenismo, which constructs indigenous subjects as passive recipients of government policies. [Amazonia, Andes, Ecuador, ethnicity, indigenous peoples]

The first formal investiture of Rafael Correa as President of Ecuador took place on January 15, 2007, in Zumbahua, a rural parish inhabited by Kichwa-speaking peasants. This parish is located at approximately 4000 meters above sea level in the central highlands of Ecuador. Zumbahua is the site of a Mission of the Salesians, a Catholic order practicing liberation and inculturation theology. Correa chose Zumbahua to show that his government favored indigenous people and the rural poor, and to demonstrate his special commitment to this people in particular. He had been a lay Salesian missionary for a year in this parish.

Alongside many other cars and buses, we climbed at dawn from the provincial capital Latacunga to the high páramo of Zumbahua. When we arrived, the parish had the atmosphere of a carnival. Among the indigenous inhabitants, we found Ecuadorian intellectuals, artists, NGO activists, and foreign tourists. As we reached the town’s main square, we realized that the center had been closed to the general public: only special guests, most of them non-Indian, were allowed inside. Interestingly, then, Correa was to speak at the heart of rural indigenous Ecuador, but the inhabitants of that parish, with the exception of the highest leaders, were not allowed into their own town plaza. I found three young Kichwa sisters whom I knew from my earlier fieldwork in Zumbahua and asked them what they thought about their town square being closed to them during the presidential inauguration. Proudly holding a newspaper that discussed the presidential investiture, they answered with smiles on their faces that this was the first time a president had come to their town. Presidents Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and Evo Morales of Bolivia were among the important speakers scheduled for the day. The presidents arrived by helicopter, to the amazement of all present. Then, the speeches started, Correa spoke last. He thanked the Salesian priests who had sponsored his missionary activity in Zumbahua, and referred to his time as a lay missionary as his most important learning experience, despite the fact that he also held a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He uttered some sentences in the Kichwa language that he claimed to have learned while living in Zumbahua. Although he was able to remember the names of several priests, he did not mention by name a single indigenous person he met during his stay.
After Correa’s speech, the parish president gave him the vara, a staff of office that had distinguished indigenous authorities from colonial times. The parish president did not give a speech. The only indigenous person who spoke, albeit briefly, at the ceremony was César Umajinga, a leader of the indigenous movement of Cotopaxi—a branch of CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador), which is the largest indigenous organization in the country. Why would Correa start his presidency at an indigenous community while avoiding close contact with its indigenous inhabitants? Why would he speak the indigenous language but fail to remember individuals from the parish where he worked? And how would indigenous Ecuadorians react to these tensions between inclusion and exclusion?

This article discusses the approach of the government of Rafael Correa (2007–present) to indigenous rights, and analyzes how this government’s policies and attitudes toward indigenous organizations compare to earlier neoliberal ways of understanding and managing diversity. It locates the case of Ecuador within a larger trend of a turn toward the left for a number of Latin American countries in the 21st century (Cameron and Hershberg 2010). The intention of this work is to contribute to ongoing anthropological debates about how postneoliberal regimes manage diversity; more generally, it contributes to anthropological scholarship on the articulations among political economy, the state, and subaltern group rights.

Ecuador is one among several countries in Latin America in which a government with a platform that rejects neoliberalism has been elected in the last decade (Cameron, and Hershberg 2010; de la Torre 2010; French 2009; Oxhorn 2009; Weyland 2009). These governments self-identify as leftist, and in some cases as socialist. Building on the work of anthropologists (Escobar 2010; Gustafson 2010; Hoffman French 2009; Postero 2007), as well as on these governments’ own self-identifications, I call these regimes postneoliberal (some prefer the term postliberal), in part because the current leadership was elected on platforms that rejected neoliberalism. These governments have adopted policies different from those of neoliberalism: they seek a more prominent role for the state, to protect internal markets against competition, to control the movements of capital, to change their relationship with the United States, to reverse some neoliberal laws, and to use a higher level of public funding than their predecessors for social welfare (Roberts 2012).

Rafael Correa claims to rule for the vulnerable and the dispossessed, and argues that he is radically changing the country through what the governing party, Alianza País, calls a “Citizen’s Revolution.” Initially, he sought the support of the indigenous movement for this transformation and emphasized the symbolic inclusion of indigenous peoples. This was important for his success in a country where the indigenous movement had become a prominent political actor in the preceding decade (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009; Pallares 2002; Zamosc 2007). Correa’s party sponsored legal changes in favor of indigenous rights in the 2008 Constitution. In addition, the Andean concept of _sumak kawsay_ (Kichwa for good
living) purportedly guides the development strategies of the regime, as spelled out in its 2009–13 national development plan (SENPLADES, Plan Nacional Para el BuenVivir, 2009–13).

Despite what seem to be important advances in indigenous rights, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador is confronting this government in a conflict that is progressively worsening. The conflict erupted in January 2009 with indigenous demonstrations against a law that opened the way for large-scale mining, and against a water law project that indigenous organizations did not perceive as redistributive of this important resource. Indigenous organizations also protested against a decree that abolished their autonomy in the administration of intercultural bilingual education. What accounts, then, for the contradiction between these symbolic, legal recognitions and the reality of the bitter confrontations in practice? How do social movements deal with a government that apparently includes them while reducing their ability to have a say in public policy? More importantly, why do indigenous movements in Ecuador have to refight struggles for recognition, autonomy, and participation that they seemed already to have won in the previous decade?

On the basis of research in Central America, anthropologist Charles Hale (2005) argues that in the ethnic project of neoliberalism the governance of diversity includes the limited recognition of some cultural rights and the rejection of more radical proposals for socioeconomic change. The result is the creation of a dichotomy between recognized and unrecognized indigenous subjects that shapes indigenous subjectivities, co-opts indigenous movements, and marginalizes their most radical elements. In the case of Ecuador, the weakening of the indigenous movement during the neoliberal period took place somewhat differently from events in Central America. CONAIE did not abandon socioeconomic objectives such as land reform and the maintenance of subsidies to basic products. However, according to Víctor Bretón (2005), international development institutions, particularly the World Bank through PRODEPINE (a Program for the Development of Indigenous and Black Peoples of Ecuador), encouraged CONAIE’s leadership to privilege technical issues and short-term goals instead of a long-term political project. Roberto Santana (2004) adds that indigenous elites used radical antineoliberal discourses while collaborating in practice with neoliberal institutions, governments, and NGOs. If neoliberal institutions and governments have particular ways to administrate diversity, is there a coherent ethnic project in postneoliberal Ecuador? Would this project, if it exists, expand on or reverse neoliberal multicultural policies? Finally, how does this project relate to the ethnic policies of other postneoliberal countries?

Authors writing in the early years of postneoliberal regimes have tended to be optimistic about the policies of inclusion of indigenous peoples. In an article that
surveys changes in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, Arturo Escobar (2010) highlights important transformations to these countries’ constitutions and government plans that include a reversal of neoliberal policies, a renewal of democracy, and the inclusion of proposals of social movements seeking a society more inclusive of non-Western perspectives, as well as a new relationship with nature. Bolivia is a paradigmatic case from which to discuss the approach of a postneoliberal regime to indigenous rights. Evo Morales, an indigenous leader, was elected to the presidency in 2005 and reelected in 2009. The 2009 Bolivian Constitution aims not only to recognize indigenous peoples, but also to decolonize society (Albro 2010). Nancy Postero (2007) argues that this new moment of postmulticultural citizenship in Bolivia was characterized by a combination of the ethnic recognition and participation afforded during the neoliberal period with a struggle for greater redistribution of the nation’s resources. Jan Hoffman French (2009), reflecting on the case of Brazil, agrees that postneoliberalism expanded neoliberal recognition and participation with more rights for indigenous and Afro Brazilians and linked these rights to concrete resources. Anthropologist Luis Fernando Angosto (2008) highlights the symbolic inclusion of indigenous peoples in the Bolivian Republic of Venezuela. The Constitution of 1999 recognized the multicultural nature of Venezuela and the rights of indigenous peoples. In addition, Chávez, who on occasion claimed to be indigenous, has named indigenous cacique Guicaipuro a national hero, promoted indigenous names for important landmarks, and organized meetings of indigenous peoples whom the regime associates with national dignity and anti-imperialism. Indigenous movements have reacted well to this symbolic inclusion and have embraced the Fifth Republic, claiming to have been socialist from ancestral times.

However, scholars also have reservations about the ways these regimes are managing diversity. Escobar (2010) sees a tendency toward the concentration of power in the state, and a continuation of traditional understandings of development based on the extraction of natural resources. He also perceives a tension between states trying to use the creative energies of social movements, and contrary tendencies to exclude social movements from government and to try to control them. Similarly, Angosto (2008) argues that the ethnic policies of Venezuela are plagued by contradictions. While recognizing the right of indigenous peoples to organize according to their uses and customs, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples is marginalizing autonomous indigenous organizations and encouraging indigenous groups to create Communal Councils not dissimilar to those promoted by the government among the rest of the population. In addition, the ministry tries to assimilate indigenous people into the national economy and does not allow them to develop alternative livelihoods. Postero (2010) now acknowledges that tensions are mounting between some indigenous organizations and the Morales regime.
over the extraction of natural resources. Other anthropologists working on Bolivia have noted the exclusions that the recent political process entails. Robert Albro (2010) points out that the constitutional focus on the Aymara, rural indigeneity, and collective rights excludes other ways of being indigenous—for example, the experiences of urban indigenous people who use both collective and individual strategies. Andrew Canessa (2006) finds that the ideology of the Morales regime, permeated by NGO understandings of indigeneity and by the use of indigeneity as a metaphor for radical politics, environmentalism, and nationalism, appeals more to urban cosmopolitans than it reflects the ways of rural people who speak an indigenous language and live in the community. Canessa (2010) has also explored the gender exclusions of the project of indigenous liberation in Bolivia: male indigenous leaders marginalize indigenous and mestizo women as they struggle to recover an indigenous masculinity hurt by colonial discourses and practices.

I argue for the Ecuadorian case that indigenous rights have suffered a reversal. There has been an expansion of some legal rights, but the legislation is contradictory and difficult to implement, or no serious attempt has been made to implement it. The regime is appropriating indigenous symbols and demands, but is not recognizing indigenous peoples as actors. The neo-liberal emphasis on participation has also been reversed. Finally, there has been a resurgence of prejudice against indigenous peoples.

This article builds on scholarship on the anthropology of the state (Cohen 1981; Coronil 1997; Das and Poole 2004; Sharma and Gupt 2006). As Laura Nader (1969) argued several decades ago, and Cris Shore (2002) reiterated more recently, it is important for anthropology not to be content with the study of the subaltern. It should also study those in power in order to gain a more complete picture of society and even to understand subaltern peoples in larger social contexts. Nader and Shore acknowledge the difficulties of studying elites, not least because they control their own self-representation and are difficult to access. Nader argues that it is fine for anthropologists to use eclectic methods for the study of elites, such as documents, memos, and other written sources when ethnography is not possible. This article resorts to such sources, but also carries out direct ethnographic research with state elites. I was present at several public events when the Correa government presented itself to indigenous peoples, observed sessions of the constituent assembly in 2007, and had access to some of the regime’s intellectuals. This ethnography of the postneoliberal state was complemented with fieldwork in indigenous communities in the northern and central highlands, and in the southern Amazon, and with work with indigenous intellectuals in Quito. In addition, I was able to participate in some events hosted by environmentalist networks that liaise with the indigenous movement of Ecuador.
As noted above, until recently the indigenous movement of Ecuador had been called the strongest in Latin America because it was able to unify organizations from the community to the national level, and because its massive uprisings were able to deeply affect state policy; it even contributed to ousting two presidents (Pallares 2002; Yashar 2005; Zamosc 2007). The rise and goals of the Ecuadorian indigenous movement have been analyzed in depth in numerous publications (see Becker 2008; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009; Lucero 2008; Pallares 2002; Van Cott 2007; Yashar 2005; Zamosc 1994), although they are beyond the scope of the present work. However, when Rafael Correa’s presidency began in 2007, this social movement was already in relative decline.

CONAIE’s crisis from roughly 2004 to the moment of publication of this work has been multidimensional in nature; different authors emphasize different reasons for it (Ospina 2009). Many point to the ill-conceived alliance of the indigenous movement with Colonel Gutierrez, who carried out a coup d’état in 2000 with CONAIE’s support. The indigenous movement’s lack of solid democratic values demonstrated by their participation in this coup has been criticized (Zamosc 2007). In 2002, Gutierrez won the presidential elections in alliance with Pachakutik, CONAIE’s political branch. This allowed Pachakutik to occupy high positions in government, holding the ministries of agriculture, education, and foreign affairs. However, a year after the election, the alliance broke up, as Gutierrez continued the neoliberal policies of earlier governments and started to negotiate a Free Trade Agreement with the United States. In 2003, Pachakutik was forced to leave the government and Gutierrez started a policy of dividing the indigenous movement. This included clientelism at the community level to try to bypass CONAIE’s organizational structures. Another strategy was to make alliances and give positions in state institutions to other smaller indigenous organizations. This strategy was not new. President Abdalá Bucarám (1996–1997) had tried earlier to divide and co-opt the indigenous movement with similar strategies.

Some authors note that the crisis of the indigenous movement may relate to its institutionalization and participation in politics (Ospina 2009; Van Cott 2009; Zamosc 2007). Zamosc (2007) argues that the struggle to control the state led the indigenous movement to make some opportunistic moves, which lost it much ground in terms of legitimacy. Van Cott (2009) adds that indigenous elected authorities might have been subject to unrealistic expectations on the part of voters that may not have been fulfilled.

Another explanation based on my own observations in indigenous communities is the growing gap between the leaders and the grassroots. Some leaders have become technocrats focused on national and international contexts, and to a degree they have lost contact with the communities. In addition, the communities have not seen enough change at the grassroots level after more than a decade of
uprisings and political participation. For example, on a visit to the Shuar Federation in Sucúa in February 2007, leaders were discussing their need for sophisticated information systems to map their territories, whereas common people reported that they were concerned about endemic illnesses, such as malaria and basic subsistence issues (field notes, February 2007). In the province of Chimborazo, a community activist argued:

Here many people love Dr Macas (a historic leader of CONAIE) but the indigenous movement is finished. The leaders . . . do business among themselves at the expense of the people. They sold themselves. Indigenous leaders are absorbed by the system. There is no leader willing to defend the poor. (Interview with P. C., June 6, 2008)

According to indigenous intellectual Luis Alberto Tuaza (2009), community members are tired of organizing and demonstrating without seeing clear results. Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld (2009) argues that it is not homogeneous social composition but class differentiation that has produced a powerful indigenous movement in Ecuador. Colloredo-Mansfeld shows that middle-class indigenous individuals with more resources, education, contacts, and mobility are essential to any explanation of its organizational strength. However, differential access to the benefits of identity politics may in the long term produce resentment and mutual alienation. Ethnicity as a strategy seems to have benefited indigenous leaders more than communities. This is because the politics of recognition and the “tokenism” with which it has been associated in the neoliberal period may have created a few jobs for leaders while precluding greater structural transformations that might have reached indigenous communities.

The crisis of the indigenous movement in the second half of the 2000s was reflected in electoral results. In the 2006 elections, Pachakutik ran with its own indigenous candidate, Luis Macas, trying to replicate Evo Morales’ 2005 victory in Bolivia. This was why Pachakutik did not run in alliance with Rafael Correa. However, Macas obtained less than two percent of the national vote (Báez and Bretón 2006) and only 25 percent of the indigenous vote (Van Cott 2009). Pachakutik’s delegation to Congress was reduced from 11 to 6 deputies.

With the rise of Correa’s project, the indigenous movement seems to have lost some of its leadership credentials in terms of antineoliberal and radical struggles. For instance, Correa’s project attracted a number of Pachakutik’s and CONAIE’s intellectual collaborators, further weakening the indigenous movement. According to Donna Lee Van Cott (2008), the indigenous movement needs to reassess the political scenario now that the left has come to power: it was easier to stand in opposition to conservative governments than it is to relate to a radical government that is depriving the indigenous movement of wider political support. The indigenous movements’ turn inwards toward a more restricted agenda, after the expulsion of mestizos from Pachakutik, did not help either. This happened after
the failed alliance with Lucio Gutierrez made activists think that they had over-stretched, which further deprived Pachakutik of mestizo and urban support. Many of these Pachakutik mestizos now form important cadres in the government of Rafael Correa: for example, Doris Solis was Ministra Coordinadora de la Política (minister coordinator of politics) in the Correa government in 2010, Augusto Barrera became mayor of Quito for Alianza País in 2009, and Virgilio Hernández was a key player for Alianza País in the National Assembly.

Correa’s new government claimed to represent poor indigenous people, and had resources to distribute in the form of jobs, public works, and cash transfers, such as bonuses for human development, housing, and the socio bosque and socio páramo programs, which subsidize communities that preserve their natural environment. In this context, the political effectiveness of the indigenous movement has dwindled, and some medium-level indigenous leaders and community members gravitated (albeit ambivalently) toward this new radical project, causing further fragmentation. For example, some successful Pachakutik regional leaders, such as Mariano Curicama (governor of Chimborazo) and César Umajinga (governor of Cotopaxi), became closer to Alianza País, Correa’s political party, while continuing to be members of Pachakutik and CONAIE.

On June 6, 2008, President Correa spoke in the city of Riobamba. A number of indigenous people from Chimborazo communities had been mobilized in buses provided by the provincial government (controlled by Pachakutik) to listen to the president. P.C. (interview, June 6, 2008) argued, “The governor [Curicama] tells the communities that they must receive the President [Correa]. Curicama has nothing to do with Pachakutik any more. Curicama already belongs to Correa. These things weaken the indigenous movement.” People descending from the communities to see the president told me that they had to go to listen to the president’s speech, or their communities would fine them. A man said, “The governor [Curicama] has said that if we do not go, we will lose the bonus of poverty (a cash transfer of US$ 35 at the time), and our water projects” (field notes June 6, 2008). A community member was reported not to be happy with Correa because the cost of living had risen and that was why, in his view, CONAIE was opposing Correa. However, he had to attend the president’s speech for reasons of accountability (rendir cuentas) to the Ministry of Education, because he is a teacher. That is, he had to go to listen to Correa because of the things he receives, even though he disagrees with him (interview with M.A. field notes, June 6, 2008).

These ambivalences have affected the indigenous movement in intimate ways, dividing kin from kin: for example, Marlon Santi, former president of CONAIE, became a radical opponent of Correa’s government and was harassed in government television propaganda for opposing the government’s natural resource policies. Meanwhile, his first cousin Carlos Viteri, Executive Secretary of the Institute for Regional Eco-development of the Ecuadorian Amazon (ECORAE), a
government institution financed by oil company taxes, has been accused of distributing subsidies to increase support for the government among Amazonian peoples. Two delegates to the National Assembly accused Viteri of using Ecorae’s public money for electoral ends (ecudorenvivo 2011). A Shuar assemblywoman spoke at a February 2010 meeting of the Shuar Federation against government support for mining and oil companies, as well as against the harassment of indigenous people by the government. Her brother, meanwhile, was a government delegate for the Ministry of Culture in the province of Morona Santiago, and organized a government friendly counter-demonstration (field notes January 20, 2010).

However, as the Citizen’s Revolution has consolidated and polarization has increased, some of these ambivalent allies have been increasingly marginalized from the ruling coalition. For example, the Shuar congresswoman’s brother had to leave his job at the Ministry of Culture. Moreover, the Comptroller of Correa’s government called for the impeachment of Pachakutik governor César Umajinga in April 2012, following accusations of corruption. Umajinga had been a strong supporter of President Correa within Pachakutik. Alianza País Mayors in the province of Cotopaxi and the indigenous vice-governor (an ex-Pachakutik who turned to Alianza País) ousted Umajinga before he had time to appeal. Umajinga had lost favor with Correa’s government when a referendum for greater control of the judiciary and the media was defeated in the province of Cotopaxi in May 2011 (El Comercio June 13, 2012, “El prefecto César Umajinga . . .”; El Mercurio June 13, 2012, “En Cotopaxi se agrava disputa . . .”; El Universo May 29, 2012, “PAIS denuncia a prefecto . . .”); Hoy, May 19, 2011, “Umajinga denuncia retaliación . . .”).

The government strategy seems to fluctuate between promoting divisions within Pachakutik and CONAIE and open confrontation. I have documented that entire families who have a Pachakutik member among their ranks are losing their jobs in the public sector (fieldwork notes, December 2012). This strategy has shaped subjectivities. The message seems to be that ambivalences or outright opposition will not be tolerated. At the same time, this strategy constructs indigenous people not as actors (who may give their support at times but with whom the government must negotiate) but as obedient subjects. In addition, the fluctuations between co-opting and dividing and open confrontation have the effect of creating confusion and further weakening the movement.

The 2008 Constitution: Advances and Ambiguities in Indigenous Rights

The 2008 Constitution introduced some advances for indigenous rights over the 1998 Constitution. However, due to tensions in the ruling coalition, some points were kept intentionally ambiguous, and some advances were not possible. In the Constituent Assembly of 2007–08, there was a debate on whether Ecuador should
be plurinational or intercultural. Plurinationalism was associated with autonomy, redistribution of resources, and indigenous representation in different instances of the state (interview with Monica Chuji, April 2008). Interculturalism referred to the right to be diverse, antidiscrimination measures, and inclusion into the nation (interview with Pedro de la Cruz, April 2008). After this debate, a consensus was reached in the governing party Alianza País: both terms, plurinationalism and interculturalism, were adopted in the constitution (Asamblea Constituyente 2008), although some of the demands associated with these terms were watered down (DINEIB 2008a). Plurinationalism was accepted as a term, but emphasis was placed on the unity and predominance of the central state. The sovereignty of the state supersedes territorial autonomy, and special representation of indigenous nationalities beyond regular democratic representation was not accepted.

Another issue that created tensions in the governing coalition was whether to declare Kichwa an official language together with Spanish. Many deputies to the Constituent Assembly wished to do so, but the final consensus reached by Correa’s party was to leave Spanish as the only official language, and to declare native languages “languages of intercultural communication.” The reasons given by the governing party to keep Kichwa in an inferior place in the hierarchy in relation to Spanish were as follows: Kichwa is an oral language; it is not a national language; it is very costly to implement making Kichwa an official language; the imposition of Kichwa along the coast would generate resentment; and it would be better if the population learned English (DINEIB 2008b).

Antidiscrimination and affirmative action are important advances in the 2008 Constitution and in the subsequent secondary legislation. Antidiscrimination principles appear throughout the constitutional text and have been further developed through Presidential Decree 60, issued in September 28, 2009 (Correa 2009b), which declares “the state will try to achieve (procurará) the hiring of Afro-Ecuadorians, indigenous, and montubios [mestizo peasants from the coast] in all its institutions in a proportion that will be not less than their participation in the total population” (my translation). This decree, however, has not been implemented (Observatorio Sobre Discriminación Racial y Exclusión Etnica 2012). One of the few experiences of implementation has been the hiring of 20 indigenous people, 11 Afro-Ecuadorians and 10 montubios as low-level diplomats by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in April 2012. Indigenous applications were processed through FENOCIN (National Federation of Peasant, Indigenous and Black Organizations), and other organizations friendly to the government, including some branches of CONAIE that have grown closer to the government (applicant, personal communication, August 2012). This strategy is probably intended to strengthen indigenous organizations allied to the government by showing that they have resources to distribute, and to further weaken and divide CONAIE. Candidates underwent a personal interview in which they were asked their political affiliation and their
thoughts about Correa’s regime. According to a candidate, those who were not sponsored by an organization friendly to the government did not get the job (interview with author, December 19, 2012).

The question of indigenous territories and control of nonrenewable natural resources remains a problematic and ambiguous arena in the constitutional text. Indigenous territories (circunscripciones territoriales indígenas) are included but do not pertain to the regular territorial organization of the state. To generate an indigenous territory, interested groups must base their petition and carry out a referendum in the divisions of the state that already exist as decentralized units—such as parishes (parroquias), counties (cantones), and provinces (Constitución de la República del Ecuador 2008, p. 158). A problem with this method is that the current divisions of the state are based on the distribution of the mestizo population. Typically, indigenous populations are located in the margins of these divisions—the center of which is the mestizo parish or city. This would make official approval of indigenous territories highly problematic (Julián Larrea, personal communication). COOTAD (Organic Code of Territorial Organization, Autonomy, and Decentralization), the secondary legislation issued in October 2010 to elaborate on this issue, retains this difficulty. The 2008 Constitution and COOTAD seem to make possible the formation of indigenous territories with state budgets, in a step beyond mere recognition of the neoliberal period; however, by requiring circumscriptions to be equal to traditional divisions of the state or additions of these (for example, a confederation of parishes or provinces), no new rights have been granted.

Furthermore, it is clear in the constitutional text that nonrenewable resources belong to the central state. The chart of indigenous rights in the Constitution establishes that communities should be consulted when their territories or rights are affected, but it is not clear whether this consultation is binding. Indeed, Alianza País did not accept unambiguous binding consultation for indigenous peoples (Gina Chávez, assistant to a Constituent deputy, personal communication, April 2008). Environmentalists and supporters of indigenous rights lost this battle, but introduced an ambiguity in the constitutional text that they are trying to use in favor of communities. The constitution establishes that Ecuador would respect all international treaties regarding indigenous and human rights, which include the 2007 United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Rights that mandates that the consent of indigenous communities is needed in order to extract natural resources from their territories (Acosta 2009).

**Governing Diversity: Postconstitutional Conflicts**

Here, I will discuss specific areas of conflict between CONAIE and the government of Rafael Correa in order to continue to analyze how the government has managed
its relationship with indigenous people. One important example of such conflict arose in relation to the System of Intercultural Bilingual Education. In February 2009 (after CONAIE demonstrated against the mining law published on January 29, 2009), Correa’s government abolished the autonomy of indigenous organizations to elect the leadership of DINEIB or to decide on educational policies through Executive Decree 1585 (Correa 2009a). This Decree established that the Minister of Education would manage the intercultural bilingual system according to national public policies. All leadership in this system would be freely nominated and only removed by the Minister. This meant a substantial change and a turn back for indigenous organizations because they had been able to elect their education leaders since 1988, to design the curriculum and educational policies, and to hire its teachers. This decision, which contradicts the concept of plurinationality declared in the 2008 Constitution, caused discontent in the indigenous movement. It is important to note that many of the movement’s cadres are bilingual teachers. The intercultural bilingual system is one of the main sources of employment for indigenous professionals in a discriminatory labor market. Furthermore, the autonomy of the intercultural bilingual system of Ecuador was unique in Latin America (Abram 2004).

Several reasons were given for this change that goes against the idea of autonomy that the declaration of the plurinational state implies. According to the Ministry of Education, Intercultural Bilingual Education had been delegated to indigenous organizations in the context of the neoliberal retrenchment of the state. Bilingual education had then become the booty of a handful of corrupt leaders who had used the system for their own profit, “politicized” it, and were thus the cause of the deep problems of poor quality in the system. The ministry also accused CONAIE of being “racist,” because they had monopolized intercultural education for the sake of indigenous organizations, had taught children about indigenous struggles, but had not included mestizos (Ministerio de Educación, March 2009).

On March 31, 2011, a new Organic Law of Intercultural Education (Ley orgánica de educación intercultural, LOEI) was issued. This law does not only apply to the education of indigenous people but refers to the whole educational system that is now intercultural throughout. For example, it establishes that the state is obliged to “progressively include in the curriculum the study of at least one ancestral language as well as the systematic study of non-official national realities, histories, and local knowledge” (LOEI, Title I, Article 5, Letter l).

A separate System of Intercultural Bilingual Education persists, but it has become part of the Ministry of Education and the minister remains its main authority. A plurinational council has advisory and accountability functions, is made up of several representatives of the executive, and has one representative per indigenous nationality. These representatives, however, are not chosen by the nationalities according to their customs, but are selected through processes defined by the Council.
of Citizen Participation and Social Control—a technocratic institution that is close
to the executive. In LOEI, the government defines interculturalidad in the follow-
ing terms: “Interculturalidad is recognized and understood as coexistence and
interaction in equality that promotes unity in diversity and mutual appreciation
among individuals, nationalities, and peoples in the national and international
contexts” (my translation, LOEI, Title IV, Chapter 2, Article 79 d, p. 30).

A section on prohibitions forbids teachers to paralyze education, and to carry
out political proselytism in schools—an article probably directed at the powerful
Maoist UNE (National Teacher’s Union) and at CONAIE. These two organizations
have controlled the public education system in Ecuador and have often protested
against different governments.

There are several tensions in this law: (1) a centralization of decision making
in the executive that assumes responsibility for the implementation of intercultur-
alidad throughout society; (2) an appropriation of interculturalidad for the nation
and a blurring of the meaning of the term at the expense of interculturalidad as
a specific political project of indigenous peoples; (3) a criminalization of protest
within the educational system, which is one of the most politically active sectors
of civil society in Ecuador; and (4) the use of the word “ancestral” throughout the
law to refer to indigenous language and culture, relegating indigenous knowledge
to the past in classical indigenista fashion.

A Kichwa linguist who is an authority in the Intercultural Bilingual System
in the Province of Imbabura, and a member of FENOCIN, interprets the law
as follows. He appreciates several positive aspects of the law: for the first time,
the whole educational system becomes intercultural and it is now based on the
indigenous concept of “good living.” Moreover, a general educational law in the
country has a whole section spelling out the importance of intercultural bilingual
education. He praises the requirement of including in the curriculum the teaching
of ancestral languages, knowledge, and history. As a linguist, he is also happy
with the creation of an Institute of Ancestral Languages. However, he believes that
this may divide indigenous professionals; they have already started fighting for
positions in the newly created institute. He acknowledges that the government
has appropriated the debate on interculturalism and that the earlier intercultural
bilingual system has been absorbed by the larger system, formerly called “Hispano”
(meaning nonindigenous) and now called “of intercultural education.” According
to this interviewee, this is due to the failure of the previous intercultural bilingual
system, and its indigenous teachers and administrators, to carry out the required
pedagogical revolution. Finally, he notes that the part of the law that scares teachers
in the Imbabura province the most is the section on evaluation and accountability
that may affect their employment. He thinks that the pedagogical change should
have been carried out progressively, through training, instead of by an “evaluation
hunt” (cacería evaluadora; interview July, 27, 2012).
This interview shows the effects of the new law on indigenous people: it recognizes their political project but appropriates it for the state and for mestizo society because of the alleged inability of indigenous professionals to carry it out efficiently. Indigenous peoples are recipients and not shapers of intercultural policies. The law creates some jobs for professionals that are seen as an opportunity, but it also has the ability to punish through nonnegotiated evaluation processes. This law is trying to shape a particular kind of indigenous subjectivity, which sees mestizos as the appropriate thinkers and agents and indigenous peoples as unable to design and implement policies.

Another indigenous intellectual—an anthropologist, a member of the Cañari Kichwa people, a teacher in an intercultural bilingual school in Cañar, and a longtime member of CONAIE—has a different opinion. When I asked him what he thought of LOEI he answered

With all sincerity, I must respond that I do not like that law. I say this not because I am against Officialism [Correa’s government], but because this is a law that does not respond to the real needs of Ecuador. Let me tell you the process of creation of this law. By request of the actors of the system of intercultural bilingual education, there was a process of pre-legislative consultation. In this process, by consensus, we requested that Intercultural Bilingual Education was considered an autonomous system from the administrative, technical, and financial point of view. This proposal was not taken into account. The government argued that pre-legislative consultation with indigenous people is not binding. It is unbelievable the way they have treated us. Well, the term “intercultural” was created by academics, but we appropriated it in Intercultural Bilingual Education, trying to dialogue, trying to look for mutual respect by the peoples who live together. However, today that term has been appropriated by Officialism as a political symbol. For me, interculturalidad is not an abstract term. It is concrete. Ninety percent of the teachers do not agree with this system that they are implementing in Ecuador. The only ones who agree are those who have become part of Officialism, because one of the strategies of this system has been to divide and destabilize the organized social systems, and to divide even with greater strength the indigenous movement. Many leaders have been bought in exchange for jobs. (Interview, July 29, 2012)

In December 2012, I visited the intercultural bilingual high school in the province of Cañar where my interviewee teaches. Differently from the recent past when educated indigenous teachers directed the institution, a mestizo woman with a lower level of education now leads the school. Another indigenous teacher in the province of Chimborazo, educated to masters level, told me that the director of his intercultural school was also a mestizo that had not completed his bachelor degree (interview, December 22, 2012). The human capital painstakingly built by the indigenous movement and their allies during the period of strength of the
Another source of conflict between the government and indigenous organizations relates to the administration of natural resources, such as oil, minerals, and water. These constitute another domain in which indigenous movements seem to be losing autonomy. There has been an expansion of extraction industries in Ecuador as well as in the rest of Latin America. States perceive these industries as an important source of revenue. However, for communities affected by extraction the consequences are negative, as they suffer displacement, pollution of the land and water, decreasing availability of water, an increase in violence, and other social problems in exchange for a few jobs, and some perks from companies. This has led to a generalized conflict in Latin America between governments and affected communities (Bebbington and Bebbington 2011; Sawyer 2004). Here, I will focus on the mining conflict.

Large-scale mining is a recent activity in Ecuador. The first mining law was passed in 1991: by 2007, 2.8 million hectares had been granted to mining companies, half of which was for the extraction of metals—a heavily polluting activity (Amnesty International 2012). In November 2008, Correa’s government presented a proposal of the mining law to the National Assembly. Despite a constitutional requirement stating that they should be consulted when their rights or territories are affected, indigenous organizations were not adequately engaged in the design of this proposal of law, which opened a path for the development of large-scale mining in Ecuador. President Correa promoted the law, arguing that it facilitated “responsible mining” by giving the state greater control over this activity (Amnesty International 2012). A conflict developed between the state, which wanted to promote large-scale mining, and indigenous movements arguing that mining would lead to violations of their human rights. This situation resulted in protests between the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009. Despite these conflicts, the law was approved in January 2009 (Amnesty International 2012).

Kurt Weyland (2009) outlines two kinds of political styles in those governments that have turned toward the left in Latin America since the late 1990s: one group of governments is more blunt and radical both in their political discourse and in their policies. Others are more moderate although they seek to implement social policies and to carry out some redistribution. According to Weyland, the governments that can allow themselves to be more radical are those that possess large deposits of nonrenewable natural resources, particularly Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador. Therefore, the extraction of natural resources is a key issue in such nations. The majority of these resources are located in indigenous territories. Thus, as governments struggle to extract nonrenewable resources in order to be able to sustain social policies, they are likely to enter into conflict with indigenous movements. Paradoxically, damage to indigenous territories and communities is
carried out or allowed to happen to fuel the kinds of small programs that are keeping the government reasonably popular within and outside indigenous communities. The result of this is a fragmentation of indigenous social movements—between those who resist forcefully and those who are happy with redistribution policies.

Bebbington and Humphreys Bebbington (2011) argue that extractive activities have been expanding aggressively in Andean-Amazonian countries in recent years. Extractive industries are opening new frontiers and deepening their work in already exploited areas. The authors argue that neoliberal and postneoliberal governments have responded in similar ways to this global expansion of extractive activities: governments desperately need and take advantage of the profits generated by these activities and claim that they use the revenues to improve the standard of living for the national population. Governments also confront social movements in frontier areas with increasing intolerance and in some cases with violence, and tend to criminalize and stigmatize those who oppose extraction. In this context, indigenous rights and autonomy, even of more restricted kinds, seem to directly threaten this intensified extractivism. Will a renewed focus on extraction set a limit on both neoliberal and postneoliberal kinds of multiculturalism?

The regression in autonomy over Intercultural Bilingual Education, territories, and natural resources has been accompanied by a strong campaign aimed at delegitimizing the indigenous leadership in presidential speeches, by intellectuals who are close to the government, and in government-owned media. For example, President Correa has asserted:

> What legitimacy does CONAIE have? . . . We, the majority must decide how we want to organize and how we want to live. And a few stone throwers should not impose their will. Thirteen million Ecuadorians should rise against these troglodyte attitudes that want to keep our country in the past . . . What CONAIE does is not resistance; it is aggression (quoted in Amnesty International 2012: 21; my translation).

A document produced by Minister of Culture Erika Sylva and Undersecretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Rafael Quintero—both of whom are social scientists—claims that since 2009 CONAIE has been attempting to conspire against President Correa and the constituent process in alliance with the extreme right, and with financial help from U.S. institutions that seek to destabilize the Latin American Left. According to the authors, the indigenous movement and the teachers’ union form part of a corporatist left that defends private interests, has abandoned the struggle for social reform, and serves neoliberal objectives (Quintero and Sylva 2010). In the state-owned newspaper El Telegrafo (June 13, 2010; my translation), opinion writer Guido Calderon has argued that the ancestral cultures of Ecuador have not made a historical contribution:
they are only characterized by a rosary of complaints and resentments . . . I do not see either their historical or their contemporary contribution. Their actions are limited to threats, social disruption, and the exhibition of a permanent violence . . . They want us to accept by force their barbarism as part of our lives. Even more, they expect our laws to lie below their brutal indigenous law. A bunch of leaders addicted to substances does not create cultures and even less ancestral cultures.

Are we witnessing a backlash against the indigenous movement by resentful mestizos who had unwillingly remained silent to date and accepted the respect required by the recognition policies of neoliberal multiculturalism? Unfortunately, after hearing recent presidential speeches, individuals such as Calderon seem to feel they can legitimately espouse such points of view. Paradoxically, some of the most severe critics of the indigenous movement are intellectuals, such as Sylva, who not so long ago were advocates for it and wrote influential pieces in its favor. Similar to the case of the Guatemalan mestizos studied by Charles Hale (2006), the racism of some mestizos in Ecuador survived the expansion of the indigenous movement and government recognition of indigenous rights. During that expansion, racism remained relatively hidden because its public iteration became politically incorrect. However, resonating with the Guatemalan case, racism resurfaced when mestizos perceived that their material interests were threatened, and, in the case under study, when a “progressive” government legitimized their prejudices again.

In a 2012 report on the criminalization of the right to protest in Ecuador, Amnesty International (2012) argues that the climate of hostility created by the president’s public statements and by other authorities acting against the indigenous movement has had the effect of making more difficult the work of those who defend human rights; it risks legitimizing aggression against them by private interests. The report also demonstrates that the government has been using the legal system to discourage protest. After antigovernment protests, public prosecutors have accused indigenous and peasant leaders of crimes, such as terrorism, sabotage, and obstruction of public roads. Most of these accusations have been abandoned for lack of proof, but the processes have been long and costly and have had the effect of discouraging leaders and communities from voicing their views. Finally, when social leaders have made accusations of threats and physical aggression by companies, the state has not investigated them (Amnesty International 2012). With regard to this, historic indigenous leader Luis Macas has argued:

There’s a political motivation for the government’s assault on the indigenous movement in the current moment. It’s not that the government simply wants to get rid of the Indians, or that it’s racism for racism sake. No. The objective is to liquidate the indigenous movement in this country, to dismantle and destroy this movement. Why? Because the indigenous movement is the principal social and political actor in the country that has struggled against the economic model . . . And his project
of development is rooted in the exploitation of natural resources. We, the indige-
nous movement, which has an emphatically different conceptualization of Mother
Nature, are saying no. So, clearly, he’s got to liquidate our movement. He’s got
to sweep aside all the social movements that stand in the way of his development
model, starting above all with the indigenous movement. (Webber 2010:9)

Conclusion: Postneoliberal Multiculturalism in Ecuador?

Ecuador’s indigenous movement confronts a project of state formation at a mo-
ment of relative organizational weakness. This government has allowed for some
apparent legal advances in indigenous rights, and indigeneity is regarded as being
symbolically important. However, these principles are plagued by tensions between
centralization and autonomy; they are used to co-opt and divide, or are barely im-
plemented. One reason for this is that the government was originally constituted by
different currents: some environmentalist, for indigenous rights and participatory,
some centralist and developmentalist. Unfortunately, the latter has gained strength
at the expense of the former. In addition, the progressive current has produced
government discourse, whereas the pragmatic current has had a more prominent
role in government practices.

What, then, is the ethnic project of the postneoliberal regime in Ecuador?
There is recognition of indigenous people but it is ambivalent or barely im-
plemented. Moreover, there are counter discourses that stigmatize indigenous
peoples—particularly those who try to retain their autonomy. There are policies of
redistribution, some of which are based on ethnicity, such as government positions
in institutions that provide services to indigenous peoples, or limited positions
based on affirmative action at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Other policies of
redistribution are universal, such as the bonus for human development and other
cash transfers to the poor. However, the data indicate that these resources are used
to strengthen support for the government, and to divide, and co-opt, indigenous
organizations. Indigenous people fear withdrawal of these funds if they do not
demonstrate faith in the government. From this perspective, the ethnic project of
this postneoliberal government is not very different from that of neoliberalism:
the government offers limited symbolic recognition and some targeted redistribu-
tion that disciplines indigenous peoples and separates “permitted Indians” from
recalcitrant ones. In Ecuador, the postneoliberal state expects uncritical support.
The state may carry out some socioeconomic transformations, but it is not willing
to negotiate these with autonomous social actors.

On the other hand, this postneoliberal multiculturalism does not promote the
kinds of tolerance that permeated earlier neoliberal attitudes. Recalcitrant Indians
are criminalized through the legal system and harshly stigmatized in discourses,
contributing to raised levels of prejudice and even violence against indigenous people in Ecuadorian society. From this perspective there has been a reversal in relation to the “neoliberal multicultural” moment. Neoliberalism also promoted levels of decentralization, autonomy, and participation that are in fact retrenching in contemporary Ecuador.

Further, reversals have been seen in the appropriation of the agendas and symbols of indigenous movements, the blurring and stretching of their meaning, and the exclusion of indigenous people from both the symbolic of indigeneity and from the management of policies that affect their lives. The present intercultural policies are not negotiated with collective actors but devised by technocrats for passive recipients. We are witnessing a regression from a participatory kind of indigenismo that originated in the 1970s and was typical of the neoliberal period, to the kind of paternalist indigenismo that characterized an earlier period of strong states, populist regimes, and nationalist economic development that was dominant from around the 1930s to the 1970s. Interestingly, this paternalist indigenismo is not accompanied by a discourse of mestizaje or a symbolic construction of the mestizo as the embodiment of the nation: the nation is now diverse, but the enlightened mestizo is still the active subject.

The multicultural agenda of the government is also plagued by contradictions and ambiguities: rights are granted but the process of obtaining them is tortuous—as in the case of the titling of indigenous territories; calls for autonomy and rights in the constitution clash with centralizing tendencies; interculturalidad is promoted but mestizos appropriate it. These ambiguities create a confused terrain that allows those inside and outside who wish to believe in the government’s multicultural policies to deny a regression in rights. This confusion also affects indigenous movements that demonstrate ambivalence toward the government and seem to lack a clear line of reaction.

How does Correa’s policy of diversity compare to that of other postneoliberal regimes? A focus on the extraction of natural resources is setting a limit on indigenous rights in Bolivia (Postero 2010) where the Morales government is facing opposition from indigenous organizations in extraction areas. The centralizing tendencies of a strong state are also present in Venezuela, where indigenous autonomy is being rescinded to organize people from above (Angosto 2008). Similar to the case of Ecuador, state appropriation of ethnic symbols and agendas has lead to the exclusion of alternative forms of indigenous organization and subjectivity in Bolivia and Venezuela (Albro 2010; Angosto 2008; Canessa 2006). However, the construction of indigenous citizens as passive recipients of policy seems to be more extreme in the case of Ecuador. In Bolivia, the government originated in the social movements, whereas in Ecuador the president and many influential government officials are middle-class intellectuals and technocrats that lack a background in grassroots politics. In Venezuela there are opportunities
for participation, even if orchestrated from above, that do not exist to this day in Ecuador. To summarize, then, we could argue that a combination of technocratic paternalism, intolerance, and outright repression shape the ethnic policies of postneoliberal Ecuador.

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Note

1 Inculturation theology is a trend within Catholicism; it asserts that non-Western cultures are not pagan but contain seeds of the word of God. Catholicism inserts itself within these diverse traditions by using their language, music, and other cultural elements in the liturgy.

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