Negotiating development and identity: brokering unequal relations of power through identity politics in Ecuadorian northern highlands

by Moreno

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A B S T R A C T

Development projects are arenas in which different groups meet with each other, usually in unequal terms. This paper explores how an indigenous development organization in the Ecuadorian Northern Highlands negotiates the difference between its own agenda and that of its donor agency. First, it presents how the indigenous staff members understand the relation between their organization and the donor agency in terms of differential power. Then, it shows how the indigenous organization legitimizes its position vis-à-vis the donor agency by privileging an approach based on ethnic identity. Finally, it presents how indigenous development workers perform their combined ethnic and professional expertise in order to maintain their legitimacy.

Introduction

In the Ecuadorian Highlands, several NGOs follow a participatory model and incorporate indigenous organizations in their projects. In the case of indigenous organizations generated by development projects, "the distinction between NGOs and grassroots organizations becomes less clear cut" (Gill 2002: 172). The position of these organizations is complex. They are located in the articulation between donor agencies and local communities. They are held as being authentic representatives of their grassroots constituencies, but they are also accountable to organizations outside the locality.

This is the case of the indigenous organization, CCIM , which was generated by the work of an international Donor Agency. CCIM works with twenty indigenous communities in Imbabura province, northern Ecuador. CCIM works under a system of child sponsorship—the main objective of the project is the improvement of the quality of life of children and families of the communities. The major work areas directly related to children are education and health. Additionally, communities receive other projects of formal and non-formal education, health, economic development, and infrastructure. Organization strengthening and gender are transversal axis informing the projects.

Most of the communities that are part of CCIM are indigenous while a few have both indigenous and mestizo population. The members of these communities belong to the Otavalo nationality, one of the Kichwa-speaking peoples of the Ecuadorian Highlands. The members of CCIM's staff are also Kichwa, except for two mestizo members (not in decision-making positions). Some of the members of CCIM staff belong to beneficiary communities.

In this article, I focus on how CCIM staff negotiates the difference between its donor's and its own agenda. Tensions, overt and hidden strategies, and accommodation often occur between this indigenous staff and its Donor Agency . CCIM endorses an agenda based on ethnic identity that has resulted in adjustments in the Donor Agency's approach to development. Additionally, CCIM's performance of expertise, analyzed through an exhibition of their work, serves the indigenous organization to legitimize its initiatives vis-à-vis the Donor Agency .

Staff member: [In the peers visit] we used to talk like this: "this is Donor Agency's proposal and this is our proposal," and there was a very clear difference. Then the director came and listened to that speech and said, "no, we are just one, we can be the head and the heart, but you are our arms and feet. Without you we cannot walk. We all are one." Then I said, if we are the arms and feet we should be Donor Agency's employees, not CCIM. She said "no, no." This topic is still unresolved in Donor Agency.

MM: How come? I thought that since you receive funding from Donor Agency, you were Donor Agency's employees!

Staff member: Our boss is the Junta , not Donor Agency. But of course, they say that 'you are the ones who have to hire or fire people.' But it is not like that. When they [Donor Agency] want a person to leave, that person leaves. If not, 'we don't give you the funding.' It is like that in a great number of things.

MM: She [the director] knew that this was in the context of the visit of this man [peer/international auditor]. [...] It was in their [Donor Agency's] interest to present themselves as "we are the CCIM project."

Staff member: Of course. It was as if CCIM appeared like it was everything and Donor Agency as if it was nothing. And that was amidst everything else that was happening to us, Donor Agency was almost like an obstacle, except for the money [we laughed]. That happened to us.

This account corresponds to a period in which CCIM pursued an agenda based on identity politics that differed from the approach to development sponsored by its Donor Agency. It shows the tensions between CCIM's staff and Donor Agency's officials in terms of the extent to which CCIM can act autonomously. Development projects are political arenas (Doolittle 2006; Olivier de Sardan 2005) in which actors exercise power through the control of agenda setting and decisions about what is discussed and what is not (Mosse and Lewis 2006: 7). A development project is like a game in which players use different cards and play according to different rules, or a system of opportunities that everyone tries to appropriate in his or her own way (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 185).

This approach to development helps to go beyond an understanding of the development apparatus as an imposed regime and any movement involved with development as just a pawn of the regime (Bending and Rosendo 2006: 232-233). Actors and movements in the South play a role, but not simply because development as defined by donor agencies is what they really want. Within the hegemonic discourse of development, the consumers of development are engaged in forms of production that do not necessarily match the objectives of the development apparatus. Thus, instead of a machine, or a top-down imposed process, one can think of the development apparatus as exerting limited control on the way people use the resources that it makes available (Rossi 2006: 46).

Understanding a development project as an arena means that it needs to be seen as a social space in which actors compete with and confront each other on unequal terms with their various types of capital (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 190). The concept of arena entails two definitions of power. On the one hand, there is the power that everybody has, even with unequal or limited resources. Even the most marginalized have the ability of passive resistance, "to refuse to do what is expected of them or to do it in another way" (Friedberg in Olivier de Sardan 2005: 186).

On the other hand, there is a form of more concentrated or instituted power that can be converted into other forms of capital. In an arena, there are positions of instituted power to which actors gain access with the support of their network of social relations and at the same time gain access to wealth that is distributed in order to enhance one's own network of contacts (ibid).

Accordingly, strategies employed in development as an arena of asymmetrical relationships are diverse. Some are small or invisible, such as refusal to participate or rumor (Scott 1985, Espinosa 2006), but some are outstanding performances of expertise, ethnicity, or both. Actors employ their diverse passive or active, invisible or overt capabilities in the face of the advantages and disadvantages that development offers. Consequently, certain individuals and social groups are able to mold the project to their own ends. Actors' strategies are based on a variety of social codes and norms of behavior. Codes vary from one social set to another, but actors adopt different systems of norms and legitimacy according to the context and to their own interests (Olivier de Sardan 2005: 187).

Development brokers are intermediary actors who need to navigate various codes and norms of behavior. They operate at the interface of different world-views and knowledge systems (Mosse and Lewis 2006: 10) and are forced to bracket and manipulate their identities within the disjunctures that emerge between the agendas of different development actors. Brokering these tensions requires a process of negotiation and translation (Leutchford 2006: 128). The process of translation entails differentiation and self-positioning, as well as gaining the necessary legitimacy. Translation is a mechanism of action in asymmetrical relationships, because it enables dialogue and the execution of activities (Espinosa 2006: 9). Brokers help to bring about the interlocking of interests that produces projects realities (Mosse and Lewis 2006: 13) and must maneuver between accommodation and resistance (Desai 2006: 184). CCIM's case illustrates the points presented. As brokers, CCIM staff members negotiate their location at the interface between the communities and the Donor Agency by differentiating themselves from the latter while simultaneously gaining legitimacy for an identity-based agenda.

We are the head and the heart (and other metaphors)

CCIM staff members see themselves as working at the interface of the Donor Agency and the beneficiary communities of the project. Some staff members have been working in development projects for several years and, in addition to their experience, have acquired academic credentials. Nevertheless, similarly to the experience of extensionists in many other development projects, "they are treated as permanent (ignorant) scholars in the institutions they are employed by and on the other hand, they have to act as experts in the field" (Desai 2006: 181).

The relationship between development workers and the beneficiaries in Latin America is mediated by ethnicity, class, and gender. The asymmetrical relationships of development may take a paternalist character (Martínez 2006) in which the technician or expert is the one who knows and chooses the better for the beneficiary—an exchange of competence for trust (Espinosa 2006: 3). It is not just any expert or any beneficiary, though, but often an expatriate or an urban, mestizo, upper- and middle- class technician in a relationship with beneficiaries who are poor, are women, or belong to racial or ethnic minorities.

Several years ago, CCIM staff started to work on their own agenda based on ethnic identity and revitalization, an agenda which was not part of their Donor Agency's original plan. According to Espinosa, a way to emancipate oneself from the paternal relationships of development is forcing recognition: "developing skills, having the will to look after oneself and to become autonomous, and being reciprocal" (2006: 4). The interview fragment mentioned above illustrates a moment in which CCIM was presenting their work based on cultural identity to an international development official. Their presentation forced the national office of the Donor Agency (located in Quito, and with mostly mestizo staff member) to recognize CCIM's approach as a valid one, because it was positively sanctioned by international auditors from the Donor Agency.

However, instead of recognition as colleagues in development, the anatomic metaphor used by the director of the national office puts CCIM in 'its place'. For that director, the national office is to CCIM, what the head and the heart are to the arms and the feet in the body, meaning that the head office sets the agenda and the extremities respond, not vice versa. However, the national office needs CCIM as an example of development success in order to keep funds flowing from abroad. Thus, there is a tension and ambiguity in the relative bargaining strength of these actors, "in the question of who needs whom the most" (Bending and Rosendo 2006: 229). In terms of their sense of self-identity, CCIM's staff does not consider themselves as being simple extensionists of Donor Agency in the field. As one of the staff members said: for them, we are [just] an area development project. But we are a second level organization. At least nowadays. Or, we feel separated [from the Donor Agency]. As mentioned above, gaining autonomy is part of the challenge to paternalistic structures. The degree of autonomy allowed by Donor Agency and pursued by CCIM is a matter of contention. According to CCIM's staff members, Donor Agency encourages them to be autonomous and to turn to other actors in order to find resources for the projects and communities. The current director of the national office regards the relationship as a partnership, as being in a 'marriage', as the 'family CCIM-Donor Agency.' Beyond this rhetoric, however, CCIM feels that the inequality is maintained:

They also say we are partners, that we are capable of negotiation, of sitting in front of each other as equals [de tú a tú], in the same conditions. But always, the one who gives the money has the power. Thus, many times they get it their own way [CCIM staff member].

One sensitive issue related to this is the hiring of staff. According to the policy, the Junta is in charge of hiring the coordinator. However, CCIM relates the case of a different organization also working for the Donor Agency in a different province that wanted to hire someone that they considered suitable, but it was not in the interest of the Donor Agency to hire this person because he would be 'conflictive or protest excessively to Donor Agency.' Then the Junta made a difficult decision [una decisión con presión] and hired Donor Agency's own choice because funding was at risk. CCIM regards this kind of pressure as being in conflict with Donor Agency's stated participatory discourse according to which the communities represented by the Junta make project decisions. One staff member recalled a conversation with members of other organizations working for the Donor Agency in the following terms: 'if they really want participation, why don't they call the nineteen partners [from the organizations working with Donor Agency nation-wide], and from this group allow the nomination of the leadership of the national office? No, they are afraid. They put the people who suit them.' Thus, in practice, participation and decision making—and consequently, autonomy—are limited by the Donor Agency, and differentiation (head and heart versus arms and feet) is maintained in order to preserve the instituted power of controlling funding and thus, maintain a final say in many 'autonomous' decisions. Nevertheless, ambiguity is allowed in order to keep the relationship alive in terms of the marriage metaphor.

From Black Sheep to Star: "The Cultural Approach Sells"

Staff member: We used to be Donor Agency's black sheep. But we beat Donor Agency to it, through our work in rights and in culture. Donor Agency was locked into activism, but an activism according to their standards.

MM: What did they prioritize?

Staff member: Health checkups, some cults [religious services]. They did not want to give but ended up giving [funding] for some infrastructure. They wanted to give kites to children, I seem to remember. We did things secretly and after all that work based on rights –and not only in the theoretical aspect but also in concrete actions in the community—we became more established. [...] All those things helped us, and I think that now we are established on that. Then, at a certain point, Donor Agency realized that the world was following that path, and they had to agree with us. And since at the international level they agreed with that...[then] suddenly Donor Agency [national office] realized that that kind of work was being done here, but not as Donor Agency's work but as something separate that at a certain moment they just tolerated in order not to have problems [with us].

Donor Agency is very different—[due to] the fact that they are in the city and we are in the countryside. For example, I think that for them development is only training, workshops, those things, and people in the communities get tired of that. In some way, one has to work with a little incentive, and work with the peoples' culture.

... as I was saying for Donor Agency giving workshops, giving training, they think that that is all development is. But I think it is more than that, because in the communities one needs to work on the recuperation of traditions. In that sense, for us that is development...
...then, I think Donor Agency got convinced that the recuperation of traditions and cultures is development as well. And that made us different from all the projects [working for Donor Agency] at the national level. Because we worked on the basis of the roots, the traditions, and that had made us strong at the national level as well as at the international level. ... From the essence [lo profundo], from the roots, from the communities, from the people
[Interview with staff member].

CCIM's staff considers that their understanding of development differs from that of Donor Agency. Over the course of the years, they have developed their own conceptualization of development that they present to visitors. But even the staff members who are not in charge of presenting this official discourse talk about a clear difference between Western development and their own. According to CCIM the communities have defined their own concept of development based on the idea of the alli kawsay, a kichwa phrase meaning "good life". This is a concept that differs from development processes exclusively centered on the individual. CCIM defends a culturally significant concept based on a family model. The communities have identified those families that serve as models. These families are characterized by "family stability, formal and informal education, economic stability, practicing traditional values, and community leadership." For the people with whom I talked in the communities, alli kawsay is a concept related to 'getting along well in the family.' From the family, the concept is extended to the community, meaning 'getting along well among comuneros.'

CCIM has continued working on the concept of development. Presenting the project to visiting officials from the World Bank who were interested in CCIM's mediation center, the staff defined development as 'the capacity of celebrating (encounter) and relating with the other, based on one's identity (a partir de lo propio).' This definition resulted from a series of talks with people in the communities and was further developed by CCIM:

[People said] 'what I want is to have the capacity or have something in order to be able to receive others when they come and to be able to offer them something and talk to them in equal terms (de igual a igual)'. And offering food was part of it. They said, 'if I don't have a house, if I don't have a place where I can receive them, where I can give them something so that they enjoy themselves, then I am sad, I am ashamed.' Thus, this highlights not the economic side of saving for the sake of saving, but the capacity for encountering, having the capacity to meet with other people. Then, everything is a function of encountering the other, and that is something one can see for example in baptisms, in weddings, in those things.

As this quote shows, CCIM emphasizes the relational nature of development—development as being an encounter. The encounter is dialogical in that people define themselves vis-à-vis one another (Wibbelsman 2005). Local celebrations are paradigmatic of this conception, since a celebration 'is related to the household, the house, the community, and the extended family. [...] and then it relates to harmony—a kind of utopia, harmony with oneself, with god, and with nature' (interview with staff member). CCIM has expanded the idea of the encounter to encompass the relationship to sacred beings within the Andean universe. Development is not reduced to an improvement of the economic condition. There is no improvement if those who have resources lose their capacity for celebrating. On the other hand, it emphasizes the ability of relating to others on an equal footing. Being reciprocal is one aspect of gaining recognition (Espinosa 2006). For Espinosa reciprocity is the basis of mutual respect. However, in development, unilateral actions are problematic because they produce a discomfort both in the donor and in the beneficiary, due to his or her inability to pay back. This inability highlights his or her weakness and dependency on the State (2006: 6).

Having its own concept of development empowers an organization. In spite of the value of CCIM's concept of development on itself, as an alternative to its Donor Agency's concept and as a criticism of hegemonic ideas of development, this self-crafted concept, as well as other self-representations, cannot be taken at face value. They must be interpreted according to an analysis of the local context (Bending and Rosendo 2006: 233). Indigenous organizations reemerged as political actors at the national level during the 1990s, pursuing an agenda based on a differentiated identity inherently endowed with fundamental rights (Hale 1997). In addition, the interethnic relationships in Otavalo have been transformed and Otavalo leaders have gained access to local positions of economic and political power (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1998; Wibbelsman 2005). In this context, identity politics represents a possible and fruitful strategy for indigenous organizations to renegotiate their demands. In Otavalo, as well as in the case of CCIM, "[r]epresentations of identity are mobilized not solely for the defense of culture itself but as a strategy for pursuing other goals." (Roper et al. 2003: 11).

CCIM, as well as other indigenous organizations, draw on the dominant discourses of social difference, such as the difference between the mestizo and the indigenous, or the recognition of 'the indigenous' within development discourse, in order to contest their status within those discourses. On the one hand, working with identity helps people at the community "not to feel that they can be relegated for the fact of being indígenas, on the contrary, that they can succeed with their traditions and their culture" [mestizo staff member working at CCIM]. On the other hand, when CCIM's staff mentioned that they beat Donor Agency to it, they were capitalizing on a difference-sensitive approach that they proposed first. An agenda based on identity politics served CCIM to redefine its power vis-à-vis Donor Agency. Before year 2003-2004, CCIM's activities based on tradition and identity were 'tolerated' by the Donor Agency. However, in a transition time from one international donor to a new international donor (from German to Canadian funding), CCIM was adamant in presenting its approach, 'from here we swim or we sink' [de aquí salimos o nos hundimos]. This once only tolerated approach became the basis for CCIM's legitimacy in the eyes of its Donor Agency—with the intermediation of the international officials from the Donor Agent. Development partnerships are permeated by relationships of power sometimes expressed in agenda setting and controlling what is discussed (Lewis and Mosse 2006: 7). CCIM was able to change the discussion on 'difference' and the legitimacy for its own agenda. CCIM's presentation of development based on identity helped them secure more years of funding. 'The cultural approach sells,' told me one of the staff members, when narrating this period of transition and negotiation. Indeed, an 'ethnicity capital' was transformed into economic capital. The funds kept flowing:

MM: When you had to change countries for funding, did you think of what to do in case you did not receive more funding?

Staff member: Not much, as we were confident. Because in a document they made of 'accompanying guidelines for [organizations working with Donor Agency],' as they call it, they had what we were proposing ten years ago, and all that [another staff member] proposed with the legislation, the collective rights. So they had those ideas there and we said they had copied us. That has made us feel sure that Donor Agency is going to keep working with us. Now some [other organizations working with Donor Agency] are doing soccer championships and cultural encounters. From a cultural encounter, [followed] a development, for example, the aumento, the waccha karay.

Valuing our culture
(valorando lo nuestro)

Official at Donor Agency-national office: CCIM had proposed to us—at that moment we had a different approach to the development process—that we not see the four strategic lines separately [health, education, economic development, and leadership]... What they proposed to us was the topic of rights, the rights that are constitutionally recognized, demanding the right to health, the right to education, etc. Besides, the constitution has a specific chapter in the topic of local rights. That was the proposal they made. It took them a long time of discussion. ... Nowadays we have as a framework the topic of rights.

MM: What changes when you shift the approach, let's say, to development as to one based on the right to health. What are the implications?

Official at Donor Agency-national office: The thing is, if we see health in abstract it may be that the perceptions from one side are standard and the solutions are standard as well. If, as CCIM has proposed, we understand it from the local side, we see that there are different understandings of what health means, and the solutions must start in that understanding... Each locality, each social group has a traditional base of thought, of local capacities that can be reflected in actions of their own initiative, and we can support that.

One staff member of CCIM thinks there are two kinds of objectives, the ones explicit in the annual operative plan, those that are part of the regulation of 'this kind of organization' (donor agency), and those objectives that are implicit—'these are part of the strengthening and developing of identity.' As part of their own objectives (those that are 'implicit'), CCIM has worked in training communities in the knowledge of collective, women's, and children's rights. This training is also embedded in specific activities. For instance, CCIM supported the recognition of the work of community midwifes, the use of traditional medicine, and research on medicinal plants and locally defined illness. Nevertheless, CCIM's use of rights does more than recognizing local knowledge and practice in project activities—it moves from equality to difference (Cowan et al. 2001; Merry 2001). CCIM, like other indigenous organizations, uses rights in order to advance its own agendas (Sieder and Witchell 2001).

A woman from the staff related that sometimes CCIM infringes the policies of the Donor Agency's national office and has run the risk: 'when we have to do it, we have to it, because we cannot ignore the humane side in order to carry out a policy that does not match (the local situation).' She commented that the child sponsorship system is too rigid because the unsponsored did not receive certain services:

In the case of special cases in health, one could only help the sponsored children. For instance, if an unsponsored child were dying, how could we not help him? So, we have based ourselves on the Policy of Protection of Children. We have to go against one policy, Donor Agency's or the Policy of Protection of Children. We cannot go against the [Policy of] Protection of Children, so we have to deviate from the [Donor Agency's] policy and try to help parents, because in special cases the help was only for sponsored children. So, we have deviated, we have helped fathers, mothers, siblings of sponsored children, even grandparents. But yes, they have questioned us. There has been serious friction with the national office. But we are not taking the money, the money is in the communities, the money is in the people, and they can come and see whenever they want [...]. We are not going against what is normal by trying to help people.

In a parallel fashion to how discourses of human rights are being used in social movements' struggles "to extract greater concessions from national states" (Sieder and Witchell 2001: 204), CCIM negotiated the terms for managing the project resources by using other nationally and internationally recognized rights. CCIM pits its Donor Agency's policy, against constitutional and other human rights, as well as the discourse of difference. Another example of this type of negotiation is the confrontation between credit and 'aumento.' The aumento is a practice related to the Inti Raymi. During this feast several exchanges take place. The aumento is a practice of receiving money that must be repaid in double during the following Inti Raymi. The Donor Agency did not allow giving credit to the communities. However, CCIM made use of a form of strategic essentialism in order to differentiate aumento from credit.

[When the Donor Agency questioned it] we said it is already under execution in the communities and when the audit came, they said 'how come you give money; you have to give it back'.
[We said] First, we have not stolen, since you say that money is for the community, for the people, it is there. Let's go and see. I remember once in a community, with this aumento thing, the audit came and [they] gave us a notice that we had to give the money back, and they came and said 'why didn't you ask for a credit and why are you asking for aumento?'
And at the community they were told, 'come in the Inti Raymi and you will understand.' And another person told him 'do not confuse credit with aumento.' In that time the PRODEPINE was giving credits, through the solidarity cash desk, and [a person from the community said] 'here we have the solidarity cash desk, too. The credit is something apart; do not mix it with aumento.'
And [the auditor] said, 'but it is the same and with very high interests.'
[The person replied] 'No, no, no, no.'
And [the auditor continued] 'besides you will not want to give it back.'
[The person said] 'Well, among you [mestizos] there are those things [problems], but everybody gives the aumento back, we all dance, we all eat together and that problem does not exist.' We listened to those interchanges. Then we told him to decide because he had made that observation to us. But he did not say anything. In that time we took advantage of that, and as the response was silence, we interpreted that as a yes.

CCIM's strategy was seizing and appropriating particular cultural practices to make possible their interactions in the world of development as an asymmetrical relationship (Espinosa 2006). Espinosa uses the concept of astuteness in order to characterize the practical reason developed from relationships first of colonization and then of domination and that allowed cultural survival (ibid: 6). Astuteness implies perspicacity, discernment, ability, even subterfuge (ibid: 5). Resorting to cultural difference between indígenas and mestizos gave CCIM "agency and contestation in situations with multiple and contradictory logics and systems of meaning" (Merry 2001: 45). In exposing the auditor to the beneficiaries' claim on the difference between credit and aumento, the auditor was confronted to the dilemma of either judging a particular way of disposing funding or respecting a cultural practice not quite legible for a person not cognizant of local traditions.

For some time, the national office of the Donor Agency maintained an ambiguous position regarding practices as the aumento. However, the Donor Agency has switched its position due to changes at the national and international context which is more open to claims based on cultural authenticity and tradition (Merry 2001: 42). In this context, "recognition of one's culture is increasingly constructed and consequently increasingly experienced as a deep, primordial human need, as well as an inalienable right, one whose denial brings both suffering and indignation" (Cowan et al. 2001: 171).

The national office recognizes that CCIM has been influential in changing its policies, and that 'there are local potentialities able to generate well-being.' One of the changes at the national office has been the hiring of staff from 'different realms of thought, from different ethnic groups.' The person in charge of the area of promotion of justice is an indígena 'with all his ancestral knowledge on the top of his theoretical knowledge acquired in foreign universities.' By the time of my research, the national office of the Donor Agency was working on a different approach to development to be implemented by year 2007, and CCIM played an important role on that change. As one official at the national office put it:

For example, something that we have learned, and in the case of CCIM is a very clear lesson for us, is that we have started to see the topic of development from a point of view [other] than the orthodox one. In my personal case, I have a degree in economics, I am educated in a liberal economy, in fact, I am a liberal. I am a believer that the market is the better option. But if they show me that there is another type of economy that works under certain kinds of interrelations, it works! That is the evidence. If we are going to give support to something economic, it is not from the point of view of what we believe, but from what works there. In those changes CCIM has helped us a lot, especially because they were the first to support their criteria in a very clear way. But also because they were tenacious in changing a planning strategy [annual operative plan?] with very concrete actions that were different than what was being done [in other organizations working for the Donor Agency]. And [they did] that with the support of Germany, because I remember that when the program official was here, she heard their explanation and told them to take that path.

CCIM has incorporated a cultural approach to many of its activities. Other examples of their work are the cabildos infantiles, the children's cabildos—an initiative that puts in practice the children's right to participate in community affairs and make CCIM a pioneer in this type of work. Brokering its own agenda with that of other actors required from CCIM a complex process of negotiation that entailed moments of serious friction with Donor Agency. However, this moment of self-positioning paid off in the long run, since CCIM gained legitimacy in the eyes of the Donor Agency's national office, in part because of the intermediation of international officials of the agency.

The professional indigenous: performing identity and expertise to foreign audiences

The fact is that Donor Agency-Ecuador is a little behind. For example the gringos, the foreigners, they are more respectful of what we are. They support what we are. They do not want to impose. It is the technicians from here [national office] that want to impose. The foreign technicians also have technical teams—Donor Agency—International. They don't [want to impose]. Other countries are ahead. I do not know. For example in Africa, communities and organizations that work with Donor Agency have done this already, something that we could not do here, because 'how can you fund a cultural encounter in that way', some ritual, some ceremony. But there, they did that already. We found that out recently. Rather here we are behind, not us, but Donor Agency. We have dedicated ourselves to development based on traditions.

The Otavaleños have gotten international recognition due to their commerce and textile production. They themselves have gone to international markets and argue that it was abroad that they could find "the respect, consideration, admiration, and interest for what they are" (Maldonado in Espinosa 2006: 4). It was the mediation of the visiting official from Germany (prior funding agency) that finally gave the approval to the CCIM proposal for development at a moment when tensions with the national office had escalated. Organizations such as the Donor Agency are state-like in that they are imagined through a spatial metaphor of verticality and encompassment (Ferguson and Gupta 2002). The verticality metaphor helps states and organizations to secure their legitimacy and naturalize their authority. One mechanism by which state bureaucrats embody their superiority is by characterizing lower-level workers "as people who belonged to, and articulated the interests of, particular communities, with limited generalizability across geographical areas, or across class and caste divisions." (Ferguson and Gupta 2002: 988). This is a process of localizing certain people as tied to either the minimum geographical level (Assies et al. 2002) or to particular experiences. However, the relationship among the subnational, the national, and the transnational branches of the organizations is not necessarily one of verticality in which the upper levels represent greater vision and a better sense of the general good, even though it is represented and imagined in that way.

National officials normally assume their location to be a higher one in relation to the local. According to their assumptions, what is "progressive" comes from the international, via the national, to the local. Nevertheless, "[p]ower relationships and processes of opinion making and decision making are increasingly located in complex and transnational settings" (Crawford in Mosse and Lewis 2006: 7). CCIM has negotiated the value assigned to the local not as being limited but as a view of development that is generalizable to other organizations working for Donor Agency. Additionally, their approach has influenced the national office. Thus, there is an inversion in the terms of the vertical relationship between the national and the local: first, because 'tradition' (the particular) is considered as having value for development and, second, because the more advanced agenda does not follow a continuum from the international to the national to the local. Instead the local is portrayed as being more progressive than the national, and allied, sanctioned and recognized by the international.

The processes of opinion making in the case of CCIM have depended heavily on what is displayed during the constant visits from foreigners and support officials and on the periodic reports presented to the Donor Agency. As a woman from CCIM recalled, 'there has been support from abroad, that yes, we are on the right path here at the office.' As the international realm provides sanctioning, the self-presentation of CCIM's work during the visits takes on a special importance. Development brokers manipulate their identities and they "exploit the artificial distinction between professional and local knowledge to claim authority and exert power and resistance" (Nightingale 2005: 600). In their presentations, CCIM capitalizes on the fact of their dual professional and ethnic identities. On the one hand, they take advantage of their Otavaleño identity—affirming their cultural difference through their formal outfit, fiestas, agricultural life, and handicrafts (see Colloredo-Mansfeld 1998: 194-195). On the other hand, they display their proficiency as development experts.

At CCIM's office there is a room used as a conference room, and called by the staff members 'el museo', the museum. In year 2005 CCIM received a peer visit. The museum was put together at that time. CCIM's office was rather a cold place due to its cement construction and the floor tiles. But at the museum, the walls were covered with straw mats typical from Imbabura and the ceiling was covered with jute. In one of the corners there was a fake tulpa (kichwa for hearth). This decoration broke the coldness of the rest of the office and the use of straw mats and jute evoked the feeling of being at a rural setting (even though the office was in Otavalo outskirts). On the walls there were pictures and CCIM's development concept, the components of the project, and the main achievements and results in each component (health, education, leadership and organization, promotion of justice, and economic development). There were also awards and recognition plaques. The museum was arranged because:

We needed something more visible, more concrete, [because] there were people who came to the office and could not go to the communities. We needed a way to explain to them our journey, what we have lived, the story of how we started, and the results we have had, and what is our plan. And we did that for the peer visit. Also, we have people's testimonies both from institutions and people.

That was a year ago. We prepared ourselves. That was when we prepared that work inside there [museum], in order to show all the process, because we did not have some pisciculture, a henhouse, or a greenhouse, we don't have that. So we tried to systematize, to graph what we have there in the downstairs room, how we started, how it was before, what we have done, where we are now, and do that through images of meetings, families. We tried to contextualize [what we do], our lines of work, a baseline, a result indicator [indicador de llegada], for that we took into account the model families.

An official from the Donor Agency regards the field technicians as 'the born interlocutors, [with a] new vision of the people's own ambit, that allows us to see other structures of relationship.' CCIM staff does not only emphasize their identity as locals. They also stress their professional competence. At the time of my fieldwork, visiting World Bank officials interested in CCIM's mediation center were taken to the museum. There, the staff presented CCIM's work in a power point presentation. The story of the mediation center (one of 13 in the country) was recounted. CCIM had been training people on rights since 1999—women's, children's, and collective rights. The staff commented to the Bank officials that the problem with just focusing on training was that people said, 'if I demand [my rights], there is no space where that need can be met.' Thus, staff members from CCIM attended a training session on alternative means for conflict resolution at a university in Quito, and when they found out about the program of mediation centers, one staff member decided to establish a center in the project. During the presentation, one member of the staff talked about the 'spatial and cultural incidence of conflicts' and how 'in order to solve the cases one deals first with a network of micropowers—the yachaj , the cabildos.' With the help of a digital graph he explained the space of the extended family, the nuclear family, the community, and several communities, which is the scenario where conflicts take place. The presenter clarified which indigenous authorities intervene according to the level where the conflict takes place. For example, if the conflict involves families of different communities, then the cabildos act, or the godparents act. Decisions involving family members who have migrated to Spain, Belgium, or the United States are also made with the help of families and community authorities. The Bank officials were impressed with the presentation and asked how the mediation center was being funded. CCIM's staff explained that they had a limited funding from the Donor Agency—since this was not part of that agency's objectives, but was CCIM's own one—and are still working on a way to make the center self-sustainable.

These outstanding presentations have impressed others as well. I heard about CCIM's museum from a colleague in Quito. In these presentations, CCIM strategically combines its local knowledge with their professional expertise. The environment of the museum and the content full of references to local culture are presented with the use of professional and development talk, as well as the aid of audiovisual displays—tradition presented via modern means. This ability and its success is seen from its staff as coming from their experience but also from the professional credentials of some of its members.

When [one member of the staff] was here for a month, [that person] started the masters degree in… was it development of indigenous peoples? That complemented us. It was a very important complement, because we could pressure Donor Agency, let's say, technically or professionally. Maybe my [approach] was something more empirical—this is good because of this and this. Nothing else. But when [that staff member] came, [that person] came with the constitution, with the collective rights. I did not have any of that. For me it was [like] it must be this way. That [then coming of the new staff member] dynamized [the relationship with Donor Agency] a lot.

In their relationship with the Donor Agency, CCIM's staff stresses their professional identity in order to contest the terms of the imagined verticality of Donor Agency. Commenting on CCIM's staff, an official at the national office claimed that its technical team has "certain pecularities" compared with other organizations working for the Donor Agency—'the depth with which they approach [a topic], the philosophical framework that they use as a basis, it is more profound than what is seen in other communities.' CCIM does not only use local knowledge, but 'knowledge produced elsewhere.' They act as "a knowledge-elite that reinterprets local realities within the framework of a global science" (Desai 2006: 181), in this case, in the framework of development discourse and indigenous rights. The performance of their expertise and ethnicity is not only intended for the Donor Agency, though. The museum and the presentation of CCIM's experience is a 'selling of the institution.' This performance serves CCIM to expand its networks of allied institutions and persons and actual and potential resources. CCIM staff strategically employs and stresses their combined ethnic and professional identity in an arena in which both elements are recognized forms of capital (Desai 2006:184).

Conclusions

Throughout this paper I have attempted to show the constitution and self-positioning of CCIM in the development arena. This positioning takes place in the interaction between hegemonic structures and the everyday politics of groups with diverging agendas. The identity of the organization is embedded in asymmetrical relations, connected to the struggle for project resources, and articulated with the contestation of dominant discourses and the recovery of space in which to maneuver. In this political constitution, the process of self-positioning, identification, and differentiation is not self-referential, but it "entail[s] a high degree of performativity and strategic calculation" (Siebers 2004: 92).

Consolidating its legitimacy has cost CCIM years of friction with the Donor Agency. Legitimacy has been gained by struggles over cultural meaning as well as struggles over material benefit (Wilson 2003: 175). CCIM reframed the disadvantageous position of a local organization in relation to the national office of Donor Agency by redefining its agenda in terms of indigenous collective, women's, and children's rights recognized by the national and international law, and the global space of human rights and international institutions (Sieder and Witchell 2001: 205, Kearny in Wilson 2003: 167). Additionally, it has engaged in a process of ethnic identification in terms of a self-crafted definition of 'development with identity' and in terms of the performance of 'tradition.' The reframing of its relationship with the national office defies the imagined verticality of state-like organizations according to which the higher, more encompassing levels represent the general good for the lower levels. It also defies the association of local with tradition and backwardness, and national with what is modern and progressive. Nevertheless, the alliance between the local realm and the international one reinforces the sanctioning function of the latter—adding to a regime of transnational governmentality (Jackson 2005).

I have highlighted CCIM's capacity for the administration of their distinctive capital, stemming from both its ethnic and professional identities. The organizations use several tactics—ambiguity, symbolic interchange, distancing, and overt confrontation— that make possible the relationship between its different development partners. Their brokerage role makes possible the co-existence of different rationalities, interests and meanings, in order to produce legitimacy and 'success' and maintain the flow of funding (Lewis and Mosse 2006: 16). Thus, as one staff member aptly put it, the cultural approach sells.

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