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Contesting State Multiculturalisms: Indigenous Land Struggles in Eastern Panama*

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Abstract. This article examines the implications of Latin America's recent wave of state-embraced multiculturalism for the region's indigenous peoples, arguing that state recognition of indigenous difference is not inevitably empowering for indigenous groups or transformative of nation-states. It utilises data from fieldwork with the Kuna Indians of eastern Panama in order to delineate more precisely the contexts and strategies of indigenous peoples which may serve to push outwards more constrained forms of institutional multiculturalism. It explores the links between Panama's historical nationalist project, contemporary state multiculturalism and ethnically specific forms of mobilisation for land rights and autonomy. It also examines the transformative potential of multiculturalism in the context of the simultaneous implementation of global economic and cultural projects of neo-liberalism.

Introduction

In 1999, publicity campaigns to commemorate the long awaited handover of the Canal to Panamanian control and the closure of US military bases in the country filled Panama's airwaves. In one television advertisement, emblematic figures from the nation's major racial/ethnic groups – *mestizo interioranos*, Afro-Panamanians and indigenous peoples in traditional dress – smiled and waved as voices sang 'We are all Panamanians'.[1] Panama's high point of nationalist resurgence, its first moments of full territorial

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[1] *Interioranos* here refers to individuals from Panama's rural central and western provinces who share a common lifestyle linked to music, dress and a 'cattle culture'. See Stanley Heckadon Moreno, 'La colonización campesina de bosques tropicales en Panamá', in Stanley Heckadon Moreno (ed.), *Colonización y destrucción de bosques en Panamá* (Panama City,

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sovereignty, were simultaneously framed in specific forms of state-promoted multiculturalism. While Panama contains one of Latin America's most racially and ethnically complex populations, in the century since independence its nationalist project has embodied deep tensions between discourses of universal citizenship and equality before the state and the practices of racial and ethnic hierarchy and exclusion that are widespread throughout Latin America.[2] Historically, the indigenous have been an uncomfortable category for elites in Latin America seeking to construct the 'homogeneous' nation. Only in recent decades have Panamanian state discourse and policies of multiculturalism given formal recognition to the *de facto* reality of a multiethnic nation.[3] Perhaps the most visible and dramatic manifestation of Panama's recent embrace of multiculturalism has been what Herlihy terms a 'silent revolution', through which indigenous peoples have gained control of 20 per cent of national territory in the form of *comarcas*, or semi-autonomous territories.[4]

This paper considers the implications of Latin America's contemporary wave of state-embraced multiculturalism for the region's indigenous peoples from the premise that state recognition of indigenous difference does not inevitably advance indigenous material and cultural interests or transform nation-states. Rather, it seeks to explore, from an empirical and nationally grounded perspective, two key aspects of state multiculturalism: first, the contexts within which multiculturalism may deepen specific elements of indigenous empowerment; and second, the links between multiculturalism and the expansion of transformational processes beyond indigenous communities through the formation of inter-ethnic and class-based alliances.

1982). The racial ancestry of *interioranos* tends to range from light-skinned European to *mestizo*, with a more limited African presence.

[2] Montgomery J. Roper, Thomas Perreault and Patrick C. Wilson, 'Indigenous Transformational Movements in Contemporary Latin America: Introduction', *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 30, no. 1 (2003), pp. 5–22; Rachel Sieder, 'Introduction' in Rachel Sieder (ed.), *Multiculturalism in Latin America: Indigenous Rights, Diversity and Democracy* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 1–23.

[3] Despite Panama's ethnic and racial complexity, the national census recognises only self-identified indigenous peoples as distinct ethnic groups and they make up approximately 10 per cent of the population: see the website of the Contraloría General de la República de Panamá at <www.contraloria.gob.pa/Publicaciones/01-02/23.pdf>. In addition, an estimated 50 per cent of Panama's population has some African ancestry: Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (PNUD), *Informe de Desarrollo Humano 2002*, available on the PNUD website <www.undp.org.pa/portal/lang__es/tabID_3465/Default.aspx>.

[4] Peter Herlihy, 'Panama's Quiet Revolution: Comarca Homelands and Indian Rights', *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, vol. 13, no. 3 (1988). Herlihy describes Panama's *comarcas* as semi-autonomous, internally regulated administrative territories under the jurisdiction of the national government. See Stefanie Wickstrom, 'The Politics of Development in Indigenous Panama', *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 30, no. 4 (2003), pp. 43–68, for a comprehensive overview of contemporary development issues faced by Panama's indigenous populations.

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The paper focuses on Panama's Kuna Indians, who have been widely recognised as one of Latin America's most active and empowered indigenous peoples.[5] Within Panama and beyond, Kuna forms of internal governance, commitment to cultural preservation and strategies of political mobilisation have served as a model for other indigenous groups.[6] The Kuna experience therefore, offers an opportunity to explore the ways in which indigenous peoples may press forward the constraints of state multiculturalism from an exceptionally strong base of indigenous organisation.

The Kuna rural population is concentrated in remote eastern Panama in three *comarcas*: the archipelago of Kuna Yala, with some 32,000 residents; and the two mainland *comarcas* of Madungandí and Wargandí, each with a population of approximately 3,000.[7] This paper concentrates on the *comarca* of Madungandí. It incorporates data from 32 interviews carried out in 2000, 2001, and 2003 with traditional authorities and activists in Ipetí, one of the twelve communities that make up Madungandí, as well as with non-indigenous (*interiorano*) colonist leaders residing near Ipetí and government personnel working in the zone. Ipetí was selected as a study site because this community has assumed a leadership role in the Kunas' decades-long struggles to defend Madungandí land rights and has actively engaged the Panamanian state in contentious politics.

The first part of the paper explores the broad parameters of state multiculturalism, and the specific ways in which Panama's historical patterns of state formation and elite nationalist projects have shaped contemporary, top-down state multiculturalism. The following section examines the processes through which the Kuna of Ipetí have engaged with state multiculturalism from below, employing ethnically specific forms of governance and mobilisation to advance land and cultural claims. The paper then goes on to examine the transformative potential of state multiculturalism in the context of the implementation of neoliberalism simultaneously as a economic and ideological project, with a focus on indigenous critical consciousness and inter-ethnic and class-based coalitions.

[5] M. Martinez Mauri, *Médiation et développement: l'émergence des ONG et des passeurs culturels a Kuna Yala* (*Panama*) (Geneva, 2003).

[6] Francisco Herrera, 'Politización de la población indígena en Panamá', in *Actas del II Simposium Nacional de Antropología, Arqueología y Etnohistoria de Panamá, abril de 1971* (Panama, 1972), pp. 291–305; Martinez Mauri, *Mediation et developpement*.

[7] Madungandí is also written as Madugandí in some of the literature and newspaper accounts. Of the total Kuna population of 61,707, approximately half resides outside the rural *comarcas*, primarily in Panama City. The Ngöbe-Buglés, whose 186,861 members are located primarily in the western provinces, are Panama's largest indigenous group. Panama's third largest indigenous group, 22,485 Embarás, is concentrated in the eastern province of Darién. PNUD, *Informe de Desarrollo Humano 2002*.

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Parameters of State Multiculturalism

By the early twenty-first century, most Latin American states had shifted from historical nationalist projects of homogenisation and racial and ethnic exclusion towards state-sanctioned multiculturalisms which incorporate official constitutional recognition and political representation of indigenous peoples.[8] One approach has been to focus on the grassroots-driven characteristics of Latin America's new multiculturalism, linking it to the unintended consequences of neoliberalism and a series of concessions on the part of elites in the face of a regional surge of indigenous collective activism.[9] Over the past two decades, indigenous peoples have mobilised around a wide range of demands including self-determination, autonomy, territorial rights, access to natural resources, political reforms, control over economic development, and reforms of military and police.[10] In the best case scenario, the new multiculturalism, particularly in those nations where indigenous peoples are a numerical majority, offers the indigenous opportunities for political, material and cultural empowerment.

Recent studies have explored the increasing institutionalisation of multiculturalism in Latin America through measures such as constitutional reform and the expansion of opportunities for indigenous participation in formal politics.[11] This expansion should be regarded as necessary, but insufficient, and additional areas need to be considered in order to evaluate the implications of state multiculturalism for Latin America's indigenous peoples.

Figure 1 outlines a continuum of possible outcomes of state multiculturalism. These range from those which serve to reinforce dominant political and economic structures and racial inequalities, to transformative and empowering consequences for indigenous peoples in five key areas: (1) formal political rights and participation; (2) indigenous land rights and autonomy; (3) indigenous material welfare; (4) critical consciousness; and (5) inter-ethnic alliances. Outcomes at the transformative end suggest processes that result from bottom-up indigenous mobilisation for multiculturalism

[8] Willem Assies, Gemma van der Haar, and Andre Hoekema (eds.), *The Challenge of Diversity: Indigenous Peoples and Reform of the State in Latin America* (Amsterdam, 2000); Donna Lee Van Cott, *The Friendly Liquidation of the Past: The Politics of Diversity in Latin America* (Pittsburgh, 2000).

[9] See Alison Brysk, *From Tribal Village to Global Village: Indian Rights and International Relations in Latin America*, (Stanford, 2000); Deborah Yashar, 'Contesting Citizenship: Indigenous Movements and Democracy in Latin America', *Comparative Politics*, vol. 31, no. 1 (1998), pp. 23–42; Van Cott, *The Friendly Liquidation of the Past*; and Sieder, 'Introduction'.

[10] Jean E. Jackson and Kay B. Warren (eds.), *Indigenous Movements, Self-Representation and the State in Latin America* (Austin, 2002).

[11] Assies et al., *The Challenge of Diversity*; Van Cott, *The Friendly Liquidation of the Past*; Yashar, 'Contesting Citizenship'.

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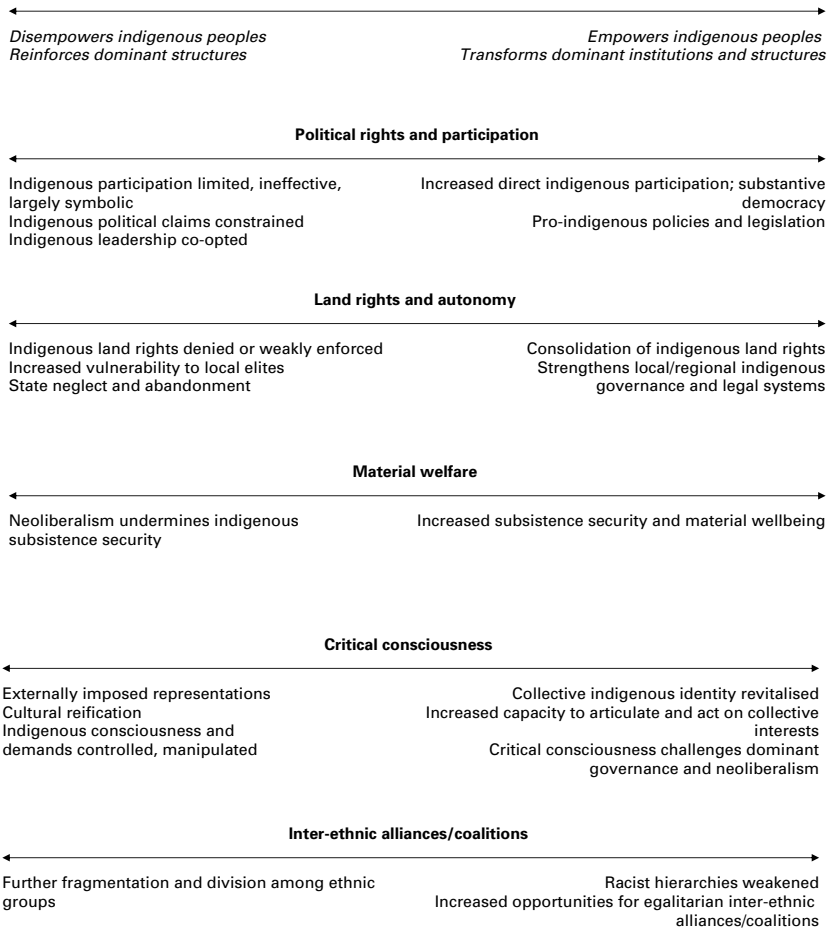


Fig. 1. *Continuum of Outcomes of State Multiculturalism.*

and which serve to advance it further, while outcomes at the disempowering end imply the ascendancy of top-down, elite projects.

At the transformative end of formal political rights and participation, state multiculturalism opens space for the expression of indigenous voices and agency. Substantive democracy and direct indigenous participation in national government expand, facilitating pro-indigenous policies and legislation. Such processes may not only benefit indigenous peoples, but also bring more fundamental shifts in the nature and processes of democracy, citizenship and development in Latin America.[12] Rachel Sieder suggests

[12] See Gerardo Otero, 'The Indian Question in Latin America: Class, State, and Ethnic Identity Construction', *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2003), pp. 248–66; Jackson and Warren, *Indigenous Movements*; Sieder 'Introduction'.

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that 'recognition of different ethnic groups by the state implies, at least potentially, a new national project'.[13]

A second facet of empowering multiculturalism is indigenous autonomy, most commonly achieved through the consolidation of indigenous land rights and local and regional-level governance and legal systems. Advances in indigenous control over land and natural resources, as well as increases in external and state aid targeted at indigenous peoples under multiculturalism, may in turn strengthen indigenous peoples' subsistence security and material wellbeing. Finally, transformative state multiculturalism brings substantive diversity and strengthens indigenous critical consciousness. Internally, indigenous collective identity is revitalised, and indigenous capacity collectively to articulate and act on interests is strengthened. More broadly, indigenous critical consciousness and practices – consensus-based decision-making, views of authority as service, and stewardship of land and natural resources – may challenge dominant forms of governance and hegemonic precepts of neoliberalism.[14] Historical racist representations and hierarchies may be reshaped, and opportunities for egalitarian inter-ethnic alliances/coalitions may increase.

A more cautious view of the new state multiculturalism, however, characterises it as a top-down project whose content has been largely co-opted by governing elites and whose specific, constrained forms limit a more profound indigenous empowerment and thus help to reinforce neoliberalism as an economic and cultural project.[15] While state forms of multiculturalism appear to offer greater inclusion, they may also incorporate more subtle exclusionary processes: discursive and power-based reassertions of control on the part of elites in the face of collective indigenous mobilisation. As Figure 1 suggests, at the disempowering end of the continuum of multiculturalism, indigenous participation in formal politics is limited and largely symbolic. Dominant forms of political culture undermine the effectiveness of indigenous mobilisation in the formal political arena and co-opt indigenous leadership. In such cases pro-indigenous policies and legislation are highly constrained by neoliberalism. Charles Hale notes that in Guatemala, indigenous claims which extend beyond state recognition of the 'right to difference', to demands for redistribution of land and natural resources (which would more deeply impact the functioning of markets) are

[13] Sieder, 'Introduction', p. 6.

[14] Assies et al., *The Challenge of Diversity*; Deborah J. Yashar, 'Democracy, Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge in Latin America', *World Politics*, vol. 52, no. 1 (1999), pp. 76–104.

[15] Charles R. Hale, 'Does Multiculturalism Menace? Governance, Cultural Rights and the Politics of Identity in Guatemala', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 34, no. 3 (2002), pp. 485–524.

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'not permitted' and labelled by state actors as culturally 'extremist'.[16] In terms of indigenous territorial and political autonomy, even in those countries where states have formally recognised indigenous land rights, such rights may be weakly enforced in practice and used to justify state neglect and abandonment. Without effective control over land and natural resources, local indigenous leaderships may be vulnerable to the machinations of local elites and/or transnational corporations, particularly as parallel advances of neoliberalism deepen pressures on indigenous subsistence security.

In the fourth area of critical consciousness, the disempowering end of state multiculturalism may bring new externally imposed representations of indigenous peoples and cultural reification. Critical perspectives suggest that the new state-sanctioned multiculturalism seeks to reconstitute the Indian citizen-subject, regulating and rationalising conduct and the proliferation of quasi-economic models of action. Similarly, specific types of indigenous consciousness, demands and forms of mobilisation (those compatible with the neoliberal model) may be rewarded with official recognition and material incentives while more transformative indigenous discourses and claims are punished or marginalised.[17] Finally, multiculturalism may reinforce a fragmentation and division among the poor and oppressed in Latin America, weakening their collective ability to put pressure on the state for change.

This paper suggests that the content and processes of state multiculturalism are shaped by the mutual engagement of top-down and grassroots multiculturalism, and will coalesce at varying points along the transformative/disempowering continuum outlined in Figure 1, depending on the national context, the relative power of national elites and indigenous peoples, and the broader environment of economic and cultural globalisation. The section that follows thus focuses on several pre-conditions – patterns of state formation, historical indigenous-state relations and intra-elite relations – that shape the context in which state multiculturalism may move toward the transformative.

Panama's Historical Nationalist Project

For more than a century, national elites have struggled to define Panama, created through foreign intervention and bisected for over 90 years by the US-controlled Canal Zone, as more than a 'fictitious country'. Racial hierarchies have been at the centre of these efforts.[18] Following independence

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] Peter A. Szok, *La Ultima Gaviota: Liberalism and Nostalgia in Early Twentieth-Century Panama* (Westport, 2001).

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in 1903, Panama's elites envisioned the country as a transnational outpost, linked economically and culturally to Europe through trade and services in the trans-isthmian zone; its status and prestige validated by whiteness beyond the borders of the nation-state. A series of legal restrictions placed on immigrant non-Spanish speaking blacks, Asians and North Africans from 1904 to the 1940s were central to this effort to 'whiten' the nation.[19] By the 1940s, a second elite nationalist project had emerged which linked national identity to the Hispanic as embodied in the dress, music and traditions of *mestizos interioranos*, even as Indians, blacks and Asians continued to be largely 'unimagined' in elite nationalist discourse.[20] National identity was also defined by what was excluded: to be 'Panamanian' was to be not black, not Indian, not Asian. In addition, Panamanian elites were concerned that the Kunas of San Blas (later Kuna Yala) were resisting their nationalist project by, for example, flying the Colombian flag in the post-independence period.[21] While elites sought to 'civilise' the Kunas in this early nationalist period, they did not practise the more extreme forms of repression against indigenous peoples that occurred in other Central American nations.

This historical top-down nationalist project did not advance unimpeded, however. In fact, it was weakened by structural and geopolitical constraints, as well as resistance by the Kunas themselves. Panamanian sovereignty was limited by the nation's continued high levels of economic, political and military dependence on the United States.[22] Panama's 'geographic vocation', the concentration of elite economic activities in the transnational commerce and service sectors of the trans-isthmian zone, also likely served to lessen economic and integrationist pressures on the Kunas in all three of the reserves of the time, facilitating a strong degree of Kuna cultural and physical

[19] Virginia Arango Durling, *La inmigración prohibida en Panamá y sus prejuicios raciales* (Panama, 1999). A portion of Panama's Afro-Panamanian population arrived during the colonial era, while large numbers of Afro-Antilleans later migrated to Panama to work on the railroad and the canal in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These Antillean migrants faced discrimination, as well as limited paternalism, in both the US-controlled Canal Zone and in the broader Panamanian society: Roy Simon Bryce-Laporte, 'Varias ideas sobre el significado de la experiencia del grupo de origén afro-antillano de Panamá para los estudios afro-americanos', in *Actas del IV Simposium Nacional de Antropología, Arqueología y Etnohistoria de Panamá* (Panama, 1973), pp. 31–57.

[20] Steve Ropp, 'Panama: Militarism and Imposed Transition', in Thomas W. Walker and Ariel Armony (eds.), *Repression, Resistance, and Democratic Transition* (Delaware, 2000), pp. 110–30; Szok, *La Ultima Gaviota*.

[21] Herrera, 'Politización'.

[22] Ropp argues, however, that the relationship between Panamanian elites and US officials was more complex than simple US domination and a unilateral exercise of North American power, as Panamanian elites also attempted to utilise the United States to support their own personal and class-based interests: Ropp, 'Panama: Militarism and Imposed Transition'.

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autonomy in the eastern rainforests into the 1960s. Kuna leaders from San Blas in particular utilised the relative weakness of Panama's nationalist project to carry out symbolic and strategic struggles to resist this top-down project and dominant representations of their culture as 'backward' or 'uncivilised' and to consolidate territorial control.[23] The most salient example of such resistance occurred in 1925 when the Panamanian government intensified pressures towards forced cultural assimilation. San Blas residents responded with a small-scale uprising and, with support from the United States, forced a government retreat.[24] In the following years, leaders in San Blas strategically cultivated ties with US officials and corporations as a counterweight to Panamanian nationalist pressures and a buffer against state repression, as well as to gain ethnically bounded material support through collective contracts for Kuna men to work on US military bases and transnational banana plantations.[25] This Kuna Revolution of 1925 has come to form part of a broader Kuna narrative of successful resistance to the state reproduced beyond San Blas.[26] In Ipetí, contemporary authorities and activists leaders refer to this event as inspiration for contemporary struggles for land and autonomy.[27]

The coup of General Omar Torrijos in 1968, which inaugurated 21 years of military rule, brought a resurgence of Panama's national-identity project and a shift toward a limited, corporatist form of multiculturalism. The Torrijos regime attempted to build a base of support with a nationalist-populist ideology that reconfigured and expanded 'Panamanian' national

[23] On historical Kuna resistance in the Bayano Region, see José Manuel Reverte, *Río Bayano: un ensayo geográfico e histórico sobre la región de mañana* (Panama City, 1961), and Eric J. Moeller, 'Identity and Millenarian Discourse: Kuna Indian Villages in an Ethnic Border Land', PhD dissertation, Chicago, 1997.

[24] For a detailed account of this uprising see James Howe, *A People Who Would Not Kneel: Panama, the United States, and the San Blas Kuna* (Washington, DC, 1998).

[25] US government influence on racial and ethnic equality in Panama has been mixed at best. While the United States offered a degree of paternalistic support for the Kuna, in the Canal Zone US officials codified forms of racial discrimination against Afro-Antillean employees. See Michael L. Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal: Panama, 1904–1981* (Pittsburgh, 1985).

[26] In contrast to Panama's indigenous peoples, ethnically-based political mobilisation of Afro-Panamanians in recent decades has been more sporadic. The less solidified agenda of Afro-Panamanians has been linked to continued identification with home islands, the wide diffusion of African ancestry in Panamanian society, strong US economic and cultural influence over Antillean consciousness, and Torrijos' strategy to demobilise Afro-Panamanians through incorporation in educational, government and military institutions: see Eva T. Thorne, 'Ethnic and Racial Political Organization in Latin America,' in Mayra Buvinic, Jaqueline Mazza and Ruthanne Deutsch (eds.), *Social Inclusion and Economic Development in Latin America* (Baltimore, 2004), pp. 307–34; Gerardo Maloney F. and George Priestly, 'El grupo antillano en el proceso político panameño', in *Actas del IV Simposium Nacional de Antropología, Arqueología y Etnohistoria de Panamá* (Panama, 1973), pp. 307–27; and Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal*.

[27] Interviews with Ipetí traditional authorities and activists.

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identity.[28] Torrijos opened spaces of political power to *mestizo* military officers, redefined West Indians as 'Afro-Panamanians', and promoted the controlled, ethnically-based mobilisation of indigenous peoples.[29] He also gave state support for new forms of pan-indigenous governance modelled after Kuna gatherings and encouraged Indians to move further on to the stage as political subjects, albeit within the limitations of an integrationist and authoritarian state. The corporatist multiculturalism of the Torrijos regime was embodied in Panama's 1972 Constitution. Article 120 stated that the state would give 'special attention to *campesinos* and the indigenous in order to promote their economic, social and political participation in national life', while Article 123 guaranteed the indigenous the reserve territories and collective property necessary for economic wellbeing.[30]

As Torrijos sought to bring Indians voluntarily into the 'nation' in physical and cultural terms through state recognition and the expansion of state services into rural areas with indigenous populations, his vision of national development also promoted mining and dam projects that were strongly opposed by indigenous peoples.[31] This strengthening of the developmentalist state directly impacted Madungandí in 1973, when the Torrijos regime obtained funding from the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to launch the Bayano hydro-electric dam project. Kuna leaders apparently acceded to the project, which flooded some 80 per cent of Kuna reserve land in Madungandí.[32] The dam project forced a large-scale resettlement of villages to higher ground and resulted in

[28] Van Cott's comparative study of Bolivia and Colombia suggests that crises of legitimacy and governability move political elites to contemplate constitutional reforms to bring indigenous peoples into state structures. The experience of Panama suggests, however, that these new forms of state multiculturalism are not only a defensive response on the part of political elites. Elites may also see the politics of indigenous inclusion as an opportunity to build a base of political power to bolster legitimacy further and aid them in competition with other national and transnational elites. See Van Cott, *The Friendly Liquidation of the Past.*

[29] For discussions of the Torrijos era see George Priestly, *Military Government and Popular Participation in Panama* (Boulder, 1986); Chris N. Gjording, *Conditions Not of Their Choosing: The Guaymi Indians and Mining Multinationals in Panama* (Washington, 1991); Ropp, 'Panama: Militarism and Imposed Transition'; Conniff, *Black Labor on a White Canal.*

[30] Santander Tristán Donoso, *Regimén de propiedad de pueblos indígenas* (Panama, 1993). See also Françoise Guionneau-Sinclair, *Legislación amerindia de Panamá* (Panama, 1991).

[31] During this period, the Ngöbe, with assistance from the Catholic Church, organised to oppose the establishment of a copper mine in their territory: see Gjording, *Conditions Not of Their Choosing.*

[32] Ipetí residents offered several explanations for this lack of more organised opposition to the dam. Several secretaries suggest that government officials deceived Kuna leaders about the true impact of the dam. Other informants emphasised that resistance would have been futile against the powerful institutions supporting the project. For an excellent detailed account of the impact of the Bayano hydro-electric dam project, see Alaka Wali, *Kilowatts and Crisis: Hydroelectric Power and Social Dislocation in Eastern Panama* (Boulder, 1989).

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significant economic and psychological loss for Kuna communities, which resonate to the present day in discourse and struggle in Madungandí.[33]

In addition to the physical and cultural disruption of the hydro-electric dam project, the expansion of cattle ranches and beef exports in the western provinces, as well as the state-funded extension of the Pan-American Highway eastward, drew thousands of non-indigenous *interiorano* migrants, also known as colonists (*colonos*), to the Bayano zone that surrounds Madungandí in the 1970s and 1980s. These colonists settled in areas to the south of the Madungandí reserve and soon outnumbered the Kuna three to one.[34] Settlement of the Bayano zone in these decades reinforced patterns of racial/ethnic residential segregation. In the Ipetí zone, for example, three neighbouring, but distinct communities – of Kunas, Embará Indians and colonists – were consolidated. The *interiorano* colonists, whose culture had been linked to 'Panamanian' identity from the 1940s onwards, also served as indirect agents of the nationalist project, both in cultural terms and by developing new economic activities (logging, cattle ranching and commerce) which linked the Bayano zone more closely to national and global markets.[35]

Government policies in the 1970s and 1980s also supported these processes of cultural and economic integration of the Bayano zone through the promotion of migration, participation in logging activities and subsidies for cattle ranching. At the same time, however, state policy also recognised ethnic difference in the region and provided differential treatment to the zone's three major racial/ethnic groups. The Torrijos regime, for example, negotiated different compensation agreements for flooded land during the hydro-electric dam project with the Kunas, colonists and the Embarás.[36] The military regime reaffirmed state support for ethnically-based land rights, specifically by formally recognising Kuna control over the then reserve of Madungandí with the 1976 Farallón Accord. The Torrijos regime also gave recognition to and encouraged reserve-level meetings (*congresos generales*), in Madungandí and elsewhere, as a culturally bounded form of governance.

[33] Wali, *Kilowatts and Crisis*; and interviews with Ipetí traditional authorities and activists.

[34] Consorcio Louis Berger International Inc. and Delca Consultores S.A., *Informe de fase 1. Diagnóstico. Volumén 1. Tomos 1 y 2. Manejo integral de la cuenca del Río Bayano, subcuenca del Río Majé y áreas adyacentes al embalse* (Panama City, Panama, 1998).

[35] For a discussion of emerging pressures that these new economic activities placed on the environment and patterns of stratification among the colonists, see Alaka Wali, 'The Transformation of a Frontier: State and Regional Relationships in Panama, 1972–1990', *Human Organization*, vol. 52, no. 2 (1993), pp. 115–29.

[36] Of the three displaced ethnic groups, the Kuna were the most organised and persistent in their negotiations with the government and received up to $4,500 each in compensation payments. In addition, General Torrijos signed an agreement known as the Farallón Accord with the Bayano Kuna, extending the boundaries of the reserve a further 28,120 hectares for a total of 180,000 hectares of land. See Wali, *Kilowatts and Crisis*.

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Contemporary State Multiculturalism

In the period since the US invasion of Panama in 1989, indigenous activism, electoral competition, and a shift in the discourse and policies of powerful multilateral lending institutions have further institutionalised state-sanctioned multiculturalism in Panama. While a study by the United Nations Development Programme has found that discrimination against Afro-Panamanians, indigenous peoples and Panamanians of Chinese descent is still widespread in daily life, state discourse and practices toward the indigenous have become less openly racist.[37] In the elite nationalist project the content of 'Panamanian' has expanded to include racial and ethnic difference, albeit represented in limited and often gendered and exoticised forms such as the Kuna women prominently featured in promotional materials for tourism. This contemporary top-down configuration of state multiculturalism has focused on a specific set of perceived 'benign' cultural markers of indigenous difference, most prominently traditional dress. It rarely acknowledges past or present patterns of discrimination and posits, beneath a 'surface layer' of diversity, a more intangible common national identity and essential harmony of interests. As with the earlier corporatist multiculturalism of the Torrijos era, Panamanian elites have supported the state multiculturalism of the post-democracy period to the degree to which they believe that it can be controlled and complements, or at least is compatible with, the broader economic development model of economic liberalisation and deepening linkages to the global economy. As Howe notes, the post-invasion Panamanian regimes have attempted to keep the Kuna, in particular, quiet, cooperative and appealing to tourists.[38]

In addition, by the mid-1990s, international financial institutions, the World Bank and the IDB, began to pressurise Latin American governments towards recognising collective indigenous land rights.[39] Whereas, in the 1970s World Bank policy had called for the dismantlement of communal landholdings, two decades later, it had shifted its policies to give greater voice and participation (in theory at least) to indigenous groups in project design and implementation, and to support indigenous collective landholdings as

[37] PNUD, *Informe de Desarrollo Humano*.

[38] James Howe, 'The Kuna of Panama: Continuing Threats to Land and Autonomy', in David Maybury-Lewis (ed.), *The Politics of Ethnicity: Indigenous Peoples in Latin America States* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 81–105.

[39] This broader shift of World Bank and IDB policy toward recognition of indigenous land rights in the 1990s is linked to the rise of transnational indigenous advocacy networks and their critiques of the past development projects supported by these institutions, as well as the adoption of a discourse of environmental sustainability by these institutions, which privileges indigenous peoples as environmental stewards rather than destroyers. On this, see Jonathan A. Fox and L. David Brown (eds.), *The Struggle for Accountability: The World Bank, NGOs, and Grassroots Movements* (Boston, 1998).

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more cost effective and environmentally sustainable in certain circumstances.[40] The policy shift by the international financial institutions (IFIs) in support of indigenous land rights also has important limitations, however. They have adopted multiculturalism, not to replace policies and projects that advance economic liberalisation, but rather as additive measures.[41] In fact, the support of the IFIs for collective land rights in Panama has been framed as a type of 'indigenous exceptionalism'. Panama's indigenous peoples are represented by state institutions as culturally bounded and separate, seeking only minimal levels of material subsistence through frozen or slowly changing community practices in harmony with the natural environment. Therefore, this new institutional recognition of the collective over the individual, of social meaning over profits in indigenous communities, is framed as a limited and isolated 'exception' that does not fundamentally challenge the (almost) universality of markets, consumption, individualism and individual property rights that undergird the IFIs' broader neoliberal model. State recognition of Kuna models of governance and collective land rights is perceived as isolated and non-transferable to other populations. It is halted in its advance and its challenge to dominant economic and cultural models by reified barriers of cultural difference. To give one example, in the late 1990s the IDB funded the $80 million Darien Sustainable Development Program, which has supported demarcation of Madungandí and collective land titling for Kuna and Embará indigenous groups in Darién, while simultaneously promoting individual land titling and further market integration for the region's non-indigenous population.[42]

Multiculturalism from the Bottom-Up

This discussion has highlighted the nationally and historically specific circumstances, as well as transnational policy shifts towards indigenous

[40] See Klaus Deininger and Hans Binswanger, 'The Evolution of the World Bank's Land Policy: Principles, Experience, and Future Challenges,' *World Bank Research Observer*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1999), pp. 247–76; Roger Plant and Søren Hvalkof, *Land Titling and Indigenous Peoples* (Washington, 2001); Shelton H. Davis, 'Indigenous Peoples, Poverty and Participatory Development: The Experience of the World Bank in Latin America', in Sieder (ed.), *Multiculturalism in Latin America*. The World Bank's 2005 operational directive and bank policy 4.10, which replaced a similar 1991 operational directive (4.20), states that the World Bank will only provide financing for projects that affect indigenous peoples when a process of free, prior, and informed consultation results in broad community support to the project by the affected Indigenous Peoples' on the World Bank website at: http://wblno018.worldbank.org/Institutional/Manuals/OpManual.nsf/0/0F7D6F3F04DD703985256 72C007D08ED?OpenDocument.

[41] World Bank. *Panama Poverty Assessment Priorities and Strategies for Poverty Reduction. Volume I: Main Report* (Washington, 1999).

[42] Potlatch, *Dinámica socio-demográfica y tenencia de la tierra* (Panama, 1998).

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rights, which have influenced top-down state multiculturalism. The range of outcomes of contested multiculturalisms is, of course, also shaped by the actions and strategies of indigenous groups themselves. In Panama, a series of global, as well as internal, ethnically specific factors have enabled the Kunas of Ipetí and Madungandí more generally to push outwards the limits of state multiculturalism in the areas of formal political participation, territorial control, material wellbeing and critical consciousness. In discourse and practice Madungandí and Ipetí leaders have contested the patterns of racial hierarchy and exclusion in Panamanian nationalism, seeking simultaneously to conserve spaces of cultural difference while steadily pushing forward opportunities for participation in formal political arenas.

In late 1988, 30 colonist families moved into the Madungandí reserve for the first time. Following the US invasion of December 1989, approximately 100 more families took advantage of the collapse of government authority and moved into the reserve close to the community of Ipetí.[43] Over the next two decades the leadership of Madungandí, and Ipetí in particular, dedicated substantial time and resources to putting pressure on the government on two key issues: the removal of the colonists, by force if necessary, and state recognition of Madungandí as a *comarca* in order to provide greater legal protection and autonomy.[44]

During the 1990s, Ipetí residents took the lead in a series of protests against the presence of colonists in the reserve and in favour of *comarca* status. On the morning of 28 April 1993, for example, dozens of Ipetí men, carrying bows and arrows and shotguns, gathered on the Pan-American Highway.[45] The men blocked the highway with tree trunks and overturned vehicles, demanding that the government remove the colonists occupying Kuna land and that Madungandí should be granted full *comarca* status. Police and government officials rushed to the scene and the protestors forcibly detained the governor of the province of Panama and the mayor of the nearby town of Chepo. Police fired shotgun pellets at the protestors. Only after the government agreed to form an *ad hoc* commission and negotiate Kuna demands did the protestors release the government officials and unblock the highway. While no one was injured in the 1993 Ipetí protests,

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] Interviews with an Ipetí *cacique* and participants in the protests. Madungandí leaders have also emphasised the colonist problem strongly in their discourse with the news media over the past fifteen years: see Rogelio Alba, 'Madungandí solicita demarcación de tierras', *La Prensa*, 9 November 1992; José Quintero de León, 'Indígenas toman rehenes', *La Prensa*, 29 April 1993; Yasmina Reyes, 'Indígenas desalojarán a colonos de Bayano', *La Prensa*, 17 January 1994; Arcadio Bonilla, 'Las luchas de Madungandí', *La Prensa*, 2 August 1996; and José González Pinilla, 'Families campesinas de Loma Bonita', *La Prensa*, 22 April 2005.

[45] Quintero de León, 'Indígenas toman rehenes'; and interviews with Ipetí protest participants.

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in a similar action in August 1996, thirty Ipetí protestors armed with shotguns and rifles wounded five police officers.[46] These protest actions and violence typically drew immediate attention from the news media and government officials. The restoration of democracy has led to intense competition between Panamanian political parties, rooted less in ideological differences than in struggles for control of state resources, power and individual prestige.[47] In this hyper-competitive political context, government officials attempted to maintain a degree of electoral support from their two major constituent groups, the Kunas and the *interioranos*, by opting for negotiation over force in response to the Ipetí protests, and by delaying both the application of coercive measures against those non-Kuna who occupy Madungandí land as well as approval of the *comarca* law.[48] In the mid-1990s the World Bank and IDB began to pressure the Panamanian government to support indigenous land rights and to act to resolve such colonist-indigenous land conflicts, holding out, as an incentive, funding for schemes such as the Darien Sustainable Development Programme.[49] These efforts, combined with Kuna lobbying campaigns in the National Assembly, contributed to the approval of Madungandí's *comarca* status in 1996. In the following years, the Panamanian government approved two additional *comarcas*, the Ngöbe-Buglé *comarca* (1997) and the Kuna Wargandí *comarca* (2001), which extend over a total of 600,000 hectares and formalise indigenous peoples' control of 20 per cent of Panama's national territory.[50]

The Madungandí *comarca* charter grants the Kuna collective control of some 180,000 hectares of land and provides the Kuna leadership with a substantial degree of autonomy, recognising Kuna governance structures as the legitimate and final authority within the *comarca*. Nonetheless, all

[46] José Quintero de León, 'Indígenas enardecidos hieren a cinco policías', *La Prensa*, 6 August 1996.

[47] Orlando J. Perez, *Post-Invasion Panama: The Challenges of Democratization in the New World Order* (Lanham, 2000); Enoch Adames Mayorga, 'Marco jurídico institucional de la gobernabilidad democrática', in Carlos Correa G., Enoch Adames Mayorga, and Raúl Leís (eds.), *Gobernabilidad democrática y seguridad ciudadana en Centroamérica: el caso de Panamá* (Managua, 2001), pp. 89–160.

[48] Wali, 'Transformation of a Frontier'.

[49] Interview with a Kuna legislative adviser, Darién Sustainable Development Programme personnel, and H. Huertas, *Diagnóstico de la situación legal de las tierras de las comunidades indígenas de Alto Bayano: II parte* (Panama, 1999). For a discussion of policy shifts at the Inter-American Development Bank, see A. Deruyttere, *Indigenous Peoples and Sustainable Development: The Role of the Inter-American Development Bank* (Washington, 1997).

[50] The Ngöbe-Buglé *comarca*, however, incorporated only half of the land requested by the group. In addition, almost half of the Embarás still live outside the boundaries of their *comarcas* and continue to campaign for recognition of smaller-sized *tierras colectivas*: see Philip D. Young and John R. Bort, 'Ngobe Adaptive Responses to Globalization in Panama', in William M. Loker (ed.), *Globalization and the Rural Poor in Latin America*, (Boulder, 1999), pp. 111–36; Wickstrom, 'Politics of Development'.

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inhabitants of the *comarca* are also subject to the constitution of Panama and the laws of the republic.[51] Under the terms of the charter, the colonists are allowed to remain in the *comarca*, but are not allowed to expand, sell or transfer their landholdings. Ipetí leaders assert, however, that the colonists have not obeyed these restrictions and that new colonist families have invaded the *comarca*. The Ipetí-colonist conflicts have therefore continued to simmer over the past ten years, and Ipetí residents have employed direct action and violence against the colonists on at least four occasions. In the most recent of these incidents, in April 2005, a group of armed Ipetí residents confronted colonists, who they claimed had extended their landholdings in the *comarca*. They tied up one male head of household, hitting his face with a stick, and burned down the houses of three colonists.[52]

In addition to these forms of mobilisation at the community level, Ipetí traditional authorities and activists have participated in regional, national and transnational indigenous rights movements. At the regional level, for example, they have sought to deepen coordination with the other eleven communities of the *comarca*, a process which dates from the 1930s.[53] Ipetí and other Madungandí communities have, for the past several decades, synchronised common strategies on issues such as the removal of the colonists, demarcation of the *comarca*, and ongoing claims for compensation for land lost with the hydro-electric dam project.

As can be seen, Ipetí mobilisation over the past decade has been in part a defensive response to the pressures of non-indigenous migration and a longer-term process of capitalist expansion into Panama's eastern hinterlands. In addition, Ipetí leaders have attempted to take advantage of new opportunities created through Panama's re-democratisation and state multiculturalism. Rather then withdrawing into the ethnically delimited space of the *comarca*, Ipetí leaders have combined their increased autonomy with ongoing engagement with state agencies, attempting to expand Kuna influence over the processes and to develop direct ethnic representation in Panama's dominant political institutions well beyond the symbolic. At the *comarca* level, Madungandí leaders have lobbied government agencies for the right to elect their own legislator and mayor, despite Madungandí's relatively small population.[54] Whenever possible Madungandí *caciques* also

[51] Gaceta Oficial, *Por el cual se adopta la Carta Orgánica Administrativa de la Comarca Kuna de Madugandí*, 8 December 1996.

[52] González Pinilla, 'Familias campesinas'.

[53] Moeller, *Identity and Millenarian Discourse*; and interviews with Ipetí leaders. On the shift of power and authority from the extended household to more formalised authority at the village level in Kuna Yala, see James Howe's excellent study, *The Kuna Gathering: Contemporary Village Politics in Panama* (Austin, 1986).

[54] Gustavo A. Aparicio O., 'Indígenas kunas piden ejercer voto en Chepo', *Panamá América*, 1 March 2004.

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bypass intermediate levels of power and insist on direct and personal access to top government nexuses of power, in particular the presidency.[55] In addition, Ipetí leaders have been able to parlay relatively strong ethnic solidarity and centralised leadership into political influence, as they have employed their ability to exert strong influence over voting patterns at the community level as a bargaining tool with politicians.

One concern linked to the adoption of multiculturalism by Latin American governments is that government institutions and actors with their greater access to material resources, as well as control over work and income opportunities, may use multiculturalism to build or reinforce ties of patronage and dependency with indigenous groups and to co-opt indigenous leadership. Ipetí interactions with external government agencies do appear to incorporate elements of the dominant political culture in Panama, in particular personalism and patronage. Ipetí informants report that during the 1999 and 2004 electoral campaigns, debates within the community over which political parties to support focused less on political ideology than on assessing which parties would provide the most material resources and services to the community. To date, however, Ipetí residents have managed the complexity of distinct external and internal political cultures fairly successfully. Just as Ipetí leaders have not sought to bring their relatively egalitarian, consensus model of internal governance into Panama's broader political structures, so they have sought also to shield internal governance to a degree from dominant political forms. Ipetí leaders, for example, oversee and have even limited the contact that government officials may have with residents.[56] In asserting their roles as political mediators, these leaders seek to prevent the efforts of political elites to divide and manipulate indigenous communities as has occurred among the Ngöbe-Buglé.[57]

On the intra-community level, Kuna community-level leaders (*sailas*) and *comarca*-level leaders who interact with government officials (*caciques*) are selected by men on the basis of their knowledge of Kuna religion and culture and abilities in oral persuasion and consensus building.[58] The Kuna grassroots, in turn, enforces control and accountability over their leaders through frequent community and *comarca*-level gatherings, moral and religious suasion, and the option of removing from office leaders who act without

[55] Interviews with an Ipetí cacique and activists and government personnel of the Darién Sustainable Development Program.

[56] Fieldwork observations; and interviews with government personnel of the Darién Sustainable Development Programme and personnel from the Instituto Nacional de Recursos Naturales Renovables (INRENARE).

[57] Francisco Herrera, *Componente indígena del proyecto Corredor Biológico Panamá. Informe Final*, n/d.

[58] Howe, *The Kuna Gathering*; and Moeller, *Identity and Millenarian Discourse*.

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community approval.[59] Informants also suggest that, to date, the leadership of Ipetí, and Madungandi more broadly, has largely avoided co-optation or corruption of their leadership by government officials and political parties.[60] This internal governance structure, both rooted and evolving, has enabled Madungandí leaders to maintain an outwardly uniform set of demands towards the state and to sustain lobbying and protest campaigns over three decades. There is a striking consistency between claims made by Ipetí leaders in the early 1990s and their discourse over a decade later on land disputes, for example.[61]

It is important, however, not to conflate the outward unity of Kuna discourse and claims to the state with an assumption that a unitary set of interests for a particular indigenous group can be identified and agreed upon *a priori*. In practice, indigenous groups may be permeated with inequalities of gender, age and social class. In fact, the very articulation and definition of group interests, even within a relatively homogeneous and egalitarian group like the Kuna, is a process of negotiation or imposition in a context of power differences. Such relationships of power are in turn influenced not only by cultural traditions and patterns of economic development, but also by state sanctioning of specific forms of indigenous leadership. With the approval of Madungandí's *comarca* charter, male *sailas* and *caciques* and an intermediary group of bilingual 'secretaries' have been accorded state recognition, while the exclusion of women from formal community and *comarca* governance has been further codified.[62] The male leadership of Ipetí has prioritised consolidating control of the *comarca*, while issues of concern to women, such as declining male participation in agriculture and family subsistence, have been given less emphasis in interactions with the state.[63]

An additional element that has enabled Ipetí residents to press the state multiculturalism process toward the empowering and transformative is geographical and cultural autonomy. Madungandí leaders, while not seeking separate state status, have asserted the right to limit or exclude the state presence within the physical boundaries of their territory. Leaders of the Madungandí community of Aguas Claras have, for example, openly

[59] In contrast, among the Ngöbe, the transition from a largely extended family model of governance to a more centralised, *comarca*-wide governance structure has brought serious conflicts and internal division and impeded the political effectiveness of the Ngöbe in their negotiations with the state: see Young and Bort, 'Ngobe Adaptive Responses'.

[60] Miguel Bartolomé and Alicia Barabas, 'Recursos culturales y autonomía étnica. La democrácia participativa de los kuna de Panamá', *Alteridades*, vol. 8, no. 16 (1998); Moeller, *Identity and Millenarian Discourse*.

[61] Alba, 'Madungandí solicita'; interviews with Ipetí leaders.

[62] Moeller, *Identity and Millenarian Discourse*.

[63] Fieldwork in Ipetí; Moeller, *Identity and Millenarian Discourse*.

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confronted the government over public health policies in recent years and required the government to negotiate the presence of health workers in the community.[64] For the Kuna, the *comarca* is linked not only to material sustenance, but also employed as a space of rejuvenation and reinforcement of collective identity. Ipetí, where outsiders can enter only with the permission of the *saila*, offers a segregated space for a series of communal activities such as the construction of houses and communal buildings; demarcation of *comarca* boundaries; preparation of food and drink for celebrations; and nightly religious and political gatherings.[65]

Ipetí and Neoliberalism

The adoption of multiculturalism by Latin American states in recent years has overlapped with the advance of economic liberalisation and associated neoliberal policies in Latin America. The relationship between these processes can be categorised in three basic ways: (1) multiculturalism is primarily an elite project which also advances neoliberalism as an economic and ideological project;[66] (2) multiculturalism as a bottom-up process challenges the basic precepts and practices of neoliberalism;[67] or (3) these processes are neither inherently mutually reinforcing nor mutually exclusive, but rather interact in complex ways as mediated by national and local experiences. This paper takes the third approach and explores the content and boundaries of multiculturalism under neoliberalism on the assumption that it is a project contested between Panamanian elites and the Kunas of Madungandí.

There are tensions between more profound indigenous empowerment and the economic and cultural projects of neoliberalism.[68] Neoliberal policies may negatively impact indigenous peoples along intertwined axes of inequality of social class and ethnicity. In Panama, as in the rest of Latin America, indigenous peoples are the poorest of the poor.[69] Neoliberalism may further undermine the income and subsistence security of rural indigenous populations by opening up rural markets to foreign competition and inexpensive agricultural imports, limiting access to production credit, and reducing access to state services overall.[70] It should be emphasised,

[64] After close to 200 residents contracted falciparum malaria in 2004, government officials had to negotiate permission to enter the community of Aguas Claras to examine residents who were ill, take blood samples, and spray pesticides for mosquito control: see Urania Cecilia Molina, 'Sahilas obstaculizan control de la malaria', *La Prensa*, 2 June 2004.

[65] Ipetí leaders, however, also express concern that willingness to participate in such activities is declining among male youth in particular and one the principal concerns of *sailas* has been to control migrations to urban areas.

[66] Hale, 'Does Multiculturalism Menace?'

[67] Brysk, *From Tribal Village to Global Village*; Yashar, 'Contesting Citizenship'; and Van Cott, *The Friendly Liquidation of the Past.*

[68] Hale, 'Does Multiculturalism Menace?'.

[69] PNUD, *Informe de Desarrollo Humano.*

[70] Roper et al., *Multiculturalism in Latin America.*

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however, that the Panamanian economy has historically been closely linked to global trade and markets, and that more recent government support for neoliberalism is less a policy shift than a continuation of more general and longer-term processes of expansion and deepening of capitalism. In Madungandí, for example, it was not the advent of neoliberalism, but the longer-term expansion of cattle ranching for export in Panama's western provinces, in the 1960s and 1970s, that helped to trigger the migration of thousands of *interioranos* into eastern Panama and hence contemporary land conflicts.

The Panamanian government adopted its first structural adjustment programme in the early 1980s, and deepened neoliberal policies further in the 1990s with revisions to the labour code, tariff reductions, and the privatisation of state industries, ports, and telephone and electricity services. One of the key elements of contemporary state multiculturalism in Latin America, a convergence of both top-down policy shifts and the pressures of grassroots indigenous mobilisation, has been the recognition of collective land rights. This policy has aided Ipetí residents in partially buffering themselves from potential negative economic impacts of neoliberalism. Specifically, Kuna consolidation of control of Madungandí has provided residents with a relatively stable means to meet basic needs beyond the fluctuations and uncertainties of newly deregulated markets. While the prices that Ipetí residents have received for coffee, their principal commercial crop, have fluctuated, the Kuna also produce food crops – plantains, avocados, rice, and corn – for self-consumption and sale in local and regional markets where prices have been relatively stable.[71] Neoliberal policies may also intensify natural resource extraction, leading to a disproportionate impact on indigenous territories, which are increasingly among the last remaining reserves of minerals, petroleum and lumber in Latin America. On a national level, Ngöbe and Kuna leaders have organised to impede state-supported efforts to establish mining operations within *comarca* boundaries.[72] Community leaders in Ipetí and Madungandí more broadly, however, have in recent years approved contracts with non-indigenous, Panamanian companies to log within these *comarcas*.[73] Logging has been the subject of debate in Ipetí nightly meetings, as residents weigh the negative environmental impacts of logging against the cash income it provides to finance both the leadership's collective lobbying efforts and trips to Panama City and the growing cash expenses of individual families. In addition, because the Ipetí in the past was relatively neglected in the provision of state services and,

[71] Fieldwork and interviews with Ipetí activists.
[72] Gjording, *Conditions Not of Their Choosing;* Wickstrom, 'The Politics of Development'.
[73] This section draws on fieldwork in Ipetí and Moeller, *Identity and Millenarian Discourse.*

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according to some informants, chose to forego bank credit and electricity for cultural reasons, privatisation and withdrawal of state services under neoliberalism appear not to have had as strong a negative impact on the Kuna as on their non-indigenous neighbours.[74] Finally, while the *comarca*'s 180,000 hectares have provided residents with access to basic subsistence and income through logging and the sale of crops, it is important not to overstate this material wellbeing. PNUD has found that 63 per cent of Madungandí residents have income levels below the amount needed to purchase the basic food basket.[75]

Kuna Critical Consciousness

An additional thread in critiques of top-down state multiculturalism is that it carries not only material and organisational implications, but is also a cultural and ideological project. Critics suggest that elite adoption of a discourse of multiculturalism is closely linked to the advance of economic liberalisation and so imparts values and organisational forms of individualism, competition and consumption, as well as an instrumental view of nature, which may disrupt and conflict with traditional indigenous collectivist orientations.[76] Critical consciousness is a complex concept, but, as utilised in this paper, it refers to discourses that seek to identify root or underlying causes of disempowerment, marginalisation and inequality. Critical consciousness suggests an awareness and ability to articulate collective interests, as well as a degree of autonomy, in the sense of a consciousness that is not easily manipulated or controlled by external actors or institutions with hegemonic perspectives.[77] It is cognisance of and ability to gauge dynamics of power. Critical consciousness envisions transformative forms of social change which incorporate both depth and breadth of the shift in the redistribution of power and resources in the nations of Latin America, historically permeated with inequality.[78] As nation-states are increasingly shaped and

[74] Residents gave differing accounts of why Ipetí Kuna lacked the electricity service provided to the neighbouring colonist community. Several individuals reported that the *sailas* had forbidden the use of electricity. Others blamed the government for failing to extend the service.

[75] PNUD, *Informe de Desarrollo Humano*, p. 110.

[76] Hale, 'Does Multiculturalism Menace?'; Assies et al., *The Challenge of Diversity*.

[77] Along similar lines, Rowlands has defined empowerment as a 'process by which people become aware of their own interests and how these relate to those of others, in order to both participate from a position of greater strength in decision making and actually influence such decisions': Jo Rowlands, 'Empowerment Examined', *Development in Practice*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1995), p. 102.

[78] Hale describes this as 'finding points of articulation among struggles against various forms of inequity rather than assuming that a single political project could encompass them all': Hale, 'Does Multiculturalism Menace?', p. 499.

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constrained by global neoliberal hegemonies discussed earlier, transformative change must ultimately incorporate the transnational.

Reformist discourses, in contrast, address indigenous claims in incremental or mitigated steps, and are externally and/or self-limited in their claims. Under neoliberal multiculturalism, reformist discourse may serve to displace, demobilise or to marginalise more transformative claims and voices from indigenous communities.[79] On the other hand, reformist claims may also escape the control of elites and bring small gains which serve to sustain or even advance indigenous capacity for collective action and lay the groundwork both within indigenous communities and within state institutions for more transformative multiculturalism.

The argument that neoliberal multiculturalism penetrates, co-opts and marginalises indigenous critical consciousness can be linked to several processes of consciousness formation. First, political elites may respond selectively to indigenous claims, meeting specific types of demands, while marginalising or punishing other types of claims. Such interactions with the state may lead indigenous leaders and populations to limit the scope and content of their indigenous discourse, distancing themselves from critical forms of consciousness not only in public spaces, but also within communities. Second, as state multiculturalism and neoliberalism advance as parallel processes, the increased contact and integration of indigenous groups with market processes may increase individualism, competition and intra-community inequality, thus undermining indigenous ability to articulate collective interests and critical ideologies. Both of these processes also rest upon the assumption that critical discourse, or at least the potential for it, predates neoliberalism and is historically nurtured, maintained and recreated in spaces of ethnic difference. I would argue, however, that we should be cautious in generalising about ethnically-based consciousness in Latin America outside specific national and local histories. For some indigenous groups such autonomous consciousness was disrupted in much earlier eras through processes of state repression and interventions, land alienation, patron-client ties and dependency. The Kuna of Ipetí, however, have generally been able to maintain a strong thread of critical consciousness, autonomous internal governance and cultural difference which challenge dominant constructs of the nation and basic precepts of neoliberalism. This consciousness is historically grounded, giving recognition and value to a form of society and collective identity which predates the nation-state. In a cycle of positive reinforcement, control of *comarca* land has enabled Ipetí residents to sustain campaigns further to solidify land rights and reinforce distinct cultural identity in discourse and practice. Madungandí

[79] *Ibid.*

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leaders do not, however, directly challenge the existence or the physical integrity of the nation-state, and in their discourse they have not made separatist or session claims.[80] Rather, Ipetí and Madungandí leaders have followed a strategy of persistent, incremental gains in lobbying the government, while maintaining internal spaces of counter-discourse in which longer-term, potentially more transformative goals may be simultaneously nurtured.

Critical consciousness in Ipetí also contests some of the basic tenets of neoliberalism. Neoliberal values of individualism and wealth maximisation are countered by strong ethnically-bound norms and sharing, reciprocity and prohibitions on conspicuous consumption within the boundaries of the community.[81] Although the use of money in Ipetí has increased in recent years, community norms forbid, for example, the construction of houses using concrete blocks or the use of televisions. In discourse, Ipetí leaders challenge dominant constructions of poverty suggesting, for example, that as long as basic food needs are met, there is no poverty in the community.[82] A more independent, critical consciousness in Ipetí is also reinforced by Kuna efforts to maintain relative economic autonomy by utilising *comarca* natural resources and avoiding debt to non-indigenous merchants and patron-client ties with non-Kuna economic brokers in general.[83]

Multiculturalism and Inter-Ethnic Alliances/Coalitions

A final component of transformative multiculturalism is that its patterns of inclusion and empowerment extend to a broad range of the population. The claims of indigenous groups in countries such as Peru, Bolivia and Guatemala, therefore, have an inherently transformative element in that they imply change that will impact the majority of the population, and the redistribution of political power and productive resources on a national scale. This issue is more complex, however, in nations like Panama where the indigenous are a numerical minority.

One possibility is that indigenous mobilisation and deeper forms of multiculturalism may lead to greater inter-ethnic understanding and

[80] However, on the levels of religious discourse and dream interpretation, millenarian visions in which the non-Kuna of Panama will disappear and the land will again be controlled by the Kuna persist in Madungandí: see Moeller, *Identity and Millenarian Discourse*.

[81] This section draws on fieldwork in Ipetí and Moeller, *Identity and Millenarian Discourse*.

[82] Interview with an Ipetí cacique.

[83] Although environmental conditions have deteriorated in the area surrounding Ipetí, increasing the distance that residents need to travel to farm and hunt, informants suggest that sufficient natural resources are still available in Madungandí to meet basic subsistence needs. Several informants suggested that issues of hunger and malnutrition in the community were primarily a social problem of young men less willing to engage in agricultural activities to sustain families.

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coalition building. Indigenous mobilisations also increase the likelihood that inter-ethnic coalitions will be more egalitarian and more fully represent and articulate diverse ethnic perspectives than past nationalist or class-based movements which have denied or denigrated ethnic difference.[84] On the other hand, ethnically and culturally based movements may be limited in impact or even disempowering to the extent that they fragment and divide the popular sectors of Latin America. David Harvey raises concerns that identity-based mobilisation 'shuts off those other voices from access to more universal power by ghettoizing them within an opaque otherness'.[85] Fragmentation may take place at an organisational and/or ideological level, making the identification and articulation of common interests and concerns, and the formation of cross-ethnic coalitions, less likely. Multiculturalism may also facilitate efforts of elites to segment popular opposition through the development of vertical ties. State recognition with an explicit ethnic content may also intensify rivalries between the poor, as in Bolivia where the creation of multi-ethnic territories has led to inter-ethnic conflict over timber resources.[86]

Rather than framing the issue as one of multiculturalism promoting identity-based mobilisation to the exclusion of inter-ethnic, class-based mobilisation, the Ipetí experiences suggest more complex relationships between class and culture in which indigenous mobilisation under state multiculturalism has not necessarily displaced class-based mobilisation. Class-based mobilisation was already weak in Panama prior to the new multiculturalism. In recent decades it was impeded by state efforts to control and incorporate leftist and nationalist movements, as well as a more general fragmentation of the left based less on ideological than personal differences and struggles for control of resources and power. There have also been tensions between Kuna organisations and Panama's leftist and nationalist movements.[87] Some such movements have at times supported a form of nationalism that, if not excluding the indigenous outright, has given them limited support for their struggles for land and autonomy. Leaders from Kuna Yala have also prioritised group wellbeing over nationalist causes in some instances, as when they were reluctant to support union and NGO campaigns for an end to the US military presence in Panama, in part because of their economic stake in employment on the US military bases. Kuna leaders from all three *comarcas* – Kuna Yala, Madungandí, and Wargandí – have, however, participated in broader organisations such as the Coordinadora Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas de Panamá (CONAPIP)

[84] Hale, 'Does Multiculturalism Menace?'.
[85] David Harvey, 'Class Relations, Social Justice and the Politics of Difference', in Michael Keith and Steve Pile, *Place and the Politics of Identity* (New York, 1994), p. 59.
[86] Roper et al., *Multiculturalism in Latin America*. [87] Interviews with Kuna NGO activists.

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to lobby on common indigenous demands such as territorial recognition and bilingual education.[88] In terms of coordination with non-indigenous groups, the Kuna have allied with non-indigenous groups on specific issues such as opposition to mining, in the Frente contra la Explotación Minera, and non-indigenous NGOs such as the Centro de Estudios y Acción Social Panameño (CEASPA) which have supported indigenous struggles for land rights.[89]

But while a degree of inter-ethnic coordination has occurred on a national scale, in the Bayano and Darién regions ethnically-based polarisation has continued and perhaps even intensified under neoliberalism and state multiculturalism. In addition to the twelve Kuna communities within Madungandí, several Embará communities and four relatively large colonist or *interiorano* communities are located along the southern border of the *comarca*. These colonists and the Kuna share a similar relationship to the land and distance from urban Panamanian culture, as well as in some instances a similar level of material wellbeing. Despite these commonalities, a combination of structural and ideological factors has impeded inter-ethnic alliances. First, Panama's historical patterns of unequal land distribution and the large amounts of land held by wealthy cattle ranchers in the central and western provinces has fostered migration to eastern Panama and competition between the Kuna and their colonist neighbours for land. In interviews colonists cite both a lack of available land for resettlement, as well as the more recent stagnation of agriculture under neoliberal policies, as factors which influence them not to cede the land that they have occupied in the *comarca*.[90] During the hydro-electric dam resettlement process the Panamanian government negotiated distinct compensation agreements with the Kuna, the colonists and the Embará. State approval of the Madungandí charter further codified *de facto* ethnic segregation in the zone, in terms of local governance, provision of state services and project funding. In recognising, and in some instances responding to ethnically-based claims, the state has made such ethnic mobilisation and discourse appear a more

[88] Interview with a CONAPIP representative.

[89] José Quintero de León, 'Grupos crean frente contra la explotación minera', in *La Prensa*, 14 June 1997: interview with CEASPA director, Raúl Leís.

[90] A substantial Afro-Panamanian population resides in the province of Darién to the east of Madungandí. Leaders from such Afro-Darienita communities have actively opposed the legalisation of the Kuna *comarca* of Wargandí and the recognition of Embará *tierras colectivas*: field notes on the 2001 National Assembly debate on the creation of the *comarca* of Wargandí; Nayra Delgado, 'La lucha por la tierra', *La Prensa*, 3 March 2001; Carlos Anel Cordero, 'Darién podría desaparecer, sostiene Milanés de Lay', *Panamá América*, 17 February 2003. For an insightful examination of tensions between Embarás and Afro-Darienitas, see Stephanie C. Kane, *The Phantom Gringo Boat: Shamanic Discourse and Development in Panama* (Washington, 1994).

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viable and seemingly fruitful strategy for indigenous activists. Such state policies of ethnically-based, differential treatment may have also contributed to lessening the likelihood that the Kuna and the colonists may identify potential shared interests in allying against elite control.

In their discourses both the colonists and Kuna emphasise that ethnic identities are solid and essentialised, and draw on exclusionary elements. Common Kuna representations of the colonists are that to be Kuna is not to eat rice, not to raise cattle, not to be sexually promiscuous or stingy. The Kuna also tend in their discourse to downplay or deny a material basis of commonality with the colonists, characterising their non-indigenous neighbours as land speculators who seek profit and not subsistence. Such claims exaggerate the wellbeing of non-indigenous settlers in the Bayano, 85 per cent of whom lay claim to fewer than 50 hectares of land.[91]

Some colonists for their part are uncomfortable with the Kuna expressions of difference and perceive the *comarcas* as physically and culturally 'breaking' or 'delinking' the nation in a way that challenges the ideal construct of unitary and inclusionary national identity.[92] Colonists interviewed were also critical of state policies of multiculturalism which appear to challenge the concept of citizenship as equality, and contend that the government and NGOs have unfairly 'favoured' the Kuna in recent years. Poor colonists also ally in action and discourse with the more wealthy members of their ethnic communities through ties of provinces of origin, extended families and clientelism.[93]

While the Kuna assert their right of difference in the face of homogenising pressures of nationalism and neoliberalism, there are limits to this assertion of difference. Ipetí leaders do not particularly attempt to extend their culture and way of life as a model for the broader society. Factors such as language barriers, the efforts of the Kuna to maintain the privacy of their distinct cultural and religious beliefs, and the historical prejudices of non-indigenous Panamanians (in both elite and popular sectors) impede the influence of Kuna discourse and practices beyond tightly drawn ethnic boundaries. Also, as suggested in the earlier discussion of indigenous exceptionalism, part of the reason why Ipetí and Madungandí leaders have been able successfully to advance their claims for land and internal autonomy with state and multilateral institutions is precisely because their claims are viewed by both Kuna and non-Kuna actors as 'exceptional', constrained by ethnic

[91] Consorcio Louis Berger International Inc. and Delca Consultores S.A., *Informe de fase 1. Diagnóstico.* A small group of non-indigenous elites, however, have obtained land in the Bayano region for cattle ranches and more recently reforestation projects.

[92] Interviews conducted in the *interiorano* communities of Wacuco, Curtí, and Loma Bonita.

[93] Consorcio Louis Berger International Inc. and Delca Consultores S.A., *Informe de fase 1. Diagnóstico;* Wali, 'The Transformation of a Frontier'.

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difference. Whether deliberate or not, the fact that the Kuna of Madungandí have had limited participation in broader inter-ethnic coalitions while seeking to defend and advance very important, but ultimately group-specific, interests through political lobbying campaigns has probably influenced state elites to employ negotiation rather than repression since concessions to the Kuna and limited forms of multiculturalism are not seen as fundamentally threatening to the wellbeing of the elite.

Conclusion

Over the past two decades, multiculturalism has been widely adopted by Latin American states. Specific forms of multiculturalism now form part of national political discourses, are codified in constitutions, and are implemented as state policy, particularly in the area of collective land rights. It has been suggested here that Panamanian multiculturalism is in part a product of a bottom-up resurgence of national and transnational indigenous mobilisation, advanced against the resistance of elites, to contest exclusionary and racialised nationalisms and bring forth new forms of democracy and citizenship. Yet this multiculturalism has also been adopted as a project of elites, and as such, potentially a means to constrain more transformative change and advance economic and cultural agendas of neoliberalism. This paper has explored the ways in which the content, boundaries and meanings of multiculturalism continue to be contested, and the implications of these struggles for the ability of indigenous peoples to advance state multiculturalism toward transformative change along the five dimensions identified at the beginning of this paper: (1) formal political participation and rights; (2) autonomy; (3) material wellbeing; (4) critical consciousness; and (5) formation of inter-ethnic alliances.

The Panama experience offers clues as to factors that may contribute to a context for empowering multiculturalism. First, transformative multiculturalism appears more likely to advance to the degree to which elites are vulnerable or divided, unable to consolidate a homogenising nationalist project, or maintain power solely through repression and exclusion. National elites turn instead to indigenous groups as a defensive measure to control or constrain indigenous dissent and mobilisation, and/or as an instrumental means to build regime or electoral support. Under the inclusionary authoritarianism of the Torrijos regime, outreach to indigenous groups was in part opportunity-seeking, a means to bolster individual and regime legitimacy. Following the restoration of democracy in Panama, ethnic inclusion, or at least the appearance of inclusion, has gained normative force, and indigenous communities have become a potential source of power for political elites in a hyper-competitive electoral context.

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A second element in creating a context for transformative multiculturalism has been the exertion of pressure on national governments by non-national elites who have their own interests in weakening or constraining nationalist projects, most recently by transnational institutions which have adopted a discourse of indigenous rights and environmental sustainability. At key junctures in Panama's post-independence period, the preponderant role of the United States pressurised the Panamanian state to move away from repression; more recently international financial institutions have linked project funding to government support for indigenous land claims.[94]

Third, components of transformative multiculturalism are more likely to advance to the degree to which they are perceived not to pose a fundamental challenge to elite access to processes of accumulation and privilege. This dynamic is linked to both 'objective', structural patterns of national accumulation, as well as to subjective elite perceptions of the threat that transformative multiculturalism represents to their interests, perceptions linked in turn to longer-term patterns of elite-indigenous interaction and racial/ethnic discourses and representations. Panamanian elite accumulation has centred not on control of indigenous land or labour, but rather on transnational commerce and services. Likewise, the Kunas' small population, as well as the history of state-Kuna interaction of mainly negotiation, offered further reassurance to political elites that Kuna demands would be self-limited and incremental. In contrast, in other nations with political cultures of exclusion and repression, the greater size of indigenous populations and the centrality of indigenous-controlled land, natural resources and labour may lead elites to oppose the same types of claims that have been recognised in Panama.

In addition to these elite-influenced factors, the ability of indigenous peoples to shape the content of multiculturalism from below is mediated by specific characteristics of the indigenous groups themselves: the cohesiveness of their internal organisation; the accountability of their leadership structures; and their historical patterns of autonomy. The capacity of indigenous and other racial/ethnic groups collectively to confront and influence state institutions and agents may also vary within national contexts. The Madungandí Kuna's relatively centralised system of internal governance, rooted and legitimated in Kuna culture and religion, is both adaptive and accountable and has enabled them largely, to date, to avoid external manipulation of recognition and funding. In contrast, the Ngöbe's historically more decentralised system of governance has left them vulnerable

[94] Keck and Sikkink refer to this as the 'boomerang effect': Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Policy* (Ithaca, 1998).

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to the machinations of political elites in dividing and co-opting indigenous leadership.[95]

This paper has also explored the linkages between economic liberalisation, the associated neoliberal policies, and state multiculturalism, asking whether they are mutually reinforcing, contradictory or contingent. Scholars have cited a crisis of legitimacy linked to neoliberalism as a triggering factor in indigenous challenges to the state.[96] Experiences of neoliberalism are also mediated, however, by national and local contexts. Ipetí mobilisation has been linked less directly to recent strategies of neoliberalism than to the longer-term process of capitalist expansion into Panama's hinterlands, evident in the hydro-electric dam project, the extension of the Pan-American Highway and the migration of colonists.

The Kuna have advanced furthest in terms of political participation, territorial autonomy and critical consciousness, with more limited gains in material welfare and in the formation of inter-ethnic alliances. On the one hand, this is an important achievement for the Kuna, who have been able significantly to buffer themselves from neoliberalism as an economic and ideological project. At the same time, the empowerment that has occurred for Ipetí and Madungandí is contained in its impact on broader transformations outside the *comarca*. Kuna political participation has accommodated rather than disrupted Panama's deepening integration into global markets. Likewise, Kuna Madungandí communities practise their autonomous way of life in territories distant from centres of accumulation. This suggests that Latin America's indigenous peoples may successfully occupy culturally and geographically bounded spaces where distinct collective identities which predate the nation-state are self-consciously nurtured. Yet such alternative discourses and practices of everyday life are not inherently destabilising of the region's neoliberal democracies. While on a discursive and ideological level there are deep tensions between more profound indigenous empowerment and neoliberalism, ideological inconsistencies are not sufficient in and of themselves to destabilise powerful elite constructs of nationalism and multiculturalism. In fact, as indigenous exceptionalism suggests, counter-discourses may co-exist with dominant expressions and forms of power. Political elites and international financial institutions have supported collective land rights, in seeming contradiction to broader neoliberal policies, in part because of the ethnically specific content of such claims. Indigenous land claims are seen as contained by reified cultural

[95] Young and Bort, 'Ngobe Adaptive Responses'; Wickstrom, 'The Politics of Development'. Similarly, Afro-Darienitas of eastern Panama have to date been unable to maintain the same degree of collective organisation and mobilisation in defence of land claims as the Kuna.

[96] Roper, Perreault, and Wilson, 'Introduction'.

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boundaries, and therefore may co-exist with neoliberal policies of individual land titling and values of individualism and consumption.

The weakness of inter-ethnic coalitions in the Bayano and Darién can be linked to both the pressures of Panama's model of development which has intensified competition over land, as well as state policies which have reinforced the framing of such competition by local actors in ethnic terms. Under these circumstances, the class-based roots of land conflicts, notably the expansion of large cattle ranches in the western provinces and state withdrawal of subsidies, services and infrastructure for small and medium agriculturalists under neoliberalism, remain obscured. This is not to say, however, that state multiculturalism reinforces ethnic fragmentation, thwarting a broader class-based project of transformation that would arise in its place. In Latin America, prior to multiculturalisms, racial and ethnic hierarchies and the discursive constructs that supported them permeated all levels of society, from elites to the poor, bringing disempowerment and inequality to the heart of class-based mobilisation which did occur. Processes of indigenous empowerment, therefore, are a critical step which may undergird any truly egalitarian, democratic and transformative mobilisation in Latin America.

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