Recoupling Groups Who Resist Dimensions of Difference, Opposition and Affirmation

Tristan Partridge

Postdoctoral Scholar (CNS/Anthropology) University of California, Santa Barbara

Abstract

This article outlines a shift in analytical focus from the outcomes of collective action to the active processes and forms of cooperation that resistance groups create, embody and engage with. By rejecting categories of difference that are imposed upon them by agents and institutions of power, and by redefining notions of opposition in their own terms, groups who resist generate opportunities for 'recoupling' themselves – allowing alliances and strengthened networks of cooperation to emerge from common practice. Drawing on fieldwork experiences in Ecuador and theoretical works of Deleuze, Derrida and Haraway, I suggest these processes depend on acts of 'affirmation': actions that reaffirm the social, economic and ecological relations that those involved deem to be valuable or vital, or both. From the specific contexts of indigenous activism in Ecuador, organising at the national and local scales and operating across boundaries of social difference, the dynamics of collaboration described here reflect those at play within a broad range of actors and collectivities engaged in diverse forms of resistance. This prompts further forms of engagement and reflection in our attempts to understand and pursue collaborative struggles for equality, collectivity and social justice.

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Groups engaged in acts of resistance face the consequences of being categorized by other agents and institutions of power as being different, or as being the opponents of such arbiters of power. The same groups may also engage directly to challenge the hierarchies implied by such categorical distinctions, and to counteract related processes of marginalisation. This article reads Deleuze, Derrida and Haraway to (i) examine how difference and opposition function within sites of contestation,

and (ii) to explore their effects on the dynamics of cooperation. Drawing upon experiences with Indigenous activists in Ecuador, I suggest a focus on affirmation – on actions that participants deem important or valuable – which enables us to see where commonalities of practice emerge, and highlights how groups foster collectivity. In different contexts of collective action, this is to ask: what is being affirmed, how, why, and by who? Such a perspective shifts analytical focus from the outcomes of action to the active processes involved. It also urges attentiveness to how differences operate among groups and within alliances that may be singularly categorized as 'opposition' by those whose authority is challenged or whose legitimacy is questioned.

Donna Haraway (1991) used 'recoupling' to describe responses to fragmented identity politics that seek to build coalitions and affinities rather than establish an essential, or categorical, unity (Reeve 2012). Here, I focus on the ways in which groups 'recouple' themselves by rejecting terms and categories placed upon them and used against them, and instead develop ways to cooperate and collaborate across difference: 'recoupling' on their own terms, rather than being defined by terms imposed by powerful others. The phrase 'groups who resist' is deliberately broad in scope, to include an open range of actors and collectivities engaged in diverse struggles to resist, recover, or reorder social and economic relations. My interest here is in settings where affirmation plays a particularly important role, and where unity of vision is not a prerequisite to action – for example, in building national movements, or in contexts where cooperation stems from common practice, not necessarily from common purpose.

Time spent with the Indigenous community of San Isidro in Ecuador's central Andes has fuelled my interest in these questions. This was a place where immediate issues (access to land, use of the landscape, access to water, the ability to practice family-scale agriculture) were addressed collectively without the collectivity having to first establish or decide upon a singular vision for the future. Processes were in place to facilitate and encourage input from as many community residents as possible, as explored below. Though I focus on examples of action among groups in one particular part of the world who identify as Indigenous (itself a term and category that has variously been imposed, challenged,

rejected and endorsed), the theoretical approaches I outline are also applicable in other contexts of collective action as means to further explore how distinct projects, or intentional sets of practices, may rely less on isolating and oppositional forms of difference, and more on those that are generative or 'affirming.'

What follows is divided into three sections: (i) a theoretical outline of difference and opposition, drawing on Deleuze to emphasise the role of action and affirmation in establishing groups who resist as agents of change; (ii) an account of how the national indigenous movement in Ecuador operates across boundaries of social difference to confront political marginalisation, thus affirming the idea of Ecuador as a plurinational country through collective action that rejects the imposition of state-defined categories, and (iii) a more localised account of how acts of affirmation (in one highland indigenous community in Ecuador) have strengthened commonality in terms that go beyond those related to legal registration with the state as an indigenous community, effectively 're-coupling' a community that has been increasingly marked by differential access to income and resources. The article concludes by reflecting on the theoretical and methodological implications of a focus on action and affirmation, and on how an attention to difference among groups and within alliances might be constructively examined in other contexts typified by conflict, opposition and contestation.

I.

Difference and Opposition / Opposition and Affirmation

Early in the discussion of 'difference' presented by Deleuze (1994), he suggests that the basis of an understanding of difference that rests upon static or essential qualities is a mistake. This is because 'difference in general is distinguished from diversity or otherness' and 'the difference "between" two things is only empirical, and the corresponding determinations are only extrinsic' (Deleuze 1994: 30, 28). What, then, determines the extent to which groups – particularly those engaged in resistance – are 'different' from the agents and institutions they oppose, and from

one another? Deleuze rejects categories that draw definitive divisions between different groups in society, especially those definitions imposed by powerful others or those that, through representation, limit active possibilities or deny the importance of action, change, and fluidity (Jun 2011): 'representation fails to capture the affirmed world of difference. Representation has only a single center… It mediates everything, but mobilises and moves nothing' (Deleuze 1994: 55–6). He instead emphasises movement, and processes that reflect the change and fluidity individuals experience when acting within a group. In place of static, categorical qualities or characteristics, and those that are externally-defined, the basis of difference emerges within social flows and shared experiences of change – through active processes of difference-making, or what Massumi (2011) calls 'differencings.'

The differences we encounter between and within groups who resist, following Deleuze, are not established solely by mobilizing forces (issues or sets of issues, complaints, demands, injustices) that an individual or group engages with, nor even by a collective sense of identity within a group: 'Deleuze replaces the foundational modern concept of identity with the concept of difference' (Jun 2011: 95). Instead, the difference-determining factors of a group are the form and flow of 'affirming' actions deployed by that group: 'in its essence, difference is the object of affirmation or affirmation itself. In its essence, affirmation is itself difference' (Deleuze 1994: 52). The idea that action is important in constituting complex relations of difference focuses attention on events and movement (rather than categories), and complements extant work on dynamics of power, cooperation and resistance (e.g. Holloway 2002; Jordan 2002). Actions of 'affirmation' are those that draw particular attention to such complex relations and overlapping dimensions of difference, opposition and resistance. Reflecting these dynamics are instances and conceptions of 'prefigurative politics,' where the means for attaining political goals are consistent with the intended outcomes (Strasinger 2010; Polletta: 2002). If those intended outcomes are equality, nonviolence, and direct democracy, then prefigurative actions toward those ends would 'affirm' those same values and principles.

Refusing to submit to, operate through, or reproduce the structures and forms of domination that threaten or impinge upon the actions be-

ing undertaken (Yuen 2001), is to coordinate action by 'creating social relations and decision-making processes that at least approximate those that might exist in the kind of society we'd like to bring about' (Graeber 2014: 85), thus actively affirming what is important to those taking part. As Rebecca Solnit (2005: 23) points out, 'Reclaim the Streets realized this beautifully, recognizing that if what the RTS activists opposed was privatization, alienation, and isolation, a street party was not just a protest of these conditions but a temporary triumph over them' (cited by Holloway 2010: 45). These actions took the street as a site of both societal exclusion and enculturation and, rejecting these happenings, RTS set about reclaiming the streets via theatrical and carnivalesque interventions: a 'revelatory and sensuous explosion' outside of (and radically different from) established political behaviour (Jordan 2002: 353). The street party was embraced as a site of inversion and affirmation. I suggest that these actions are not fully defined by their oppositional politics, nor are they only moments of 'temporary triumph.' Instead, by organising, acting and relating in ways that generate and sustain the social relations that those involved wish to bring about, these interventions are actively 'affirming' collectivity, solidarity, and immediacy.

Taking this idea further, we see the emergence and function of difference, opposition, and affirmation in a new light by looking at formulations of 'difference' that go beyond notions of dualistic opposition, to those that – again following Deleuze – recognise the concept's multiple and 'affirming' dynamics and implications. Dominant views on difference, particularly those designed to silence or marginalise dissent, tend to draw a normative line of distinction between authority and anything it deems to be oppositional. This characterises a political atmosphere that is all too familiar, bisecting the social world into those 'with us' or 'against us' – usually a volatile division enforced ultimately by violence or the threat of violence. Subsequently, any activity which can be categorized as opposition among groups who resist becomes viewed as an expression only of their place in a power struggle, a struggle mapped across the particular issues being fought for or discussed. To expand on (and to potentially subvert) this perspective – to consider more dimensions of a power struggle than straightforward opposition – is to interrogate assumptions regarding the exercise of authority and domination, and to examine the fluid, processual behaviour of power relations.

One such assumption is characterized as understanding 'power to' as the expression of force, as an individual property couched in self-belief, or as a form of interaction whose presence is limited to particular events. Such a selective view overlooks or denies the ways in which power permeates interaction. To expand this view is to consider how other forms of power might be identified and enacted, and to instead understand 'power to' as always social in its nature: an ever-present aspect of how 'sociality is constituted,' and intricately built into 'the way in which doing is organised' (Holloway 2002: 28). In this light, the loss of 'power to' is linked to the 'power over' of others, but not in a zero-sum game where gains and losses are locked in a shifting imbalance. Instead, this loss acts as a translation of all forms of power in continuous flux. Thus, pursuing intentional or coordinated actions – 'affirming actions' that participants pursue and promote as important to them – is an expression more of power to than power over. When such affirming actions are identified as 'opposition,' they face further suppression and the threat of being denied the capacity to pursue distinct social projects: 'if we are deprived of our capacity-to-do, or rather, if we are deprived of our capacity to project-beyond-and-do, of our capacity to do negatively, ecstatically, then we are deprived of our humanity' (Holloway 2002: 27-8). Opposition, however, is not only a category or relation imposed on groups by those in positions of power. As with difference, opposition can also be interrogated and reexamined as emerging from, and through, active processes.

Opposition and Affirmation

Deleuze suggests that 'the greatest difference is always an opposition' (1994: 30) but qualifies this statement with two further points. The first is that oppositions are not in themselves singular or definitive, but are shaped by evolving actions and emergent relations: 'oppositions are roughly cut from a delicate milieu of overlapping perspectives, of communicating distances, divergences and disparities, of heterogeneous potentials and intensities' (Deleuze 1994: 50). The second point qualifying Deleuze's notion of difference and opposition is that the latter is only one way in which difference is enacted, interpreted and maintained (or 'mediated'): 'Difference is "mediated" to the extent that it is subjected to

the fourfold root of identity, opposition, analogy, and resemblance' (Deleuze 1994: 29). Of these, the mediation that most strongly distinguishes and determines a subject (amid its relations with others, and with other differences) – the mediation that most 'makes the difference' and tests how far difference can extend (Deleuze 1994: 30) – is opposition.

However, since oppositions from this perspective are not fixed and are instead shaped by emergent actions, difference does not necessarily entail opposition and contradiction. Difference is more extensive than contradiction; singularity and particularity can be expressed and enacted independent of any relations of opposition. As above, the zealous and 'sensuous explosion' of immediacy – within moments like those created by Reclaim The Streets – have physical, relational, and emotional impacts that are more extensive than (and cannot be defined or understood only in terms of) the systems of privatization that they oppose. Similarly, a focus on opposition as a way to understand and identify difference limits our perspective by obscuring from view the actions that contribute to positions and particularity:

> It is not difference which presupposes opposition but opposition which presupposes difference, and far from resolving difference by tracing it back to a foundation, opposition betrays and distorts it. Our claim is not that difference in itself is not "already" contradiction, but that it cannot be reduced or traced back to contradiction, since the latter is not more but less profound than difference.
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> Deleuze 1994: 51

In this light, 'affirming actions' within resistance groups – actions which for Deleuze become 'determining factors' in establishing difference – do more than create and demarcate opposition because they derive from something other than solely a singular 'foundation' and they can, and do, change over time.

The notion of affirmation as a definitive aspect of action emphasises how multiple oppositions are generated in action – relational oppositions that occur within a multiplicity of connected differences. Multiple differences are connected, for example, between protest groups and the state, as well as between and within the social movements themselves:

'[it is not] primarily a question of dissolving tensions in the identical, but rather of distributing the disparities in a multiplicity… everywhere, couples and polarities presuppose bundles and networks, organised opposition presupposes radiations in all directions' (Deleuze 1994: 51). Thus, affirming actions are not limited to being acts of opposition, and at the same time are capable of, if not likely to result in, connecting diverse groups together through newly discovered or freshly formed networks and connections. Intentionally building or sustaining a group based on certain principles of organising and relating may present radical challenges to the more customary practices of any dominant sector of society, but it doesn't necessarily follow that they are actions of opposition. Instead, they are better thought of as acts of affirmation: doing what is most desirable for, and suitable to, the people involved in the group itself.

As described in Sections II and III, below, understanding the particularity of groups is vital to deciphering the many intersecting differences that surround and constitute them. We have seen how prefigurative political action pursues the forms of organising, relating and acting that reflect how groups would like to exist and relate, or how they would choose to exist and relate were they not as constrained or marginalised as they find themselves to be now. What is being affirmed in such instances may well be very locally specific: maintaining a particular form of congregating or decision-making, or adapting inherited ideas and methods to address immediate social and economic issues. Drawing on Deleuze, making the distinction between a dualistic concept of difference and one that is manifold and affirming is critical to highlighting these locally or relationally specific aspects of a group, and to better understanding the specificities of a group's actions and intentions.

Dualistic difference and affirming difference are distinguished by their relationship to opposition: the former is static and the latter more subject to change. Deleuze illustrates these notions of difference by drawing attention to the relations surrounding any one instance of opposition (the 'entire space' within which it is articulated):

> As for opposition… it is as though things were spread out upon a flat surface, polarised in a single plane… what is missing is the original, intensive depth which is the matrix of the entire space and the first

affirmation of difference: here, that which only afterwards appears as linear limitation and flat opposition lives and simmers in the form of free differences.

Deleuze 1994: 50-1

The 'depth' to an instance or articulation of opposition is the set of relations with other differences that affirming actions both emerge from and generate. As such, recognising the multiple, mediate ways in which groups, their concerns, their members and their opponents, are linked one to another works to destabilize the static relations of difference and opposition that might be imposed upon groups who resist. The 'depth' of actions that oppose privatization and alienation, for example, is the complex array of aspirations and expressions that go into doing whatever is necessary to affirm mutuality and immediacy in collective processes. What initially appears as flat or linear opposition is not fixed, but is better understood as being prone to development, distortion or dilution through interaction with other relations of difference – a multiplicity that disrupts attempts to 'pin down' and suppress opposition.

Another way to conceptualise the distinction between oppositional and affirming notions of difference is found in discussions that contrast 'monocentrism' with 'acentred' accounts of systems and collective activity. Deborah Rose draws on David Turner (1987: 99-106) outlining the code of 'monism' that unifies elements around the recognition of 'one ultimate principle': 'things (groups, individuals, ideas) defined as being different are brought together in sets of relationships which achieve a unity; parts are subsumed within a common code or organisation' (Rose 2000: 219). Such a singular conception of group formation (and of the development of resistance trajectories, defined by unitary opposition) obscures the manifold relations of difference that Deleuze draws attention to. It is a 'monist' approach that 'denies plurality [and] totalizes structure' (Rose 2000: 219). It also fails to engage fully with the complexity of decentred and decentering mobilizations seen in recent years, for example in global social forums, indigenous resistance across Latin America and elsewhere, anti-summit actions and innumerable campaigns to oppose or redirect development projects (Maeckelbergh 2009).

Where a dualistic interpretation of difference has been contrasted

with one which recognizes the manifold and affirming nature of surrounding interlinked and interlinking differences, here Rose contrasts 'monocentrism' with the model of an 'acentred system.' This presents us with an additional device for understanding the nature of difference beyond schismatic opposition. It also establishes a model for the acentred society which 'rejects any centralizing, unifying automaton as "an asocial intrusion"' (Rosenstiehl & Petitot 1974, at Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 17, 519) – and which rejects the exercise of 'power over' that breaks mutual recognition and denies the pursuit of social projects (Holloway 2002: 29). This, in turn, leads us 'to a position profoundly removed from notions of centralization, hierarchy, privilege, and external frames of reference' (Rose 2000: 220). Work on social movements and direct action resistance groups[1] has given significant focus to the forms of horizontal organisation currently utilized in many (global) social movements, and to the inclusivity and strength that such 'acentred' approaches deliver within those groups.

Relationality and Experience

As noted above, Deleuze's emphasis on affirmation highlights the contingency and fluidity of relations of difference in sites of contestation and oppositional action. It also highlights how a dualistic or schismatic perspective on difference fails to capture, or deliberately conceals, the complexity of networks and relations that constitute groups engaged in resistance. In Henry's (2010) analytical terms, the contrast derived from Deleuze is between static 'categorical differences' and those that are affirmed through action, so-called 'generative differences.' Generative differences do not depend on contradiction or opposition and are instead 'intensive, relational, productive and multiple' in that they (i) are identified by 'intensities' (rather than fixed qualities), (ii) 'resonate' in relations of difference across boundaries within or between groups and individuals, (iii) actualise and produce the 'form and expression' of a collective by allowing internal differences to be articulated, and (iv) exist on multiple planes and are affirmed in action through 'processes of questioning' (Henry 2010: 6-8). It is through these intensities, resonances, relations

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[1] Examples include: Maeckelbergh 2009; Graeber 2007; Graeber 2009; Nash 2001; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009; Jordan 2002.

and processes of 'generative' affirmation that action emerges: 'the particularity of things and the relations between them arise on the basis of difference' (Henry 2010: 7). In broader terms, we could gloss generative difference as reflecting a relational (rather than categorical) approach to and understanding of the world – a contrast that is not limited to theoretical propositions.

There are cosmological realities embodied by indigenous populations of the Global South and North that articulate such relational views regarding not only the identification of individuals and groups, but also of other entities and relations. Some Amazonian models of the self 'presume a spiritual unity and a corporeal diversity' among all living things (de Castro 2004). This is comparable to notions of Cree personhood that view the natural world by assuming connections and exploring differences, rather than assuming difference and examining relations (Scott 1996). Understanding the nature of differences, and how they connect, relate to one another, and morph over time, becomes vital to understanding interaction of all different kinds. In this, difference is a critical component in establishing particularity. For the current task of examining how cooperative groups differentiate and 'recouple' themselves – both done through actions of affirmation and the rejection of categories of difference imposed upon them – we need to look at how categorical divisions are avoided or overcome. If particularity is established in part by difference, and difference is emergent within affirming actions and relations, we are led to ask what kinds of action might be considered 'affirming' in this way.

One approach is to look at the relationship between oppositional (political) action and what is being proposed, promoted, expressed or tangibly created within processes of collective action (Maeckelbergh 2009). That is to ask, What is being affirmed in the actions and lived experience of those taking part? There is an unfinished history that situates apparently oppositional action within streams of resistance from Bakhtinian street carnivals (with their unpredictable and inversionary drive) to the spatial politics of the Occupy Movement (Kerton 2012; Shiffman et al. 2012), all building toward a creative point: an experiential model of the culture being fought for and desired (Duncombe 2002: 347). In actions like these, as with Reclaim The Streets' street parties, the

critical moment is not defined by destruction, but by production. Thus not all apparent opposition can be understood simply as negation, since acts of opposition are co-constituted with other relations of difference, other creative priorities and experiences.

Derrida illustrates this co-constitution with the idea of a 'playing movement' that produces distinct actors and experiences. In echoes of the contrast drawn between 'dualistic' and 'manifold and affirming' difference, his concept of différance refers to a realm of relations beyond that of category or opposition: 'What is written as différance, then, will be the playing movement that "produces" – by means of something that is not simply an activity – these differences, these effects of difference… We will designate as différance the movement according to which language, or any code, any system of referral in general is constituted "historically" as a weave of differences' (Derrida 1982: 11-12, at Plotnitsky 2004: 23). Following Brogan (1988: 31), we can read in this the idea that différance transcends the opposition of oppositional politics, and is generative in the sense of drawing together diverse systems and codes within a collectivity, moving beyond the 'binding together and separating' that comparisons and categorizations involve.

To illustrate this view on (political) opposition, Derrida refers to the creation of the 'theatre of cruelty' as a (collective) act that both sought to reinvent its own purpose and identity, and to recast its relation to the body of thought and action it opposes. Crucially, this is done through an expression of 'affirming difference' rather than through a categorical negation or opposition:

the theatre of cruelty is defined as "the affirmation / of a terrible / and, moreover, implacable necessity" (Antonin Artaud [1948] *Le théâtre de la cruauté,* p.84)… Artaud, therefore, does not call for destruction, for a new manifestation of negativity. Despite everything that it must ravage in its wake, "the theatre of cruelty / is not the symbol of an absent void." It *affirms*, it produces affirmation itself in its full and necessary rigor.

Derrida 1978: 292-3, italics original

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The terms and purposes of what is being produced are not defined by what is being opposed or negated, but by the needs and intentions being affirmed. This describes a basis of opposition, then, that is a processual mixing of action, intention, reflection and experience, rather than a singular event or instance of conflict.

Thus far, we have reviewed diverging interpretations of difference in the work of Deleuze and Derrida that contrast those based on fixed categories and impositions with those that emerge as a consequence of 'affirming' actions. The former – categorical difference – is associated with static notions of opposition; the latter – generative or affirming difference – is, by contrast, associated with actions of opposition that express power *to* (in the pursuit of intentional social projects) rather than power *over* (which typifies the exercise of authority and control). In this light, affirming actions are recognized as moving beyond opposition to create new networks and relations, and to develop an active model of the kinds of organization and interaction that are being actively fought for and constructed. The following section offers an overview and account of indigenous politics at the national level in Ecuador, in order to show how difference may be articulated with these dynamics of collaboration and political contestation.

II.

National Indigenous Politics in Ecuador:

Macrotropes, Managing Alterity and Affirming Plurinationality

A wide variety of forms of resistance and collective action fall under the term 'indigenous politics' in Ecuador. Acts and expressions range across direct action, mass mobilizations, and popular protest, through to electoral politics and engagement with institutions of authority, most notably the national government (Becker 2011b). This involves interactions (and tensions) that connect groups from different parts of the country, foregrounding a variety of class-based concerns, identity politics, and campaigns for particular rights. Here, I focus on how two contrasting

'macrotropes,' or paradigms, of difference and diversity within national politics have fuelled indigenous action from the post-independence era and first half the twentieth century, up to the present day (Whitten 2003). The first are racialised policies of *mestizaje* (lit. blending) that sought to create a category of inclusion redrawing boundaries of social and cultural difference – imposing an artificial homogeneity that denied divisions between Indigenous, Black, *Mestizo* and White populations (and ignored the diversity that characterised each of those groups, especially within the different that identify as Indigenous). The second paradigm is that of *plurinacionalidad* (pluri- or multi-nationalism; pluri/multinationality) that reflected the call from indigenous groups in Ecuador for more meaningful social and political inclusion, equality and the acknowledgement of territorial rights (Becker 2011b: 143). The means to achieve this kind of political recognition required diverse groups to act collaboratively[2], to create and affirm the political spaces that plurinationality would require.

The needs, sources of conflict, and livelihoods for those involved in the Indigenous Movement vary considerably across different groups and regional members – consistently testing the alliances that the movement both generates and depends upon. Ecuador is said to host Latin America's strongest indigenous movement, fronted by CONAIE [Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador] which was formed in 1986 from previous organisations of indigenous nationalities from

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[2] The account offered here, necessarily brief for reasons of space, is not intended to overlook the divisions and conflicts among Indigenous groups that occurred around plurinationalism: 'Even among Indigenous activists the significance of plurinationalism was hotly debated, with those allied with the CONAIE most interested in pressing the issue. Pedro de la Cruz, [then president of another, more class-based Indigenous coalition: FENOCIN, the National Federation of Campesino, Indigenous and Black Organisations in Ecuador] remained skeptical of the practicality of the concept of plurinationality, stressing interculturality instead (El Comercio, March 23, 2008). In contrast, for Ecuarunari [the regional federation of highland Kichwa peoples], "plurinationalism means building a strong and sovereign state that recognizes and makes possible the full exercise of collective and individual rights and promotes equal development for all of Ecuador and not only for certain regions or sectors" (Ecuarunari 2007: 4). It denied that plurinationalism meant creating a state within a state' (Becker 2011a: 54).

the Sierra (highland) and Amazonian regions (Yashar 2005). This was just two years before graffiti reading '*500 años de resistencia*' ['500 years of resistance'] began appearing across the country, in opposition to the celebrations planned to mark the quincentennial of Columbus' arrival in the Americas, dated to October 12, 1492 (Meisch 1992; Lucas 2000). CONAIE came to national and international prominence through the 1990 *levantamiento* (uprising), followed by other mobilizations in 1992, 1994, 1997, 2000, and 2001 (Martínez Novo 2009). CONAIE and other organisations within the Movement have since influenced development policy and the drafting of the national constitution in 1998 (Yashar 2005) and again in 2008.

These hard-won gains and ongoing rifts and shifts in Ecuadorian politics have roots in recent histories of interacting economic policies, racism, marginalisation and strengthened identity politics across Latin America. Preceding decades that saw neoliberal policies being imposed and adopted across the region also saw many states and elites respond systematically to political opposition by 'encouraging people to express discontent through the idiom of identity' (Hale 1997: 575). Through such strategies, expressions of discontent are theoretically more easily contained (by more powerful agents) due to the fact that the medium of communication is unitary (and centred around the will of those who have a monopoly on the use of force in order to further the govern-mental project)[3] – the idiom of identity or indigeneity as defined by the state. Meanwhile the subject groups (encouraged to participate in both political dialogues and governmental projects) span across numer-ous cultural planes and ethnicities – a diversity denied by state-defined categories (Blaser 2004).

One result of such limited definitions is that the particularity of groups expressing discontent is also denied, the 'culture of cultures' of a diverse country is negated, and various forms of (cultural, political, ethical, economic) difference are collapsed into a unitary category of

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[3] Following Max Weber's formulation: 'a compulsory political association with continuous organisation will be called a "state" if and insofar as its administra-tive staff successfully upholds a claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order' (Graeber 2007: 162).

'other' or 'opponent' (Whitten 2003). This is a process of 'managing alterity' and the extent to which it affects the freedom and interpretation of protest groups acts as a measure of repression. It structures political relations on similar principles to earlier policies of *mestizaje* – which sought to homogenize a nation divided by distinctions between White, Mestizo, Indigenous and Black populations (Latta 2011) – leaving structural relations of inequality intact behind a rhetorical facade of equality and inclusion (de la Torre 2006). Rather than cultivating a platform for identity politics, *mestizaje* policies sought to neutralise the particularity of claims coming from diverse groups and populations. As such, the Ecuadorian government's current efforts to stifle opposition reflect what many indigenous and activist groups regard as the latest in an historical series of measures designed to enforce the will of elites (Zamosc 2007).

For Whitten, within a nation of different languages, ecologies, cultural and social systems, there have been two paradigms that 'compete for salience in the politics and poetics of identity and representation… One is that of *el mestizaje* [the blending]… and the other is that of *multinacionalidad* (multinationalism, multinationality), subsuming multiculturalism. The first emanates from the elite; the second swells up from el pueblo [the people]… Who is to be identified as *el pueblo* in any given context, in any specific arena, during any particular crisis, depends, in part, on the ways by which the macrotropes of *el mestizaje* and *multinacionalidad* play out on [national] stages' (Whitten 2003: 12). *Multinacionalidad* is more frequently referred to as *plurinacionalidad* or plurinationality which, as Whitten highlighted, subsumes the nominal or purely theoretical respect for cultural diversity associated with top-down multiculturalism, and builds on the demands of indigenous and grassroots groups. This pushes further, calling for radical structural change and the transformation of democratic and participatory processes within the post-colonial state in ways that reflect the needs and experiences of all indigenous nationalities and peoples, demanding full equality across diversity (Huanacuni 2010; Lang 2013: 6). The two macrotropes/paradigms have followed very different trajectories of implementation and resistance.

The deeply racialised policies of *mestizaje* set political parameters that limited opposing demands and voices, and it was in that context that Ecuadorian indigenous organising grew, became formalised at the

national level throughout the twentieth century, and ultimately led to uprisings in the 1990s and actions that have followed (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009). Forced into a unitary category of 'citizen' that denied particularity, diverse indigenous groups pushed against imposed understandings of national unity, the diminishing of 'disparate social and cultural worlds' and the falsehood of a 'shared deontic and epistemic horizon (Foucault 1997)' (Povinelli 2001: 326). Those who set the agenda for what was tolerable variety rather than unacceptable deviance from deontological norms had sought to group together and thus contain diverse movements and indigenous nationalities, as unification in the form of an imposition. However, other methods of building collaboration across difference have since emerged and taken shape within indigenous action in Ecuador. Processes of creating, negotiating, and achieving a more positive form of unity or solidarity – recoupling different groups on their own terms, through collaborative action – have since confronted dominant forces that seek to limit and control resistance.

Recoupling: opposing universal visions

The universalising drive of *mestizaje* policies – subsuming difference – reflects the threat of powerful agents 'dissolving' opponents that Haraway (1991) describes. Haraway outlines the need for 'unity' across diverse communicative struggles as a means for combatting structures of marginalisation, expressing a hope for finding 'more potent myths for resistance and recoupling' among a diverse range of actors (Haraway 1991: 154). Underlying this view on resistance are not just myths, but also critical analyses of the very forms of domination being resisted. This highlights how acts of opposition involve both a range of all-too-real material struggles as well as a battle that is largely communicative – a contested terrain involving definitions as much as specific demands or rights.

The model of domination Haraway describes is said to operate through new networks of 'informatics' rather than the 'comfortable old hierarchical dominations,' where social phenomena are recast according to its own logic: cooperation as 'communications enhancement,' the Family Wage as 'Comparable worth,' and even 'Nature/Culture' as identifiable 'Fields of Difference' (Haraway 1991: 161-2). Although this

model depicts forms of systematic control that seek to subsume more than ethnic diversity within a singular vision – to go beyond the strategies and intent of *mestizaje* policies – it illustrates some of the effects of political universalisation and its consequences for oppositional groups. The context outlined is one where collective action confronts *totalising* structures seeking to reduce all difference to an aspect of its own machinery – to dissolve opponents within its own explanatory language, or within its own 'code': translating the world through a singular, common language in which 'all resistance to instrumental control disappears and all heterogeneity can be submitted to disassembly, reassembly, investment, and exchange' (Haraway 1991: 164). This equates to 'dissolving tensions in the identical' in Deleuze's terms (Deleuze 1994: 51).

Actions fighting this 'disassembly' and dissolution, and using difference to political advantage while building a movement on 'connected heterogeneity' (Joas 1996), were central to the '500 years of resistance' mobilisations, and for the formation of the 1990 indigenous *levantamiento*/uprising in Ecuador. The achievements of indigenous movements regarding nominal recognition of multiple nationalities and the protection of collective rights, appeared first in the 1998 Constitution (Yashar 2005), but were only fully realised through the movements' influence on the 2008 Constituent Assembly and the formation of that document:

> The 1998 constitution had defined Ecuador as "pluricultural and multiethnic," but stopped short of the more politically charged term 'plurinational.' When the 1998 constitution failed to deliver on its promises, indigenous movements returned to pressing their long-standing and key central demand of plurinationalism… for the first time the 2008 constitution incorporated this contentious word into its text. Article 1 now declared that Ecuador was a "constitutional state of rights and justice, social, democratic, sovereign, independent, unitary, intercultural, plurinational and secular"

> Becker 2011b: 143

Constitutional change has marked a stage in the unfinished process of fighting for realised equality, rather than an end in itself. Achieving this stage, however, has meant negating the kinds of totalising structures

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that Haraway described above. Within the strictures of state-defined notions of inclusion/exclusion and categories of cultural/social difference, the indigenous movement brought together diverse concerns to tackle the rhetoric and policies that otherwise limited political participation. In de Certeau's terms, the diversity of groups and actions within such a movement reflect a 'polytheism of scattered practices' pitted against the 'monotheistic privilege [of] panoptic apparatuses' (de Certeau 1984: 48, cited by Mitchell 2007: 93). However, as in other social movements for change dependent on the contributions of diverse agents, such practices are not only scattered in space and time. They can also be *polytheistic* in their creation and instigation, drawing on different beliefs, priorities and realities, and occasionally finding expression through coordinated campaigns, developing collaborations between different groups at the local, regional and national levels. We can think about actions that tackle totalising attempts to deny difference among their opponents – actions that are constituted by the contributions of diverse groups – as 'tactics' in the sense that their diverse, often discordant, basis disrupts the imposition of categories defined by the state and its institutions.

Resisting state-imposed categories

Typically, de Certeau's tactics are acts that agents use to unsettle dominant scripts and power relations, and which (unlike Ecuador's Indigenous Movement) are scattered in the sense that they operate within isolated spheres, avoiding (or being unsuitable for) direct engagement with state politics. However, the 'space' of the tactic, also derived from de Certeau, is a concept useful in highlighting how any such disruptive action tends to take place within a discursive realm – or space – defined by powerful others (Mitchell 2007: 99). As an 'art of the weak' a tactic 'must play on, and with, a terrain imposed on it' since 'the space of a tactic is the space of the other' (de Certeau 1984: 37). Those deemed different, or identified as opponents of state policies and visions, are thus marked, forced to operate within this 'other' realm and its related categories.

As examples, de Certeau looks at historical colonial contexts where the relatively powerless developed ways 'of using imposed systems' to 'create at least a certain play in that order, a space for manoevers [sic] of unequal forces and for utopian points of reference' (de Certeau 1984:

18). Yet tactics are not only discursive responses to dominant discourses (of difference): 'Rather than cultural symbolic or linguistic systems, de Certeau appears to see them more as speech acts – tactical deployments of symbolism'[4] (Mitchell 2007: 100). These are acts of affirmation in the sense that they find ways to restate and rearticulate the kinds of social relations that groups and individuals would choose to initiate and depend upon were they not as restricted as they are by the 'imposed systems' and the limited 'space of the tactic' that de Certeau describes. To the extent that they are acts that reaffirm locally specific ways of relating and being, such tactics 'encourage heterogeneity' and serve to counteract dominant dictations (or narratives) of difference and powerlessness (Napolitano & Pratten 2007: 4)[5]. In this light, coordinated political action of the kind that led to constitutional change in Ecuador in 1998 and 2008 (drawing on diverse indigenous groups from across the country and their struggles) embodies resistance to the imposition by the state of categories of difference and inclusion. This was done by restating, rearticulating, and reclaiming – by affirming – cultural and ethico-political differences that policies of mestizaje sought to stifle and deny, and using those differences to expand the range of potential collaborative alliances (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009).

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[4] 'A North African living in Paris or Roubaix . . . insinuates into the system imposed on him by the construction of a low-income housing development or of the French language the ways of "dwelling" (in a house or language) peculiar to his native Kabylia. He superimposes them and, by that combination, creates for himself a space in which he can find ways of using the constraining order of the place or of the language. Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of plurality and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation' (de Certeau 1984: 30, as at Mitchell 2007: 100).

[5] 'The coherent thread of de Certeau's diverse range is not a "high" theoretical theme, but a method, a way of operating which encourages heterogeneity and allows alterity to proliferate… He provides a methodology, it is argued, to grasp subjectivity in its fragmented forms, since he unsettles models of internalised subjectivity (and therefore its confinement to a cognitive/psychological level) by constantly connecting internalisation to modes of political, historical critique and the production of narratives. More than ever, this applies to the emergence of fragmented selves in an age of late capitalism, both as sense of loss and as sense of (ironic dis-) connection' (Napolitano & Pratten 2007: 4).

Against a 'totalising universalism' (Mitchell 2007: 93) these struggles emphasised their particularity and respective differences, counteracting strategies pursued by institutions of power that were 'derived from and oriented toward the realisation of an abstract model' (de Certeau 1984: 29) – the model of *mestizaje* – in favour of opening and maintaining a political space that would recognise indigenous plurinationality. Both the dynamics of resistance, and the focus of subsequent studies tasked with understanding them, have distinguished between dominant definitions of difference or inclusion, and those that are actively created by groups engaged in resistance, 'making a distinction between objective [as in externally-defined] definitions of class, race, and ethnicity and the subjective processes through which these are constructed' (Pallares 2002: 222).

Constitutional rights: coopted, defended, challenged

Some of the changes introduced in Ecuador's most recent (2008) Constitution further complicate the dynamics of difference and opposition, making the contested terrain between state politics, indigenous groups and grassroots mobilizations one that is bound up in processes of cooption. That document proposed radical amendments, for example incorporating Food Sovereignty into national agricultural policy – a concept initially articulated by the transnational autonomous activist group, La Via Campesina, and later adopted in ethos by numerous rural social movements in Ecuador. The constitution also adopted elements of Kichwa indigenous thought. 'Buen Vivir' (or 'Harmonious Living,' from the Kichwa concept of *Sumak Kawsay*) became a framework development policy, and the Nature itself (from the Kichwa understanding of *Pachamama*, or Mother Nature) was granted the collective right to 'exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles, structure, functions and its processes in evolution'[6]. The national Indigenous Movement and numerous ecological campaign groups were instrumental in the constituent

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[6] Excerpts from the 2008 Constitution (in English) are available here: http://therightsofnature.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/Rights-for-Nature-Articles-in-Ecuadors-Constitution.pdf, accessed: 18 October 2015.

assembly responsible for these changes (Acosta 2012). Subsequent reactions among activist groups have involved ongoing efforts to maintain the intention of the Constitution – attempts to articulate the complexities of what such wide-ranging revisions to national political and development strategies would mean for the populations concerned, and to engage both state institutions and those affected populations in establishing systems to implement them.

These coopting political shifts in Ecuador have affected the perceived need for protest groups to distinguish themselves (and to maintain ideological distance from) state institutions, but to do so in a political atmosphere increasingly hostile toward voices of dissent. Questions raised by these relatively unprecedented political transitions concern how difference and opposition are identified and governed, which in turn affects how separate, oppositional groups have been treated, and the conditions within which they can forge alliances and respond – calling for revised forms of theoretical engagement and analysis. Some of the government's reactions have, however, followed patterns that are all too familiar – despite the hopes rooted in political changes achieved by indigenous groups and activist movements in the 1990s: 'Ecuador has achieved what most Latin American societies have been dreaming of for decades: a stable leftist government. Yet things did not turn out the way social movements had imagined them. In particular, the list of people accused of terrorism expands each day… Ecuador's legal crackdown against all forms of political dissidence is so systematic that "lawfare," the abuse of law as a weapon of war, is becoming a new style of governance' (Picq 2013). At the time of writing, Manuela Picq – the author of that article on 'lawfare' – is one among a number of prominent activists, scholars and journalists threatened with imprisonment or deportation, amidst a new indigenous uprising in the country (Becker 2015b).

Before these recent escalations in the use of administrative and physical violence, the character of political opposition in Ecuador had itself changed. Leftist political gains made in the years and decades running up to Rafael Correa's first election in 2006 ended decades of national political instability, and effectively defeated the traditional conservative opposition – meaning that the social-movement and indigenous left became the most significant political challenge to the Correa administration

(Becker 2013). Any challenge to Correa's government (and to various demands of the 'Citizen's Revolution' he has declared as being in process) faced increasingly severe repercussions: official narratives turned the president's 'democratic adversaries' into 'irreconcilable enemies,' among them leaders and activists from indigenous groups and other social movements (de la Torre 2011). Correa has already denounced the latest indigenous uprising as an attempt to 'destabilize' the government driven by covert right-wing interests, but organisers and activists maintain that their focus is on implementing the 'promises' of the 2008 Constitution (against the demands of conservatives), calling for a government that engages in dialogue and is 'more responsive' to indigenous and social movement demands (Becker 2015a).

Affirming support for the equality- and justice-focused components of the 2008 Constitution has thus become a central plank in contemporary struggle. It also locates mobilisations on a technical and legal plane that engages directly with governmental strategies of dismissing or denouncing opposition, or implementing modes of 'lawfare.' Oppositional political subjects are frequently caught in this political terrain, however, contesting the terms of multiple claims for justice. The predicament of 'maintaining power, but losing authority' may affect both the state and oppositional groups, but differentially so since the state (having more resources to do so) tends toward increased surveillance and 'new networks of domination,' narrowing the terms of opposition, and creating 'more complex mechanisms for maintaining control' (Mitchell 2007: 93). Discursive use of 'with us or against us' politics may also appear in both state and oppositional, or activist, rhetoric (Abu-Lughod 2002), but again the state has primary access to modes of communication and influence and is thus better equipped to marshal opposition according to its own needs. By denying differences between various left- and right-wing groups deemed to be opponents, the Correa administration denies plurality – and thus obscures the particularity of separate claims for change and for justice – pursuing a 'monocentrism' (Rose 2000) that articulates 'one idea as the only idea' (Said 1979): in this case, the notion of the 'Citizen's Revolution.'

Affirming plurality and particularity

These are established tools of governance – mapping the territory of what is and what is not deemed acceptable, and shaping (or seeking to shape) societal understandings of 'the good, the tolerable, the abhorrent, and the just' (Povinelli 1998). The limits set by these understandings impact the breadth, scope, and conditions of possibility that the actions of oppositional groups both maintain and operate within: 'political subjects and their modes of resistance are formed within rather than beyond the organisational terrain of the state (Mitchell 1991). Modes of collective action operate within the contours and fault lines of this landscape, not outside it' (Napolitano & Pratten 2007: 9). Correa's dismissive insistence on a single plane of opposition is a particular affront to indigenous groups, who have fought for official recognition of Ecuador's different Indigenous Nationalities as part of a 'plurinational state' – long-standing demands that Correa initially endorsed (Becker 2011b) – and who have, over time, accommodated competing claims and transitions among its members between class-based and identity-based mobilization, between 'peasant struggles' and 'Indian resistance' (Pallares 2002). As we have seen, by affirming plurinationality and rejecting the terms of opposition imposed by state agencies, indigenous uprisings in the 1990s and since foregrounded plurality, embraced particularity and, to some extent, overcame the fault lines of a political landscape that had denied difference between voices of dissent.

The focus here on national level politics in Ecuador, the macro-tropes of *mestizaje* and *plurinacionalidad*, and indigenous mobilizations that have continued to build momentum over many decades highlights contrasting practices regarding difference and opposition pursued by the government and by indigenous movements. While policies have variously denied categories of difference (creating universal categories) or have imposed them (as part of strategies to discredit dissent and opposition), resistance movements have foregrounded affirmation, thus affirming both the plurality and particularity of a diverse range of calls for social justice ('recoupled' in their support for plurinationality), as well as the content of a constitution that has reached further than most in expanding the rights of marginalised groups and entities. These struggles are ongoing, and new hurdles continually challenge social movements in Ec-

uador. Such affirming actions, however, continue to reflect how groups forge political subjectivities and, crucially, form political alliances across boundaries of social and cultural difference, doing so within a political terrain whose dimensions have been imposed by elites whose interests and positions are directly threatened by the actions of those alliances.

I have made frequent reference to the diversity of Ecuador's indigenous groups and nationalities, and the range of livelihoods, interests, and realities that emerge in the country's very different social and geographical regions. On a more localized scale, difference and diversity create other challenges for groups acting collaboratively, and the next section examines this in the context of one Andean indigenous community in particular.

III.

San Isidro: Indigenous Community Organising and Affirming Collectivity

Alliances formed within CONAIE and the indigenous movement have mobilised against changes proposed by Correa to the 2008 constitution, and continue to be particularly strong in defence of land and water (thus against the 'neo-extractivism' of new gold mines and expanded oil operations in Amazon regions), by including calls for water justice and more meaningful land reform (Becker 2015a). Issues around land and water are acute in Ecuador's central Andes, and opposing the expansion of export-oriented agricultural enterprises, mobilising to stop the expansion of water-mining activities, and campaigning to reverse historic water rights that favour large farm estates at the expense of indigenous communities have all been oppositional efforts in which people in the community of San Isidro have played an active role in recent years (Partridge, forthcoming). Above, I looked at how indigenous action at the national level dealt with dynamics of difference and opposition in efforts to affirm the goal of fashioning Ecuador as a plurinational state. Here, I focus on how a community has dealt with difference in particular while strengthening communal ties and supporting collaborative action.

San Isidro is a community that has become increasingly diverse in terms of the resources people have access to. Some of the 92 households there in 2011 depended entirely on agriculture for their income. For them, contributing time and effort to a community irrigation project sustained their ability to raise and harvest food on diminutive plots of land. Others, meanwhile, had relatively lucrative manual jobs in the Amazon's oil industry. Though less dependent on irrigation and on agriculture, many migrant labourers continued to participate in community projects, such as the pipeline, as a way to renew ties with friends and family during the one-week-in-three they were usually able to spend at home. Differences in income levels, understandings of identity and purpose, or disputes and conflicts, were neither denied nor necessarily overcome within different forms of coordinated action. Common concerns could overlap sufficiently for action to continue, amidst a diverging range of personal motivations for participation. In this this sense, cooperation required shared practices not identical purposes.

Similarly, communal undertakings required varying levels of commitment and sacrifice. In some instances, the forms of action had a deliberate aim – campaigns, construction, conflict-resolution. Collaborating to counteract land inequalities and the effects of histories of dispossession were ways to assert – or to affirm – a 'capacity and intent to remake a badly crafted social world' (Whitten & Whitten 2011). At other times, the outcomes and consequences of communal action were more elusive. New connections, relationships, perspectives were the diffuse implications of such collective attempts to bring about what people deemed vital or desirable – or both (Holloway 2010: 4).

Concerns and conflicts in San Isidro stemmed from issues of land, water, resources, and livelihoods – the basis of material needs and value. Since 2009, San Isidro has been legally recognised as a registered indigenous community. This makes the community legible to both the state, and to other communities operating within the national Indigenous Movement (Partridge, forthcoming). Legibility in this context brings with it potential benefits. In relations with the state, certain collective rights (over land use and community organising) are theoretically protected by law (Becker 2011a); in engagement with members of regional and national indigenous groups, forming coalitions and scaling-up local

mobilisations is facilitated through established networks and channels of communication (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009). In this sense, San Isidro is operating within a category of difference defined by the state.

Registering as a community and achieving this status is, nonetheless, insufficient to generate and sustain the relations necessary to keep communal action thriving in San Isidro. Community status is, at root, an imposed category defined by the state agencies that govern registration, and brings with it expectations and requirements of a community in terms of local political leadership, structures of representation and communication, and terms of participation within regional- and national-level Indigenous organisations (Bretón 2003) – Andean communities do not 'exist outside the state to be intruded upon by it' (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009: 206). To address how acts of affirmation interact with difference in this context, the focus here is on how residents in San Isidro, operating within the expectations and limitations of community status, have strengthened collectivity through practice rather than through formal membership or registration, 'recoupling' a community experiencing divisive shifts and pressures. Central to these efforts has been the use of the *minga* or 'collective work day' – a process and practice that both facilitates and enforces participation by the majority of community residents[7].

The irrigation pipeline project had transformed *minga* practice in San Isidro. Since its construction began in 2009, widespread participation in *mingas* were vital both to the pipeline's original completion, and

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[7] A lot of regional literature has focused on mingas (collective work-parties) in the different forms they take in collective life across Andean regions. Some paint a picture I do not recognize of unproblematic harmony and cooperation, seemingly without the tensions that tend to emerge in any collective endeavour. In the necessarily brief reflections here, however, the primary emphasis is on how mingas are used to engage with some of the immediate realities of life in San Isidro and how, within these processes, they affirm relations, histories and interactions that are specific to this community. Further work would relate these experiences to those documented elsewhere, which variously interpret mingas as cultural expressions, symbols of community, or as a source of free labour for governmental development programmes (Latta 2011; Bretón 2003), or else detail their importance in contemporary forms of community organising, and within Indigenous political action (Pallares 2002; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009).

to its ongoing use. *Mingas* involved physical labour contributed by representatives from member-households (people who had access to the water for use in their smallholdings), for anywhere from a few hours to a few days at a time, and they took place usually at least once a month. Though their practice had long been a recognized feature of communal life, their frequency and intensity had increased since the pipeline project began, and each event typically involved around 50-100 people. In terms of maintaining a supply of fresh water from the páramo directly into the village, for the purpose of supporting and encouraging family-scale agriculture, *mingas* were undoubtedly productive. The work required (in terms of upkeep and organising) was extensive and significant: demanding equal, shared, physical and financial contributions from its use-members, the pipeline both depended on and generated a sense of cooperation centred around resources held in common.

Mingas were undertaken by different people for different reasons. Residents who depended financially on the agricultural produce they could grow and sell were likely to place more emphasis on the productive benefits of the pipeline project, whilst a migrant worker returning home for a week, say, might (equally) have been keen to share in the affective exchanges offered by mingas as social events. Differences were not obscured or 'dissolved in the identical' (Deleuze 1994: 51) as with what happens when diverse groups are forced to subscribe to homogenising practices and policies. Instead, shared and affirming practices provided a basis for cooperation. What participants shared is a relationship with an administrative system (community status and its organisational requirements) that enables and governs the ongoing practice of mingas, doing so through a series of lists, accounts and community meetings. Mingas emerged out of the coordination of people feeling variously drawn, motivated, coerced, or compelled to participate to their practice.

Shared work and repeated acts: strengthening connections

What are the resonances with collective action undertaken in other contexts, and how might dynamics of collectivity in San Isidro be reflected or recreated in such contexts? Durkheim (1995 [1912]) famously described 'collective effervescence' to explore the idea of social 'force,' when peo-

ple experience mental, physical or emotional influences and transformations, with the result that they become more tightly bound 'to the ideals valued by their social group' (Shilling & Mellor 1998: 196). Durkheim's focus, however, dealt more with ritual than collective work (Harris 2007: 160), and the relationship between *minga* practices and formalized community expectations and requirements is of central importance. Another reading of *minga* practices would highlight their role in affirmation and generative difference.

In section I, we saw how Deleuze's emphasis on practices of affirmation highlight the particularity of groups and networks who are engaged in resistance and collective action. Rather than being defined by the categories and impositions that state structures use to make groups legible (or to denounce them as opponents), such groups can define their values and intentions through affirming actions, generating the connections and relations that subsequently foster support for furthering their social projects. 'Recoupling' is achieved through action, rather than being imposed. In place of 'categorical difference' we have 'generative difference' which emerges from particular intensities, resonances, relations and active processes (Henry 2010: 7). At the heart of such intensities and relations are repeated acts – a form of repetition that does not necessarily involve imitation or replication, but which nonetheless contributes to processes of affirmation.

For Deleuze there are processes of repetition that refer to the 're-appearance of identical' events and phenomena, and there are those by which 'difference can be translated from one situation to another' through so-called *synthetic repetition*, which is sub-divided into processes of *active synthesis* and *passive synthesis* (Henry 2010: 8). The latter, though not active, is still considered to be 'constitutive' (Deleuze 1994: 71)[8]. An example of *passive* synthesis (linked to group formation) would be collective learning processes that, over time, generate organisational forms and collective subjectivities within a group (Henry 2010: 8). In the case of San Isidro, this would be the inherited structures of community gov-

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[8] Here Deleuze has followed Hume's idea that: '*Repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind which contemplates it*' and adds that *passive synthesis* 'is not carried out by the mind, but occurs in the mind which contemplates, prior to all memory and all reflection' (Deleuze 1994: 70, 71).

ernance. Meanwhile, active synthesis (expression/activity within a movement) is reflected in a group's outward-looking and explicit political assertions, both physical and verbal, whether as a manifesto, mobilisation, or organised meeting (Henry 2010: 9). In this case, the outward focus of active synthesis is toward the pipeline project, demonstrating through organisation and activity the value and purpose of collaborative undertakings.

DeLanda applies a similar process of repetition to the maintenance and perpetuation of the work of organisations, including governments, most notably in repeated combinations of 'technical and ceremonial expressions' of legitimacy: 'the daily following of commands by members of an organisation is itself a direct expression of legitimacy. In other words, displays of obedience, when observed by other members, directly assert the legitimacy of authority, while acts of disobedience directly challenge it' (DeLanda 2006: 71, italics original). The interplay and mutually reinforcing nature of repeated actions in formal settings can thus encourage either obedience, or dissent; in the setting of collective work, they move toward recoupling and affirmation.

Active syntheses can also become processes by which collective action gains political agency: 'collective agency may be expressed internally, in relation to individuals who are members of the collective, as in the case of consensus and affinity. Or it may be expressed in relation to external actors, as in the case of direct action and networking' (Henry 2010: 10). In this reading, Henry also argues that instances of 'generative differences' are found where resonant intensities (of experience) produce and relate to multiple other differences and actions, especially within the deliberate setting of a social movement (or, here, within shared work):

> The collective expressions of joy [and satisfaction], the feelings of triumph and of the unexpected, the feelings of possibility… these intensities of experience are [generative differences]… These differences combine to repeat the effects of the action in ways which are both immediately expressive (active synthesis) and formative of collective politics (passive synthesis)

> Henry 2010: 11

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It was through intensities of experience, and their requirements of physical, temporal, and social investment that *mingas* played an increasingly important part in sustaining collaborative action at the community-level, and 'recoupling' the community on its own terms (related to, but not dependent on, its state-endorsed registered status). There remained a tension between fostering and encouraging participation on the one hand, and the conflicting demands and priorities of diverse family arrangements and economic concerns on the other. Despite these differences, however, the combined aspects of *mingas* as social event and as a practical (maintenance) exercise had perpetuated their practice, and reaffirmed a sense of purpose and viability for collaborative action within San Isidro.

IV.

Conclusions

Diverse social actors, particularly groups who resist, find themselves operating within and against structures that deny their needs, claims and priorities. Such groups – mobilized to confront the ventures or existence of powerful agents that benefit from those limiting structural relations – are driven to engage in communicative and physical struggles against and within those imposed limitations. The consequences of being categorized as 'other,' 'different,' or as 'opponents' of institutions of power include facing the enforcement of boundaries of difference, and resultant processes of marginalisation. Policies that uphold such 'categorical differences' curtail possibilities for the pursuit of intentional social projects. By contrast, particularity and difference that emerges through affirming actions performed by resistance groups tends to work in the other direction, establishing and strengthening the basis for collaborative efforts to continue and grow. Reestablishing a basis to commonality and collectivity is the 'recoupling' that Haraway describes among groups who build alliances and connections rather than constructing collectivity on a unity of vision, identity, or purpose.

At both the national and local levels of indigenous political action in Ecuador, we saw how affirming actions not only brought groups together on their own terms, but also worked toward a functioning, ex-

periential model of the kinds of relations and interactions that were being fought for, sustained, or strengthened (Duncombe 2002: 347). At the national level, this involves diverse indigenous groups organising across social, cultural and geographical differences in order to simultaneously reclaim and reassert their particularity whilst also achieving state recognition of plurinationality within Ecuador's borders. Networks and alliances were formed in order to further these collective aims and to establish a commonality rooted in what was being affirmed, rather than in state-defined political categories of difference. At the local level, the government-administered status of being a registered indigenous community had become the backdrop – rather than the framework – for reinvigorated cooperative action in San Isidro. Commonalities of practice brought residents together in shared, affirming action: the practical, productive outcomes of mingas intertwined with renewed relationships and 'intensities' of experience generated in processes of communal labour. Despite growing differences within the community, these synthetic, repeated actions had furthered the project of redoubling collectivity.

Action among indigenous groups operating at the national level also complicate the basis of political opposition in Ecuador, highlighting the conflicting consequences of imposed categories of difference: the injustices of their perpetuation or negation (carried out by the state), and the merits of them being actively opposed (by resistance groups and indigenous movements) – reshaping the nation's political terrain in the process. Deleuze emphasised that apparent oppositions should be examined not as neat divisions, but as 'a delicate milieu' of 'overlapping perspectives, divergences, disparities, potentials and intensities' (Deleuze 1994: 50). Recent histories of indigenous action in Ecuador reflect how the same can be critically applied to the alliances that have been formed in order to engage and overcome political oppositions. In San Isidro, divergences and disparities were linked to broader trends of social change in the highlands and in rural communities across the world, rather than being borne of oppositional action (though local campaigns for land rights and water justice are ongoing). In Derrida's (1982) terms, both cases of collective action show how a 'weave of differences' overlap in a 'playing movement' that produces the kinds of outcomes and experiences that those involved had fought for. Crucially, though, the relations and

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connections being generated were not defined by relations of opposition or negation, but by the intentions and desires being actively affirmed.

Many of the underlying ideas discussed here also relate to other settings typified by conflict and contestation. For example, reexamining 'opposition' through theories of difference and affirmation speaks to analytical work on constructed distinctions between sources of knowledge in environmental conflicts (Willow & Wylie 2014), or the disputed authority of rationalised accounts of risk and acceptable or unacceptable expertise (Jasanoff 2012). In other spheres, this approach develops analytical tools for use in research where we might investigate how agency and value emerge in emancipatory collective action, or amidst social struggles for autonomy, legitimacy, and recognition (Maeckelbergh 2009; Strasinger 2010). Issues of public understanding and identification are also considered in combination with specific demands, via links between differences of opinion or definition on one hand, and the rejection of particular policies and protocols on the other.

In terms of further studies of social organising and collective action, a critical focus on dimensions of difference, opposition, and affirmation can cast new light on the active processes that constitute and sustain groups who resist. Rather than studying only, or primarily, the outcomes of particular actions, by paying attention to the kinds of activity that participants consider most crucial – by scrutinizing what is being affirmed, by what means, for what purposes, and by which actors – we're led to reconsider how the success, symbolism, and significance of resistance can be interpreted and understood. In this light, we see that many distinct forms of intentional action rely less on isolating and oppositional forms of difference, and more on those that stem from reflection, connection, and affirmation.

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