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# Knowing Nature: Plurinationality and Productivity in Ecuador's Socialist State

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KNOWING NATURE:  
Plurinationality and Productivity  
in Ecuador's Socialist State

By

Kelsey Gilman

Accepted in Partial Completion  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

Kathleen L. Kitto, Dean of the Graduate School

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Chair, Dr. Ricardo Lopez

Dr. Kevin Leonard

Dr. Tamara Lea Spira

## Master's Thesis

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Kelsey Gilman  
May 13, 2016

KNOWING NATURE:  
Plurinationality and Productivity  
in Ecuador's Socialist State

A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of  
Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by  
Kelsey Gilman  
May 2016

## Abstract

My research explores the relationship between Ecuador's purported disengagement with neoliberalism in 2008, and the simultaneous inclusion of certain types of indigenous knowledge in the country's new socialistic order. Knowledge production provides a useful category of analysis because it has historically been used to undermine subaltern claims to political autonomy and self-governance. By focusing on the political space created for elite indigenous intellectuals, I examine how peasant and working class groups are re-subalternized by state discourses claiming to have solved the "indigenous question." I analyze how market relations of power produce new discourses of equal opportunity, as well as new identities ("consumers" and "producers"), and seeks to educate the proper distribution of desires across the class spectrum so as to cultivate consent to the point that vastly unequal distributions of power are considered legitimate. I argue that this hegemony is re/produced by a much broader demographic than generally acknowledged by the political Left – one that includes not only political elites, but subaltern groups as well.

Using Ecuador as a case study, my research offers an alternative understanding of how neoliberalism works. Dominant narratives tend to explain the concept using predominantly political and economic categories of analysis, describing it as a repressive ideology that privileges elite class projects to accumulate and consolidate wealth at the expense of society at large. While I fully agree that neoliberalism fosters and exacerbates economic inequalities, I find that political-economic analyses alone fall short of explaining how and why hierarchies shaped by market relations of power retain legitimacy despite political revolution and change. My research considers ongoing debates regarding the subaltern's capacity to speak and the ways in which they do, using notions of subaltern agency and its influence on hegemony to explain that neoliberalism works by allowing subaltern groups to create limited space for themselves through assimilation and appropriation of market discourses and identities, while simultaneously excluding the "unproductive" aspects of their subalterneity. I explore how neoliberal projects seek to educate the desires of these diversely classed groups, to cultivate consent for its continued legitimacy as a social, cultural, and political ideology.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis is years in the making, and continues to evolve apace with my structures of thought. I began to research political processes in Ecuador during my undergraduate career, to explore how inequalities in material wealth reinforce and rationalize inequalities in the authority to rule and produce knowledge. This marked my first experience grappling with abstract theoretical concepts, and proved a wholly frustrating experience. Many thanks to my advisor, Babafemi Akinrinade, who later noted: “The process of writing has challenged you to be better than you are, and I am very happy that you rose to the challenge.” As am I. His refusal to let me “solve” the question — *What will you spend the rest of your education doing, strengthening the opinion you have already formed of neoliberalism?* — and willingness to engage my argument has inspired the materialization of this thesis.

Ricardo Lopez, my committee chair, has directed these studies from the start. Then a member of my undergraduate committee, Ricardo clarified upon signing the completed draft of my concentration: “We’ll keep working on these concepts... This is just a proposal, right?” Indeed it was; for at the time I lacked the structures of thought to conceive the argument I articulate herein. Over the past five years, his passion for ideological discussion and debate has created an ongoing dialogue which (I hope!) is reflected in the current iteration of this thesis. Although he does disagree with parts of my argument — and went on the record to inform the committee as much before signing this document — he has constantly pushed me to be “better than I am.” I am forever grateful for the unsurmountable effort he has invested in teaching me to actively identify imperialist ideas, and (at least begin) to recognize when I unwittingly reproduce them. Through working with Ricardo, I have learned to de-naturalize my self, and in the process have developed an academic voice — without losing my creativity. As this thesis remains a work in progress, I can only hope for the honor and privilege of working with him again.

Many thanks to committee members Kevin Leonard and Tamara Lea Spira, both of whom engaged my argument in critical discussion and raised provoking questions about its political implications. I am deeply grateful for the time and effort they have invested in my work, and their commitment and flexibility to meet the necessary deadlines. As well, I must thank the administrators at Universidad Intercultural Amawtay Wasi for graciously responding to my solicitations, and for expressing interest in posting my work on their website at [www.amawtaywasi.org](http://www.amawtaywasi.org). *Eternamente agradecida*.

Last, but certainly not least, I extend my deepest thanks to those who have encouraged my reading and writing from the start. To my father, Randy R. Gilman, whose tales of global travel in his youth laid the groundwork for my fascination with different ways of knowing. His endless support for travel throughout my childhood has taught me that knowledge is produced as much through lived experience as in the halls of academia. And to my mother, Brenda Gilman, who copyedited my first-ever kindergarten poem (“Where the Fairies Are”), and continued to do so with every college essay until the first quarter of grad school. I look forward to sharing many more writing projects in the future. Finally, to my best friend and favorite sister, Kaelan, whose unconditional love and support has inspired me to keep writing: let the *minga* continue! And to Connor: for knowledge is produced in conversation.

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## List of Acronyms

ALBA	Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America
AP	<i>Movimiento Alianza País</i> , National Alliance Movement
CEAACES	Council for the Evaluation, Accreditation and Assurance of Quality University Education
CONAIE	Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador
CONFENAIE	Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon
CONEA	National Council of Evaluation and Accreditation
CONESUP	<i>Consejo de Educación Superior</i> , Board of Higher Education
ECUARUNARI	Confederation of Peoples of Kichwa Nationality of Ecuador
FEINE	Council of Indigenous Ecuadorian Evangelical Organizations
FENOCIN	National Confederation of Campesino, Indigenous, and Black Organizations
ICCI	Scientific Institute of Indigenous Cultures
INEVAL	National Institute for Educative Evaluation
LOEI	Law of Intercultural Education
NSHE	National System of Higher Education
PDE	Decennial Plan for Education
SEIB	Bilingual Intercultural Education System
SOTE	Transnational-Ecuadorian Systemic Pipeline
UEM's	<i>Unidades Educativas del Milenio</i> , Schools of the Millennium
UIAW	<i>Universidad Intercultural Amawtay Wasi</i>



## Preface

In December 2012 I had the privilege to travel to the remote village of Guano, Chimborazo with a middle-class family from Quito. The trip was part of a Christmas event the family organized each year: they collected bags of secondhand clothes from friends and coworkers; bought sandwiches, sodas and bags of candy; and donated the lot to an indigenous community in the countryside. Communities were selected according to their compatibility with specific criteria: they were rural, remote, and difficult to access; the majority of the population lived at or below the poverty level; and they were indigenous. In the weeks leading up the event, middle-class *quiteños* were encouraged to make donations of food or clothing to the “indigenous community”; the associated material poverty that accompanied the idea of indigeneity was implicit in the request.

During the actual distribution of goods, the *quiteña* family worked in cooperation with the principal of Guano’s only primary school to organize community members into lines to await their gifts. The principal was dressed in her work uniform, a dark blue blazer and knee-length skirt, and wore makeup and low-heeled shoes. She worked together with the *quiteña* family to monitor the recipients, who wore traditional uniforms according to ethnic identity, to ensure they did not exploit the system by returning to the line after receiving their respective food and clothes. Participating in such an event made me question the continuance of market relations of power and how they shaped indigenous lived experiences in Ecuador’s post-neoliberal turn.

In the following thesis, I engage Gayatri Spivak’s famous question *Can the subaltern speak?* to argue not only that they can; but indeed they often do so in ways that defy presump-

tion. Across disciplines, scholars of the political Left tend to assume that subaltern speech must necessarily be exercised in a counter-hegemonic way. In no way do I disagree with the claim that they can and do speak to counter hegemony; I find such arguments compelling and crucial to understanding those actors whose needs and desires have not been met by hegemony. And yet, to assume that all subaltern speech is necessarily counter-hegemonic seems to me a sweeping generalization that warrants closer examination. Must agency necessarily be counter-hegemonic in order to be considered “agency”? In what ways is agency limited or informed in its exercise? I find endeavors to understand how and why the subaltern speak as they do more productive to tailor political struggles for radical structural change.

Since my trip to Ecuador I have sought to better understand global inequalities in material wealth, the authority to produce knowledge, and the right to rule. This thesis is inspired in part by a classroom discussion on neoliberalism in Latin America that took place in the fall of 2015. After reading *Buying into the Regime* by Heidi Tinsman, our Transnational Americas class debated her question “Who buys into the regime?,” engaging her argument that women workers in Chile’s fruit-export industry (1973-1980’s) participated in the construction of neoliberal hegemony. “Despite low wages, many women and men who harvested grapes for export became proud owners of televisions...and washing machines,” Tinsman writes. “Many such goods were purchased with credit and debilitating debt. Sometimes the goal of owning modern appliances took precedence over buying adequate food. But most fruit workers saw their purchases as positive improvements.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Heidi Tinsman, *Buying into the Regime: Grapes and consumption in Cold War Chile and the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 4.

For some, Tinsman's claim presented an irresolvable paradox: Why should workers, who presumably stood to gain from state-subsidized goods and services, willingly buy into a regime of privatized consumption that ultimately contributed to their own indebtedness? Students questioned the agency behind workers' consumptive habits, using terms like "false consciousness" and "unaware" to describe their decision-making processes, demurring that they "didn't want to believe" that peasants bought wholeheartedly into the regime. They found it difficult to argue that the subaltern, too, reproduces hegemony.

I wonder why such an argument is so problematic for scholars of the political Left. Subaltern subjects do not benefit from romanticized histories of their inherently insurgent capacity to act. As historian Tamara Spira reminds us, authors of self-described 'colonial status' refute the notion that structural subjugation equals conquest; to expect indefatigable revolutionary sentiment from subaltern actors holds them to higher political standards than most middle-class activists and intellectuals are willing to meet themselves. Rather than assume they must be "wrong" or "miseducated," I find more productive questions to be yielded from asking how and why they speak as they do.

Similar questions apply to the case of indigenous intellectuals in the Andes. My research shows that intellectuals like the professionally-dressed principal from Guano — who are indisputably subaltern actors, engaged in an ongoing political struggle for the right to speak and "think against the state"<sup>2</sup> — in fact reproduce the very conceptual hierarchies they so ardently seek to change. The purpose of my critique is not merely to accuse and reprimand subaltern groups for reproducing hegemony; I follow Edgar Esquit's lead to assert that "my essay does not

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<sup>2</sup> Luis Macas, "Pluriversidad Indígena Amawtay Wasi: ¡PRESENTE!", *YouTube video*, 25:15, posted by "Marie-Eve Drouin-Gagné," December 20, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaTRLn8gVyI>.

talk in terms of betrayal. Rather, it deals with social processes that deserve ... careful analysis so as to further clarify the relation between hegemonic processes and ... resistance.”<sup>3</sup> Like Esquit, I write to explain how and why market relations of power retain hegemonic status despite the propagation of vehemently anti-neoliberal speech. Indigenous intellectuals in the Andes, like every other historical actor, do not produce knowledge in a vacuum; they, like others, are grounded by their own subjectivity. Esquit, writing about similar processes in Guatemala, asks: In what way does this emerging sector of educated [indigenous leaders] delimit a new narrative about the past?<sup>4</sup> I build on his work to add, How do their narratives contribute to a more nuanced understanding of neoliberalism — and how best to approach change?

The question of political speech affects us all. Faced with an impending decision — to grad school, or to quit — I, too, must decide whether my passion for justice is “marketable,” or whether it will undermine my viability in an increasingly neoliberal economy. Ecuador has already hosted a political revolution — and though much has changed, the absolute subject (as Judith Butler would claim) has not, as it remains an economic subject endowed with the right to consume. I present this thesis as a contribution to radical conceptualizations of change, to insist that it is not enough merely to declare rupture with hegemony; we must live this project as well. The question becomes, how.

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<sup>3</sup> Edgar Esquit, “Nationalist Contradictions: Pan-Mayanism, Representations of the Past, and the Reproduction of Inequalities in Guatemala,” in *Decolonizing Native Histories: Collaboration, knowledge, and language in the Americas*, ed. Florencia Mallon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 216.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

## Introduction

We, the sovereign people of Ecuador, ... celebrating nature, the Pacha Mama, of which we are part and which is vital for our existence... decide to construct a new form of living together, in diversity and harmony with nature, to achieve *el buen vivir*, *sumak kawsay*.<sup>5</sup>

On September 28, 2008 Ecuador officially declared itself a plurinational state. The newly ratified constitution included certain kinds of indigenous knowledge: it officially recognized the rights of nature, or Pacha mama, and assured all citizens access to “the good life” (“el buen vivir,” as translated by the state from indigenous concepts of *sumak kawsay*). Article seventy-one states: “Nature, or Pacha Mama, where life becomes real and reproduces itself, has the right to be integrally respected in its existence, and to the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structures, functions, and evolutionary processes.”<sup>6</sup> The document proceeds to outline a “regime of *buen vivir*,” which grants to all persons, communities, peoples and nations the right to benefit from the “natural wealth” of the country. In order to achieve *el buen vivir* — defined as the basic human right to food, water, and a healthy living environment — the state would be responsible for “directing, planning, and regulating the process of development.”<sup>7</sup> Passing with sixty-four percent of the vote, the new constitution marked an official shift from neoliberal to socialist governance, and seemed to indicate the beginning of a new political era for Ecuador.

The inclusion of indigenous knowledge in state discourse was not limited to the new constitutional amendments. The four-year National Development Plan — renamed the “National Plan for Buen Vivir (2009-2013)” upon Correa’s election in 2007 — outlined a proposal to

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<sup>5</sup> Ecuador Constitution, Preamble.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Title II, Chapter 2, Article 71.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Title VII, Chapter 1, Article 277.

“overcome the reductionist vision of development as economic growth and place at the center of development the human being and, as an ultimate objective, the achievement of *sumak kawsay* or el buen vivir.”<sup>8</sup> As well, indigenous knowledge has been included in the realm of academia: since 2008, the Ministry of Education has formed a National System of Bilingual Intercultural Education, and Ecuador became the first country in Latin America to boast a state-funded indigenous university — the Intercultural University of Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples, *Amawtay Wasi* (UIAW). Since then, indigenous knowledge has been in political, economic, and academic spheres at the national level. It would appear to have attained the status of hegemony in Ecuador.

The presence of Pacha mama and other indigenous concepts in official state discourse is the result of an expansive indigenous social movement which began in the early 1970’s in response to Ecuador’s rising oil export economy. This movement sought to protect indigenous communities against the social, cultural, economic and environmental impacts of oil extraction in the Amazon. It began as a loose confederation of groups with disparate political agendas — ranging from integrationist in the Andes, to isolationist in the Amazon — which sought unity across class and ethnic difference in an agenda defined against neoliberal economic policies. Among demands for collective rights and self-governance, indigenous groups demanded epistemic equality by means of official state recognition of their authority to produce knowledge. As part of a broader discourse on “indigenous control of indigenous affairs,” the movement began to advance demands for a plurinational state, broadly conceived as the “reformation of the dominant economic system to eliminate exploitation of both humans and nature, and of the dominant cul-

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<sup>8</sup> The Republic of Ecuador National Planning Council, *National Plan for Good Living 2009-2013: Building a Plurinational and Intercultural State* (Quito: National Planning and Development Secretary, 2009), 23-25.

tural order to create an intercultural society founded on the recognition of the Other and respect for [epistemic] difference.”<sup>9</sup> Central to this late-twentieth-century indigenous mobilization were demands that plurinationality be recognized by the state. Particularly, it demanded the state to acknowledge and respect epistemic difference, indigenous ways of knowing, and most importantly, indigenous authority to produce knowledge.

Demands for plurinationality can be understood in terms of the demand for authority to define the meaning of “nature.” Andean epistememes view the world to be spiritually immanent, conceiving spiritual and material worlds to exist simultaneously in the present. Such a worldview can be loosely compared with Catholicism, which affirms the existence of divine miracles in the physical world. This understanding contradicts and challenges transcendent notions of spirituality that emerged from the North Atlantic Enlightenment, which distinguish between the spiritual world (existing only in the afterlife) and a secular material present. From their locus of epistemic difference, indigenous thinkers conceive nature and humanity to comprise a single category of thought, and thus to be worthy of same political rights and protections. Demands for official state recognition of Pacha mama’s rights can therefore be understood as a demand for indigenous authority to define the term “nature” as both sentient and sacred; coeval with the value of human life.

In this thesis I elaborate how demands for plurinationality emerged out of a decades-long struggle between indigenous groups and the state over the authority to produce knowledge: from defining the meaning of “nature” between the 1990’s-early 2000’s, under what is commonly referred to both by indigenous groups and the state as the neoliberal era; to determining the mean-

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<sup>9</sup> Luis Macas, “The political need for epistemic reconstruction of ancestral knowledge,” in *Pueblos Indígenas, Estado y Democracia*, ed. Pablo Dávalos (Buenos Aires: Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales, 2005), 35.

ing of a “quality” intercultural education in Ecuador’s purportedly post-neoliberal turn. Different historical actors contest the meaning of the term “neoliberalism,” which in turn explains whether or not they consider plurinationality to have been achieved since 2008. The indigenous movement defines neoliberalism as a repressive force characterized by the exploitation of both humans and nature, against which it has found unity across class and ethnic difference. By contrast, Rafael Correa’s self-described socialist government portrays neoliberalism as a repressive force characterized by the concentration of wealth in the hands of an elite few, leaving aside questions of nature and spirituality, thus allowing him to present proposals for the redistribution of wealth as “liberating” without questioning his continued reliance on the exploitative oil-export economy. Despite their differing definitions of the term, indigenous groups and the state both share a repressive understanding of how neoliberal hegemony works.

And yet, historical narratives produced by each deviate with respect to whether or not Ecuador is in fact “post-neoliberal,” and plurinationality has been achieved since 2008. Latin Americanist John Beverley describes the “pink tide,” or *marea rosada*, which has “engulfed the whole continent” following the turn of the century, marking a deliberate and widespread disengagement with neoliberalism throughout the region. Following a violent urban upheaval on February 27, 1999 Hugo Chavez emerged as a political leader to propose a “more pluralistic and less state-centered” version of socialism in Latin America. In a publicized speech Chávez described “socialism of the twenty first century, which is based in solidarity, fraternity, love, justice, liberty, and equality.”<sup>10</sup> Though loosely defined, discourses promoting modern socialism have since been adopted by governments in Brazil (Lula da Silva, inaugurated 2003), Bolivia (Evo Morales, in-

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<sup>10</sup> John Beverley, *Latinamericanism after 9/11* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 7.



augurated 2006), and Ecuador, among others. Chavez's initial evasiveness regarding how best to "transform the mode of capital" has allowed room for interpretation between these political elites. Yet while the governments of the *marea rosada* may vary ideologically and economically, they share a common political identity as governments of the Left, and a common political project of "postneoliberal regional economic cooperation and affirmation."<sup>11</sup>

Like other politicians of the *marea rosada*, Correa's 2006 presidential platform denounced "neoliberal globalization that would turn countries into markets, not nations."<sup>12</sup> He promoted five main points of a Citizen's Revolution, which included calling a constituent assembly; fighting against corruption; opposing neoliberal economic policies; increasing funding for health and education; and promoting regional integration.<sup>13</sup> It celebrated the participation of groups formerly excluded from politics; the redistribution of national wealth; and simultaneous discourses of Latin American regional sovereignty and social inclusion. In this respect, Correa's agenda overlapped with indigenous discourses promoting plurinationality; and by the early twenty-first century, the indigenous movement had been increasingly incorporated into this broadly-defined movement of the Left. Consequently, demands for plurinationality originally defined by indigenous groups to mean "indigenous control of indigenous affairs" came to belong to a broader socialist discourse promoting equality and inclusion, as Correa and the AP entered into the struggle for hegemony.

Since 2008, indigenous discourse regarding Correa's administration as a liberating force has changed. Bringing the question of "nature" back into the conversation, they argue that his

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Rafael Correa, interview by Charlie Rose, *Charlie Rose*, PBS, April 16, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Marc Becker, *¡Pachakutik! Indigenous Movements and Electoral Politics in Ecuador* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 112.

government is “just as” repressive as the neoliberal governments that came before, as it continues to rely on an exploitative economy that violates Pacha mama’s rights. The indigenous movement correctly identifies the underlying layers of coloniality shared between neoliberal and socialist forms of governance, which both conceive an economic — not a natural — subject of rights. Although these governments differ regarding the legitimate concentration of wealth (neoliberal policies protect the right to accumulate, whereas socialism the right to access wealth) and the role of the state in facilitating these rights (to protect capital or social equality), they nevertheless take for granted the human right to consume.

Histories of the Citizen’s Revolution produced by both indigenous groups and the state therefore share a romantic narrative structure of overcoming, which creates a binary between “repressive-neoliberal” and “liberating-socialist” forms of government and leaves no room for nuance. Instead, I argue, recent political transformations in Ecuador should be narrated tragically, as the impossible decision between possible options in which subjects cannot choose without remainder. This changes the question from “revolution-or-not,” to account for the possibility of an incomplete victory, thereby creating space to explore why hierarchies in thought and knowledge persist despite political revolution and change. I argue that between 1980s-early 2000s, indigenous demands for plurinationality were deemed wholly unproductive to state projects designed to increase the production of oil, open the country to foreign investment and trade, and reduce the state’s distributive function, and were therefore wholly excluded from official state discourse. With the advent of the *marea rosada*, however, dominant discourse came to promote the redistribution of wealth, Latin American international sovereignty, and citizen participation in politics. This emergent discourse found indigenous demands for plurinationality productive to agendas seeking to portray modern socialism as “totally” or absolutely anti-neoliberal. As a re-

sult of this discursive shift, I argue, certain types of indigenous knowledge came to be partially included in official state discourse.

In this context, the presence of indigenous knowledge in official state discourse takes on new meaning. Ecuador's self-declared plurinationality in 2008 cannot be attributed solely to the political success of the indigenous movement; but also to Correa's Citizen's Revolution. This slippage allowed indigenous demands for radical epistemic change to be incorporated into official state discourse not only to protect and empower indigenous communities, but also to legitimize socialist governance as "totally" anti-neoliberal, evinced by citizen participation in politics. Correa's declaration that "Ecuador is a plurinational state" bolstered his own right to rule, even as indigenous demands for epistemic equality remained largely unmet. Such processes of inclusion and exclusion and their resultant epistemic hierarchies become evident when indigenous struggles to define "nature" are placed at the center of historical analysis.

The simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of indigenous demands in Ecuador creates a political and epistemic paradox. The state at once purports to recognize, respect, and protect the rights of nature, while at the same time promising citizens equal access to the benefits of the country's "natural wealth" — a euphemism for the oil export economy — as part of their rights as human beings. The state simultaneously promises to recognize the rights of "nature," defined in political-economic terms as a material resource to be exploited to benefit society at large. The state uses indigenous concepts of *sumak kawsay*, translated as "el buen vivir" or "the good life," to legitimize its own control over the oil-export industry, in the name of redistributing wealth. Correa's government uses indigenous knowledge to affirm its own universal authority to provide

for citizens, effectively undermining political demands for “indigenous control of indigenous affairs” and re-subalternizing indigenous knowledge to the authority and purview of the state.

The claim that plurinationality has indeed been achieved in Ecuador elides these contradictions, rendering continued inequalities a “non-issue.”<sup>14</sup> Correa’s declaration that “The Ecuadorian people have risen like a phoenix from the ashes of neoliberalism, and we are building this beautiful country”<sup>15</sup> relies on a repressive narrative of neoliberalism in order to portray itself as liberating: a “total” or “absolute” revolution. It also relies on the assumption that indigenous knowledge appears “authentically” or unmediated in official state discourse — that the included knowledge has been defined as intended by indigenous groups, and not been appropriated or re-defined by the state. Moreover, it assumes that the inclusion of certain knowledge is representative of indigenous communities as a whole; and not a particular class of intellectuals trained at Western universities, with legal and political ties to international governing bodies. The first assumption renders the role of the state transparent in processes of negotiation that necessarily precede the inclusion of political demands, while the second makes invisible the heterogeneity of indigenous communities shaped by social, ethnic, classed and gendered hierarchies. By claiming that “Ecuador is a plurinational country,” Correa’s government undermines indigenous protests and demands that have continued since 2008.

Indigenous narratives point out the contradiction inherent in the Citizen’s Revolution: that despite limited inclusion of their demands, plurinationality has not been achieved in Ecuador. This narrative locates responsibility for their continued exclusion with the state, argu-

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<sup>14</sup> Cuban historian Alejandro de la Fuente writes about the construction of race as a non-issue in Fidel Castro’s post-racial Revolution. Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> “Afirma Correa haber sacado a Ecuador del neoliberalismo en seis años,” *Grupofórmula*, January 12, 2013: <http://www.radioformula.com.mx/notas.asp?Idn=296850>.

ing that state repression of the indigenous movement results from discursive appropriation and the failure to enforce their hard-won rights. According to this version of events, the state incorporated indigenous discourses of plurinationality without observing their legal ramifications — such as enforcing the rights of Pacha mama — in practice. Continued state repression and violence against the indigenous movement evinces little change in relations of power with the state, allowing for indigenous political organizations such as CONAIE to claim that “Correa has assumed the traditional neoliberal posture of the rightist oligarchy.”<sup>16</sup> This explanation of political events conflates Correa’s development plan with neoliberal models that rely on the exploitation of natural resources. It describes neoliberalism as a repressive force in order to portray socialism as “no change,” thus conflating their respective and often contradictory political agendas. While not incorrect, this narrative ultimately fails to explain how and why certain types of indigenous knowledge have indeed achieved a measure of inclusion, and how this partial inclusion has impacted the critical purchase of a movement formerly united in opposition to neoliberal rule.

Both narratives of the Citizen’s Revolution — either as “successful,” or “no change” — share a repressive understanding of how neoliberal hegemony works. Socialist narratives use it to portray the Citizen’s Revolution as a “total revolution” (evinced, in part, by indigenous self-representation in politics) and therefore a “liberating” and legitimate form of rule. The indigenous movement, to portray socialism as “equally repressive,” evinced by continued state violence against indigenous communities and their interests. Though employed for different political ends — whether to legitimize or destabilize Correa’s government — both Citizen’s Revolution and the indigenous movement share a repressive explanation of how neoliberal hegemony works.

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<sup>16</sup> Daniel Denvir and Thea Riofrancos, “CONAIE Indigenous Movement Condemns President Correa,” *America Latina en Movimiento*, May 16, 2008: <http://alainet.org/active/24062&lang=es>.

And yet repressive narratives tend to elide the complexity of how power works. Triumphant narratives of socialist political success ignore the role of the state in processes of negotiation that necessarily precede the inclusion of certain indigenous demands, rendering transparent the continued exclusion of others. Repressive narratives also overlook the role of indigenous intellectuals as translators of knowledge “between worlds,” and into political demands recognizable by the state. In order for Correa’s government to have appropriated indigenous discourse, as these leaders claim, indigenous knowledge must first have been made translated into Spanish. The role of indigenous intellectuals as translators and representatives of a heterogeneous community shaped by class and ethnic difference are missing from narratives that describe neoliberalism as a repressive force. Whether for socialist or indigenous political ends, repressive explanations of neoliberalism ultimately fail to explain how the political and epistemic contradictions created by the 2008 constitutional amendments managed to maintain hegemony in Ecuador.

Historical narratives emerging from Ecuador belong to a larger methodological trend on the political Left to describe neoliberalism as a repressive force. Neoliberal hegemony has long been considered a political and economic paradigm that privileges elite and wealthy classes at the expense of working and popular groups. Repressive narratives argue that neoliberalism maintains hegemony through the use of violence and exploitation by an elite few against society at large. Latin Americanists describe neoliberal governance in the region as “astringent;”<sup>17</sup> an effort to “consolidate and eliminate options.”<sup>18</sup> Peruvian anthropologist Felipe Burbano de Lara calls it “a predatory political economy dependent upon national and state resources, concentrated on

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<sup>17</sup> Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 196-197.

<sup>18</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side Of Western Modernity: Global futures, decolonial options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), xxvii.

wealth and committed to the interests of the US, the IMF and foreign capital.”<sup>19</sup> Analyzed thus, neoliberalism is an indisputably exploitative and restrictive force. Even so, such narratives fail to explain why hierarchies in knowledge retain legitimacy despite concrete political transformation and change.

My research takes exploitative neoliberal political economies as a point of departure to examine how the logic of the free market can also be a productive force. Examined through the lens of knowledge production, with discourse and identity at the center of analysis, a different understanding of neoliberalism emerges. My research shows that neoliberal discourses promoting “equal opportunity” and “universal access to the market” also created new social identities — “producers” and “consumers” — shaped by new relations of power defined by the market. Neoliberal hegemony functions by educating the desires of these social identities across the class spectrum, in order to cultivate consent to the extent that vastly unequal distributions of wealth are considered legitimate. These new identities (intentionally or otherwise) create limited space for the “productive” aspects of social groups formerly marginalized on the grounds of race or gender, in order to facilitate their access to the market. Yet the inclusion of these formerly subaltern groups only extends as far as their participation in the market; for at the same time, those aspects deemed “unproductive” to the market remain excluded as such. As such, I contend, productive understandings of neoliberalism are better suited to explain how and why hierarchies in knowledge and identity persist despite political transformation and change.

Using Ecuador as a case study, I argue that the recent inclusion of indigenous knowledge in official state discourse is best understood in terms of what I refer to as “neoliberalism in ac-

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<sup>19</sup> Felipe Burbano de Lara, “El nacimiento de un nuevo sujeto político,” *Iconos, Revista de Ciencias Sociales Flacso-Ecuador*; no. 15 (Quito: FLACSO, 2003), 7.

tion”: a hegemonic project to facilitate simultaneous processes of in- and exclusion of indigenous knowledge, and to incorporate, appropriate, and redefine certain kinds of knowledge to legitimize state projects to achieve social equality. My research shows that Correa's government creates space for those aspects of indigenous knowledge deemed “productive” to his political agendas (such as the concept of *sumak kawsay*, translated as “el buen vivir” and understood in terms of material wellbeing), while simultaneously excluding that which it finds “unproductive” (such as the rights of Pacha mama, which impede socialist projects to generate wealth by means of the extractive economy). Moreover, I contend, even that knowledge which does achieve inclusion must first be redefined as “productive” according to socialist standards. Through redefinition, the state is able to appropriate indigenous concepts, incorporating them into a broader socialist proposal for change: the Citizen’s Revolution. Thus, the presence of indigenous knowledge in official state discourse evinces Correa’s claim that “successful revolution” has been achieved in Ecuador, while simultaneously facilitating and obscuring the reproduction of hierarchies that marginalize indigenous authority to produce knowledge. My research is significant because it shows that neoliberal hierarchies in thought and identity are reproduced by a much broader demographic of people than generally considered on the political Left: not only elites, but state and indigenous actors as well.

This thesis belongs to a recent literature that seeks to rethink the histories of neoliberalism. According to dominant narratives, neoliberalism was first introduced to Latin America through the force of US imperial aggression. These narratives insist that neoliberalism retains hegemonic status by means of a repressive force exercised by a wealthy elite at the expense of working and popular groups. Neoliberalism is often conceived as an import to Latin America,



imposed coercively from without by the United States and its political allies.<sup>20</sup> Some authors (such as Nobel laureate Amartya Sen) have argued that such policies were deliberately intended to serve the interests of American corporations at the expense of Latin American populations.

Neoliberal ideologies came to achieve global hegemonic status in the late 1980's with the end of the Cold War. Latin Americanists often refer to the Washington Consensus as the first manifestation of a so-called "neoliberal doctrine," which comprised a set of economic principles designed to promote trade liberalization, the privatization of property, and direct foreign investment by multinational corporations to alleviate the poverty brought on by the 1982 crash in world oil prices. International institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank began to make loans to so-called "developing countries" conditional on structural adjustment packages designed to reduce the role of the state in the national economy, offering market democracy as a solution to the social problems caused by poverty.

More recently, historian Heidi Tinsman seeks to complicate such repressive narratives of neoliberalism. Her research examines the rise of the grape-export economy in Chile over the course of the twentieth century, using consumption as a category of analysis to explore the changing power relations in the transition from socialist to neoliberal rule (1970's — 1980's). She argues that new consumer practices in Chile, which were the result of an expanding and increasingly neoliberal fruit-export industry, constituted a redistribution of power which politicized

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<sup>20</sup> The Chicago Boys are often cited as harbingers of imperial economic policy. A group of Chilean economists who studied Friedman's libertarian economic theory at the University of Chicago in the 1970's, the Chicago Boys assumed high-level positions as advisors to right-wing governments upon their return to Chile, Argentina, Mexico and Colombia. From their positions of power, these economists "generally advocated widespread deregulation, privatization, and other free market policies for closely controlled economies, and rose to fame as leaders of the early reforms initiated in Chile during the rule of General Augusto Pinochet." Gary S. Becker, "What Latin America Owes to the 'Chicago Boys'," *Hoover Digest* (1997): <http://www.hoover.org/research/what-latin-america-owes-chicago-boys>.

different levels of hegemony: from nuclear family relationships, to Chile's military government, and even marketing circles within the United States targeting "Today's Working Woman."

Tinsman's methodology assumes a transnational approach, offering a global perspective on how neoliberalism arises in dialectical relationship between diversely classed groups. "Consumption itself is not inherently good or bad," she explains; "it is a social relationship between people, mediated by things that are made, and endowed with meaning, by people. Like other social relationships, consumption is produced within particular relations of power and produces new ones."<sup>21</sup> Her research shows that the consumptive habits of different social groups — ranging from working-class women in Chile, to marketing executives in the U.S. — functioned in concert to produce the relations of power that comprised neoliberal hegemony. Consequently she argues that neoliberalism was not an import to Chile, but arose "organically" in response to popular demands for change under Allende's state-managed economy. Her research informs my own as it shows how new consumer practices under neoliberal hegemony constituted a redistribution of power that was bottom-up as much as it was top-down.

These new social relations of power were accompanied by discourses promoting "equal access to the free market," which aligned with liberal demands for equality of opportunity "in accord with the category of the subject and the principle of individual rights."<sup>22</sup> This liberal market logic created space for subaltern groups previously marginalized on the grounds of racial and sexual difference to appropriate neoliberal identities (of "producers" and "consumers"), and use

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<sup>21</sup> Tinsman, *Buying Into the Regime*, 5-6.

<sup>22</sup> Such logic, as Beverley contends, is founded on a presumption of equal worth that is problematic because it fails to account for "the various relations of subordination, exploitation, and marginalization produced by capitalist modernity itself, involving as they do at all moments racism, Eurocentrism, colonialism and its aftermath, the destruction or displacement of native populations and territorialities, ... and so on." John Beverley, *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 90.

discourses of “equal opportunity” to empower themselves within the existing order.<sup>23</sup> This explains why neoliberal agendas in fact share partial connections with projects to achieve social inclusion and equality; discourses promoting equal access to the market “across class and creed” were less concerned with promoting the agency of subaltern groups as they were designed to expand the jurisdiction of the market. The inclusion of subaltern groups in neoliberal hegemony is thus directly proportional to their participation in the “free” market economy; as de la Cadena quips, “Those who cannot consume do not count.”<sup>24</sup>

Whereas Tinsman shows how new consumptive habits constituted a redistribution of power that empowered subaltern groups within neoliberalism, de la Cadena argues that this restructuring nevertheless reproduced historical hierarchies. She compares this “new” form of liberalism to the “old” liberalism of the twentieth century, to show that “given the historical radicalization of Latin American social formations, those [who remain excluded] are those whose discrimination had already been legitimized.”<sup>25</sup> While the latter extended its domain through education, the former proposed to do so by way of the market: “The parallel difference is that while the old liberalism privileged education as a source of hierarchies and discrimination, the new liberalism privileges the market and constructs hierarchies through the profits of producers and the indispensability of consumers’ capacity to consume.”<sup>26</sup> De la Cadena builds on Tinsman’s argu-

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<sup>23</sup> Anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena explains that “competition is the motor of the market; and for this to function, all obstacles that prevent the conversion of citizens into consumers should be eliminated. Racial discrimination is one of these obstacles, as the market should extend itself across race and creed. For this to happen, producers needed to be educated... that ‘social exclusivity’ is a feature of economic inefficiency. This new economic culture identifies itself as ‘multicultural.’” Marisol de la Cadena, “Anterioridades y externalidades: Más allá de la raza en América Latina,” *Hemispheric Institute E-misférica: Race and its Others* 5.2 (2008): 3.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

ment to show that even as market logic rearranged relations of power, it also created new hierarchies that re-subalternized social groups “whose discrimination had already been legitimized.”

Carla Freeman’s research on middle-class women in Barbados shows how a rights-based discourse of “equal opportunity,” and new social identities (the “self-made entrepreneur”) work together to create space for women of color to empower themselves within a broader neoliberal order. In an article titled *Neoliberal Respectability: Entrepreneurial Marriage, Affective Labor, and a New Caribbean Middle Class*, she argues that women have achieved upward social mobility in Barbados by entering the domain of an emerging entrepreneurial middle class. She explains that “the neoliberal mandate [requires] flexibility in all realms of life – the capacity to constantly retool, retrain, and respond to the shifting tides of the global marketplace, the expectation that individuals will become ‘entrepreneurs of the self.’”<sup>27</sup> This flexibility allows for diverse social identities to partake in “neoliberal self-making,” which takes for granted the agency of individuals in creating an identity and recognition for it within neoliberal hegemony.

As Freeman contends, “neoliberal self-making” does indeed create space for women to empower themselves by becoming entrepreneurs. Yet this argument does not account for class privilege, or otherwise consider how access to material wealth is a condition of possibility for access to social mobility. Marisol de la Cadena’s work (explored above, in conversation with Tinsman) addresses this problem, explaining that neoliberal hegemony creates space only for that

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<sup>27</sup> Carla Freeman, “Neoliberal Respectability: Entrepreneurial Marriage, Affective Labor, and a New Caribbean Middle Class,” in *The Global Middle Classes: Theorizing Through Ethnography*, ed. Rachel Heiman, et al. (Santa Fe: SAR Press, 2012), 85.

which it finds “productive” about the subaltern — that which is productive according to market logics. The rest remains excluded.<sup>28</sup>

Charles Hale argues that these simultaneous processes of in- and exclusion in fact comprise a particular political project endeavored by the state. He contends that multicultural neoliberalism is a “cultural project of neoliberalism that responds to indigenous demands while containing them in a broader neoliberal order,” which creates a “paradox of simultaneous cultural affirmation and economic marginalization.”<sup>29</sup> Heeding Hale’s call to maintain a “distinction between the cultural project of neoliberalism, and the socio-political consequences that follow as this project is deployed,”<sup>30</sup> Robert Andolina explores how aspects of multiculturalism are transmitted to a “post-neoliberal” turn in Ecuador.

Andolina insists that although neoliberalism is often conceived as a “no-society” form of rule, it is better understood as a kind of social hegemony. “Emerging out of a dialogical partnership between neoliberalism, feminism, environmentalism, [and] multiculturalism,” social neoliberalism views “cultural difference, environmental protection, gender equality, and popular participation as necessary ingredients in development.”<sup>31</sup> Andolina explains that social neoliberalism

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<sup>28</sup> She juxtaposes two instances of racism to illustrate this process. First, she describes an instance in which indigenous youth were refused entry to a disco in Perú. In response, the National Institute of Defense of Competition and the Protection of Intellectual Property (INDECOPI) – a neoliberal organization charged with “promoting a culture of loyal and honest competition, and protecting all forms of intellectual property” – denounced the disco’s owners and administrators for their policies of “social exclusivity,” which were deemed a feature of economic inefficiency. The second example is a racist comment made by a Peruvian congressman – “Are you going to ask the llamas and vicuñas their opinion on the Free Trade Agreement?” – with respect to rural indigenous groups. INDECOPI (and all other government agents and organizations, for that matter) were silent following the comment. De la Cadena offers her own analysis: “That INDECOPI didn’t sanction the racist congressman shouldn’t attract much attention; he wasn’t affecting the rights of consumers.” de la Cadena, “Anterioridades y externalidades,” 3.

<sup>29</sup> Charles R. Hale, “Does Multiculturalism Menace? Governance, Cultural Rights and the Politics of Identity in Guatemala,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* Vol. 34 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 493.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 498.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Andolina, Nina Laurie, and Sarah A. Radcliffe, *Indigenous Development in the Andes: Culture, Power, and Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 9.

views human capital as a basis for participation in markets and governance; his research explores how “indigenous culture gets redefined as an asset rather than an obstacle to development.”<sup>32</sup>

Tracing the processes by which “cultural features like extended family networks, norms of reciprocity, close relationships to land, and consensual communal governance are redefined as social capital,” Andolina shows that indigenous intellectuals — as well as the state — engage in projects to redefine knowledge in terminology deemed “productive” to state agendas. His research informs my own because it reveals that processes of redefinition happening simultaneously in inverse directions: for even as indigenous intellectuals redefine knowledge to make it “productive” to the state, their own identities are shaped in the process — both epistemically, through formal education at so-called “Western” universities, and politically, through interaction and negotiation with international political bodies such as the UN. This new generation of professionals claims to represent indigenous interests in Ecuador; yet, as Andolina shows, “they also downplay and exclude some kinds of knowledge, pedagogy, bodily markers, and performances, while generating new hierarchies.”<sup>33</sup> His research takes the indigenous intellectual as a modern neoliberal subject: no longer “authentically subaltern,” yet still marked by colonial difference, leaders of the movement work together with the state to redefine indigenous knowledge as “productive,” thus participating in the creation of a discourse promoting socially inclusive development.

My research further explores the role of the indigenous intellectual as a modern neoliberal subject, asking how they participate in processes of redefinition to frame demands for recognition of colonial difference. By examining the indigenous movement’s struggle for authority to

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 21.

produce knowledge — whether to define “nature” as sentient, or to determine the meaning of a “quality intercultural education” — my research explores the historical processes by which hierarchies in knowledge are generated and reproduced, to find that more social groups participate than generally acknowledged by scholars of the political Left.

Recent state projects to consolidate and homogenize knowledge in Ecuador have been highly effective in silencing indigenous avenues for producing and sharing knowledge. In the course of my research, key sources — including UIAW’s website — have “disappeared” from the Internet and other means of access. The difficulties I experienced in accessing indigenous sources are directly related to questions of power and political speech, and evince the continued reproduction of hierarchies regarding who has the authority to discern “what may, from what may not be considered knowledge.”<sup>34</sup>

Consequently, my research relies on unconventional sources of information. As I was regrettably unable to conduct research in Ecuador, I must resort to using primary documents as they become available in secondary sources; against best practices, my thesis consistently cites indigenous works found in the tomes of others. My first chapter draws from a compilation of oral histories published by anthropologist Rosaleen Howard-Malverde in 1981 — titled *Dioses y Diablos: Tradición oral de Cañar Ecuador*, and accessed online through the University of Texas’s Archive of Indigenous Languages of Latin America (AILLA) — to illustrate the facile passage between human and natural worlds which forms the basis of indigenous epistemology. Historians often debate the value of oral history, questioning its claim to provide “truth” or verifiable knowledge. Given the nature of oral tradition “as a performative medium based on imparting

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<sup>34</sup> Foucault, Michel, *Power/Knowledge* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1980), 197.

knowledge and wisdom gained through direct personal experience or connection,” notes Mallon, “the rule of evidence associated with the scientific method are less relevant or applicable. For some, this makes oral tradition a lesser form of evidence, precisely because it is not verifiable.”<sup>35</sup> She responds that oral histories are valuable “precisely because they are not data but systems of thought that provide... a window on the ways the past is culturally constituted and discussed. In other words, stories [are] not merely about the past; they also provide guidelines for understanding change.”<sup>36</sup> In the context of my research oral histories are valuable precisely because they have been deemed “not-real” knowledge by the state.

Chapter two uses a self-published anthology of indigenist thought called *Sumak Kawsay Yuyay: Antología del Pensamiento Indigenista Ecuatoriano sobre Sumak Kawsay* to track the emergence and dissemination of political discourses regarding *sumak kawsay*. This compilation contains a wealth of knowledge produced by indigenous intellectuals in a variety of formats including doctoral theses, dissertations, conference papers, journal articles and more. Although these works could, under other circumstances, be used as secondary sources, I read them as primary sources for evidence that indigenous intellectuals do in fact reproduce the conceptual hierarchies they seek to reform. Chapter three, which examines discourses surrounding the 2004 creation and 2014 closure of Universidad Intercultural Amawtay Wasi, draws from social media including Facebook and Youtube to access indigenous narratives that have been deliberately submerged by the state. In line with theoretical questions regarding the subaltern’s capacity to speak,

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<sup>35</sup> Florencia E. Mallon, “Introduction: Decolonizing knowledge, language, and narrative,” in *Decolonizing Native Histories: Collaboration, knowledge, and language in the Americas*, ed. Florence E. Mallon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 14.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*



my methodology necessarily relies on free and other “democratic” outlets for sharing information, from which indigenous activists have a platform to speak against the state and be heard.

In the spirit of facilitating ideological exchange — a “dialogue of knowledges” — it is also worth noting that indigenous concepts and discourse appear thrice translated in this thesis (from Quechua into Spanish, then English). As each iteration moves farther from its original articulation, repeated translation necessarily risks conceptual perversion. Even as I engage this project, I acknowledge that some ideas are necessarily lost in the translation between worlds. Although unavoidable, this exercise has helped me cultivate a deeper appreciation for indigenous intellectuals tasked with articulating demands for radical change in a language historically banned from politics. Moreover, in the course of researching I have reached out to administrators from UIAW; they have proved exceedingly willing to discuss my work, and expressed interest in publishing a version of this thesis on their website. Given the nature of my argument and critique, such a “diálogo de saberes” is of utmost importance — for knowledge is indeed produced in conversation.

This thesis develops in three chapters. The first uses the 2008 constitution as a case study to show how simultaneous processes of inclusion and exclusion work, asking which types of indigenous knowledge are deemed “productive” to socialist projects, which are “unproductive,” and why. In this chapter I use oral histories from Cañar to show that – contrary to claims to have achieved plurinationality – certain types of indigenous knowledge still remain excluded from the new socialist order. I argue that the knowledge that is deemed “unproductive” to state projects is that which views material and spiritual worlds to be immanent, rather than transcendent, to show

that socialist hegemony reproduces hierarchies in thought and identity characteristic of neoliberal rule.

Chapter two examines the 2009-2013 National Plan for Buen Vivir (formerly the National Development Plan) to explore the processes by which “productive” knowledge gets incorporated into official state discourse. I show that in order to meet socialist standards for “productivity,” indigenous knowledge must first undergo processes of redefinition which strip it of spirituality and leave aside questions of “nature,” effectively lessening the radical potential of demands for epistemic change. As such, I argue, even that knowledge which does get incorporated into official state discourse cannot be considered “authentically indigenous,” as it is the product of political negotiation and cooperation with the state. To illustrate this process, I track the emergence and dissemination of discourses on *sumak kawsay*: from its use amongst indigenous communities, to its foundation for the country’s national development plan. I use knowledge produced by indigenous intellectuals to show that they, too, participate in processes of redefinition that precede the inclusion of their knowledge in state discourse. Originally proposed to counter the logic of development and its concurrent ecological destruction, I show that *sumak kawsay* came to be known as a sustainable “human-centered” alternative to repressive neoliberal models of development, proposed by Correa in 2006.

The final chapter elaborates how processes of in/exclusion and redefinition work together to reproduce neoliberal hierarchies in thought and identity. I build on previous case studies to show that, despite the limited inclusion of “productive” knowledge in official state discourse, modern developmental theory still bans immanent ways of knowing from politics. Using a series of laws passed in response to indigenous demands for intercultural education, I track the brief

contentious life of Latin America's first state-funded indigenous university, the Intercultural University of Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples Amawtay Wasi (UIAW), from its 2004 inception through its state-mandated closure in 2014. I analyze the state's rationale for closing the school — a purported “lack of mercantile quality” — to argue that legislation passed in response to indigenous demands for bilingual intercultural education was later repurposed by the state to affirm its own universal authority to produce knowledge. I conclude that despite the partial inclusion of certain kinds of knowledge in state discourse, Correa's government continues to reproduce hierarchies that marginalize the authority of indigenous groups to actually produce it.

My research shows that in the process of securing rights for Pacha mama, indigenous intellectuals effectively validated a political system that undermined their own authority to “speak.” By appropriating dominant discourses to empower themselves, indigenous intellectuals effectively expanded socialist rhetoric to include references to “plurinationality,” without displacing the structures of thought that necessarily preclude recognition of this demand. Thus the presence of “plurinationality” and other indigenous knowledge in state discourse serves to evince Correa's claim that revolution has been achieved in Ecuador, while only partially addressing indigenous demands for recognition of different ways of knowing.

# Theory

My notion of hegemony is informed by contemporary dialogues in subaltern studies and amongst historians of Latin America. In response to Gayatri Spivak's famous question *Can the subaltern speak?*, I join authors such as John Beverley and Florencia Mallon to argue indeed they can: subaltern voices not only constitute hegemony, but can become hegemonic in their own right. Nevertheless, just because they can does not mean they enjoy equal capacity to do so; Walter Mignolo's work examines constructions of the colonial matrix of power to show that the capacity to speak is shaped by colonial difference. This changes the question, and raises others; *Must subaltern speech be "counter-hegemonic" in order to be considered speech?* I suggest not only that the subaltern (in the context of my research, indigenous intellectuals in the Andes) can speak, but — as part of a broader political project to achieve state recognition — sometimes do so in ways that actually reproduce hegemony. Rather than deny this phenomenon, I argue that it is more productive to ask why and how they choose to.

In her *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak argues that the figure of the "true" subaltern — conceived as the Third World woman, subalternized by simultaneous forces of patriarchy and imperialism — cannot speak. She argues, "Simply by being postcolonial or the member of an ethnic minority, we are not 'subaltern'.... When a line of communication is established between a member of subaltern groups and the circuits of citizenship or institutionality, the subaltern has been inserted into the long road to hegemony."<sup>37</sup> Spivak therefore distinguishes between the "true" subaltern, which is totally voiceless and cannot be heard or read in its own right; and

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<sup>37</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 310.

that which has been incorporated into hegemony. John Beverley summarizes her argument thus: “If the subaltern could speak — that is, speak in a way that really *mattered* to us, that we would feel compelled to listen to, then it would not be subaltern. Spivak is saying, in other words, that one of the things about being subaltern means not mattering, not being worth listening to.”<sup>38</sup> If this is true, then the subaltern ceases to be such as soon as it gains legitimacy and achieves inclusion in the dominant order. It becomes *not*-subaltern, or a political historical Subject. This makes Spivak’s notion of the subaltern “a ‘space’ or a ‘habitat’ that is *outside* of the [state] – that is, outside of (or below) hegemony.”<sup>39</sup>

According to this conceptualization, subalterneity is mutually incompatible with social and political inclusion; it is structurally impossible for the subaltern to speak. Under these circumstances, the subaltern must be represented by intellectuals belonging to the dominant order. In the context of my research this would mean that Ecuador has, in fact, achieved the maximum inclusion of indigenous knowledge and identities possible, and that elites are responsible for representing the interests of those groups who remain excluded from the dominant order. An even more inclusive state is impossible, because the subaltern cannot speak or represent itself.

Beverley disagrees. In his book *Latin Americanism after 9/11*, he uses the Haitian Revolution to question Spivak’s claim that subalterneity is a “position” mutually exclusive with political domination.<sup>40</sup> This would suggest that being subaltern, while perhaps coinciding with subor-

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<sup>38</sup> Beverley, *Testimonio*, 82.

<sup>39</sup> Beverley, *Latinamericanism after 9/11*, 119.

<sup>40</sup> He writes: “In the Haitian Revolution the slave-owning planter class became a subordinated group, in the sense that its own identity and interest were coercively negated – its plantations were confiscated, and many of the slave owners . . . were killed or forced into exile. Does that mean that the former slave owners became “subaltern”? In a narrow sense, yes. . . . But to insist on that point. . . . would seem to distort significantly the meaning and political valence of the idea of the subaltern.” Beverley, *Testimonio*, 112.

dination in many – if not most – instances, is in fact distinct from the notion of dominance. The subaltern is not a place, as Spivak argues, but rather an identity that can traverse political hierarchies. Despite its loss of control of the state, the planter class remained in control of what Walter Mignolo calls the “colonial matrix of power” (I return to this discussion below). Conversely, by the same logic the former Afro-Haitian slaves became dominant – or, as Beverley writes, “became the state” – while not ceasing to be subaltern. This is illustrated by the manner in which globally hegemonic states, such as the United States and countries of Western Europe, refused to recognize the legitimacy of the former slaves’ new government, instead enacting an economic blockade and threatening foreign military intervention against the new republic. The former slaves achieved dominance in Haiti without ceasing to be subaltern in the colonial hierarchy of power.

The political implications of Beverley’s argument for my research indicate that the subaltern can indeed speak: it becomes a question of how. Florencia Mallon conceives the subaltern to negotiate with, and therefore speak against, hegemony. She defines hegemony as an endpoint achieved through processes of negotiation:

First, hegemony is a set of nested, continuous processes through which power and meaning are contested, legitimated, and redefined at all levels of society... Second, hegemony is an actual endpoint, the result of hegemonic processes which have contributed to the emergence of a common social and moral project and allows those in power...to rule through a combination of coercion and consent.<sup>41</sup>

Mallon’s definition goes beyond the traditional Gramscian notion of hegemony as “rule through a combination of coercion and consent” by elaborating a distinctly Foucaultian understanding of power as existing “everywhere at all times.” By acknowledging the processes by which hegemo-

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<sup>41</sup> Florencia E. Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 6.

ny as an endpoint is established, Mallon creates space for narratives that have been traditionally excluded by “ex post facto” historical constructions whose “very purpose [is] to enshroud and bury the various and multitudinous debates and confrontations that had gone on before.”<sup>42</sup> Her work on the Liberal Revolution shows that subaltern voices were central to the conflictual process of constructing hegemony in postcolonial Mexico, which accounts for the incorporation of their demands for and definitions of citizenship and nation within dominant discourse. She claims that these processes of negotiation — which constitutively includes subaltern speech — in turn shaped what hegemony looked like as a final endpoint. Thus for Mallon, subaltern speech is by nature counter-hegemonic, articulated in negotiation (and therefore conflict) with hegemony.

Yet just because the subaltern can speak does not mean they have equal capacity to do so. Walter Mignolo’s work on the history of so-called “Western” modernity explores the historical construction of the colonial matrix of power,<sup>43</sup> to show that notions of modernity are inseparable from the logic of colonialism. He explains that the idea of “modernity” is founded on a double colonization of time and space: the “colonization of time, [which] was created by the Renaissance invention of the Middle Ages,” and the “colonization of space by the conquest of the New World.”<sup>44</sup> Together, these colonizations “located Europe as the point of reference of global history,”<sup>45</sup> placing societies in an imaginary chronological line of global linear time proceeding “from nature to culture, from barbarism to civilization following a progressive destination toward some

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<sup>42</sup> Mallon, *Peasant and Nation*, 3-4.

<sup>43</sup> Comprised of four interrelated domains: control of the economy, of authority, of gender and sexuality, and of knowledge and subjectivity. The colonial matrix achieved global hegemonic status between 1500 to date both through “the internal conflicts among imperial states, [as well as] between these states and their enslaved and exploited colonial subjects.” Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 8.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

point of arrival... in different temporalities, with Europe in the present and the rest in the past.”<sup>46</sup>  
In so doing, he explains, processes of knowledge-construction simultaneously established hierarchies across lines of race, class, and gender that today form the basis of modern society.

Mignolo shows that while the subaltern can indeed speak, their capacity to do so is limited by the colonial matrix of power. He refers to these differing and hierarchically limited capacities as the “colonial difference,” which privileges knowledge produced by some peoples, and according to certain methods, over others. In order to recognize the colonial difference in knowledge production, he calls for an analytic shift from the “enunciated” (the knowledge itself produced) to the “enunciation” (what he calls the “knowing,” or the process of knowledge production). For my research, the question of knowledge by and for whom is central to indigenous demands for plurinationality, as universalizing projects to consolidate state authority defeat the purpose for which the indigenous movement arose in the first place: to produce knowledge by and for the particular problems facing their communities in the twenty-first century.

I find an explanation of hegemony which constitutively includes the subaltern most compelling. If power is to be understood, in Foucaultian terms, as a “multiplicity of force relations”<sup>47</sup> (in other words, as a relational force that only exists when *exercised*, in action, between two or more people); and if no one is “outside” of these force relations (meaning, everyone is affected by power; no one is *not* affected by power), it would follow that the subaltern – much as any classed historical subject – is necessarily within the force relations of power. Simply because

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>47</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 92.



everyone is affected by power does not mean everyone has equal capacity to use it; nevertheless, it locates the subaltern decidedly within the limits of hegemony.

The question thus becomes, Must agency be counter-hegemonic in order to count as “speech”? Or can it be considered “speech” even as it reproduces hegemony? I find it interesting that, while each of the above authors articulates a different understanding of the subaltern’s role in shaping hegemony, they all share an assumption that subaltern speech must necessarily be exercised in a counter-hegemonic way. In no way do I intend to argue that subaltern voices cannot be used to articulate counter-hegemonic projects; I find these arguments compelling and crucial to understanding those subaltern projects whose needs and desires have not been met by hegemony. And yet, to assume that all subaltern speech is necessarily counter-hegemonic seems to me a sweeping generalization that warrants closer examination. Must agency necessarily be counter-hegemonic in order to be considered “agency”? In what ways — if at all — is agency limited or informed in its use?

It is important to acknowledge the political implications of this argument with respect to neoliberalism. If subaltern voices are necessarily constitutive of and included in hegemony, and if there is no clear distinction to be made between counter- and hegemonic speech, then subaltern agency must necessarily be employed in the construction of neoliberal hegemony. According to dominant narratives on the Left, this presents an irresolvable paradox: Why would subaltern groups contribute to the construction of a hegemonic order that explicitly privileges elite interests over their own? Are subaltern groups, in supporting a neoliberal regime, laboring under false consciousness? Rather than assume them to be “wrong” or “miseducated,” this thesis asks what can be learned from exploring how and why they speak as they do.

# Chapter I

## The Terms of Inclusion: Socialism evaluates indigenous knowledge for productivity

Pacha mama's presence in the new constitution results from nearly half a century of political organizing by indigenous groups. Prior to the 1970's indigenous politics in Ecuador were largely regional, with disparate groups in the Andes and the Amazon organizing to address community concerns locally.<sup>48</sup> The pan-Amazonian Confederation of Ecuadorian Indigenous Nationalities of the Amazon (CONFENIAE), founded in 1980, was among the first multilingual political organizations in the country.<sup>49</sup> Committed to "defending and valuing the cultures of the Indigenous nationalities in the Ecuadorian Amazon," CONFENIAE dedicated itself to building "only one national organization for the various Indigenous nationalities in the country."<sup>50</sup> To do so, it had to unify diverse classed and ethnic groups with differing political agendas.

Thanks to the concentrated efforts of CONFENIAE, fourteen indigenous nationalities from the coast, highlands, and Amazon came together on November 16, 1986 to form the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE). In the Sixteen Points,<sup>51</sup> CONAIE declared itself constitutively against neoliberal agendas harmful to indigenous interests. For the next two decades, CONAIE staged protests and made demands on behalf of indigenous commu-

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<sup>48</sup> Becker, *¡Pachakutik!*, 6.

<sup>49</sup> Andolina et al., *Indigenous Development*, 28.

<sup>50</sup> Becker, *¡Pachakutik!*, 5.

<sup>51</sup> A list of demands including: "Declaration of Ecuador as a plurinational state"; "Grants of land and legalization of territories for the nationalities"; and "Permanent funding of bilingual education"; along with the "Absolution of debts to FODERUMA and the National Development Bank" and "Freezing of consumer prices." CONAIE, "Gobierno contestó punto por punto los pedidos indigenas," *Hoy* (June 29, 1990): 5A.[http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/conaie/hoy\\_en.php](http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/conaie/hoy_en.php).

nities in Ecuador. The historical question of knowledge production was central to their movement: demands for a plurinational state were simultaneously understood to mean autonomy for indigenous communities and their ways of life. These demands directly conflicted with neoliberal agendas which sought to privatize the oil-export economy and legitimize the accumulation of wealth it generated.

When Correa announced his candidacy in the mid-2000's, hegemonic discourse had begun to shift to promote "social equality" and "citizen participation in politics," coinciding in part with indigenous demands for plurinationality. This political transformation created space for certain types of indigenous knowledge to be incorporated into a broader socialist political discourse. By 2008, indigenous political party Pachakutik had gained enough strength to secure four seats in the Constituent Assembly — enough to ensure Article ten affirming that "Nature will be the subject of those rights recognized by the Constitution."<sup>52</sup> While an historically significant achievement, this inclusion was not an unqualified victory. As Maya anthropologist Edgar Esquit notes, it also "represents the state's influence in the political definition of multiculturalism, identity, and rights."<sup>53</sup> Thus, while presence of indigenous knowledge in hegemonic discourse is undeniably the result of powerful and sustained indigenous movements, it also attests to the workings of multicultural neoliberalism.

This chapter explores simultaneous processes of in- and exclusion in Ecuador, asking which types of indigenous knowledge are deemed productive to socialist political projects, which are found unproductive, and why. In the first section I use oral histories from the highlands of Cañar to show that — contrary to claims that plurinationality has been achieved — some indige-

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<sup>52</sup> Ecuador Constitution, Title II, Chapter 1, Article 10.

<sup>53</sup> Esquit, "Nationalist Contradictions," 206.

nous knowledge remains excluded from the new socialist order. Oral histories, together with explanations of key terms and concepts, reveal the Andean world to be spiritually immanent; according to this logic, humans and nature comprise a single category of thought and reality. From this locus plurinationality is defined as official state recognition of epistemic difference, represented by political demands to protect nature as a subject of rights. The next section examines the historical construction of modern liberal political theory, which distinguishes humans from nature as separate categories of thought, to show that immanent conceptualizations of nature are literally un-thinkable to state actors. From this perspective, the epistemic framework shared by socialist and neoliberal political agendas rises to the fore of analysis; I show that despite major political differences, socialism and neoliberalism share a vision of an economic subject of rights that renders the “rights of nature” inconceivable. Thus, I claim, socialist hegemony — like neoliberalism — reproduces hierarchies that marginalize indigenous authority to produce knowledge. \

Finally, I use the 2008 constitution as a case study to show that — like neoliberalism — modern socialism considers all indigenous knowledge “unproductive” until it is stripped of spiritual and natural elements to fit within modern structures of thought. Once redefined, this knowledge is deemed “productive” to projects seeking to legitimize the redistribution of wealth generated by the oil-export industry, and are subsequently incorporated into official state discourse; the rest remains excluded, as it was under neoliberal rule. Thus indigenous knowledge is included within hegemonic discourse, while indigenous demands for the authority to produce knowledge remain largely unmet.

## A. The oil-export economy and the rise of indigenous politics

The indigenous movement in Ecuador arose primarily in response to the country's rising oil-export economy. Prior to the 1970's indigenous organizing in Ecuador was largely regional, with disparate groups in the Andes and the Amazon addressing local concerns at the community level.<sup>54</sup> But when Texaco discovered vast amounts of oil in a northern region of the Oriente<sup>55</sup> in 1967, the ecological impacts of extraction prompted the affected communities to form confederations to protect their lands and ways of knowing. In 1972 Ecuador completed its first cross-country pipeline: the Transnational-Ecuadorian Systemic Pipeline (SOTE). SOTE handled approximately 250,000 barrels of oil per day, and was built to prepare for the country's anticipated admission to OPEC.<sup>56</sup> That same year, indigenous communities in the Amazon came together to form the Movement of the Indigenous people of Ecuador (*Ecuador Runakunapak Rikcharimuy*, Ecuarrunari). It was the first indigenous group in Ecuador "with the intention of conjoining with indigenous communities of the Sierra"<sup>57</sup> to protest the damaging impacts of drilling at the national level. Following Ecuador's admission to OPEC, oil prices spiked; the boom lasted throughout the 1970's as prices rose from \$2.50 per barrel in 1972, to \$35.26 in 1980. During this time, oil revenues funded unprecedented state spending, which rose from 12 percent annual

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<sup>54</sup> Becker, *¡Pachakutik!*, 6.

<sup>55</sup> Consisting of two hundred square miles in the northern part of the Amazon, the Oriente is one of the most fragile ecosystems in the world, and home to eight indigenous communities.

<sup>56</sup> Patricia Widener, *Oil Injustice: Resisting and Conceding a Pipeline in Ecuador* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011), 16.

<sup>57</sup> Confederación de Pueblos de la Nacionalidad Kichwa del Ecuador (Ecuarrunari), "Historia de la Ecuarrunari," <http://www.llacta.org/organiz/ecuarrunari/>.

dly, increasing from 22 to 33 percent GNP in the following decade and eventually coming to supply nearly one-half of all government revenue.<sup>58</sup>

When the price of oil peaked in 1980, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE) formed to create the first multilingual political organization in the country. Committed to “defend and value the cultures of the Indigenous nationalities in the Ecuadorian Amazon” against the increasingly invasive extractive economy, CONFENIAE dedicated itself to building “only one national organization for the various Indigenous nationalities in the country.”<sup>59</sup> To so do, it had to unify diverse groups with differing political agendas: communities in the Amazon tended to be more concerned with oil exploitation and environmental issues, while highland groups focused primarily on land tenure and economic policies.<sup>60</sup> CONFENIAE itself addressed these challenges, asserting it “indispensable to unite the double dimension of our struggles” through recognition of “the double character of our problems: as members of a class and as part of different Indigenous nationalities.”<sup>61</sup>

In the early 1980’s Ecuador suffered an economic crisis brought on by the crash in world oil prices. By 1982 foreign debt had risen to 60 percent of GDP, prompting then-president Osvaldo Hurtado to proclaim that Ecuador “neither can nor should have continued to resort to eternal indebtedness... The age of petroleum prosperity has come to an end... It is necessary to begin an age of austerity.”<sup>62</sup> Structural adjustment programs designed to further increase the pro-

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<sup>58</sup> Allen Gerlach, *Indians, Oil, and Politics: A Recent History of Ecuador* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2003), 33.

<sup>59</sup> Becker, *¡Pachakutik!*, 5.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>62</sup> Osvaldo Hurtado, “Política Democrática,” *Editora Nacional* vol. I (1990): 1, quoted in Gerlach, *Indians, Oil, and Politics*, 33.

duction of oil, open the country to foreign investment and trade, and reduce the state's productive and distributive role marked the beginning of a new political era. Over the course of the 1980's and 1990's, policies intended to intensify exports, privatize public property, and cut government spending were also understood to increase foreign investment, boost the GNP, and improve governmental efficiency.

In the same decade, thanks to the concentrated efforts of CONFENAIE, fourteen indigenous nationalities from the coast, highlands, and Amazon came together to form the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE). In 1986 CONAIE announced its intent to “consolidate the indigenous peoples and nations of Ecuador, to fight for the land and indigenous territories, to fight for our own education (bilingual and intercultural), to fight against the oppression of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, to fight for the cultural identity of indigenous peoples, against colonialism and for the dignity for indigenous nations and peoples.”<sup>63</sup> At its first official congress, CONAIE founded the Scientific Institute of Indigenous Cultures (Instituto Científico de Culturas Indígenas, ICCI); later, CONAIE and ICCI would work together to create the first state-funded indigenous university in Latin America: the Universidad Intercultural Amawtay Wasi (UIAW).

For the next two decades, CONAIE advanced political demands on behalf of indigenous communities in Ecuador. It defined itself primarily against neoliberal economic policies, promoting a discourse of plurinationality and interculturality. In 1990 the organization issued its Sixteen Points (referenced above), and to commemorate the quincentenary of Columbus' arrival it set

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<sup>63</sup> Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador, “Quienes Somos,” <http://conaie.org/quienes-somos/>.

forth an agenda advocating indigenous autonomy over indigenous affairs.<sup>64</sup> In 1994 the group spearheaded a protest that effectively paralyzed the country for a week, blockading roads with boulders and trees to represent the emergence of indigenous actors on the national political stage. In 1995 CONAIE opted to engage in electoral politics, and formed the political party Pachakutik to nominate Luis Macas as candidate for president. Though unsuccessful in his bid, the mere fact of Macas' candidacy demonstrated the political strength of the indigenous movement during neoliberal rule.

Several years later another political movement began to unfold in response to neoliberal economic policies, commonly referred to as the *marea rosada*, or “pink tide” (discussed above). Between 1995 and 2005 the indigenous movement in Ecuador became increasingly incorporated into this broadly-defined *marea rosada*. In 1997, 2000, and 2005, CONAIE participated with a coalition of socialists, environmentalists, feminists, and other anti-neoliberal groups in a series of successful revolutions to overthrow the government. Leading up to the 2006 presidential elections, *Pachakutik* seriously considered forming an alliance with Rafael Correa and his Movimiento Alianza País (AP). His platform denounced “neoliberal globalization that would turn countries into markets, not nations,” and promoted five key points of a Citizen’s Revolution which called for: convening a constituent assembly, fighting corruption, opposing neoliberal economic policies, increasing state revenue for healthcare and education, and promoting Latin American regional integration.<sup>65</sup> Correa’s agenda overlapped with demands for plurinationality

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<sup>64</sup> Their call to action to indigenous peoples proclaimed: “We are still witnessing colonial aggression: The conquest of the Amazon today is very clear. This land is under assault in order to exploit its mineral resources ... The Indigenous people of the Amazon are confronting this conquest, and this is 1989. ... Thus October 12, 1992 presents a great opportunity not to celebrate, ...but rather to reflect upon 500 years of the European invasion and to formulate alternatives for a better life, in harmony with Nature and with human dignity.” NativeWeb, “Call to Action on the First Continental Meeting of Indigenous Peoples,” <http://www.nativeweb.org/papers/statements/quincentennial/first-cont.php>.

<sup>65</sup> Becker, *¡Pachakutik!*, 112.



advanced by the indigenous movement, prompting then-president of Ecuadorian Humberto Choleña to declare that “Correa coincides with our struggles.”<sup>66</sup> Originally defined by indigenous groups to mean “indigenous control of indigenous affairs,” demands for plurinationality came to belong to a broader socialist discourse promoting anti-imperialism and Latin American regional sovereignty as Correa entered into the struggle for hegemony.

The extent of coincidence between Correa and the indigenous movement was short-lived for a number of reasons. For one, Correa refused to dialogue with CONAIE according to indigenous principles of collective decision-making, instead preferring to approach individual leaders in attempt to broker a deal. Moreover in September 2005, he appeared uninvited at a *Pachakutik* congress to deliver a speech in Kichwa, where he offended delegates who interpreted his actions as a folklorization of their political concerns.<sup>67</sup> Yet despite increasingly apparent differences between Correa and the indigenous movement, the discourses they espoused were not entirely distinguishable from one another. Both groups sought to rewrite the constitution: Correa to grant himself more authority to rule, and indigenous groups to codify their demands in legislation. Both sought to reform neoliberal economic policies: Correa to question the legitimacy of wealth accumulation, and indigenous groups to question the logic of development itself. And both demanded social inclusion and equality — defined by Correa as the incorporation of “historically excluded groups” to the market, and by indigenous groups as access to state funding and resources for education. Although their political demands differed, the indigenous movement shared discourse with the Citizen’s Revolution which eventually allowed for it to be subsumed within a more loosely defined *marea rosada*.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 105.

Correa was elected president in 2007 with fifty seven percent of the vote. In his inaugural address he promised to leave behind the “long neoliberal night,” and to replace the market with a “solidarity economy” that placed “humans, not markets, at the center of development.”<sup>68</sup> In a gesture affirming this claim, he refused to sign an agreement allowing the IMF to monitor Ecuador's economic plan, and turned down a proposed free trade agreement with the United States in favor of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our América (ALBA), an international trade organization prioritizing poverty reduction and social inclusion. Moreover, Correa proposed to push constitutional reforms that would raise taxes on the revenues generated by oil exports to provide government subsidies and improve social services at the national level. Since taking office he has reformed and nationalized seventy-two percent of the country’s oil industry, and increased the national budget for health care, education, and subsidized housing.<sup>69</sup>

Correa intended the amendments of 2008 to represent the country’s official transformation from “repressive” neoliberal rule to “liberating” socialist governance. Yet just months prior to ratification, CONAIE broke ties with Correa’s administration. In a public statement the organization denounced “President Rafael Correa’s racist, authoritarian and antidemocratic statements, which violate the rights of [Indigenous] nationalities and peoples enshrined in international conventions and treaties. This constitutes an attack against the construction of a plurinational and intercultural democracy in Ecuador. Correa has assumed the traditional neoliberal posture of the rightist oligarchy.”<sup>70</sup> In this context of political rupture, I examine the 2008 constitution to ask which types of indigenous knowledge are deemed “productive” or “useful” to so-

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 112-113.

<sup>69</sup> Nicholas Kozloff, *Revolution!: South America and the Rise of the New Left* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 52-54.

<sup>70</sup> Denvir and Riofrancos, “CONAIE Indigenous Movement Condemns President Correa,” <http://alainet.org/active/24062&lang=es>.

cialist projects, which are considered “excessive” or “obstructive,” and why. I begin with an examination of the immanent Andean world to develop an understanding of political demands for interculturality and plurinationality, in order to argue (below) that they remain largely unmet.

## B. Introducing the Andean world: immanence as epistemic difference

The *urku yaya* are the owners of the mountains that surround indigenous communities in Cañar. They are “the gods of old that ruled during the period of the first creation, whose power diminished – without disappearing completely – after the cataclysm that is reported to have preceded the current period.”<sup>71</sup> This epoch, explains anthropologist Rosaleen Howard-Malverde, was “characterized by the fact that trees, stones, and mountains had the gift of speech.”<sup>72</sup> As discussed above, speech can be understood in terms of agency, or the capacity to think and act as a sentient historical subject.

The *urku yaya* are known throughout the Andean sierra, from Ecuador to Bolivia and Peru. Oral histories transcribed by a French anthropologist in 1906<sup>73</sup> describe a sexual division of the mountains into masculine and feminine beings; presently in Cañar, “it is said that *tayta Buerán* is the lover of *mama Zhinzhuna* (a neighboring mountain).”<sup>74</sup> Contemporary sources also explain why some mountains possess fewer natural resources than others: “The *urku yaya* who were sleeping at the moment of distribution arrived late, and so received little in terms of

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<sup>71</sup> Rosaleen Howard-Malverde, *Dioses y Diablos: Tradición oral de Cañar Ecuador* (Paris: Amerindia, 1981), 25.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> P. Rivet, “Le christianisme et les Indiens de la République de l’Equateur,” *L’Anthropologie* vol. 17 (1906): 81-101, quoted in Howard-Malverde, *Dioses y Diablos*, 25.

<sup>74</sup> Howard-Malverde, *Dioses y Diablos*, 25.

vegetation and sources of water.”<sup>75</sup> In the Andes, masculine mountains are thought to contain gold in the form of agricultural products of the sierra: corn, other grains, and tubers; while *urku mama* are the guardians of goods from the *yunga* (“tierras calientes,” or “hot lands”) – also of gold: yucca, oranges, sugarcane, and bananas.<sup>76</sup>

In Cañar indigenous groups continue to tell the story of el Charún Yaya. The introduction to Howard-Malverde’s compilation *Dioses y Diablos: Tradición oral de Cañar Ecuador* analyzes this story for themes of human sacrifice and reciprocity, explaining it as a “metaphorical expression of the old custom of sacrificing newborn and unbaptized children to the mountain.”<sup>77</sup> In the context of my research, el Charún Yaya exemplifies “the facile passage between the human and the natural worlds [that] is a bedrock of indigenous culture,”<sup>78</sup> to show that indigenous epistememes conceive humans and nature to comprise the same category of thought and reality.

Throughout the narrative, el Charún Yaya — the “keeper of the mountain” — speaks and interacts with a human woman and her child. Kinship ties are formed through the baptism of the baby girl; Howard-Malverde notes that, in accordance with the reciprocal obligations this relationship implies, “this explains the gifts the mountain gives to the woman, and also the fact that in the end he claims for himself the godchild and mother, considering that she had not completed her obligations [in return].”<sup>79</sup> The story concludes with both woman and child turning into elements from nature: the baby becomes a hill of corn, and the woman turns into a bush. Through-

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>78</sup> Barbara Schroder, “Developing Intercultural Science Education in Ecuador,” *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, Vol. 2, Issue 1 (2008): 38.

<sup>79</sup> Howard-Malverde, *Dioses y Diablos*, 26.

out the narrative, both “keeper of the mountain” and human actors transcend or exceed conceptual boundaries that distinguish humans from nature.

Though clearly not human, neither are Charún and the *urku yaya* inert objects from nature. They are sentient natural beings that de la Cadena calls earth-beings: “Other-than-human beings such as animals, plants, and the landscape; the latter [of which] is composed of a constellation of sentient entities known as tirakuna, or earth-beings with individual physiognomies more or less known by individuals involved in interactions with them.”<sup>80</sup> Throughout the Andes, humans conceive earth-beings through an epistemic framework that considers spiritual and material worlds to be immanent. “For Quechuas,” Mignolo explains, “more-than-human phenomena (including human beings) were conceived as Pacha mama; and, in this conception, there was not, and there is not today, a distinction between ‘nature’ and ‘culture.’ Quechuas saw themselves *in* it, not separated *from* it. As such, culture was nature and nature was (and is) culture.”<sup>81</sup> Spanish anthropologist Antonio Luis Hidalgo-Capitán surmises: “Indigenous peoples understand nature, with a holistic perspective, as a living entity that encompasses everything, including human beings. Nature is life and life exists in all the elements of nature.”<sup>82</sup>

Nina Pacari, Kichwa sociologist and former magistrate of the Constitutional Court of Ecuador, explains Andean understandings of nature in terms of *samai*, the energy that imbues all beings with life.

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<sup>80</sup> Marisol de la Cadena, “Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes: Conceptual Reflections beyond Politics,” *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 25, Issue 2 (2010): 341-342.

<sup>81</sup> Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 11.

<sup>82</sup> Antonio Luis Hidalgo-Capitán, Alejandro Guillén García, and Nancy Deleg Guazha, *Sumak Kawsay Yuyay: Antología del Pensamiento Indigenista Ecuatoriano sobre Sumak Kawsay* (Huelva y Cuenca: Universidad de Huelva, 2014), 56.

All the beings of nature are imbued with the energy of Samai and, consequently, are bestowed with life: the rock, the river (water), the mountain, the sun, the plants, all [such] beings have life... We are all part of a whole; and despite being distinct, we are complementary; we need each other mutually.<sup>83</sup>

Pacari understands the concept of “life” to arise from the complementarity of natural elements — including rocks, rivers, and human beings — as each depends mutually on the others in order to exist. According to this logic, humans are but another element in a world comprised of elements from nature; the category “life” encompasses all these elements in their interactive complementarity.

Nature has many translations in Quechua. In its comprehensive (holistic) entirety, nature is most commonly referred to as “Pacha mama.” Ariruma Kowii, former sub-secretary of indigenous education, distinguishes between this concept and the elements that comprise it: he explains that “Pacha mama,” or “the spirit of all nature or the universe,” encompasses “the spirits of fire (*Nina*), water (*Yaku*), wind (*Wayra*) and earth (*Allpa*).” As such, Kowii distinguishes between nature “as the universe, which is Pacha mama, or mother of the universe,” and nature “as land or territory, [which] is also ‘*Allpa Mama*,’ or mother earth.”<sup>84</sup> This distinction speaks to the myriad conceptualizations of nature in the Andean world, and also to the difficulty of translating them intelligibly into Spanish.

Luis Macas, former president of CONAIE and rector of UIAW, describes the theoretical framework behind indigenous understandings of nature in the publication *Yachaykuna (Saberes)*.

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<sup>83</sup> Nina Pacari Vega, “Naturaleza y territorio desde la mirada de los pueblos indígenas,” *Derechos de la Naturaleza: El futuro es ahora*, ed. Alberto Acosta et al (2009): 32-33, quoted in Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 56.

<sup>84</sup> Ariruma Kowii, “El Sumak Kawsay,” *Revista Electrónica Aportes Andinos* (2009): <http://www.uasb.edu.ec/User-Files/369/File/PDF/CentrodeReferencia/Tem asdeanalisis2/buenvivirysumakkawsay/articulos/Kowii.pdf>, quoted in Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 56.

He explains that conceptually, indigenous communities “do not provoke a rupture with Pachamama”; that “even today, they conceive and live as part of her.”

Human beings are the product of living together in society, but as such, we are the result of forms of living together with Nature... Pachamama is the very construction of life itself, which is why the fundamental axis of our struggle is to defend and protect life. We are the civilization of life and for life.<sup>85</sup>

Macas' definition of Pachamama complicates the notion of nature as a subject of political rights: for not only is nature non-human; it is not an individual, either. Rather, as Macas explains, Pachamama is a process: “the very construction of life itself.” This definition complicates the relationship between humans and nature discussed thus far — not only do humans and nature reproduce life together, but the former is also responsible for defending and caring for the latter.

Indigenous anthropologist Atawallpa Oviedo further elaborates the relationship between humans and nature. He explains their respective roles in economic terms, with nature as the “producer” and humans the “cultivators” of life.

Mother Earth is the producer of everything... the human being is just the cultivator of all that exists and makes life. That is to say, the human being is just one more element in the cycle of life, and as such is neither at the center nor at the end of life; [existing] neither to accumulate wealth (capitalism), nor for equality (socialism) between men, but rather to reactivate our individual consciousness to a total consciousness, being able to live together and share in harmony with the Everything (holism).<sup>86</sup>

Oviedo translates immanent understandings of the human-nature relationship using an economic discourse (describing the role of nature as the “producer” of everything), while at the same time distancing notions of *sumak kawsay* from both capitalist and socialist secular agendas. He emphasizes nature's spiritual immanence: not just sentient, the “everything” that is Nature is holistic

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<sup>85</sup> Luis Macas, “El Sumak Kawsay,” *Revista Yachaykuna (Saberes)* No. 13 (2010): 19.

<sup>86</sup> Atawallpa Oviedo, “Qué es el Sumakawsay: Más allá del socialismo y el capitalismo,” *Sumak Ediciones* (2011): <http://vamosacambiarelmundo.info/wp-content/uploads/documentos/queeselsamakawsay.pdf>, quoted in Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 54.

and sacred. Accordingly, he does not conceive nature to exist as a resource for human use and exploitation; but rather views humanity to exist as guardians of all living nature.

Given that humans and nature create life together, Andean conceptualizations of the term “community” include both human and non-human beings. In Quechua, the term *allyu* elicits the relations between human- and non-human beings that interact in a given territory.<sup>87</sup> Indigenous schoolteacher Justo Oxa explains that “the community, the *allyu*, is not only a territory where a group of people live; it is more than that.”

It is a dynamic space where the whole community of beings that exist in the world lives; this includes humans, plants, animals, the mountains, the rivers, the rain, etc. All are related like a family. It is important to remember that this place [the community] is not where we are from, it is who we are. For example, I am not *from* Huantura, I *am* Huantura.<sup>88</sup>

For Oxa, notions of “community” that do not include “the whole community of beings that exist in the world” are insufficient for understanding *allyu*. As with the rights of Pacha mama, political demands for collective rights are complicated by the fact that indigenous conceptualizations of “community” exceed the bounds of Western understandings of the term.

The life processes and interactions between human and natural beings are described in an indigenous philosophy of life called *sumak kawsay*. Often translated in official state discourse as “el buen vivir” or “the good life,” *sumak kawsay* can be defined as a form of living in harmony with nature and other human beings. “It supports principles of social equality and environmental sustainability,” notes Hidalgo-Capitán, “and is characterized by the relevance it gives to the self-determination of indigenous peoples in the construction of *sumak kawsay*, as with spiritual ele-

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<sup>87</sup> de la Cadena, “Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes,” 353.

<sup>88</sup> Justo Oxa, “Vigencia de la Cultura Andina en la Escuela,” in *Arguedas y el Perú de Hoy*, ed. Carmen María Pinilla (Lima: SUR, 2004), 239, quoted in de la Cadena, “Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes,” 354.



ments of Andean cosmovision (Pachamama and other divinities, spirits, myths, and rites of indigenous cultures).”<sup>89</sup>

*Sumak kawsay* is comprised of two distinct concepts. “Sumak means plentitude, grandeur, fairness, completeness, superiority. Kawsay is life in permanent realization, dynamic and changing; it is the interaction of all of existence in movement; ... As such, Kawsay is *estar siendo* (to be being).”<sup>90</sup> Given that life can only be sustained by a reciprocal relationship between sentient nature and humans-as-caretakers, the notion of *sumak kawsay* necessarily relies on structures of thought that “do not provoke a rupture” between humans and Pacha mama. *Sumak kawsay* cannot be conceived in habits of thought that distinguish humans from nature as separate categories of thought and being.

In the late twentieth century, indigenous groups began to articulate political demands for *sumak kawsay* in terms of “interculturality,” understood as a radical alternative to neoliberal multiculturalism. Luis Maldonado, Kichwa philosopher and political scientist, explains:

It is important to stress ... that without recognition of diversity, intercultural relations cannot exist. ...[W]ithout the recognition of constituent historical subjects, there cannot be intercultural relations, because interculturality is the interrelation of subjects who, within the framework of the plurinational state, establish relations of equality to overcome relations of domination.<sup>91</sup>

Conceived through the lens of *sumak kawsay*, interculturality implies reciprocal relations of power, balance, and harmony. Whereas neoliberal multiculturalism represents a “cultural project [of the state] that responds to indigenous demands while containing them in a broader neoliberal

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<sup>89</sup> Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 29.

<sup>90</sup> Macas, “El Sumak Kawsay,” 23.

<sup>91</sup> Luis Maldonado, “Interculturalidad y políticas públicas en el marco del Buen Vivir,” in *Salud, interculturalidad y derechos: claves para la reconstrucción del Sumak Kawsay — Buen Vivir*, ed. Gerardo Fernández-Juárez (Quito: Ministry of Public Health, 2010): <http://es.scribd.com/doc/53200935/SALUD-INTERCULTURALIDAD-2010>, quoted in Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 215.

order,”<sup>92</sup> Maldonado and other intellectuals explain that interculturalism “seek[s] more than a cross-cultural encounter framed by hegemonic relations... Its objective is to create new horizontal relationships within a pluralist state.”<sup>93</sup>

Political demands for *sumak kawsay* have also been articulated using a discourse of “plurinationality.” Although intellectuals have yet to agree on a comprehensive definition of the term, Macas’ description incorporates many common themes. He defines it as

a profound transformation of society, of the political, economic and cultural systems, towards the application and validity of the true Sumak Kawsay, of the Rights of Pachamama, and of the authority of the territorial community governments as legitimate political-judicial representatives, which permits collective and consensual decision-making to organize and plan the communitarian way of life that is el Buen Vivir of society and the current world in crisis.<sup>94</sup>

In an article titled “The Political Need for an Epistemic Reconstruction of Ancestral Knowledge,” he expands this definition to address knowledge production, asking “Is it possible to recognize other forms of constructing knowledge? If so, how do we validate them?”<sup>95</sup> He contends that plurinationality would “allow for the possibility to speak not only of cultural and ethnic diversity, but also historical diversity,” particularly regarding indigenous history. “It is fundamentally necessary to understand that [plurinationality] is not just a discourse to justify diver-

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<sup>92</sup> Hale, “Does Multiculturalism Menace?,” 493.

<sup>93</sup> “[Multiculturalism] poses a threat to pluralism insofar as it promotes a simple tolerance for ethnic minorities, fostering their participation in an electoral system that dilutes their impact upon the nation. By contrast, interculturalism (on paper, at least) seeks new forms of establishing conditions of equality and consensus by enhancing the contents of minority voices. The objectives of interculturalism transcend those of multiculturalism because interculturalists seek more than a cross-cultural encounter framed by hegemonic relations. Their objective is to create new horizontal relationships within a pluralist state.” Joanne Rappaport and Alberado Ramos Pacho, “Collaboration and Historical Writing: Challenges for the Indigenous-Academic Dialogue,” in *Decolonizing Native Histories: Collaboration, knowledge, and language in the Americas*, ed. Florencia E. Mallon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 126-127.

<sup>94</sup> Macas, “El Sumak Kawsay,” 12.

<sup>95</sup> Macas, “The political need for an epistemic reconstruction of ancestral knowledge,” 40.

sity. Diversity is there and always has been.”<sup>96</sup> Macas insists that indigenous groups must engage in two struggles – one political, the other epistemological – to affect change. In sum, he defines the plurinational state as a “reformation of the [dominant] economic system, the elimination of exploitation, the incorporation of other rationalities to the currently prevailing economic rationality that threatens the physical destruction of our planet.”<sup>97</sup> To achieve equality, the plurinational state necessarily entails a reformation of democracy “to express the existence of the Other.”<sup>98</sup>

In 2008 Correa claimed to have achieved these demands, officially declaring Ecuador a plurinational state. The following section questions this claim. By tracing the history of modern liberal political theory, I explore the epistemic framework shared by both neoliberal and socialist forms of government that distinguishes “humans” from “nature” as distinct categories of thought, and prohibits immanent conceptualizations of “nature” from the realm of politics. I examine the shared epistemic hierarchies between distinct neoliberal and socialist agendas, both of which celebrate an economic (i.e. anthropocentric) subject of rights. In the chapter’s concluding case study, I show that — despite the selective inclusion of some indigenous knowledge — demands for state recognition of epistemic difference and indigenous authority to produce knowledge remain largely unmet, as they were during neoliberal rule.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 37-38.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 38.

## C. The liberal political theory that banned nature from politics

“Earth-beings are contentious,” de la Cadena argues, “because their presence in politics disavows the separation between ‘Nature’ and ‘Humanity’ on which the political theory our world abides by was historically founded.”<sup>99</sup> She elaborates how political and epistemic processes beginning in the 17th century which “sought to secularize life and produce knowledge outside of the sphere of influence of the church”<sup>100</sup> resulted in the creation of two regimes: that of Nature, and that of Culture.

In the first are plants, animals, and minerals, also physical and chemical energies, and [other material] things. In ‘culture’ are men; they make history, politics, and knowledge... In the process they create connections between nature and culture, but to be able to create these connections they maintain these two spaces ontologically separate, and negate the connections that they themselves create.<sup>101</sup>

She explains that while “men” engage in simultaneous processes of intermingling (in the form of “inventions”) and separation between these two categories, they only admit to processes of separation or “purification,” which reify nature and culture as distinct categories of thought. Importantly, she maintains, “the separation is epistemological, and as such, *we have never been* (ontologically) modern.”<sup>102</sup> Mignolo affirms that “between the concept of nature and the concept of Pachamama... there is no entity that is ‘better’ understood as one or the other... Thus the ques-

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<sup>99</sup> de la Cadena, “Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes,” 342.

<sup>100</sup> de la Cadena, “Anterioridades y externalidades,” 3.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> It is worth noting that de la Cadena herself assumes a distinction between the “epistemological” and “ontological,” thus creating a binary between categories of thought and reality even as she considers them to be “not-real.” de la Cadena, “Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes,” 342.

tion is not so much where do we ‘file’ nature as what are the issues that emerge from ... its control and management.”<sup>103</sup>

When the Jesuit Father José de Acosta first published his *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* in 1590, European Christians believed that “understanding nature was tantamount to understanding its creator, God.”<sup>104</sup> As in the Andean world, European Christians believed that an inherent connection existed between nature and spirituality; but whereas Andean thinkers viewed the two to be immanent, comprising the same category of thought and reality, Europeans understood this relationship to be transcendent, viewing the phenomenon “nature” in contradistinction to “culture” and conceiving it as external to the human subject. Thus, Mignolo explains, “The initial moment of the colonial revolution was to implant the Western concept of nature and to rule out the Quechua concept of Pachamama.”<sup>105</sup> Twenty years after Acosta, Sir Francis Bacon published the *Novum Organum* (1620), in which he claimed that “nature” was “there” to be dominated by man. In the period before the Industrial Revolution, “European Christians asserted their control over knowledge about nature by disqualifying all coexisting and equally valid concepts of nature, ... [and] by disqualifying and ignoring concepts that contradicted their own understanding of it.”<sup>106</sup>

Once “nature” became an established concept in secular thought, its meaning changed. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution nature came to refer primarily to

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<sup>103</sup> Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 10.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

the source of natural resources (charcoal, oil, gas) that fueled the machines of the Industrial Revolution; that is, “nature” became a repository of objectified, neutralized, and largely inert materiality that existed for the fulfillment of the economic goals of the “masters” of the materials... The mutation of nature into natural resources in the West was a sign of progress and modernization and at the same time a sign that other civilizations stagnated and were falling behind.<sup>107</sup>

As Europeans began to understand “man as the master and owner of nature,” they constructed epistemic hierarchies that “divided humanity into races, situating some groups closer to culture and farther from nature (dominating it), and others farther from culture and closer to nature, being dominated by it.”<sup>108</sup> Emergent theories of social evolution served to de-humanize civilizations deemed too close to, and hence “dominated by,” nature.

In the 1660’s a debate between Thomas Hobbes (author of *Leviathan*) and Robert Boyle, champion of the “experiment” as scientific method, bolstered this distinction between humans and nature. The outcome established science as the domain for objective representation of nature, and politics as the negotiation of power to represent people vis-a-vis the state.<sup>109</sup> Science historians Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer assert that the quarrel arose over a disagreement in proper methodology for producing knowledge: Hobbes denied the truth of Boyle’s experiment due to its private nature, and Boyle insisted that experiments could not have the public aspect that should characterize politics. According to Shapin and Schaffer, this quarrel “served as an important historical moment in the invention of the language that lifted ‘politics’ from ‘science’ ... Rather than creating two separate spheres — Boyle science and Hobbes politics — what they did together (through their quarrel) was to create our modern world.”<sup>110</sup> Hobbes and Boyle were, thus, “like a pair of Founding Fathers, acting in concert to promote one and the same innovation in

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>108</sup> de la Cadena, “Anterioridades y externalidades,” 7.

<sup>109</sup> de la Cadena, “Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes,” 342.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

political theory: the representation of citizens belongs to politics, but politics is not allowed to have any relation to the nonhumans produced and mobilized by science and technology.”<sup>111</sup>

Thus modern liberal political theory is founded on a logic of development which elevates “humans” over “nature” along a graduated civilizational scale according to which “civilized man” belongs to the realm of politics; “uncivilized/primitive man” is dominated by nature; and nature itself belongs to the realm of objective science. “Together,” de la Cadena explains, “these antitheses — between humanity and nature, and between allegedly superior and inferior humans — declared the gradual extinction of other-than-human beings and the worlds in which they existed... Instead a single world appeared, inhabited by many peoples (now we call them cultures) more or less distanced from a single ‘Nature.’”<sup>112</sup> This hierarchization of knowledge, which came to attain global hegemony over the course of the past five hundred years, rendered immanent conceptualizations of sentient nature literally inconceivable. As de la Cadena notes, “The *unthinkable* is not the result of ‘absences’ in the evolution of knowing; it is the result of [existing categories] that give it shape, making some categories thinkable and those that challenge them *unthinkable*.”<sup>113</sup> Immanent Andean understandings of nature challenge dominant structures of thought, which know nature as objectified, neutralized, inert materiality, and thus transcend the jurisdiction of science as the domain for objective representation of nature.

Since both ideologies belong to this modern liberal political genealogy, socialism and neoliberalism both subscribe to this logic of development. As such, both forms of governance rationalize the exploitation of natural resources to benefit human society. As this logic is unable to

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<sup>111</sup> de la Cadena, “Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes,” 342.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 346.

<sup>113</sup> de la Cadena, “Anterioridades y externalidades,” 12.

conceive “nature” as spiritually immanent, both share a vision of a subject of rights that is economic, not natural. Although Correa portrays neoliberal development as “market-centered,” presenting his own model as “human-centered” by comparison, in reality both economies are human-centered: their divergence lies in the legitimate distribution of wealth amongst human subjects. While neoliberal projects seek to justify the accumulation of wealth, socialist agendas promote its redistribution to society at large; nevertheless, both governments privilege the “consumer’s indispensable capacity to consume.”<sup>114</sup> Narratives that portray neoliberal development as repressive and “market-centered” therefore obscure the fact that socialism shares with its economic (anthropocentric) subject of rights, and thus fails to interrupt the hierarchies in knowledge such logic creates.

Indigenous knowledge has achieved hegemonic status in Ecuador in part because Correa’s government selectively incorporates certain discourses deemed “productive” to his political agenda, in attempt to distance socialist political economies from neoliberal models of development. In order to seem “productive” to socialist standards, and thus attain a measure of inclusion in official state discourse, indigenous concepts must first be stripped of spiritual immanence to fit within dominant categories of thought that differentiate humans from nature, which legitimize economic models founded on the exploitation of natural resources. Second, “productive” indigenous discourses must affirm and validate political agendas to redistribute wealth and access to material resources, which legitimize Correa’s right to rule. Knowledge that meets both of these criteria gets incorporated into official state discourse, to evince Ecuador’s successful transition to plurinationality and legitimize claims that indigenous political concerns have been met.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 3.



In the final section of chapter one, I use the 2008 constitution as a case study to show that Pacha mama, the *urku yaya*, and other immanent beings from nature remain largely excluded from socialist rule, as their right to exist conflicts with (human) citizens' right to benefit from the wealth generated by the extractive economy. At the same time, I show that *sumak kawsay* — specifically translated as “el buen vivir,” and defined in terms of material wealth — is welcomed into official state discourse precisely because it has been stripped of immanence, and affirms socialist discourses which promote equality and the redistribution of wealth.

#### D. The Rights of Pacha mama versus the Right to Buen Vivir: Which knowledge is “productive” to modern socialism?

The preamble of the 2008 constitution begins: “We, the sovereign people of Ecuador.... celebrating nature, the Pacha Mama, of which we are a part and which is vital to our existence.... decide to construct a new form of living together.”<sup>115</sup> This statement marks the first of two appearances made by Pachamama throughout the document; the next proclaims “Nature, or Pacha mama, where life is reproduced and sustained, has the right to complete respect for its existence and the maintenance and regeneration of its vital cycles, structures, functions and evolutionary processes.”<sup>116</sup> In both instances, the modern secular term “nature” appears first; only then does the constitution recognize “Pacha mama” as an immanent being. The order of appearance privileges secular notions of nature as a material object, and marginalize its conceptualization as a political subject of rights. Even when it references “Pachamama” directly, the constitution de-

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<sup>115</sup> Ecuador Constitution, Preamble.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., Title VII, Chapter 2, Article 71.

scribes it as a territory or place (“where” life reproduces itself), rather than a being or a process (“who/which” reproduces life).<sup>117</sup> It makes no mention of the *urku yaya*, *tirakuna*, or any other natural beings from the Andean world; they are conspicuous only by their absence.

By contrast, the constitution refers to “nature” over forty times. For example, Article ten assures that “people, communities, groups, nationalities, and collectives are the holders of rights and will enjoy those rights guaranteed in the Constitution. Nature will be a subject of those rights recognized by the Constitution.”<sup>118</sup> Even as it purports to acknowledge “nature” as the subject of rights, the syntax of the article separates natural beings from the human configurations of “people, communities, and nationalities,” who are the “holders of constitutional rights.” Rather than conceive nature and humans as both sentient subjects of rights — as per indigenous demands — Article ten privileges the rights of humans over the rights of nature, as demonstrated by their categorization into sequential sentences. Consistently throughout, the constitution privileges human rights over those of nature, and defines the concept in modern liberal terms of objective materiality rather than sentient spirituality.

Thus the constitution promises to protect nature not for the sake of nature as a living being, but rather as a quantifiable material good to which human beings should have access as part of their universal rights as humans. Article fourteen of a chapter titled the “Rights to Buen Vivir” recognizes the peoples’ right

to live in a healthy and ecologically balanced environment, that guarantees sustainability and “el buen vivir,” *sumak kawsay*. It is declared in the public interest to preserve the environment, to conserve the ecosystems, the biodiversity and the integrity of the genetic patrimony of the country, the prevention of environmental harm and the recuperation of degraded natural spaces.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Recall Oxa’s definition of *allyu* (above): He is not *from* Huantura, he *is* Huantura.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, Title II, Chapter 1, Article 10.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 2, Section 2, Article 14.

The purpose of protecting nature — again defined in modern liberal terms as an “environment,” an “ecosystem,” and “biodiversity,” rather than Pacha mama — is not because it has a right to exist as a political subject, but because an “ecologically balanced environment” is a matter of public interest. Among their rights as humans, the citizens of Ecuador deserve access to a healthy, sustainable living environment, defined by the state as “el buen vivir, sumak kawsay.” Again the terms’ order of appearance hierarchizes these conceptualizations, as modern (imperial) language appears first, followed by indigenous terminology. The article does not protect nature’s right to exist; but rather protects nature as a material good that can and should be exploited to satisfy the consumptive capacity of humans.

This legal contradiction emerges most explicitly in Title Seven, which outlines the Regime of Buen Vivir. Article 395 articulates the state’s paradoxical promise to simultaneously protect the rights of nature and facilitate citizens’ access to the wealth generated from its exploitation in “the following environmental principles”:

The state will guarantee a sustainable model of development, environmentally balanced and respectful of cultural diversity, which conserves biodiversity and the capacity for natural regeneration of ecosystems, and assures the satisfaction of the needs of present and future generations.<sup>120</sup>

The state avoids this contradiction discursively by pledging to protect nature as a material object, the exploitation of which ensures human wellbeing. Although it promises to be “respectful of cultural diversity,” the article does not abandon the anthropocentric logic of development that considers “man” master and owner of nature. While the language of the article purports to satisfy

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., Section 1, Article 395.

its obligation to protect nature, it does so according to modern liberal definitions of the term — thus reproducing epistemic hierarchies even as it claims to have “solved” them.

Moreover, the state draws from indigenous concepts and discourse to justify its own self-appointed authority both to manage development and define the meaning of the term “nature.” Article 276 states “in order to achieve *el buen vivir*, it will be the general responsibility of the state ... to direct, plan, and regulate the process of development.” The following article grants the state authority to:

construct an economic system that is fair, democratic, productive, supportive and sustainable based on the egalitarian distribution of the benefits of development, of the means of production... [and] to maintain a healthy and sustainable environment that guarantees to citizens and collectivities equal, permanent and quality access to water, air, and soil, and to the benefits of subsoil resources and national heritage.<sup>121</sup>

The state explicitly grants citizens, as part of their human rights, access to “the benefits of subsoil resources” from nature; the extraction of which the state will manage and control; and which at the same time violate the rights of Pacha mama — also guaranteed by the state. Thus the state uses indigenous knowledge to legitimize its “sustainable” model for development, the anthropocentric logic of which nevertheless reproduces hierarchies that marginalize the political purchase of indigenous demands for recognition.

Correa found even this limited inclusion of the rights of nature obstructive to his political goals. During the eight-month convention of the Constituent Assembly, he blamed an “infantile” coalition of environmentalists, leftists, and indigenous activists for the “intrusion” of Pacha mama, claiming that it represented “the worst danger for the Ecuadorian political process.”<sup>122</sup> He

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., Title VI, Chapter 1, Article 277.

<sup>122</sup> Pablo P. Ospina, “Las demandas indígenas en el proceso constituyente,” *Tendencia: Revista de abálisi político* (2007): 102-105, quoted in Becker, *¡Pachakutik!*, 150.

further insisted that such “barbarous mistakes” would need to be corrected before the constitution would be ready for public referendum.<sup>123</sup> Such corrections did not occur, and the constitution passed with “excessive” indigenous demands (at least partially) included. Following the new constitutional amendments, Correa’s government nationalized seventy-two percent of the oil industry’s productive capacity, and pledged to increase export production. The oil sector currently accounts for more than half of Ecuador’s export earnings, and approximately two-fifths of public sector revenues.<sup>124</sup>

Ecuador’s continued dependence on oil has brought the Correa administration into direct conflict with the indigenous movement, which continues to protest on behalf of Pachamama. Brazilian anthropologist Salvador Schavelzon cites one notable case of conflict, the Yasuni-ITT initiative (2007-2013), as exemplary of a trend in which “the government proposes socialist policies with the support of the majority, but ultimately cedes to capitalist impulses with respect to traditional models of development, which place a parenthesis around the constitutional innovations that had called the attention of the world.”<sup>125</sup>

The Yasuní-ITT<sup>126</sup> initiative, proposed just months after Correa assumed office, promised not to drill for the estimated 846 million barrels of petroleum located in Yasuní National Park — on the condition that the international community agree to pay Ecuador half the estimated value

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<sup>123</sup> “Correa observa ‘barbaridades,’” *El Comercio*, July 23, 2008, 3.

<sup>124</sup> US Energy Information Administration, *Ecuador: International energy data and analysis* (EIA 2015): [https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis\\_includes/countries\\_long/Ecuador/Ecuador.pdf](https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis_includes/countries_long/Ecuador/Ecuador.pdf).

<sup>125</sup> Salvador Schavelzon, *Plurinacionalidad y Vivir Bien/Buen Vivir: Dos conceptos leídos desde Bolivia y Ecuador post-constituyentes* (Quito: Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales, 2015), 65-66.

<sup>126</sup> ITT refers to the indigenous communities living in Yasuní National Park: Ishpingo, Tiputini, and Tambococha. *Ibid.*, 66.

of the oil (\$3.6 billion).<sup>127</sup> Yasuní is one of the most ecologically diverse places on earth, and home to three uncontacted indigenous communities. In his draft of the proposal, National Secretary of Planning and Development René Ramírez emphasized the importance of “non-accumulation” and of “the value of doing nothing” in the face of capital accumulation, thereby opposing traditional models of development associated with capitalism and environmental destruction. Instead, Ramírez claimed, the primary objective of the initiative was “the construction of a different relationship between humans and nature, and the valorization of a biodiversity not monetarily quantifiable.”<sup>128</sup>

Six years and \$13 million later, Correa officially announced an end to this historic initiative. In a public statement he declared the resources in Yasuní to be “destined to satisfy the needs of the population, particularly to change the matrix of energy of the country, and [to promote] research, science, and technology.”<sup>129</sup> Schavelzon observes that “the arguments presented by Correa were interesting: his decree stated that the rights of nature and the citizens to live in a healthy environment did not guarantee the continuation of the initiative... It also mentioned that the state requires resources to combat and overcome poverty, and that the Decentralized Autonomous Governments of the Amazonian peoples [living in Yasuní] would be co-partners in the benefits of eventual petroleum exploitation.”<sup>130</sup> In a televised interview Correa blamed the international community for its lack of enthusiasm. He argued that drilling would affect only zero

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<sup>127</sup> John Vidal, “Can Oil Save the Rainforest?” *The Guardian*, January 19, 2013: <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/jan/20/can-oil-save-the-rainforest>.

<sup>128</sup> Schavelzon, *Plurinacionalidad*, 66.

<sup>129</sup> Rafael Correa, “Cadena nacional sobre liquidación de fideicomisos del Yasuní,” August 15, 2013: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=315v8QPAqQg>.

<sup>130</sup> Schavelzon, *Plurinacionalidad*, 66.

point one percent of the park's area; as the potential profits of the oil had been calculated at \$18 billion, he presented the country with a rhetorical dilemma: "One hundred percent [protection] for Yasuní, and nothing of resources for the urgent needs of our people; or ninety-nine point nine percent of Yasuní intact and close to \$18 million to overcome misery — especially in the Amazon, paradoxically the region with the greatest incidents of poverty."<sup>131</sup> Correa claimed that to present "petroleum versus Yasuní" or "extractivism versus Yasuní" was to create a false dilemma. He affirmed that "we can put an end to misery *and also* preserve the Amazon" (emphasis added); implying that the six years spent during the initiative had cost thousands of Ecuadorians access to running water, educative infrastructure, and healthcare. As he approved operations to begin drilling, Correa promised the nation: "This decision hurts none more than I, your own *compañero* presidente."<sup>132</sup>

In protest the groups living in Yasuní seized control of several oil wells and demanded environmental protection for their communities. In a public statement they declared:

We will defend Yasuní though we have not one single dollar. We should transform Yasuní into a tool for great international happenings; but for this to happen, we need a coherent government that does not constantly go back on its word and acts in accordance with its objectives. The petroleum in Block 31, which is in the interior of Yasuní, cannot be exploited, as it places at risk the joint communities of ITT.<sup>133</sup>

Correa deployed the military in response, arresting forty-five people and charging them with terrorism. Although he eventually lifted the state of emergency, the government kept twenty-three activists in detention.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Becker, *¡Pachakutik!*, 177.

Continuing conflict over Yasuní reflects the epistemic paradox created by Correa's economic policy. Macas explains this contradiction in terms of the continuity between neoliberal and socialist forms of government, and their relations of power to indigenous groups'. He insists that the state's objective is to:

liquidate the indigenous movement in this country, to dismantle and destroy this movement, because the indigenous movement is the principal social and political actor that has struggled against the economic model, against neoliberalism. Correa wants to have a green light to do as he pleases. And his project of development is rooted in the exploitation of natural resources. We in the indigenous movement, which has an emphatically different conceptualization of Mother Nature, are saying no.<sup>135</sup>

Macas conflates Correa's socialist "project of development" with neoliberal models, identifying both to be "rooted in the exploitation of natural resources." He distances indigenous agendas from both by stating that they hold "an emphatically different conceptualization of Mother Nature," and unequivocally rejects them by "saying no." Thus, Macas portrays the indigenous movement — which is historically opposed to neoliberal rule — as faced with "no change" in relations of power with Correa's socialist government. Schavelzon affirms this claim, explaining that Yasuní-ITT "shows political continuity with ... a [form of] development that demonstrates as much a progressive as a neoliberal posture for the same model of increasing consumption and expansion of capital."<sup>136</sup>

And yet it is important to distinguish between these political agendas, as socialist and neoliberal governments diverge their response to indigenous demands. Whereas demands for plurinationality were deemed wholly unproductive to neoliberal agendas which sought to extract and accumulate wealth, the 2008 political shift to socialist rule introduced a new hegemony that

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<sup>135</sup> Luis Macas, interview by Jeffrey R. Webber in *Until the Rulers Obey: Voices from Latin American Social Movements*, ed. Clifton Ross, Marcy Rein (Oakland: PM Press, 2014), 240.

<sup>136</sup> Schavelzon, *Plurinacionalidad*, 65.



promoted the redistribution of wealth and Latin American sovereignty which found discourses of plurinationality productive to its goals. By constructing what Schavelzon calls a “double discourse,”<sup>137</sup> the state created space to legitimize itself using indigenous knowledge without addressing their demands for epistemic change.

The concept of *sumak kawsay* has been more successfully included into official state discourse than Pacha mama because it can be stripped of immanence, and because — once redefined as a secular concept — it affirms and validates socialist agendas to promote equal consumer access to the market. The next chapter explores the processes of redefinition weathered by indigenous concepts prior to their inclusion in official state discourse. It is worth noting that the rights of Pachamama have been included in the new constitutional amendments despite their obstruction to Correa’s goals, attesting to the strength and capacity of subaltern voices to speak and shape hegemony from below.

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<sup>137</sup> “Though not necessarily setting a new political course, [the Yasuní-ITT initiative] can be seen in terms of the ambiguity and double discourse with respect to development and the rights of indigenous groups and nature.” Ibid.

## Chapter II

### Processes of Redefinition

#### Sumak kawsay from alternative to development, to alternative development plan

Following the new coexistence contract set forth in the 2008 Constitution, this Plan proposes a moratorium of the word ‘development’ in order to incorporate the concept of el Buen Vivir into the debate.<sup>138</sup>

This chapter examines Ecuador's 2009-2013 National Plan for Buen Vivir, to show that knowledge deemed “productive” to socialist political agendas undergoes processes of redefinition prior to its incorporation into official state discourse. This redefinition effectively serves to lessen the radical potential of demands for epistemic change. In this chapter I track the emergence and dissemination of political discourses on *sumak kawsay* from its use amongst indigenous communities, to its presence in the National Development Plan. I argue that prior to inclusion *sumak kawsay* is stripped of spiritual immanence to fit within modern liberal structures of thought, and redefined in terms of material wellbeing to validate socialist agendas promoting social equality and the redistribution of wealth.

Chapter two begins by exploring indigenous definitions of *sumak kawsay*. The first section shows that — despite some discrepancy — indigenous intellectuals generally view the concept to be spiritually immanent, placing particular emphasis on the harmonic relationship between humans and nature. According to this logic, *sumak kawsay* best is understood as an alternative to modern development founded on the extraction and exploitation of natural resources. The next section explores the role of indigenous intellectuals as translators of *sumak kawsay*, and

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<sup>138</sup> The Republic of Ecuador National Planning Council, *National Plan for Buen Vivir (2009-2013): Building a Plurinational and Intercultural State* (Quito: National Planning and Development Secretary, 2009) 5.

as representatives of indigenous communities to the state. I examine various Spanish translations of the term (including “el buen vivir” or “the good life”; “la vida armónica” or “the harmonic life”; and “la vida en plenitude” or “life in plenitude”), as well as its conversion into a political concept by means of liberal discourse (to describe it as a form of democracy; sustainable development; self-determination; communitarian living; solidarity; and social equality). In this section I argue that translations from Quechua into Spanish mark the first stage in processes of redefinition that necessarily precede its inclusion into state discourse; by translating immanent knowledge into language recognizable by the state, indigenous intellectuals unintentionally facilitate projects to redefine immanent knowledge to fit within secular socialist agendas, which promote development to generate wealth for society at large.

Finally, I argue that the state selectively incorporates a particular definition of *sumak kawsay* (“el buen vivir,” understood in terms of material wellbeing) in order to present socialist agendas of “human-centered development” as a legitimate alternative to the “market-centered” development promoted by neoliberal models. This project seeks to create a false dichotomy between socialist and neoliberal political agendas both founded on an economic (i.e. anthropocentric) subject of rights. I use the National Plan for Buen Vivir as a case study to show that definitions of *sumak kawsay* which have achieved hegemonic status in Ecuador are stripped of immanence, leaving questions of spirituality and nature aside, to promote socialist agendas of social equality and inclusion. Through this process of redefinition, *sumak kawsay* is appropriated and accredited primarily to Correa’s Citizen’s Revolution, with indigenous communities — and ancient Greek philosophers — credited as “contributors” to the concept.

## A. Sumak kawsay “desde nuestra lógica”: Nature and humanity reproduce life together

*Sumak kawsay* is an indigenous life philosophy based on the search for and maintenance of harmony within the community, comprised both of human and non-human beings, which has “as much an aspirational [sacred] dimension as one of day-to-day life.”<sup>139</sup> Introducing his own definition of the term, Macas insists that it must be understood “from our logic”:

For a true understanding of Sumak Kawsay it is necessary to think from our [episteme], from [a locus of] decolonization and not from colonial thought; not from its paradigms; in such a way that only the resistance and struggle for decolonization of thought has brought us to rupture with the [universalizing] Western paradigm.<sup>140</sup>

He proceeds to explain that it is best translated as “la vida en plenitud,” or “the plentiful life,” with respect to the “whole” community (of humans and natural beings):

Sumak Kawsay... is the result of interaction, of human and natural coexistence. That is to say, Sumak Kawsay is the state of plenitude for the entire living community. It is the permanent construction of all of life's processes, in which are manifest: harmony [and] balance, internal and external to the whole community; not only human, but also natural.<sup>141</sup>

Defined as a cyclical process in which the role of humanity is to maintain balance and harmony with nature, *sumak kawsay* cannot be conceived in modern structures of thought. It cannot be abstracted from immanent understandings of nature as both spiritual and sentient.<sup>142</sup>

Carlos Viteri, Kichwa anthropologist from the Amazon, further elaborates Macas’ definition to explain that *sumak kawsay* consists both of a concrete, bounded territory, as well as the life experience and personal traits that enable humans to obtain the resources necessary to sur-

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<sup>139</sup> Antonio Luis Hidalgo-Capitán, “Seis debates abiertos sobre el sumak kawsay,” *Iconos. Revista de Ciencias Sociales* no. 48 (2014): 30.

<sup>140</sup> Macas, “El Sumak Kawsay,” 31.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> As in de la Cadena’s notion of *un-thinkable* categories of thought, discussed above.

vive.<sup>143</sup> According to Viteri, *sumak kawsay* cannot exist without “territory”: humans need the *huerta*, the forest, and water in order to survive. But neither is *sumak kawsay* limited to the notion of “territory” itself, for it also requires certain knowledge and characteristic of the humans who manage the land (such as *samai*, balanced conduct, and wisdom). Without these traits, Viteri explains, humans cannot interact with the land to attain *sumak kawsay*. Thus it can be understood as the relationship between humans and nature — neither in isolation.

As Macas claims, notions of *sumak kawsay* are unique to the Andean world. Capitán-Hidalgo affirms, noting that “In large part indigenous thought about *sumak kawsay* is created and transmitted orally, within the communities themselves, in Kichwa or other indigenous languages.” As such, “We are in need of a *chaka* (bridge) between said knowledge and the Western academic environment. This bridge is made up of indigenous intellectuals [whose structures of thought are] formed as much by Western as by Andean epistemological frameworks.”<sup>144</sup>

Hidalgo-Capitán’s anthology of indigenist thought on *sumak kawsay* introduces individual authors and their educational backgrounds. All of the contributors listed were of Kichwa nationality; from the Andean sierra; and involved with the indigenous movement in some way, whether through CONAIE, *Pachakutik*, ICCI, or UIAW; several had ties with international governing bodies like the UN. “All of these educational characteristics, along with emphasizing the

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<sup>143</sup> “The territory comprises three spheres: the *huerta*, from which to attain basic sustenance; the forest, from which to obtain meat by hunting; and water, for domestic use and [for] fish to complement the diet. In order to obtain the resources necessary for *sumak kawsay* from the territory, one must... have interior strength (*samai*), balanced conduct; wisdom; the capacity to learn and comprehend; future vision/foresight; perseverance; and compassion. If one possesses all these qualities, s/he will be able to interact with the *huerta*, with the forest and the waters, to get the necessary material resources — and no more than the necessary — in order to achieve *el sumak kawsay*.” Carlos Viteri, “*Súmak Káusai*. Una respuesta viable al desarrollo,” *Tesis de Licenciatura en Antropología Aplicada* (Quito: Universidad Politécnica Salesiana del Ecuador, 2003), 41-52, quoted in Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 36.

<sup>144</sup> Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 32.

strong ties that exist between [these individuals], allow us to establish a profile of the components of ... indigenist thought regarding *sumak kawsay*,”<sup>145</sup> he observes. This profile comprises a group of intellectuals, politicians and community leaders with university educations, professional experience, international contacts and political alliances. As such, this group is not wholly representative of heterogeneous indigenous identities, but rather comprises the paradoxical figure of the “Western-educated” indigenous intellectual.

Macas acknowledges the epistemic paradox created by such “Western-educated” leadership in the indigenous movement. Addressing an audience of peers, he writes:

We satisfy ourselves by going to university, and to the best universities in the world, to the universities where [people] study to become presidents, to become ministers of finance... But I think it's necessary to look at what the intellectual from OXFAM America did to the economy of indigenous peoples.<sup>146</sup>

Macas questions the value of Western methods and purposes for producing knowledge for indigenous lived experiences by asking: knowledge by whom, for what purpose? Education at Western universities and participation in international politics has transformed these intellectuals' structures of thought; no longer “authentically indigenous,” they have fashioned themselves as self-made neoliberal subjects. From the perspective as representatives between worlds, they demand recognition from the modern secular state on behalf of the immanent Andean world. The question for this class of intellectuals becomes, how best to translate immanent concepts into political demands recognizable by the state?

Of the five principle topics addressed by indigenous authors in their elaborations on *sumak kawsay*, the first two — “nature” and “community” — have been explored above. The

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>146</sup> Macas, “The political need for an epistemic reconstruction of ancestral knowledge,” 38-39.

next section examines the others — economy, rejection of economic development, and plurinationality<sup>147</sup> — to show that indigenous intellectuals worked together with the state to redefine immanent ways of knowing as “productive” in attempt to empower themselves within neoliberal hegemony.

## B. Translating *sumak kawsay*: Indigenous intellectuals bridge worlds

The human being, if not related with another being, does not exist.<sup>148</sup>

By nature of their role as translators, indigenous intellectuals were the first to present *sumak kawsay* as an economic model founded on indigenous values of solidarity, generosity, and reciprocity. In the late 1990’s Kichwa anthropologist Carlos Viteri, whose work “is probably the best systematization of the concept of *sumak kawsay*,”<sup>149</sup> began to describe it as “a traditional economy of the Amazonian indigenous groups, [which] is essentially a gift economy; that is, based on the recorded exchange of goods” which did not necessarily rely on monetary value.<sup>150</sup> At this time, Hidalgo-Capitán explains, indigenous communities had long been labelled “poor or underdeveloped in the measure of their economic, social, political and cultural structures” — a categorization which justified their continued subjugation to the state. Thus, in attempt to empower themselves and their communities, indigenous intellectuals began to adopt a discourse of “eco-

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<sup>147</sup> Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 46.

<sup>148</sup> Macas, “El *Sumak Kawsay*,” 19.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.

<sup>150</sup> Viteri, “*Súmak Káusai*. Una respuesta viable al desarrollo,” 14, quoted in Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 45.

conomic development, [which was] converted ... into a concept [that was] imported and incorporated into the lexicon of indigenous communities without question.”<sup>151</sup>

Around the same time, CONAIE began to introduce references to a “true” version of development to its political agenda. It described this new form of development as:

The daily practice of comprehensive humanism, in which man and nature are in close and harmonic interpellation to guarantee life, in a [role] in which human, natural, and financial resources should be taken into account by the State and by Indigenous Nationalities in a way that is harmonious, comprehensive, democratic, and ethical, to embark on a true form of development.<sup>152</sup>

FENOCIN<sup>153</sup> also began to speak of a “sustainable development with identity,” conceived as a form of development “not removed from the community, [but rather] tied to a communitarian reality, which does not alter the conception of the earth that indigenous groups hold.”<sup>154</sup> Indigenous organization FEINE too made references to a kind of “comprehensive development” conceived as “a new style of development founded on social equality, respect, and harmony with nature, with greater productive efficiency, to better the conditions of living for society in general, in the developmental framework of their own organizational systems, as exercised by an alternative power.”<sup>155</sup> As indigenous leaders and politicians began to introduce *sumak kawsay* as a political concept to counter so-called “traditional” models of development, they translated it using a rational-economic discourse that would seem “productive” to the state.

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<sup>151</sup> Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 47.

<sup>152</sup> Lourdes Tibán, “El concepto de desarrollo sostenible y los pueblos indígenas,” *Boletín ICCI — ARI Rimay* no. 18 (2000): <http://icci.nativeweb.org/boletin/18/tiban.html>, quoted in Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 47-48.

<sup>153</sup> The National Confederation of Campesino, Indigenous, and Black Organizations, founded in 1970.

<sup>154</sup> Tibán, “El concepto de desarrollo sostenible y los pueblos indígenas,” quoted in Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 48.

<sup>155</sup> Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 48.



In the early 2000's, as part of an attempt to consolidate the diverse and varied discourse surrounding *sumak kawsay*, some indigenous leaders began to defend the use of the term “ethno-development.” Kichwa sociologist and political scientist Loudres Tibán, currently a National Assembly member for *Pachakutik*, proposed an indigenous version of development that

insist[s] on respect for traditional strategies and ancestral forms of relation between man and nature, which historically have proven successful in protecting and conserving the environment and social life; this proposal calls itself *ethnodevelopment*, which implies reaching a sustainable, holistic, alternative development without negating cultural diversity, founded in its own culture, wisdom, and organization, without reducing the wellbeing of humanity.<sup>156</sup>

Determined to achieve state recognition, indigenous intellectuals began to appropriate hegemonic discourses of “development” and redefine them to meet indigenous agendas. In so doing, they expanded the definition of “development” to include *sumak kawsay*, without challenging the modern secular structures of thought that precluded its conceptualization as immanent.

Viteri, the first to translate *sumak kawsay* as a form of indigenous economy, also became the first to publicly question the utility of “development” for translations of *sumak kawsay*. In 2003 he began to critique “the custom of coining terminology, like for example ‘ethno,’ ... ‘eco,’ ‘auto,’ ‘communitarian,’ ‘sustainable,’ etc., in relation to the word *development* associated with indigenous peoples.”<sup>157</sup> He claimed that these expressions merely re-articulated notions of devel-

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<sup>156</sup> Tibán, “El concepto de desarrollo sostenible y los pueblos indígenas,” quoted in Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 48.

A 2002 statement by Kichwa author Silvia Tutillo, sociologist and editor for *Revista Yachaykuna (Saberes)*, provides another example of discourses promoting ethnodevelopment. She writes: “In indigenous strategies of development, improving the quality of life plays a very important role, along with the strengthening of self-government [and] ensuring the lives of current and future generations... In short, a strengthening of the community as such, which can be considered a process of *ethnodevelopment*.” Silvia Tutillo, “La perspectiva de desarrollo sustentable desde las agencias de desarrollo y la forma de entender el desarrollo de los pueblos indígenas,” *Revista Yachaykuna (Saberes)* no. 4 (2002): <http://icci.nativeweb.org/yachaikuna/4/yachaykuna4.pdf>, quoted in Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 48.

<sup>157</sup> Viteri, “*Súmak Káusai*,” 10, quoted in Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 49.

opment without questioning the essence of the concept, and therefore reproduced the Western paradigm of development “that is nothing other than the continuation of colonization by other means.”<sup>158</sup> As such, he explains, it was not a question of implementing “development with a particular name, but rather [introducing] another form of conceiving life and the desirable goal of achieving an *alternative to development*.”<sup>159</sup>

In indigenous societies... the concept of development does not exist. The concept of a linear process which establishes a state of before and after, of underdevelopment and development, does not exist as it does in societies founded on the European matrix [of power]. [Instead] there exists an integrationist vision of what the mission of human effort should be, which consists of searching for and creating the material, environmental, and spiritual conditions to achieve and maintain *sumak kawsay*, which is the ideal of “*buen vivir*” or the “*harmonious life*.”<sup>160</sup>

This passage marks the first appearance of *sumak kawsay* translated into Spanish as “*el buen vivir*” in the historical record — not by the state, but by an indigenous intellectual. In the above excerpt, Viteri describes “*el buen vivir*” as contradictory to so-called “European” notions of development, which rely on a concept of global linear time that does not exist in indigenous thought. Rather, he explains, indigenous groups conceive life is a cyclical process — which is why *sumak kawsay* cannot be adapted to Western models of development. Early translations of the concept as “*el buen vivir*” which would later be incorporated into socialist discourse as a form of sustainable development were originally articulated to counter the logic of development altogether.

Building on Viteri’s thesis, other indigenous authors have since rejected the notion of “development” in translations of *sumak kawsay*. Nearly a decade later, following the 2008 con-

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 20, quoted in Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 49.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., ii-iii, quoted in Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 49.

stitutional amendments and CONAIE's break with Correa, indigenous economist Pablo Dávalos explains that:

We had to abandon the idea of “development” because... it implied violence, imposition, subordination. It is not possible to “develop” anyone else, because each society has its own cosmovision that must be respected; and if in this cosmovision there exists neither [the concept of] development nor linear time, then [said society] cannot be developed; one thinks that by doing so, one is doing this society a favor, when in reality s/he is radically violating it.<sup>161</sup>

Yet even as they challenged the utility of “development” for conceptualizing *sumak kawsay*, indigenous intellectuals continued to translate it using an economic discourse to make it comprehensible to the state. In his book *Que es el SumaKawsay?*, Atawallpa Oviedo describes the concept as having an “economic conscience,” even as he argues that it is neither “a viable alternative to development, nor a new form of development”:

Its economic conscience... is one of economic equitability between all living beings, not just between humans... The foundation of human life is... the capacity and ability to maintain balance between all forms of production, provision, compensation, reciprocity, and mutual distribution, as much in one's personal life, as at the family, community, and national level.<sup>162</sup>

These intellectuals reject modern liberal economic theory as a framework for understanding *sumak kawsay*, given that “it is based on the ego-centric *homo economicus*, as well as other variations of the economic rational agent, and ignores the spiritual dimensions of economic activity and other rationalities distinct from egoism, such as those founded on solidarity, generosity, and reciprocity.”<sup>163</sup> Yet by appropriating economic discourse to explain *sumak kawsay* and demand it

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<sup>161</sup> Pablo Dávalos, “El *Sumak Kawsay* (Buen Vivir) y la crítica a la teoría económica como ideología,” *Revista Polémica* no. 7 (2011): [http://usfq.edu.ec/publicaciones/polemika/Documents/polemika007/polemika007\\_007\\_articulo003.pdf](http://usfq.edu.ec/publicaciones/polemika/Documents/polemika007/polemika007_007_articulo003.pdf), quoted in Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 50.

<sup>162</sup> Atawallpa Oviedo, *Qué es el SumaKawsay: Más allá del socialismo y el capitalismo* (Quito: Sumak Ediciones, 2011), 255, quoted in Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 54.

Another example by Oviedo in 2011: “Sumak kawsay is not an alternative for development, nor a new form of development, nor a movement towards socialism.... nor a new social formation. Sumak Kawsay is a [way of life] that is alternative and other-worldly, for harmony and balance between all the beings that make and reproduce life as a whole.” Ibid., quoted in Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 50.

<sup>163</sup> Capitán-Hidalgo et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 46.

of the state, indigenous intellectuals also inadvertently engaged in processes that redefined them as modern neoliberal subjects.

Former National Assembly member Monica Chuji, a Kichwa intellectual from the Amazonian community of Sarayaku, embodies the paradoxical figure of the neoliberal indigenous intellectual. In her definition of *sumak kawsay*, Chuji insists that the concept “contradicts the economic theory and cartesian paradigm of man as the ‘owner and master of nature.’” After rejecting this logic, Chuji proceeds to associate herself exclusively with her indigenous identity:

There exist [“existimos,” first person plural] millions of human beings, far from the figure of the ‘consumer,’ from free markets, competition and merchandise; ... Human beings who belong to diverse communities, with a relationship to memory that is atavistic, ancestral; unlike liberal reason.<sup>164</sup>

Though she rejects the logic of development for understanding *sumak kawsay*, and is a published author on the topic of “development versus *sumak kawsay*,” Chuji herself is not “far from the figure of the consumer” as she claims to be. In fact she was formerly a member of Correa’s AP, having served as his communication secretary until she broke ties with the party in September 2008. A woman who self-identifies as indigenous, at once capable of negotiating the world of modern politics, Chuji embodies the neoliberal subject of the “Western-educated indigenous intellectual.” By associating exclusively with her indigenous identity and distancing herself discursively from the “figure of the consumer,” Chuji obscures her role as translator and representative between worlds.

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<sup>164</sup> Monica Chuji, “Modernidad, desarrollo, interculturalidad y *Sumak Kawsay* o Buen Vivir,” *Foro Internacional sobre Interculturalidad y Desarrollo* (2009): [http://www.inredh.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=%20216%3Amodernidad-desarrollo-interculturalidad-y-sumak-kawsay-o-buen-%20vivir&Itemid=86](http://www.inredh.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=%20216%3Amodernidad-desarrollo-interculturalidad-y-sumak-kawsay-o-buen-%20vivir&Itemid=86), quoted in Hidalgo-Capitán et al, *Sumak Kawsay*, 46.

Indigenous intellectuals — and not the state — were the first to translate *sumak kawsay* as an economic model using the language of development. Consequently their demands for inclusion could be met without challenging the logic of “man as the master and owner of nature” which they so adamantly fought to change. By introducing *sumak kawsay* into the political sphere using a liberal economic discourse, indigenous intellectuals facilitated state projects to lessen the radical potential of their demands, and subsume them within a broader socialist agenda founded on the logic of development and redistribution of wealth. Thus, as argued in the following case study, the definition of *sumak kawsay* that was incorporated into official state discourse was not an indigenous life philosophy intended to disrupt the logic of development, but rather as an alternative form of development proposed by Correa’s government to counter neoliberal accumulation of wealth.

### C. Sumak Kawsay as El Buen Vivir: the socialist model for development

Most indigenous intellectuals agree that “el buen vivir” is not the most accurate translation of *sumak kawsay*. Though Viteri was the first to define it thus, authors including Macas, Maldonado, and Pacari maintain that “el buen vivir” more closely translates to the Quechua expression *alli kawsay*, wherein *alli* means “good,” but not “plentiful.” As such, they associate “el buen vivir” with a form of life that has amputated the spiritual dimension of *sumak*, and associate it exclusively with material wellbeing.<sup>165</sup> Macas insists, “As we see it, Sumak Kawsay and el Buen

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<sup>165</sup> Oviedo, *Que es el SumaKawsay*, 177, quoted in Hidalgo-Capitán, “Seis debates abiertos sobre el *sumak kawsay*,” 31.

Vivir are two totally opposite conceptualizations.”<sup>166</sup> Thus socialist conceptualizations of “el buen vivir” are primarily characterized by the relevance they give to its “political dimension in state management, particularly its emphasis on notions of social equality, leaving aside questions of nature, culture, and identity.”<sup>167</sup> They understand *sumak kawsay* as “an increase in subjective wellbeing,” both tangibly and otherwise (in the satisfaction of needs, a better quality of life, and “healthy flourishing in peace and harmony with nature”). Importantly, socialist definitions do not consider it a uniquely indigenous concept; they also attribute it to an epistemic genealogy traceable to ancient Greece. Consequently, the notion of buen vivir “fits within socialist models of governance that aspire to eradicate poverty by means of redistributive politics.”<sup>168</sup> In short, translations of *sumak kawsay* as “el buen vivir” attained inclusion within state discourse because they strengthened and affirmed a broader socialist agenda to generate and redistribute wealth by means of development.

The introduction to the National Plan for Buen Vivir begins: “The 2007-2010 National Development Plan, the ‘Plan for the Citizen’s Revolution,’ ...is a proposal for change outlined by the Movimiento País to the citizens of Ecuador during the elections of 2006, which set out the core traits of an alternative political agenda for Ecuador.”<sup>169</sup> The Plan immediately credits the “core traits of an alternative agenda” to Correa's government, affirming that the agenda proposed

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<sup>166</sup> He explains: “Whereas Sumak Kawsay is an institution, an experience deeply rooted in communitarian ways of life and applicable only to these systems, the concept of Buen Vivir is processed from a Western epistemic viewpoint that corresponds with the current system, and fits into a model which seeks to ‘make up’ or improve upon this current system. So, we [in the indigenous movement] believe that Sumak Kawsay and Buen Vivir are two completely opposing views.” Macas, “El Sumak Kawsay,” 24.

<sup>167</sup> Hidalgo-Capitán, “Seis debates abiertos,” 27.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>169</sup> The Republic of Ecuador National Planning Council, *National Plan for Buen Vivir (2009-2013): Building a Plurinational and Intercultural State* (Quito: National Planning and Development Secretary, 2009), 5.

within is socialist, not indigenous. It goes on to proclaim that the Plan’s “most weighty meaning” lies in its “conceptual rupture with the Washington Consensus and most orthodox approaches to the concept of development.”<sup>170</sup> The Plan discursively conflates the logic of development, a historical construction of the Industrial Revolution, with a particular neoliberal economic model, and distances its own proposal by declaring a “conceptual rupture” with both. In accordance with indigenous demands, the state has incorporated a discourse rejecting the logic of development, allowing it to claim an epistemic, as much as a political, revolution.

This claim warrants closer examination, for the Plan proceeds: “By following the new coexistence contract set forth in the 2008 Constitution, this Plan proposes a moratorium of the word ‘development’ in order to introduce the concept of Buen Vivir to the debate.”<sup>171</sup> The Plan uses politically ambiguous language, referring to a “coexistence contract” (which can mean either social equality between humans, or *sumak kawsay*, the relation between humans and nature) to reject the concept of development — conflated with a particular neoliberal political agenda — in favor of el buen vivir, presented as a radical socialist alternative. This discursive slippage allows the Plan to declare a “rupture” with the logic of development (as a political theory), by defining itself in opposition to neoliberal projects to accumulate wealth beginning in the 1980’s.

To legitimize claims of “radical conceptual rupture,” the Plan portrays “orthodox neoliberal development” as an exploitative economic model which maintains hegemony by means of repressive force, to portray itself as a liberating socialist alternative.

The widespread concept of development as modernization and economic growth is measured by ... the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Industrial development is society’s expected development

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 18.

and [constitutes] a dimension of modernization. The reasons for underdevelopment are attributed to “obsolete” societies; this ... leaves aside [peoples’] relation to the processes of capitalist accumulation.<sup>172</sup>

Though the Plan critiques the “widespread concept of development as economic growth” as measured by GDP, or the market, it does not confront the logic of modernization or industrial development per se. Instead, it questions the legitimacy of “development” insofar as it “leaves aside the people’s relations to ... processes of capitalist accumulation.” The Plan fails to address the logic of development itself, which views nature as “material wealth” or property; instead it claims, the wealth generated by capitalist development should be used to provide for “the people.”

The Plan portrays itself as “liberating” simply by proposing an alternative agenda to redistribute, rather than consolidate — amongst humans — the wealth generated by development.

In response to [the above excerpt], the concept of human development has been proposed: the idea that development must have human beings, and not markets or production, as its main concern. What must be measured, thus, is not GDP but the living standards of the people though indicators related to the satisfaction of human needs.<sup>173</sup>

The Plan sets up a false dichotomy between neoliberal-development (understood as a single concept), and itself: a “radical human-centered alternative.” This discursive slippage obscures the fact that the Plan, too, is founded on the logic of development. Qualified as “sustainable” compared to neoliberal standards, the Plan nevertheless relies on the same extractive oil-export economy explicitly designed to “satisfy human needs.”

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.



In this narrative context, the Plan presents “el buen vivir” as a socialist alternative to repressive, market-driven “neoliberal-development” (as a single category of thought).

El Buen Vivir pursues a vision that surpasses the narrow quantitative margins of economics and allows the application of a new paradise whose purpose is not the material, mechanic, and endless accumulation of goods, but one that promotes an inclusive, sustainable, and democratic economic strategy. In other words, one that incorporates actors historically excluded from the capitalist market logics to the accumulation and redistribution processes, as well as to modes of production ... that are different from such market logics.<sup>174</sup>

By claiming to have surpassed the “material, mechanic, and endless accumulation of goods” characteristic of neoliberal-development, the Plan portrays its proposal as beyond materiality. And yet its claim to be ‘revolutionary’ is not founded on challenging the logic of development, but proposing to expand it to include “actors historically excluded from the capitalist market” to benefit from processes of accumulation and redistribution. As such, the Plan does not represent a radical rupture with capitalist market logics; indeed it proposes to expand the market — and consequently takes for granted the identities and discourses such market logics produce.

Once it has established “el buen vivir” as a socialist response to neoliberal-development, the Plan acknowledges “other approaches to the concept,” identifying both Andean and Greek contributors. Chapter three, titled “Change of Paradigm: From Development to Buen Vivir,” explains that “the Andean Indian peoples have contributed to this debate” — with respect to notions of development — “from other epistemologies and cosmovisions, with the term *sumak kawsay*, ‘life to the fullest.’”<sup>175</sup> Though most frequently translated in official state discourse as “el buen vivir,” the Plan opts to define *sumak kawsay* as ‘life to the fullest’ to minimize the sig-

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 18.

nificance of the “contributions” made by the indigenous movement to its own proposal. It proceeds:

The notion of development is inexistent in these peoples’ cosmovision ... [According to them] we, the community, and nature become one. We share “being” together with all these living creatures that are part of our lives. [These worlds] connect to each other and are part of the whole within a spiral, and not linear, perspective of time.<sup>176</sup>

The Plan distinguishes “ourselves, the community” — understood to mean human beings — from “nature,” which must “become one,” assuming (from its modern hegemonic viewpoint) that they were not already. The Plan thus portrays *sumak kawsay* as an indigenous equivalent to socialist conceptualizations of collectivity and community, detailed above in the document’s Introduction as “el buen vivir.”

The Plan quickly transitions to explain that el buen vivir is not the same as *sumak kawsay*, because it draws on concepts “that are also present in Occidental thought.”

In his ethical and political theories, Aristotle already talked about Good Living. For him, the ultimate goal of the human being is happiness, which can be achieved with a happy polis. In other words, happiness for all, which is each individual’s happiness, can only be achieved in the political community. In this sense, he relates happiness to friendship, love, political undertaking, the possibility of contemplation in and from nature, of theorizing, and creating works of art. All of these elements have been usually forgotten in the prevailing concept of development.<sup>177</sup>

Whereas *sumak kawsay* is portrayed as ancestral and folkloric, “el buen vivir” belongs to a genealogy of Western thought that allows the concept to enter the realm of politics. Thus the Plan affirms structures of thought that distinguish between politics as “the representation of humanity vis-a-vis the state,” and “nature as the domain of objective science.” At the same time, it seeks to distance itself from the economic logic it shares with neoliberalism by asserting that “all of the

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

elements of life” — proposed as the basis for the socialist alternative — “have been forgotten in the prevailing [neoliberal] concept of development.”<sup>178</sup> By providing citizens with “these elements” — vaguely defined as the concept of *buen vivir* — the Plan claims to provide not only political, but epistemic revolution as well.

The partial inclusion of *sumak kawsay* as a source of inspiration for socialist development models creates space for the state to appropriate and redefine the concept. Significantly, the Plan refers to the constitution, and not indigenous authors, to define *sumak kawsay* as a model for economic development. It defines the concept as “overcoming the reductionist vision of development as economic growth and placing at the center of development the human being and, as an ultimate objective, the achievement of *sumak kawsay* or *el buen vivir*.”<sup>179</sup>

For the new Constitution, *sumak kawsay* also implies improving the peoples’ quality of life; developing their capacities and potentialities; relying on an economic system that promotes equality through social and territorial redistribution of the benefits of development; guaranteeing national sovereignty; promoting Latin American integration; and protecting and promoting cultural diversity.<sup>180</sup>

Not only does it presume the state’s authority to define *sumak kawsay*, the Plan also opts to translate the concept as “*el buen vivir*” rather than “*la vida en plenitud*” or any of the other translations agreed upon by most indigenous intellectuals. Given that the term “*el buen vivir*” is defined (in the Plan’s Introduction) as a socialist model for development, the state conflates two distinct concepts: *sumak kawsay* as an indigenous life philosophy, translated into liberal political discourse as “*el buen vivir*”; and *el Buen Vivir* as an economic proposal for change outlined by Correa in 2006. This ambiguity creates space for the state to “speak for” indigenous groups, to de-

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 24.

fine *sumak kawsay* as form of socialist political economy conducive to the logic of development. Thus, only those aspects of *sumak kawsay* considered “productive” to socialist agendas (specifically, values which affirm social equality and environmental sustainability) were incorporated into state discourse, while aspects considered “unproductive” — spiritual and natural dimensions — remained excluded.

Once it has established “el buen vivir” as a socialist economic proposal to which “Others” have contributed, the Plan proceeds to explain its understanding of relationship between humans and nature. In a section titled “Harmonic Relations with Nature,” it states:

Ethical responsibility with the current and future generations and with the rest of species is a critical foundation to prefigure human development. The Plan acknowledges the economy’s dependence on nature; it admits that economy is part of a broader structure – the ecosystem – which supports life as a resource-supplier and waste-drain... It is not about keeping our natural heritage unharmed – given the use of energy and materials by different societies and given the ecosystems’ assimilation capacity, this is impossible. It is about protecting at the adequate levels.<sup>181</sup>

Indigenous demands for *sumak kawsay* appear in the Plan’s discourse as an “ethical responsibility” (a concept from modern liberal philosophy), important to protect not because nature is living and thus deserves rights, but because the economy depends on using it as a material resource in order to function. The Plan explicitly affirms a developmental logic which views “man as the master and owner of nature,” and conceives nature to an exploitable resource usable to advance human society. It distances its own proposal from environmentally destructive neoliberal models by proffering a “sustainable” alternative to such forms of development.

In this narrative context, the Plan proceeds to outline its own economic strategy. In a chapter titled “Long-Term Accumulation and Redistribution,” the Plan explains how “human-centered development” will privilege the needs of humans — not only over markets, but also

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 21.

over nature. The strategy is designed to “satisfy the basic needs of the population through wealth-generating processes that are sustainable over time.”<sup>182</sup> In the neoliberal era of individualism and self-interest, it explains, growth and redistribution were decided by leakage; but “in this era of solidarity, reciprocity, and cooperation, it is conceived as ‘distributing while producing’ and ‘producing while distributing’.”<sup>183</sup> In line with this logic, phase one of the strategy does not propose to slow down production: rather, it addresses neoliberal patterns of wealth accumulation. “Although dependence on primary goods to sustain the economy will remain, redistribution, deemed the core of change in this period and throughout the strategy itself, will be intensified.”<sup>184</sup>

The next two phases of the strategy propose to shift the “relative weight” of the national industry to a “new sector of clean energy and bioenergy production and consumption,” and “consolidat[e] a strategy for export diversification.”<sup>185</sup> Although it promises a more sustainable model of development, the Plan clarifies that, with respect to “Non-Renewable Natural Resources,” the needs of humans come first. “One-fifth of the surface of the Ecuadorian territory shelters important non-renewable natural resources: oil reserves, mineral and non-metal reservoirs,” it states. “Their exploitation — with all possible precautions — has an environmental impact; nevertheless it is essential for society’s performance as a source of income for the country.”<sup>186</sup> Thus the Plan explicitly affirms anthropocentric understandings of the human-nature relationship. The

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 103.

economic theory and cartesian paradigm of “man as master and owner of nature,” identified by Chuji (above), has not been unsettled from hegemonic status. Rather, the state has appropriated and redefined indigenous conceptualizations of *sumak kawsay* in order to portray its own “human-centered” development model as a radical alternative to supposedly “market-centered” neoliberal forms, without questioning the logic such “radical rupture” necessarily entails. As such, indigenous knowledge has achieved inclusion in official state discourse even as political demands for epistemic restructuring remain (mostly) unmet.

# **Chapter III**

## **The Brief Conflictive Life of Universidad Intercultural Amawtay Wasi 2004-2014**

The final chapter of this thesis elaborates how discursive processes of in- and exclusion and re-definition work together to reproduce hierarchies in knowledge. Building on previous case studies, I show that — despite the limited inclusion of “productive” knowledge in official state discourse — socialist hegemony continues to exclude immanent knowledge from the realm of politics. Through a combination of legislation and published interviews, I track the history of Universidad Intercultural de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos Indígenas *Amawtay Wasi* (UIAW) from its 2004 commencement through its state-mandated closure in 2014. I argue that the state’s rationale for terminating the school — a purported “lack of mercantile quality” — demonstrates its own continued authority to evaluate and assess indigenous methods and purposes for producing knowledge, and find them lacking. As such, the question of plurinationality in Ecuador — understood as “indigenous control over indigenous affairs,” including and especially regarding the authority to produce knowledge — remains unresolved.

I argue that repeated state efforts to close UIAW between 2009-2014 evince a deliberate project to silence indigenous knowledge considered “excessive” to Correa’s goals. Tragically, these projects were facilitated and legitimized by the success of the indigenous movement, whose demands for social inclusion, interculturality, and plurinationality were legalized in the new constitutional amendments. As with demands for *sumak kawsay* in the 1990’s— 2000’s, indigenous intellectuals appropriated dominant discourses of “science” and universal access to ed-

ucation in order to frame demands for bilingual intercultural education in 2008. Though the indigenous movement achieved important political victories with the new constitutional amendments, the language of this legislation was ambiguous enough to permit the state to use it to close indigenous schools for “lack of mercantile quality” less than ten years later. As with the 1990’s struggle over the authority define “nature,” so now do indigenous groups and the state spar over the meaning of a “quality” intercultural education in Ecuador. My research shows that indigenous intellectuals appealed to the state using hegemonic discourse to legitimize their proposals for an autonomous indigenous university; consequently, I conclude, in the process of seeking epistemic equality, indigenous intellectuals themselves participated in reproducing hierarchies that privileged modern scientific ways of knowing over immanent indigenous ones. Thus the reproduction of neoliberal hegemony emerges as a historical process, revealing how discourses and identity retain legitimacy in spite of political transformation and change.

## A. Creating a House of Wisdom (1990’s — 2006)

The UIAW is an educational project of the indigenous movement ... whose purpose is to serve as a foundation in the construction of a plurinational state and an intercultural society.<sup>187</sup>

Planning for the Universidad Intercultural de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos Indígenas, *Amawtay Wasi* — the “House of Wisdom” — began in the mid-1990’s. CONAIE and the ICCI assembled a team of leaders, teachers, community members, researchers, and professionals who imagined the university as “a space of both reflection and action,” intended to “work towards the decolonization of knowledge and committed to reconstructing the concept and meaning of intercultural

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<sup>187</sup> Universidad Intercultural de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos Indígenas Amawtay Wasi, “Nuestra Visión,” [https://www.e-science.unicamp.br/prosul/admin/publicacoes/documentos/publicacao\\_607\\_UINPI.pdf](https://www.e-science.unicamp.br/prosul/admin/publicacoes/documentos/publicacao_607_UINPI.pdf).



knowledge.”<sup>188</sup> As part of an educational project of the indigenous movement, the team began to design curriculum for a university dedicated to indigenous ways of knowing.

The university’s theoretical framework relied on indigenous categories of thought. It combined elements from nature with key components of human agency to form Centers of Knowing.

The University’s components emerge from the basic elements of life (air, fire, earth, water, and life). This paradigm of elements incorporates five key components: *yachay* (to know), *munay* (to love), *ruray* (to make/do), *ushay* (to have capacity) and *kawsay* (origin-life). The articulation between the five elements and the five components gives rise to the formation of the five Centers of Knowing, as each one raises a specific challenge.<sup>189</sup>

These five centers, comprised of natural elements and human characteristics, form the loci from which knowledge is produced. Their symbolic representation is coeval with the centers themselves, as the theoretical world and material world are synonymous in immanent frameworks of understanding. As such, this theory explains relations of power in terms of the “conjugation of force-symbols (air, fire, earth, water, and life),” which

act tensionally (in concurrent antagonism) in terms of linkage (reciprocity, proportionality, correspondence and complementariness), and throughout the cyclical process of interaction, go about producing changes and transformations. This process takes place in a living cosmos (polysemic, polyvalent, and polysymbolic), which incorporates both explicit and implicit aspects of reality, introducing a strong component of incertitude. The conjugation of the four fundamental elements is symbolically expressed in life, in the human; in communities, cultures, and intercultural sociality.<sup>190</sup>

The first sentence describes indigenous theorization on how power works: as the “tension” and “linkage” between the force-symbols of nature, the interactions of which produce relations of

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., “Quienes Somos,” [https://www.e-science.unicamp.br/prosul/admin/publicacoes/documentos/publicacao\\_607\\_UINPI.pdf](https://www.e-science.unicamp.br/prosul/admin/publicacoes/documentos/publicacao_607_UINPI.pdf).

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., “Estructura de Amawtay Wasi y Componentes Epistemológicos,” [https://www.e-science.unicamp.br/prosul/admin/publicacoes/documentos/publicacao\\_607\\_UINPI.pdf](https://www.e-science.unicamp.br/prosul/admin/publicacoes/documentos/publicacao_607_UINPI.pdf).

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

reciprocity, proportionality, correspondence and complementariness. This logic directly contradicts socialist projects to use the country's "natural wealth" to facilitate human consumption. The second sentence describes a "living cosmos" comprised of realities both "explicit" and "implicit," which accounts for the uncertainty and inexplicability of life. Acknowledgement of uncertainty requires a measure of faith, or the ability to live in tension, and challenges the will to knowledge characterized by scientific ways of knowing. The last sentence explains that together, the first four forces of nature — air, fire, earth, and water — are symbolically expressed in the fifth: life, which encompasses humanity. As the planning team notes, "the described concepts give origin to the structure of Amawtay Wasi, expressed in a new epistemological perspective (of linkage) and which in its tension make up the foundation of UIAW."<sup>191</sup>

In order to gain entry to the National System of Education, UIAW needed the approval of the Board of Higher Education (Consejo de Educación Superior, CONESUP). In attempt to legitimize UIAW's immanent Centers of Knowing to the Board, the planning team described the university's epistemic framework in the language of "science." For example, its proposal for UIAW's cyclical learning process (in accord with non-linear indigenous understandings of time) refers to both Western and Ancestral "sciences":

The *Runa Yachay*, or Cycle of Formation in Ancestral Sciences, comprises the level of Learning to Think while Doing Communally, and part of the level Learning to Learn;  
The *Shuktak Yachay*, or Cycle of Western Sciences, comprises the level Learning to Learn and part of the level Learning to Unlearn and Relearn;  
The *Yachaypura*, or Cycle of Interculturality, comprises part of the level of Learning to Unlearn and Relearn, as well as the level of Learning to Undertake/Embark.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., "Ámbitos de aprendizaje," [https://www.e-science.unicamp.br/prosul/admin/publicacoes/documentos/publicacao\\_607\\_UINPI.pdf](https://www.e-science.unicamp.br/prosul/admin/publicacoes/documentos/publicacao_607_UINPI.pdf).

In its proposal to decolonize indigenous knowledge production, the planning team described “Ancestral” and “Western” epistemes as different kinds of “science.”<sup>193</sup> Yet by presenting these epistemes as coeval, the team simultaneously de-legitimized their own colonial difference, privileging the hegemonic language of science even as they demanded recognition for the value of immanent knowledge.

The proposal proceeded to outline UIAW’s methodology, consistently using a scientific discourse to affirm its authority to produce knowledge. The first stage, the “investigation,” would “potentialize [student’s] capacity to search for solutions, to confront problems, and to conduct investigations in the diverse fields of *knowing* and *knowing to do/make*, with bio-ethical values and attitudes.”<sup>194</sup> Even as it acknowledges that problem-solving can come from “different fields of knowing,” the proposal still presents immanent concepts in scientific terms, translating *sumak*

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<sup>193</sup> Schroder explains that “In English discourse, the term science is contested terrain and can have a number of very different meanings... Those who are anthropologically oriented focus on the philosophical and cultural assumptions that undergird the term... such as the assumption of human separation from and dominance of nature that is embedded in Western culture...”

The difference between the use of this term in English and in Spanish... [is that] the Spanish term, *ciencia*, is much closer to its Latin root meaning “knowledge” and retains more of that original meaning. *Ciencia*, for Spanish speakers, is thus more likely to be glossed as “knowledge,” and the participants in this study used these two terms almost interchangeably... In describing native science, highland [Andean] speakers pointed to the technological accomplishments of pre-Colombian cultures—in medicine, agriculture, architecture, engineering, astronomy, hydrology, and so forth as concrete examples of indigenous science.”

An international conference on Indigenous Science in Teacher Education Curriculum was held in Puyo, in the Amazonian region of Ecuador (IBIS, 2003). The a group of interviewees on intercultural education concluded: From here on, we should speak simply of “wisdom.” This is the manner in which we will recognize and give value to the ancestral knowledge of indigenous communities. We are not interested in whether or not this wisdom is acknowledged as “science” by “scientists.”

“In other words,” Schroder explains, “it is not necessary to invoke a Western concept (science) to value and reproduce ancestral knowledge. Seen from this perspective, the discussion of indigenous science is only a necessary translation for the benefit of non-indigenous society. It employs a term of high value in that exterior realm as a way of legitimizing indigenous knowledge for the exterior audience.”

Schroder, “Intercultural Science Education,” 34-37.

<sup>194</sup> Universidad Intercultural de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos Indígenas Amawtay Wasi, “Ámbitos de aprendizaje,” [https://www.e-science.unicamp.br/prosul/admin/publicacoes/documentos/publicacao\\_607\\_UINPI.pdf](https://www.e-science.unicamp.br/prosul/admin/publicacoes/documentos/publicacao_607_UINPI.pdf).

*kawsay* as a philosophy of “bio-ethical values and attitudes.” Bio-ethics is a field of medicine and belongs to the realm of science, which “knows” nature to be a material object. By describing indigenous “values and attitudes” towards nature as “bio-ethical,” the planning team for UIAW falls short of articulating the radical potential of their proposal to redefine “investigation” as a concept to include immanent understandings of nature. By privileging scientific discourse in its proposal to legitimize immanent ways of knowing to CONESUP, the planning team reproduced hierarchies that marginalized their own authority to produce knowledge.

UIAW was designed to address the particular social problems facing indigenous communities. In so doing, the team proposed, the school would contribute to the construction of an intercultural society founded on *sumak kawsay*. The school’s six main objectives pledged to:

- 1) Create an integral university that works to overcome the divide between practice and theory.
- 2) Train professionals and technicians to help find solutions to the problems of indigenous nationalities and peoples.
- 3) Convert the university into an intercultural environment that incorporates the wide range of knowledge of indigenous peoples and nationalities.
- 4) Offer high-quality education for all interested students based primarily upon the needs of the indigenous nationalities and peoples.
- 5) Integrate the conceptual, research, discussion and application aspects of learning with rigor and integrity.
- 6) Contribute to the construction of a new intercultural society based upon mutual understanding and respect and grounded in the concept of harmonious coexistence.<sup>195</sup>

The first objective addresses the division between “practice” and “theory” particular to transcendent ways of knowing which conceive a rupture between material and spiritual worlds. Its primary aim is to bridge the divide between sentient humans, endowed with agency and worthy of political representation, and conceptualizations of inert nature to be known by science and used for development, to create space to conceive nature as spiritually immanent. The second objective —

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., “Nuestros objetivos,” [https://www.e-science.unicamp.br/prosul/admin/publicacoes/documentos/publicacao\\_607\\_UINPI.pdf](https://www.e-science.unicamp.br/prosul/admin/publicacoes/documentos/publicacao_607_UINPI.pdf).

“to train professionals and technicians” — paradoxically celebrates the very identities promoted by neoliberal hegemony: entrepreneurs, professionals, and technicians. Out of context, this objective could be read as a market solution to poverty by means of economic incorporation. The third, fourth, and fifth objectives propose to incorporate indigenous knowledge into the curriculum, and to offer a “high-quality” education catered to the particular problems faced by indigenous communities in the twenty-first century. Taken together, the planning claimed, these objectives would contribute to the construction of an intercultural society, conceived as “mutual understanding and respect” and “grounded in the concept of harmonious coexistence,” *sumak kawsay*.

After nearly a decade of planning, the team presented its proposal to CONESUP. On November 26, 2003, CONESUP approved it and sent a resolution to Congress. Eight months later, on July 28, 2004, Congress issued Law Number 2004-40 acknowledging that “It is in the national interest to promote the creation of this Center of Higher Education which complements the intercultural system of bilingual education currently operating in Ecuador as outlined in Article 20 of the Law of Higher Education.”<sup>196</sup> Article one of the new law states:

The Intercultural University of Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples, *Amawtay Wasi*, is hereby created as a self-financing private institution, of private law and with legal jurisdiction, not for profit, with academic, administrative, and financial autonomy. Its activities shall be regulated in accordance with the provisions of the Constitutional Policies of the Republic, the Law of Higher Education, the University Statute and its rules.<sup>197</sup>

The new law’s passage meant that UIAW was admitted with full “academic, administrative, and financial autonomy” into the National System of Higher Education. With little available funding,

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<sup>196</sup> Republic of Ecuador Congress, *Law Creating the Universidad Intercultural de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos Indígenas Amawtay Wasi*, December 8, 2003: [https://www.corteconstitucional.gob.ec/images/stories/pdfs/SUBE\\_Y\\_BAJA/SUBE\\_Y\\_BAJA3/0027-09-AN-res.pdf](https://www.corteconstitucional.gob.ec/images/stories/pdfs/SUBE_Y_BAJA/SUBE_Y_BAJA3/0027-09-AN-res.pdf).

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

UIAW had to begin as a private university. Luis Macas, rector of UIAW at its time of closure, felt the need to defend its status as a private school: it was “not for profit, that is to say, for capitalist purposes,” he explained later, but out of necessity to survive.<sup>198</sup> Macas posits UIAW as anti-capitalist and not-Western; nevertheless, the university required approval from CONESUP, and earned it in part by using the language of “science” and by accepting CONESUP’s terms of approval: privatization. The university’s acceptance into the National System of Higher Education presented an epistemic paradox, as supposedly autonomous indigenous knowledge came to be subject to the National Law of Higher Education.

Article four articulates this contradiction, stating that the “academic autonomy” promised the university included the right to produce knowledge “for the fulfillment of its purposes,” as an indigenous school designed to address indigenous educational needs. The state acknowledged and listed by name the immanent Centers of Knowing outlined in UIAW’s epistemological structure: The “Center Kawsay, or life; the Center Ushay - Yachay, or interculturality; the Center Ruray-Ushay, or Life Technosciences; Center Munay-Ruray, or the Living World; and the Center Yachay-Munay, or the Cosmovisions.”<sup>199</sup> Formal state recognition of indigenous centers of knowing would appear to respect indigenous rights to pedagogical autonomy; nevertheless, UIAW’s acceptance into the National System of Higher Education remained contingent upon its subjugation to state law. To affirm these relations of power, the law stipulated that UIAW’s administration must submit the university Statute within sixty days for approval by CONESUP, to

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<sup>198</sup> Macas, “Pluriversidad Indígena Amawtay Wasi: ¡PRESENTE!” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaTRLn8g-VyI>.

<sup>199</sup> Republic of Ecuador Congress, *Law Creating the Universidad Intercultural de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos Indígenas Amawtay Wasi*, December 8, 2003: [https://www.corteconstitucional.gob.ec/images/stories/pdfs/SUBE\\_Y\\_BAJA/SUBE\\_Y\\_BAJA3/0027-09-AN-res.pdf](https://www.corteconstitucional.gob.ec/images/stories/pdfs/SUBE_Y_BAJA/SUBE_Y_BAJA3/0027-09-AN-res.pdf).

mark the official commencement of the school. It also prohibited UIAW from offering graduate-level courses for the next five years.

On November 30, 2004, CONESUP officially approved the university's commitment "to contribute to the formation of human talents that will prioritize a harmonious relationship between Pachamama (Mother Nature) and the Runa (Human Being), based upon the principle of Sumak Kawsanamanta Yachay, which means 'Learning Wisdom and the Good Way to Live.'"<sup>200</sup> UIAW celebrated its inauguration "as part of the living web that we weave in the intercultural cosmos" with the immediate commencement of classes in the *chakra* (township) of Conocoto. Available majors included Ancestral Architecture, Intercultural Pedagogy, and Agricultural Engineering, among others.<sup>201</sup> The start of classes marked the culmination of a decade-long project to achieve pedagogical autonomy for indigenous communities — an impressive feat in an era characterized by state violence and repression against indigenous mobilization.

Over the new few years, UIAW would expand to include four campuses throughout the Andes, and come to be seen as a model for success amongst indigenous groups across Latin America.<sup>202</sup> Nevertheless, as Esquit observes, "this victory was not so straight forward" because "it also represented the state's influence in the political definition of [indigenous] identity and rights." UIAW's creation was not only the result of indigenous demands for intercultural education, but belonged to a broader social movement to reform education in Ecuador and subjugate it to state management and review.

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<sup>200</sup> Universidad Intercultural de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos Indígenas Amawtay Wasi, "Nuestra visión," [https://www.e-science.unicamp.br/prosul/admin/publicacoes/documentos/publicacao\\_607\\_UINPI.pdf](https://www.e-science.unicamp.br/prosul/admin/publicacoes/documentos/publicacao_607_UINPI.pdf).

<sup>201</sup> Pluriversidad Amawtay Wasi's *Facebook* page, accessed April 14, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/pluriversidad.wasi/photos/pb.1028193743865608.-2207520000.1460700674./1063927170292265/?type=3&theater>.

<sup>202</sup> Macas, "Pluriversidad Indígena Amawtay Wasi: ¡PRESENTE!," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaTRLn8g-VyI>.

In 2006, during the final year of Alfredo Palacio's presidency, the Ministry of Education proposed a ten-year plan that was promptly approved by national referendum and became mandatory regardless of presidential successor. The eight policies of the Decennial Plan for Education 2006-2015 (PDE) proposed to universalize and standardize education Ecuador, using a discourse of social inclusion and equal opportunity.<sup>203</sup> It promised citizens universal access to a “quality” intercultural education, with “quality” defined in terms of quantifiable material resources such as “physical infrastructure” and “equipment.” Most importantly, the PDE established a legal basis for the National System of Assessment and Accountability. The political implications of the PDE were huge: it subjugated the authority of indigenous schools — designed to produce immanent knowledge by and for indigenous groups — to universal assessment and review by the state. This political trend would only increase when Correa arrived to power.

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<sup>203</sup> The eight policies are as follows: 1. Universalize elementary education. 2. Universalize middle school education. 3. Increase Bachillerato [high school] enrollment to at least 75 per cent of the population in the corresponding age group. 4. Eradicate illiteracy and strengthen adult education. 5. Improve the physical infrastructure and equipment of schools. 6. Improve quality and equity in education and implement a national assessment and accountability system. 7. Elevate the status of the teaching profession and improve initial teacher education, professional development, working conditions and quality of life for teachers. 8. Annually increase by 0.5 per cent of the GDP the amount allocated to education until at least 6 per cent is reached.

Pablo Cevallos Estarellas and Daniela Bramwell, “Ecuador, 2007-2014: Attempting a Radical Educational Transformation,” in *Education in South America*, ed. Simon Schwartzman (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015): [https://www.academia.edu/21006908/Ecuador\\_2007-2014.\\_Attempting\\_a\\_radical\\_educational\\_transformation](https://www.academia.edu/21006908/Ecuador_2007-2014._Attempting_a_radical_educational_transformation).



## B. Correa's reign (2006 — 2013)

Upon taking office in 2007, Correa promptly approved the Intercultural Education Act, which added three more objectives to the Decennial Plan for Education. The new law proposed to reform the legal framework of the National System of Higher Education (NSHE) to allow for “profound change”; to re-establish state authority over the NSHE to “better implement public policy”; and to “redeem the public school,” which had been widely discredited, through programs of evaluation and assessment. These reforms were to be accompanied by a budget increase of \$2.3 billion a year.<sup>204</sup>

Correa's policy reforms addressed indigenous demands for state-funded intercultural education by pledging to “reorganize the supply of educational opportunities” to increase the access of “permanently excluded groups.” To increase the jurisdiction of the state over national education, Correa's government employed a two-prong approach. The first tactic involved concentrating all primary and secondary schools into institutions called Millennium Schools (Unidades Educativas del Milenio, UEM's). To “better the quality of public education in Ecuador,” the Ministry of Education promised to

provid[e] integral educative infrastructure, with innovative physical and technological resources, so that these educative centers will be the referent of an educational model for the third millennium, which integrates functionality with flexible and adaptable spaces, sporting areas for recreation, furniture and adequate technological support.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> “Education for All,” *The Business Year*, <https://www.thebusinessyear.com/ecuador-2015/education-for-all/review>.

<sup>205</sup> Ecuador Ministry of Education, “Proyecto emergente de Unidades Educativas del Milenio y Establecimientos Réplica,” 6 November 2015: <http://educacion.gob.ec/proyecto-emergente-de-unidades-educativas-del-milenio-y-establecimientos-replica/>.

The second strategy was to implement a national system of evaluation that included student, teacher, and institutional performance assessments.<sup>206</sup> As such, the 2007 Intercultural Education Act belonged to a broader socialist project to universalize and standardize knowledge in Ecuador, and subjugate it to state review.

While the 2008 constitutional amendments marked an unprecedented historical achievement for the indigenous movement, they also served socialist political agendas. Laws passed to address indigenous demands for bilingual intercultural education were repurposed by the state to affirm its own universal authority to evaluate the “quality” of education in Ecuador. In line with its pledge to provide citizens with *el buen vivir*, the state assumed responsibility for assuring universal access to a “quality intercultural education” in Ecuador. The new amendments established a legal precedent for the state to evaluate indigenous knowledge according to modern frameworks of understanding — for “quality” — and find them lacking. Though an undeniable victory for the indigenous movement, the 2008 amendments also reified hierarchies that marginalized indigenous authority to produce knowledge.

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<sup>206</sup> Estarellas and Bramwell, “Ecuador, 2007-2014: Attempting a Radical Educational Transformation,” [https://www.academia.edu/21006908/Ecuador\\_2007-2014.\\_Attempting\\_a\\_radical\\_educational\\_transformation](https://www.academia.edu/21006908/Ecuador_2007-2014._Attempting_a_radical_educational_transformation).

For example, Title II on the citizens' Rights to Buen Vivir holds the state responsible for providing universal access to bilingual intercultural education in Ecuador.<sup>207</sup> Article 355 goes so far as to state: "The state will recognize each university's... academic, administrative, financial and organic autonomy... [and] guarantee the exercise of academic liberty and the right to search for truth, without restrictions."<sup>208</sup> The constitution uses a discourse of "equal opportunity" and individual rights to assure universities in the NSHE — including UIAW — academic liberty.

At the same time, other amendments placed UIAW even further under state control. Article 344 subjugated the National System of Education to state review by the National Educative Authority, a political body designed to "regulate and control the activities related to education, such as the functioning of the entities in the National System of Education."<sup>209</sup> Significantly, Article 346 established that "There will exist an autonomous public institution, for comprehensive internal and external evaluation, which will promote the quality of education."<sup>210</sup> Thus the state granted itself authority to evaluate the "quality" of education in Ecuador, according to its own definition of the term.

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<sup>207</sup> Article 347 requires the state to "guarantee a system of bilingual intercultural education, which will be used as the principle language of education for the respective [indigenous] nationalities, and Spanish as the language of intercultural relations." This locates responsibility for assuring the citizen's human right to an "intercultural education" with the state — not indigenous groups — and can be understood as the result of political projects by indigenous groups and the state alike to incorporate community schools into the NSHE. Ecuador Constitution, Title II, Chapter I, Article 347.

Moreover, Article 348 requires the state to finance "community education" — a term understood to refer to indigenous community schools — insofar as they are "duly qualified, in accordance with the law." This meant that the state had to provide adequate financial resources to support teachers and students in indigenous educative spaces. However, it also made state funding conditional on conformity to state standards for "qualification" and "quality." Ibid., Article 384.

Article 351 assures the National System of Higher Education will be governed by principles of "equal opportunity" and "self-determination in the production of thought and knowledge." Ibid., Article 351.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., Article 355.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., Article 344.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., Article 346.

Most importantly, Article 354 grants the state permission to shut down those schools and universities — including UIAW — which do not meet its requirements for “quality.”<sup>211</sup> Together, the new amendments create a paradox between UIAW’s “academic liberty and the right to search for truth without restrictions,” and the state’s universal authority to evaluate indigenous schools according to its own definition of “quality,” and find them lacking. Armed with these new laws, the state commenced its first evaluation of UIAW.

On October 18, 2009, three members of the National Council of Evaluation and Accreditation (CONEA) visited UIAW’s administrative center in downtown Quito, intending to finish the evaluation in one day. The team made no effort to visit any of the four community campuses where classes were offered; nor did they consider the intercultural framework of the university, as stipulated by law. Instead, the team recommended that UIAW be shut down along with twenty-six other universities in Ecuador — “on the grounds that [the school’s] academic offerings did not fulfill the minimum conditions to continue to function as a university.”<sup>212</sup> According to CONEA's assessment, UIAW lacked “mercantile quality.”

Macas and the administrative team fought to maintain the university’s accreditation with the NSHE. They requested that CONEA explain how it had incorporated UIAW’s intercultural dimension into its analysis of the university’s curriculum. CONEA’s response stated that their evaluation model was “universal,” with no exceptions made for any university — including

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<sup>211</sup> “The body charged with accreditation and quality assurance will be able to suspend, in accordance with the law, universities, polytechnic schools, institutes of higher education, technologies, and pedagogies, as well as request the repeal of those that have been created by law.” *Ibid.*, Article 354.

<sup>212</sup> Macas, “Pluriversidad Indígena Amawtay Wasi: ¡PRESENTE!” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaTRLn8g-VyI>.

UIAW.<sup>213</sup> CONESUP concurrently denied UIAW's request to open more academic programs in communities that had petitioned for them.

UIAW turned to the Constitutional Court of Ecuador for support. In December 2009, the Court ruled that CONESUP must function in agreement with Convention 169 of the ILO (Articles 2, 3, 4, 5 and 27) and the Ecuadorian Constitution, ruling that "UIAW can and should develop its own model of higher education based upon its own learning principles grounded in Indigenous knowledge, which can serve as an innovative influence in the national system of education."<sup>214</sup> Though UIAW would not be closed, the struggle was far from over. A little over a year later, the National Assembly would approve a revised version of Correa's 2007 Law of Intercultural Education (LOEI), to further expand the scope of the National System of Education and expand state authority over the production of knowledge in Ecuador.

The new LOEI, passed by the National Assembly on March 31, 2011, used the 2008 constitutional amendments to establish Millennium Schools (referenced above) and INEVAL, an institution for evaluating and assessing the NSHE.<sup>215</sup> These two institutions worked together to universalize and standardize the "quality" of education in Ecuador, and legitimized state closure of indigenous educative spaces. The 2011 LOEI cited Article twenty-eight of the new constitution, which required the state to provide universal education as a human right, in order to

guarantee the right to education, and determine the principles and general ends that orient Ecuadorian education within the framework of el Buen Vivir, interculturality, and plurinationality... It

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<sup>213</sup> Cultural Survival, "The House of Wisdom: Ecuador's Intercultural University and Its Challenges," <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/ecuador/house-wisdom-ecuador-s-intercultural-university-and-its-challenges>.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Published in Official Registry No. 417, March 31, 2011.

develops and deepens constitutional rights in an educative environment and establishes the basic regulations for... the functioning of the Nation System of Higher Education.<sup>216</sup>

Article one thus grants the state authority to define discourses of “el buen vivir, interculturality, and plurinationality” originally articulated by the indigenous movement. It proposes to “develop and broaden the constitutional rights” achieved through indigenous political organizing to grant itself authority over the NSHE. In other words, the new LOEI used indigenous political achievements of 2008 designed to empower indigenous groups, to justify its own universal control over knowledge in Ecuador.

Along with the Millennium Schools and INEVAL, the new law established a national Bilingual Intercultural Education System (SEIB) within the NSHE, “to guarantee *el buen vivir* in the plurinational State.” Article seventy-eight requires

the curriculum of the Bilingual Intercultural System of Education [to] be developed within the framework of current models, in concordance with the national curriculum, which necessarily reflects the intercultural and plurinational character of the State.<sup>217</sup>

The SEIB was intended to replace indigenous community schools as authoritative spaces of intercultural learning. Article seventy-seven declares “The Bilingual Intercultural System of Education includes all those groups articulated by the policies, norms, and members of the educative community from the community level [up]... which relate directly with the processes of learning in ancestral and official languages.”<sup>218</sup> With this law, the state assumed responsibility for defin-

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<sup>216</sup> *Organic Law of Intercultural Education*, Executive Decree No. 1241, Official Registry No. 417 (March 31, 2011): <http://educaciondecalidad.ec/ley-educacion-intercultural-menu/ley-educacion-intercultural-texto-ley.html>.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 78.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

ing the methods and purposes of an “intercultural education;” in so doing, it claimed the authority to evaluate and discern what may from what may not be considered “knowledge.”

The SEIB had two main objectives. The first — to “develop, fortify, and potentiate bilingual intercultural education, with criteria for quality, from elementary through secondary and higher education”<sup>219</sup> — granted the state authority to assess and determine the quality of indigenous knowledge according to its own frameworks of evaluation. The second, to “potentiate ... the use of ancestral languages, whenever possible, in all social contexts,”<sup>220</sup> revealed the state’s intent to relieve indigenous groups of the authority to define and implement the meaning of a “bilingual intercultural education,” and assume the responsibility for itself. Because the state — and not indigenous groups — would now be responsible for assuring “quality” intercultural education in Ecuador, the state — and not indigenous groups — would have the authority to determine what “quality” looked like.

The new LOIE also used the constitutional amendments to subsume the NSHE to state assessment and review. Article sixty-seven establishes the National Institute of Educative Evaluation (INEVAL) to “promot[e] the quality of education” in Ecuador, and Article sixty-eight grants it the authority to develop and apply “indicators of quality.” Thus indigenous projects to incorporate UIAW into the NSHE worked in concert with state projects to increase its own jurisdiction over indigenous pedagogy and knowledge production.

Seven months after the new LOEI, in October 2011, UIAW submitted a petition to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples. It called on the UN to support UIAW’s

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., Article 81.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

efforts to offer university degree programs for indigenous communities in Ecuador. In the meantime, the UIAW had passed its five-year minimum requirement to offer graduate courses. On April 28, 2012 the first student cohort graduated with degrees in ancestral architecture, sustainable agriculture, and intercultural education. Yet between April 2012 and October 2013 only sixty-two students total would graduate, as the following month witnessed both the implementation of Millennium Schools and the creation of INEVAL.

Between May and December of 2012, the Ministry of Education initiated its “Educational Opportunity Reorganization Model” to construct Millennium Schools across Ecuador. The purpose of the UEM’s was to enhance the efficiency and utility of educational facilities, and thereby advance the “quality” of education in Ecuador. The state understood “quality” to mean access to material wealth in terms of sports facilities, computer labs, and learning materials; it pledged to build eight hundred schools by the end of 2017, at an estimated cost of \$8 billion.<sup>221</sup>

Millennium Schools were designed to increase the jurisdiction of the NSHE in rural areas. Through this initiative, the Ministry of Education proposed to “develop an educative model that responds to local and national needs” by incorporating “rural zones permanently excluded from state-supported systems”<sup>222</sup> into the NSHE, simultaneously subjugating these communities to state authority and control. Framed as a solution to indigenous demands for access to educative resources and funding, the Ministry promised to begin construction of the UEM’s “in the poorest [national] sectors, with the highest indices of unmet basic needs, ... with institutions characterized by low educational quality and by the absence of basic minimum conditions for the

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<sup>221</sup> “Education for All,” *The Business Year*, <https://www.thebusinessyear.com/ecuador-2015/education-for-all/review>.

<sup>222</sup> Ecuador Ministry of Education, “Unidades Educativas del Milenio,” <http://educacion.gob.ec/unidades-educativas-del-milenio-5/>.



formation of girls, boys and youth.”<sup>223</sup> It preemptively defined rural sectors — referring to indigenous communities — as always-already characterized by “low educative quality” and “lacking the minimum conditions” to provide students with a quality education. Its proposal to implement Millennium Schools (in order to provide universal access to “quality” modern education) thus reproduced historical hierarchies that presumed indigenous inability to produce knowledge.

On November 26, 2012, in the midst launching the Millennium Schools initiative, the Ministry of Education also formed the National Institute of Educative Evaluation, (Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa, INEVAL). With a legal basis in Article 346 of the 2008 Constitution<sup>224</sup> and LOEI Articles sixty-seven and -eight (discussed above), INEVAL became the administrative body responsible for evaluating the NSHE. Criteria for evaluation would be determined “with a basis in the standards for educative quality defined by the Ministry of Education”; and INEVAL was charged with “develop[ing] others which it considers technically pertinent.”<sup>225</sup> INEVAL’s responsibilities included “developing methodologies for adequate evaluation at the national, zonal, and local level; elaborating instruments of evaluation and security protocols; processing and analyzing results to help the National Educative Authority to make informed decisions; and building and applying indicators to evaluate the quality of the National System of Education.”<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Tellingly, official state discourse uses the female gender pronoun (“mujeres” or “niñas”) first when referring to mixed-gender groups of people, evidence that the order of appearance of indigenous terms in the constitutional amendments (“nature, Pachamama” and “el buen vivir, sumak kawsay”) is not an accident. Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Which reads: “There will exist a public institution with autonomous internal and external evaluative authority, which promotes the quality of education.” Ecuador Constitution, Title VII, Chapter 1, Article 346.

<sup>225</sup> Ecuador Ministry of Education, “Unidades Educativas del Milenio,” <http://educacion.gob.ec/unidades-educativas-del-milenio-5/>.

<sup>226</sup> National Institute of Educative Evaluation, “Objetivos,” <http://www.evaluacion.gob.ec/objetivos/>.

The following year, in June 2013, the Ministry of Education published a “Manual for Recurrent and Preventative Maintenance for Educative Spaces.” The introductory quote reads: “There will be a re-powering and restructuring of educational institutions and schools representative of the country, so that they may have access to the adequate infrastructure in order to promote the Educative Revolution. This requires a systemic program and the permanent maintenance and equipment of infrastructure.”<sup>227</sup> The manual codified “adequate infrastructure” as a prerequisite for the continued success of the Citizen’s Revolution in Ecuador, simultaneously legitimizing state projects to close or remodel schools that did not meet basic minimum requirements. Publication of the manual marked yet another stage in ongoing projects to standardize the education system and subjugate knowledge to state review. Yet it also presented something new: it established a universal standard for “adequate infrastructure” against which all universities in the NSHE would be judged, with “basic minimum” requirements which — if not met — meant the school’s demise. As such, it brought the struggle for authority to produce knowledge between the continent’s first state-funded indigenous university, and the state itself to a head.

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<sup>227</sup> Ministry of Education, “Manual de mantenimiento recurrente y preventivo de los espacios educativos,” [http://educacion.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2013/06/Manual\\_infraestructura.pdf](http://educacion.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2013/06/Manual_infraestructura.pdf).

### C. The closure of Amawtay Wasi (2013-2014)

On September 23, 2013, three months after publication of the Ministry's "Manual for Educative Spaces," the Council for the Evaluation, Accreditation and Assurance of Quality University Education (CEAACES, formerly CONEA) returned to UIAW for a final review and decision based on recommendations made in their October 2009 visit. UIAW had agreed to a follow-up review on the condition that CEAACES work together with the university to design an appropriate model for the assessment to account for UIAW's epistemic difference, as stipulated by the Constitutional Court's 2009 decision. But CEAACES refused, opting to override the articles of the ILO-169 Convention and impose Ecuadorian law instead. As such, UIAW had to agree to a framework of evaluation that was "far from" the pedagogical philosophy of the university, "even though the model did not fit reality."<sup>228</sup>

Macas describes the evaluation process as marked by irregularities. The review team, comprised of sixteen people, included two armed bodyguards — "as if we were criminals," he admonished. And though UIAW's administration was told to expect a rubric prior to evaluation, the on-site observation happened first — and the rubrics never came. "What was the review team doing, without the information from the rubrics beforehand?" he asked pointedly in a subsequent interview. "What's the point [of having an assessment] when there's nothing to verify?" With only three days' notice prior to review, CEAACES claimed there would not be enough time to include the main points proposed during the two cooperative workshops designed to construct an evaluation process pertinent to UIAW's intercultural educative model.

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<sup>228</sup> Macas, "Pluriversidad Indígena Amawtay Wasi: ¡PRESENTE!", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaTRLn8g-VyI>.

On Monday, September 23, at eight-thirty in the morning, CEAACES's evaluation of UIAW began. After welcoming the team, Macas voiced his preoccupation that an intercultural assessment model — so carefully discussed with CEAACES beforehand — had not been implemented. He expressed concern that “CEAACES's model of evaluation does not correspond to the pedagogical model of Amawtay Wasi,” but rather “completely ignores it, to such an extent that it fails to mention the parts of the institution's organizational structure; it confuses the Centers of Knowing with the University's disciplines, for example.”<sup>229</sup> A member of the review team acknowledged CEAACES's failure to incorporate the agreed-upon points. Nevertheless, he hurried on, the assessment model was already approved and “now is not the time for critique, but rather application [of the model] as is.”<sup>230</sup> He further clarified that the evaluation team was not authorized to incorporate any modifications at that time. Macas responded: “We know that that is not up for discussion; our preoccupation is that all of the data that you collect [here today] will have no value in the diagram outlined by CEAACES. As such, we already know how the results will turn out; to the point that one can already imagine CEAACES's decision; and if everything has all already been decided, come, let us begin the so-called ‘evaluation.’”<sup>231</sup>

Despite the apparent rigidity of CEAACES's rubric, UIAW's administration described the evaluation itself as “without clear protocol,” ultimately “discretionary, that is to say, subject to the criteria of the evaluators.”<sup>232</sup> To offer an example, it noted that “On Monday, [the review

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<sup>229</sup> Facebook, Inc., “Pluriversidad Amawtay Wasi's *Facebook* page.”

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> This discrepancy on CEAACES's part may have been caused by an adjustment to accommodate *El Libro Verde*, UIAW's (relatively succinct) teaching philosophy. My research has turned up very little on this book aside from reference to it in works by Macas and other indigenous intellectuals; it appears to be a self-published work. If this book were less than three hundred pages — which is likely — this could explain CEAACES's sudden self-contradiction. It also demonstrates that the evaluation rubric was not as fixed as the team originally made it seem. Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

team] maintained that a book for university use should have at least three hundred pages, otherwise it is not considered a book. On Tuesday, it maintained that books for university use were those that had one hundred pages or more; only these books would get points in the evaluation. The criteria for CEAACES to evaluate and grade a book for university use is by its number of pages.”<sup>233</sup> Other examples included when “they [the review team] could find no explanation for the fact that we pay our teachers in kind, [as] the Western requirement of CEAACES is that they are paid a salary... In this case, ZERO.”<sup>234</sup> Such discrepancies led Macas to question the validity of the evaluation itself, suggesting that CEAACES merely sought “to give a negative result so as to eliminate the university.” In a post-evaluation review of the experience, UIAW rated CEAACES a “0” for co-management and “lack of transparency in the evaluation process.”<sup>235</sup> The university later posted on its website: “May the so-called ‘evaluation’ practiced by CEAACES be abandoned in effect, for deliberately ignoring the pedagogical philosophy of Amawtay Wasi.” It called instead for “another assessment, relevant to our reality.”<sup>236</sup>

Six weeks later on Friday, November 4th, a public hearing commenced to comprise the final stage of UIAW’s evaluation. CEAACES was to announce its resolution regarding the university’s academic standing in the NSHE. With a forty percent minimum required to pass; and considering CEAACES’ resolution that “the Intercultural University of Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples, Amawtay Wasi, ‘Did Not Pass’ the evaluation process ..., for not having passed the minimum standards for quality established by the Council, having obtained in the evaluation an

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Macas, “Pluriversidad Indígena Amawtay Wasi: ¡PRESENTE!” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaTRLn8g-VyI>.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

overall result of 26.9 percent”;<sup>237</sup> CES resolved to “suspend indefinitely the Intercultural University of Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples, Amawtay Wasi.”<sup>238</sup> The administration at UIAW responded heatedly through social media, denouncing “an evaluation realized with parameters far from the pedagogical philosophy of the University, which — even though the model was given to them — the ‘evaluators’ did not read; they threw it away.”<sup>239</sup> Macas insists that the evaluation took place “for the sake of negating UIAW...to delegitimize us to the public.”<sup>240</sup> Nevertheless, in accordance with Ecuadorian law, the Universidad Intercultural Amawtay Wasi closed indefinitely in April 2014.

According to Macas, the supposed “lack of mercantile quality” at UIAW was simply a pretext for closing the school. He claims that between 2005 and 2013, UIAW functioned exclusively off of student pensions and community support: “The government never gave a cent to the university, on the contrary, ... it gave nothing but \$3,104 for teacher salaries.” As such, he finds a contradiction inherent in the state’s mandate to close: “Correa’s government, without giving us any resources, came to demand from us ‘mercantile quality,’ that is: buildings, libraries, laboratories.”<sup>241</sup> According to state standards, which view “quality” in terms of quantifiable material goods like technology and infrastructure, indigenous schools are always-already found “lacking.” This, Macas explains, is why UIAW was forced to close — “We didn’t have the ‘quality,’ so we

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<sup>237</sup> The Republic of Ecuador Council of Evaluation, Accreditation, and Quality Assurance for Higher Education, *Resolution No. 001-068* (November 4, 2013): <http://www.ceaaces.gob.ec/sitio/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/RESOLUCIÓN-No.-001-068-CEAACES-2013-APROBACIÓN-INFORME-TÉCNICO-FINAL-DEL-PROCESO-DE-EVALUACIÓN-REALIZADO-POR-LA-U.-AMAWTAY-WASI.pdf>.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>239</sup> Facebook, Inc., “Pluriversidad Amawtay Wasi’s Facebook page.”

<sup>240</sup> Macas, “Pluriversidad Indígena Amawtay Wasi: ¡PRESENTE!” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaTRLn8g-VyI>.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

had to be shut down.”<sup>242</sup> By closing UIAW, the state affirmed its own authority to define and impose a universal standard for bilingual intercultural education in Ecuador, irrespective of epistemic difference.

Projects to subsume indigenous knowledge to state assessment and review defeat the purpose for which Amawtay Wasi was created in the first place — to produce knowledge by and for the particular problems facing indigenous communities. Macas explains the difference between their respective understandings of quality: “For [the state], a ‘quality’ education means ‘no poverty.’ To be rich means that you have money, resources, intelligent buildings. That is their standard for gauging poverty.” His own definition differs: “It is necessary to educate our children,” for identity purposes: to perpetuate indigenous ways of knowing and living. “The state replaced [our community schools] with these Millennium Schools.... But buildings and computers don’t make an education: people are the actors of education; the community is the actor of education.”<sup>243</sup>

These differing definitions of “quality” arise from their distinct respective political agendas; hence purposes for producing knowledge. The state produces knowledge for the “third millennium,” as it proclaims in its Millennium Schools initiative — scientific knowledge that will transform the “natural wealth” of the country into consumer goods like technology and infrastructure, to which Ecuadorian citizens have universal access. As the National Plan for Buen Vivir (analyzed above) acknowledges, “It is not about keeping our natural heritage unharmed — given the use of energy and materials by different societies and given the ecosystems’ assimila-

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

tion capacity, this is impossible.”<sup>244</sup> As indigenous groups seek to protect and defend Pachama-  
ma, their purposes for producing knowledge directly counter that goal. When “living,” UIAW  
“work[ed] to overcome the divide between practice and theory” that allowed “nature” to be un-  
derstood as a “repository of objectified, neutralized, and largely inert materiality that existed for  
the fulfillment of the economic goals of the ‘masters.’”<sup>245</sup> It produced knowledge to validate and  
affirm indigenous identities and ways of knowing, in order to contribute to the construction of a  
plurinational state and intercultural society founded on *sumak kawsay*.

By subsuming particular “unproductive” indigenous agendas to the universalizing im-  
pulse of the state, Correa’s administration has committed an act of epistemic violence. Macas  
describes the UEM’s with their dormitory-style housing like the “Indian Schools in the United  
States,” whose goal was “to take children out of their culture by force, to intern them, to brain-  
wash them: to assimilate them culturally so that they would never return to their place, and stop  
being Indians.”<sup>246</sup> As such, he considers the closure of autonomous indigenous educative spaces  
tantamount to “ethnocide” — not through the use of weapons, but education.

The legal battle over UIAW’s “right to search for the truth, without restrictions”<sup>247</sup> speaks  
to the continued struggle between indigenous groups and the state over the authority to produce  
knowledge. For just as indigenous groups fought to define the meaning of “nature” in the 2008  
constitution, they have continued to struggle for the authority to determine what a “quality”

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<sup>244</sup> The Republic of Ecuador National Planning Council, *National Plan for Good Living 2009-2013: Building a Plurinational and Intercultural State* (Quito: National Planning and Development Secretary, 2009), 21.

<sup>245</sup> Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 12.

<sup>246</sup> Macas, “Pluriversidad Indígena Amawtay Wasi: ¡PRESENTE!” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaTRLn8g-VyI>.

<sup>247</sup> Ecuador Constitution, Title II, Chapter 1, Article 355.



bilingual intercultural education means for their communities. “Although we have no money and no resources, we have a plurinational state,” explains Macas. “We supported [the new constitution] thinking that it would respect our difference, that we would not have the same identity [as the rest of society], but we would have the same rights. But here the good Indians are those who think with the government, and the Indians who think against the government are bad Indians, which have to be eliminated.”<sup>248</sup> Despite having “achieved” plurinationality in the post-neoliberal turn, the state still does not recognize or respect indigenous epistemic difference. Instead, it privileges those whose discourses “think with the government,” as Macas claims, and seeks to “eliminate those [that] think against it.” Thus, the recent political transformations in Ecuador are best read as neoliberalism-in-action: the partial inclusion of “productive” subaltern knowledge, and simultaneous exclusion of that which is considered “unproductive” or excessive, as part of a broader state project to respond to indigenous demands while containing them in a broader neoliberal order.

Macas locates responsibility for the reproduction of conceptual hierarchies with the state. He claims the indigenous movement “must leave the legality of the uni-national state, to search for legality in a plurinational context... [Our rights are] in the constitution, but the colonialists will not implement them... They cannot conceive different autonomies in one state. We haven’t started yet, but we need to begin building a plurinational state.”<sup>249</sup> With this statement Macas absolves himself and other indigenous leaders of responsibility, blaming “colonialists” for the failure to construct a plurinational state. And yet, as this chapter has shown, the legislation used by

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<sup>248</sup> Macas, “Pluriversidad Indígena Amawtay Wasi: ¡PRESENTE!” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaTRLn8g-VyI>.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

the state to legitimize closing indigenous schools — including UIAW — was in fact passed at the behest of the indigenous movement, which had since the 1990's demanded access to state funding and bilingual intercultural education, and won them in the amendments of 2008. As Esquit notes, this was not an unqualified victory: for it also meant the state's influence in the definitions not only of “bilingual intercultural education,” but also plurinationality, *sumak kawsay*, and other indigenous political discourses. Thus, a project designed for “indigenous control of indigenous affairs” came to be redefined to legitimize the state's universal and exclusive authority to rule.

This thesis has shown that the state is not alone in reproducing epistemic hierarchies. Indigenous intellectuals participate too in processes of re-articulation that strip immanent concepts like *sumak kawsay* of natural and spiritual elements. In the process, they also unintentionally strip political demands of the radical potential to produce knowledge that challenges the anthropocentric logic of development. By framing demands for state recognition of difference using hegemonic discourse, indigenous intellectuals failed to confront the structures of thought that ban immanent knowledge from the realm of politics. In so doing, they reproduced the very hierarchies they fought to un-do.

Demands to reopen UIAW continue to rely on this “double discourse” shared with the state. By demanding an “intercultural, autonomous, communitarian school” funded by the state with the “necessary economic resources,” the administration team effectively demands that which Correa promises to provide. In a Facebook post from November 15, 2013, the newly renamed “Pluriversidad Amawtay Wasi” demanded that the government leave the NSHE's resolution ineffective, and:

proceed to instate the law to create the University Amawtay Wasi so that it can be officially recognized as communitarian, intercultural, autonomous, and [financed] with the necessary economic resources... Halt the ethnocide by means of homogenizing mercantilist education... [for] an intercultural education from elementary through higher education with epistemic equality and in dialogue between knowledges.<sup>250</sup>

Even though the team denounces state appropriation, they continue to articulate demands for change using this language. This example shows how indigenous intellectuals continue to appeal to the state for inclusion — in terms of access to “the necessary economic resources” — in a discourse recognized by and shared with the state. As Spivak contends, this strategy of “recognition through assimilation” is one method by which hegemony creates space for the domesticated Other — but does not allow for recognition of the Other as such.<sup>251</sup>

This thesis has shown that recent political transformations in Ecuador are best understood as a case of “neoliberalism-in-action.” New market relations of power which attained global hegemonic status in the 1980’s privileged new discourses and identities — including those of the indigenous intellectual, who sought autonomy from the state through a discourse of “development,” interculturality and plurinationality. In order to maintain hegemonic status, the state selectively created space for the “productive” aspects of this increasingly powerful indigenous movement, to “respond to [their] demands while containing them in a broader neoliberal order.”<sup>252</sup> It disregarded that which it found “unproductive”: the rights of Pacha mama. Thus discourses of *sumak kawsay*, plurinationality, and interculturality appear in official state discourse as evidence that plurinationality had been “achieved” in Ecuador, while indigenous demands for radical epistemic restructuring — “indigenous control of indigenous affairs” — go unmet.

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<sup>250</sup> Facebook, Inc., “Pluriversidad Amawtay Wasi’s Facebook page.”

<sup>251</sup> Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” 89.

<sup>252</sup> Hale, “Does Multiculturalism Menace?,” 493.

Indigenous intellectuals, the paradigmatic neoliberal subject, are faced with a “tragic dilemma.”<sup>253</sup> As representatives between worlds, they are tasked with explaining their demands (which are inherently immanent, and require translating the “unthinkable”) to the modern secular state. Should they rely on immanent concepts and language alone, their demands for recognition would be incomprehensible. And yet if they frame demands in a liberalizing political discourse the state might recognize, they risk reproducing the very conceptual hierarchies they seek to change: that “the representation of citizens belongs to politics, but politics is not allowed to have any relation to the nonhumans produced and mobilized by science and technology.”<sup>254</sup> So far, prominent indigenous figures in Ecuador have continued to rely on this “double discourse” they share with the state. This — more so than repressive narratives — explains why neoliberal hierarchies in knowledge and identity persist beyond the “post-neoliberal” turn.

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<sup>253</sup> Literary historian David Scott explains that in Greek tragedies, “the fact of plurality of values and ends do not present an occasion to affirm a rational calculus on the basis of which to choose the best way to proceed. What interests the tragedians are those instances in which the plurality of values is such that it is impossible to choose satisfactorily – to choose without remainder – between rival goods. This is the kind of conflict over which tragedy wishes to ponder.” David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 182-183.

<sup>254</sup> de la Cadena, “Indigenous Cosmopolitics in the Andes,” 342.

## Conclusion

To return to Spivak’s question: Yes, the subaltern can speak; but the ways in which they do are not intuitive. Though Tinsman considers the question to be “banal” — as “everyone buys into the regime”<sup>255</sup> — this historical reading requires more nuance. The question is not merely who buys into the regime, but why they do and how their identities are shaped in the process. This changes the question, and brings the role of indigenous intellectuals back into the conversation. Conceptualizations of neoliberalism as a productive force reveal that hierarchies in discourse, thought, and identity maintain hegemony despite political change not because they are imposed by an elite few against “the rest” of society, but because diverse actors across the class spectrum — including indigenous intellectuals and other subaltern groups — perpetuate them too.

Macas insists that UIAW was better off without state support. Before 2008, he explains, “We could use the *libro verde* — UIAW’s philosophy of pedagogy — to organize our own curriculum, based on our own ways of knowing. We couldn’t do that as a state university.”<sup>256</sup> His observation affirms the fact that with state funding comes state management: the right to “academic liberty” and the material resources promised by the new constitution only extends as far as indigenous subjugation to state authority. Macas surmises: “If you don’t comply with state standards, you cannot be a university. What do we say? We must question, What is a university?

Where does the concept come from? It comes from the West... for Westerners and Western ways

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<sup>255</sup> Tinsman, *Buying into the Regime*, 14.

<sup>256</sup> Macas, “Pluriversidad Indígena Amawtay Wasi: ¡PRESENTE!” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaTRLn8g-VyI>.

of thinking. Do we really want to be a university? Or do we want an autonomous space of critical thinking as indigenous peoples?”<sup>257</sup>

By questioning the stakes of inclusion, Macas questions whether or not it remains a desirable goal for the indigenous movement in Ecuador. For even as they seek recognition of indigenous difference, the state promises to include these groups as part of its own project to expand and universalize market logics. As such, indigenous and state actors alike are motivated by different reasons to create space in state discourse for indigenous ways of knowing. But “In a world governed by the colonial matrix of power, he who includes and she who is welcome to be included stand in codified relations of power.”<sup>258</sup> The question necessarily becomes, inclusion for what and whose purpose?

The indigenous movement demands inclusion in order to confront the colonial matrix of power, by unstructuring the hierarchies it creates along lines of race, class, and gender. They present discourses of *sumak kawsay*, interculturality and plurinationality as an opportunity to interrupt the logic of development and pursue a more egalitarian future. By contrast, the state includes indigenous knowledge to circumscribe the radical potential of these demands, in an effort to maintain hegemonic status. As the indigenous movement in Ecuador gained momentum and began to make claims to hegemony, socialist agendas created space for the most “productive” aspects of these claims to both lessen their radical potential, and affirm the legitimacy of socialist rule.

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, xv.

As they lacked the authority to define the “terms of inclusion,” indigenous intellectuals effectively equipped the state with the means to retain universal authority over knowledge in Ecuador. While they used their knowledge to articulate demands to decolonize the production of knowledge, the state employed it as evidence that these demands had been achieved by the Citizen’s Revolution, thereby obscuring the continued operation of the colonial matrix of power. Thus the question *Inclusion for what/whose purposes?* has two possible answers: either to achieve radical structural change, or prevent it.

In no way does this thesis intend to minimize the role of indigenous groups in transforming Ecuadorian politics and society. As a direct result of this movement, knowledge that was previously excluded and marginalized under neoliberal rule has been officially recognized and affirmed: Pacha mama holds constitutional rights; *sumak kawsay* challenges the logic of development; and scholars not only study indigenous knowledge in academia, but use it to critique hegemony and make new arguments. Rather, I have attempted to follow Esquit’s example by “further clarify[ing] the relation between hegemonic processes and indigenous resistance”<sup>259</sup> in Ecuador. My research shows the ways in which the state creates space to include indigenous knowledge and identities, as well as the ways in which it reproduces the social and political hierarchies of the neoliberal era. These issues are central to understanding neoliberalism as a historical process, to better explain how it retains hegemonic status and to imagine different futures.

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<sup>259</sup> Esquit, “Nationalist Contradictions,” 216.

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