

## 10. Performing and disputing indigeneity in the Fiesta del Coraza in Otavalo, Ecuador<sup>1</sup>

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The Fiesta del Coraza is a Kichwa festivity specific to the canton of Otavalo in the province of Imbabura in the Ecuadorian northern Andes.<sup>2</sup> The festive character, the *coraza*, is acted by the *prioste*, the celebration sponsor. In a spectacular costume, he represents majestic and beneficent authority:

[He wears] shiny white pants and a shirt decorated with sequins, appliqués, buttons, gilt trim, fake pearl necklaces, and a plumed cocked hat hung with costume jewellery chains, beads, and pendants that hide the Coraza's face and head. He rides a horse, wears shoes, and carries an umbrella, all status symbols associated with whites in an earlier era. (Meisch, 2002, p. 260)

*Indígenas*<sup>3</sup> (indigenous people) of the rural civil parish of San Rafael de la Laguna, who to this day form the majority of its population, have celebrated the Fiesta del Coraza since the late 17th or early 18th century (Ares Queija, 1988, p. 128). In the early 1980s they temporarily abandoned the event and, in 1986, non-*indígenas* of the town of San Rafael, the parish's administrative centre, took up the Fiesta, claiming they were saving it from dying out. Since then, they have celebrated Coraza wearing indigenous attire and dancing as *indígenas*. Meanwhile, *indígenas* elsewhere in the broader canton of Otavalo began reviving the Fiesta del Coraza and other festivities in the mid-1990s, in parallel with their newly political mobilisation. In June 1990, Ecuadorian *indígenas* broke into the national political arena by staging a major uprising

- 1 This research has been funded by the European Research Council as part of the interdisciplinary project, Indigeneity in the Contemporary World: Performance, Politics, Belonging, led by Professor Helen Gilbert at Royal Holloway University of London.
- 2 The state of Ecuador is administratively divided, from higher to lower tiers, into provinces, cantons and rural and urban civil parishes.
- 3 Considering that processes of social categorisation are contextual and relational, I refrain from translating the labels *indio* (Indian), *indígena* and *blanco* (white) into English. Individuals may self-identify as members of a category but have had another foisted upon them. Thus, a *blanco* in Otavalo may not be identified as a white person in English-speaking countries. I use the analytical term '*non-indígena*' to refer to those who self-identify as *blanco* or *mestizo*, unless the analysis warrants the use of these labels.



Figure 10.1. The coraza at the inauguration of Ariruma Kowii as the Undersecretary of Education of Indigenous Peoples, 22 August 2006. Photo: Sergio Miguel Huarcaya.

that paralysed the country for 12 days. During the 1990s and early 2000s, they constituted one of the strongest indigenous movements in Latin America. As part of this political and cultural revival, the Federation of Indigenous Peoples and Peasants of Imbabura (Federación de Indígenas y Campesinos de Imbabura: FICI) has staged a *Fiesta del Coraza* every year since 1995 in a different sponsoring community. Both versions of the *Fiesta* – by *san rafaeleños* (people from San Rafael) and by indigenous FICI activists – have taken it out of its original context, transforming it from a traditional *fiesta patronal* (in honour of a patron saint) to a performance event in an overarching contemporary festival. The original *Fiesta del Coraza* was celebrated on 19 August to commemorate the feast day of San Luis Obispo, Otavalo's patron saint. *San rafaeleños* currently stage the *Coraza* around 9 June, as part of a week-long celebration of the foundation anniversary of the San Rafael de la Laguna civil parish. The indigenous activists from the FICI, in contrast, celebrate the *Coraza* around 22 September as part of the *Kuya Raymi* (*fiesta of the Inca's wife*), which honours women and the fertility of Mother Earth during the autumn equinox.

The performance of the same festivity by indigenous and non-indigenous constituencies raises several important analytical questions. What exactly are they celebrating and does that differ from what they are commemorating? How do their political interventions differ? To what extent do these interventions

rely on the commodification and spectacularisation of indigenous culture? This chapter, after tracing the history of the Fiesta del Coraza, will compare the non-indigenous version of the San Rafael festivity with the indigenous version staged by the FICI. It aims to demonstrate that these celebrations are neither cultural appropriations to promote national unity nor strategic performances of authenticity for economic benefit. Rather, they respond to local and dialogic configurations of 'being and becoming'<sup>4</sup> indígena and non-indígena in the quotidian contest for local power. Non-indígenas in San Rafael have commodified the Fiesta del Coraza to add symbolic value to their own localised identity within the Ecuadorian imagined community. By contrast, the FICI activists have turned the festivity into a spectacle to promote indigenous culture as worthy of global recognition, implying that indígenas have a genuine culture while non-indígenas do not.

Anthropological studies of indigeneity in the Andes have long drawn attention to the prominent role of fiestas in constructing and reproducing indigenous cultural identity. Research based on fieldwork conducted before the late 1970s – when the centuries-long servile relations of production bonding indígenas to the haciendas finally ended – offers diverse views of the fiesta. While some scholars focus on the fiesta's potential to construct community, preserving historical memory and maintaining tradition (Crain, 1990; Moya, 1995), others emphasise its exploitative aspects: the ways in which the fiesta naturalised ethnic inequalities through ritual (Crespi, 1981; Guerrero, 1991; Thurner, 1993). More recent scholarship considers the ways in which indígenas construct alternative notions of citizenship by means of festive performance. Making tangible a sense of cultural continuity in spite of the pressures to assimilate into mainstream non-indigenous culture, indigenous festive performance emphasises concrete relationships to place and values rather than abstract categories of national belonging (Butler, 2006, p. 374; Lazar, 2008, p. 143; Goldstein, 2004; Wibbelsman, 2005). Research on indigenous performance in Ecuador beyond the scenario of the fiesta underlines the ways in which indígenas enact authenticity to demand differential concessions from the state (Tolen, 1999), to access development funds (Bretón, 2003), or to cater for tourists (Gómez-Barris, 2012; van den Berghe and Flores Ochoa, 2000; Ypeij, 2012). The latter has led anthropologist Andrew Canessa to suggest that indigenous authenticity has become commodified (2012, p. 109). Existing literature, however, has paid little attention to the ways in which

4 'Being and becoming', according to John Comaroff, is 'the mapping of those processes by which social realities are realised, objects are objectified, materialities materialised, essences essentialised, by which abstractions – biography, community, culture, economy, ethnicity, gender, generation, identity, nationality, race, society – congeal synoptically from the innumerable acts, events, and significations that constitute them' (2010, p. 530).

processes of commodification and spectacularisation of indigenous culture relate to the dialogic constitution of indigenous and non-indigenous identities and alterities.

## The Fiesta del Coraza across history and anthropology

'Coraza' in Spanish means a piece of armour covering the chest and back. However, indigenous intellectual Enrique Cachiguango argues that the word derives from *kuraka*, the Kichwa term for hereditary lord.<sup>5</sup> There is as yet no empirical evidence to demonstrate convincingly either a Spanish or a Kichwa origin for the term. The Fiesta del Coraza is a hotchpotch of performances that baffle anthropological interpretations attempting to reveal a coherent underlying symbolic order. The festivity's principal feature is a parade towards the plaza or community in which the celebration takes place. In contemporary renditions, female dancers make way for the parade holding a long cord tied to coins. They are followed by the *pendoneros*, male dancers carrying red flags. The coraza and his companion ride along on horseback, and the *yumbos*, two men who dress in blue costumes and paint their faces white, bring up the rear on foot or horseback.<sup>6</sup> Yumbo in Kichwa is a pejorative word that refers to the natives of the eastern lowlands. In the Fiesta del Coraza, however, the yumbos resemble European buffoons rather than Amazonian natives. At the tail end of the parade, a mestizo band plays brass and drums and a multitude of people follow along. Until the early 1980s, the festival included a chase on horseback or foot in which the yumbos threw hard sweets in the coraza's face. The chase ended when the coraza started to bleed. According to Ares Queija, the enacted battle reflected cultural conflict, but neither the coraza nor the yumbos could be said to clearly represent conqueror or conquered (1988, p. 124). When the parade arrives at its final destination, a boy recites a poem in Spanish from memory, praising the moral integrity and leadership of the coraza. The boy is called the *loa*, the Spanish term for a panegyric poem.

Catholic lore asserts that the fiesta started three centuries ago with the discovery by an indígena of a statue of San Luis Obispo next to the church in San Rafael. More sceptical accounts argue that it was actually the parish priest who entrusted an artisan with sculpting the statue. The priest then buried it close to the church wall (Ares Queija, 1988, p. 128; Buitrón and Collier, 1949, p. 105). After the statue was found, according to Elisabeth Rohr,

the parish not only had its own patron saint, so the parishioners did not have to go on pilgrimage to the neighbouring town, but more than anything, the parish could keep the offerings that before had flowed to

5 Personal communication, 29 Sep. 2011.

6 In some stagings, the coraza may lead the parade rather than follow the dancers.

Otavaló. In this way, the annual Fiesta del Coraza honouring San Luis Obispo turned the formerly insolvent parish into a truly prosperous one. (1997, p. 63)

Until the early 1980s, the Fiesta del Coraza included two events: the Fiesta Chica (small fiesta) at Easter, in which one or more corazas were presented to their communities, and the main celebration on 19 August, in which the corazas and their entourages paraded from their communities to San Rafael. After attending Mass in the church, they carried the statue of San Luis in a procession through the town.

Like other fiestas patronales, the Fiesta del Coraza was part of the *cargo* (position of responsibility) or fiesta system, the institutionalised rotation of community offices and sponsorships of colonial origin and common to Mesoamerica and the Andes. By assuming the sponsorship of the Fiesta del Coraza, indígenas gained prestige and political influence among their peers, and simultaneously demonstrated respect towards their forefathers. For recently married indígenas, sponsoring the festivity was an obligatory rite of passage by which they obtained adulthood and respect (Walter, 1981; Rohr, 1997). According to Susana Oyagata, the first indigenous president of the civil parish council, parents pressured their sons and daughters into sponsoring the festivity, and community members reviled those individuals who were yet to do it, calling them *mocosos* (snotty-nosed kids).<sup>7</sup> Older and wealthier couples might have taken on the sponsorship several times, in order to increase their social networks, at times in competition with rival factions (Walter, 1981, p. 183). At the level of interethnic relationships, however, the festivity was coercive and exploitative, funnelling indigenous economic resources into non-indigenous hands. The following comment, voiced by an indigenous woman from the community of Huaycopungo, typifies critiques of this aspect as widely expressed today:

The chief of the civil registry named the sponsors each year, forcing them to undertake the position. The band, food, drink, everything was very expensive. The indígenas spent a lot and continued to live in poverty. To cover the expenses, they took out loans from the mestizos, pledging animals and land as debt securities. Many were unable to repay the loans back and lost their animals and lands.<sup>8</sup>

The sponsors also covered the fees for the Mass, the rental of costumes and horses and the cost of fireworks. Since non-indígenas monopolised not only the provision of most of the goods and services for the celebration but also

7 Personal communication, 29 Sep. 2011.

8 Personal communication, 2 June 2012.

the civil parish's political administration, they often swindled the indígenas. The money spent by the indigenous sponsors amounted to the equivalent of several thousand dollars and constituted a tremendous financial burden for them and their families. As an economic coup de grâce, the non-indigenous women who hired out coraza costumes charged exorbitant fees if any of their cheap adornments were lost during the celebration, arguing that they were made of gold. These adornments were counted one by one when the costumes were returned (Ares Queija, 1988, pp. 49–50).

## Demise and renewal

Indígenas stopped celebrating the Fiesta del Coraza in 1985. Reflecting the prevalent mood of the time, non-indigenous intellectuals lamented that a festivity that was 'associated with the cultural heritage of the indígena of Otavalo' had been buried (Valdospino Rubio, 1990, p. 11). The Ecuadorian journal of musicology, *Opus*, claimed that the celebration had come to an end because of the intransigence of San Rafael's parish priest, who insisted on observing the event without music and alcohol (ibid.), but the main cause of its demise was the lack of indigenous individuals willing to bear the sponsorship costs. According to a male indígena from the civil parish of San Rafael de la Laguna: 'my parents sponsored the festivity. They told me to undertake the sponsorship, but I did not. Two of my brothers did it. Another brother and myself did not. Of course, this created great problems among us'.<sup>9</sup>

Factors contributing to the unwillingness of the indígenas to sponsor the festivity included the demise of the old hacienda regime, the rise of labour migration to other parts of Ecuador, the expansion of access to schooling, and the conversion of significant numbers of indígenas to evangelical faiths. Proselytisers of the latter condemned the fiesta as an act against God's will, and converts renounced drinking and dancing altogether (Huarcaya, 2003). Because of their literacy skills, young adult indígenas became the new community leaders and, yet to undertake the sponsorship of festivities, they criticised the lifestyle of their parents and grandparents as burdened by excessive drinking and economic exploitation.

In the civil parish of San Rafael de la Laguna, indígenas stopped celebrating not only the Fiesta del Coraza, but also the Pendoneros, a separate festivity held in October, and the Fiesta de San Juan (Saint John) in June.<sup>10</sup> Observing that these traditions were disappearing, a group of young non-indígenas from the

9 Personal communication, 9 June 2012.

10 The Fiesta de San Juan coincides with the summer solstice. Since the 1990s, indígenas have called it Inti Raymi, the Festival of the Sun.



town of San Rafael got together and decided to revive them. William Oña, the non-indígena who drove this revival, outlines what happened:

In general, these customs are clearly indigenous, right? When other religions or religious sects came here, the traditions of our peoples, of our indígenas, were getting lost. When I was around twenty years old – I was still attending secondary school – I met with fifteen or twenty boys of my age, all from here, from this neighbourhood, the parish centre. I proposed that we, as san rafaeleños, should rescue the traditions that we had had. We decided that five persons would organise the [festivity of] Pendoneros; five, the Coraza; and five, San Juan. We drew lots to assign who would organise each festivity, and we paid for them from our own pockets. From then on, the customs of the Coraza and Pendoneros started to undergo a revival. Later, other people who might not live here but were from here, who were of an older generation and had more power, started to volunteer to sponsor the festivity. Since then, the tradition has continued and now the indígenas want to recuperate the customs that they have lost.<sup>11</sup>

Having started in 1986, this 'new' tradition is now more than a quarter of a century old. The young san rafaeleños merged the Pendoneros into the Fiesta del Coraza to build a celebration of the anniversary of their civil parish. The resulting festival, of which the Fiesta del Coraza is the main event, includes a pageant for indigenous women, a coronation of the festival queen – a non-indígena woman who is selected beforehand – a race of reed watercraft across Lake San Pablo, a gastronomic fair, a football championship and a ball with live



*Figure 10.2. Non-indígenas celebrating the Fiesta del Coraza in San Rafael, 11 June 2011. Video still: Sergio Miguel Huarcaya.*

11 Personal communication, 5 Oct. 2011.

music. According to Oña, indígenas who are interested in celebrating the Fiesta del Coraza must choose a date that does not conflict with the celebrations of the civil parish's anniversary.

For their own part, indígenas have been resurrecting the Coraza in various forms since the mid-1990s, as part of what Barbara Butler calls a 'self-conscious indigenous revival' (2006, p. 393), the strengthening of indigenous cultural identity that has accompanied their political movement. Until the 1980s, the Fiesta del Coraza was mostly celebrated by the indígenas of San Rafael de la Laguna. However, from the mid-1990s, it has been staged in other indigenous communities across the canton, either on their own initiative or by FICI activists as part of the Kuya Raymi celebration. The activists developed the Kuya Raymi as a 'true indigenous festival' in response to the Fiesta del Yamor, a festivity organised by the Otavalo municipality since 1968. In addition to bullfights, parades and musical performances, the Fiesta del Yamor included choreographed indigenous rituals and separate beauty pageants for non-indigenous and indigenous women. The activists saw that the fiesta "whitened" their cultural contribution' and reproduced exploitive and asymmetrical relationships between the indigenous communities and the non-indigenous elite (Rogers, 1999, p. 61).

From a historical perspective, the Kuya Raymi could be considered an invented tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1992) because there is no evidence that the indígenas in Otavalo celebrated it before the FICI's interventions. The organisers of the Kuya Raymi emphasise that the festival has a strong spiritual component at its core, and that it is not an event for mere tourist consumption.<sup>12</sup> With the present budget for the event bordering on US\$ 40,000, the Kuya Raymi is funded mostly by corporate and state sponsors. In September 2011, it was celebrated in the community of El Cercado and the city of Cotacachi. The festival included a ritual ceremony in a sacred spring by a *yachak* (healer) on the Monday, a traditional bonfire in El Cercado on the Friday, a full-blown beauty pageant featuring prominent artists on a stage in Cotacachi on the Saturday, and the Coraza as the concluding highlight on the Sunday. Activists from FICI call this last event '*tantanakushpa ripashunchi*' (let's go all together). The coraza and his entourage paraded several kilometres uphill, from Cotacachi to El Cercado's football field. Upon the parade's arrival, the pendoneros burst spontaneously into a run, the loa recited a poem exalting the community from a stage, the coraza passed a staff to the president of the sponsoring community – selected through a draw – for the following year and bands played indigenous music throughout the evening and night. The event included a child singing on stage and many groups of girls and young women performing choreographed dances

12 Personal communication from Auky Anrango, 3 Oct. 2011.





*Figure 10.3. The coraza arriving at the community of El Cercado, 25 September 2011. Video still: Sergio Miguel Huarcaya.*

in the field. In contrast to the non-indígenas in San Rafael, who engaged in brash behaviour, binge drinking and group singing, the indígenas were more subdued, dancing in circles as is traditional and following sharing rituals when drinking.

Activists from FICI have encouraged indigenous communities across the canton to organise and continue the celebration of the Kuya Raymi by themselves, but they have preferred to stage only the Fiesta del Coraza. Indígenas are currently organising the Coraza not only where it was celebrated before, in communities close to Lake San Pablo, but also where it was not, in communities such as Ilumán and Carabuela, north of Otavalo city (Meisch, 2002, p. 261). Contemporary celebrations are held on various dates. Huaycopungo, for instance, stages the Fiesta del Coraza in January, when newly elected authorities take possession of the community council, while La Compañía mounts it in June as part of the festivities for Inti Raymi.<sup>13</sup>

Current community renditions of the Fiesta del Coraza are very different from those of the recent past. Today, there are no exploitative authorities, priests or costume renters. Sponsorships no longer deplete the economic resources of the priostes. Most of the funds come from a small fee paid to community councils by their members, which are responsible for organising the festivities. This revival has not only given indígenas a sense of pride but

13 In 2011, when I attended the Fiesta del Coraza in La Compañía, indigenous participants honoured Saint Rose of Lima, disregarding the Catholic calendar of saints' days. Saint Rose's day is on 23 August. The availability of a big, framed image of Saint Rose determined the villagers' choice of saint.

has also strengthened their solidarity. A case in point is the community of Huaycopungo, where the Fiesta del Coraza was staged anew in 2000, after a 16-year hiatus. The celebration was organised in part by a major leader of the Evangelical Church, who three years before 'had singled out the traditional Coraza fiesta as a reason for the local Protestant revolt from the Catholic Church' (Butler, 2006, p. 342). The organisers called the event '*Hatun kuraka tikramuy*' (The return of the great lord). In addition, they made some important changes to the format, deciding that the poem traditionally recited by the loa should exalt the powers of the landscape rather than praise the beneficence of San Luis Obispo, as it did in the past.<sup>14</sup>

Performances of the Coraza are also increasingly evident in official ceremonies in Otavalo. In these instances, elected and appointed indigenous authorities incorporate a small parade and/or a dancing troupe into state rituals. In 2000, Mario Conejo, the first indigenous mayor of Otavalo, brought a coraza to his inauguration. His brother, Ariruma Kowii, also did so when he was inaugurated in 2006 as Undersecretary of Education of Indigenous Peoples, a new post in the Ministry of Education and Culture. Accompanying the indígenas in their newfound political power, the Coraza in Otavalo has become a symbol of a renovated indigeneity, worthy of respect and recognition.

## Interethnic cultural criticism

Among indígenas across the canton, contrasting perspectives on the non-indigenous celebration in San Rafael distinguish the activists from the non-activists. Whereas non-activists do not disapprove of the celebration, activists are extremely critical, qualifying it as a folkloric event that is inauthentic. Indigenous activists are hyperconscious of the workings of racism and are much more likely to pinpoint and denounce its dynamics. In June 2010, Susana Oyagata hired Samia Maldonado, an indigenous activist and video producer from the city of Otavalo, to shoot the event. A year later, Maldonado gave me her impressions:

For me, it was shocking. The mestizos were very racist. They ignored the president of the civil parish council, who is the first indigenous president. On stage, they did not consider her properly. They displaced her.

During the parade, an old teacher gave a speech about the important families of San Rafael. Of course, none of them were indigenous. In addition, when referring to the indígenas, he spoke of 'our indios', as if he or they owned the indígenas. I also was surprised by their display of joy. They felt exuberant joy representing themselves as indígenas. But those

14 Personal communication from Susana Oyagata, 29 Sep. 2011.

representations were stereotypical. The men imitated drunken indios and the women waved their skirts in seductive ways. No indigenous women would ever dance like that. This is just folklorism.<sup>15</sup>

For indigenous activists, the point of reference is the way in which indigenous subordination was naturalised until sometime in the 1980s. Non-indígenas often addressed indígenas as '*mi hijito*' or '*mi hijita*', my little son or daughter, framing the interaction within a paternalist framework in which indígenas could not demand respect as adults. At times, non-indígenas ignored the indígenas as if they were invisible. At others, they mistreated them to remind them of their inferiority. This performance of dominant identity naturalising inferiority was part and parcel of the quotidian and institutionalised appropriation of indigenous labour and products. For non-indígenas, indigenous inferiority was not only part of common sense, a shared understanding without any need for debate, but also the means by which they constructed their own dominant identity as Ecuadorian nationals. As Andrés Guerrero argues, citizenship was constructed upon the prerogative of executing 'immediate and everyday strategies of power' to constantly recreate indigenous subordination (2000, p. 13). For present-day activists, who have demonstrated political strength and effective mobilisation, any traces of the explicit discriminatory behaviour of the past are unacceptable.

In 1986, when non-indígenas started to celebrate their own Fiesta del Coraza, indígenas in the Ecuadorian highlands were yet to achieve some degree of what Randolph Lewis calls representational sovereignty, 'the right, as well as the ability, for a group of people to depict themselves with their own ambitions at heart' (2006, p. 175). From colonial times until the emergence of contemporary indigenous activism during the late 1980s and early 1990s, structures of domination across public and private spheres had curtailed the possibility of indígenas having a voice (Lucero, 2008, p. 25). Rather than speak for and represent themselves, they were represented by non-indígenas at both local and state levels (Guerrero, 2003, pp. 299–303). These representations coalesced into the stereotype of the indio as a miserable being lacking initiative and prone to drunkenness. Indigenous activists only started to criticise the non-indigenous celebration of the Fiesta del Coraza when they gained a voice through their political mobilisation. Their challenge to non-indigenous common sense is however a work in progress. When I asked William Oña how he would respond to that criticism, he resorted to stereotypical assumptions:

If we dressed as mestizos, we would not be rescuing the old customs. It would not be the same. We are rescuing those customs, acting them as they were in the past. If you imitate a clown, you have to dress like a clown. If I

15 Personal communication, 6 June 2011.

imitate, let's say, a beggar, I have to dress like a beggar. If I imitate a beggar, I won't use a suit. There are people that have criticised [the festivity] and others who have not. I think that if the criticism is constructive, I accept it, but if the criticism is malicious, if it is against the customs ... We have had malicious criticism. On a few occasions, some people have insulted us, but all I can say is that we have to move forward doing the best we can. If not, the custom [in San Rafael] would end.<sup>16</sup>

Significantly, among the eight indigenous communities in the civil parish of San Rafael de la Laguna, only one, Huaycopungo, has revived the Fiesta del Coraza.

According to Susana Oyagata, in 2010 when indígenas participated for the first time in the parish's anniversary celebrations, relations between the two groups were particularly strained:

Racism is still alive here. During the fiestas of last year, 2010, the mestizos criticised everything we did because we were indígenas. There was also a clear separation between the groups. I fought for the participation of the communities. I argued that the civil parish belonged to everyone, not only to the urban centre. When indígenas started to participate in the cultural and sport events, the mestizos said 'how is it that they are going to participate? This is solely ours'. In a meeting (of the civil parish council) we analysed and reflected on this situation. This year [2011], the communities participated for a second time. I think that the mestizos are getting used to our involvement because this time, they did not criticise us. Before, they did not respect us. They said that because we were indígenas, we did not have the capacity to organise the celebrations. Now, after seeing the good work that we have done, they greet us. Before they did not even greet us.<sup>17</sup>

Of course, not all non-indígenas in San Rafael, or for that matter in other places, share the same predisposition towards the indígenas. Analyses that treat indigenous and non-indigenous populations as 'unitary collective actors with common purposes' (Brubaker, 2002, p. 164) hide not only the complex heterogeneity of both populations but also the multiplicity of individual interactions across the ethnic boundary. Yet the non-indigenous families who have historically monopolised political power in San Rafael are not going to cede their status easily. As Susana Oyagata continues, 'in the past, they acted as the owners of the parish. They always wanted to control the fiestas. They thought that they had control over all the population of the communities'.<sup>18</sup> In

16 Personal communication, 5 Oct. 2011.

17 Personal communication, 29 Sep. 2011.

18 Ibid.

the struggle for the political control of the civil parish, indígenas face not only the challenges of electoral campaigning but also the lingering naturalisation of indigenous subordination. They have to subvert long-held discriminatory beliefs that indígenas are not as capable as non-indígenas in intellectual and administrative work. In San Rafael, indígenas have increased their participation in two domains from which they were previously excluded: the political administration of the civil parish and the events celebrating its anniversary. However, they do not participate in the specific part of the broader festival that stages the Coraza, which has remained a non-indigenous affair. Instead of joining this celebration in June, indígenas have opted to host their own Fiesta del Coraza in January, in the community of Huaycopungo across the Pan-American Highway.

### **Performing indigeneity in the Fiesta del Coraza**

Reflecting on the ways in which folkloric festivals have become part of the Andean cultural landscape, Stuart Rockefeller argues that festivals are not fiestas. The latter 'refer to celebrations, normally in some sense religious', whereas festivals 'consist largely of representations of what are taken to be the most significant performative elements of the fiestas' (1999, pp. 120–1). Fiestas might represent the social relations of the participants, but festivals aim to represent a culture, or cultures, as something of worth to an audience, even in those scenarios when performers and audience members might be from the same group of people. In addition, festivals objectify chosen elements of the fiestas, placing them in another context, that of spectacle, a performative event of a certain scale structured around the distinction between performers and audience (*ibid.*, p. 125).

By taking the Fiesta del Coraza out of its original context, both stagings, by the san rafaeleños and by the FICI activists, objectify it. According to Ruiz-Ballesteros and Hernández-Ramírez, 'objectification turns experience and the cultural and environmental elements naturalized in daily practice into objects of reflection and, potentially, into resources for the tourist market' (2010, p. 213). The objectification of culture makes possible its commodification, understood as 'a process by which things come to be evaluated primarily in terms of their exchange value' (Stronza, 2001, p. 270). Yet neither of those festivals is profit driven. What organisers and participants get in return is not money but symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) in the context of the dialogic construction of their identities and alterities.

In June 2006, local and provincial authorities unveiled a monument to the Coraza, a three-metre statue of the character mounted on a horse, at the entrance to the town of San Rafael. The erecting of the monument was enabled

by an initiative of the priestes of that year and received financial support from the Otavalo municipality. In an article covering the event, the newspaper *La Hora* claimed that the Coraza is a 'symbol of the cultural identity of the *pueblo* of San Rafael' (2006, 14 June). In Spanish, *pueblo* may be translated as 'people' or as 'town', but to define *who* is the *pueblo* of San Rafael is not a straightforward task. The *san rafaeleños* living across Ecuador reunite to celebrate the only symbolic resource that makes the town recognisable at the national level: the Fiesta del Coraza. They are performing for themselves even though a few *indígenas* from nearby communities come to watch the parade. While non-*indígenas* of San Rafael commemorate the anniversary of the civil parish, they celebrate the condition of being *san-rafaeleño*, a condition that is until this day ethnically exclusive. *Indígenas* do not self-identify as *san rafaeleños*. In quotidian usage, the term *san-rafaeleño* designates a member of the non-indigenous families that have lived in San Rafael, a town of only a few blocks, in contrast to the rural inhabitants of the surrounding indigenous communities. This division has reproduced a long-standing ideology that has correlated *blanco-ness* (whiteness) with urban space and indigeness with the countryside. *Indígenas* do not participate in the non-indigenous celebration of the Fiesta del Coraza because they cannot celebrate the condition of being *san-rafaeleño*, nor share the joy of celebrating it. This condition relates to the *san rafaeleños'* traditional local dominance, which has lately been challenged by the increasing power of the *indígenas*. In a national context in which provincial individuals have been stereotypically stigmatised as *chagras*, an Ecuadorian expression that designates people as unsophisticated because of their rural and/or provincial origin, the *san rafaeleños* have commodified the Fiesta del Coraza to add symbolic capital to their identities as a local elite. Most of the festivity sponsors have successful military and police careers. Spending from 3,000 to 5,000 US dollars on the event helps them demonstrate to their peers that they have succeeded in the world beyond San Rafael.

Daniel Goldstein argues that spectacles attempt 'to make certain things dramatically visible', constituting symbolic models and mirrors of cultural reality. They have 'a powerful resonance as instruments for maintaining social order and producing social change' (2004, p. 16).<sup>19</sup> Whereas audiences and performers in the non-indigenous staging of the Coraza are from the one group, the audiences for the indigenous presentation of the Coraza in the Kuya Raymi are much broader. Always initiating the parade in cities, either in Otavalo or Cotacachi, the FICI activist-organisers have turned the Coraza into a spectacle. These cities attract considerable numbers of tourists from abroad. The Kuya Raymi also gets attention from the press and the numerous websites

19 Goldstein uses Don Handelman's terms (1990).



run by *otavaleños* (people from Otavalo) abroad.<sup>20</sup> As Auky Anrango, the main organiser of the 2011 Kuya Raymi, argues, their ambitions go beyond the local: 'the recovery that we are doing, revitalising the festivities, is in fact successful. And we want to make this visible not only at the provincial level but at a global level'.<sup>21</sup> The Kuya Raymi is also a didactic performance, a vehicle for teaching indígenas the value of their culture. Emphasising the common patrimony that binds together indigenous performers and audiences, the festival empowers the indígenas as agents of representational sovereignty (Rockefeller, 1999, p. 123–4; Lewis, 2006, p. 175). Contemporary indigenous renditions of the Fiesta del Coraza are driven by a self-conscious indigeneity. Whereas in the past racial/ethnic difference was upheld by non-indígenas, constructing the indio as the negative mirror image of the blanco (Butler, 1981, pp. 245–6; Colloredo-Mansfeld, 1998, p. 186), difference is currently sustained by indígenas, who underline that they have something that the non-indígenas supposedly do not: a genuine culture grounded in place and millenarian tradition. Thus, Marco Guatemal, the FICI President, argues:

I think that all people have culture, but if we focus on the traditional, on what is our own, we have our own festivities. In our worldview, these festivities related to the *Pachamama* (Mother Earth), the sun, the moon, to the whole to which we are linked. In contrast, in the mestizo world this is not valued in the same way. What is valued is man and nothing else. In their festivities, they celebrate the Spanish conquest, the foundation of a parish. In contrast, indigenous festivities have to do with the space in which we are walking. For instance, now we are in the time of sowing and we celebrate the Kuya Raymi.<sup>22</sup>

Self-conscious indigeneity involves a search for, and an articulation of, a defiant political identity, making culture explicitly political to challenge the naturalisation of the social order in terms of indigenous subordination and non-indigenous dominance. Activists also emphasise that indigenous festivities are not theatrical performances. According to Cachiguango, 'Andean celebrations are not mere commoditised folklorisms but celebrations that have a real context, a real world and a real spirituality in which they move and develop'.<sup>23</sup>

Following Rockefeller, it could be argued that the Fiesta del Coraza, as celebrated either by san rafaeleños or by FICI activists, is no longer a fiesta. Those

20 The term *otavaleño* may refer to indigenous and non-indigenous people from the canton. In most contexts, however, the term refers to the former, owing to their global visibility as traders and musicians.

21 Personal communication, 3 Oct. 2011.

22 Personal communication, 3 Oct. 2011.

23 Personal communication, 29 Sep. 2011.

stagings have become part of festivals, which are intentionally orchestrated to convey a political message. As far as that is concerned, this chapter is not looking to argue that these performances of indigeneity or non-indigeneity are simply a matter of rational choice or strategic essentialism (Spivak, 1988). Rather, performance here constitutes a fundamental way of being and becoming indígena and non-indígena. It is through performance that community and culture become tangible expressions of ethnic difference. The dynamics of belonging and exclusion encompassed in the indigenous and non-indigenous celebrations of the Fiesta del Coraza, and the interethnic criticism surrounding them, dialogically construct indigenous and non-indigenous selves and others. Staging the Fiesta del Coraza, san rafaeleños commemorate the civil parish's anniversary and celebrate themselves as a local non-indigenous elite. Staging the Fiesta del Coraza in the Kuya Raymi, indígenas commemorate the agricultural ritual cycle and celebrate their culture. The self-conscious revival that indígenas have put into action is not a direct outcome of primordial traditions and a pre-existent ethnic consciousness; rather, it is a work in progress. As Susana Oyagata argues, indígenas only started to revive the Fiesta del Coraza once they realised that it was theirs:

Indígenas from here already have the vision of somehow re-appropriating [our culture]. A few years ago, the Fiesta del Coraza was very discredited. People did not want to hear anything about it. Some asked, 'Do we want to revive the Coraza? What for?' The evangelicals said that those were pagan festivities. Others asked, 'How are we going to revive a festivity in which we suffered discrimination, humiliation and, at the same time, exploitation? We do not want that'. But then we realised that the festivity belongs to us, that it is our own. From then on we have resumed the celebration.<sup>24</sup>

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24 Personal communication, 29 Sep. 2011.

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