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Remapping Nature: Motherhood, Autonomy, and Anti-Mining Activism in Íntag, Ecuador

Ellicott K. Dandy

Colby College

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Remapping Nature

Motherhood, Autonomy, and Anti-Mining Activism in Íntag, Ecuador

Ellicott Dandy
Senior Honors Thesis
Department of Anthropology
Colby College
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It was really the allure of autonomy that pulled me to Íntag initially; enticed by the promise of a semester-long adventure culminating in a month of independent study, I left the dark afternoons and bright classrooms of rural Maine for a country I still thought of as small. I went to Ecuador envisioning total independence in a unique scholarly pursuit, with a safety net too far away to matter. I was naïve. I learned very quickly that every wonderful aspect of that unforgettable month was, in fact, a person. Now, more than a year later, this project has outgrown the dimensions I anticipated for it so noticeably, that to have merely one name on its cover seems unnatural. I feel deep appreciation for the friends I have made in Íntag, whose stories I have tried to represent here; and for my gracious support system in Ecuador, especially Fabián Espinosa who taught me about the power of reciprocity and that without love, there can be no strength.

At the outset of the writing process, I envisioned a climactic ending in which the final keystroke would resonate deep within a sleep-deprived soul and the feeling of accomplishment would pulse through my veins. Again, I was naïve. The process of writing itself has brought dozens of such moments of passionate engagement with worlds and ideas so exciting as to dwarf the satisfaction of meeting a deadline. The people with whom I shared these moments—who inspired them, worked with their modest beginnings and helped mold abstractions into productive observations, who celebrated when they came to fruition and encouraged more—deserve my sincere gratitude.

I owe endless thanks to Professor Chandra Bhimull, my advisor, my sounding board, my guide through the daunting territories of anthropological inquiry, the recipient of emails time-stamped with hours I wish not to recall. Your ceaseless questioning provoked the thoughts that became the words and pages that follow.
Without the kindness and support of Professor Mary Beth Mills, I might have lost faith in myself months ago. Professor Mills and all of the other Anthropology professors at Colby College also deserve thanks for the frequent brainstorming, indiscriminant lending of books, and comedic relief.

The Latin American Studies Program, my other academic home at Colby, graciously funded my trip back to Íntag in January to continue my research. Many of the program’s dedicated professors also offered encouragement and advice, and even indulged my desires to discuss this thesis endlessly. To Professor Ryan Jones in particular, thank you for the unconditional academic support, the consistent reassurance, and the pistachios.

My incredible friends and family have redefined what it means to be supportive. Veritable tightrope walkers (and some slack-liners), they artfully walked the line between enthusiastic encouragement and concern for my health. For taking a real interest in this project and for providing the perfect balance of distraction and celebration at appropriate points along the way, thank you all. Jessica Pires and Rachel Rosenbaum have earned unique recognition for their humor, solidarity, snacks, and haikus.

And finally, I thank the reader for giving me an audience. Cultural anthropology exists for the people who engage with it, and I hope that you find the story of Íntag as compelling as I have.
“¿Hola? ¿Roberta?” I called out, nearly tripping over a chicken.

“Yes, I’m back here, behind the house!” I followed her muffled call to a small, dark shed where a plump little woman of about 60 stood in the doorway, scattering table scraps to the dozens of guinea pigs underfoot. “Oh hello, I’m just feeding the cuyes.” Cuy is the Kichwa word for guinea pig, a phonetic name for the noise they make; the sounds that punctuated Roberta’s warm greeting. I introduced myself, a student trying to learn about the powerful women of Íntag and their important role in fighting against mining. Did she have a minute to talk about her work?

She proudly showed me her huerta familiar, her garden, where she grew almost every vegetable that she and her husband ate, explaining how blessed she is to have land that provides so much. She then invited me inside to talk. Roberta is the president of the women’s group, Manos Laboradoras al Paraíso, or “working hands of El Paraíso.” It is one of the many women’s groups organized around principles of alternative development as a productive response to the unpopular, environmentally destructive, and socially divisive arrival of large-scale metal mining. Her organization is based in the tiny community of El Paraíso, which consists of a few dozen houses scattered along a single street perched high up on a verdant hill. Manos Laboradoras’ current project is raising cuyes, a traditional Andean delicacy. Each of the members cultivates vegetables using sustainable agricultural techniques, and Roberta, as president, feeds and cares for the guinea pigs. They bring them to the Sunday market in the centralized parish of Apuela to sell.

El Paraíso and Apuela are small towns in the region or zone of Íntag comprising roughly half the landmass of Cotacachi County, located in Ecuador’s cloud forest north of Quito. Íntag’s
widely dispersed population consists in roughly 12,000 people (about half the population of Cotacachi County) of mestizo ethnicity, or mixed indigenous and European descent. They are all descendants of migrant farmers who colonized the land in the last 120 years, and frequently refer to themselves as Inteños (masculine plural) and Inteñas (feminine plural) as they continually construct a place-based sense of shared identity. The fragile yet fruitful natural environment shapes the lifestyle and motivates local opposition to the destructive presence of international mining companies in Junín, another small town in Íntag. This fight divides residents, pitting those who see mining as a solution to poverty—which affects over 90 percent of locals—against those who condemn it as an unsustainable enterprise, capable of endangering endemic flora and fauna, contaminating vital water sources and otherwise clean air, and tearing at the social fabric (Secretaría de Estado 2002). The latter group has sought a solution to the crisis; through an extensive series of community-based initiatives to generate income sustainably, progressive-minded Inteños seek to earn money without sacrificing the delicate environment. These efforts at organic fair trade coffee cultivation, ecotourism enterprises, and the artisanal projects have, though perhaps initially unintentionally, empowered the area’s women. As a result, many community leaders like Roberta have woven feminist ideologies into the goals of their alternative development projects.

As the heavy rains emblematic of the cloud forest environment drummed on Roberta’s corrugated metal roof, she talked about the challenges of fighting for the environment on the grassroots level, and about what she sees as the growing importance of eliminating machismo. She prides herself on the environmental sustainability of her lifestyle, noting the independence it affords her and her husband through food security, and praises her community for the value its people have begun to place on protecting the local environment. “But,” she pauses, turning her
sad smile to the rain, “we still have a lot of work to do. There are still women who don’t know their rights, who let their husbands make decisions for them, and we can’t win this fight without them.”

In this study, I investigate the social impacts of local responses to the mining conflict in Íntag with particular respect to women, the community, and environmentalism. I am especially intrigued by the high rate of participation among women activists and how this has contributed to changes in gendered power dynamics as activists have reclaimed the female body as a powerful symbol of nature and victim of oppression. I contribute to broader scholarship linking gender and resource politics by critically reconstructing local conceptions of femininity, motherhood, the environment, and their relationship to the state. My work also represents a counterpoint to public discourses that view land rights claims as tied to indigeneity; I problematized ethnicity-centered arguments that portray indigenous groups as the only marginalized peoples worthy of unchallenged and unchallengeable rights to their lands. At its core, this thesis is about the plasticity of culture as I catch grassroots activists in the act of altering the ways that they and their families, friends, and neighbors go about their daily lives, understand themselves, and relate to one another. Anthropological examinations of the tensions between structure and agency will perhaps benefit from my description of agents manipulating the structure (Cooke 2009).

**Political Ecology: an appropriate anthropological lens**

I believe I can best represent and analyze Inteñas’ conception of the fundamental inextricability between the area’s most prominent ideologies of environmentalism, autonomy, and gender equality through the framework of political ecology. Drawing primarily from work by Fernando Coronil, Arturo Escobar, and Diane Rocheleau, I investigate the applications of
political ecology in this setting. Coronil illuminates constructed boundaries between nature and society, while Escobar’s work provides theoretical alternatives to this relationship. Rocheleau incorporates the important dimension of gender. This field of anthropology is perhaps best understood through what it is not: political ecology directly opposes more mainstream discourses of development that attempt to separate the lives and activities of people from the environment by blurring the imagined boundary between nature and culture. In so doing, political ecology challenges the notion of an apolitical ecology by demonstrating the profound and varied ways in which people interact with their environments, building and reimagining relationships. Feminist political ecology incorporates and centers gender in these relationships, recognizing the relevance of the gendered division of labor and ideologies with gendered differences for shaping the interactions between people and their environments. Dominant narratives of political economy emphasize the importance of “productive” work, which is often men’s work, thereby overlooking the kinds of work that social constructions of gendered labor specify for women. Seeking to expose the otherwise invisible interactions among the various actors, bodies, and forces at play, feminist political ecology brings a gendered approach to political ecology (Rocheleau 1995). Privileging multiple perspectives that are differentiated on the basis of gender allows for a multidimensional deconstruction of the dynamic relationships between Inteñas and Inteños, the high-mountain cloud forest in which and with which they live, and the political economy in which they act.

A gendered approach to political ecology allows me to investigate the complex and often messy intersections of and tensions between narratives of nature, the body, ethnicity, and discourses of development in Íntag. As I explore in chapter one, one of the most salient legacies of the Spanish colonial empire in Inteño society is the mestizo ethnicity. The Spanish
The colonization of Ecuador, between 1531 and 1822, was a conquest of land and resources, but it was also a conquest of people. Often through the violence of rape, Spanish and native ethnicities fused to produce and reproduce mestizaje, operating in a sticky space of artificial—yet no less powerful—binaries between native and European, natural and cosmopolitan. The work of the Spanish empire, then, was to pull the body away from “nature” and into “society.” Indigenous peoples whose nationalities the Ecuadorian state still recognizes today circumvented that violent process of miscegenation.¹ Popular and academic discourse surrounding development and conservation ecology frequently assumes that indigenous groups live without this separation, and can therefore lay claim to their environment—often deemed “ancestral lands,” or territorios in the case of Ecuador—as integral to their culture (Sawyer 2004). Following centuries of oppression, these indigenous groups re-appropriate the widely criticized “Nobel Savage” stereotype that locates the root of their difference in their relationship to nature (Kuper 2003, Krech 1999, Hames 2007, Sawyer 2004). Therefore, an important indigenous political strategy in Ecuador and elsewhere has reinforced the claim that they belong more in the realm of “nature” than in that of “society”. They do this in large part through affirming symbolic associations between indigenous people and the natural environments, or territorios, in which they live. The distinct activism in Íntag, and the work of Inteña women in particular, strives to undo this separation with respect to mestizo ethnicity by remapping nature onto their bodies partially through reimagining local constructions of femininity, motherhood, and community. I argue that Inteña female activists use their bodies the way indigenous groups use their land in the idea of

¹ I hesitate to use the word “miscegenation” because of the historical racialized hierarchies that contextualize its use. By using this word, I do not invoke any of the same hierarchies or attribution of characteristics or values on the basis of ethnicity or race with which the term is profoundly associated. Rather, I employ it here to refer to the production of new ethnic identities through the—often-violent—sexual unions between members of different groups.
territorio, by infusing their bodies with the symbolism that protests against the ultimately destructive separation between nature and society.

Activists’ strategy to mobilize constructions of the feminine, maternal body as symbols to incite action invokes the Foucauldian notion of biopower. Biopower is the mechanism of manipulation in which the body is both the site and object of control (Foucault 1978: 137). The specific threads of Inteña activism that take advantage of the meanings others associate with their bodies as points of entry into the public discourse rework biopower by upsetting the hierarchy it often upholds; that of the (patriarchal) state over the populace. Inteña feminists use their own bodies—with specific reference to their reproductive capabilities—to elicit particular responses from others. Although mobilizing these meanings may initially reinforce the gendered division of labor built on these constructions of motherhood, activists ultimately use the access such mobilization grants them to renegotiate gender roles. This thesis will show how environmentalist and feminist grassroots organizations use and promote a construction of feminized nature as a way to blur the line between nature and society; it catches them in the process of using the power afforded by their activism to improve the plight of women locally.

No stranger to feminist environmentalism, political ecology, then, uses a theoretical approach that mirrors and deconstructs this endemic discourse. In using cultural anthropology and the lens of political ecology to tell a story about Íntag, I hope to convey more than just the experiences of the people I met and the interactions I observed. Rather, I hope that my portrayal of Íntag will enrich cultural anthropology and popular discourses, including those of resource politics, human rights, and sustainable living. The case of Íntag, with particular respect to the communities’ collective struggle to maintain control over their resources, exposes the ways in which mainstream literature and even the most progressive politics essentialize indigeneity,
thereby inadvertently marginalizing the rural mestizo poor. By asserting that their cultural identity and livelihood—let alone the health of the planet as a whole—depends on the protection of their natural environment, Inteñas and Inteños are paving the way for broader access to land rights. In other words, while the discourse that includes documents such as the United Nations’ Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples promotes the rights of groups historically marginalized for their ethnicity, it often displaces abuse to communities like Íntag (United Nations General Assembly 2008). By claiming a collective identity rooted in the ecosystem and dependent on their own autonomy, Inteños show that their ethnicity should not exclude them from the right to what one Inteño called “a productive life” (Antoni, April 23, 2012, personal communication).

Mining Resistance: A multifaceted response to a multifaceted threat

A brief review of the arrival of the mining threat and consequent local resistance will illuminate some of the aforementioned tensions in the politics surrounding resource extraction and ethnicity. Additionally, I hope my analysis of these events will speak to the necessity for a feminist political ecology framework in making anthropological sense of these intersecting issues in Íntag.

As part of a structural adjustment plan, the national government of Ecuador commissioned a geological study of the country’s subsoil minerals in the early 1990s (Kocian et al. 1992). The high demand for the products of the extractive industries in combination with the typically high cost of production often motivates companies to search for the least expensive means of extraction. Laws like UNDRIP serve as obstacles to extractive activity, such that the natural resources near which communities with fewer protections (like those in Íntag) live become more attractive to companies in the extractive industries. Therefore, as long as demand for products such as oil and copper remains high, the companies who benefit will displace the associated environmental abuse to least protected people and places. For literature on the Not In My Backyard phenomenon see Schively 2007. Freudenburg 1992, Galeano 1997, Bebbington, et al. 2008, and Ballard and Banks 2003 analyze the abusive tendencies of the extractive industries in under-regulated, “developing economies” within the context of globalized trade.
al 2011: 12). The study found copper deposits in Íntag’s Toisán mountain range, beneath the rich and delicate diversity of plant and animal life. Quito sold concessions to Bishi Metals, a subsidiary of the Japanese Mitsubishi, which began exploratory drilling in Íntag in the mid-1990s (Zorrilla 2010). Meanwhile, locals began to learn about the destructive potentials for large-scale metal mining, including erosion, contamination of water and air, noise pollution, deforestation, desertification, relocation of communities, and higher rates of prostitution, drug use, sexually transmitted diseases, and domestic violence.³ This initiated a shift in local attitudes toward environmentalism that supported a desire to conserve and maintain the health of the delicate surrounding environment. Angered Inteños and Inteñas fought against the mining company, staging protests, filing lawsuits that cited abusive activities such as assault and forced relocation, and ultimately resorted to burning down the company’s facilities (ibid.). Bishimetals finally withdrew its concession without ever having broken ground.

In the wake of this confrontation, the government in Cotacachi, the county that encompasses Íntag, declared itself an ecological county. In theory, this distinction precludes local approval of any measures that put at risk the area’s natural environment (Asamblea de Unidad Cantonal – Cotacachi 2012). For years, sustaining the support of the county government fortified Inteños’ and Inteñas’ struggle to keep the area free of mining. After Bishimetals returned empty-handed to Japan, Ascendant Copper of Canada arrived with an equally abusive set of practices, according to local accounts (Zorilla 2010). Inteños were finally able to force out this company as well, using similar tactics of popular protest and maintaining that developing the concession was illegal under local law. Unable to rebound from extensive press coverage of its human rights abuses and environmental neglect, Ascendant Copper eventually dissolved,

³ For a more thorough description of the specific threats open-pit copper mining poses to the unique environment surrounding Íntag in particular, see chapter one.
returning the mining concession to the Ecuadorian state. Despite ultimate success by most measures, these fights seared fear and painful conflict into the memories of Inteñas and Inteños, such that asking about their experiences required tact and sensitivity to the lasting social implications of these violent confrontations.

The residual fears surfaced in multiple conversations throughout my visits to Íntag. Men like small, soft-spoken Omar remember first and foremost the social destruction, despite their deep concern for the environment. Omar is fastidious in his upkeep of his farm; his carefully placed coffee plants beneath giant banana trees, intermittently planted with small legumes, reflect meticulous and exhausting hours of hard work. He said he shares those hours with his family, that his children race down the steep hills after school to help him pull weeds from the soft soils, dogs at their ankles. I asked him about what happened in his community—several hours from Apuela by motorcycle—during the mining conflicts. He shook his head. “The first major impact of mining was social. There were conflicts between relatives, within families,” he told me, slowing his speech on the last two words (Omar, January 16, 2013, personal communication). I heard people talk about this impact even more than the environmental implications of breaking ground on the mine, indicating the profound overlap between the environmental and the social for Inteños and Inteñas. The field of economics categorizes these, collectively, as “negative externalities,” because they negatively impact those deemed external to the enterprise of mining (Buchanan and Stubblebine 1962, Saha 2012, and Johnson 2005). For people living within Íntag, these negative consequences of the copper mine are internal in that they are inescapable. The particular environmentalism that local activists have adopted serves to internalize these externalities in part by rendering them inextricable; the social impacts are deeply intertwined with the environmental and vice-versa.
Despite these pending threats, locals desperate for any kind of economic stimulus found, and in some cases, continue to find themselves in favor of the mine. When mineral mining was first proposed in Íntag, nearly all Inteños self-identified as “poor” in the Unsatisfied Basic Needs method employed by the country’s census (Ecuador en Cifras). For Bishimetals and Ascendant Copper—with the powerful backing of a state desperate for revenues—the high levels of local poverty served as excellent leverage. Representatives from the mines offered to hire locals and buy their land for more money than they could earn by selling their crops, interacting with and exaggerating local narratives of economic insecurity. Some immediately refused the offers, caring more about maintaining their land and their lifestyle than about the extra income. Others saw it as their right to do with their land and their labor as they wished, or felt their economic circumstances gave them little choice. As the conflict between the multinational corporations and the state on one side, and local activists on the other escalated, it tore families apart on more intimate levels, and activist leaders recognized that local unity required economic security. Local leaders invested in fortifying and uniting sustained community opposition to the mine began engineering income-generating projects, like Roberta’s cuyes, in line with their own visions of environmentally sustainable and sustainably autonomous development.

Environmentalist causes underlie the alternative development measures, guiding much of local activism toward environmentally safe practices in everyday lives across the zone. The concerted efforts to grow a diverse variety of crops to avoid soil depletion, to plant crops in diagonal rows on the steep slopes so as to diminish erosion, and to grow everything organically are remarkable, but fairly new. Sandra, an activist and community leader who has played a central role in multiple aspects of the movement told me with an ironic smile, “Sometimes we say, ‘thank goodness the mining threat arrived,’” and she laughed (Sandra, January 7, 2013,
personal communication). Although I did not expect it, her statement made a lot of sense to me. By the time she and I sat down in the tiny credit co-op she runs in Apuela, I had pieced together enough sentences about the “change in attitude” to understand that the threat of mining was, in many ways, a catalyst for the widespread and enthusiastic environmentalism I observed in Íntag. They consider themselves “agrarian environmentalists,” and many of the aforementioned alternative development projects follow this model for sustainability.

One of the most significant, and I would argue tangible, changes to the area as a result of the mining threat and the resistance it sparked is the elevation of women’s status. Many women initially recognized themselves as primary stakeholders in protecting the area from the mine and participated in marches and protests to keep their communities, their families, their water, and their land safe from this threat. Others, like Roberta, began to take leadership roles in the alternative development projects, many of which now run on the participation of women exclusively. Recognizing a need to organize these groups on a larger scale and the potential for gender equality, women community members created the Coordinadora de Mujeres de Íntag, or Women’s Coordinating Committee of Íntag (CMI) with the intentions of unifying women’s participation in the fight against mining and fostering efforts to improve women’s plight in the area. In its dozen years of operation, the CMI has addressed the gendered aspects of the challenges Íntag faces because of its poverty, lack of infrastructure, and the pervasiveness of misogynist tendencies in Ecuador (Lind 2003). The CMI’s contributions to the fight against mining includes helping women’s groups secure grants for their alternative development projects, providing structural support, and finding markets in which they sell their products. In local politics, the CMI participates by holding educational seminars in various communities about women’s rights in Ecuador. The organization has also run education and prevention
campaigns about domestic violence and child abuse and brought sexual education to the public high schools, and generally served as a visible testament to efforts toward gender equality in Íntag.

By many accounts, Íntag is a very different place than it was before the arrival of the threat of mining. Most agree that the communities have recovered from the deep divides that strained local relationships at the height of the conflict. Owing to the concerted efforts to promote environmentalism, gender equality, and the valuing of their natural wealth, many express optimism about the strength of the community and its ability to withstand further threats. However, the mining conflict is anything but over. For six years following the departure of Ascendant Copper, Quito controlled the mining concession under the national mining company, ENAMI. Lacking the experience, technology, and capital necessary to develop a copper mine of this size, the government reached an agreement with CODELCO, the Chilean national mining company and the world’s largest copper producer. The agreement stipulated that Quito would retain rights to the concession but that CODELCO would develop it. In October of 2012, community leaders sent an open letter to the Chilean government requesting that the company—whose expertise and technology are indispensible in the development of Junín concession—leave Íntag. CODELCO remained in the area, ready to break ground following a green light from Quito and turn the proposed site into an operational mine (Zorilla 2012b).

On February 13, 2013, the Cotacachi county government approved the project in a five-to-four vote. Locals throughout Íntag say they feel disenchanted with the county government, accusing officials of corruption for violating the county’s unique charter, and many look ahead with anxiety, wondering whether they will be able to retain their legitimacy in opposing the mine without the support of the county government. Some still maintain support for the mining
concession, citing continued poverty in the area. Although many locals and outsiders share confidence in Íntag’s ability to ultimately drive out CODELCO, to great cost for ENAMI, they face an uphill battle.

Methods and Reflexivity

Throughout this project, I have had the exciting privilege of using fieldwork methods not frequently available to undergraduate students. I spent my junior spring semester in Ecuador on a study abroad program based in Quito, focused on culture and development. The entire semester built toward a final month-long independent study project. After falling in love with its mountains, clouds, waterfalls, orchids, and butterflies and learning about the mining conflict and local activism during a program excursion, I became determined to spend that month in Íntag. I passed that month in a state of naïve but passionate awe, stumbling through the fundamentals of fieldwork, between the entangled roots of cloud forest trees. I lived with an incredibly gracious host family, Pilar and her son. I worked with many of the aforementioned women’s groups, and generally tried to spend time with people in the area. Volunteering my labor for these alternative development projects served my research as participant observation, and I conducted interviews with many of the people with whom I connected over the course of my four weeks in Íntag.

I wrote my final paper for that semester about ecofeminism and alternative development, highlighting the ways in which Inteña women benefit from the economic autonomy, individual empowerment, and social interaction fostered by alternative development projects. I was thrilled and endlessly inspired by the people I had met and the implications of Íntag as a model of development for those seeking alternatives to the environmentally and socially destructive mainstream model.
Upon returning to Colby College for my senior year, I began to study and expand the project as a senior thesis in anthropology. In January of 2013, I flew back to Quito and boarded a bus at the northern end of the crowded and polluted Andean city for Otavalo. Two hours later, I found myself surrounded by the volcanic peaks of Cotacachi and Imbabura and asking strangers in traditional Otavalan dress when the next bus to Peñaherrera, a “population center” in Íntag, might leave. “A las dos y medio, creyó.” It was not long before I rumbled along the narrow, curving dirt road in a very full bus, progressing from páramo, or high-alpine ecosystems, into the wet, green thickness of the tropical Andean cloud forest. I wiped the fogged-up window clean to catch oddly familiar glimpses of white orchids dotting the slopes so steep and so close I could nearly touch them through the window. It seemed impossible to juxtapose images of the muddy, foggy, and lush environment we were winding through with those from my morning run through a park in Quito—let alone with the snow-covered Rockies I had watched shrink through an airplane window a mere forty-eight hours earlier. I had returned to Íntag with a renewed and nuanced interest in certain aspects of Inteña activism that grew from weaving my first experience in fieldwork into current anthropological literature on development, Andean constructions of gender, and feminist political ecology. I wanted to explore the intersections of these themes in local anti-mining discourse.

The process of getting to Íntag to engage with these issues through ethnographic fieldwork reminded me of my own positionality within my project. I spent the three-hour journey from Otavalo to Peñaherrera next to a man named Vicente, who turned out to be one of Pilar’s twelve siblings. Probably like many of our fellow passengers, he was returning from his three-week shift in the Amazon basin where he works for an oil company to visit his family for a few days. I explained to him that I had been to Íntag before, that I am a college student in the United
States, and that I am writing my thesis about the mining conflict in Íntag. He looked at me a little quizzically and said, “Why would you come all the way to Ecuador to write your thesis?” alerting me once more to the rarity of this opportunity, and perhaps for the first time, to the utter unlikelihood that his children would have the same one (Vicente, January 3, 2013, personal communication). In partial avoidance of addressing the inequalities in the forces that brought me to Íntag twice in one year, I elected to take the seemingly virtuous route and explain that, “I think this is an important story to tell.” We spent the rest of the bus ride talking about Íntag’s environmentalism and the shifts in local politics and culture following the threat of mining. In accounting for the beginning of our conversation, a second reading of my field notes from that day leads me to interpret this discussion as a form of his active resistance in itself; as I discuss below, I was a unique audience for Vicente and many of my other informants.

After four or five days back in Íntag, nearly everyone knew who I was and had a vague idea about why I was there. The rest of the month of January was a whirlwind of rainstorms, excellent coffee, and impromptu motorcycle rides. I spent my time listening to women’s stories while I helped peel potatoes or washed dishes, interviewing women while their tiny children played with my shoelaces, wandering into rural communities in search of people I had never met, bartering at Apuela’s Sunday market, riding in the backs of pick-up trucks, and furiously writing up observations and reactions via headlamp after Pilar and her son had gone to sleep in the other room. Most of my fieldwork kept me in or near Peñaherrera, getting to know better some of the people I had met during my last visit and expanding my network as much as I could in the limited time I had. Peñaherrera claims about 1200 residents, so the presence of a blonde, green-eyed gringa was not exactly inconspicuous.
It is hard to situate my whiteness in Íntag. On a map, the capital and Peñaherrera are roughly forty miles apart, but getting there was a longer journey than flying from Houston to Quito—and Houston looked more like Quito than Íntag did. Its isolation and the decades of mining conflict make for a complicated collective experience with the outside world. Although the arrival of foreign individuals remains a fairly infrequent—and at the very least, a noteworthy—occurrence, specific discourses regarding these encounters are noticeable in Íntag. Indispensable grants and donations flow in from the United States, Europe, and even Quito to support the environmentalist activism and alternative development projects, and some outsiders from the same places arrive as tourists or well-intentioned but often relatively ineffective volunteers. However, others enter the zone toting drills and surveying equipment, prepared to dig. I did not fall into any of these categories very easily, but my foreignness—and probably my whiteness in particular—interacted with some of the stereotypes of each.

The same rampant inequalities that render something as complicated and expensive as large-scale copper mining a lucrative investment also brought me to Íntag. I was there because I have access to resources and funding opportunities that Inteño children likely never will, and judging by reactions such as Vicente’s, being there for such a purpose is not only foreign, it is powerful. One of the most uncomfortable aspects of anthropological fieldwork and this project in particular is its dependence on the very power imbalances that it—and I—problematic and even condemn. I find the story of Íntag an intriguing and important one to tell and I am able to tell it in part because I have and have access to particular forms of agency that my informants do not. Conscious of this tension, while I was there I tried to position myself as a learner who would then become something of a loudspeaker, hoping to project the words my informants told me in interviews and casual conversations—though I did not hear them with an uncritical ear.
However, positioning myself as a benevolent outsider may have occasionally backfired; in my earnest attempt to upset a balance of power I simultaneously disdained and utilized, I re-appropriated my agency. While my initial intention was to empower my informants via portrayal, such empowerment depends heavily on my own power outweighing theirs in certain, important contexts.

In my reflective—and reflexive—work, I wonder how framing this project as an opportunity for me to learn about and later relay Inteñas’ and Inteños’ experiences influenced both the content and packaging of the stories they told me, especially in light of the ways in which the foreign flows through Íntag. Given the length of each of my stays, there was no mistaking my transience; I was always just about to leave and translate my informants’ words for another, English-speaking, well-educated audience. I believe that for many of my informants, this was an opportunity to shed a very particular light on the story of Íntag. In other words, in making my own purposes clear, I inadvertently, and perhaps, unavoidably encouraged them to tell me the story the way they want that English-speaking, well-educated audience to hear it. I do not think this undermines the validity of any of the accounts I have translated, reprinted, and analyzed here. On the contrary, reading into this self-conscious and deliberate framing of the story sheds light on some of the forces at play. If I acknowledge that everything I learned from my informants is packaged in a specific way, I can explore the motivations behind this specific packaging, and integrate this analysis—that of why they tell the story they do—with my analysis of the story itself. I am, in a sense, trying to interpret their interpretations of the mining conflict and its aftermath in Íntag. I hope that doing so will add a dimension to my ethnographic account that reveals something about Inteñas’ perception of their own positions, as individuals and as a collection of communities, in a global and historical context.
It is important to note that I translated all the words I quote from Spanish to English, unless I indicate otherwise. Naming my informants presented an important and difficult issue for me in this project. The overwhelming majority of my informants specifically requested that I refer to them by name in the final product, viewing this as a unique opportunity to use their often silenced voices. At the same time, standard practice in anthropology relies on anonymity to protect informants whose words may be used against them, especially in situations as sensitive as mining conflicts. I was, and remain, torn between honoring my informants’ requests to be named at the risk of identifying them to their often violent opponents in the mining conflict, and changing their names at the risk of employing another variety of paternalistic silencing that suggests I know what is best for them better than they do. However, this changed significantly when, following the decision in February, it became clear that the conflict would likely heat up again. I realized that the potential risks for my informants had increased significantly over the month since they had given me permission to use their names. Unable to contact all of them from Maine, I elected to change the names.

I have organized the chapters of this thesis in such a way that reflects my analytical processes. This analysis gradually contextualizes activism in Íntag within Ecuador and the broader discourses of ethnic dimensions of resource politics, feminism and motherhood, environmentalism, and tensions between rural areas and Quito. Chapter one uses a political ecology approach to anchor my ethnographic encounters in their relevant histories and ecologies, especially in reference to the threats that mining poses them. This chapter also focuses on tensions between Íntag and the urban centers of Quito, Otavalo, and urban, colonial Spain. In
chapter two, I analyze local constructions of femininity and motherhood with particular respect to the relationships between these tropes and the threats mining presents. Although the potential destruction associated with mining lurks in the background throughout this thesis, the actual issue of mining will fade from analysis as I focus more on the long-term impacts of locals’ responses to it. I allow my informants to speak to current literature on Andean constructions of womanhood, calling to the surface themes of independence and self-reliance. Building on these messy constructions, I begin chapter three with a symbolic analysis of visual texts in Íntag that reflect the ideologies of Inteña activism. I use the rest of that chapter to explore local activism as a point of convergence between these narratives of autonomy that use the female body as a symbolic, material, and discursive site through which Inteñas reclaim both identity and power, by blurring the boundary between nature and their society. Chapter four shows how locals incorporate the ideals and practices espoused by the anti-mining activism into their everyday lives, with particular attention to the ways in which these activities embody the aforementioned local constructions of identity and autonomy. The conclusion brings the issue of the mining conflict back to center-stage and addresses the most current information on the progress of the mine itself and local responses to it, using what I have shown about local cultural shifts to propose a cautiously optimistic outlook for the coming events in the conflict.

Throughout these chapters, I weave in the argument that a key strategy of Inteña activism depends on reconstructing nature with particular respect to their own positions within it. Using political ecology to recognize the powerful ways in which cultural constructions of nature influence interactions with the environment and therefore impact the people living within it, I ultimately conclude that emulating the Inteña model in constructing nature may address many of the social, environmental, economic, and political problems many parts of the world face today.
ONE

Rooting the Texture of Culture: A Political Ecology of Íntag

Political Ecology as an Analytical Lens

Political ecology provides the framework of analysis that most closely conforms to Inteñas’ and Inteños’ descriptions of Íntag. It recognizes the convergence of political economy, culture, and the natural environment as lived realities. On a basic level, the health, availability, and specific variety of natural resources in an area profoundly impact the everyday lives of the people who inhabit that place. The struggle between groups and individuals for use, control over, and appropriation of such resources impacts and often characterizes social relationships of power. This theoretical framework becomes increasingly relevant and necessary to understand the influences of those political and economic structures on localities and their cultures given the growing demand for natural resources under the neoliberal economic model. Íntag provides an important case study for the ways in which these large-scale structures and the demands that drive them impact people and their environment. The effects on each are not discrete; the theory of political ecology teaches—and my ethnographic account will show—that the political and economic are also profoundly social, cultural, and ecological. According to many Inteños, they are who they are and do what they do in large part because of where they are and what the ecosystems are like; because local culture cannot conceptually extricate itself from the specifics of the local environment, neither should an anthropological representation of this culture.

Nature does not frequently play a central role in cultural analysis despite—or perhaps because of—its ubiquity and our unavoidable dependence on it. Anthrophistorian Fernando Coronil attributed nature’s marked absence in social critique to post-Enlightenment thought that conceives of the physical environment as an “inert stage on which historical events take place
and nature as the passive material with which humans make their world” (Coronil 1997: 23). Dominant western thought, in Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar’s words, takes for granted the presence of nature “as a resource external to humans and which humans can appropriate in any way they see fit” (Escobar 2006: 9). And yet, nature remains an unavoidable dimension of the human experience. In an historical review of political ecology in the third world, geographer Raymond Bryant notes that the creation of political ecology met the need “to couch anthropological insights about human-environmental interaction in the context of an appreciation of the wider political and economic structures that influence activity in any given locality” (Bryant 1998: 81). Political ecology resolves this near opposition in inventories of theory—between Bryant’s espousal of political ecology and the opposition in Coronil’s observation—by acknowledging the pervasiveness of nature throughout cultural, political, and economic narratives and accounting for the relationships among them.

As a school of thought deeply embedded in anthropology, political ecology rejects an essentialized conception of nature, posing instead a theory of the natural environment that recognizes its cultural constructedness. Even our empirical explanations of nature are necessarily grounded in our lived experiences, profoundly and unavoidably shaped by our social worlds through “environmental discourses.” Escobar accounts for the culturally specific qualities of nature as an experience, explaining that nature is “differently produced by different groups or in different historical periods” (Escobar 1999: 5). According to Escobar, “nature is simultaneously real, collective, and discursive,” meaning it exists independently of people, but we cannot isolate our experience of it from the cultural values through which we perceive and engage with it (Escobar 1999: 2). By classifying nature as “discursive,” Escobar proposes that it is powerful and

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4 Although Coronil’s application of this construction takes place several centuries after the Spanish conquest of the “New World,” I find it no less applicable to this earlier period in history.
even political; the distribution of nature itself embodies power relationships in multiple settings. Indeed, nature is often both the site and the object of conflicts between cultural groups, and plays an important role in the formation and constant reproduction of cultural identity; hence, it is “collective” because multiple people experience and perceive nature together. Even Eric Wolf’s assertion that, “man rises up against nature by means of what we would today call culture,” posits a conflictual yet nevertheless inextricable relationship between people and nature, of which culture is both a byproduct and an integral component (Wolf 1982: 73). Therefore, traditional western attempts to separate nature from society fail to account for the interactions between people and their environments, and the important ways in which those relationships change over time and vary between places. As Coronil’s analysis of the “neglect of nature” shows, this separation between culture and nature aligns with and allows for a western economic pragmatism in construing nature as a commodity available for exploitation (Coronil 1997: 21).

My informants in Íntag find themselves in a continual battle against this construction of nature as a limitless commodity with no social life of its own. For many of the people with whom I spent time, the perception of nature as a dynamic organism sets them proudly apart from their urban counterparts. Cindi, an 18-year-old girl from the tiny community of Cerro Pelado whose large family has been actively involved in the fight against mining, told me about the year she spent working in Quito. She says she had trouble connecting to people who did not value nature the same way she does: “When I would ask where their food came from they said, ‘The grocery store.’ And water? ‘The sink.’ In the city, they live as if nature existed in another world” (Cindi, January 4, 2013, personal communication). Cindi is not alone in articulating this

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5 Carolyn Merchant’s influential work, *The Death of Nature* (198…) explores the socio-historical roots of this construction of nature as external to culture. Her analysis uses a gendered lens to expose the patriarchal aspects of the nature/culture divide in the west. Merchant’s work describes precisely that to which the Inteña worldview presents a productive alternative.
conceptual gap between Íntag and Quito. The complex relationship between the rural communities across Íntag and “the state” (el estado, a symbol of unfairly concentrated power and resources as well as the bureaucratic structure) manifests in the issues of resource management (economic and natural). This relationship also plays an important role in the formation of community identities, priorities, and Íntag's imagined positionality in the discourse of development, and in constructions of development itself.

In this chapter, I use the framework of political ecology to construct a rich image of Íntag with special attention to the ways in which relationships between Íntag and urban centers influence lived realities within the zone of Íntag. Very little academic work exists on Íntag’s cultural history, but I integrate oral history narratives with ecological histories to illustrate a relevant backdrop of the area (D’Amico 2012, Espinoza Soriano 1988, Kuecker 2007). For my purposes, the best way to blend knowledge of cloud forest ecosystems into my study of Íntag is in reference to its vulnerabilities and the characteristics that make it a valuable ecosystem for Inteños; local consciousness of the natural richness is profoundly connected, and in some ways a response to, the ways in which copper mining threatens it.

Íntag, the Ecosystem

Íntag spans roughly 580 square miles across the tropical Andes in the province of Imbabura, just north of Quito. Dense, green forests thickly cling to the steep sides of mountains whose elevations climb and drop vertiginously. Fog flows out of a remarkable variety of entangled plants, rolling into clouds that hang among the mountain peaks and float between the
dramatic valleys. Íntag is in a cloud forest, a life zone characterized by the consistent airborne presence of mist that condenses between the plants and gathers into low hanging, often ground level clouds. Worldwide, cloud forests average about 2000mm of rainfall, which is only 500mm less than annual precipitation in the Amazon Rainforest (Jarvis and Mulligan 2010: 332). Cloud forest ecosystems, like rainforest ecosystems, typically have very poor soils topped by rich duff layers, or layers of decomposing plants from which living plants extract important nutrients. Plant roots therefore do not penetrate very deeply into the soil, such that frequent landslides during the rainy season often result in uprooted trees, leaving the steep slopes vulnerable to erosion and dicey for travel. The maintenance of this duff layer of decaying vegetable matter, then, is crucial to plant lifecycles and depends on the high levels of humidity. Circularly, it is only in the presence of these plants from which the moisture condenses that clouds can form and maintain that humidity.

Open-pit metal mines, also known as strip mines, require significant deforestation for the digging of the large pit itself, the construction of roads, tailing ponds, and processing plants. This often leads to erosion, and the cloud forest environment’s particular vulnerability to erosion compounds the dangers of open-pit mining. Signs throughout Íntag warn against the potential for desertification through deforestation: “Danger! The water will come to an end – do not knock down the forest,” they call to passersby.⁶ The high levels of rainfall allow for the rapid growth of plants, which require water for photosynthesis, but also produce it as a by-product, thereby maintaining the humidity in the area. Without these plants the water would have nowhere to go but down the steep slopes of the Andes and flowing downstream to the west coast, effectively cutting off the area’s hydrological cycle.

⁶ See Image #1 in the Appendix
Deforestation also threatens the area’s incredible biodiversity. Ecuador is one of seventeen mega-diverse countries on the planet and Íntag lies at the convergence of two of the world’s thirty-four biodiversity hotspots, the Tumbes-Chocó-Magdalena and Tropical Andes. The latter hosts an estimated ten percent of the planet’s vascular plant species, which gives it more biodiversity than any other region on Earth (Conservation International). Desertification through deforestation eliminates the plants themselves—many of them endemic—and the habitats they form for many endemic and endangered fauna. The Andean Spectacled Bear is an endangered specie whose dwindling habitat the proposed copper mine would severely threaten. The unique hydrological cycle and the intensity of the equatorial sun allow for such high levels of biodiversity.

**Ecuador, in the Empire**

Ecuador’s wealth of natural resources, such as those mentioned above, has played an important role throughout the Republic’s history. The violence of the colonial period, between the mid-1500s and the first quarter of the nineteenth century, profoundly reshaped the country’s demographics. Quito was a colonial stronghold of the Spanish Empire under the viceroyalty of Peru starting in 1563. Spaniards enslaved people of the Kichwa and other indigenous cultures throughout the country for their labor in agriculture, in gold and silver mines, and in the textile industries (Socolow 2000). In rural areas, individual Europeans and the Catholic Church generally owned large areas of land, known as *latifundia*, and enslaved indigenous peoples and other impoverished groups in the *huasipungo* system, a debt peonage arrangement that entrapped the rural poor for generations (Phillips 1987: 108).
To understand the legacies of the Spanish Empire in Íntag in particular, I focus on the creation of the mestizo ethnic identity (or mestizaje) as a consequence of the aforementioned encounters between people in colonial Ecuador. Mestizos are the dominant ethnic group in Ecuador, and nearly one hundred percent of Inteñas and Inteños self-identify as mestizo, thus sharing this complicated heritage with their urban, comparatively wealthier and more educated counterparts. I analyze mestizaje as an act that pulled the body away from nature, to which modern-day Inteñas respond by re-claiming their connection to nature. Coronil begins his insightful and inspiring article, “Beyond Occidentalism,” with a critical look at maps as “discursive” objects that delineate metaphorical yet widely accepted distinctions between parts of the world (Coronil 1996: 52). These maps seek to distinguish, primarily, a Eurocentric Self from an “underdeveloped” Other, positioning the latter as closer to nature. Through this lens, we can imagine the Spanish Empire as a process of discursive map-making, wherein colonial powers inscribed the culture of Catholicism, capitalism, and European thought onto both the landscapes of the Americas and the bodies of the peoples who inhabited them. Importantly, Iberian colonialism generally sought to incorporate colonial subjects into the Spanish and Portuguese Empires through assimilation—a process far more violent than the word implies—such that marking people with a unique ethnic hybridity carried out and illustrated the process of incorporation (Gose 1994).

As an ethnic hybrid of European and indigenous Mesoamerican bloodlines, mestizaje is simultaneously a “liberating force that breaks open colonial and neocolonial categories…questions authenticity and rejects the need to belong,” and an “official discourse of nation formation [and] a new claim to authenticity” (Mallon 1996: 171). Historically, as an ethnic identity mestizaje was something of a double-edged sword. It represented both the
“inferior” traits of indigeneity to those vying for the power associated with European heritage, and the abusive characteristics of the imperialistic Spaniards for indigenous peoples. Mestizaje marks the friction of empire on physical bodies; it was emblematic of both rape, a dark side of colonialism, and the syncretism, consensual and otherwise, of encounters between peoples. Meanwhile, in addition to differentiating peoples from each other, mestizaje is an important part of the ways in which colonial and postcolonial cultures imagine and interact with nature on the basis of ethnicity. The language of assimilation in Spanish colonial texts is rife with portrayals of indigenous peoples throughout the continents as part of the nature they sought to conquer; just as gold and silver deposits were resources for the Spanish economic empire, so too were people resources for the Spanish cultural empire as potential subjects to the Spanish crown (Gose 1994, Socolow 2000). The gendered element of mestizaje additionally appears in this discursive reconstruction of nature in that the victims of both the sexual creation of this ethnic hybridity and the domination of nature for the expansion of culture are portrayed as passive, feminine, and in opposition to that which—or he who—penetrates them. To refer back to Wolf, one might argue that “man’s” attempt to “rise up against nature” is an attempt to control it, not unlike men’s efforts to control women’s bodies.

Íntag today

The challenges in constructing an historical context to contemporary Íntag signal the constructedness of accounts of the past. Conveying the fragmented and re-presented stories of Inteños, Inteñas, and social scientists about Íntag’s past expose disjunctures and shaky understandings, and yet, allude to the production of these narratives that I observe in anti-mining activism in Íntag. In Silencing the Past, Michel-Rolph Trouillot problematizes the very idea of a
collective past in its assumption of both “the past to be remembered,” and “the collective subject that does the remembering.” In other words, in an historical narrative of a society’s collective past, “the constructed past itself is constitutive of the collectivity” (Trouillot 1995: 16). As I tried to understand the story of Íntag by weaving together different threads of memory, I had to recognize that “history reveals itself only through the production of specific narratives” but that silences are equally important in reconstructing the past (Trouillot 1995: 25, 27). If the chapters that follow examine the “process and conditions of production of such narratives” in the present, recognizing those narratives in the midst of production as powerful actors in the Inteño social world, this section will communicate, in their contexts, the narratives Inteños tell about the Inteño experience before today (Trouillot 1995: 34).

Following the country’s hard-fought independence from Spain in 1822, the political economy of the national period is typically described through the booms and busts of certain commodities. Ecuador’s position on the equator guarantees it a temperate climate and fairly consistent rainfall, while the volcanic Andes provide most of the land with rich and fertile soils. “Everything grows in this country,” Felipe, who works for the coffee growers’ association in Íntag, told me (Felipe, April 20, 2012, personal communication). Ecuador’s nineteenth century was generally characterized by political instability, although very little has been written about rural areas during this time. The country experienced economic prosperity under military dictator Ignacio de Veintimilla in the last two decades of that century, owing in part to the low cost of indigenous labor in rural areas. It was during this period that migrants began to colonize Íntag, and while most report that “pressure on the land” drove them to the area, initial causes of this pressure remain unaddressed in accounts of Ecuadorian history.
The story that many Inteños and Inteñas tell about Íntag begins in the late 1880s and 1890s. Their great- and great-great grandparents migrated from a variety of other places in Ecuador to settle what became a sparsely populated, loosely associated smattering of mestizo farming communities (Alisa, January 13, 2013, personal communication, Eva and Enrique, January 5, 2013, personal communication, Cindi, January 4, 2013, personal communication). They named their first settlement Calvario, which is Spanish for Calvary, drawing parallels between Jesus’ tormented walk to the site of his crucifixion and the torturous journey from Otavalo (Alisa, January 13, 2013, personal communication). In Calvario, which the community soon elected to rename Plaza Guitiérrez for the president at the time, and other small communities scattered across the zone, colonos farmed the agricultural products they needed to sustain their large families, raised livestock, and supplied the timber industry with trees they cut down. I tried to piece together a little oral history of Íntag through interviews with older members of the community and from the documentary Under Rich Earth that describes the mining conflict in Junín throughout the 1990s (Under Rich Earth 2008). Stories of the first colonos’ experiences in Íntag paint the journey to Otavalo to sell agricultural products and transport sick family members as treacherous and dreaded. Even the bumpy, narrow dirt road that now winds switchbacks up and down the vertiginous slopes of Íntag’s steep topography and frequently closes due to landslides did not reach the isolated region until the middle of the twentieth century. Infrastructure and public works such as schools, healthcare, and water and electricity in buildings are a relative novelty in Íntag, which still has no established postal service. Quito’s limited interest in serving the poor farming population in Íntag has only recently begun to produce results, many of which some locals decry as populist political maneuvers.
Lacking particular kinds of infrastructure, Íntag’s *colonos* spent arduous hours trekking across the beautiful yet challenging landscape. “It would take them twelve hours to walk to Otavalo,” a woman named Lucía at the Sunday market in Apuela told me of her grandparents’ experience. “My grandmother gave birth to all of her children at home, and two were born before the midwife even arrived,” she told me with an air of reverence for her grandmother’s resilience. (Lucía, January 13, 2013, personal communication). In this description, Lucía mobilizes local ideas about self-reliance that have become important parts of the activist movements today, specifically in their attempts to cultivate a sense of shared identity based on their temporally limited common heritage. In focusing on the accomplishments of their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents despite their lack of resources, Inteños and Inteñas today construct an image of themselves based in this narrative of their collective past.

In the documentary about anti-mining activism in Íntag, *Under Rich Earth*, one man explains how the parents of the community of Junín collectively tricked the state into sending a teacher by exaggerating the number of students who lived in the community. “We had to fight to get what we needed,” he says to the camera (*Under Rich Earth* 2008). This oppositional relationship between Íntag and Quito seems to have played an important role in Íntag’s history, and ties today remain strained. In conversation after conversation I got the sense that Inteños regard the state as an obstacle more than as a resource, especially in the context of the mining conflict wherein national policies frame Íntag as the “nature” from which Quito may extract the commodities its “society” needs to continue, echoing, perhaps, earlier forms of domination. Portraying this tense relationship using the language of a nature/society divide, it becomes easy to draw a comparison between the relationship between Ecuador and Spain in the colonial era and Íntag and Quito today. The line between rural Íntag and urban Quito is no less messy,
constructed, and contestable than that which Inteñas fight to blur between nature and society. The construction of this rural/urban binary ideologically distances Íntag from Quito, framing the city as a foil to Íntag and helping to form the local identity. My informants are able to describe and define themselves in part by showing how they are different from their urban counterparts, and the desire for such ideological distance between the two, materially distant places profoundly shapes local conceptions of agency and responsibility, and reinforces local desires for autonomy.

A broader political and economic context will illuminate the development of this relationship, and the discourses to which it gives rise, over time. I chart the course of the problematic discourse of development in Ecuador, with respect to Íntag, in order to show how the strained relationships between Íntag and Quito influence local approaches to problem solving. I hope this analysis will contextualize the cultural rift between nature and society that justifies and perpetuates dominant models of development, thereby offering insight into why local activists work to narrow and even eliminate this rift.

Ecuador, the Republic and Íntag within it

Ecuador’s thirty-year Liberal Revolution began in 1895 under the leadership of General Eloy Alfaro. The Revolution’s most significant changes included the separation of church and state and the consolidation of state power through its more consistent application throughout the country. Meanwhile, owing to its temperate climate, rich volcanic soils, and consistent rains in addition to its subordinate position in the global trade system, Ecuador turned increasingly to the export of raw commodities (Colburn 2009). Ecuador was quickly becoming the world’s top

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7 Much economic literature dedicates itself to problematizing the practice of basing economies, primarily in the global south on the export of raw commodities. Research shows that that developing countries, like Ecuador, that export these materials and import manufactured goods are at a significant disadvantage when compared to countries
exporter of cacao and bananas at the end of the nineteenth and throughout the first half of the twentieth centuries, which increased the demand for large sections of arable land. This drove small-scale farmers to places like Íntag where steep slopes and poor soils render the land undesirable to large companies in the business of growing mono-crops for export. Growth in these export economies created linkages to Íntag’s production of *cabuya*, or sisal, a fiber from the agave plant. Sisal was used throughout the twentieth century in the shipping industry as a strong sack for exporting goods. Agave plants densely populate the scenery throughout Íntag, providing a thread of consistency between otherwise diverse plant growth and uniting the many microclimates. The useful plant sustained the local economy for the first few generations of colonization, but in the early 2000s, the demand for it dropped quickly, as sisal in the export industries was replaced by another fiber (Corporación de Toisán, Alisa, January 13, 2013, personal communication, Enrique, January 5, 2013, personal communication).

Íntag’s other major agricultural commodity was *panela*, or raw cane sugar. Sugarcane responds well to Íntag’s growing conditions, given heavy rainfall and frequent tropical sunlight. Making sugar, however, is a labor-intensive process that is usually mechanized throughout most of the world. Enrique, Pilar’s father and a well-respected farmer, used to cultivate sugarcane on his small farm and built his own processing plant to produce sugar for sale. He explained that he would hire labor several times each year for the arduous, days-long process of turning sweet, wet cane into distinctive tasting, caramel-colored granular sugar that Inteña women used to cook with and children still often eat. For decades, *panela* was an important part of the diet in Íntag, and the commodity enjoyed high local demand. Enrique indicated the few stalks of sugarcane that

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that do the opposite, owing in part to the volatility of commodities prices, the potential for Dutch Disease, and the lack of economic linkages associated with resource extraction as compared to manufacturing and service industries. This phenomenon is more popularly known as the Paradox of Plenty, and Ecuador’s economy embodies it all too well (Reed 2002, Sinnott et al. 2010).
remain on his property with an air of resignation, lamenting their diminished significance in the local economy and the Inteño palate:

No one eats [panela] anymore. Everyone wants sugar now. It was always here, but before it was just the rich people who would eat it. And everyone else ate panela. Now, young people don’t like panela. It changed with education; they started to go to the city and when they came back they didn’t want panela anymore (Enrique, January 5, 2013, personal communication).

Enrique laments the economic loss of internal demand for this labor-intensive commodity, and the social loss of a cultural demand for a product emblematic of Intag itself. The commodity was both an important part of the local economy that made small-scale farms economically viable and a culinary symbol of Intag. The labor-intensive process was a days-long seasonal social event, celebrating intra-familiar collaboration and classic Inteño hard work. Now that its value has decreased so significantly, the processing activity has all but disappeared in local traditions. By several accounts, this shift in demand was concurrent with the rapid decline of the sisal market, such that the economy of Intag experienced a sharp turn downward around the year 2000.

The small stores that dot the economic landscape of Intag still sell panela, but as less of a staple and more of a treat for special occasions like birthdays and religious holidays. Over the many hours I spent in a store in Peñaherrera, I noticed that women would buy processed white sugar in bulk for their everyday needs and panela in small quantities for certain celebrations. Enrique and other Inteños and Inteñas’ attribution of the loss of local appetites for panela to the increased exposure to sugar in the cities illustrates local attitudes toward cosmopolitanism and urban cultures more generally. The complex issue of out-migration to urban areas for educational opportunities is rooted in a lack of state support for public education in the area. When families save enough money to send their children to study in the better public high schools or to universities in urban areas, as Enrique did with roughly half of his thirteen children, they worry
that their children will develop a taste for the lifestyle and products they encounter. Whether or not out-migration for education is solely responsible for the sharp decline in demand for *panela*, the perception that external values on specific commodities so profoundly impact—both economically and socially—what many otherwise perceive as an isolated and autonomous area comprises a significant aspect of the Inteño worldview. That Enrique associated processed sugar with both “rich people” and “the city,” both important actors in the discourse of development, speaks to the local construction of ideological distance between Íntag and “the city” (Escobar 1994, Holston and Appadurai 1996, Escobar 1998). The super-imposed value system directly marginalizes communities like Íntag by undervaluing the products like *panela* around which their way of life arguably revolves. The way Enrique and others see it, if Íntag could maintain total autonomy, the system might sustain itself, and yet the necessity for state-sponsored education and state-funded infrastructure complicates their dream for an independent Íntag.

The story of Ecuador’s export economy serves as an important backdrop to the arrival of the mining threat in Íntag. In addition to agricultural exports, the middle of the twentieth century saw an increase in the export of nonrenewable resources from Ecuador, upon which the economy became highly dependent. In 1967, Texaco “discovered” oil in the Amazon basin and by the early seventies, oil comprised most of Ecuador’s export revenues. Authoritarian leaders, José Pilar Velasco and General Guillermo Rodriguez Lara, promoted nationalism through populist projects such as subsidized food, unrealistically low taxes, and high levels of welfare, and supported these projects through oil revenues. Dependent on these subsidies, the growing nation’s needs quickly outpaced the country’s resources and the authoritative government began to use oil reserves as loan guarantees until external debt increased twentyfold throughout the 1970s (Sawyer 2004: 17). Oil prices began to crash worldwide in the early 1980s, leaving the
newly democratic Ecuadorian government with an extremely difficult economic situation. Quito turned to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a loan, the criteria for which stipulated that Ecuador create a climate more favorable to foreign direct investment and provide for an increased and diversified export of natural resources (Mosely et al. 1991: 137).

True to the values of neoliberalism, which gained significant traction during this time, and under further pressure from the World Bank, the Ecuadorian congress passed a 1985 law encouraging the expansion of the mining industry (Rudolph 1989)\(^8\). Subsequently, the state commissioned a study of subsoil minerals and found copper, gold, and silver deposits in the zone of Íntag. Given the sharp rise in demand for copper because of the rapid industrialization in China, the copper deposit near Junín represented the most lucrative project, and the state sold the mining rights to Bishimetals, who began exploratory drilling in the mid-1990s, igniting the long and brutal fight against the development of this mine. Here, it is important to note the ways in which external demands and capitalist flows have come to clash in the rich and delicate environment of Íntag.

**Latin America’s first Ecological County**

The arrival of the mining threat exacerbated local frustrations with Quito. The state’s apparent entitlement to local resources intensified feelings of neglect from the state that Inteños perceived and experienced throughout their history. The idea that Quito could essentially occupy another universe but still enter Íntag to extract metals destructively for their own gain angered

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\(^8\) By the term “neoliberalism,” I mean a group of interrelated policies meant to increase the production of exports and attract foreign investment through deregulation and privatization, with special attention to its violent and important relationship with ecology (Sawyer 2004: 7). Importantly, environmental anthropologist Daniel Renfrew classifies neoliberal economics as the “ecological phase of capitalism” (Renfrew 2011: 588), in which biodiversity plays an important role in relationships between cultures. This speaks to the significant role that natural resources play in relationships between groups of people, regardless of how their differences are delineated.
locals and by many accounts, further encouraged them to “take development and governance into our own hands” (Lorenzo, April 24, 2012, personal communication).

In 1996—between conflicts with mining companies in Íntag—the Cotacachi County populace elected Auki Tituaña, the county’s first indigenous mayor. Íntag accounts for roughly half of the land area of Cotacachi and just under half of its population. Tituaña began to overhaul the county’s political system, gradually instituting a participatory democracy that has since garnered prestigious international recognition for its inclusive and effective model. In addition to the County Assembly—an elected representative body that meets regularly, Cotacachi annually holds the meeting of the People’s Assembly of Cotacachi (Asamblea de Unidad Cantonal de Cotacachi) in which citizens from across the county can appear to voice concerns, lodge complaints, and vote on “citizen’s resolutions” up for implementation in the year to come (Zorilla 2012a and Cabannes 2006: 196). In 2000, Cotacachi became Latin America’s first Ecological County. The county passed the Cotacachi Ecological County Ordinance, which required that all decisions regarding development, industry, and infrastructure be made with strict attention to their potential impacts on the environment (Consejo Intersectorial de Gestión Ambiental 2000: 2). The measure also specifically outlawed excessively destructive activities including open-pit mining. Importantly, the document noted the critical role women have played in advocating for responsible environmental management and stipulated conditions for women’s participation in the decision-making process (Consejo Intersectorial de Gestión Ambiental 2000: 8).

9 The city of Cotacachi, the county seat, was awarded the UNESCO Cities for Peace Prize in 2000 for Latin America and the Caribbean for “Citizen Participation and Transparency” (UNESCO Cities for Peace Prize, “Laureate Cities.”). In the same year, Cotacachi also won the UN and Habitat’s Dubai International Award for Best Practices for being an “Example of Participatory Democracy and Decentralization” (UN Urban Management Programme “Cotacachi, Ecuador: Children and Youth as Partners for Local Management”).
This model for governance embodies some of the same values of conservation ecology that Íntag has adopted in its resistance to mining. By centering and therefore granting nature legal legitimacy, this political model seeks to reconstruct nature by using its leadership position—to invoke Coronil’s discursive quality of maps once more—as it encircles Íntag. Incorporating these ideas into local governance indicates self-conscious efforts on the part of Inteños and other citizens in Cotacachi to contradict circulating discourses that actively marginalize and undervalue nature, as a means to their environmentalist ends. Similarly, Inteña activist tactics employ self-conscious attempts to valorize and honor nature as part of the process of internalizing the negative externalities associated with mining.

At a retreat for the Women’s Coordinating Committee of Íntag, a woman named Lidia lectured on the importance of political participation. She held in her hands a copy of the 2008 Constitution of Ecuador and called upon different women to read from it. The incredibly progressive document delineates the rights of Nature, including the “integral respect for its existence” and the “maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes” (Constitución de la República del Ecuador, Capítulo VII, Artículo 71). The document also incorporates a distinctly feminist thread, calling for gender equality and general empowerment of the sexually and ethnically marginalized. Lidia asked the room, “How many of you were part of the process of writing this document?” Señora Nadia, a midwife and leader of a women’s alternative development project in Peñaherrera, leaned over and proudly whispered in my ear, “We all were! They borrowed so much from the Cotacachi government plan” referencing the ways in which the rights of nature echo Cotacachi’s ecological charter (Lidia and Nadia, January 4, 2013, personal communication).
That the national Constitution drew from so much of the Cotacachi government’s platform serves, in a sense, as a validation of their alternative visions for development priorities. I cannot overstate the messiness of this interpretation. Although writing—what citizens of Cotacachi see as—alternatives to traditionally harmful forms of development into the most powerful document in the country certainly validates these alternatives and suggests that they are both viable and important values by which to govern the Republic, it only does so within the hierarchical structure of power that Inteños and Inteñas verbally disdain and actively protest. The symbolic value of the national constitution is significant in a specific discourse that emphasizes the hierarchies Inteños hope to upset through their activism and alternative development measures.

Inteños and Inteñas wrestle with this simultaneous resentment toward and tacit acceptance of the hierarchical structures of development that privilege the state in a frictional and often conflictual discourse. This discourse sits uncomfortably alongside their conflicting resentment for the intervention of these types of development and their dependence upon them. Still unable to resolve the tensions in their relationship with the state, Inteños and Inteñas often resort to describing the source of their loyalty to the area as deeply rooted in the natural environment and its ability to sustain them. Despite the challenges they face as marginalized communities,

We are so blessed in Íntag. I have always said, as long as the rain falls and the sun shines, nothing can happen to us. Everything grows here. We can feed ourselves, we have water, and we have each other. We need to value our land. I always have. I have always loved this land (Tiana, January 16, 2013, personal communication).

In emphasizing the productivity of the land, Tiana, a coffee farmer, can make sense of her positionality in the fight against mining. The mining conflict has made Íntag a node at which the

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10 See chapter four for a discussion of the state’s sparse presence in Íntag.
discourses of conservation ecology, development, and community autonomy converge, wherein locals must chart their course amidst clashing currents. For women like Tiana and CMI President Isadora, who told me, “We live in a paradise; we need to appreciate our zone and live in peace,” grounding priorities in the natural environment seems safe, solid, and clear. The discourse of development externalizes the value of nature, unreliably commoditizing products like panela, but the value of a healthy natural environment strikes many Inteños and Inteñas as timeless, and even inherent (Escobar 2006). For many of the people I met in Íntag, there is nothing so indisputable as the value of that which feeds and nurtures the body. Sofía, the first female president of Íntag’s environmentalist organization, DECOIN, put it this way:

For me, family is where you teach your children to value what you have, to value where you live, to value the land, the Pachamama. So I think really, that helps you, not with more superficial issues, like what your house is made out of. Rather, it’s better to value clean water, pure air, peace and tranquility, which, in spite of everything, we have in Íntag (Sofía, January 9, 2013, personal communication).

Her comment about house materials is significant; one of Sofía’s main critiques of a state-sponsored project to build houses in rural areas is that all of the houses they build look like buildings in urban areas. “Why,” I once heard her ask, “do they not ask us of what materials we want our houses to be built? Why are they all concrete, like the buildings in the cities?” (Sofía, January 4, 2013, personal communication). These comments represent a conceptual dichotomy between Íntag and urban centers, wherein that which is “pure,” “clean,” and “tranquil” exists naturally in Íntag, while the destructive, imperialistic effects of development are rooted outside of the zone. In reality, I think that the division between Íntag and Quito is far less clean and precise than Sofía, Cindi, and others would have had me believe in their attempts to explicitly distance themselves as Inteñas from the culture of the city. Sharing an ethnic identity with their urban counterparts perhaps necessitates the assertion of other differences in the justification of their deliberate divergence from the conceptions of development and nature Inteñas and Inteños.
associate with urban areas and the national political apparatus. However, it is precisely that lack of clear delineation from which stems so much of the sticky friction between local conceptions of the collective self and visions for development and the future.

**Conclusion**

Political ecology posits that nature and society are inextricably bound, constantly interacting, and impossible to separate to the extent that an anthropological representation of any culture should include important ecological components. This analytical lens is appropriate for Íntag in particular, given local efforts to internalize the negative impacts of mining by reasserting Inteñas’ and Inteños’ connection to and position within their natural environment. The rich natural resources in which Inteños and Inteñas live serve as both their shared sense of identity and powerful motivation for their resistance to the copper mine. This particular direction of activism focuses on the Inteña physical body, whose ethnic identity, I argue, was the result of map-making efforts of the Spanish Empire. In the discourse of assimilation in colonial Latin America, the unique ethnic hybrid of European and indigenous Mesoamerican heritage separated society from nature by imbuing people—the objectified subjects—with European culture. The effect of this conception was and continues to marginalize both nature (as an inert backdrop) and those associated with it. Extraction-based development, including that which characterizes the Ecuadorian economy, depends on the tendency of this separation between nature and society to externalize the negative consequences of its industrial activities; invisible impacts need not be addressed. In crossing, blurring, and remapping that dividing line Inteña activists and the Inteño society at large *internalize* the destructive repercussions of activity like copper mining, thus providing a clear and valid reason to oppose it. They remap the dividing line by moving it to the
ideological and physical border between Íntag as a rural area and Quito as an urban, detached one. Tensions run high between la zona and la ciudad or el estado in large part because of competing conceptions of the value of Íntag’s natural resources. National politics construe resources like the copper deposit in Junín as important sources of financial revenue, while locals in Íntag recognize more value in maintaining intact that which physically sustains their (natural) bodies.

Women in particular play an important role in this activism. In the next chapter, I make anthropological sense of how local constructions of femininity and motherhood position women as primary stakeholders in the fight against mining, and how women activists use this position to gain access to resources such as political and economic power. I also show how and explain why the remapping of nature and the female body in particular serve the goals of feminist activism in Íntag.
Locating women in the dynamic and intersecting landscapes of labor, power, activism, nature, and family life in Íntag proved a challenging task. Part of what renders this activism among women in Íntag so fascinating is how rapidly their positions within the each of those landscapes have changed—in some ways, as a result of them—and yet such metamorphoses have been neither straightforward nor smooth. In order to track the paths these women continually navigate, I discuss the greater context of gender, ethnicity, and motherhood in the Andes in ways that speak to my informants’ conceptions of themselves and my own observations. This lays a foundation for my discussion of Inteña activism that conveys Inteñas’ own attempts to portray themselves as primary stakeholders in the mining conflict because of their positions as women and mothers—those very positions which otherwise exclude them from public and political discourses.

Establishing the link between the female body and nature is an important aspect of obliterating the constructed divide between nature and society, and this chapter suggests a feminized construction of nature as an increasingly important part of both the strategies employed by activists and the Inteño worldview more broadly. I introduce women like sisters Liliana and Pilar, the woman I lived with, who embody the kind of autonomy that the colono culture admires, and yet they utilize this agency primarily in order to be good mothers. Being good mothers to their children and retaining that independence depends in large part on the ability of the natural environment to yield the resources they need. Many Inteña women thus envision their relationship with the environment as both reciprocal and inextricable, and through
their activism they translate this vision into symbolic connections between a feminized earth and their own physical, mestizo bodies.

**Motherhood and Autonomy**

Liliana lives in Peñaherrera, in a little house built around her very successful store. It is the only store that sells everything in Peñaherrera, and everyone in the nearby communities of El Cristal and El Paraíso rely on Liliana for sugar, shampoo, cigarettes, and nearly everything in between. She opens the shop at 6:30 or 7:00am and closes when people stop appearing at the door, which is usually after 10:00pm. She and her fourteen-year-old daughter, Gloria, stand behind the counter, casually greeting every customer by name, adding up prices on a simple hand-held calculator, and recording bills in an old notebook. Shelves cover the walls of the tiny store from floor to ceiling, where plastic baggies full of flour share corners with canned peaches, locally produced *panela*, coffee from the grower’s association, and toothpaste with brand-names like Crest and Colgate. The store is a hub of local social activity. Children run in and out during their recess at school across the street, grabbing Liliana’s homemade juice popsicles out of the freezer in exchange for dimes.\(^\text{1}\) Women ask for the freshest country chickens and ask Gloria about school while toddlers tug at their wrists, begging for sweets. At night, groups of men gather at the benches outside the store, under the streetlamps, and buy large plastic crates of Pilsener beers.

Liliana is a mother of three, and currently lives with the father of her youngest son. Right out of high school she got married and had two children with a man who was killed while working in the Amazon Basin. At the time Gloria, the oldest, was less than two years old. The

\(^{1}\) Ecuador has used the U.S dollar since 2001 in order to control against dangerously high levels of inflation (Hanke 2003).
circumstances of his death are unclear, but she was widowed and alone at age 23 with two toddlers. Struck by her courage and strength, I asked her about that time in her life, and what her journey through it was like. It was about 6:30pm, when the equatorial sun sets and most people go inside to eat a small dinner with their families. As always, people continually streamed in and out but traffic was lighter than during other hours. Liliana knew I was trying to learn about women’s lives in Íntag and she wanted to discuss the challenges in her life as well as the success she has enjoyed. She started her story with the death of her first husband, expressing sincere appreciation for the emotional and financial support her family, in-laws, and others in the community provided her in the immediate aftermath of his apparent murder. But she also talked about it as an opportunity to live out the dream she had had as a child of owning her own business, and took care not to understate her own strength.

“I took out a loan for $1000 and started with a really small store. And four years later, the business grew, I bought the land here and we started to build the house,” she told me, explaining that she did not start dating her current husband, Galo, until after she had been successful independently (Liliana, January 8, 2013, personal communication). She spoke about what struck me as incredible efforts with a matter-of-fact air, as though she were merely carrying out a duty. At first I assumed it was a duty she had to herself, because she had dreamt of owning her own business since she was a child. Then, she drew the connection between her store ownership and being a mother:

I [have my own store] to be able to stay close to my children. I never had to send them to daycare or anything. And if they get sick, I don’t have to ask anyone’s permission; I just close the store and I go. For that reason I have always had the mentality that it’s better to be independent; because of my family, for my household, for my spouse and my children. I studied, I got my education, but when I got married and had my daughter, it wasn’t for me to leave her abandoned. Children need their mothers, not a nanny or a maid or the grandparents or the aunts and uncles. (ibid.)
For Liliana, so much of the appeal of having her own business lies in knowing that her independence enables her to be a good mother. She has twelve brothers and sisters, three of whom live a stone’s throw from her store and her parents live close by in El Cristal, and yet knowing she could close up her shop in order to take care of Gloria or her younger brothers gives Liliana a strong sense of security and satisfaction in her self-reliance. She takes pride in being one of the few local women who owns her own business and she emphasizes the complementarity of her and Galo’s separate responsibilities in the store and in the household. However, she only seems to recognize this autonomy as a means to an end; rather than merely taking pleasure in the economic autonomy of being in control of her own income, she focuses on what it enables to do as a mother.

Liliana’s description of her own accomplishments parallels anthropologist Emma Cervone’s synthesis of Kichwa women in Ecuador, whose experiences in activism “challenge the assumption that women who become leaders fight openly against gender discrimination” (Cervone 2002: 180). Although Liliana does not construe her business as a politically active entity nor her work within it a deliberate challenge to local gender roles, she is very aware that her position blurs the traditional distinction between gendered realms of labor. Entering the “productive” sphere, especially in as visible a setting as Liliana’s store, amounts to an important embodiment of female empowerment, and yet she does not seek to redefine her role as woman or a mother. Rather, transgressing this gendered division of labor is an effort to fulfill the responsibilities of being a woman, and doing so grants Liliana a sense of power and accomplishment. Being able only to rely on herself reinforces the value of fulfilling these responsibilities; she embodies two important values in the Inteña worldview: maternal care and independence.
For other women, however, the spirit of autonomy can exist in tension with their sense of obligation as mothers. Liliana’s younger sister, Pilar, lives nearby with her seven-year-old son, Rogelio. Rogelio’s father and Pilar dated in high school but were planning on ending the relationship when she went away to college. Like many young Inteñas, Pilar got pregnant and never left Íntag. After a year of living with Rogelio’s father, she realized she preferred single parenthood. “It is very hard work for so many reasons,” she acknowledged, as we stood in her kitchen peeling potatoes one night. “But it’s so much better to have control over my own money, live independently, in my own home, and not have to worry about what someone else wants” (Pilar, April 17, 2012, personal communication). She spoke frequently about the relief she felt at leaving his house and how much pride she has in having her own home. But she also worried about whether it was best for Rogelio: “Sometimes, I think it would be better for him to have a mother and a father. I know he loves his father so much. But is it really better for him to see a couple that doesn’t love each other? I don’t think so” (Pilar, April 20, 2012, personal communication).

Motherhood and Inteña Catholicism

Now that they have been separated for over six years, Pilar has grown to appreciate her independence. One day I found her hanging up the phone looking flustered. She gave me a knowing look and explained that Rogelio’s father had been calling her, trying to rekindle their relationship. “[He] wants to get back together with me, but no…I can’t stand the idea of being subordinate to him. I would rather raise Rogelio by myself than be with [him] again,” she paused. “And I know I can do it” (Pilar, April 24, 2012, personal communication). Although Pilar is only twenty-five, people much older than she often address her using the more formal
usted as a means of showing respect. People often describe her as *capaz*, which literally translates to “capable” but carries certain regard in a society that so thoroughly values autonomy and self-reliance. She has a good job as the director of the InfoCentro, a public computer center part of state efforts to increase access to technology in rural areas. She keeps Rogelio healthy, clean, and well dressed, and many people admire her for being so responsible.

Pilar is one of the few people in Peñaherrera and its surrounding communities in her twenties. Most of her high school classmates left Íntag for college and then found jobs in Otavalo, Ibarra, or Quito. She has a strong group of friends, however, and almost all of them have children, but only about half have steady partners. None are married. At first I found this prevalence of premarital sex in tension with the teachings of the omnipresent Catholic Church. However, it quickly became clear that the Church’s teachings seem less important in Íntag than do its function as a venue for social interactions, and parenthood is no exception.

Jorge, whose uncle was Liliana’s first husband, is thirty and has a seven-year-old son. He lives in Otavalo with his son’s mother, but the two were never married. We stood in the park one afternoon, watching his son play soccer with Rogelio and another boy their age. I asked about his *novia* and he explained, “Practically no one actually gets married around here. Most people are together as boyfriend and girlfriend and then once they get pregnant, they move in together and it is all as if they were married. We don’t care about the ceremony” (Jorge, January 19, 2013, personal communication). Pilar seemed to agree: “Most people don’t feel like they need it. Why bother?” (Pilar, January 12, 2013, personal communication) She listed the couples she knew of in the area who had been married, and it was a short list, suggesting that although the Church has an important presence in the community, its teachings are not very tangible on a personal or everyday level.
Pilar fairly candidly discussed her single parenthood with me. She explained that when she got pregnant, her father became very upset, but that “everything changed when Rogelio was born,” because he was so happy to have another grandchild. I asked her about access to contraceptives for high school-aged students. She laughed and rolled her eyes. “Look, technically, we all have access to condoms and even pills at the free health clinic, but everyone is afraid to ask for it. This community is so small and if you ask for condoms your mother will know about it by the time you walk all the way home. People gossip” (Pilar, January 12, 2013, personal communication). She went on to tell a story of two students who were about to graduate high school with a three-year-old daughter in tow, and Doña Marcela, her neighbor, referred to the same couple in another conversation. Although these two women have very different perspectives, they each expressed similar admiration for the couple’s capacidad, or capability in raising this child while they were still in high school.

While their admiration did seem sincere, I feel that I must account for my own positionality and interrogate their words. Local constructs of the United States and Europe position these vague shapes on maps as both the “metaphoric” sources of destructive development and the veritable centers of education, cosmopolitanism, and prosperity (Coronil 1996). Given the rural-urban barrier that local activist discourse consistently reinforces and despite very real friendships that I made and maintain with people in Íntag, it would be naïve and irresponsible of me not to acknowledge that nearly everything about my presence there represented modernity (Escobar 2007: 201). Perhaps in an attempt to portray themselves to me in a positive light, I think people like Pilar and Doña Marcela chose to highlight their viewpoints that they associate with modern liberal thought. Their exposure to what they perceived to be my culture consisted almost entirely in Hollywood productions—which significantly inform their
perception of “modern” places—that espouse a very cavalier attitude toward sex. In attempting to adopt these ideas in their conversations with me, these women exhibited a high degree of flexibility and self-awareness of how they represent themselves to (white) foreigners in particular. I think this particular perception shows increased respect for the labor intrinsic to local constructions of motherhood, reflecting success in certain aspects of Inteña activism, which I discuss in the next chapter. Other aspects of motherhood shed light on local constructions of femininity, which, I argue, Inteña women reclaim and manipulate as means of accessing anti-mining activism in portraying themselves as primary stakeholders in the conflict.

Perhaps ironically, the stigma associated with the use of birth control seems to be more destructive than that with teenaged pregnancy and single parenthood. As delicately as I could, I asked about whether the stigma associated with contraceptives had to do with the Church. Pilar’s twenty-two-year-old sister, Pamela, practically scoffed at the idea. “No,” she said, putting her three-year-old son, Mica, in my lap. “It’s not the church. Kids just know their parents will find out, and so they take the risk. But when they get pregnant, everyone knows what they did. It’s funny, no?” (Pamela, January 12, 2013, personal communication) Ultimately, these teenaged girls are fulfilling their “natural” role by becoming mothers, and I realized that children occupy a very special place in Inteño communities. Adults and children interact socially on what struck me as a unique level in Íntag. Children run around the town, darting in and out of Liliana’s store, and adults frequently stop them to engage in conversation. Although the subject matter of the conversations is often different, they seem to relate in the same casual, familiar way, appearing as equals in the conversation. Adults frequently address children as usted, indicating a high level of respect. Children, then, are nearly always regarded as positive additions to the community, regardless of the circumstances in which they arrive.
I focus on reproduction here because of its relevance to Inteña activist discourses that use the maternal body as a symbol. Although Catholic dogma is exemplary of Foucauldian biopower in the centrality of the body in Church teachings, the teachings themselves have a relatively weak presence in Íntag (Foucault 1978). As I argued in the introduction, Inteña women reclaim their bodies in their activism, manipulating the meanings attributed to them by institutions like the Catholic Church to obtain a voice in the zone-wide conversation about mining. The diluted presence of the Catholic Church adds a layer of complexity to this idea, since the more dogmatic elements of its existence fade into the background in Íntag as its more secular utilities—such as serving as a social space—come into focus. That Inteña constructions of sexuality and marriage do not comply by Church teachings speaks to Íntag’s relative isolation from these teachings and lessens the challenges to the activist process of redefining gendered hierarchies.

Women and Nature

Women as mothers face an important host of responsibilities that position them as important stakeholders in the fight against mining. Just as food sovereignty is important on a regional level given high rates of poverty, providing food for one’s family is not only necessary to survive; being able to do so with one’s own resources is an important source of pride. Many families have small plots of land around their houses where the women (primarily) cultivate vegetables for household consumption, and in many of the smaller communities, women must carry water from the streams. The impacts of mining on the environment, then, most directly affect Inteña women.

12 Anthropologist Rebecca Lester finds through her work in a Mexican convent that “Catholicism is, at its core, a theology of bodies.” Sexuality, Lester argues, confronts Catholic society as a “potentially dangerous force to be carefully controlled,” and targets the female body as the object of the exertion of its power (Lester 2005: 34). Controlling female sexuality, reproduction, and the maternal body, then, are key to maintaining the Church’s power and social stability in Catholic societies.
Roberta, the woman who raises the *cuyes*, has two sons grew up and left the region in search of work years ago, and now live with their children in Otavalo and Quito. She is in her sixties but the day that I walked to her house in the tiny community, El Paraíso, she was working hard in her fields, harvesting vegetables that she herself had planted. After picking corn, we climbed the steep slopes through yucca and papaya plants, under a huge avocado tree and between coffee plants to find rows and rows of lettuce, cabbage, different varieties of carrots, and alfalfa for the guinea pigs she raises. She turned to me proudly and said, “I grow everything my husband and I eat, and all organically. Very, very rarely do I have to buy something to eat. We are free from chemicals” (Roberta, January 14, 2013, personal communication). In addition to being proud of her hard work and physical capabilities (I was certainly sweating on the hike back up that hill), she really emphasized the aspect of independence.

In the last chapter, I discussed in depth the importance of the productivity of the land in the formation of a common identity. The ability to provide clean, safe, nutritional food for one’s family is an important responsibility associated with motherhood. Sofía, the President of the environmental organization, DECOIN, believes that this role strengthens the aforementioned connection between women and the environment. On a very practical level, women depend on the health of the environment in order to carry out their duties as mothers and truly take care of what is most important to so many of them: their children. Such a sentiment of obligation to the family influences many of my informants’ decisions as well, though with a very important nuance; Inteña women embody local ideals of independence, self-reliance, and responsibility most thoroughly when such autonomy enables them to best meet their obligations as mothers. Escobar’s work on the political ecology of social movements speaks to this phenomenon in a variety of cultures, identifying the significance of the fact that women, not men, lead many
grassroots environmentalist movements, especially in marginalized places. This leads Escobar to speculate that women’s prescribed roles in many societies grant them a particular stake in protecting the environment and resisting traditional development (Escobar 1998: 66). Escobar’s conclusion speaks to my own suspicion that women in Íntag might not have become involved in the fight against mining had local constructions of femininity not rendered their responsibilities dependent on the health of the environment.

Just like its environmental destruction, mining poses social threats that more directly and heavily impact women. In their study of the anthropology of mining, Chris Ballard and Glenn Banks explore gendered aspects of mining’s social implications for rural communities in the developing world. They find that, “Mining is an exceptionally masculinized industry, in terms of the composition of its workforces, its cultures of production, and its symbolic despoliation of a feminized nature” (Ballard and Banks 2003: 302). The first two issues speak to the problematic (and often problematized) gendered aspects of many forms of development and industrialization. Mining companies hire very few local workers for anything but the hard manual labor necessary to open the mine, such as cutting roads, and a small percentage of those jobs typically go to women, such that a very tiny proportion of the productive labor involved in the mine directly benefits local women. The men who do work for the mines spend far less time at home, thereby increasing women’s unremunerated burdens within the household. Absent the embellishment of promised short-term economic gains, many women are able to recognize the social dangers mining entails.

In the case of Junín, Bishimetals’ Environmental Impact Assessment conservatively predicted the relocation of one-hundred families; because responsibilities associated with motherhood far surpass those of fatherhood in Íntag, relocation would more significantly burden
women than men. A variety of studies show that the rapid and short-lived influx of cash brought by mining companies frequently correlates with subsequent high levels of intoxication and substance dependency which often result in higher levels of domestic violence. When I asked Inteñas about the negative implications of mining, they often cited “delinquency,” “prostitution,” and fights between families. Because mining companies import many of their skilled (typically male) workers from elsewhere, they often build camps as semi-permanent residences with a high demand for sex work. The sex industry is fraught with issues, but the most prominent of these for Inteña women is the threat of the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS (Ballard and Banks 2003: 307; Ferguson 1999, Gerritsen and Macintyre 1999: 47). Just as teenagers face the threat of social stigmas when purchasing condoms because of gossip, married couples do not often practice safe sex because the assumption is that one only needs condoms if one has multiple sex partners. Although many Inteño men do keep multiple partners, purchasing condoms would be an admission of guilt, such that their wives (whose condom purchases would equally look like admissions of guilt) are not protected from the STDs that their husbands’ partners may carry (Jorge, January 19, 2013, personal communication).

Inteña activists have latched onto Ballard and Banks’ third point as the intersection between the social and environmental impacts of mining, and an equally symbolic point at which they access the resistance movement. The effort to feminize nature capitalizes on this set of maternal responsibilities and the maternal body to internalize the “symbolic [and literal] despoliation” of nature (Ballard and Banks 2003: 302). As I explore in the next chapter, Inteña feminist activism depends in large part on local insistence on a strong connection between women and the earth, articulated through the analogous reproductive roles that women and “mother nature” share. In order to take advantage of this discourse, Inteña women must
manipulate their status as mothers and maintain certain aspects of the gendered hierarchies that allow them access to these discourses.

The widely accepted conception of women as primarily mothers pervades gender constructions in communities across the Andes. Kristi Anne Stølen found that women and men alike did not consider childless women to be “real women” in her work in Ecuador’s Central Highlands (Stølen 1991: 85). Other anthropologists have found similarly family-centric constructions of femininity throughout the Andes. As Susan Paulson’s Bolivian informants explained, “Andean women do not exist individually, outside of the family and the community, women do not think, need, or act outside of the couple” (Paulson 2002: 139). Perhaps counter-intuitively, this grants women activists another opportunity to both embody and fight to achieve on a zonal level the autonomy that local culture celebrates; they access social capital by acting—or at least framing their actions to be—in the best interest of their families. These ethnographic findings speak, perhaps, to the respect with which others treat Pilar as a single mother; Rogelio’s health indicates her success as a mother, and she can barter with that success as an activist and in other forms of public discourse.

Conclusion

Constructions of motherhood within Íntag are complex and fluid, but the responsibilities associated with motherhood often inform local women’s relationships to one another, with men, and on an individual level, with themselves. In this chapter, I discussed the ways in which local constructions of femininity and motherhood influence and motivate Inteña activism, with particular respect to local regard for autonomy and independence. Drawing upon anthropological
literature in political ecology, I showed that women across cultures often face slightly different and perhaps more immediate threats from environmental damage.

An analysis of the potential impacts of mining through political ecology gestures towards women as particular stakeholders in the conflict in Junín, thereby rendering logical their high rate of involvement despite not having held many visible positions before the arrival of the mining conflict. In the following chapter, I discuss the ways in which this set of responsibilities motivates the mobilization of women in Íntag’s fight against mining and I explore the broader implications of an activist discourse that reclaims a cultural connection to nature.
THREE

Manipulating the Landscapes: Inteña Activism

A primary component of Inteña activist ideology compares the female body to nature as a creator of life, thereby representing the women who inhabit these bodies as natural subjects, with a profound connection to Íntag’s natural environment. In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which local activism mobilizes these symbols as a means of inciting action among others. I begin by analyzing the symbolism in signs, murals, and other images throughout the area, move on to a nuanced description of local feminism and activist techniques that echo indigenous movements, and end with a discussion of the mining conflict as the spark for the activist flames that Inteños continue to fan. This chapter highlights the construction of nature as both the object of and catalyst for a variety of activist movements.

I noticed various representations of the idea of feminized nature all over Íntag. Along the narrow dirt road that connects Íntag to Otavalo, signs caution passengers not to litter and to avoid stopping in areas of reforestation. One such sign shows an abstract form of a tree, depicted as a pregnant woman; above the soil, the trunk and branches form a typical tree, but below the earth’s surface, roots stretch out from a human embryo.

A vibrant mural adorns the side of a convent in Apuela, facing a set of heavily trafficked stairs. The convent sits directly across the street from where the Sunday market takes place each week. Alongside a veritable depiction of a Garden of Eden-like abstraction of animals peaking out from among a strange variety of plants, reads the following inscription: “Woman…beautiful and fertile like nature, who should be respected and loved, not attacked by

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13 See Image #2 in the Appendix.
the destructive hand of humanity.” This inscription equates nature with women through their status as victims to the actions of “humanity.” This genders the environmental destruction caused by people as masculine to its passive feminine victim, deserving of love and respect. I would venture to identify this “destructive hand of humanity” as traditional models of development that, as I discussed earlier, depend on a construction of nature as a feminine, passive repository of resources. The imagery, meanwhile, does not depict species found locally, nor does the bluish palate include the range of greens that surround even the mural itself. Rather, this depiction of nature is almost otherworldly, complete with alien-like plant life curving around wolves and large cats, perhaps to elevate nature to a sort of transcendental state even as the inscription clearly situates women within the same discursive category as nature. Nature is at once beyond the everyday and yet it is also the place in which people, especially women, are rooted. Importantly, this image calls upon and empowers men as women and nature’s protectors, thus holding them responsible for gendered violence that hurts nature as much as it hurts women. Gendering both nature and development serves to reinforce the idea that women hold a particular stake in protecting the former in large part by reinventing the latter through the alternative development projects I discuss more thoroughly in the next chapter.

Down valley from Apuela the road forks and begins a winding ascent toward Peñaherrera. The signs indicating distances illustrate competing discourses of development in Íntag. The green sign is a familiar sight to travelers of roads throughout the global north and thus symbolize this particular form of development in Íntag. As part of national infrastructure, the comparatively battered green sign also serves as a visual testament to the local narrative of state neglect. This sign is battered, bent, and in a noticeable state of disrepair compared to the wooden signs advertizing the Cotacachi-Cayapas Ecological Reserve in the center and the sign

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14 See Image #3 in the Appendix
beckoning travelers to “come and enjoy real community tourism” in Peñaherrera, “the green heart of the world.” These signs were made by activist groups to advertize local offerings off the so-called beaten path. Their excellent condition in comparison to the green sign subliminally suggests that the alternative underdog is beating its mainstream foe in this fight for prominence. Additionally, the descriptive text on the wooden signs fleshes out the names of towns that the green sign merely indicates, communicating the aspects of the areas that locals want to promote. In a way, these descriptions are important aspects of the stories Inteños and Inteñas tell outsiders about themselves, whereas the green sign treats their towns as simple labels that outsiders place on one of Coronil’s discursive maps.

There is a mural on the small building in the park in Peñaherrera that depicts an open-pit mine, surrounded by desertification and images of death.15 A green, tree-like woman stretches out from the pit, desperately clinging to a brightly colored orb—which might be a seed—and cries bloody tears onto it. Text written in and around the orb cautions the viewer to “Take care of your mama… Pachamama.” Pachamama is a Kichwa concept of the earth, portrayed as a feminine being in indigenous cosmopolitics. On the opposite side of the wall, the words “For your future, nooooooo,” disappear into a hole in the brown and desolate soil, out of which writhe green and earth-like feet, entrenched in pollution. Tiny, evil-looking people operate giant machinery, depicted as monsters that aim their sinister snout-drills toward the helpless earth. Small shadows of dejected people walk out of the pit and in the distance beyond the pit looms a smog-producing cluster of buildings, behind a leafless tree with a person hanging from a noose. This powerful and explicit image reproduces the perceived destructions inherent in mineral extraction and aligns the anti-mining agenda with that of the earth herself. Importantly, this mural occupies an entire side of a building right in the center of the tiny town. The bars in the

15 See Image #4 in the Appendix
photograph are playground equipment that surrounds the entire building. In addition to being an important place for children, this wall is easily the most public space in Peñaherrera because it faces the main street, down which pass all vehicles entering and exiting the community, including busses carrying people to and from Apuela and Otavalo. Nearly everyone sees this mural, many of them several times per day.

These very public, visual, verbal, and textual reminders of people’s connection to and place within the earth—with particular respect to the female body—are part of a conscious and deliberate effort to adopt and integrate an environmentalist ideology into Inteño culture. The articulations and adoption of this ideology constitutes a form of activism in its deliberate attempt at social change. As I discussed in chapter one, in addition to the land itself, women in particular use their bodies as sites through which they construct nature in a new way; one that renders it inextricable with culture and society. They invoke the “green rhetoric” of the indigenous political movements, thereby repositioning the nature/culture binary mapped onto their mestizo ethnic identity (Sawyer 2004). Through these tactics, Inteño women use their specific social positions as women and mothers to assert their stake in protecting the area against mining, and by way of their involvement in these fights, they take ownership of their bodies in ways that challenge a powerful paradigm of western culture. At the same time, this source of power depends—at least at the present—on the maintenance of an essentialized notion of gender that does restrict and limit women’s activity. The western feminist might ask, to what extent does this location of their indispensability in a narrowly-defined social role like motherhood limit the potential for their activism? At face value, the use of the female body as a symbol for the environment seems

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16 Western feminism also strives to discredit what it labels patriarchal representations of women as nurturers for essentializing feminine characteristics (Ortner 1972).
antiquated and restricting, but the work of the Women’s Coordinating Committee exposes it as one step in a long process whose goals are as feminist as they are environmentalist.

My first full day back in Íntag in January 2013, I rattled past that mural in the back of a pick-up truck with a group of women, who ranged in age from their early twenties to late seventies, from Peñaherrera and some of its surrounding communities. The Women’s Coordinating Committee of Íntag (CMI) was holding a retreat to come together as a large group for a belated Christmas celebration and had graciously invited me to spend the day with them. On the bumpy ride down to the hot springs pools in Nangulví, where the CMI hosted the retreat, the women expressed excitement for the retreat and speculated who might come. They asked each other about their children and grandchildren and wondered aloud why the rainy season still had not begun. We arrived in one of half a dozen or so pick-up trucks from across the region, some carrying women, adolescent girls, and plenty of children on a two-hour journey on uneven roads. I could tell this was an important event for each of them, through the enthusiasm of their greetings and the regret they expressed on behalf of friends and neighbors who were unable to make the trip. Given their relative lack of personal mobility, due to constraints of time, the terrible roads, the expense of owning vehicles, and their heavy burdens at home, this retreat presented many of them with a unique opportunity to socialize with friends from across the region.

We gathered in a large room, sitting in rows of plastic lawn chairs. Tiny babies breast-fed while their siblings crawled around our feet and toddlers wandered up and down the aisles between the chairs. Several of the members of the CMI steering committee stood at the front of the room with a microphone and introduced a well-dressed woman, whom I will call Lidia. She began to talk about the necessity for women to engage politically with respect to environmental
issues, because, “We have a very direct connection to nature, as human beings, but principally as women, because the Pachamama is what gives life...and we, too, as women, have that capacity to give life. We are generators of life” (Lidia, January 4, 2013, personal communication). Lidia’s assertion that the connection between people and nature is most direct between women and nature indicates a local conception of the power in the unique position of the female body.

The context of the retreat itself highlights the significance of Lidia’s words, which speak not only to local constructions of motherhood, but also to the broader implications of the discourse of Inteña activism. A few days later, Selena, a former leader of the CMI, and I sat in a quiet corner of Apuela on market day while she nursed her baby. We had been talking about the retreat, and as I marveled at the sheer number of women involved in this environmentalist fight, she explained to me that, “women, directly with nature, we have a connection because we’re mothers and we have to provide for our children. And the earth is the same; it produces food and it’s like having children” (Selena, January 6, 2013, personal communication). Selena and Lidia each emphasize a connection between nature and womanhood that repositions them as natural subjects with a claim to their natural environment.

Nature and the Inteña Female Body

Inteñas’ efforts to self-consciously adopt and continually construct a strong connection between nature and the female body imbue that social construction with social capital.17 Florencia Mallon describes this tactic as “strategic marginality,” wherein they find a unique power in their otherness because, “only from the margins...can one truly criticize” (Mallon

17 To define social capital, I refer to Anthony Bebbington and Thomas Perrault’s explanation of the term, which says, “social capital is an embodiment of cumulative effects of human activity; it facilitates productive activity when combined with other forms of capital; it can be wielded as actors pursue their given objectives; and it can contribute to the creation of other types of capital” (Bebbington and Perrault 1999: 398).
The work of Inteñas extends beyond Mallon’s definition of this term because their marginality is active; beyond merely critiquing the mining project and the model of development of which it is part—itself an admirable exercise of agency given the centuries of their marginalization—their activism entails integrating these values into their everyday life. By adopting sustainable agricultural methods and creating the images discussed at the beginning of this chapter, they are fighting and rewriting large-scale and historical narratives at the level of the local and the everyday.

As I argued in the last chapter, local constructions of motherhood often render women vulnerable to environmental destruction. Through her work in “out-of-the-way-places,” geographer Yvonne Underhill-Sem identifies the maternal body as a site at which political, economic, and ecological discourses converge and conflict (Underhill-Sem 2005: 21). Importantly, she defines places as “historically contingent and globally located sites of identity” (Underhill-Sem 2005: 23), and positioning the female body in particular as one of them speaks to the significance of Inteña activism in that it challenges the very powerful “historically contingent,” “globally located,” constructions of identity that I addressed in the previous chapter.

Inteña mothers, I found, use the ecological dimensions of their positions and roles as mothers in corporeal form to gain access to social and political arenas. At the CMI retreat, Lidia illustrated the position of the female body as an instrument of patriarchy and capitalism:

This is our condition as women, reflected in our bodies. It’s the female body that is an instrument that patriarchal systems and capitalism use to exercise power and superiority. Because of our bodies, we are raped, abused sexually and discriminated against. It’s in their best interest to keep us oppressed, by controlling our bodies (Lidia, January 4, 2013, personal communication).

Arturo Escobar and Wendy Harcourt observe similar tactics that women elsewhere use in their anthology of women’s place-based social movements, *Women and the Politics of Place*. Their introduction outlines women’s high rates of participation in “struggles over livelihood and environment” by locating livelihood as “central to family, community, and economy.” “Struggles to defend and democratize livelihood,” they posit, “have to do with all of these domains in which women have a particular stake” (Escobar and Harcourt 2005: 10).
Invoking several important tenants of feminism, Lidia positions the female body as a point of convergence of different forms of oppression. Lidia is not Inteña; she came “de la ciudad” (from the city) (Nadia, January 4, 2013, personal communication) to talk about the importance women’s participation in politics at this retreat. When I brought up this idea to Selena a few days later during our conversation in Apuela, she used a slightly different tone that used analogous constructions of the female (and maternal) body and nature. She explained, “One has to respect nature, and the earth, and treat it well so that it can give us these products that we need. We’re the same; if we are in good health, we do well, if we participate and have a good environment” (Selena, January 6, 2013, personal communication). The near automaticity with which she links the ideas of gendered capitalist oppression to nature indicates not only their inextricability in her worldview as an Inteña activist, but also, I would argue, the success of that activism. The negative externalities associated with mining and other capitalist practices that harm the environment, are, in her mind, very much like the abuse associated with patriarchy to which Lidia referred, and the images and texts of feminized nature on murals and signs throughout Íntag additionally exhibit these ideas. Selena uses her body to internalize these externalities, such that destroying nature—either through irresponsible mining practices or unsustainable agricultural practices—is metaphorically analogous, and physically causal of, damage to her body, too. The thorough and effective adoption of these ideas throughout the community attests to the ability of these agents to manipulate the social structures in which they exist.

Most anthropological literature on women’s activism in the Andes in particular finds a distinct version of feminism that differs from its western counterparts, which situate the quest for individual rights as a top priority of feminist movements to be achieved through structural changes involving the redefinition of gender roles (Browner 2001 and Kamrani 2008: 251).
Andean culture, meanwhile, perceives of the household as both the basic unit of society as well as the site at which Andean women negotiate gender, as opposed to outside of it (Crain 1994, Lind 1995, Paulson 2002, and Phillips 1989). Mary Crain, for instance, observes in another rural area of Ecuador that, “Women drew on traditional constructions of gender relationships that defined them as ‘mothers’ and ‘guardians of family welfare,’ to gain entry into the formal political sphere” (Crain 1994: 92). Crain interpreted this “entry” as “either a direct or indirect extension of their gender-defined roles in the domestic sphere” (Crain 1994: 86), which empowered them by “enabl[ing] their intervention in the public arena of formal politics” (ibid.). This intervention through the maintenance of traditional gender roles ultimately allowed many of Crain’s interlocutors to “[see] themselves as ‘political actors,’ capable of altering existing power relations” (Crain 1994: 93). When Selena described other women activists in Íntag, she almost always connected their motives to “the household,” “the family,” or “her children,” and then went on to talk about the individual benefits for each woman, such as “not being treated like servants” (Selena, January 9, 2013, personal communication). In other words, meeting the needs of the home and the family initially draw women into anti-mining activity, but the activism itself brings a sense of empowerment that, secondarily, allows women to renegotiate gender roles.

The CMI leads the efforts to change conditions for women more broadly throughout the region. In 2007, the group, in concert with several NGOs and local government organizations, release a small publication entitled, “Women Leaders in the Development of the Zone of Íntag in Cotacachi County,” in which they described the CMI’s goals and profiled twenty-two Inteña

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19 I found Selena’s use of articles interesting; “el hogar,” “la familia,” “sus hijos.” Preceding household and family with el and la (the) perhaps suggests that although these units are the responsibility of women, women have no real ownership over them. Meanwhile, that children are definitely “hers” (sus) reflects local sentiments that parents—those who possess children—are women, or mothers, thus bestowing women with a sense of authority to which men cannot easily lay claim.
women leaders. The introduction emphasizes that, “Inteña women are not at all submissive…nor are they quiet…nor are they at all ignorant” (Mujeres Líderes 2007). The direct rejection of this particular selection of adjectives indicates both their pervasiveness as stereotypes in Íntag, and suggests the CMI’s priority in negating them. The CMI has held workshops across the zone to raise awareness of and stop domestic and sexual violence. According to a survey they conducted during February and March of 2012 whose preliminary results the leaders discussed at the retreat, rates of domestic violence have dropped significantly in recent years, partially as a result of these workshops. The early results, which still remain unavailable for public consumption, show that, “our daughters are in school much longer than we were,” suggesting that this idealized version of femininity that symbolizes the Inteña feminist movement may not be as limiting as it sounds (Sofía, January 4, 2013, personal communication). Using widely held constructions of motherhood and femininity as points of access to public discourse certainly plays into gendered hierarchies, but entry into that discourse affords women the opportunity to change it.

I believe that ecofeminist literature obscures this nuance by assuming an inherent biological connection between women and the environment. Inteña activists certainly employ that language by portraying themselves as “givers of life” like the Pachamama. However, gendered political ecology exposes the complexity of this discourse by recognizing the physical, ecological, and cultural impacts of these symbolic associations. In starting with an environmentalist—rather than feminist—agenda Inteñas approached the problem of mining as, “a threat to our rich environment, like our home” (Selena, January 6, 2013, personal communication). Acid mine drainage, deforestation, and noise pollution are mining’s negative externalities that physically impact their ecological *place*, but the damage does not stop there;
because they envision themselves as active “organisms” within that ecosystem, they can recognize the potential for physical destruction in their own bodies (ibid.). In using the word “organisms” (organismos) to refer to people in Íntag Selena linguistically shatters the barrier between nature and society by equating Inteños and Inteñas with any other living being negatively impacted by mining. I also find it interesting that organismo also refers to the body in general. Pilar would explain to friends that I liked to go running “para mantener sano el organismo,” or “to keep her body healthy” (Pilar, April 2012, personal communication). Therefore, Selena uses the word to eliminate that which sets people apart from other organisms in labeling us as that which we share with other beings. Rather than accepting this physical oppression—this poison by capitalism—women like Selena use their vulnerable bodies as catalysts for change. This requires an active and deliberate discourse that internalizes these externalities within their physical bodies. As an active, deliberately and artfully created construction, an anthropological interpretation cannot assume its inherence; to do so is to discredit the efforts of that activism.

Women activists of Íntag insist upon being subjects of nature and organisms within this ecosystem by showing how their bodies are part of it, and thus equally damaged by the destructive processes of mining. On an intellectual level, this activism undoes the work of the Spanish empire, which, as I discussed in the introduction, pulled their bodies out of the realm of nature and into Spanish, Catholic, and capitalist society. Inteñas—and many of their Inteño colleagues and counterparts—insist on the artificiality of the division between nature and society necessary to justify an environmentally damaging model of development. Moreover, they continually deny it by centering as opposed to marginalizing their ecosystem as an inextricable element of and important actor within their own society. As I discussed above, Selena’s use of
the word *organism* also works to level the playing field; when they downplay their own importance as living beings, they implicitly elevate the status of others.

**Standing on the Shoulders of *Indígenas*: Re-Appropriating a Strategic Marginality**

Continuous, explicit efforts to portray the female body as both a symbol for nature and a node at which discourses of imperialism, environmentalism, patriarchy, and marginalization collide situate Íntag’s struggle within the powerful current of indigenous environmentalist politics in Ecuador. By adopting ideas about the strong connection between women and nature, invoking the language of the Pachamama—or Mother Earth, whose rights the Ecuadorian Constitution of 2008 protects—Inteñas position themselves very close to nature, much the way indigenous environmentalist movements in Ecuador do. Indigenous groups in contemporary international political discourse in general, and environmentalist discourse in Ecuador in particular, enjoy this “strategic marginality” in that they employ exactly that which has marked their otherness—their unique ethnicity—in order to lay claim to resources including their ancestral lands.  

By asserting that they are ethnically unique, and therefore inherently different from the mainstream, indigenous groups such as Suzana Sawyer’s Amazonian informants have fought for, and in some cases won, a privileged position within Ecuador’s national political discourse that affords them inalienable rights to their land.  

A key aspect to their rhetoric is the

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20 The uniqueness of the indigenous ethnicity differs from that of the hybrid, mestizo ethnicity. Indigenous activism often involves identity politics that center on notions of authenticity with respect to their relationship with the environment, wherein Indigenous groups represent themselves, “as guardians of the forest, natural conservationists whose cultural traditions and spiritual values predispose them to live in harmony with the earth” (Conklin 1997: 713). This depends on an irrefutable connection between their culture and their ethnicity; being different grants them different rights (See Stolcke 1995 for a thorough discussion of cultural fundamentalism).

21 Sawyer follows indigenous environmentalist action throughout the final decade of the twentieth century. Her informants battled against multinational oil companies in the Ecuadorian Amazon, participating in a rich history of indigenous political activity in the tiny yet diverse country.
claim of a cultural connection to the land justified by ethnic difference, a claim Inteños and Inteña cannot make.

Although residents of Íntag share an ethnicity with those from whom they are trying to distinguish themselves, their activist strategies to integrate themselves into their ecosystems echoes indigenous political tactics in Ecuador. It seems that they are trying to use similar tactics in order to take advantage of similar rights. One of Suzana Sawyer’s indigenous informants from the Ecuadorian Amazon explains that land is “defined ancestrally – from this come our customs. From this comes our identity” (quoted in Sawyer 2004: 77). Sawyer’s informants use “territorio” to mean “ancestral space, the site of historically belonging within a lived landscape.” She explains that,

Territorio could not be bought or sold; it embodied a social category of identity/locality, habitus/habitat not an economic category of wealth and possession. Much more than signifying the physical and material contours of a region, territorio encompasses moral-cosmological and political-economic complexes that shape identity and social relations (Sawyer 2004: 83).

Importantly, however, the concept of territorio is a “recent construction” and a “key ideological component in a process of nacionalidad-making,” or the process by which indigenous groups began to identify as sovereign political units and consequently earn the same recognition from the state (Sawyer 2004: 84). In other words, rooting their ethnic identity in the land they occupy, interact with, and thrive off of was strategic, discursive, and reactionary. Just like the incorporation of a renewed respect for nature into Inteña culture, Amazonian indigenous groups’ construction of ancestral ties to their land was, according to Sawyer, a vital component of their struggle to achieve autonomy. She explains that her informants worked to construct their own “historical entitlement to Amazonian lands” on the basis of their indigeneity “by juxtaposing indigenous mythology, ancestral heritage, and 500 years of oppression with broader international concerns for tropical conservation and indigenous rights” (Sawyer 2004: 54). In his analysis of
the political ecology of social movements, Escobar finds that, “The defense of territory…implies the creation of a new sense of belonging linked to the political construction of a collective life project and the redefinition of relations with the dominant society,” and concludes that, “the struggle for territory is thus a cultural struggle for autonomy and self-determination” (Escobar 1998: 72). In other words, self-determination requires, in large part, self-definition, such as Selena’s explicit attempts to equate people with organisms.

The stories in Sawyer’s ethnography and of Íntag speak to the necessity for visible difference from the mainstream in that active process of self-definition. That Íntag, a collection of largely mestizo communities, employs a startlingly similar strategy indicates the value of this particular kind of othering given the wider context of a dominant culture that ideologically separates itself from nature. Perhaps ironically, this effort reveals as much—or perhaps even more—about the dominant, western-influenced culture, which fancies itself so far from nature that only societies that are somehow profoundly, inherently, and inalterably different from their own might enjoy the kind of intimate connection with nature upon which they have no right to infringe. These indigenous groups are often fetishized in the media, portrayed as “the crusaders of the rain forest, the last patch of tropical Eden left on this earth” (Sawyer 2004: 53). Therefore, maintaining the analogy between the nature/culture divide and the indigenous/white or mestizo divide is beneficial to indigenous groups concerned with protecting their natural resources. It has the opposite effect in Íntag, where residents have no ethnic basis for a claim to such difference, nor a long enough shared history to satisfy a contemporary political definition of common ancestry; they are, by mainstream definitions, not different enough from their urban counterparts to deserve the same rights as indigenous groups. Íntag’s answer, apparently, is to negate those divisions so fundamental to the extractive industries, the culture in which they are embedded,
and the political economy that necessitates them, and reinforce the differences that separate them from the culture to which those industries belong.

This process of self-definition invokes a self-imposed cultural fundamentalism, wherein Inteñas and Inteños deny the necessity for racialized ethnic difference as a basis for autonomy and ownership over their land in part by insisting on a cultural difference. In Íntag, this particular brand of self-essentialism blurs those boundaries by rejecting the idea that a human connection to nature might be ethnically determined, and positioning themselves across the supposed binary between nature and society. Roberta wove this thread into our conversation about her move from Quito back to Íntag. Her belief that, “I feel good here because this is my land,” asserts a tangible connection to nature, and in desiring “that others honor the same connection they feel” she indicates the importance of such a connection in the culture that she imagines connects Inteños and Inteñas to one another (Roberta, April 19, 2012, personal communication). Focusing on this connection as that which differentiates Íntag from Quito requires a fundamentalist statement about Inteño culture. Veronica Stolcke portrays cultural fundamentalism as a contemporary descendant of racism, which “thematizes, instead [of relations between races], relations between cultures by reifying cultural boundaries and difference” (Stolcke 1995: 12). Stolcke rightly problematizes these constructions in their inability to move past the problems of racism and its tendency to essentialize peoples on the basis of difference, noting the dangers of a tool that reinforces social and cultural hierarchies. However, indigenous political groups reclaim and activists in Íntag consciously construct their cultural difference as a means to separate themselves from the dominant, urban culture. For indigenous groups, this involves reclaiming and validating fundamentalist portrayals of their cultures posited by the non-indigenous
mainstream, thereby reifying the artificial boundaries between cultures and between societies and nature, to which Stolcke and Merchant refer, respectively.

Inteñas like Roberta imitate such activism by appealing to another difference. In deconstructing the political implications of this ethnic division, I would argue that Inteños invoke and therefore uphold another: that of the notorious distance between urban and rural areas throughout Latin America (Butterworth and Chance 1981, Kay 2008). More than two-thirds of Ecuador’s population lives in urban areas, and short bus rides often bring the passenger to destinations that seem worlds away from where they started (The WorldBank 2013). Íntag is no exception, and the ideological and cultural distances most Inteños report between their region and Quito are themselves discursive spaces. Pausing between uprooting weeds from the steep slopes of her farm, Tiana described for me her feelings toward “the city.” She laughed with that same playful sense of self-deprecating humor that endeared me to so many of the women I met there. “Even Apuela is too urban for me! I could never live there. To me it is a city, but right here, I breathe pure air, there is so much water, and it’s tranquil” (Tiana, January 16, 2013, personal communication), she told me. By most standards, Apuela is a very tiny town, but compared to her community, Villa Flores, which is home to a church, a school, and a collection of farms, it seems like a city. Interestingly, the next aspect of her life in Villa Flores that she chose to highlight as in opposition to “the city” was social: “We take care of each other among neighbors, but in the city they are so selfish [egoísta]. The selfish people don’t take care of the future, they don’t think about it” (ibid.). Her binary constructions of rural versus urban culture reflect her conception of their relationship. She portrays people in “the city” as egoísta, implying both selfishness and egotism, which characterizes the interactions between the state and Íntag in the mining conflict.
Pablo, a prominent and passionate local anti-mining activist explained to a group of students, “In Íntag, we have two enemies; the multinational [mining company] and the state” (Pablo, February 12, 2012, personal communication). Locals feel targeted and abused by city-dwellers, who view rural areas as repositories of resources, and nature as, in the words of Escobar, “a resource external to humans and which humans can appropriate in any way they see fit” (Escobar 2006: 9). In the context of mining, this construction of nature permits not only the extraction of some resources, but the contamination of the entire system, including, according to Inteños and social scientists, its human elements (Ballard and Banks 2003, Bebbington et al. 2008). Considering this treatment, Tiana’s and others’ amorphous descriptions of “the city” as Íntag’s opposite are continually validated and reproduced not only in activist discourse, but in local identity construction—for the “defense of the territory” and otherwise—as well (Escobar 1998: 72).

**Striking Gold: The Mining Threat as a Catalyst for Cultural Change**

Environmentalist discourse lives an active social life in Íntag. Discussions about sustainability, efforts to reduce agricultural causes of erosion and the use of pesticides (locally referred to as *veneno*, or poison), and signage reinforce the importance of valuing and respecting the environment. These efforts often appear side-by-side with similar tactics to promote gender equality, decrease domestic violence, and encourage women’s participation in local politics, businesses, and alternative development projects. Integrating these ideals into daily practices requires actively engaging a variety of community members who voice an awareness of these shifts in local culture.
I met Orlando on a bus from Peñaherrera to Apuela for the Sunday market one day last April. I sat next to him on the crowded bus and, noticing my light skin and blonde hair, he asked me what had brought me to Íntag. When I explained that I had come to learn about alternative development following the mining conflict, his face lit up. “I was the founding president of the Consortium,” he told me, referring to the Consortium of Toisán, an umbrella organization for the CMI and other groups associated with alternative development (Orlando, April 29, 2012, personal communication). Upon arriving in Apuela I had to find someone else in the market, but he offered to talk to me more in the DECOIN office afterward.

A little while later we sat side by side in the DECOIN office, while people stopped in, seeking brief refuge from the busy street. When I asked him what kinds of changes he had observed in Íntag, the first thing he mentioned was the shift toward gender equality: “Twenty, twenty-five years ago, there was a lot of machismo, so the women had to educate themselves. Then the men changed their attitude” (ibid.). The simplicity with which he portrays this complex and messy shift made me wonder whether he, as a male leader, played much of a role in the feminist aspects of activism in Íntag. Many of the women leaders with whom I spoke highlighted the difficulties of combating internalized discrimination and expressed feelings of near disillusionment with some of the remaining challenges, despite having made very real gains. Orlando, meanwhile, seemed to consider the issue of gender equity a closed case that had depended on direct and simple methods. It struck me as strange that his first choice was an attempt to honor the feminist work of activist groups like the CMI—thus implicitly naming gender equality as a primary component of anti-mining activism in Íntag—and yet his choice of words was almost dismissive both of the work this accomplishment required and the work left to be done. His language also speaks to the conception that combating machismo locally is the
responsibility of its victims—an element of gender oppression whose domain extends far beyond
the indistinct boundaries of Íntag. At the same time, however, depicting this change in a
simplistic way may also imply that locals like Orlando accept it as an integral component to anti-
mining activism, and a logical consequence thereof. The fact that he and others are able to take
for granted that women in Íntag now generally live with more respect, less domestic violence,
more access to resources, and greater rates of public participation indicates their respect for and
belief in the necessity for these changes.

The second change Orlando wanted to discuss was the “change in attitude regarding the
environment.” He explained that, “People have reduced the use of chemicals and there’s a better
treatment of the soils,” thereby trying to communicate a renewed sense of responsibility among
locals for their influence over the environment in a variety of activities. I think this shift speaks
to some of the profound changes in the ways in which Inteñas and Inteños construct nature, in
large part as a reaction to the threat of environmental destruction through mining. Sandra, an
environmentalist whose leadership in feminist activism and alternative development projects
brings to light the intersectionality of these causes, described this phenomenon as relatively
ironic. She said, “We find ourselves saying a lot that it was so good that the companies arrived,
because if they hadn’t we would have continued in the same way, not caring about the
environment. These are the good unintended consequences of the threat of mining” (Sandra,
January 7, 2013, personal communication). Framing the mining conflict as a catalyst for social
change shows the malleability of both nature and the culture that constructs it, and yet, such
manipulation requires dedicated and arduous work. In another conversation with Sandra, she
discussed her goals for her children. She told me that she wants her children to learn,

from a young age, that a big part of our life—of our destiny—is in our hands and that we
have to learn to be the generators of our own initiatives; to be the bosses and not the
employees...First, one has to love one’s land, where we were born, and that there are things that one can leave to learn, but we have to come back to this space to build up our development here in the Zone. They cannot leave and forget their own and their land. One has to take care of the environment (Sandra, April 22, 2012, personal communication).

Sandra feels that the survival of environmentalism—this new construction of nature—in Inteño culture depends in large part on instilling in her children the same deep sense of respect she feels for the land, and in particular, this land, in Íntag. In that way, the future generation comprises both the means and the ends to this activism, because people like Sandra and Tiana fight against mining so that their children can enjoy these resources, and yet they also recognize that the longevity of the movement depends on their children’s maintaining it. At the same time, I do not think I could possibly overstate the importance of this sense of agency in Sandra’s vision for her children. Given the frequent (and I might add valid) frustrations Inteños voice regarding their marginalization on the part of the oppressive state and manipulative mining companies at the height of the conflict, insisting that her children could, should, and will be in charge of their own destiny is itself an accomplishment of her own activism. That so much about local activity has changed local “mentality” indicates the possibility that future generations of Inteños might very well maintain them.

When Sandra and Orlando, as active and visible community leaders, invoked this “green rhetoric” in describing cultural changes to me in particular, I got the sense that the conversation itself was part of the self-definition process in “defense of the territory” (Escobar 1998: 72). Perhaps more so in hindsight, but while I was in Íntag as well, I began to notice Inteños’ and Inteñas’ own recognition of the social capital derived from employing this “green rhetoric,” suggesting that reconstructing nature in Íntag is profoundly strategic beyond the intrinsic value of sustainable activity. Planting crops on a particular angle to reduce erosion, avoiding monocultures, and minimizing or eliminating the use of pesticides are difficult activities that
have inherent benefits to the local ecosystem and to their own health, but they are also
discursive. In a lecture at Colby College, Gloria Steinem offered advice to social activists in
general, imploring them to integrate their goals into their methods. She said, “the means we
choose everyday are the ends we will get” (Gloria Steinem, February 28, 2013). Rather, she
suggested, than hoping for a set of ends that will justify means, adopting effective and positive
methods will beget the ends activists seek. Inteña activism clearly personifies Steinem’s
philosophy, but their frustrations and reflexive criticism speak to how difficult it is to evaluate
and recognize their progress.

Conclusion

Through a variety of productive methods, Inteña activism ultimately works to construct
nature in new ways, radically reworking, blurring, and crossing the boundary in western culture
between nature and society. Catalyzed largely by the threat of mining, the means adopted by
Inteña activism include sustainable agricultural techniques and teaching their children to value
the land. In a tactic that allows for identity construction, which Escobar recognizes as an integral
component to the defense of territory in the political ecology of social movements, Inteñas use
their physical bodies to construct a sense of collective self that depends on the frequent and fluid
interactions between people and the environment. In so doing, Inteñas invoke the language,
symbolism, and political tactics of indigenous activist groups in other parts of Ecuador, but their
mestizo ethnic identity disrupts a popularly accepted construction of nature as an Other to
society. At the same time, denying the legitimacy of the nature/society binary requires, for
Inteñas, setting themselves apart culturally from their urban counterparts in a way that reinforces
another binary; that between rural and urban areas. In the next chapter, I will explore how people
in Íntag incorporate these ideals and practices into their everyday lives with special attention to how this increase in the ideological distance between themselves and Quito influences how they conceive of the Íntag locale within more global flows of ideas and resources.
“We value our own”: Communal autonomy through the land

The emphasis on community is integral to the success of each of the various activist goals discussed in the previous chapter. Framing the large and diverse zone as a single community instead of a collection of smaller ones instills a sense of shared stake in the mining conflict. In this chapter, I focus on how Inteños and Inteñas use the construction of nature as a source of collective identity in their alternative development projects and everyday practices in order to meet those needs.

Many activists structure their platforms around the shortcomings of Quito’s involvement in the area. The state minimalistically provides such infrastructure and services as public schools, roads, and subsidized health centers in some of the larger towns throughout Íntag, but many of these services are abysmal at best. Teachers and health practitioners typically stay for a requisite year of service in rural areas and many locals complain of their lack of both experience and dedication to the job. Although the state has finally begun a project to pave the main road starting in Otavalo, the roads within the zone still remain unpaved, treacherous, and vulnerable to landslides.

Last April, Sandra and I sat side by side on a low bed in the front room of her little house in Peñaherrera. Her three children played in the room next to us, laughing and shouting over the sound of the rain. I had been trying to talk to Sandra for weeks. Nearly every person I had talked to about alternative development had mentioned Sandra in some capacity; she seemed to be involved in organizing almost every alternative development project and I knew she had worked as the secretary for the CMI, and yet her ubiquity was nearly surpassed by her elusiveness. It was
late on a Sunday afternoon when she finally had a few free moments for an interview and we started to talk about her involvement in anti-mining activism and women’s empowerment in Íntag. I was especially interested in hearing about the various challenges she faces as a leader in the CMI and in a variety of alternative development measures. These “productive initiatives,” as Sandra calls them are environmentally sustainable projects that integrate the goals and values of Inteña activism into their everyday lives; they are a productive answer to the idea that forms of development must distance people from, and will necessarily harm, nature.

Sandra began our conversation by listing what I had come to understand as the primary goals of the CMI’s work: promoting economic autonomy for women and teaching Inteñas across the region about their civil rights as women. Drawing on the theory that having their own source of income, independent of their husbands’ allows women a higher degree of independence and more bargaining power within the household. Leaders like Sandra have also observed that having this economic autonomy additionally elevates women’s status to the effect that rates of domestic violence drop following the addition of this separate income. Speaking in part to the far-reaching power of a development discourse that ranks, hierarchically, productive work typically executed by men above the domestic burden that women across cultures often shoulder, this model for female empowerment blurs the line that separates women from the productive sphere as much as that which separates nature from society. Women must still earn respect through participation in the economy—thus reinforcing the prejudiced distinction between work that contributes to the economy and work that does not—and yet, they defy the dominant model by asserting that Íntag need not depend on the type of development that multinational mining companies offer. In order to take full advantage of the opportunities presented in these alternative development projects, and to reap the entire range of potential benefits associated with the increased presence of
women activists, leaders, and participants in the economy, the CMI argues, women must know their legal rights. Through a series of educational projects and informal gatherings over several years, the CMI has made, and continues to make, multi-faceted efforts to increase local awareness among both men and women of women’s rights as Ecuadorean citizens. This two-pronged approach constitutes both a means and ends for many of the region’s leaders. Empowering women through economic autonomy and education regarding their constitutional rights is a means by which to strengthen the community as a whole in order to fight against mining, but it is also an end in itself, because of its positive impact on the lives of women and families in the area.

The third struggle Sandra named stood out to me at the time as relatively unexpected, and yet now it seems emblematic of the Inteño social world. Looking through the doorway to her children and then turning back to me, she said, “Another [challenge] is making ourselves our own enterprisers in our own initiatives in our own future that we want in the zone of Íntag. We cannot wait for it come from outside, but rather, we ourselves are going to do it” (Sandra, April 22, 2012, personal communication, emphasis hers). I was surprised to hear this immediately following the two most basic objectives of the movement toward gender equality in Íntag. Until that point, I had no idea that autonomous ownership over the “initiatives” was just as important an outcome as women’s economic autonomy and knowledge of their rights—nor that it was as challenging to achieve.

In retrospect, this moment within that precious hour of conversing with Sandra offered me extraordinary insight into an important convergence of the values that drive activists with the

22 The Constitution of 2008 guarantees pregnant women the right to “free maternal healthcare services” (Constitución de la República del Ecuador 2008: Capítulo III, Sección 4A). Additionally, the state, “shall promote equality with respect to the representation of women and men in publicly appointed or elected office” (Constitución de la República del Ecuador 2008: Capítulo V, Artículo 65), and the document outlaws discrimination on the basis of gender throughout.
external factors that obstruct their paths to success. Sandra conceives of the Inteña vision of development as dependent on both personal initiative and regional autonomy, each of which reflect the high regard for independence and self-reliance I observed among locals. It would make sense that an ultimate goal of the alternative development efforts might be a manifestation of cultural values. That Sandra also feels that accomplishing this autonomy is a major challenge reveals her perception that philosophies of development from outside of the area threaten Íntag’s movement against mining. Sandra’s assertion also directly challenges traditional notions of development, speaking to a growing body of anthropological literature that does the same; problematizing development as a construction of the affluent west (Escobar 1994, Esteva 2009). Inteños’ and Inteñas’ recognition of their opposition to something as immense and entrenched as traditional development certainly attests to their spirit of independence. I use this final chapter to explore the ways in which a wide range of locals use alternative development projects and sustainable agricultural methods to live and engage with the values activists espouse in their resistance to mining.

The Attitude of Independence

Glen David Kuecker, an historian on Latin American social movements, writes about the resistance to mining in Íntag as a case study of mobilization in Latin America that contests “traditional definitions of citizenship” (Kuecker et al. 2008: 1). In the time he spent in Íntag, he heard locals describe themselves as “independent, hardworking, and honest” (Kuecker 2007: 99). It was only upon my return to Íntag in January of 2013 that I began to hear people emphasize some of the same characteristics, in their praise of others and in personal pride. Glancing back over my notes from my previous trip, I finally appreciated the significance of the last challenge
Sandra had articulated eight months earlier. As a major goal and a major challenge for Íntag, the spirit of independence and self-reliance characterizes the motivations of grassroots efforts, even as the powerful political and economic forces active throughout Íntag pose a major threat to those efforts. On a very basic level, Inteñas and Inteños take a lot of pride in being able to provide for themselves and their families. As I discussed in chapter one, their isolation from urban population centers, the lack of infrastructure, and general marginalization by the state have motivated—if not necessitated—a do-it-yourself attitude among Inteños for generations, which many of their small businesses embody.

The road from Apuela to Peñaherrera climbs a long, steep hill, gaining roughly one thousand feet in elevation over less than a mile. Toward the top, a new valley begins to form where the road forks, as one route continues its snaking climb toward Peñaherrera, and the other slopes downward, curving around a tree tomato farm before resuming a steep ascent up the spine of an impossible-looking ridge. The sides of this mountain are almost completely vertical and in places, its summit is barely wider than the bumpy dirt road stretching along its length. At the end of that road is a family run tourist operation, known as Wariman. Wariman is a recently discovered archaeological site, home to the only known remnants of the Kara culture who lived in 1500 C.E. Luis, whose father owns the land, maintains the area and gives tours of the little museum and the Sun Temple, a pyramid-like outcropping on the otherwise flat top of the mountain. In order to attract more tourist traffic, he has also built cabins, a small restaurant, and a zip-line that runs a dizzying course from the top of the Wariman mountain all the way across the River Íntag valley to a waterfall on the opposing slope. Luis gave me a personal tour of Wariman, thrilled that I was studying anthropology. We started with a glass of lemonade in the little restaurant, and he proudly explained that his kitchen only used local lemons, and that their
sour juice was sweetened with *panela*, instead of cane sugar. I asked if the coaster under my glass was made with *cabuya* fiber and he nodded enthusiastically, explaining that a woman in the craft group, Mujer y Medio Ambiente, had crocheted it. “We value our own,” he said, indicating once again his pride for local products.

He showed me the ceramic relics in the museum, and as we climbed to the top of the Sun Temple, he pointed to the conspicuous bumps along the landscape where archaeologists expected to find more small temples. In describing each of these antiquities, he was sure to emphasize the strength and autonomy of the Kara people: “They were not conquered by either the Inca or the Spanish”; “They managed all by themselves, so isolated from everything on this mountain.” Although the Kara died of a mysterious disease roughly 380 years before the first generation of current Inteñas and Inteños arrived in Íntag, the characteristics he chooses to spotlight speak to those he and others in Íntag value about their own culture. Luis asked if I wanted to speed above the valley on the zip-line, but I politely declined, hoping to return to Peñaherrera in time for lunch, and back to the United States in one piece. “You must at least come to appreciate the view,” Luis pleaded. “I have been working on this for months.” As a compromise I obliged, following him across the width of this strange mountain and down a set of steps carefully cut into the earth, which gave way to a level path carved into the nearly vertical slope. Impressed by the work, I asked who had dug out and leveled the path. He stopped so that we were standing side by side and he put a hand on my shoulder, indicating the path in front of us that led to a little deck. “I cut this path myself. I did everything myself. I like doing my own work, even if it takes longer.” I mused that this must have taken him months, and that the heavy rains must have added an extra challenge. “I do it alone because it satisfies me to know that I have done it, and I feel so
secure knowing I don’t have to depend on anyone” (Luis, January 10, 2013, personal communication).

The idea of self-sufficiency motivates Luis and essentially guides his business model, and others’. After only a few days in Íntag last April, I observed that all the businesses were very small, and that only an extreme minority of the stores and restaurants had multiple employees. Almost everyone who owned a business in Apuela or Peñaherrera works by themselves or with one or two others. Liliana, who owns “the only store that sells absolutely everything” in Peñaherrera, explained to me that her self-employment is an important source of security and autonomy. She acknowledged, as I swept the small slab of concrete outside the store, that she probably works much harder and longer hours as the storeowner than she would as an employee, but she pointed to the sign, “Víveres de Liliana” (Liliana’s Supplies) and said, “That means I make the decisions” (Liliana, January 6, 2013, personal communication).

**Action and Language Fertilize the Grassroots**

In addition to valuing their own independence as business owners, Luis and Liliana each take pride in supporting other alternative development projects and in serving or selling, respectively, locally grown foods. Above all else, Inteñas and Inteños seem to believe that the productivity of the land allows for this self-reliance and zonal autonomy. Two days before my adventure to Wariman, I had spent the evening talking to Sebastián in his house in Peñaherrera. Sebastián works odd jobs in construction in and around Peñaherrera. I had come to his house in search of his wife, Marci, who had worked with Nuevos Horizontes, one of the women’s groups dedicated to growing, drying, and selling organic herbs. Marci was visiting her ailing mother, but when I explained what I was trying to learn about, Sebastián was excited to tell me about his
experiences as an anti-mining activist. I asked him to talk about the issue of mining in Íntag, and he replied, “Mining would completely destroy us,” and began to list the environmental damages and their threats to the food Inteños grow. In his iambic intonations, he carefully explained, “It would contaminate all of our air, our water—everything. The zone of Íntag is so very productive, above all, and we depend on that so that we don’t have to rely on anything else—on anything from outside.” After recounting the violent act of burning down the Bishimetals mining camp, he began to list the fruits and the vegetables that grow throughout the region, the vulnerable treasures that make possible the lifestyle he cherishes, with obvious pride. “Everything grows here. Everything” (Sebastián, January 8, 2013, personal communication).

As I walked back from Sebastián and Marci’s house that night, I mentally mapped out the progression of his story. I had only asked him, “What do you think about mining in Íntag?” and he began by listing its threats to the environment, quickly explaining acts of civil disobedience, and then spent the most time and care describing the foods that mining threatened. I was so very struck by the nutritious variety of plants and animals this fragile ecosystem sustains, and, moreover, his reverence for it. He took so much pride in explaining to me, an outsider, how valuable each of these natural commodities is for the communities throughout Íntag. In communicating his profound admiration for the productive capabilities of his natural environment, Sebastián showed the same tendency to blur and complicate the division between nature and society that I observed in women activists. Again, I must account for the symbolic weight of my own ethnicity and citizenship and analyze the space it likely took up in that tiny living room. Sebastián’s story took on near-religious tones, communicating a cultural reverence for the land and its productivity, even years after he participated in the fight to protect it. Sebastián, then, still discursively incorporates the values that motivated and directed his activism.
into conversations he has today, perhaps recognizing the value in reaffirming his dedication to and identification with the natural environment around Íntag.

Several days later, I accompanied Felipe, who works for AACRI, the coffee growers’ association, to visit some of the coffee farms. His job for AACRI entails visiting the farms to guide members through the process of organic coffee cultivation. We rode his motorcycle for about an hour to Villa Flores, a tiny community composed of farms, a school, and a little church. We visited Tiana, who works with her husband and their youngest son on their farm. They are both members of AACRI, and while Felipe and Tiana’s husband ventured down the steep slope, she told me about belonging to the association in the context of mining resistance, carefully articulating that being able to produce their own crops for consumption and sale has helped sustain their activism more than anything else. Unperturbed by the flies circulating near her head, Tiana smiled at me and said proudly, “We are so blessed in Íntag. I have always said, as long as it rains and the sun shines, nothing can happen to us”. Clearly, her strongest sense of security lies in the health of the ecosystem. She went on to explain that, “Everything grows here. We can feed ourselves, we have water, and we have each other.” I found it especially interesting that she spoke of food and water security before she talked about solidarity, as if to say that local priorities are to sustain oneself and one’s family primarily, and then to support others in the community. Then, she made the connection between those priorities, asserting that, “We need to value our land. I always have. I have always loved this land” (Tiana, January 16, 2013, personal communication).

For Tiana, successful resistance to mining depends on unity in the community, which requires the health of the land and the ecosystem. She believes that collective appreciation for this gift of autonomy through robust agricultural production will reinforce their efforts to keep
mining companies away from Junín. When Inteños and Inteñas need not rely on an external actor for a job in order to provide for their families, they have achieved a sense of freedom through this self-reliance, and they truly owe it to the land. Collectively, they share this value for the land, recognizing that maintaining such autonomy depends on a unified effort to care for the fruitful environment. Put simply, the prospect of an open-pit mine directly threatens the health of that environment, and therefore, their lifestyle. Her clear, verbalized associations between the work of AACRI as a viable economic alternative to mining and her love for the land indicate the success with which Inteña activists have woven these discourses into individuals’ imagined tapestries of Íntag. At the same time, that so many Inteños and Inteñas deliberately continue to incorporate this language into the everyday might equally indicate that there are people they have yet to sway; continually infusing mundane interactions with the language of activism perpetuates its efforts because the work is not yet done. Shannan Mattiace discusses the challenges Mayan activists in Chiapas face to integrate their visions of local autonomy into everyday life; as with Íntag, activist campesinos in Chiapas find immense value in the idea of agricultural self-sufficiency and political autonomy and yet must work actively on a quotidian and local level to ensure more widespread support for such goals (Mattiace 2003: 35).

**Zonal Independence and De-centered Development**

In addition to its reinforcement of local ideals, Sandra’s articulation of the importance of regional autonomy also reflects strong distrust for the exogenous. In mid-November, construction began on a state-funded project to pave the rutted and narrow road connecting Íntag to Otavalo. Although Apuela and Otavalo are only nineteen miles apart on a map, the winding road takes about three hours to travel by bus, assuming none of the frequent landslides slow the
journey, or render the route impassable. Although nearly everyone in Íntag acknowledges the necessity for a more direct route to emergency medical care, local forecasts of the overall impact of the newly paved road vary remarkably. On a symbolic level, this is a very important gesture from the state to indicate that Quito has not forgotten Íntag. “But,” retorts Pilar, in a hypothetical argument with President Rafael Correa, “it is not an accident that they are doing this in an election year” (Pilar, January 4, 2013, personal communication). Correa won reelection on February 17, 2013. Some people welcome perceived economic benefits, predicting that cutting the time of the drive by more than half will make Íntag more accessible to markets for agricultural products as well as tourists. Others view these potential benefits as threats, believing that Íntag’s isolation has in fact allowed for the rural lifestyle they enjoy. This widely accepted opinion among activists in particular perhaps facilitates the ideological shift toward a more nature-centered culture.

Conscious of the local push toward autonomy, long-time Íntag resident Alisa worries that the road will facilitate the spread of a troubling trend in Cotacachi, the county seat. Ecuador has recently become a top destination for retirees from Canada and the United States for its low cost of living and pleasant climate. Unfortunately, the presence of so many foreigners, and their cash, drives up prices of everything from groceries to land. Alisa fears that the road would make Íntag a more desirable location for these retirees, and that their arrival would make Íntag an unaffordable place for Inteños to live. Additionally, the influx of foreigners would likely fragment the community, making it even harder for activists to unify the area against mining. If Íntag becomes a more culturally and ethnically diverse area, asserting claims to their natural resources on the basis of a shared culture that values the land and depends on its health will be far more challenging (Alisa, January 13, 2013, personal communication).
Sandra shares this fear. In January, she told me that one of the most interesting trends she had observed in the preliminary analysis of the CMI survey data showed that most of the women surveyed did not like the idea of foreigners coming to live in Íntag (Sandra, January 7, 2013, personal communication). Pilar’s opinion is roughly the same; “It’s nice if they come to visit, but we don’t want them bringing all their things,” she said, laughing (Pilar, January 4, 2013, personal communication). Foreign volunteers are not unheard of, and as a blonde-haired, green-eyed gringa, I had no hope of covering up my non-native status. People were generally interested in what had brought me to Íntag, impressed that I could speak Spanish, and delighted that I had come to learn, instead of to teach. I heard story after story of well-meaning but useless volunteers, like the young woman who had spent months teaching women’s groups ceramics, only to find that the firing oven required more electricity than the community transformer could provide.

In addition to foreign individuals, Inteñas and Inteños express skepticism regarding external political and economic influences because of their potential to threaten local autonomy. As we saw with the introduction of white sugar to local cuisine (see chapter one), economic influences from outside the zone tend to undermine internal values and activist efforts to “value our own” (Luis, January 10, 2013, personal communication). It seems that Inteñas and Inteños generally hesitate to trust outsiders—especially people from la ciudad—with making political decisions that directly affect Cotacachi and the zone of Íntag in particular. During Lidia’s discussion of the importance of political participation at the CMI retreat, Cindi, an eighteen-year-old girl who had made the two-hour trek from the small community of Cerro Pelado that morning, spoke up. “We shouldn’t wait for a government to do what’s best for us,” she said, confidently speaking to the entire room, undeterred by the fact that she was younger than nearly
everyone who was not breastfeeding. “We are the ones who form the future, we can’t wait for a government or a politician to make the change we want to see.” Other women nodded in agreement and Sandra, standing behind her, smiled in solidarity, clearly encouraged by this young woman’s blend of pragmatism and idealism. Cerro Pelado is very close to Junín, and her family was badly affected by the mining conflicts, so Cindi comes by her lack of confidence in the state honestly. If Quito encouraged the kind of development that brought such violence to her otherwise “tranquila” community, she sees very little reason to trust the “empty words” of a politician (Cindi, January 4, 2013, personal communication).

Importantly, none of these flows are unidirectional into Íntag. Many of the students and others migrate to cities in search of jobs end up moving there permanently. This complication makes for an uncertain future in Íntag and complicates both the rural-urban divide Inteña activism reinforces and calls into question its endgame; are these activists fighting for a departing future? Ideally, the vast majority of Inteños with whom I spoke indicated a desire to keep their families together in the zone, and yet in order for their children to avoid facing the same set of challenges they had as impoverished farmers, many parents recognize the necessity of migration for education and employment. Even the most idealistic of Inteños understand that their ideal solution to this problem counters a strong current of global development, of which ever-increasing rates of rural-to-urban migration are part and parcel. Back in April, toward the end of my conversation with Sandra, she told me, laughing self-consciously, “It is as if we want to be the autonomous country of Íntag, and make all our own things; our own milk, our own eggs—[to do] everything ourselves, and not have it come from outside” (Sandra, April 22, 2012, personal communication). That her dream for Íntag entails total self-sufficiency indicates that
she does not value dominant forms of development, but her self-conscious tone suggested her own recognition that such a model is not feasible in the context of that type of development.

Gustavo Esteva, a Mexican activist, points out that, “for two-thirds of the people on earth, this positive meaning of the word ‘development’…is a reminder of what they are not. It is a reminder of an undesirable, undignified condition. To escape from it, they need to be enslaved to others’ experiences and dreams” (Esteva 2009: 10). The version of development that mining concessions bring to places like Íntag are rooted in a very culturally specific system of value, but the culture to which they belong is far from Íntag. Roberta firmly rejects the idea that economic growth could be a positive change for Íntag. When I asked her to explain her position, she said simply, “We’re not going to put money in a pot [to eat]” (Roberta, April 19, 2012, personal communication). She and Sandra seem to be invoking Escobar’s definition of “post-development,” or, “an era where development cease[s] to be the central organizing principle of social life” (Escobar 2010: 12). Sandra, Rosa, and others would like to see an Íntag free of not just mining, but of the hegemonic discourses of development that translate the products of such a destructive activity into currencies whose ultimate purpose is exchange for the products of the activities that mining threatens, yet upon which Íntag already thrives.

This re-definition of development is actually gaining acceptance in Ecuadorian politics, but only to the benefit of certain groups. The country’s extremely progressive 2008 Constitution recognizes, in addition to the rights of nature, the autonomy of indigenous nationalities, many of which enjoy political representation. Pachakutik, the indigenous political movement, played an important role in advocating for the rights of nature in the Constitution, gaining for Ecuador an important set of protections against the destruction of its vulnerable biodiversity. Indigenous peoples often occupy a special, even idealized, position in anti-neoliberal discourses, particularly
within the realm of conservation (Crain 1994, Paulson 2002, Paulson 2003, Sawyer 2004, Sikkink and Choque 1999). As I discussed in chapter three, this derives in part from essentialized notions of indigenous cultures’ relationships to the land that assume a cultural sacredness. Almost paradoxically, this tendency shows another dichotomous aspect to the discourse of development, wherein indigenous peoples are culturally “othered” enough to enjoy a degree of autonomy from western notions of progress and development. I call this an “othered privilege” that ethnically similar—yet culturally divergent—groups marginalized by development do not enjoy. Thus, while political parties such as Pachakutik and indigenous representative organizations like CONAIE or CONFENIAE have independently adopted values of conservation partially in the name of cultural heritage, academia and international politics have largely granted them something of a monopoly on such discourses

This fetishization of indigenous cultures in environmental protection most clearly manifests in the UN’s Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which grants indigenous peoples the right to “free, prior, and informed consent” regarding “any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources, particularly in connection with the development, utilization or exploitation of mineral, water or other resources” (United Nations General Assembly 2008: Article 32). No such international treaty exists to protect the same rights of rural, non-indigenous communities. Additionally, Escobar asserts that the “biocentric turn” in the 2008 Constitution “resonates as much with the cosmovisions of ethnic groups as with the principles of ecology,” (Escobar 2010: 21) speaking to the near automaticity with which even critical deconstructions of development associate ecological philosophy with specific ethnic identities. However, the rights to a clean environment and control over local development should not depend on ethnicity. Assuming such a conflation marginalizes non-indigenous groups, such
as the communities throughout Íntag through underrepresentation. However, incorporating the same rhetorical and symbolic tactics in reclaiming their own connection to nature in both activist struggle and everyday activity renders the resistance movement in Íntag a formidable opponent to large-scale metal mining and exogenous development.

**Conclusion**

This chapter highlighted several of many manifestations of the activists’ values of autonomy, independence, and ecological sustainability in the everyday lives of Inteños and Inteñas. It would seem that even the most progressive and creative means to protect against the destructive consequences of traditional development fail to adequately meet the needs of Íntag. This marginalization tasks Inteñas and Inteños with the formidable burden of breaking a trail through the challenging landscape of development to arrive at precisely the destination they envision for themselves. And yet, through their alternative development projects and efforts toward sustainable agriculture on the level of the local and the everyday, Inteñas and Inteños seem to embody a case for access to the same rights as their indigenous counterparts.
CONCLUSION

On Wednesday, February 13, 2013, the Municipal government of Cotacachi County voted to approve the proposed mining project in Junín in a five-to-four decision. This gives the partnered Ecuadorian and Chilean state mining companies, ENAMI and CODELCO respectively, a green light to develop the copper deposit in Íntag.

Rumors of bribery began to circulate the internet on facebook.com and DECOIN’s website, as did calls for resurgence in the resistance movement. BN Americas, an online source for business intelligence in Latin America geared toward advising investors and companies with business interests in Latin America, quickly published an article forecasting a grim future for the mining companies in light of Íntag’s strong history of mining resistance. The article warns CODELCO, ENAMI, and their investors that, “certainly they will be met with the same civil resistance that community members have successfully implemented in the past” (Demo-Dananberg 2013). The reputation of Íntag’s resistance clearly precedes itself, and I believe a review of what Inteños have accomplished through their activism justifies a cautiously optimistic outlook for this next phase of mining resistance in Íntag. I therefore conclude this study looking forward, integrating my observations and analyses from the preceding pages with current information about the state of the mining conflict in Íntag as a means of anticipating what might come next.

Upside Down World, an online magazine that covers politics and activism in Latin America, recently reported a protest at a mining trade fair in Quito. The protesters were “mostly women” and spoke out against the development of the copper deposit in Íntag and criticized abuse and neglect at other mining sites throughout the country (Upside Down World 2013). This
level of visibility of women activists from Íntag is due in large part to the changes locally in women’s roles as a result of their participation in mining resistance and alternative development initiatives. As I discussed in chapter two, local constructions of femininity and the gendered division of labor position women in Íntag as primary stakeholders in the fight against mining. Because they are generally responsible for providing nutritious food and clean water for their families, Inteña women are especially conscious of negative changes to the environment, such as those associated with large-scale metal mining. This set of responsibilities often confines them to the household, and like women in other parts of the world, Inteñas have faced gendered discrimination and abuse, which often prevented their participation in public endeavors. However, this gendered set of responsibilities also opened for Inteña women a unique point of access to the anti-mining activism. Inteña women used their status as mothers and providers to lay claim to environmentalist discourses; the mine would interfere with their abilities to be mothers, and they therefore opposed it.

Following their participation in mining resistance, Inteña women activists have begun to rewrite their own roles and remap their positions in society. Many attribute higher levels of respect for women’s work and lower levels of domestic violence, as well as the feminization of local leadership positions, to the economic autonomy women have garnered through their participation in alternative development measures in combination with increased public visibility via activist events. Looking forward, women in Íntag face significantly smaller barriers to public participation in anti-mining activism than ever before, owing in large part to their sustained efforts to incorporate the positive outcomes of mining resistance into the Inteño social world.

Rainforest Rescue, an international NGO dedicated to protecting rainforests, supports Íntag’s efforts to keep the area free of mining. Most recently, the group posted a petition to
President Rafael Correa, discouraging his support for a mining operation that severely threatens the Andean Spectacled Bear, an endangered species (Rainforest Rescue 2013). The NGO applauds Íntag for its increased efforts toward protecting the local environment, which I believe are important, positive, and lasting impacts of mining resistance. The movement to protect the area from mining catalyzed a series of projects to protect the fragile environment from many of the anthropogenic threats it faced. Adopting sustainable agricultural techniques, recycling trash, reducing deforestation, and avoiding the use of pesticides collectively establish and continually reinforce a local sense of responsibility for maintaining the health of the land, plants, animals, and water catchments in Íntag. These activities have immediate and intrinsic value in their impacts on the environment itself; reducing erosion, contamination, deforestation, and consumption ensure the longevity of the ecosystems and people’s practices to sustain themselves within it. Socially, concerted efforts to reduce human impact—and the visibility therein—have instilled a sense of responsibility and awareness more broadly of Inteños’ and Inteñas’ obligations to protect that which nourishes them. Many of my informants whose voices liven the discussion in chapter four, believe that maintaining the health of the natural environment is integral to their survival as people and that the land binds them together. Preventing the development of the mining concession is one more way to make their lives and livelihoods environmentally sustainable. The anti-mining cause is clearer now than it was before now that it fits into the everyday practices and common values held by people throughout the zone.

A significant component of maintaining these changes to local culture regarding the rights of women and the environment has been—and I imagine will continue to be—the deliberate and explicit efforts to reconstruct nature and people’s positions within it. Using the female, and more specifically, the maternal body as a symbol for the strong and powerful
connection between people and the environment in which, with which, and for which they live, breathe, and nourish themselves, Inteñas incorporate the blurring and crossing of a supposed divide between nature and society into their shared heritage as a collective. In the face of their temporally limited shared heritage, Inteña activists consciously work to integrate a set of values into the collective identity. As I discussed at length in chapter three, asserting a connection to their land incorporates successful aspects of indigenous activism in Ecuador and sets the residents of Íntag apart from their ethnically similar but culturally divergent urban counterparts with particular respect to how each group constructs nature. This particular construction of nature—which Inteña activists continually produce and reproduce through their rhetoric, the imagery with which they adorn local spaces, and the missions of their alternative development projects—portrays the earth and its complex systems as active participants in the lives of people, in direct opposition to the western, urban vision of nature as a repository of resources available for extraction and consumption by people. The Inteña construction internalizes the negative externalities of activities such as mining by conceptually shortening the distance between the activity and its environmental consequences. Inteña women use their newfound and hard-earned voices to portray their bodies as the victims of mining’s abuse, thereby exposing the otherwise invisible effects of mining.

This work to establish a set of values shared locally has also incorporated efforts to reinforce the importance of zonal autonomy. Drawing on already widely respected values like independence, self-reliance, and the importance of hard work, Inteña activism has emphasized the need for Íntag to make its own decisions, take matters into its own (collective) hands, and map out its own plans for development the way communities see fit. In deepening the divide between peripheral Íntag and central Quito, Inteña activism employs a “strategic marginality” to
use their different construction of nature to distinguish themselves from residents of Quito, the state, multinational companies, and the specific version of development that characterizes and makes their lifestyle possible. Defining themselves as fundamentally different from Quito on the basis of culture and their associated political and economic needs remaps the dividing line that isolates nature from society, and moves it to delineate rural zones like Íntag from urban areas like Quito. Calling for autonomy empowers locals to make their own decisions and use their own agency to incorporate the ends into their means; advocating independence requires shifting responsibility and granting ownership over the destiny of the zone to those who reside within it, and distributing power more equally among men and women. Having worked over the past two decades to instill this sense of responsibility among locals, Inteña and Inteño activists are far better prepared to confront a coalition of external actors whose actions are guided by values very different from those espoused throughout Íntag.

If the BN Americas article and the experiences of Bishimetals and Ascendant Copper are any indication, local opposition is a powerful opponent to the joint venture between ENAMI and CODELCO. However, the strength of the opposition depends in no small part on local unity, which, I would argue, has improved tremendously through these efforts to reconstruct nature and integrate that construction into local identity. I hope that this will also preempt what many consider the most destructive part of the resistance process: the animosity between opposing sides of the community. By making the negative impacts of mining visible and personal, activists contextualize and complicate the often exaggerated economic benefits promised by mining companies, thus deterring locals from supporting the mine as a source of economic growth. Of course, the potential for strife is still very high and activists will have to work even harder to
reassure other Inteñas and Inteños who remain on the fence that the long-term detriments of mining activity will overshadow the short-term benefits.

Regardless of the outcome of this phase of the mining conflict, Íntag faces serious challenges in its immediate future. Although the opposition to mining has grown and unified significantly throughout the zone as a result of the work discussed above, dissent, in some capacity, remains. To suggest that all Inteños and Inteñas unanimously object to the idea of mining would be reductive, naïve, and it would undermine the scope, complexity, and implications of activist work. In the face of persistent poverty, even the most temporary of jobs offers economic relief to those who do not have the privilege to turn it down. Despite efforts to “value our own,” other Inteños and Inteñas might not feel the same sense of allegiance to the land that sustains them, and therefore still see little reason to oppose the mining project. Allegiance to the President further sways some ardent Correaista Inteñas and Inteños in favor of the ENAMI/CODELCO project. Indeed, the fact that even in April of 2012—when the threat seemed distant—activists worked almost tirelessly to continually instill the values of autonomy, environmentalism, and a feminized vision of nature into the vernacular and everyday activity speaks to the need they identified to change people’s minds. However, the benefits of this work extend far beyond the context of the mining conflict; shifting and manipulating cultural constructions of nature, femininity, and the collective identity has brought positive changes to individuals, families, and the environment in Íntag.

As I argued in the Introduction, Inteña mining resistance carves out a shared identity among residents of Íntag by blurring the boundary between nature and society. Constructing nature this way provides a productive response to the destructive impacts of development in the capitalist model. True to the lens of feminist political ecology, the act of centering nature serves
to expose some of the power dynamics and long-term consequences that western constructions of nature obscure. Recognizing both the conceptual complexity of the Inteña vision of nature and the work Inteñas continuously put forth to integrate it into the social fabric of Íntag also attests to the plasticity of culture. Aware of the impacts of broader discourses on cultural constructions of nature and conservation politics, Inteña activists find political power and intrinsic value in manipulating the ways in which their communities conceive of and engage with their natural worlds, which are always cultural.
APPENDIX

Image #1

Danger! The water will come to an end - Do not knock down the forest.

Image #2

Woman...beautiful and fertile like nature, who should be respected and loved, not attacked by the destructive hand of humanity.


Coordinadora de Mujeres de Íntag. 2007. *Mujeres Líderes en el Desarrollo de la Zona de Ítag, Cantón Cotacachi.*


http://www.decoin.org/?s=history&x=0&y=0.

