Between Interculturalism and Ethnocentrism: Local Government and the Indigenous Movement in Otavalo-Ecuador

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To what extent might an indigenous mayor govern beyond ethnically defined grievances, without being labelled traitor by the indigenous organisation? This article deals with the challenges faced by the Ecuadorian indigenous movement when it attains power in local government. The issue will be explored through the case of Mario Conejo, who in 2000 became the first indigenous mayor of Otavalo representing the indigenous political movement Pachakutik. Although ethnically based tensions in the local indigenous movement were evident throughout the period, 2006 saw Conejo leave Pachakutik and create a new political movement. This rupture can be traced, I argue, to an intercultural dilemma and the difficulties of ethnically defined political movements.

Keywords: alliance-building, indigenous movement, interculturalism, local government, Otavalo, Pachakutik.

Introduction

Since the first years of the twenty-first century, the Ecuadorian indigenous movement, which has had a significant impact since its emergence in 1990, has experienced a crisis of representation and legitimacy, mainly as a result of its participation in the formal political institutions and in alliances with traditional political actors. The principal organisations of the indigenous movement, including the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE; Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador), have suffered from tensions, conflicts and internal divisions. These tensions are manifested most strongly in Imbabura Province in the northern Ecuadorian Sierra, and particularly in the municipality of Otavalo, a canton identified as the intellectual cradle of the national indigenous movement and likewise a local fortress for the indigenous political party Pachakutik.

Mario Conejo Maldonado was elected mayor of Otavalo in 2000 on the Pachakutik slate, and he has remained in the municipal leadership since then. He was the first indigenous mayor of the canton to be elected. Nevertheless, in January 2006 Conejo announced his withdrawal from Pachakutik and later the same year launched a new political movement – *la Minga Intercultural* – which promoted a broad political agenda beyond indigenous issues. This initiative grew out of an already tense relationship that from its beginning had generated conflict with the indigenous movement at a national, provincial and local level. In Otavalo the principal indigenous social movement organisation is tied to CONAIE, yet Mayor Conejo decided to abandon Pachakutik in 2006 and created a new political movement. At first sight this seems counterintuitive, because CONAIE-affiliated organisations might be expected to interact more successfully with officials elected on the Pachakutik slate, but in Otavalo the opposite occurred. The tensions between the ethnic indigenous perspective and the ideas of interculturalism are important elements in this contradiction, and some aspects of this will be explored here. In this regard, a few aspects of this challenge will be touched upon to reflect on the intercultural dilemma in local political processes.

This case study analyses local-level tensions in Otavalo's social movement and electoral politics, focusing particularly on Mayor Mario Conejo and the political movement Pachakutik. I will analyse how attempts to combine non-institutionalised strategies with formal institutionalisation at the municipal level have created conflict between the organisations. Important aspects of alliance-building and conflicts at the local level will be analysed, as will the question of whether national power structures affect the organisations at the municipal level. More recent political scenarios related to the development of the political movement of President Rafael Correa and the elections of April 2009 will likewise be examined.

The article is based on a series of semi-structured and improvised interviews with key informants during fieldwork trips conducted between 2004 and 2009. The aim has been to grasp the differing and at times contradictory perceptions and interpretations of the political actors concerned with local electoral politics and the nature of ethnic political movements. The study considers political power structures and conditions for collective action of social and political organisations. The aspect of presence/absence of political allies is essential to this, as well as the relative strength of the competing actors at local and national levels.

The concept of interculturalism in this study is based on the vision of creating social harmony in a society of diverse ethnic populations, while at the same time recognising the existence of racist and exclusionary structures. Cultural diversity is viewed as a strengthening factor for society (Walsh, 2009: 14–15). The intercultural dilemma is understood as a tension of political governance. In my case, the dilemma emerges when an indigenous political leader is elected mayor of a municipality with a relatively high indigenous population. If an elected mayor starts providing welfare for all social sectors, including non-indigenous, without prioritising indigenous grievances, disillusion might deepen among indigenous citizens and organisations. This is a reflection of centuries of exclusion and frustrated expectations. Such a dilemma is particularly delicate in municipalities with an indigenous minority or with only a slight majority in population, as the mayor will understandably be under greater pressure to consider demands of non-indigenous groups, and likewise to establish alliances beyond the ethnic boundaries (see also Rice, 2009). The intercultural dilemma is a multifaceted expression of how the mobilisation conditions change for the indigenous movement. Interculturalism is without doubt a vague and normative concept, and in this study I will not thoroughly

define its significance. My aim is rather to use the intercultural dilemma to analyse the political challenges and complications of the ethnically defined movement in the context of local government and socio-political alliance-building.

It is important to examine the tensions, conflicts and strategies that emerge when indigenous actors become maximum local state authority. Indeed, Ecuador has longer historical traditions of municipal and provincial elections than many of its neighbours. In practice, though, the political leaders at these levels have been politically weak as a result of lack of economic transferences. Local governments had traditionally been riven with patronage and corruption. It was only with legislative reform in 1998 that a principle of co-participation with an autonomic transference was established that gave 15 per cent of the national budget to the municipalities. With respect to the political-territorial division of authorities, in Ecuador provincial prefects are responsible for social services in the rural sectors, while the municipal mayors are in charge of the urban areas. The dividing lines between urban and rural are often unclear; in fact, mayors and prefects frequently develop projects in sectors beyond their official responsibility, with a view to generating political support. Often, however, local governments have received less than 15 per cent, which has been the case also in Otavalo since 2000 (Conejo, interview, Otavalo, 9 December 2004), leading to tensions and suspicion between the political-territorial authorities and confusion among citizens.

The Indigenous Movement and the Intercultural Dilemma

In terms of grassroots activism, the Ecuadorian indigenous movement is the strongest on the continent (Yashar, 2005). From the political institutionalisation of CONAIE in the mid 1980s, through the municipal electoral triumphs from 1996 onwards and the indigenous contribution to the constitutional process of 1997–1998, the Ecuadorian indigenous population has become increasingly prominent. The indigenous movement has not only been a decisive political actor on issues concerning bilingual education, rural development and models of participatory democracy, but has also contributed to the relatively peaceful overthrow of two national governments, Abdalá Bucarám in 1997 and Jamil Mahuad in 2000. In the presidential election of 2002 the indigenous movement allied itself with lieutenant colonel and former coup leader Lúcio Gutiérrez and achieved inclusion in the national government, including two ministerial posts for CONAIE-Pachakutik representatives. The alliance lasted only six months, however, and the indigenous movement withdrew from government to re-establish itself in political opposition. Since this transitory Gutiérrez alliance, the indigenous movement has experienced a crisis of legitimacy and credibility, manifested most of all in deepening dissatisfaction on the part of the grassroots with the national leadership of CONAIE and Pachakutik. However, signs of a crisis had appeared already before the Gutiérrez alliance, related among other things to the participation of indigenous leaders in the previous governments, for example during the presidency of Mahuad. Despite the relative weakening in its national political influence, Pachakutik has maintained its strength at the municipal level with various kinds of local political alliances and in the 2004 elections, Pachakutik triumphed in seventeen municipalities, among them Otavalo.

Historically, CONAIE has been strongest in the Ecuadorian indigenous communities (Zamosc, 2007: 16), which has in turn benefited Pachakutik and its ambitions as a political movement. An estimated 80 per cent of the indigenous organisations at

the community level are affiliated to CONAIE (Van Cott, 2005: 107). Most other Ecuadorian political parties lack strong grassroots movements, something that made Pachakutik attractive as an alliance partner. The relationship between CONAIE and Pachakutik has nevertheless been a two-edged sword since the beginning. On the one hand, the legitimacy and organisational strength of CONAIE contributed to the successful formation of the political party and its electoral participation. But on the other, the superior position of the social movement has prevented the development of the political movement, because Pachakutik is formally subordinated at times to CONAIE. The contradiction between demands for radical structural change through non-institutional means on the one hand, and electoral and institutional participation on the other, has been reflected within the movements. The existence of Pachakutik has not moderated the radical position of CONAIE; the confederation has continued to express its repudiation of the traditional political class, questioning the structures of the state. Pachakutik, at the same time, has had to negotiate as a party/movement with these same actors and institutions.

The politicisation (and partidisation) of CONAIE has contributed to the accentuation of internal contradictions by generating complex structural and organisational relations between the social and political movements (Van Cott, 2005; Zamosc, 2007). The political movement is defined and conditioned by the party system and controlled by oligarchic power structures, whereas the social movement CONAIE follows an historical political project related to issues of identity as indigenous peoples. Challenges related to this could be, for example, the risk of elected Pachakutik leaders placing individual priorities before the collective grievances of the indigenous movement, or when the indigenous political leader is also obliged to represent the non-indigenous population and consider their needs as well (Lalander, 2008; Van Cott, 2008). This dilemma is based on the key difference between the two movements: CONAIE is exclusively indigenous, whereas Pachakutik is an intercultural electoral vehicle open to broader alliance-building, albeit similarly identified as an indigenous party. In my study this incongruity is conceptualised as the intercultural dilemma.

Contextual Background

Before proceeding with an analysis of the indigenous government in Otavalo, a brief historical overview is necessary to achieve some understanding of the local context. Otavalo is popularly known for its indigenous market of handicrafts and textiles (the biggest in the world). The indigenous population of Otavalo belongs ethnically and culturally to the Kichwa-Otavalo indigenous nationality. According to the population survey of 2001, Otavalo has the highest proportion of indigenous population in Imbabura Province, with 55.35 per cent of the 90,188 Otavaleños identifying themselves as indigenous. According to the same survey, the average of indigenous self-identification in Imbabura is 25 per cent (in Torres, 2004: 4, 16). Otavalo is exceptional because indigenous citizens have achieved economic and social development without losing their fundamental cultural values. Through their handicraft and commerce the 'Otavaleños' succeeded in overcoming the traditional obstacles of discrimination and created an indigenous urban zone instead of the traditional white-mestizo domination of the city (Kyle, 2001; Meisch, 2002; Lalander, 2008). In addition, many Otavaleños are educated and an increasing number of migrants have returned to the city with university degrees. Several scholars (e.g. Kyle, 2001; Meisch, 2002) explain the recent developments in the indigenous

movement with reference to the existence of an 'indigenous bourgeoisie' in Otavalo with its core in the Quinchuquí and Peguche communities. Interestingly, the family of the indigenous mayor of the study – Mario Conejo – is from those two communities. While this approach is interesting, other factors might have been more influential.

The Federación Indígena y Campesina de Imbabura (FICI; Indigenous Peasant Federation of Imbabura/FICI)¹ was founded in 1975 by the new generation of Otavalo indigenous intellectuals along with young indigenous peasant leaders of Otavalo and neighbouring cantons, mainly from Cotacachi (Korovkin, Sánchez and Isama, 2002: 115–126). The activities of these indigenous intellectuals were characterised more by the strengthening indigenous identity than by local commercial expansion. Shortly before the transition to democracy in 1979, FICI spearheaded indigenous mobilisations against the white-mestizo authorities (Korovkin, Sánchez and Isama, 2002: 140). Together with provincial indigenous federations from Chimborazo and Pastaza, FICI played a crucial role in the formation of CONAIE, and has maintained its role as the main local and provincial organisation of indigenous representation in Otavalo, and since 1986 as the provincial affiliate of CONAIE. It is important to state that the indigenous peasant federation FENOCIN (Federación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas Indígenas y Negras), associated with the *Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano* (PSE; Ecuadorian Socialist Party), did in fact operate in Otavalo. The PSE has been characterised as the most important historical political ally of the indigenous movement (Becker, 2008). Following Tanya Korovkin, FENOCIN had a significant but short-lived presence in Otavalo in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the new generation of indigenous intellectuals that emerged in the canton questioned the demands of the federation with its mystical message of a proletarian revolution and therefore created FICI, which in comparison has been more focused on ethnicity (Korovkin, Sánchez and Isama, 2002: 115–126). Although FICI categorically rejected elections until the 1990s, indigenous political activists in Otavalo have participated in parties, not only socialist and leftist but also centre-right parties. The group around Mario Conejo has been sporadically close to the PSE since the late 1970s, which is an important factor in the analysis of recent alliance-building between indigenous actors and the Patria Altiva I Soberana (Proud and Sovereign Fatherland) (PAIS) movement of Rafael Correa. Historical ties between indigenous and other leftist actors can thus work to facilitate alliance strategies.

Local Government and the Intercultural Dilemma

Mario Conejo Maldonado, sociologist and son of commercial artisans, was elected as the first indigenous mayor of Otavalo in 2000. The victory of Pachakutik in neighbouring Cotacachi in 1996 was an important factor positively affecting the conditions of electoral participation and self-confidence among the indigenous political activists in Otavalo, because it was already evident that indigenous actors could indeed govern. Conejo is without doubt one of the most successful and recognised mayors of Ecuador, and in a few years he has spearheaded institutional, political, economic, social and cultural changes, including the difficult mission of unifying the different ethnic groups in the canton, a project developed under the banner of interculturalism. As an

1 The abbreviation FICI has recently changed significance to the Federación de los Pueblos Kichwa de la Sierra Norte del Ecuador.

acknowledgement of these efforts on behalf of ethnic and social integration, Otavalo was declared the intercultural capital of Ecuador by Congress in October 2003. The creation of trust towards the state was a key priority for Mario Conejo since assuming the mayoralty. His strategy to combat clientelism and paternalism has been manifested through popular participation in decision-making processes and the implementation of development projects. He also, for example, adopts principles of transparency in relation to public contracts with entrepreneurs and architects. The Tocquevillian argument about trust between citizens and local state institutions as fundamental for democracy is thus important to consider (e.g. Tandler, 1997) in order to better understand how a traditionally excluded actor could emerge and convince citizens beyond the indigenous movement of the value of radical reform.

Once elected mayor, Conejo revitalised the Strategic Plan of Otavalo (*Plan Estratégico de Otavalo*). It is divided into two sub-strategies known as the Otavalo Life Plan (*Plan de Vida Otavalo*), which is implemented from above, and the Neighbor Workshops (*Talleres de vecinos*), involving capacity-building from below. These involve the participation of citizen groups, including leaders of social sectors, who work in thematic groups. In every plan, regional long-term technical advisors played key roles in collaboration with the citizens involved in the local government, and several development plans emerged rapidly as a result of the work in the thematic groups. The core development plan of the Conejo administration is the 60/40 formula. Conejo explains the formula thus:

We have developed a formula of development that we call 'the formula of popular participation for development'. It is a 60/40 model. If we should fix the streets in an area, the house-owners pay 60 per cent of the costs [and the municipality contributes 40 per cent]. (Conejo, interview, Otavalo, 9 December 2004)

The mayor holds that the 60/40 formula has created a sense of responsibility in the citizens at the same time as the legitimacy of the municipality has increased. Nevertheless, there are critics of the 60/40 model within the indigenous movement who hold that it benefits the privileged sectors of society above all and does not work in the poor rural areas.² In rural areas the citizens contribute 25 per cent of the cost and the municipal government 75 per cent, since the urban population generally has better socio-economic conditions, whereas the rural citizens are more affected by poverty. Therefore they are less able to contribute, even though their proportion is lower. Even Luis Maldonado, co-founder of Pachakutik–Imbabura, recognises the importance of the municipal government of Conejo and the 60/40 experience:

Obviously, the initiative is very important. That is, I could not say that it does not work. I think that it is one of the most important local governments that exists. . . , like the 60/40, to achieve people's overcoming this image that they should not contribute, to overcome the [culture of] poverty saying that the state should give us everything. (Maldonado, interview, Ibarra, 31 May 2007)

2 However, some of the first projects to be carried through according to the model were actually in rural areas. In 2008, I observed agreements between the municipality and the rural neighbours of Rey Loma and the installation of electricity in the community, one of the poorest areas of Otavalo.

However, the project of ethnic integration in Otavalo has not evolved without complications and conflicts. Social and political divisions within the area's indigenous population were politically evident even before Conejo was elected, and reflected national-level meddling, local rivalry and the impact of social hierarchies. In the elections of 2000, Conejo encountered rivalry within Pachakutik through the pre-candidature of FICI president Carmen Yamberla, who represented a hard-line faction within CONAIE. During the selection process, Pachakutik was allied with the indigenous political movement of the evangelical church, Amauta Jatari, for the purpose of joining forces and selecting a common candidate. Each candidate was presented by a local organisation: Conejo was launched by the urban cultural association Otavalo Kichwa Llacta, and Yamberla by the community organisation of Ilumán, and was also supported by important, national-level sectors within CONAIE and Pachakutik, including Nina Pacari.³ CONAIE thus aimed to intervene in the organisational process to support an actor – Yamberla – instead of recognising the local popular movement, that is, the option of Conejo. Despite their influence, the final decision gave Conejo the official Pachakutik candidature, and Yamberla left the movement to participate through a temporary organisation called Valle del Amanecer (the Awakening Valley). The final electoral results proclaimed a triumph for Conejo with 45.95 per cent of the votes, while Yamberla finished in third place with a humiliating 16.51 per cent (in Lalander, 2008: 211). Yamberla was rejected for several reasons. Her discourse was considered by many citizens to be too focused on ethnicity, while they viewed Conejo as a more moderate option as indigenous leader with urban connections and approval also among white-mestizo citizens (Lalander, 2008: 210–212; Van Cott, 2008: 148–151). In retrospect, Yamberla holds that other factors worked against her: being a woman, poor, without a university title and from the rural sector. Likewise, she emphasises that the opposition of the evangelical church to her candidature had a decisive influence and that important economic sectors of Otavalo backed Conejo (Yamberla, interview, Otavalo, 11 June 2007). Yamberla has since returned to Pachakutik.

The divide between the less privileged rural Indians, for example of the Ilumán community, and the wealthier ones of the urban centre and the communities of Quinchuqui and Peguche has been pronounced for decades and was manifest politically in the elections. In the Pachakutik–Otavalo conflicts of 2000, elements appear related to class, ethnicity, urban/rural divides, gender discrimination, and other social structures, for example, the church. Signs of division between Conejo and Pachakutik were thus overt years before the mayor's leaving the movement in 2006.

An initial key ally of Conejo in 2000 was the Unión de Artesanos Indígenas del Mercado Centenario de Otavalo (UNAIMCO; Indigenous Artisans' Union of the Centenarian Market of Otavalo), founded in 1988, which has been the dominant trade union and non-profit entrepreneurial organisation of the Otavalo artisans and vendors. UNAIMCO is mainly an urban indigenous organisation and since the late 1990s a factional force of Pachakutik–Otavalo. Although disillusioned with the new administration, UNAIMCO chose to withdraw its support for Conejo already in 2001.

3 Nina Pacari is a historical leader of CONAIE and was Minister of Foreign Affairs in the government of Gutiérrez in 2003. Cotacachi mayor Auki Tituaña (brother-in-law of Pacari) was one of the evaluators of the pre-campaign of Pachakutik, and he defended and promoted Yamberla in these elections.

In sum, the principal tension in the indigenous movement was manifest between a stricter political agenda at national level and flexible alliances created at the local level, rather than between Pachakutik and FIC/CONAIE. A contradiction emerged in which Pachakutik functioned simultaneously as the platform of Mayor Conejo and as the oppositional political organisation of FICI in the canton. Conejo came to municipal power with Pachakutik and the support of the politically organised evangelical Indians, without having a close connection to FICI. However, it is worth recalling that from the late 1970s to the beginning of the 1990s, the group around Conejo was collaborating closely with FICI, among other things through cultural activities and economic contributions (Carlosama, interview, Ibarra, 27 June 2007). The key elements of the intercultural dilemma were thus manifest since the very beginning of the local indigenous government.

The Divorce

Despite the emerging crisis within Pachakutik at national level, Conejo was re-elected in 2004 with 54 per cent of the votes, an increase in popular support compared to the 46 per cent behind his candidature in 2000, despite the fact that the evangelical indigenous organisation decided to leave the alliance with Conejo in these elections and participate through its own movement, Amauta Jatari. The increased support behind Conejo in 2004 indicates that a growing number of white-mestizo citizens had supported the political project of the mayor, particularly if we consider that neither UNAIMCO nor FICI backed Conejo.

Of course, Otavalo is not just any municipality for Pachakutik; it is one of the movement's most important strongholds in the whole of Ecuador. Many other municipalities where Pachakutik governs have relatively small populations compared to Otavalo and the votes for Conejo in 2004 are equivalent to the electoral support of Pachakutik in fourteen other municipalities. The division of Pachakutik in Otavalo and the abandonment of Conejo and other representatives of the organisation in January 2006, accentuated an already existing crisis within the movement. Pachakutik and CONAIE demanded that Conejo should leave the mayoral post because, as they argued, he was placed there by the indigenous movement. Elements related to both class and ethnicity are important to understanding the conflict. Conejo's intercultural project and his desire to govern for all Otavaleños were criticised because they did not prioritise indigenous needs in poor rural sectors. The mayor was accused of being a traitor and opportunist, and of being under the control of white-mestizo forces. The call for his resignation was not echoed and Conejo remained in office. A vacuum of political representation emerged, but after a few months of confusion among the supporters of the mayor, a group close to Conejo launched the new movement Minga Intercultural. In Kichwa the word *Minga* means 'collective work in communitarian support' and is a concept full of indigenous symbolism reflecting identity, solidarity and ethnicity.

As early as 2004, Conejo was distancing himself from CONAIE and Pachakutik, as if the mayor preferred to view Pachakutik as an electoral apparatus and CONAIE as a national-level organisation of little relevance at the local level. He rarely mentioned the political movement that he officially represented – Pachakutik – or the name of any national social programme or international organisation, but spoke rather of '*nosotros/we*', 'the local government together with the citizens', 'the Otavaleños', 'through the politics of popular participation', and so forth, to emphasise who the real

protagonists of the process really were; local people. (Conejo, interview, Otavalo, 9 December 2004; Lalander, 2008: 217).

In comparative research on deliberative democracy in Ecuador and Bolivia, the personal leadership skills of Conejo emerged as decisive for the success of his local government (Van Cott, 2008: 146–151). Indeed even indigenous critics recognise Conejo's skills as an efficient and honest head of local government administration. For example, Maria Castañeda, who speaks for Pachakutik and FICI, confirms this, although rejecting him as a leader of the indigenous movement:

I do not see him as a leader of the indigenous movement. He is a personality, a leader that could be rescued – he has good intentions. He has done very good things, but not as a leader of the indigenous movement. As a professional, as we all have seen, he has made an effort, although not from the principal perspectives of the indigenous movement. He still has done rather interesting things and that is why they support him here, indigenous as well as non-indigenous citizens. (Castañeda, interview, Otavalo, 8 June 2007)

Former white-mestizo members of Pachakutik in Otavalo say they felt excluded. They were called 'Pachakutik lights', implying that they were not real (indigenous) members. Lawyer, linguist and Kichwa poet Ariruma Kowii Maldonado, brother of Mario Conejo, suggests that the conflicts in Otavalo clearly illustrate the risks of ethnocentrism, and he criticises the Kichwas who use it as a political weapon to manoeuvre against Conejo from the ethnic angle. He confirms that they also labelled Conejo 'Pachakutik Light', asserting that he was the leader of the Otavalo mestizos (Kowii, interview, Quito, 15 January 2008). Mayor Conejo emphasises that from the moment he took municipal power, his principal opposition and resistance was always from the indigenous sectors: FICI, UNAIMCO and Pachakutik. He argues that the solution for Otavalo was not to be found in a continued sectarianism, which was one of the main reasons why he defected:

The space of Pachakutik was too limited to include all the aspirants. Pachakutik is 99 percent an indigenous movement. It started as a vision for everybody, but later it gradually transformed into a more indigenous movement. That is not what Otavalo needs. Otavalo requires broad spaces, more participatory and democratic spaces. Facing the opposition that existed within Pachakutik, I decided to leave, without having discussed my decision with any member of the working team. (Conejo, interview, Otavalo, 12 June 2007)

Ethnocentrism is also a problem at the national level and in 2005 a group of Pachakutik's mestizo leaders, among them Virgilio Hernández and Augusto Barrera, left the movement as a protest against this tendency. Both Hernández and Barrera today hold important political positions within the movement of Rafael Correa. The dilemma of ethnically or interculturally based local government was a central factor underlying the division of Pachakutik in Otavalo, although it should be emphasised that several FICI and Pachakutik leaders in Otavalo see the benefits of the intercultural project and of not closing the gates to the participation of non-indigenous citizens.⁴ Anthropologist

4 Interviews at FICI, Otavalo, with Yamberla and Campos, 24 January 2008. Fanny Campos has been a (mestiza) collaborator in FICI for fourteen years and has been provincial coordinator of Pachakutik in Imbabura since 2008.

Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld (2007: 88–89) argues that even though ethnic identity might be central in the discourse of the indigenous movement, in practice the shared cultural identification is a weak political resource, because of cultural, economic and social diversities within the movement. This is particularly evident in places such as Otavalo.

Summing up, the relation between Conejo and Pachakutik from the year 2000 can be seen as a political project of local alliances that from the beginning was marked by tensions and internal conflicts and that concluded with the mayor's leaving in 2006. Given Pachakutik's function as a vehicle to build alliances at different governmental levels, the flexibility principle of the movement thus failed in Otavalo. Furthermore, part of the explanation for this malfunction can be traced to the vague boundaries between the social and political indigenous movements. Indeed, there exists a political sphere parallel to Pachakutik, beyond the institutional spaces where it formally operates as an elected authority, in which CONAIE can mobilise against the agenda of the political party. The contradiction consists in their coexistence within one and the same indigenous movement, with more radical demands on the streets than in formal institutions.

During the fieldwork for the study between 2007 and 2009, several (anonymous) indigenous informants in Otavalo expressed confusion about the situation, asking how it was possible that Mayor Conejo no longer represented the indigenous movement of Pachakutik. They felt identification with Pachakutik, and the Whipala flag that has become a symbol of the party, so for them it would be extremely difficult to give their votes to a candidate outside Pachakutik. Yet other indigenous Otavaleños say that they still identify with Pachakutik but at the same time express approval of Mario Conejo as the municipal leader.

The progress of the indigenous political movement that came to municipal power in 2000 can largely be explained by the gradual socio-economic development of the indigenous citizens, accompanied by a deepening political consciousness and the integration of the movement with white-mestizos, albeit with deep dividing lines of an ethnic and class nature. The oppositional factions of Pachakutik in Otavalo are indeed characterised by discourses of class and ethnicity, frequently evident, for instance, in the arguments against Conejo's leadership by the vendors and artisans of UNAIMCO, as well as by FICI as representative of the poor rural sectors. The organisational structure of the CONAIE-affiliated FICI has strengthened the political movement at the local level, but at the same time has operated in opposition to Conejo, both before and after his withdrawal from Pachakutik. Consequently, there has not been a clear FICI/CONAIE–Pachakutik alliance in charge of municipal power in Otavalo, something that is a fundamental reflection of the main contradiction of the study, that is, the intercultural dilemma. Different factions – ethnocentric versus intercultural – can be discerned in CONAIE and Pachakutik that cross the boundaries of the two organisations. Hardliners in CONAIE and FICI have also tried to intervene in the local organisational process, supporting Carmen Yamberla in 2000, for example, instead of recognising the popular movement behind Conejo.

The organisational structures within Otavalo are complex, with many contending organisations. The presence of the evangelical indigenous political movement, with which Conejo was allied until 2004, is only one example of these organisational structures. The social diversity of the canton's indigenous population is another, related explanatory factor behind this contradiction. Conejo himself, despite his being a co-founder of Pachakutik and his close connection with CONAIE, lacks a solid trajectory within the indigenous movement beyond Otavalo and has participated rather through personal associations and local alliances or networks. This helps us to understand the emergence of tensions and direct conflicts with CONAIE and Pachakutik.

Probably the most important reason why the intercultural dilemma has been so strongly manifest in Otavalo are the cleavages generated by the presence of a large Indian population in urban areas. Conejo's principal support has thus not been the rural communities, as might have been supposed considering CONAIE's traditional strength and its relationship with Pachakutik.

The Correa Effect: Intercultural Tensions at the National Level

Matters have been further complicated in recent times by the emergence of Rafael Correa. One interpretation of the Correa effect on the indigenous movement could be that he has taken advantage of a power vacuum and has mobilised a kind of cooptation of social organisations that had experienced political crises of representation, such as the FENOCIN indigenous peasant confederation, a key ally of Correa that has been associated with class struggle. In the context of national electoral failures of the indigenous movement, and the popular support behind Correa and his Movimiento PAIS among indigenous sectors, Korovkin contributes two explanations. One is the intimate historical relationship between the indigenous movement and Leftist parties, a connection that has too seldom been given scholarly attention. The other is traced to the internal crisis within the indigenous movement, chiefly within Pachakutik and CONAIE (Korovkin, 2007). In Pachakutik the 'Correa effect' is reflected in the tendency for some sections of the movement to develop a parallel oppositional political project, whereas others have integrated with the Correa alliance. Within the national leadership of CONAIE and Pachakutik, critical statements emerged regarding the opposition to Correa. During the electoral campaign of 2006, a large number of representatives of the indigenous movement supported Correa. However, Gilberto Talahua, former national coordinator of Pachakutik, argues that ECUARUNARI⁵ opposed the alliance and decided to launch CONAIE president Luís Macas:

He was imposed by the leadership of the indigenous movement, disconnected from the feelings of the bases that begged for the alliance, which was later reflected in the electoral results. (*El Universo*, 2007)

The results of the first round of the electoral process demonstrated that indigenous support for Pachakutik in the communities, even in the communities and districts where Pachakutik was in position of municipal government, was in crisis. This crisis of representation became evident in the indigenous movement, which expressed electoral preferences for other options at the national level, not only Rafael Correa and PAIS, but also candidates such as Gilmar Gutiérrez (brother of Lúcio) from Partido Sociedad Patriótica (PSP), and Alvaro Noboa of Partido Renovador Institucional de Acción Nacional (PRIAN) (Báez Rivera and Bretón Solo de Zaldivar, 2006).

Relations between Minga and Correa were uncertain and PAIS was slow in making the alliance. Municipal and provincial elections were to have been held in October 2008,

5 ECUARUNARI (Ecuador Runacunapac Riccharimui) is the regional organisation of the Ecuadorian Sierra. It was founded in 1972 and the name signifies 'Awakening of the Ecuadorian Indians'. ECUARUNARI was a key actor in the creation of CONAIE in 1986 and is the strongest regional force within the confederation.

but because the planned date was too close in time to the constitutional referendum of 28 September,⁶ the former were postponed to 26 April 2009. In Otavalo the Minga movement had supported Correa since 2006. In the elections of deputies to the Constitutional Assembly in 2007, Minga tried to achieve an electoral alliance with Correa's PAIS, without success. Up until December 2008, it remained uncertain whether Minga could join with the PAIS Movement. Before the 2009 elections Conejo faced severe challenges in the realm of popular support, even though he was officially approved by 25 January 2009 as the pre-candidate for the mayoralty on the slate of PAIS. Conejo reflects on the historical challenges for the Left to build alliances and grasp political opportunities:

Despite the failure of the alliance [between Minga and PAIS] for the *Constituyente*, we have maintained a dialogue with them. Ever since the Minga movement was formed we have stated that alliances should be a policy of the movement. In this country, what is important is precisely to join the forces of the tendencies. The Right has always been more united and the Left always divided. In some way, we regard the Correa phenomenon as an opportunity to generate processes of unity within the tendency, but with a purpose and perspective of renewal. But the Left has committed a great deal of errors through its radicalism, occasionally involving radical fundamentalism . . . which leads to the loss of perspectives on realities, and revolutionary projects. These can hinder action and decisions. I believe that the Left should learn how to interpret local, national and international realities, in order to provide solutions to societal problems. (Conejo, interview, Otavalo, 7 January 2009)

The political movement around Mario Conejo was subsequently pressured to search for new alliance partners after the Pachakutik split, and before the elections of 2009 the most attractive option was the popular PAIS MOVEMENT. On 26 April the elections were held and at national level Rafael Correa secured the presidency in the first round with 51.99 per cent of the votes (Consejo Nacional Electoral, 2009). The PAIS movement likewise triumphed in all the municipalities of Imbabura and again at provincial level, with its former governor Diego García being elected Prefect and former vice-mayor of Otavalo, Gabriela Rivadaneira as vice-prefect. In Otavalo the vote-counting procedure was delayed for a week. The margin between the two strongest candidates was indeed minimal, but finally the electoral board declared the triumph of Mario Conejo with 42.44 per cent of the vote, compared with 40.85 per cent for Gustavo Pareja, former Prefect of Imbabura who represented the new political movement Poder Ciudadano. Paradoxically, while Poder Ciudadano officially supports Rafael Correa at the national level, it has not joined PAIS.

Gustavo Pareja had previously been associated with the right-wing PRIAN and Partido Roldosista Ecuatoriano (PRE) parties, but he was elected prefect in 2000 on the slate of Pachakutik in alliance with Izquierda Democrática (ID). Until late January of 2009, Pareja was promoted as the likely Pachakutik candidate for the mayoral post in Otavalo. The leadership of FICI emphasised good historical relations between

6 A novelty with the new Constitution of 2008 is that in future mayors should work also in rural areas and prefects in the urban zones as well.

the federation and the prefect, particularly in comparison with FICI's experiences with mayor Conejo. The division of Pachakutik and the departure of Conejo had led local indigenous leaders, mainly FICI supporters, to make the electoral overthrow of Conejo the chief objective in this campaign. And, as they argued, Pareja would be the only possible candidate to achieve such an outcome (interviews in Otavalo with Campos, 8 January and Yamberla, 16 January 2009). This line of reasoning might seem contradictory because Pareja also left Pachakutik in 2004, yet paradoxically he was not labelled a traitor. While Pareja is a white-mestizo leader, the expectations were far higher when an Indian reached maximum local power. As anonymous informants argued: 'From the mestizo leaders you can expect all kinds of betrayal and still forgive them'. Within the indigenous movement there was therefore a higher tolerance level towards Pareja.

Already during 2007, people within Pachakutik–Otavalo feared that an electoral race against Conejo would be hard to win if he were to ally with Correa's PAIS. This also confirms the power of the president's political movement at the local level. The crisis of the indigenous movement at the national level was thus reflected in Otavalo. Notwithstanding this, at the last minute and when all other political movements had already presented their candidates, the indigenous party chose to participate alone and the alliance with Pareja was rejected. José Manuel Quimbo, former president of the UNAIMCO artisan organisation, stood for the mayoralty and achieved 11.95 per cent of the votes. In a recent conversation with the author, Quimbo recognised that the political climate and the popularity of Correa were not favourable for Pachakutik. He equally emphasised certain challenges for the indigenous movement:

In the structures of the indigenous movement, particularly at cantonal level, there is a lack of political and ideological formation. To the extent that during the course of four Pachakutik congresses we have never spoken about the principles, the philosophy or the political project that Pachakutik provides as an alternative force that could emerge to model the meeting between the values and positive things of the Occidental world and the Andean culture. The proposal of Pachakutik is not to construct a communitarian democracy, no, no, no. We aim to search for a third way in which the real values of interculturalism are nourished. (Quimbo, interview, 17 January 2009)

In the aftermath of the elections, the local Pachakutik–CONAIE organisation FICI experienced dramatic turmoil. The case of Fanny Campos hints at a continuing ethnocentrism in FICI. In the fall of 2009, Campos left the organisation after a conflict with the new FICI president Marco Guatemal. According to Campos (interview, 16 December 2009), Guatemal had expressed the view that there was no longer any space for mestizas in the FICI. In addition, Monica Campos, sister of Fanny Campos, was expelled from FICI after eighteen years of service to the organisation. This conflict was preceded by Fanny Campos's denouncement of possible collaboration between Guatemal and the PAIS movement. Campos herself held the position that FICI should be exclusively associated with Pachakutik. However, Guatemal denies such association with PAIS and Correa and has actually spearheaded FICI–CONAIE demonstrations in Imbabura against the government in 2010.

Now, Conejo's political approval had been weakest in the rural areas, but in the 2009 election his candidature triumphed in important rural areas, such as San Pablo del Lago, whereas the urban support of the mayor decreased in comparison with 2004.

Mayor Conejo suggests that the ethnic identification worked in his favour and that the internal fights within Pachakutik and the alliance with Pareja confused the rural bases. At the same time, it would have been very difficult for Conejo to triumph without the alliance with PAIS. Furthermore, Conejo argues that the electoral campaign was marked by racist discourses on the part of Pareja (Conejo, interview, Otavalo, 27 June 2009). The central slogans of Pareja's campaign were 'change' and 'dignity' (*cambio y dignidad*). Local people interpreted this message as the restoration of dignity to the municipal government by getting rid of the 'Ponchos' (Indians). In addition, mestizo collaborators of Conejo were threatened and insulted in racist terms during the electoral campaign (Conejo, interview, 2 December 2009).

The main banner of Correa's political project has been the *Revolución Ciudadana* (Citizen Revolution) which comprises the idea of a 'desectorisation' of society, that is, a policy to abolish social stratification along ethnic, gender, religious and class lines. Paradoxically, in the new constitution the first article declares Ecuador to be an intercultural and pluri-national state, that is, a recognition of indigenous grievances, which clashes with the vision of 'desectorisation'. Notwithstanding, the 'desectorisation' had been a component of the intercultural vision of the government of Mario Conejo since 2000 and the principal reason behind his decision to leave Pachakutik and create the Minga movement. Correa's Citizen Revolution is nevertheless double-edged. On the one hand, desectorisation proposes the elimination of inter-ethnic boundaries, and, on the other, Correa is concerned with legitimacy in terms of ethnic representation in PAIS. The trajectory of Conejo and the successful intercultural local government in Otavalo was therefore an attractive political alliance for PAIS. Similarly, CONAIE and Pachakutik were forced to reconsider their political priorities. In the more leftist national political context of the Correa administration, the anti-neoliberal dimension may still be the main concern of the movement, but it will not constitute the rallying point of mass-based oppositional politics, at least not if Correa stays on his popular track.

Conclusions

This study has analysed an important aspect of Ecuador's indigenous movement: the local tensions that electoral and movement politics have created within one of the country's most powerful indigenous localities, Otavalo. By focusing on indigenous mayor Mario Conejo and the political movement Pachakutik, I have emphasised the complex alliances at play in local indigenous politics. Moreover, the study also demonstrates how interethnic and cross-class alliances have put Conejo at odds with Ecuador's national indigenous confederation, CONAIE, and its affiliated political party Pachakutik. This is key to understanding the local dynamics at work between indigenous actors, something that has often been overlooked in previous studies of Ecuador's indigenous movement, which have tended towards national-level analyses. The findings contribute to the debate on the challenges of ethnically defined movements in the Andean countries and elsewhere, and will be useful also beyond the indigenous context: in research on identity politics, alliance-building and the relationship between social movements, political parties and the state.

The Otavalo case clearly illustrates the importance of approaching the local level in studies of party-movement relations and alliance-building in organisations based on ethnicity. Significant analytical elements might appear more clearly at the local level than at the more abstract realm of national politics. I have similarly demonstrated that

an organisational complexity exists at the local level that is not palpable in the national relationship between Pachakutik, CONAIE and other organisations. This is important because most studies on the Ecuadorian indigenous movement state that its strength comes from below, from the communities. This power from the grassroots should not always be taken as self-evident, however. The complexity at the cantonal level is frequently hidden, both in academic studies and in political discourses, behind common statements referring to the power of the communities and grassroots organisation.

Despite Otavalo having such a large indigenous population, Pachakutik did not succeed in establishing a solid movement around the mayor. There are many organisations competing for indigenous representation, with rural–urban divisions and Indians present in practically all social sectors. The Pachakutik alliance around Mayor Conejo lasted until early 2006, but from the first moment, the relationship between the group around Conejo and the oppositional factions of the ‘indigenous party’ was characterised by conflicts and internal tensions, frequently manifested in terms of interculturalism, ethnicity and class. The close relationship, yet unclear boundary between CONAIE and Pachakutik weakened their ability to carry out politics at local government level. The development of the local government in Otavalo has thus not depended for its functioning on the organisational strength of the principal social movement (CONAIE). More important was a rather loosely arranged network between the Conejo government and citizens from different mainly urban sectors, crossing the ethnic boundaries.

The combination of the extra-institutional strategies of CONAIE with the institutionalised actions of Pachakutik as a recognised actor within the formal political system requires a renegotiation of the indigenous identity. From the ethnic angle the dilemma thus consists of Pachakutik’s official intercultural and pluri-ethnic identity, whereas CONAIE is an exclusively indigenous organisation. In the situation in which Pachakutik reaches local political power, the critical quandary emerges the moment the indigenous Pachakutik mayor begins governing also for the non-indigenous population. The conflict and break up in Otavalo illustrates that the intercultural dilemma was crucial to the division of Pachakutik and the creation of Minga Intercultural. At the same time, as has been argued, the weakening of Pachakutik–CONAIE at national and local level has indirectly worked in Conejo’s favour. Besides, the local implications of the development of the political movement of President Correa are clearly manifested in Otavalo, with Conejo being re-elected on the slate of Movimiento PAIS, whereas Pachakutik is dealing with the challenge of being a left-wing oppositional actor in a political climate dominated by the popularity of the leftist movement of Correa. Similarly, the strategic alliance of Conejo’s movement with PAIS proved to be decisive in the local elections of 2009.

Interculturalism is already a social and political reality for the indigenous peoples. The future of the indigenous movement in Ecuador and elsewhere will undoubtedly depend on how the principal indigenous organisations handle the dilemmas of interculturalism in political alliance-building.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported between 2007 and 2009 by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. The author also wishes to thank all informants in Ecuador, colleagues at the Institute of Latin American Studies at Stockholm University, likewise my research contacts at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar and FLACSO in Quito.

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