The Making of an Indigenous Movement: Culture Ethnicity, and Post-Marxist Social Praxis in Ecuador

Chad T. Black

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Chad T. Black

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The Making of an Indigenous Movement: Culture, Ethnicity, and Post-Marxist Social Praxis in Ecuador

by

Chad T. Black

Department of History
University of New Mexico
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ABSTRACT

The 1990 Indian Uprising staged by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) forced indigenous issues into the national political discourse of Ecuador through the activities of a post-Marxist, progressive social movement. The formation of CONAIE, in 1986, and the 1990 Uprising were the culmination of an organizational process that began in the 1970s with indigenous regional organizing as a reaction against Marxist/mestizo/integrationist leadership, repression of traditional leftist organizations, and increasing pressures placed on indigenous communities through Ecuador's heightened position in the capitalist world-economy. This organizational process clarified to indigenous leaders a new vision of progressive social praxis based upon ethnic and cultural claims, rather than the strictly economic demands of the traditional left. This paper documents the organizing process as a significant historical development in the emergence of post-Marxist progressive social movements.
Para muchas personas interesadas en un cambio social que realmente establezca un modo de vida igualitario, democrático y digno, el Levantamiento constituyó un mensaje de esperanza y de vida. La mobilización en el campo demostró que es posible vencer a la inercia y al desconcierto. Incluso aquellos que habían sucumbido a “la crisis de paradigmas socialistas,” a “la falta de referentes estratégicos”, hicieron un paréntesis en su desencanto para atreverse a pensar en aquellos indios convencidos en la lucha por sus derechos, en aquellas masas protagonizando en la práctica la construcción del proyecto alternativo popular.

Comisión por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (CDDH)

In June 1990, the indigenous population of Ecuador exploded into the national political discourse as thousands of Indians participated in a general strike under the leadership of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE). On 28 May 1990, two hundred Indians occupied the Santo Domingo Cathedral in old town Quito to protest lack of responsiveness to indigenous demands on the part of the social-democratic government of Rodrigo Borja. Within days a national uprising began with local communities and members of CONAIE, ECUARUNARI, and the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorean Amazon (CONFENIAE) taking part. Participation was strongest in the sierra as communities in the provinces of Cotopaxi, Bolivar, Chimborazo, Tungurahua, Pichincha, and Imbabura rose up in support of those in the Santo Domingo Cathedral. The Sierra soon was paralyzed as road blocks were constructed along the Pan American highway. The cities suffered food shortages, revealing their dependence on the rural economy. Thirty policemen and soldiers were taken hostage in Chimborazo province and land was seized from hacendados throughout the country. The government, along with the press and general population, were taken by surprise by the extent of the action, but initially refused to seriously consider the demands of the indigenous participants. The action was unprecedented and did not accord with traditional conceptions of the parochial, passive inhabitant of the countryside. President Rodrigo Borja mobilized the national police and army, the traditional response to unrest in the streets, in an effort to gain control of the situation. Despite violent acts carried out against the indigenous leadership, including the assassination of Oswaldo Cuvi Paguay in Chunchi, protestors remained

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2 CONAIE claims indigenous peoples represent 40% of the population of Ecuador. The number is debated, based on the criteria used to categorize people and because there is no ethnic category used in official state census data. See Appendix 1 for a list of the indigenous nationalities represented by CONAIE.
amazingly calm and orderly. On 6-7 June the government made initial contacts with the indigenous leadership in an attempt to dispel the uprising. On 8 June 1990, the president initiated high-level negotiations between several representatives of the national government, including the Ministers of Agriculture and Land Reform, and Vice President Luis Macas of CONAIE. Moderated by the Archbishop of Quito, the discussion ended eleven days of occupation. In an orderly fashion, the Indians left Santo Domingo Cathedral and road blocks were cleared. CONAIE brought to the table seventy-two priority land conflicts and sixteen demands for national structural reform, outlining a cultural agenda separating CONAIE from previous reform movements that had been either local in focus or integrationist in attitude.

Initial talks centered on three demands CONAIE put forth to deal with land tenancy issues, calling for the restructuring of the Institute on Agrarian Reform and Colonization (IERAC), the general application of the Law of Agrarian Reform, and the creation of a fund that would aid indigenous communities in paying for land received. Negotiations continued intermittently over the next few months as CONAIE pressed for the recognition of the sixteen points and supported a radical territorial accord sponsored by the Organization of Indigenous Peoples of Pastaza (OPIP). The CDDH characterized the negotiations as a classic example of manipulation and diffusion. After requesting the movement’s demands, the government negotiated a symbolic retreat (the relinquishment of Santo Domingo) and then embarked on a campaign of repression within the actual rural communities. The next step was to open official dialogue, set up commissions of study, and then doom the movement to bureaucratic anguish.

In addition to problems with the negotiations, the movement came under sustained attack from groups representing large landowners and ranchers in the Sierra and Oriente. For example, Ignacio Pérez Arteta, president of the Cámara de Agricultura de la Primera Zona, claimed that there was no land left to be redistributed, that small farms already dominated the majority of the Sierra and were underutilized by indigenous farmers who were incapable of properly exploiting the Sierra’s food-production capabilities. The uprising was characterized as the beginning of an indigenous assault on all private property. Simón

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4See Appendix 2.
7Ignacio Pérez Arteta, “El Levantamiento indigena visto por los hacendados,” Indios, 37-60.
Bustamente Cárdenas, president of the Asociacion de Ganaderos de la Sierra y Oriente, suggested that the extent of coordination and organization evidenced by the uprising must be due to the influence of foreign experts and professional agitators aligned with the traditional left. He then went even further, declaring he had strong evidence that CONAIE and CONFENAIE “are infiltrated and financed by international communism and other extremist movements...” Such suggestions were based, again, on traditional views of Ecuador’s indigenous population which could not comprehend that the communities were able to organize, coordinate, and enact such drastic social action on their own. The actions of CONAIE and the indigenous movement in June 1990 brought into stark relief centuries of racism, oppression, and the false reality of Ecuadorean national unity.

The magnitude and objectives of the uprising set the Levantamiento Nacional Indigena (so termed by the movement’s leadership to place the action within an historical context8) apart from its antecedents, which were largely centered around specific land tenure issues. The concerns enumerated by CONAIE provided a context for action revolving around a three-fold agenda of land, culture, and national identity. The centrality of cultural claims, mediated through an alternative conception of the nation, and the organizational process that gave birth to CONAIE and a unified national Indian movement represented a significant break from traditional leftist and popular social movements. As Luis Macas noted, “The uprising marked a decisive change in the future of our movement; we have achieved a political space, we have entered into the political scene of the country....”10 This political space, according to indigenous leader and attorney Nina Pacari, aims at articulating an alternative vision for all of Ecuadorean society. Born out of centuries of oppression and exploitation, the movement seeks to transform Ecuador through, “the construction of a plurinational state that tolerates and encourages diversity among different groups in society.”11

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8 Simón Bustamante Cárdenas, “El Levantamiento indigena: Un nuevo actor en la década del 90,” Indios, 87. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are the author’s.


The formation of CONAIE was a post-Marxist development that sought to redefine understandings of nationality, economy, and ethnicity based upon concepts of pluri-nationality and multiculturalism. Indigenous regional organizing began in the 1970s as a reaction against Marxist, mestizo, integrationist leadership, conservative reaction to traditional leftist organizations, and increasing pressures placed on indigenous communities through Ecuador's enhanced position in the capitalist world-economy. This organizational process clarified to indigenous leaders a new vision of progressive social praxis based on ethnic and cultural claims rather than the strictly economic demands of the traditional left. The process brought indigenous organizational efforts from a reactionary position, in the defense of territory, to a pro-active position in which the indigenous have sought to actively contest the Ecuadorean experience of modernity and development, proposing alternative paths to modern conceptions of the national identity. As such, CONAIE and the 1990 Uprising typify the new social movements that emerged throughout Latin America in the 1980s.

The centrality of culture, the articulation of an alternative to modern images of national development and identity, the reinterpretation of Ecuadorean history through marginalized eyes, and coalitional strategies based on a plurality of differences place CONAIE and the indigenous movement in Ecuador on new ground. In an effort to understand the significance of these developments, this paper will seek to document the organizing process, culminating with the formation of CONAIE and the 1990 Uprising, as a significant historical development in the emergence of post-Marxist progressive social movements. After outlining the structural context of Ecuadorean developmentalism and nationalism in the second half of the twentieth century, we will explore the shift in the organizational process that occurred beginning in the 1970s. Finally, in order to clarify the articulatory practices of CONAIE's contestation of Ecuador's hegemonic claims to identity and development, we will analyze the key issue of bilingual education, which encapsulates CONAIE's (re)presentation of 500 years of indigenous history, the concept of plurinationality, and the strategic program by which the organization has engaged the State. But first, it is necessary to provide the theoretical framework of this study within the recent developments in social movement and nation theory.

I choose the term post-Marxist because CONAIE and the indigenous movement represent a progressive political force that has rejected Marxist categories such as the centrality of class and the revolutionary seizure of state power in favor of ethnic/cultural identity, alternative economic development, and a radical participatory democracy that questions modernist conceptions of the developmentalism, representative democracy, and the nation-state.
New Social Movements and the Question of National Identity

The last twenty years have witnessed exciting new developments in the study of social movements as researchers have sought to understand and theorize newly emergent movements based around issues such as ecology, feminism, and ethnicity. The identity-politics of these new movements posed agonizing challenges to the functionalism and Marxism of the 1960s and 1970s. No longer, for example, could rural movements be categorized and analyzed under the strictures of economic and class reductionism with the rise of ethnically and culturally-based resistances. In the beginning of the 1980s theorists were quick to valorize these “new social movements” (NSMs) as the embodiment of new popular interests and practices, discontinuous with the revolutionary tactics that dominated much of the twentieth century. As the decade progressed, though, continuities were discerned that led to a much more nuanced understanding of NSMs and their syncretic blending of old and new strategies. Though continuities are recognized, most current scholarship accepts the idea that something new is occurring. Schools of thought dealing with social movements can be divided into two general categories, one centered in the United States and the other in both Europe and Latin America. As Leon Zamosc has noted,

In the United States two currents converge around the strategic components of collective action: the resource mobilization approach, which emphasizes resource management and the pivotal role of organization; and rational choice theory, which conceives of actors as instrumental agents who behave rationally to maximize their own benefits. In European [and Latin American] sociology, the main contributions have tended to focus on two aspects that can also be perceived as convergent or at least complementary: the symbolic content of social movements and the processes of identity construction and transformation that furnish the bases for collective action.15

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13 I will be using the definition of social movements provided by Elizabeth Jelin in “Otros Silencios, Otras Voces: El Tiempo de la Democratización en Argentina,” in Fernando Calderón, ed., Los movimientos sociales ante la crisis (Buenos Aires: Universidad de las Naciones Unidas, 1986): “[Social Movements are] forms of collective action with high degree of popular participation, which use non-institutional channels, and which formulate their demands while simultaneously finding forms of action to express them, thus establishing themselves as collective subjects, that is as a group or social category.” Quoted in and translated by Escobar and Alvarez, 15.


Resource-mobilization and rational-choice theorists tend to see social movements as rational actions based on an evaluation of costs and rewards, dependent on contextual factors such as the availability of resources for organization. Though individual identity is a contingent factor in these resources for organization, these theories tend to focus on group level concerns, such as “dense interpersonal networks” that enable organization. Identity-centered theories, on the other hand, “emphasize the processes by which social actors constitute collective identities as a means to create democratic spaces for more autonomous action.”

Escobar and Alvarez have specified three axes along which NSMs engage hegemonic political structures: identity, struggle, and democracy. By utilizing these three axes, NSMs capitalize on presently existing social and political categories to undermine dominant interpretations of those categories, especially identity and democracy. The result tends to present two potentialities for change which Escobar and Alvarez term: 1. The transformation of “sociopolitical citizenship” in the struggle for recognition and political space; and 2. “The transformation or appropriation by the actors of the cultural field through their search for a collective identity and the affirmation of their difference and specificity.” It quickly becomes evident that the nodal point of contestation in these NSMs is between civil society (the locus of identity-formation) and the State (the locus of political engagement). Because this point of contestation involves cultural and political implications, it is impossible to view NSMs from solely economic or social perspectives. Particularly in Latin America, NSMs have been formed in opposition to traditional party politics and traditional leftist organizations. As Escobar and Alvarez note,

Today’s social movements—even those that take place solely in the public arena—do not restrict themselves to traditional political activities, such as those linked to political parties and state institutions. Rather, they challenge our most entrenched ways of understanding political practice and its relation to culture, economy, society, and nature.

Calls for autonomy, self-definition of group identity along cultural and ethnic lines, and the utilization of old and new strategies of contestation take form within the context of the intellectual, political, economic, and social structures already present in society. As a result, today’s social movements often come into conflict with and seek to redefine what Benedict Anderson has termed “the most universally


\[17\] Escobar and Alvarez, 5.

\[18\] Ibid., 4.

\[19\] Ibid., 3.

\[20\] Ibid, 7.
legitimate value in the political life of our time," the nation.21 Therefore, it is important to place social movement analysis within the context of the national project.

At present, one could easily conclude that national identity is a given. Just as everyone is born into a specific gender, with specific physical characteristics, and into a given family, everyone is supposedly born into a given nationality. And yet, the process by which one’s national identity is formed goes far beyond the geographical circumstances of one’s birth. Over the past two centuries national identities have been formed through contesting visions of mutual association, relying heavily on a hegemonic interpretation of national history and destiny bestowed upon the population by elite interpretation. Traditional understandings of “nation-ness” have viewed the emergence of nation-states and national identity as a phenomenon of the modern age. Nations are defined in opposition to empire, modernity in opposition to tradition.22 From both Marxist and liberal perspectives, the “project” of nation-building lay with the ascendent bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie accomplished the project by submitting countervailing identities to the aspirations and needs of the national community, an a priori existent group defined by territory, language, and cultural unity. Florencia Mallon observes,

In this version, nationalism was an integrated ideology whose proponents or believers put the interests of the nation— an already defined, integrated community with a territory, language, and accepted set of historical traditions— before the more divisive loyalties of region, class, family, or ethnic group. And this was the yardstick held up to (or straightjacket forced on) any social group that ostensibly might or might not “have” nationalism or “be” nationalistic....23

The conception of the a priori nation relied heavily on historical traditions thought to unify and define individuals beyond their local loyalties. Equality in citizenship, which such national identity assumed, grew out of the rhetoric of Enlightenment political discourse.

The construction of a shared history of citizenship with which all levels of society could identify demanded a teleologically determined history of national destiny. Such historical construction, buttressed by shared cultural values and practices (the symbols and rituals of national identity) took on a characteristic of eternity, of a past immemorial that supposedly unifies the collective experience of diverse classes, races, ethnicities, and genders within given spacial and psychic boundaries. Of course, no such unifying historical narrative of a past immemorial exists for any nation. The building of these identities

involved a process of imagining ties that existed beyond the localities of class, race, gender, and ethnicity. They are, in essence, fictive. Coming to such a conclusion demands questioning of our basic conceptions of nation-building. As Etienne Balibar has asked, "May we, in these conditions, continue to see the formation of the nation as a 'bourgeois project'?" It seems likely that this formulation—taken over by Marxism from liberal philosophies of history—constitutes in its turn a historical myth.24

The contours of nationalism, from its inception, have been constructions of a modern mythology. In order to understand the complexities of the process of building national identities, it is invaluable to utilize a definition of nation-ness that allows for an analysis of contestation. I propose to use the definition of Benedict Anderson: "[the nation] is an imagined political community."25 In attempting to establish hegemonic control over the definition of nation-ness, particular groups within society imagine historical and cultural boundaries of identity that marginalize competing visions. The winning vision is presented to the population as the fulfillment of national destiny through a teleological interpretation of national history as discussed above. Individual identities conform to this dominant image, to a large extent, because they are inescapably formed within a social context. As Balibar notes, "All identity is individual, but there is no individual identity that is not historical, or in other words, constructed within a field of social values, norms of behavior and collective symbols."26 National identity is therefore individual and relational, simultaneously a "mass phenomenon and a phenomenon of individuation."27 Yet, even though national identities are historically and socially constructed, the notion that they are relational makes them fluid. Within the confines of the dominant understanding of national self there always exist many 'others' that fall out of accepted identity. There are moments in which these 'others' provide a stronger pull on individual identity than the hegemony of the dominant historical discourse.

The moments of contestation provide opportunities to redefine the notion of citizenship and national identity through negotiation of particular locations of alternate identity. Identities based on gender, race, ethnicity, and class provide multiple discourses of contestation that have often challenged and changed the imagined nation by redefining the inward and outward enclosures of citizenship and national

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25Anderson, 5-6.
26Balibar, 94.
27Ibid.
identity. Duara terms these contestations discourses of discent.\textsuperscript{28} Discourses of discent unify complex combinations of "cultural signifiers: symbols, practices, and narratives," that stand in both direct relation and opposition to the dominant discourse.\textsuperscript{29}

NSMs represent these discourses of discent in action. They seek to reinterpret dominant understandings of national identity and development through the articulation of alternatives. Essentially, NSMs are struggles over meaning as much as material concerns, and they are therefore cultural struggles.\textsuperscript{30} According to Arturo Escobar, NSMs throughout Latin America must be situated as alternative discourses that have arisen within the context of the crisis of developmentalism and modernity that have patterned the nation-building process throughout the region in the twentieth-century. Developmentalism, whether through capitalist modernization or Marxist oriented dependency theory, has acted as a truth-producing system of power over the acceptable boundaries of national identity. As Escobar notes, "development discourses have functioned as powerful instruments for shaping and managing the Third World."\textsuperscript{31} Development discourses, in concert with the discourses of modernity, establish boundaries which subject tradition modes of socio-economic and cultural organization to normalizing criteria based on the experience of Western capitalism, ultimately leading to the destruction of subaltern realities. The destructive nature of this process is of little concern, though, to the advocates of "progress."\textsuperscript{32}

In the case of Ecuador, the second half of the twentieth century has been marked by successive governments dedicated to the modernization of the economy through developmentalist programs. Land reform, export-oriented agriculture, oil exploration and the colonization of liminal zones within the national territory have marked this agenda of modernization, defining the boundaries of national social and economic activity. Directly tied to the development policies of the State was an ethnic ideology of mestizaje that sought to marginalize alternative ethnic identities. This dual perspective of economic and social modernization through integrative ethnic policies was clearly expressed by General Rodriguez Lara, head of the ruling military Junta from 1972-1976, when he stated: "[In Ecuador] there is no more Indian

\textsuperscript{28}Duara, 168. Discent is a syllogism combining the terms "descent" and "dissent," uniting what Duara sees as the two main locations of contestation.
\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., 165.
\textsuperscript{30}Arturo Escobar, "Culture, Economics, and Politics in Latin American Social Movement Theory and Research," 64, in Escobar and Alvarez.
\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., 65.
\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., 66.
problem. We all become white men when we accept the goals of the national culture." It was within this context of development and mestizaje that indigenous organizing mushroomed in the 1970s. Therefore, in order to contextualize the organization process of the indigenous communities, we will turn now to a structural overview centered around the two key sectors of agriculture and oil.

**Structural Contexts: Ecuadorean Political Economy, 1948-1985**

The Liberal Revolution of 1895 brought Ecuador into the modern period. Under the leadership of an incipient coastal bourgeoisie, the Revolution was market-oriented and anti-clerical, directly attacking the conservative political elite of Quito and the highlands. In effect, the Revolution broke conservative hegemony over national politics, and the Liberals, under the leadership of Eloy Alfaro, embarked upon a development agenda they hoped would bring Ecuador in line with the modern world. The plan seemed to work well. As long as agricultural export earnings remained high there was money to fund Liberal projects such as universal, lay education. A brief period of political stability followed until 1925, when inflation and depression brought on by World War I sent Ecuador into a period of agonizing struggles for control of the national government.  

It was not until 1948 that stability returned with the election of Galo Plaza. The intervening period had witnessed twenty-three governments in as many years. Due to fortunate economic conditions fueled by the post-war boom of the US economy and a dramatic increase in agricultural-export revenue, three succeeding elected governments (1948-1960) were able to rule the country in relative peace. Banana and coffee plantations were the most successful businesses, and their growth paralleled the emergence of a capitalist agricultural class with close ties to the commercial and banking elites. The financial gains experienced with the export boom enabled these administrations, especially that of Galo Plaza, to embark on ambitious development programs, which included colonization projects, infrastructural improvements,

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and a concerted effort at developing the country’s natural resources.\textsuperscript{37} As Corkill and Cubitt explain, Galo Plaza was “Ecuador’s first modern \textit{desarrollista} (developmentalist) president and the policies he pursued gave a greatly enhanced and strengthened role to the Ecuadorean state and to the bureaucratic middle class which ran it….”\textsuperscript{38} By the end of the 1950s, demand for agricultural exports began to fall and Ecuador’s dependence on global market forces was made manifest. Prices began to rise as wages stagnated and the economy fell into recession. The post-war boom years were over, and the structural inequalities that lay unchanged began to pose significant problems.

The brief period of stability soon to come to an end. As Augustin Cueva notes, “Bourgeois illusions of political stability disintegrated in the sixties. The ‘democratic’ parenthesis of 1948 was built upon favorable economic conditions, but not a structural transformation that would ensure lasting stability.”\textsuperscript{39} 1960 was a fateful year. As Fidel Castro consolidated rule in Cuba and John F. Kennedy announced a new vision of inter-American relations, instability was brewing in Ecuador with the reelection of ardent populist Velasco Ibarra to a fourth non-consecutive term as president. Velasco was elected on a platform that was intently nationalist and anti-American on the question of Cuba. As is typical of populist leaders, Velasco was unable to deliver on his promises to the popular sectors, and was likewise considered dangerous by the middle class and elites. Eventually students and workers took to the streets, Velasco was forced to resign, and in November 1961 Vice President Carlos Julio Arosemena took over the presidency.\textsuperscript{40} Arosemena lasted only two years, and in 1963 was deposed in a military coup orchestrated by conservatives and the US Central Intelligence Agency.\textsuperscript{41} Four reasons were given to justify the coup: 1. The necessity to remove an embarrassing alcoholic president; 2. Arosemena’s inability to enact needed structural reforms; 3. Allegations of communist infiltration; and 4. Fear of the possibility of Velasco’s reelection in the 1964 presidential race.\textsuperscript{42} The first reason acted as immediate justification for the coup, but the second and third most likely provided the true cause. Three years of military ruled ensued.

The military junta aggressively pursued a development agenda under the influence of the Alliance for Progress. This agenda included rabid anti-communism coupled with reformist policies that sought to

\textsuperscript{37}Corkill and Cubitt, 18.
\textsuperscript{38}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39}Cueva, 46.
\textsuperscript{40}Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{41}Corkill and Cubitt, 19.
modernize the economy and alleviate social pressures. In the junta’s first manifesto, published in the Quito daily El Comercio on 12 July 1963, the leadership proclaimed,

It is our firm intention to guarantee capital and labor in an atmosphere of reason and patriotism which answer to the exigencies and fully justified readjustments of the historical period through which our Country is passing, in order to promote the advent of a better social structure, through a planned and comprehensive evolution, with the benefits for all and for the supreme and sacred interests of the Nation.43

The discourse of the military government, over the next three years, progressed along this dual axis of repression and reform, couched in justifying terms of the legitimacy of the nation-state. One of the government’s first decrees, for example, outlawed the Communist Party and established the necessary groundwork for intense repression of all those who were considered “Communist affiliated.”44 Likewise, within one year the junta announced Ecuador’s first large scale agrarian reform law. The 1964 Law of Agrarian Reform achieved minimal redistributive goals, but was successful in ending pre-capitalist wage relations in the Sierra. Precapitalist work relations had persisted in the Sierra into the 1960s, particularly through the huasipungo and arrimado systems.45 The Costa had largely experienced a labor transition with the rapid growth of export-oriented agriculture and large-scale ranching dating back to the turn of the century. As Zevallos observes,

As early as 1954, landless wage laborers accounted for over half of the agrarian work force in the coastal lowlands. The development of capitalist agriculture in the Highlands, meanwhile, lagged considerably behind. In 1954, landless wage laborers represented only two percent of the agrarian workforce in this region.46

The 1964 Law therefore sought to outlaw precapitalist wage relations in an effort to unify agricultural wage relations throughout the country. Former huasipungeros were granted title to the subsistence plots they had formerly worked on the hacienda. But the direct redistribution of land was minimal. According to Zevallos land grant titles averaged a mere 3.5 hectares in the Sierra, and were often of low quality. Apart from transferring usufruct rights into ownership for the huasipungeros, all other redistributed land came from government holdings and land donated by the Catholic Church. The main goal was that of efficiency, and no maximum size on farms was assigned. The success of the reform lay completely in the abolition of

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43 Quoted in Needler, Appendix A, 49.
44 Ibid., 29.
45 Under the huasipungo system, families exchanged labor for usufruct use of subsistence plots, grazing land, and wood resources on the hacienda, accompanied by a small wage. The arrimado system was the same minus the wage. Both systems were designated by the junta as precapitalist relations, unified under the title precarismo. José Vicente Zevallos L., “Agrarian Reform and Structural Change: Ecuador Since 1964,” in William C. Thiesenhusen, ed., Searching for Land Reform in Latin America (Boston: Uniwin Hyman, 1989): 43.
46 Ibid., 42.
precapitalist wage relations.

A second round of reform occurred in 1973 under the leadership of a second military junta. In February 1972 the Ecuadorean military once again took power, deposing Velasco for the final time. On 11 March, General Rodriguez Lara, leader of the junta, announced the new government’s tendency towards “revolutionary nationalism,” designed to enhance the national strength of Ecuador and patterned after the reformist military government of Peru.47 Like the previous junta, the government of General Lara proceeded with a dual commitment to repression and reform. The agrarian reform program went further than that of 1964, but still emphasized efficiency and modernization of the agricultural sector over redistributive goals. Articles 25 and 30 of the new law established the parameters of expropriation based on inefficient utilization of land holdings. Article 25 defined inefficient farms as those that had: 1. Less than 80% land use by January 1976; 2. Productivity below government set averages for the zone where the farm was located; and 3. Farms that were under equipped with physical infrastructure.48 Article 30 sought to end absentee land lordship and established that farms could also be expropriated based on regional demographic pressures, violation of labor laws, and misuse of natural resources.49 Increased oil revenues (see below) enabled the junta to provide credit and technical assistance to support the reform. Agricultural expenditures rose dramatically, from 74 million sucres in 1970 to 2,033 million sucres in 1979 (a real increase of 6.1% of total government expenditures).50 Credit also increased 429% during the same period. The majority of credit, though, went to medium and large farms, with only 5% of the monies dispensed to small farms.51

Once again, modernization of the agricultural sector was the core emphasis of the reform. The greatest change in land tenure was accomplished through colonization. With the discovery of oil in the Oriente, massive migrations of agricultural settlers flooded the region, following infrastructural improvements supporting the petroleum industry. According to Francisco Pichón, population growth in the new petroleum zones averaged 8% per year from 1974-1985, far above the national average of 2% during

47 A reformist military government overthrew Peru’s civilian administration on 3 October 1968, beginning twelve years of military rule. The ideological foundation of the coup d’etat emerged from a governing group of progressive officers, dedicated to liberating Peru from a continuing “predominance of foreign economic interests.” (Rudolph, 55) Further explanation can be found in James D. Rudolph, Peru: The Evolution of a Crisis (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1992).
48 Zevallos, 45-46.
49 Ibid., 46.
50 Ibid., 47.
51 Ibid., 48.
the same period.\(^{52}\) The junta emphasized colonization for several reasons, all part of an ideology of national development. From a national security perspective, settlement of the Amazonian frontier enhanced national integrity, protecting the valuable petroleum reserves. Colonization also provided an acceptable outlet for demographic pressures in the Sierra. Finally, colonization presented an opportunity for the extension of agricultural production. As Pichón notes,

> The dominant development tendency has emphasized the need to develop and integrate Amazonia economically so that it can contribute to the solution of structural problems at the national level, namely, unequal distribution of population and resources and insufficient agricultural production.\(^{53}\)

Plots granted to colonizers averaged 42 hectares, skewing statistical presentations of the effects of reform. From 1964-1985, 744,400 hectares were adjudicated through reform (22.4%), while 2,580,100 hectares were granted through colonization (77.6%). The average acreage for plots awarded, combining colonization and reform, was 7.5 hectares.\(^{54}\) According to Zevallos, correcting for grants to former huasipungos of land they had had usufruct rights to, actual redistribution accounted for only 5.4% of total agricultural land, or 520,000 hectares by 1985.\(^{55}\)

The incomplete nature of the land reform became a key concern for indigenous communities. During the 1970s, though, oil revenues and colonization temporarily masked the impoverished nature of highland land tenure. Petroleum replaced traditional agricultural exports as the leading source of government revenue in the 1970s as a consortium of Texaco and Gulf began intense exploitation of reserves in the Oriente in 1972. Capital intensive exploration and exploitation actually began in 1918 in the Santa Elena Peninsula on the coast by a subsidiary of British Petroleum. This first concession was soon followed in 1921 by agreements between the government and Delaware-based Leonard Exploration Company. Leonard operated as a front company for Rockefeller’s oil dynasty Standard Oil, and signed a fifty year concession for 2.5 million hectares in the Oriente. They were allotted four years for survey and study, six years for exploration, and forty years for exploitation. The government was to receive 6% royalties on any produced crude as well as a rent of S./ 0.20\(^{56}\) per hectare annually.\(^{57}\)


\(^{53}\)Ibid., 666.

\(^{54}\)Zevallos, 50-52.

\(^{55}\)Ibid., 50.

\(^{56}\)S./0.20 denotes a denomination of the sucre, the Ecuadorian monetary unit, and thus the case in point signifies 0.20 sucre.

Leonard signed a second agreement on 25 March 1931, securing their presence in the Oriente. But six years later, in 1937, under the administration of Frederico Paez, Leonard was exiled from Ecuador. Paez claimed the company was derelict in payments, owing the country S/126,000, and at fault for failing to report findings of oil during the six year exploration period. In August 1937, Paez signed an agreement with the Anglo-Saxon Petroleum Company, a front for Royal Dutch Shell, which involved 10 million hectares of the Oriente.\(^58\)

In retaliation for the treatment of Leonard Exploration, Standard Oil fueled the fires of a border conflict with Peru, building up the Peruvian military with direct monetary assistance. The conflict that ensued drastically shifted Ecuador’s territorial borders in favor of Standard Oil and Peru, a conflict that continues to this day.\(^59\)

Ecuador’s present involvement with the petroleum industry stems directly from the pivotal years between 1961 and 1972. On 26 August 1961 the government of Velasco Ibarra granted a concession to Minas Petroleos del Ecuador. Minas was under the direction of Howard Steven Strouth, a US oilman, and was operated through two of Strouth’s companies, Phoenix Canada Oil Co. and Norsul Oil and Mining Ltd. Strouth worked hard to attract Texaco and Gulf, succeeding in 1962 when the Texaco-Gulf consortium formed and acquired 1.65 million hectares of the Oriente without knowledge of the government. On 5 March 1964 the consortium signed an agreement with the ruling junta, legitimizing its claim. Then, on 29 March 1967, “Lagro Agrio No. 1 tossed 2,730 barrels” of industry-grade crude petroleum. Within three years, an oil pipeline had been built to the coast and Ecuador became a net petroleum exporter.\(^60\)

Ecuador’s entry into the oil economy coincided with the dramatic increase of petroleum prices due to the OPEC embargo. The military junta pursued a course of intense intervention in the industry, forming the Corporación Estatal Petrolera Ecuatoriana (CEPE) in 1973. Increases in production amounted to windfall profits for the government, and the dream of modernization finally appeared attainable. The national budget grew from 7.2 billion sucres in 1973 to 15.2 billion sucres in 1976, with oil receipts growing from 18% to 55% of revenue respectively.\(^61\) Exports of petroleum grew from 204,600 barrels in

\(^{58}\)Ibid., 47-48.

\(^{59}\)Ibid., 49.


\(^{61}\)Martz, 159.
1970 to 45.4 million barrels in 1981.\textsuperscript{62}

Ecuador made the transition back to democracy on 10 August 1979 with the election of Jaime Roldos. Roldos confronted a $4 billion debt and 15\% inflation, due to overzealous borrowing by the junta. But the possibility of surmounting these obstacles existed due to favorable conditions in the oil market. Oil prices experienced an increase from the depressed prices of 1976, soaring from $13 per barrel to almost $35 in 1979 because of instability in the Middle East. In January 1981, Ecuadorean crude hit a record price of $40.39 per barrel. Revenues increased dramatically, but the windfall was short-lived. By the middle of the year, the price had fallen to $32.90 per barrel, and by 1982 the country faced a major economic crisis such as had not been seen since the beginning of the oil boom. Budgets were based on unrealistic oil prices, and resulted in deficits.\textsuperscript{63}

The boom years ended, and prospects for the Ecuadorean economy and oil industry suffered greatly with the global recession of 1982. Oswald Hurtado, Roldos’ Vice President who had taken office upon Roldos’ death in a helicopter accident, was forced to institute an IMF led austerity program in order to reschedule debt payments. Stabilization measures involved cutbacks in public expenditures, devaluation of the sucre by 50\%, reduction of government subsidies, and decreased involvement in petroleum exploration and exploitation.\textsuperscript{64}

The dream of modernization and development was over. Hurtado was replaced in the 1984 elections by the conservative Febres Cordero, who restored repression in the face of labor and ethnic discontent. Ultimately, the countryside suffered most from the failed experiment with developmentalism, represented through the petroleum industry, colonization, and agrarian reform. The incomplete nature of agrarian reform left rural, more specifically Sierran, communities frustrated. Colonization and petroleum exploitation proved to be very invasive to the indigenous communities of the Oriente. Rural communities, experiencing greater marginalization, added to rural-urban and highland-coastal migration. The country had been 58.6\% rural in 1974, but was 51\% urban by 1986.\textsuperscript{65} The combination of these factors proved fertile ground for the growth of counter-hegemonic articulations of identity. Migration, increased pressures placed upon the indigenous communities due to global economic trends, successive waves of anti-communist repression, incomplete agricultural reforms, demographic pressures, and a total dissolutionment

\textsuperscript{62}Ibid., 399, 414.
\textsuperscript{63}Corkill and Cubitt, 50-51.
\textsuperscript{64}Ibid., 51-52.
with the mestizo-modern national project (as typified by General Lara) led the indigenous communities to renounce external organizational and institutional leadership in favor of locally pro-active organizations. Out of this organizational process, and largely in response to the structural factors clarified above, indigenous leaders increasingly broadened the scale of their efforts, leading to the formation of a unified national movement under CONAIE that was able to directly contest mestizo-modernist images of national identity. We now turn to that organizational process.


Rural organizing began in Ecuador within this context of a national ideology of economic modernization and racial mestizaje. Thought and action on the issue of “the problem of the Indian,” deeply influenced by this dual ideology, was built on a foundation of integration, both in liberal and socialist circles. Theorists and organizers on both ends of the political spectrum perceived the indigenous situation as a problem of integrating native populations into either capitalist or socialist agendas. Liberal nation-builders of the post-Independence period viewed “Indians” as obstacles to economic modernization and rational state construction. Rural populations needed to be integrated into the national process, as low wage workers in the emerging urban-industrial complex or as laborers on commercially-oriented haciendas. Liberals viewed indigenous populations as a valuable source of labor and their lands as a resource in the construction of an agricultural-export economy, an association that proved devastating to traditional modes of social and cultural reproduction. As Brooke Larson explains,

In the emerging liberal-positivist discourses, the “Indian” was reconfigured into an impoverished, hapless, illiterate, and uncivilized subject, who remained on the margins of the market economy, neither interested in nor capable of mercantile initiative or productive enterprise. Of course, the naturalization of the Indian as an immiserated creature living beyond the pale of civilization both reflected, and legitimated, erosive economic changes unleashed around the turn of the twentieth century. Liberal land and tax reforms that divested native Indians of their traditional rights to communal lands, tax exemptions, and judicial privileges; free-trade policies and ideologies that opened the interior highlands to cheap foreign wheat and other products, which, in turn, dislodged traditional Andean suppliers and traders from regional markets; and the spread of scientific racism that converted Indians into subjects incapable of promoting, or sharing in, Order and Progress— all converged to undercut earlier Andean modes of adaptation and struggle, livelihood and resistance.66

The integration model dominated left-thinking as well. The writings of José Carlos Mariátegui, the

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dominant Peruvian Marxist of the 1920s, characterized this trend. Mariátegui acknowledged the unique nature of Andean economic development, tied to a traditional mode of production based on the kinship community, or *ayllu*. He recognized that the erosion of communal land tenure under the pressures of export-oriented commercial agriculture was the foremost problem facing indigenous populations, yet his solution required the integration of these populations into the socialist revolutionary project. Mariátegui explains,

> Any treatment of the problem of the Indian—written or verbal— that fails or refuses to recognize it as a socio-economic problem is but a sterile, theoretical exercise destined to be completely discredited. The problem of the Indian is rooted in the land tenure system of our economy. Any attempt to solve it with administrative or police measures, thought education or by a road building program, is superficial and secondary as long as the feudalism of the gamonales continues to exist. The assumption that the Indian problem is ethnic is sustained by the most outmoded repertory of imperialist notions. The hope of the Indian is absolutely revolutionary.67

It should be noted that the use of the word ‘ethnic’ by Mariátegui connotes something more akin to biological ‘race’ in its present usage. Mariátegui recognized the strength of culture to an unprecedented extent in Latin American, even global, Marxism, and sought to theorize Andean revolution taking into account indigenous culture. Such heresy, from the Marxist-Leninist perspective, placed the Peruvian outside of the acceptable boundaries established by the Third International. Ultimately, many Latin American Marxists discounted the cultural aspects of Mariátegui’s theory and concentrated on rural-urban revolutionary linkages that reduced indigenous peoples to the purely economic category of peasant.

The economic reductionism of both liberal and Marxist discourses, therefore, identified rural peoples strictly as *campesinos*, or peasants, situating their position within local and global economic structures and the transformation of the agrarian economy. This orientation, discrediting ethnic and cultural identity as a source of resistance, dominated not only anthropological and historical literature, but also the actual relationship between Indians and the nation-state throughout the twentieth century.

Barbara Schroder has argued that the peasant approach has been key to both the left and right in Ecuador particularly, noting,

> [the term peasant] became the term of choice to refer to rural peoples, used by both the expanding Ecuadorian state and Marxist scholars. For the state, ‘peasant’ was preferable to ‘Indian’ as it was more readily assimilated into the ideology of a homogenous, mestizo nation, which was central to the state’s development agenda. For Marxists, the discourse of ethnicity was eschewed as being identical with the reformist ideology of ‘indigenismo,’ which, in its concentration on cultural issues, sidestepped the issue of

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the need for radical restructuring of the society in political and economic terms.\textsuperscript{68} The action of naming a group significantly reflects the boundaries and parameters by which the group aims at effecting its 'other.'

In the case of indigenous organizing, the label of \textit{campesino} reflected early goals and programs. Significant organization of the countryside and city did not begin in Ecuador until the 1920s during the rule of left-nationalist general Eloy Alfaro. Under the influence of the Bolshevik Revolution, artisans and workers began to assemble syndicates and guilds. By 1926, many of these artisans and workers, in concert with radical intellectuals, formed the Socialist Party and began to organize peasant communities in the Sierra, with names like “The Inca,” “Free Land,” and “Bread and Land.”\textsuperscript{69} Concentrated largely in the central highlands, these organizations focused their efforts on the struggle for access to land, water, wages, education, and the end of abuse at the hands of hacienda owners.

It was not until 1944 that the first broad-based efforts were made to organize rural peoples. In August of that year, under the leadership of the Communist Party and in conjunction with the Confederation of Ecuadorean Workers (CTE), the Federation of Ecuadorean Indians (FEI) was formed. As can be expected, the analysis of class exploitation and land tenure issues dominated the FEI’s program. As CONAIE explains,

\begin{quote}
\textit{The area of action of the FEI was strictly in the Sierra; [the organization] considered only the agrarian problem of \textit{indigenas} who were within the hacienda system (huasipungeros and arrimados), sought the elimination of servile forms of production, parceling out of latifundios, payment of salaries, the reduction of work hours, and the general application of labor legislation.}\textsuperscript{70}
\end{quote}

Though there were local indigenous leaders represented within the FEI, ultimate authority lay with the blanco-mestizo leadership of the socialist and communist parties and the CTE. This chain of authority was epitomized in the FEI’s program, which disregarded ethnic/cultural sources of identity and action as distractions to needed structural change.

The FEI’s organizational efforts, and continued agitation for wage and land reform helped bring about the 1964 Law of Agrarian Reform. During the 1950s and 1960s, land tenure issues formed the core of rural struggles, in part because of the activities of the FEI. As noted above, though, the reform was a failure from a redistributive perspective, and the military government that enacted it was intensely anti-communist. The combination of these factors undermined communist efforts in the countryside, and the


\textsuperscript{69} Field, 41. CONAIE, 30.

\textsuperscript{70} CONAIE, 31-32.
military preferred to negotiate with the National Federation of Campesino Organizations (FENOC). FENOC was an outgrowth of earlier attempts by the Catholic Church to provide an alternative to leftist organizations for workers and peasants. In the years following the 1964 reform, FENOC played an active role in arbitrating between campesinos, land owners, and IERAC. From the indigenous point of view, the development projects of the 1950s and 1960s, along with the government, private, and international organizations that sought to implement them, were top-down, modernization-oriented affairs that were constructed to deal with the peasant population, disregard local and communal aspirations. Their origin and orientation neglected the needs the indigenous communities perceived to be their own.

The transference of leadership from Communist to Catholic organizations took place concurrently with the rise of Catholic radicalism represented in liberation theology. Liberationists sought to transform the church from its traditionally conservative role to one based on the needs and aspirations of the popular sectors, by exercising a “preferential option for the poor.” Missionaries and priests became very active in organizing indigenous communities in the 1960s and 1970s as a practical application of the realignment of Church orientation. In addition to the structural factors facing the indigenous communities, the changes in the Catholic Church were partially responsible for the new wave of local organizing that occurred in the 1970s.

The pattern that local indigenous organizing followed in the 1970s was actually established in 1964 with the creation of the Federación de Centros Shuar (Federation of Shuar Centers). The Shuar inhabit the southern section of Ecuador’s Oriente, covering part of the provinces of Morona Santiago, Zamora Chinchipe, and Pastaza. Shuar communities have experienced incursions of foreign interests (from their perspective) in the form of missionaries, colonizers, business interests, and the military from the beginnings of colonial expansion into Ecuador’s Amazonian region. In particular, their proximity to Peru caused traditional Shuar territories to be considered strategic in the continued attempt to consolidate and protect

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71Zamosc, 46.
72CONAIE, 33.
74See, Roberto Santana, Ciudadanos en al etnicidad: Los indios en la politica o la politica de los indios Biblioteca Abya-Yala 19 (Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 1995).
Ecuadorean national territory and resources. Missionaries and economic development interests worked hand-in-hand to pacify Shuar communities and bring them into the corporate community of Ecuadorean national-identity. This corporate community was embodied in the construction of schools, churches, colonization, and modernization policies. As Hendricks notes, the embodiment of Ecuadorean national hegemony was accompanied by “an ideology of Ecuadorean nationalism and a policy promoting ethnic assimilation that equate[d] progress with whiteness and Christianity as well as economic development.” Mestizaje and developmentalism were brought to the Shuar through the discourse of the civilizing-missionary project. The organization of Shuar communities into a federation originally acted as a protective measure in the face of such incursions. It is significant that the Shuar place this organizational process within the context of incursion into their territory, an intrusion which represented not only an attack on land and resources, but also on the cultural integrity of their nation.

The formation of the Federation was facilitated by Salesian missionaries, influenced by the changes sweeping Latin American Catholicism. In 1961, the missionaries began to lay the groundwork for the future Federation, meeting with leaders from the various communities. The resulting organization shifted in name and structure over the next three years, until the formation of the Federation on 22 October 1964, with the support of the Ministry of Social Welfare (resolution No. 2568). In the following years, the Federation worked to “set up a counter-ideology aimed at resisting the intrusion of nationalist ideas and practices” by pursuing self-directed economic development, bilingual education, and the attainment of title to traditional lands. In constructing this counter-ideology of resistance to State hegemony, the Federation typifies another aspect of the new wave of indigenous organizing: the syncretic use of Western modes of production and organization in the protection of indigenous territory and culture. For example, the Federation’s economic development program has emphasized the development of cattle ranching, an activity imported from the incursions of Western development policies. Also, the mode of political organization in the communities employs Western traditions of elections/commissions to represent the needs and aspirations of the Federation.

The pattern established by the Shuar was replicated throughout the Oriente into the late 1970s. Six indigenous nationalities are present within the Oriente, including Quichua, Siona/Secoya, Cofan, Huaorani,

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76 Hendricks, 55.
77 Ibid.
78 CONAIE, 90.
79 Hendricks, 54.
Shuar, and Achuar, accounting for approximately 100,000 people according to CONAIE. Each of these nations has shared experiences with the incursions of the military, transnational corporations, colonizers, and missionaries, groups that sought to “civilize” Ecuador’s Amazonian frontier for the purposes of resource exploitation and national integration. In particular, the arrival of petroleum corporations and Protestant missionaries in the 1950s and 1960s placed tremendous pressures on the indigenous communities. According to CONAIE, the major factors that influenced the Amazonian organizational impulse were: 1. the activity of the Summer Institute of Linguistics; 2. petroleum exploitation; 3. the construction roads to support the petroleum industry, and the spontaneous colonization that followed; 4. organized State-sponsored colonization; 5. the rise of export agriculture (particularly African palm); 6. the militarization of the Oriente for national security purposes; and 7. the designation of national parks and reserves in traditionally indigenous territories. These material conditions embodied the discursive practices of Ecuadorean national hegemony, and shaped the consciousness of indigenous communities.

Local organizations were formed in an effort to protect access to material resources, reflected in the self-identification of the earlier groups as workers’ syndicates or peasant organizations. For example, in the province of Napo, early organizational efforts, with support of Catholic missionaries, resulted in the creation of the Syndicate of Agricultural Workers. By the late 1960s, the communities of Napo formed a new organization named the Provincial Federation of Campesino Organizations of Napo (FEPOCAN). Both of these groups were organized around the defense of land. By 1973, though, at the Third Ordinary General Provincial Congress of FEPOCAN, the name was changed to the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of Napo (FOIN) in order to more truly represent the nature of the organization. FOIN’s objectives had broadened from the defense of land to a two-tiered program that included the defense of the land and the defense of culture. Resistance to incursions of the national culture and its ideology of developmentalism and mestizaje became central issues.

This transition occurred throughout the Oriente, in all nine of the provincial organizations that

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80 CONAIE, 35, 37.
81 SIL is an evangelical Protestant organization, brought to the Oriente in 1953 with government approval, that used linguistic study as a pretense for the spread of North American fundamentalist religion and cultural values. The group sought to pacify indigenous peoples in order to facilitate the incursion of transnational corporations, particularly petroleum companies. Their involvement with indigenous peoples spanned the continent. See, Gerald Colby and Charlotte Dennett, Thy Will Be Done: The Conquest of the Amazon: Nelson Rockefeller and Evangelism in the Age of Oil (New York: HarperCollins, 1995).
82 CONAIE, 39.
83 Ibid., 47.
form the core of movement in the region. \(^{84}\) Half of these organizations were formed under the direct sponsorship of Catholic missionaries. All of the organizations placed their organizational process within a historical context of the oppression by and resistance to intrusive practices of missionaries, economic interests, and government projects dating back to the colonial period. As the decade of the 1970s progressed, the region experienced a dramatic intensification of national development with the boom in the petroleum industry. As the earlier quote by General Lara suggested, the development program of the military government emphasized modernization, mestizaje, and a cult of “national culture.” The mutual recognition of shared experiences and problems across ethnic and cultural boundaries instigated the organization of a regional association that would be able to strengthen and unify the voice of indigenous concerns within the Oriente. The construction of a regional organization was successfully completed on at the First Congress of the Indigenous Nationalities of Amazonia on 22-24 August 1980 in Puyo in the province of Pastaza. At this regional meeting, the provincial organizations decided to unify through the constitution of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorean Amazon (CONFENIAE). \(^{85}\)

The formation of CONFENIAE significantly changed the scope and substance of the new indigenous organizational efforts of the 1970s. Born out of local, grassroots struggles, CONFENIAE, and the program it developed, broadened the scale of indigenous demands, through unity in diversity, patterning an inclusive strategy ultimately resulting in the formation of CONAIE and the 1990 Levantamiento. CONFENIAE places its construction within the context of the growth of indigenous consciousness and the maturation of their organizational abilities. Regional representation of indigenous demands seemed the next logical step in pressing for the preservation of culture and resources. CONFENIAE explains,

> The maturity attained by the organizations permitted us to seek the unity of the peoples of Amazonia, as the mechanism to most effectively continue struggling as a united front, in a coordinated manner, for our ancestral rights such as: the land, culture, and a space within the political scene of the country... [a]pects vital to the survival of our peoples. \(^{86}\)

CONFENIAE linked all elements of their struggle to the preservation and extension of their cultural distinctiveness. The group viewed their indigenous culture as a “patrimonio nacional” (national patrimony) that demarcated the various nationalities of the Oriente as, “race[s] of true people[s] with their own

\(^{84}\) The nine key organizations identified by CONAIE are, FOIN, the Federation of United Communities of Natives of the Ecuadorean Amazon (FCUNAE), the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of Sucumbios, Ecuador (FOIS-E), the Association of Siona-Secoya Centers, the Huao Nation, the A'I Nation (Cofan), the Organization of Indigenous Peoples of Pastaza (OPIP), the Federation of Shuar Centers, and the Independent Association of the Shuar People. Ibid., 7-8.

\(^{85}\) Ibid., 99.

\(^{86}\) Ibid.
civilization. The terminology employed taps into the discourse of the nation utilized by the government to legitimate claims to authority over culture and resources. This shift represented a radical development in the regional and national goals of the movement, converting locally-based material concerns into struggles over meaning and identity— with serious implications for questions of resources.

By their second congress in 1982, CONFENIAE began to develop the specific programmatic objectives that would guide the national indigenous movement over the next ten years, including: 1. the petition for legal title to land and resources through governmental, institutional means; 2. the insistence on bilingual education, as a means to preserve indigenous language and culture; 3. the protection of traditional medicine; and 4. the fortification and unification indigenous organizations, autonomous from political and sectarian religious influences.

It is significant that the most dynamic organizational leadership in the indigenous movement of Ecuador originated in the Oriente, a region long considered as Ecuador’s own internal frontier. As Ana Maria Alonso has noted,

In the New World the frontier is conceived as a liminal space, betwixt and between savagery and civilization, a place where the struggle of human beings against the wilderness assumes a particularly harsh form, where society’s domestication of nature is always contingent and threatened. As an outpost of the civilized polis, the frontier is viewed as lying at the margins of state power, between the laws of society and the freedoms of nature, between the imperatives of obedience and the refusals of defiance. The liminality of the frontier, its location on the creative margin between the wild and the social, makes it the locus of liberty and possibility.

Frontier areas, seen as either under-utilized or unoccupied, need to be incorporated into the national economy through a process of pacification, occupation, and civilization. Likewise, frontiers offer opportunities for the alleviation of social pressures in central regions, as well as for social mobility in structured societies. In the case of Ecuador, the government viewed the Amazonian frontier as an area that required both incorporation into the national project for economic and national security purposes, and as a zone that provided the possibility of alleviating population and agricultural pressures in the central highlands. As a result, the indigenous nationalities of the Oriente experienced an intensified encounter with the dual purposes of the frontier. The intrusion of the oil economy and colonization policies of the national government transformed the Amazon from a peripheral area into a central region of development. Indigenous communities occupied traditional lands without formal, government recognized title, and

87Ibid., 100.
88Ibid., 101-102.
cultural/ethnic-based claims were the most effective strategy the communities could utilize. As casualties of the national project of modernization and mestizaje, the diversity of indigenous cultures within the region had good cause to learn the process of unification in heterogeneity.

Organizational processes in the highlands displayed both similarities and disjunctures with the experiences of the Oriente. Highland indigenous peoples are unified, for example, by the Quichua language, and sustained contact with the Hispanic social, cultural, and economic systems from the initiation of the colonial period. Significantly, this contact with the Hispanic world integrated indigenous communities in the Sierra into the urban economy as primary agricultural producers and into the Catholic Church. These two aspects were foundational in the organizational process, which began, as noted earlier, with support and leadership from Communist activists and the progressive wing of the Catholic Church. Transportation and communication networks, rural-urban migration, and presence of groups such as the Federation of Ecuadorean Indians (FEI) and the National Federation of Peasant Organizations (FENOC) eased the process of organization, and, unlike in the Oriente, provincial and regional organizations developed concurrently during the 1970s. Analogous with Oriente groups, these organizations experienced a transformation in orientation during the decade from peasant-oriented to self-identified indigenous organizations. We will look at the provincial organizations in Imbabura and Pichincha as examples of these trends before turning to the regional group, ECUARUNARI.

Indigenous people represent approximately 75% of Imbabura, including Otavalo, home to one of Ecuador’s most economically successful ethnic groups. The organizational impulse developed amongst this population through communal experiences with agrarian reform, social, economic, cultural, and political discrimination, the organizational work of ECUARUNARI, and with the growth of a new strata of indigenous intellectuals and professionals. Initially the objectives of population fell in line with traditional peasant strategies and demands, typified by the formation of the Peasant Confederation of Imbabura. The confederation was founded as the result of a May Day march in 1974. From the beginning, though, there developed an internal debate over the orientation the group would emphasize. The original objectives of the group identified four key points of struggle: 1. local political self-determination; 2. the defense of culture in the face of racial discrimination; 3. the recuperation of lands; and, 4. the strengthening of the organization

90 CONAIE, 131.
91 Ibid.
as indigenous. It took four years to achieve a compromise, and in 1978 the confederation convened its first congress as an indigenous organization. The compromise dictated that though the group was defined as indigenous, it would enter into an alliance with organizations based on class and emphasize a leftist political agenda. Six years later, in 1982, the confederation changed its name to the Indigenous and Peasant Federation of Imbabura (FICI). Finally, in 1984, at the Third Congress of FICI, the group adopted the Quichua name Imbabura Runacunapac Jatun Tantanacui Inrujta. The shifts in name represented the shift in outlook, as the group sought to emphasize more and more the indigenous nature of their projects and demands.

Pichincha Riccharimui, one of two provincial organizations in the capitol province of Ecuador, identified its two main influences as the Cuban Revolution and Vatican II, bringing together the two main organizational factors in the Sierra, the progressive Church and Latin American Marxism. Formed in 1974 under the pattern of ECUARUNARI, and with the support of the progressive sectors of the Catholic Church, Pichincha Riccharimui decided early on to break with any institutional affiliations with the Church. The organization maintained its commitments, like those in Imbabura, to a leftist political line. Originally conceiving the struggle as racially-defined, against blanco-mestizos, Pichincha Riccharimui refined its struggle to the confrontation of the systemic rule of the dominant class and the State, perceived to be the protector of elite interests. By 1988, the group’s objectives reflected this synthesis of class and ethnic resistance, articulating their struggle as the struggle for land, respect of indigenous communities, against the high cost of living, for the rescue of traditional medicine, for unity with the working class, and for bilingual education directed by the indigenous communities.

The amalgamation of class and ethnic interests in the Sierra is representative of the legacy of the FEI and the progressive sectors of the Catholic Church. The regional organization of the Sierra, ECUARUNARI, founded in June 1972, characterizes this trend. In the founding congress of the organization, attended by 200 delegates from indigenous communities throughout the Sierra, there was a strong debate over whether the organization would be distinctly indigenous, or would also include non-Indians (read indigenous or peasant-oriented). With the support of the Church, the faction arguing for an exclusively indigenous organization won, and ECUARUNARI was founded as a both indigenous and ecclesiastical organization. The strong presence of the Church sought to counteract its waning influence in FENOC, whose leadership was formally taken over by socialists in 1975. According to Zamosc, though,

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92 Ibid., 133.
93 Ibid., 149.
94 Ibid., 215.
the identification of ECUARUNARI as an indigenous organization may have been true of its organizational basis, but its program differed little from the left-oriented FENOC. Zamosc explains,

A the local level, however, [ECUARUNARI] sought a foothold in the organizational forms already existing in the Indian communities and their cabildos. Yet for all the emphasis on ECUARUNARI’s distinctiveness as an Indian organization, its discourse scarcely differed from that of FENOC in that it espoused a class-based ideology focuses on the struggle for land, linking that struggle to the socialist ideals of the worker-peasant alliance and paying little attention to ethnicity as an issue itself.\textsuperscript{95}

The class-oriented ideology of ECUARUNARI’s program, and the ties to the Catholic Church, were not without contestation. Throughout the 1970s, the organization seemed to be in perpetual crisis, along ideological, political, and organizational lines. It was not until 1979 at the Fifth Congress of ECUARUNARI that issues identified with a cultural agenda began to appear, with the first resolutions on issues such as bilingual education and the defense of cultural values.\textsuperscript{96} The beginnings of this shift in ECUARUNARI’s orientation coincided with the dissipation of FENOC’s influence in the Sierra. The socialist leadership of FENOC hampered the organization’s ability to mobilize indigenous communities. In addition, left-identified organizations came under increasing repression from the military junta in the late 1970s, precipitating a crisis on the left that only heightened in the 1980s. As Zamosc notes,

When asked to account for FENOC’s incapacity to respond in a dynamic fashion to the new conditions, most activists and observers point to two factors: the bureaucratic entrenchment of its national leaders, and the ideological crisis that has gripped the Socialist party and the Ecuadorean left in general.\textsuperscript{97}

ECUARUNARI’s shift, which sought to emphasize the defense of indigenous cultures and increased participation in the democratic political processes of the national political scene without abandoning its material demands, enhanced its standing in the regional communities.\textsuperscript{98}

The formation of CONAIE in 1986 united the diverse trends and historical legacies of the various organizations of the Sierra and Oriente. Most significantly, CONAIE completed the transformation of the indigenous movement from dependence upon Church and left-political leadership ties, to one directed and organized by an indigenous intelligentsia trained by the experiences of the last two decades. An outgrowth of earlier experiences with the National Coordinating Council of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONACNIE), the result of an alliance between CONFENIAE and ECUARUNARI, CONAIE was formed during a national congress of indigenous organizations that met from 13-16 November 1986. The congress

\textsuperscript{95}Zamosc, 47.
\textsuperscript{96}CONAIE, 221-222.
\textsuperscript{97}Zamosc, 48.
\textsuperscript{98}Ibid.
was attended by 500 delegates from the nine indigenous nationalities of Ecuador, representing 27 organizations from the Costa, the Sierra, and the Oriente. The themes of analysis of the meeting centered on developing a national agenda for the indigenous nationalities, including demarcating the new organization’s stance on political issues, land reform, legislative reform, bilingual education, women’s issues, and traditional medicine. The consequent resolutions reflected the birth of a national social movement that fit all the criteria of a NSM, including the primacy of cultural identity, unity through diversity, organizational autonomy, and the struggle for the democratization of the political process, while maintaining connections to structural reforms in the economic and agrarian sectors. These resolutions included:

- The struggle for direct participation in the Public Administration of the State.
- Devolution of land to indigenous communities.
- The creation of an indigenous bank to fund the adjudication of these lands.
- The analysis of reality from an indigenous perspective, and the education of the communities on this reality.
- The dissemination of an indigenous ideology and philosophy.
- The creation of a permanent political commission on relations with national politics.
- The officialization of indigenous languages.
- The defense of native cultures.
- The development and implementation of an indigenous led bilingual education program.
- The preservation of traditional medicinal practices.

This initial outline provided the foundation of the platform CONAIE brought to the nation’s attention in June 1990. CONAIE places its formation within the historical context of oppression, resistance, and a tradition of communal and kinship based solidarity. The leadership of CONAIE presents the organization as the natural outgrowth of the increasing scale of organization, from the local, to the provincial, to the regional, to the national. The constitution of a national organization, uniting the three regions of the country, enabled the indigenous movement to articulate alternatives to the modernization-mestizaje project that had defined Ecuadorian national identity for the balance of the twentieth century.

Following the legalization of the organization, CONAIE began to work towards developing a unified national project for the indigenous movement. The task was a staggering one, as old tensions between the Oriente and Sierra had to be overcome. In order to unite the diverse interests of the nationalities, and the linguistic barriers that separated the groups, CONAIE centered its efforts on the promulgation of a platform focused on land, education, and constitutional reform. The influence of Oriente nationalities is evident in the extent to which cultural issues formed the core of the organization’s platform.

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99 CONAIE, 269.
100 Ibid., 270-272.
Oriente groups had embraced a more radically ethnic discourse because of the virtual absence of alternative leftist discourses and organizational practices in the region. The legacy of Sierran ties to the workers movement and left politics remained in the formation of CONAIE, representative of the close relationship between the emergence of an ethnic discourse and the residual influence of long-standing efforts by the Ecuadorean left to organize the highlands.

The ethnic-class connection, along with the desire to openly mediate indigenous concerns within the democratic-political process were embodied in two activities CONAIE participated in in 1987. First, on 1 May 1987 CONAIE participated in the first unified May Day March in seventy-five years. The march was co-sponsored by the United Front of Workers (FUT), the Popular Front (FP), the National Coordinator of Workers (CNT), and CONAIE. The march was an outgrowth of the April 1987 First United Convention in which groups of campesinos, workers, and indigenous met to solidify a decade of relationship building.\(^{101}\)

From the beginning, CONAIE sought to cultivate and maintain public solidarity with the worker’s movement, aligning itself with the progressive political tradition. Secondly, in June 1987, CONAIE participated in a national indigenous colloquium organized by the National Congress, and overseen by the congressional Vice President. The principal objectives of the colloquium were to develop labor legislation for the countryside and elaborate mechanisms to increase direct, democratic participation between Congress and civil society, in particular indigenous organizations. The modified perspective of the government sought integration of the indigenous communities into the national community “without the loss or atrophy of their rich cultural identity.”\(^{102}\)

CONAIE’s willingness to work in solidarity with the class-based organizations and in direct contact with the national government established a key modus operandi for the successful implementation of the 1990 Uprising. Early contacts with the government established the legitimacy of CONAIE’s claims to speak for the indigenous populations of the country. In addition, the mutual support of ethnic and class movements enhanced CONAIE’s position in public opinion, support that was central to the legitimation of the Uprising.

Throughout the early years of the organization, CONAIE continued to press for the actualization of agrarian reform and land redistribution for indigenous communities. The pressure applied by the indigenous movement succeeded in attaining the repeal of the Regulations of the Law of Agrarian Reform,

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\(^{102}\)“Coloquio indigena,” El Comercio 6/6/87, in Kipu 8: 35.
declared in 1982 by President Oswald Hurtado in 1982. From their inception, peasant and indigenous communities protested the regulations, whose principle objective was to paralyze the implementation of the reform. On 10 June 1987 the Tribunal of Constitutional Guarantees suspended the totality of the regulations, in large part due to the pressure placed on the Tribunal by thousands of peasants and indigenous throughout the country. The decision was seen as a victory not only on the agrarian reform front, but also over the interests of the oligarchy and hacienda owners represented by the conservative administration of then president León Febres Cordero.

As already indicated, CONAIE’s ambitions went far beyond land reform and traditional labor concerns, seeking rather to redefine the contours of national development and identity. The thrust of CONAIE’s focus centered on the concept of plurinationality, going beyond recognition of the diversity of cultures and languages within Ecuador to a redefinition of the very nature of national-democratic participation. In 1988, CONAIE advanced its plan for national reform in its “Preliminary Draft of the Law of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador.” The document, born out of the Commission of Indigenous Affairs of the National Congress, was submitted as a catalyst of discussion on the direction and objectives of the national indigenous movement. Most significantly, the document begins with the proclamation of the plurinational character of Ecuador, stating in Article 1,

The Republic of Ecuador is a plurinational State within which the indigenous peoples participate with their culture, organization, and rights, especially the right to self-determination which this law guarantees and normalizes.

The document continues to outline an indigenous agenda of cultural identity based on this notion of plurinationality in which indigenous peoples would participate directly in Ecuador’s democratic process. Other themes enumerated in the document include legislative reforms, land issues, education, culture, medicine, and the development of legal guarantees to indigenous autonomy and self-determination. It is significant that the terminology used draws heavily on the Enlightenment and modernist lexicon of democracy, rights, nationality, and self-determination.

By 1989, the indigenous movement was beginning to make its presence felt in the national political discourse. Issues of identity, culture, and history, with real political implications, were increasingly discussed in the national press. The discussion revealed cracks in the official discourse on development and

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103 “Suspensión del reglamento de la ley de reforma agraria triunfo de la lucha campesina-indigena,” El Mercurio, 6/23/87, in Kipu 9, 44.
national identity. For example, the Inter-American Day of the Indian, designated as 16 April by the Organization of American States, precipitated reflection on the integrity of indigenous identity and the cultural elements that mark off that identity from the blanco-mestizo world. One commentator noted, "We evoke on this date the thousands of indigenous who struggle for their identity, although in adverse conditions, to their families and children who work in the countryside and the city."\(^{105}\) An Hoy editorial delineated differences between indigenous and Western perspectives on the purposes of economic development. The commentator suggested that Western economies strive for the reproduction of capital, while indigenous economies endeavor for the reproduction of life.\(^{106}\) Much to the chagrin of General Lara, the Indian had not disappeared, and the national culture was anything but hegemonic.

The coming quincentennial of the arrival of Christopher Columbus also provided grounds for discussion, in a battle of history and identity that only heightened as 1992 approached. Susana Cordero de Espinosa sought to contradict that traditional perception of the passive Indian in an editorial in Hoy on 20 May 1989. She proclaimed that the presentation of indigenous history as a history of passivity was the result of an ideology of domination that confined indigenous resistance to the colonial resistance of Rumiñahui and Tupac Amaru.\(^{107}\) Luis Maldonado stated with greater insistence that, "The celebration of the V Centennial is another imperialist aggression to the peoples of Latin America, and in particular to Indian peoples."\(^{108}\)

President Rodrigo Borja responded to the increased activity of the indigenous movement with favorable rhetorical overtures. In his acceptance speech on 10 August 1988 and then again on 6 May 1989 at an international conference in Brazil, Borja proclaimed that ‘Ecuador is a country plurinational and multicultural.’\(^{109}\) Borja continued, stating that the indigenous nationalities,

\[\text{are} \text{ true nationalities... With a racial unity, with the same culture... with the same language and religion, with specific practices and customs, with traditions, with concepts of life, with world-views... that must be respected.}^{110}\]

César Verdugo, Minister of Work and Human Resources, announced at the 76th Conference of the International Organization of Workers in Geneva Switzerland in June of 1989 the need for legislation to protect indigenous “nationalities.” He recognized the need for states to legalize the pluriethnic and

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\(^{105}\)“El Indio,” Revista Familia, 4/16/89, in KIPU 12, 23.


\(^{109}\)“El Estado Plurinacional y Multicultural de Borja,” in, Ibid., 289.

\(^{110}\)Ibid.
multicultural reality of their populaces, and the need for the legalization of indigenous forms of social organization that would guarantee and respect the integrity of indigenous cultural identity. This rhetorical shift contravened the official conceptions of national unity, defined by the mestizo project of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. According to the indigenous leadership, though, the significance of the pronunciations went no further than rhetoric. Borja’s conception of plurinationalism was called superficial, as the real situation of the indigenous communities had changed little if any. But the references did invite a debate the indigenous leadership longed to enter: “the construction of a country truly plurinational, multicultural, and democratic.”

The discontent of the indigenous communities continued, as did the consolidation of CONAIE as a national organization. As the debate on indigenous issues progressed on a national level, the reality of the rhetorical nature of Borja’s pronouncements became increasingly clear. The mood was ripe for action. In April 1990 at the Fifth National Assembly of CONAIE the decision was made to organize the June Uprising. Luis Macas explained,

Amidst the total discontent of our people, CONAIE convened in April of 1990 our Fifth Assembly, which took place in Pujili. After a profound analysis of the situation, which beset the indigenous and the Ecuadorian people in general, through consensus, we decided to realize the Levantamiento Indigena on the 4th, 5th, and 6th of June. The national political scene of Ecuador would never be the same again. The organizational process that gave birth to CONAIE had clarified to its leadership a culturally based agenda that enabled the organization to contest dominant understandings of national identity through the articulation of an alternative vision of the nation. This agenda was a struggle over meaning, though it included very real material implications. Born out of the experiences of modernization, development, and mestizaje, the indigenous movement actively engaged in a discourse of descent built on a syncretic interpretation of indigenous history and development, and of the implications of democratic citizenship. A key element of the discursive practices of CONAIE was CONAIE’s call for indigenous-controlled bilingual/bicultural education. The education issue is especially significant because of the role education has played in the construction of Ecuadorian national identity. Bilingual education, as defined by the indigenous movement, embodies the struggle over history, nationality, language, and culture that make this social movement so crucial.

112 “El Estado,” 290.
113 Macas, 16.
Educational institutions provide a major contact point for the development of national identity. School buildings embody the presence of the nation, while civic education reads national identity into students. As Radcliffe and Westwood explain,

Individuals acquire consciousness of a national identity at the same time as they acquire the national language, an education and other cultural resources. As the nation is ‘embodied’ in education, secular rituals such as elections, the media and cultural institutions, ‘the nation is thus a component in each individual’s self- and other-awareness.’

In Ecuador, nearly seventy-five per cent of the population has at least a primary education. Schooling is centered around the development of “the cultural inheritance of Ecuadoreans” in order to “maintain and preserve all the values of nationality.” This purpose is codified in Ecuadorean law, the 1984 Constitution stating that, “Education will inspire the principles of nationality, democracy, social justice, peace, the defense of human rights... [and] the promotion of an authentic national culture.”

Educational institutions in Ecuador, which require civic education through the secondary level, have actively pursued the preservation of an imagined historical heritage, the universalization of the Spanish language, and the integration of the population into dominant understandings of citizenship and ‘civilization.’ Radcliffe and Westwood note that this process is especially evident in state schooling among indigenous populations who have had little contact with the State:

Among the indigenous group of Huaorani in the Oriente, state education is as much about changing bodily habits and clothing as it is about learning the curriculum. Schooling brings ‘civilization,’ that is a new set of behaviours associated with the modern status of citizenship.

The primacy of Spanish is also significant. For the majority of the history of Ecuador, and particularly since Independence, Spanish has been used as the only official language in education, while other languages have been confined to use in the home. The State perceived indigenous languages as incapable of transmitting an acceptable culture, and schools as the location of linguistic, and therefore cultural, transformation.

The implication is that languages consist of more that simple means of communication,
but rather are invested with cultural implications that affect every level of one’s participation in society. CONAIE’s authors explain,

The subordination of Quichua should not be understood as a purely linguistic problem, or simply as the disappearance of a language that is difficult to learn. Rather, it should be understood as a dependency and structural disarticulation of all the native nationalities. The aforementioned subordination is the expression of a process of domination, executed for more than 100 years in our country and in all of Indigenous America. 119

The preservation of indigenous languages through an effective bilingual education program, from CONAIE’s perspective, is therefore intricately linked to indigenous liberation from more than a century of linguistic and cultural imperialism in the form of civic education. The implications go far beyond linguistic protection. Education therefore acts as a discursive practice though which the boundaries of nationhood are established. The contestation of this discursive practice by the indigenous movement, through bilingual education programs, represents an articulatory practice that seeks to redefine the boundaries of nationhood and identity. 120

Precedents for a national bilingual education program exist on many fronts. The 1945 Constitution guaranteed the use of indigenous education in areas with majority indigenous populations, stating in Article 143: “In areas with predominantly Indian populations, [schools] will teach in Spanish as well as Quichua or the respective aboriginal language.” 121 The 1984 Constitution maintained this policy, stating in Article 27, “In education systems that develop in areas with predominantly indigenous populations, [schools] will utilize Quichua or the language of the respective culture as the primary language of education, and Spanish, as the language of intercultural relations.” 122

Early efforts at bilingual education, though, originated outside of official State educational institutions. Primary among these were distance education programs using radio, pioneered by Monsenor Leonidas Proaño, Archbishop of Riobamba. Proaño’s program, Popular Radio Schools (ERPE), emphasized the extension of literacy throughout the Sierra through the use of radio. The purpose of the program was, “To organize literacy campaigns through radio and to instruct the popular classes in

118(...continued)
Samuel Ññiguez and gerardo Guerrero, Pueblos Indígenas y Educación 1.2 (Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 1987).
119Ibid., 3.
120The concept of articulatory practice used here draws upon the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics (New York: Verso Books, 1985). Laclau and Mouffe define articulation as “any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call discourse.” 105.
121CONAIE-COMUNIDEC-IAF, 10.
122“Codificación...”
materials fundamental for their development and the incorporation of indigenous peasants into the social and economic life of the nation." By 1969, ERPE had opened 369 schools in nine provinces across the Sierra, four in the Oriente, and two on the Coast. During the 1970s, the progressive wing of the Catholic Church encouraged bilingual education programs as it sought to extend the use of Quichua throughout dioceses in the Sierra. By the end of the decade, Catholic University in Quito was offering courses in Quichua and developing pedagogical materials for its teaching as a second language. The University concurrently formed the Center for Investigation of Indigenous Education (CIEI), which worked towards codifying and unifying local bilingual education programs.

The activities of CIEI corresponded with the democratic transition of 1979 and the assumption of power by the Roldos-Hurtado administration. The administration initiated a rural literacy program, in Quichua, that centered on the objectives of the re-valuation of indigenous psychology, culture, unique socio-economic and political problems, and the development of their own forms of organization. Hurtado went further, officializing bilingual education in indigenous communities on 12 January 1982, resolution 000529, which stated that based on constitutional recognition of indigenous languages as part of the national culture, and guarantees of their utilization in indigenous education, the government 'officializes Bilingual-Bicultural Education, establishing in areas of predominant indigenous populations, primary and middle [schools] where instruction will be imparted in the Quichua and Spanish languages, or the local vernacular.' On 5 May 1982, the government then created the Department of Rural Education (DER) in order to centralize state policy on bilingual education in the countryside. Finally, in 1985 the government entered into an agreement with the government of Germany that resulted in the formation of the Project for Bilingual Education, in conjunction with the Ministry of Culture and Education (MEC) and DER.

The increased interest in bilingual education programs, including literacy drives, opened a door of opportunity for the indigenous movement to mold the direction and curriculum of the programs. From the perspective of CONAIE, this opening constituted a possibility for the national government to encourage the "preservation and development of a national identity that arises out of the multi-lingual and pluri-

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123 CONAIE-COMUNIDEC-IAF, 12.
125 CONAIE-COMUNIDEC-IAF, 14.
127 Matthias Abram, director of EBI from 1985-1990, has published a history of the program. See Abram, op. cit.
In 1988 CONAIE submitted to MEC a national plan for indigenous education that proposed guarantees for bilingual education amongst all the indigenous nationalities of the country. Under the proposal, MEC and CONAIE would cooperatively administer educational programs taught in the dominate indigenous language of a given region’s indigenous population. Funds for the programs were to be provided by MEC and jointly administered by the two organizations. In November 1989, MEC and CONAIE met officially to establish the responsibilities of the government and the participation of CONAIE in the development of Bilingual-Intercultural Education. Under the agreement, assumed the coordination of the National Literacy Campaign “Monseñor Leonidas Proaño” in the communities under their influence. In addition, CONAIE assumed the responsibility for the development of educational materials for the program, including curricular materials at various levels of schooling and methodological manuals for bilingual educators. In return, MEC would provide the necessary resources and facilities, including the publication of materials developed. Resources provided included S./56 million. The meeting coincided with the formation of the National Director of Indigenous Bilingual-Intercultural Education (DINEIB) by the Borja administration.

CONAIE leadership viewed the formation of DINEIB and the negotiation of direct participation of the indigenous movement in the production of national educational policy as a significant victory. Criticism immediately came from various representatives of the left, as well as within indigenous communities, that believed CONAIE had sold out to the government. But the action accords with the social movement’s goals of democratizing indigenous participation in the national political scene. Certainly the 1990 Uprising vindicated the leadership’s perspective, that selected participation in the government did not diminish their capacity to act autonomously, and in radical opposition to the same group they were cooperating with.

The importance of bilingual education lies in its use as a strategic point of struggle against national fields of power. CONAIE’s responsibility in preparing didactic material for the national program provided a tremendous opportunity to re-structure the emphases of rural education. The codification and dissemination of indigenous languages, outside of missionary work such as that of the SIL, vindicates the cultural implications of the use of non-Spanish languages. As Virginia Plérola remarked in a December 1988 editorial in Hoy,
In the recreation of cultural forms, in daily relations of individuals and spontaneous and organized public interactions... language plays the role of a bond, of an instrument of articulation between culture and society. To accept this relationship—between culture and society—implies the recognition of the function of society in the dynamic of groups and social classes that dispute spaces of power. Therefore, language becomes the expression of hegemonic interests of resistance or alternatives.\textsuperscript{132}

The incorporation of indigenous languages into the educational system enacts a revalorization of indigenous culture. The articulatory practice of bilingual education fixes a system of differences, built upon the plurality of indigenous national identities (all in contestation to dominant interpretations of national identity), by constituting and organizing cultural preservation through the dissemination of language, ‘embodying’ indigenous consciousness through the institutionalization of cultural identity, and through the democratization of national educational policy. The result is a discursive practice in which participants are empowered to negotiate their incorporation into broader Ecuadorean society. Control over curricular issues equates control over the interpretation of history, and thereby the interpretation of citizenship, participation, and national identity. As Paulo Freire has noted, literacy education can provide the tools necessary for people to critically view social reality, a process of conscientization.\textsuperscript{133} This process shifts the contours of a major source of ‘civilization’ and ‘nationalization’ commanded by the government. The democratic discourse accompanying the development of public education laid the foundation the indigenous movement has used to question Ecuadorean hierarchy.

A Conclusion?

CONAIE and the indigenous movement in Ecuador have significantly shifted Ecuador’s national political dynamic. As the legitimacy of modern understandings of the nation-state, based on the suppression of localized alternatives to national identity, is being violently contested throughout the world (Rwanda, the Balkans, etc.), Ecuador’s indigenous peoples have actively engaged in a non-violent, anti-hegemonic challenge to Ecuadorean nationalism. The movement has sought to redefine understandings of nationality, economy, and ethnicity based upon concepts of plurinationality and multiculturalism clarified by the organizational process that gave birth to CONAIE. This organizational process developed in response to structural factors directly impacting the daily lives of indigenous communities. Pressures placed on the communities by agrarian transformations, modernization policies, and the increased presence of the Ecuadorean State sparked a wave of indigenous organizing, particularly in the 1970s. At the

\textsuperscript{132} Virginia Plérola, “Bilingüismo y educación,” Hoy 12/31/88, in Ibid., 37.
moment when Ecuador’s development dreams seemed within reach, undercurrents of resistance were brewing. Influenced by the progressive wing of the Catholic Church and the sustained activity of the Ecuadorean left, indigenous communities throughout the country joined together to protect their access to resources. As these organizations matured, it became clear that class-based ideologies were incapable of representing the desires of the communities. A shift occurred in which the peasant orientation of the socialists and the integrative implications of Church involvement were renounced. This process was far from uniform throughout the country, and the specific structural contexts of the given regions greatly affected the extent and pace of the shift. In the Oriente, where State intrusion was felt more keenly, the organizations embraced a culturally-based agenda more fully. Sustained contact with national markets and culture over a longer period of time in the Sierra produced a regional movement with strong contacts to Ecuador’s traditional left.

As local and provincial organizations recognized the efficacy of uniting their struggles, the indigenous movement became pro-active on an increasing scale. The development of national representation in 1986 with the formation of CONAIE typified this process. The process brought indigenous organizational efforts from a reactionary position, in defense of land, to a pro-active position in which the movement sought to contest dominant understandings of Ecuadorean nationality, formed on the dual discourse of development and mestizaje. But this position, and the cultural agenda that defines it, does not rely on an essentialist view of indigenous identity. CONAIE’s praxis synthesizes the modern and the traditional, engaging the national government on concepts grounded in the liberal-democratic discourse of Ecuador’s nation-builders. This position is typified in CONAIE’s program of bilingual education. Bilingual education, for CONAIE, seeks to fortify indigenous cultural identity through the preservation of indigenous languages, a practical application of the concept of pluri-culturalism. By utilizing a key institutional path for the development of national identity, bilingual education has the potential to provide an alternative identity from within nationalized channels. The programs adopt an institution legitimized in liberal-democratic discourse for the construction of counter-hegemonic discursive practice and the extension of democratic participation. By capitalizing on both modern and traditional practices in the contestation of the dominant discourse of national identity, and by emphasizing ethnic/cultural parameters in the construction of alternatives, CONAIE typifies the NSMs that emerged throughout the continent in the 1980s.

In subsequent years, the indigenous movement continued to pressure the national government. Uprisings in 1992 and 1994 maintained the tension established in 1990. The movement is not, though, without internal challenges and weaknesses of its own. A movement unified through a plurality of
differences always walks a tenuous line, marginalizing voices within while protesting such marginalization from without. Bilingual education programs have been concentrated largely in Sierran communities, often emphasizing Quichua to the point of monolingualism, thus marginalizing participants from broader access to national dynamics. Additionally, the indigenous do not constitute the only marginalized group within the country. The incorporation of Afro-Ecuadoran and mestizo perspectives remains a real challenge in the movement’s alternative vision for ‘all Ecuadorians.’ Massive government corruption during the administration of Abdalá Bucaram seduced representatives of the indigenous movement as well as the elites. As Ecuador’s domestic economic and social situation moves ever closer to crisis, the need for the articulation of a definitive alternative to a political system virtually all Ecuadorians perceive of as devoid of meaning remains. The jury is still out as to whether or not Ecuador’s indigenous movement can effectively fill that void.
### The Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador

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1From CONAIE, 283.
CONAIE'S SIXTEEN DEMANDS

1. Return of lands and territories taken from indigenous communities, without costly legal fees.

2. Sufficient water for human consumption and irrigation in indigenous communities, and a plan to prevent pollution of water supplies.

3. No municipal taxes on small properties owned by indigenous farmers.

4. Long-term financing for bilingual education programs in the communities.

5. Creation of provincial and regional credit agencies to be controlled by CONAIE.

6. Forgiveness of all debts to government ministries and banks incurred by indigenous communities.

7. Amendment of the first article of the constitution to proclaim Ecuador as a multi-national state.

8. Immediate delivery of funds and credits currently budgeted for indigenous nationalities.

9. Minimum two-year price freeze on all raw materials and manufactured goods used by the communities in agricultural production, and reasonable price increase on all agricultural goods sold by them, using free-market mechanisms.

10. Initiation and completion of all priority construction on basic infrastructure for indigenous communities.

11. Unrestricted import and export privileges for indigenous artisans and handcrafts merchants.

12. National legislation and enforcement to provide for strict protection and controlled exploration of archaeological sites under the supervision of CONAIE.

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1Quoted in Fields, 41.

14. Respect for the rights of children and greater government awareness of their current plight.

15. National support for indigenous medicine.

16. Immediate dismantling of political party organizations that parallel government institutions at the municipal and provincial levels, and which manipulate political consciousness and elections in indigenous communities.


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2. Davidson, Russ "A Description of Rare and Important Medina Imprints in the University of New Mexico Library." May 1988.


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