The Indigenous Quest for Power Sharing in Post-Colonial Ecuador

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Abstract: The power structures instilled during colonial times allowed foreign rulers to govern already established societies, and to develop an ethnically-polarized, stratified society that fosters disparity and impairs the country from developing as a unified nation. The cultural identity of contemporary Ecuadorian society was constructed on the oppression of ethnically "inferior" groups, creating in the indigenous and rural communities a sense of powerlessness that has for many years allowed for the exploitation of resources and of human capital in favor of the elite minorities. Concepts such as "ethnic" and "traditional" are employed as synonyms for marginal, which served to develop a national identity that represented the indigenous populations as uncivilized subjects in contrast to the Europeanized "white" urban national subjects. Consequently, ethnic inequality has succeeded in virtually extinguishing indigenous languages and subjugating native communities for centuries. A more unified potential can well prepare Ecuador for a more globalized future.

Keywords: Ecuador, indigenes, colonial, inequality, identity, interethnic

1. Introduction

The account of oppressed ethnic groups in Ecuador is fragmented and episodic. This history, however, has also brought about a movement of unification and joint action for economic and social development. Within the context of a country where people are more tolerant of corruption and fatalities than they are of holding symmetrical relationships with the indigenous, social groups tend to become separatists. The indigenous populations of Ecuador inhabit mainly the rural areas in eighteen provinces—ten provinces in the highlands, five in the Amazonia and three on the coastline. The estimated population of these areas is close to 4,600,000 people, of which roughly two-thirds are indigenous (INEC, 2011). In these geographical clusters the majority of people are victims of abandonment, alienation and very low social mobility (Borja, 1998). Within these spaces we also find that the indigenous people co-inhabit the land alongside communities that identify themselves as non-indigenous. This occurs within a social frame of low interaction among groups, asymmetrical relations and the multilingual context that makes these encounters even more polarized.

Indigenous groups in Ecuador have been exploited for over five centuries, and yet they have managed to preserve their distinctiveness and diverse traditions through the ancestral means of communication that are part of their cultural construct. The main communication element of these ethnic communities is oral communication, which is subject to the subsistence of native languages. Other forms of cultural communication include dance, iconography of their traditional handicrafts, and symbiotic manifestations with nature (e.g., the emulation of animal

sounds in language, music and chromatics). Though many speak Quichua, the Ecuadorian dialect of the Amerindian language, Quechua, Ecuador also contains eight autochthonous native languages (Shaur, Achuar-Shiwiar, Cha'Plaachi, Tsafiqi, Awapit, A'Ingae, Paicoca and Huao Tiriro), some of which risk extinction, while others remain strong (Borja, 1998). The preservation of these languages is subject to population demise due to migration to urban cities and cultural assimilation. Still, these traditional languages are very much alive and continue to evolve into complex grammatical and lexical systems.

The history of the Ecuadorian nation can be illustrated through two different faces: one of great passion and determination and one of fragmentation and oppression. Both realities are deeply rooted in the colonial past of the nation and are intrinsically tied to one another in the creation of a national identity. The power structures developed during Ecuador's colonial past heavily segmented the population and developed a stratified social structure. The cultural personality of the contemporary Ecuadorian society evolved within a context in which the "ethnic" and "traditional" were used as jaundiced descriptors of the marginalized 'indigenous' populations, while Westernized "white-*mestizo*" and urban subjects enjoyed social mobility and economic opportunity. Consequently, ethnic inequality succeeded in both delegitimizing the cultural value of *indigenous* languages, as well as subjugating native communities.

This paper explores the definition of the Ecuadorian *indigenous* subject within a pluricultural social frame. It contends that the processes that led to the regional turn to the left also marked a critical juncture in which the socio-political dynamics fostered the unification of ethnic subaltern groups. This exploration will take an interdisciplinary approach that comprehends the process of identity building within the context of Ecuador's interethnic and social politics. Finally, the article will attempt to contextualize the Ecuadorian social reality in face of transnational globalization and its impact on reconciling the multiple cultures of Ecuador, as well as on the country's international relations.

As this article turns to the literature and to its primary arguments, a word from the author's perspective is also important. I am a young Ecuadorian female who is bilingual in Spanish and English, who holds dual citizenship in Ecuador and the United States, and who would likely be classified as a "white-*mestiza*" in the social system of Ecuador. Educated in Ecuador and in the USA, I have learned about ethnic relations from multiple perspectives and experienced the privilege of my status in my struggle to develop a more viable international perspective for my homeland of Ecuador. As a student of political science I recognize the dominance of power, ideology, and self-interest in national development. And as a student of intercultural and international communication I recognize the centrality of voice and symmetry in personal and group relations. All of these varied influences have led me to the philosophical position of this paper, a somewhat auto-ethnogeographical, humanistic perspective, with very realistic concerns for the future of Ecuador.

2. Framing the Issue

The articulation of social inequality involves the distribution of power and resources. At the heart of this concern is who gets what and why. In the context of Latin America—a poverty stricken region—the distribution of wealth, goods, services, and basic opportunities is socially

inverse and unbalanced. While minorities enjoy great wealth, the majority, particularly the indigenous groups, lives below the poverty line (Keefer & Knack, 2002). The detrimental consequences of this distributive system are intensified by the fact that these are generally relatively poor societies. Thus, "not only do the poor, the female and the darker receive smaller pieces, but the social cake is not large to begin with" (Hoffman & Centeno, p.365). At the starting line of the new century the main concern is promoting development through modernization, and countries like Ecuador are struggling to incorporate themselves into the "global village" while the internal ethnic fragmentations hinder their own consolidation as a nation (Beck & Mijeski, 2000).

Various authors have underlined the implications of modern life and globalization in portraying the urban as superior over the rural, causing migration to the urban areas in an effort of the rural populations to survive. The paradigm that the indigenous communities in Ecuador face is the struggle to preserve their traditional languages, systems and structures, while fighting to penetrate the mainstream modern social sphere, so as to gain the power and recognition that has been kept from them for over five hundred years.

Regardless of how the indigenes of Ecuador and their descendants have perceived themselves, the colonial and modern state maintains a hegemonic control over the social structure in which the only relevant means of identifying indigenous peoples are external to them (Beck & Mijeski, 2000; Crain, 1990; Colloredo-Mansfeld, 1998). Consequently, their cultures, language and traditional symbols have been delegitimized and marginalized as indicators of backwardness, poverty and stagnation—all as a consequence of illiteracy and media misrepresentation (Floyd, 2008).

Significant efforts for social improvements have been made on the part of indigenous peoples through organizations and mobilized protests. Even though indigenous protests were suppressed and kept out of the social sphere for many years, after centuries of struggles, the indigenes have gradually managed to gain recognition. These activist groups have successfully pressed the government for the reevaluation and abolition of restrictive policies that were created to hinder their social participation. Such is the case of the amendment to Article One of Ecuador's Political Constitution in 1984, by which they were able to include in a state's official document the recognition of Quichua and other native languages as part of the national culture (Crain, 1990; Kanagy, 1990).

After 1984, indigenous organizations formally penetrated the arena of electoral politics by forming first the CONAIE (National Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities), and consequently the Pachakutik-Nuevo País political movement, which resulted in the election of former CONAIE President Luis Macas and seven other candidates to the national legislature in the 1996 elections (Beck & Mijeski, 2000). The success of indigenous leaders in the Ecuadorian legislature elections evidenced the collective power those communities have, in terms of population, over other groups. The results of this progress are only slowly impacting the lives of the indigenous people.

3. The Indigenous Identity as a Result of 'Mestizaje'

The first symptom of a fragmented social scheme appears in the context of social

communication, the process that links the indigenous peoples and all other groups that make up Ecuadorian society. The linkages between these groups are dictated by a long-standing relationship of domination, exploitation, segregation and racism. The differentiations made among the racial "hierarchies" continue to describe social groups and mark their social standing. By the end of the colonial period, over one hundred categories of possible variations of mixture between Spaniards, indigenes and Afro-Ecuadorians existed. Social classifications such as "montubio," "zambo," "cholo," "longo," "indio," "criollo," and "white-mestizo" are some of the most common terms used to describe gradations of mixture (mestizaje). These ethnic categories point to both the citizens' social standing and their recognition as national subjects. Spanish settlers created this collection of ethnic slurs in the sixteenth century, and they have ever since been applied to individuals of mixed ancestry.

The relentless repetition of these slurs has penetrated the linguistic structures and influenced conceptions of the social order. Ecuadorians are vulnerable to constant attack through the use of these phrases of demeaning racist connotations. From these social order schemes, some groups developed into ethnic units. For instance, Montubios are an ethnic subaltern group, but they have developed their own cultural identity built on their productive activity, geographic location, idiosyncrasy and culture, thereby distancing themselves from their indigenous ancestry. Zambos are descendants of black and Ameri-Indian progenitors, also located mainly in the coastal region with a history of slavery. Zambos have conventionally inhabited small coastal clusters plagued by poverty, in which the lack of collective drive to gain social participation has led to stagnation. The Montubios and Zambos are groups that have distanced themselves from their indigenous roots as a result of racial mixing.

The Cholo is a descendant of a past racial mix that renders a "whiter" complexion and a closer proximity to the higher social groups. As a group, the Cholos never developed an identity, but rather sought to distance themselves from their indigenous roots through "auspicious" racial mixing. The Cholo embodies the social stigma that plagues the Ecuadorian society with indigenous issues, and their history helps illustrate both the class struggles and the underlying, perverse belief that a "white" Ecuadorian is better than, and socially above, the others. Longos are the product of a first generation mix between a Cholo and an Indian, or a Criollo (white settler) and an Indian. The physiognomy of a Longo reveals more indigenous traits than those of a Cholo, but nevertheless both groups originated from a binary mixing of Spaniards and Ameri-Indians.

The *indios* (Indians) are at the lowest level of the social hierarchy and are most profoundly marked by the colonial past. Acting on an urban, white-mestizo fear of filth and disease, these indigenes have been subordinated and shunned from contact with high power positions in government and industry. These long-standing divisions between more Europeanized subjects and the inferior, dirty native culture have seeped through the indigenous communities as a self-imposed handicap. In the regions where most indigenous communities are located (namely northern Ecuador and the highlands), race relates to the natural appearances of cultures, which are shaped by profound economic inequalities. Race manifests itself in the physical details of the encounter, not just in perceived differences. Their social identities materialize in the visual traces.

Ironically, "whites" ceased to be a race during an early stage of Ecuador's colonial past, when settlers quickly began to mix with the indigenes, having mainly illegitimate offspring

referred to as mestizos. The term mestizo is traditionally used in Latin America and Spain for people of mixed European and indigenous descent; it was used to describe those who had one European-born parent and one indigenous parent. In the social hierarchy imposed during colonial times, mestizos had fewer rights than Europeans, and than *criollos* who were born in the New World of two European-born parents, but more rights than *indios* and blacks. During the colonial period, mestizos quickly became the majority group in much of what is today Latin America, and after Ecuador's independence from Spain, the mestizo group became dominant. Nowadays, even though Ecuadorian people in the upper classes generally identify as white (more so to distinguish themselves from those whom they regard as inferiors than because they actually consider themselves white), the majority of the population is to some degree *mestiza*. For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to this group as white-mestizos.

Up until the mid-twentieth century, mestizos had exploited the *indios* for their work and kept them virtually as slaves in their Huasipungos, a piece of land that the "master" rented out to the Indians on his land so that they could grow food or raise animals, in exchange for the work the *indios* had to do for the master. The *indios* were paid low wages for hard labor, much like the "sharecroppers" of the rural southern USA in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Globalization and modernist ideas, however, began to call these practices into question during the latter half of the twentieth century. Ecuador's political leaders, the mestizo civilian population and other nationalist institutions, saw a need to "develop" and "modernize" the country. With the oil boom modernization experts flooded the country, fostering ethnic fragmentation by suggesting that the Indian-problem was the main obstacle hindering the country in its pursuit of modernization. Modernist theorists brought about the rhetoric of "backwardness" of the indigenous and other 'nonwhite' mestizos. The obvious solution seemed to be that Ecuador would have to gradually eliminate all that was indigenous and traditional. The indigenous people have since been accused of keeping the rest of Ecuadorian society from developing.

4. Redefining the National Identity and Indigenous Social Participation

Minority elites have taken the power to categorize and define what it means to be an *indigena*. For centuries, public policy has silenced and heavily restricted the large indigenous population. The "white-mestizos" have been in the social struggle of either dominating or being dominated. To the indigenous, however, the struggle is not for domination, but for the power to assert dignity, autonomy and pride in their ethnicity, which has so long been undermined. To be called an "indio" is to be cast as a second-class citizen with an immutable socio-cultural, political and economic position. To this day, the word is used as bantering slang among young people. In spite of the persevering remnants of the colonial social structure and racial perceptions, for the past forty years, the indigenes have been moving towards inclusion, participation and ethno-cultural assertion.

About forty years ago, the indigenous people began to participate in organized resistance movements. Beginning in the 1960s, indigenous peoples organized to defend their native cultures, lands, identities, and rights. Since that time, their organizational unity has been gradually growing. Indigenes have sought to reclaim their national identities and contradict

development policies of the Ecuadorian state that affected them and their traditional ways of life. The empowerment movement began among the Shuar people of a region known as "el oriente," the orient. The indigenous movement then spread throughout the different regions, moving in through the coast and gaining force in the Highlands, where the majority of communities are located. Finally, in 1986, the first pan-Ecuadorian indigenous organization was created, which is known as the *Confederación Nacional de Indígenas del Ecuador* (CONAIE).

4.1 Education and Literacy

Two very important public policies served as stepping-stones for the empowerment of the indigenous peoples: one with regard to education and the other having to do with the communications media. Though their empowerment remains feeble without concrete objectives and corruption that continues to plague their leadership, the impact of literacy and media participation has brought about unification and association.

The beginning of literacy as a state objective dates back to 1944. From then until the 1980s, the government merely extended the years of elementary school required by law, and illiteracy dropped to 22%, from over 40% in the 1940s. The Highlands, however, still had a significant education deficit in comparison to other regions, which was mainly due to a higher concentration of indigenous communities in the region (Borja, 1998).

In 1979, the ethnic factor was incorporated into public policy regarding education. It became a political objective that sought to eradicate illiteracy in order to achieve social, cultural and economic development. The concepts of multiethnic and pluricultural were spoken of in the context of revaluing Ecuadorian culture, and were included for the first time in political discourse. President Jaime Roldós presented a literacy proposal that incorporated Quichua as a sub-program in schools, from which over twenty thousand Quichua speakers would benefit. One of the main problems it encountered, however, was the lack of teachers. The absence of educators gave way for community leaders to fill the gap. Although they stepped up to take advantage of this opportunity, they had little to no formal academic instruction and knew nothing about teaching methodology. This initiative spawned other subprograms, such as the bilingual-bicultural program, which would produce materials for teaching and learning in indigenous languages. Even with their limited success in developing a Quichua literacy program, the adverse conditions such as lack of methodology, the inadequate use of public funds on the part of community leaders, migration to the urban centers and student desertion, along with persistent levels of poverty, took a toll on the literacy outcomes of indigene groups. Moreover, the provinces with the largest indigenous population were the ones to receive less funding and consequently they were the ones that profited less from the literacy campaign (Borja, 1998, p. 160).

Though literacy initiatives opened spaces for indigenous participation and brought their needs to the social scene, the discriminatory phenomena cannot be ignored. The overall academic achievements of the project in rural areas were marginally negligible, to the extent of being considered regressive illiteracy in the predominantly indigenous areas. Though racist attitudes did play a large role in the distribution of funds, intra-communal corruption also interfered. We must also acknowledge that the native languages are passed on as an oral

tradition, which is why learning in mainstream terms is not in line with how the indigenous transmit knowledge to their descendants. Indigenes tried teaching Quichua through Western methodology, but such a methodology clashed with the traditional evaluation methods and the instruction strategies for native languages. It was not until the late 1990s that Quichua was used as a written language (Borja, 1998, p. 160).

4.2 Participation in the Communications Media

In spite of the program's shortcomings, the associative and organizational opportunity that the education initiative provided is important. The early 1980s began with small steps in bringing the indigenous presence to the social communication stage in Ecuador. In 1982, the *Centro Internacional de Estudios Superiores de Comunicación para América Latina* (CIESPAL) executed a project of "Educative Communication in Rural Areas," by which they involved indigenes in producing their own alternative media for local distribution. The project succeeded in consolidating local organizations and helping them reach out to other communities through radio broadcasts (Checa-Montúfar, 1991).

Since 1983, the editorial house Abya-Yala has published *Kipu*, a magazine that reported on the themes of the indigenous world. One of the two main challenges that *Kipu* faced was that it was only published bimonthly and it had limited geographic reach. Another obstacle was that its sources of information were national mainstream newspapers, thus carrying a social bias.

By 1989, when CIESPAL conducted research to appraise the impact of media upon social communication, particularly in the marginalized rural areas, their findings suggested that the indigenous population continued to have virtually no access or direct participation in the national media, particularly written media. Their overall low rates of literacy made written media inaccessible to them. This reality also meant they were subjectively represented in these media outlets. National newspapers treated the "indigenous matter" only in chronicles or in news pieces that continued to depict them as elements of stagnation in the country's development (Checa-Montúfar, 1991).

4.3 Redefining the Indigenous Identity

After a long process of redefining their identity, the unification of merchant groups in Imbabura defied the traditional power structures. In the city of Otavalo, where a large group of indigenes converges to sell their crafts, the success of their entrepreneurial endeavors has contributed to redefining what it means to be an *indigena* on a regional level. These days Otavalo is a city of transnational enterprise. The value of land in the city-center exceeds the price per square meter of anywhere in the country. *Otavaleños* have won political offices and fought for bilingual education. Their new wealth has legitimized native organizations and empowered other communities in the Andes.

Otavaleños have also led a broad political movement along with Ecuador's other native groups, by which they insisted that the cultural differences within the nation be recognized in the new constitution. The pan-indigenous organization negotiated for constitutional recognition of Ecuador as a pluri-ethnic society, and sought government support in abolishing stigmatized

bi-racial categories of "white" and "indio." Furthermore, this organizational unity has led to increased electoral gains since 1996.

Despite cultural self-confidence and the social, political and economic gains of the past half-century, the new ethnic movement has not displaced Ecuador's older racist attitudes. Racist images continue to circulate within white-mestizo and indigenous society. Boundary-marking symbols and activities continue to polarize social groups. The feelings about Westernized institutions among many indigenous people have led them to prefer separation from white-mestizos and their culture. Moreover, with a virtually non-existent middle-class, the social transition becomes more challenging even for those seeking mobility.

Social communication in Ecuador is the ongoing struggle by whites-mestizos to subordinate indigenous peoples and maintain hegemony over them. In the reality of contemporary society, every Ecuadorian of nationalist creed and collective conscience should call him or herself mestizo for they are the product of the native and European cultural union. The dilemma is that the aforementioned terms have permeated academic literature and public discourse, and continue to foster social asymmetry as well as instill an inferiority mindset among the indigenous communities, which promotes a polarizing power gap (Checa-Montúfar, 1991).

In spite of the official recognition of Ecuador as a multicultural and pluricultural nation, the State offers little support for indigenous communities, including no medical assistance or support for the proliferation of their traditional lifestyles. The lack of the State's protection of their fundamental rights and needs conveys to the indigenous communities that the State does not acknowledge them as equal national subjects, raising the question: Where do these communities stand legally and psychologically within the context of the nation? Who are they as people that inhabit the land, and have done so since far before the times of the Spanish conquest?

This alienation is not a casual occurrence; it comes as the dramatic result of centuries of oppression, subjugation and humiliation. Moreover, the little participation indigenous groups are allowed has for the most part not been objective and it responds to separatist mindsets that support fragmentation and social stratification that in turn favor private interest. In this stage, social communication does not entertain exchange, feedback information, or solidarity among social actors. The media's treatment of indigenous matters is for the most part encapsulated in the treatment of social issues that plague the country with poverty, backwardness and informality.

5. The Resurgence of the Left

Although many factors influenced the market-reform failure of the 1980s, the appeal of the left seems to be a reaction that has more to do with politics than it has to do with policy. The relationship between the events and movements relate to the role of power struggles between competing social groups. Leftist ideology has articulated and disseminated an alternative to past systems that have caused discontent among the fragmented societies.

The recent infusion of the leftist ideology has developed uniquely in each country in which it has developed. We can trace the political instability back to the period between the 1930s and the 1980s, which was plagued with marginality, inequality and social hardships.

In response, political protests spread across the region, as well as widespread inflation and debt. The majority of these centralized governments reacted by sponsoring social programs geared towards benefiting the urban areas, excluding the rural multiethnic areas (Corrales, 2004). These biased responses enlarged and angered the already impoverished populations in rural areas and put a stronger strain on the urban resources to house and employ the large rural migrations pouring into the cities (Corrales, 2004, pp. 43-44).

During the 1990s neoliberal market reforms were implemented in Latin American economies, which turned the focus away from social programs towards deep reforms. These reforms were carried out on two different levels: the aggressive reformers (Mexico, Chile, Argentina and Peru) and the hesitant ones (Ecuador, Paraguay and Venezuela) (Corrales 2004, pp. 63-64). Ecuador had growth without inflation in the 1990s, but growth levels were unexceptional and did not meet the needs of the underprivileged population; they were insufficient to generate employment and combat the strong levels of poverty (Corrales 2004, p. 50). Furthermore, the austerity policies of the 1990s generated further political protests before there could be any palpable results (Corrales, 2004, p. 51). Market reforms divided the population into three different groups: market reform winners, market reform losers and those that did not win as much as they would have liked—the "frustrated winners, who were the actors that served as the main mobilizing force in the anti-market rise of the late 1990s" (Corrales 2004, pp. 52-53).

The "frustrated winners" were those dissatisfied with their gains who saw the bigger winners as cheaters and beneficiaries of corruption. These "lesser winners" wanted to reassert themselves by instigating revolts against the incumbent and the ruling parties, and given their socio-economic background, they employed more sophisticated tools of critical assessment than the less mobile people and exerted destabilizing pressures on the regimes (Corrales, 2004, p. 53). Market reform losers, who made up the biggest group, mainly indigenes, were unemployed and neglected. But even though they were experiencing the most hardships, it was the "frustrated winners" who mobilized the protest and appealed to the grievances of the indigenes for support (Corrales, 2004, pp. 52-53).

The political anti-status quo force opened spaces for disenfranchised groups to enter the center stage of the uprising, which created social mobilization opportunities and prompted the shift to the left. Declining clientelism opened the door for citizens to reorganize from below and provided opportunity for new social movements to "challenge the status quo" (Corrales 2004, p. 53). Moreover, the collapse of traditional parties opened opportunities for new actors to capture the political space. The lowered entry barriers for new political organizations that opposed the dissatisfying incumbent also paved the road for indigenes to aspire to gain political spaces through which they could seek a more symmetrical social standing (Corrales 2004, pp. 53-54).

The indigenous movement found strong support from xenophiles, human rights crusaders, and those advocating in favor of redistributive policies to help the poor (Crain, 1990). The campaign addressed the ethnic apartheid under which indigenous groups were neglected, thus lacking political representation and economic assets. These white-mestizo groups took center stage mainly in the 1970s and associated with the left during the 1990s. The wide assortment of constituencies that flared up during this time illustrates how the left drew support from underrepresented groups with varieties of discontent (Crain 1990, pp. 54-58).

The resurgence of the left across Latin America has created the illusion, in the eyes of

the international community, to be forming a coalition that will undermine democracy and implement radical policies. Nonetheless, the present leftist regimes are heterogeneous and tend to align on two sides: the modern left versus the populist left. The divergence among these movements explains why it is highly unlikely that a coalition will be able to form a united front. On the one side, the modern leftist front, "open minded, reformist, and internationalist" (in countries like Bolivia, Argentina, Peru) (Crain 1990, p. 66), springs as a tamed version of the radical left of the past and has reformed its movement based on the lessons learned from the past (Htun, 2006). On the other side, the left led by the tradition of Latin American populism is nationalistic, shrill and close-minded (in Venezuela and Ecuador). This front is fatally unaware of the mistakes of the past-left and its most representative proponents: Cuba and the Soviet Union (Htun, 2006).

Populist discourse in Ecuador alleges to foster political ideas and activities that are representative of disenfranchised peoples' needs and wishes, through which it appeals to the masses. The tradition of populism in Ecuador has proven to propel leaders, such as Rafael Correa, toward authoritarianism. Correa gained electoral votes by instigating social animosity built upon a negative rhetorical force against power groups, while still being unable to deliver any concrete positive results for the masses.

Even so, the indigenous have been able to profit from Correa's anti-status quo platform. On September 28, 2008 when the electorate was called to vote in favor or against the new constitution, the approval of the new constitution marked an important turning point in the history of indigenous communities, at least from a legal perspective. The recognition of plurinationality aligned with values of unity, indivisibility of the Ecuadorian State, and the rights of the diverse indigenous nationalities, Afro-Ecuadorians, and *montubios*. The new Constitution takes a humanistic approach and mentions as its main objective "*sumak kawsay*," which is a term used among the indigenous nationalities that means collective good and integral living.

6. Ecuador in the Global Village

After the Spanish conquest, pre-colonial native societies were dislocated into new territories within Ecuador. Contemporary ethnic groups, however, did not form merely as a result of location, to believe this would be to erroneously attribute colonizers with social engineering. These groups came to be because people of similar characteristics and ascriptions made the choice to be part of a distinct group and as such they must be allowed the dignities and facilities to enter intercultural and international exchanges as proud members of their groups. The role of indigenous leaders in this context is to move forward and redefine what it means to be indigenous. The role of the communities, as a whole, is to promote the indigenous ethnic distinctiveness and pride in face of globalization's pressures, without hindering development. The challenge is strong, but it can come gradually as the indigenes recreate their national identity.

Rationality as a process of understanding one another in context can effectively connect indigenous communities and the greater Ecuadorian society. While tradition can be maintained within community activities and exchanges, being able to acknowledge the function of flexibility when engaging in international exchanges can foster symmetrical interactions. Understanding other cultures through knowing and feeling pride in our own culture, as well

as being appreciative of differences can be useful in order to better understand the common characteristics and the points of incompatibility. Learning to take pride in the indigenous cultures and their role in mestizo heritage can be shaped as a project of nation building, by which empowering all Ecuadorian ethnic units, so that they may be open to each other's differences in culture and traditions (Crain, 1990).

The unity of Ecuadoreans as a nation is the only way to seek independence from international financing and its intrinsic pressures. Seeking international social symmetry by eliminating the biases created by groups' uncertainty about difference can serve as a means to gain a power balance in the international sphere and its processes. Furthermore, it is imperative that mestizos recognize that the Ecuadorian society is a "browning society" and the indigenous are gaining spaces in the legal, institutional and political arenas.

Change is the focal point in the matter of individual countries within a globalized context. International communities are constantly changing. It is important, however, to keep in mind that change is relative to power, and though we may be communities in transition, power awards people and groups the capacity to interact on a symmetrical level. Under this world-view society is a system kept in balance by the reciprocal nature of relationships and interactions. In a global context change is the starting point and the order of equilibrium is a by-product of a group's ability to develop mechanisms to successfully adapt to, and exert influence upon, the global village while still adhering to an autochthonous ethnic social structure. The degree to which there is compatibility and symmetry between the parties interacting will foster more positive and effective interactions. The point is thus not to be self-absorbed but to create social linkages.

7. Conclusions and Discussion

The organizational development that the indigenous nationalities have reached has enabled them to have autonomous development through the production of goods and services that are autochthonous to their heritage and traditions. The pride they hold in their ancestry and its relationship with their communal development has been a topic of discussion in Ecuadorian as well as global academia and politics. The current representations of indigenes in the communication media have portrayed them in a more positive light. Indigenes are now shown as dutiful national subjects that enrich the national heritage of the Ecuadorian people. Even so, one may also encounter racist discourse in everyday conversations or in the media, which one day may praise the indigenous heritage and yet another day treat them as lesser beings.

The transition process has not yet succeeded in ridding the Ecuadorian society of the social hierarchies imposed by its colonial past. Competing personal and group interests are still trying to maintain hegemonic subjugation of the indigenous, as a means of maintaining their economic and social power. However, the overall social atmosphere is much more favorable to recognizing the virtues of the indigenous peoples' communal life and solidarity as a means for development. The recent gains that indigenes have had with the new Constitution and with becoming central actors in national politics are still under construction, and have been since the nineteen-sixties, which points to the gradualism of the process.

Also important is the corruption that exists among indigenous leaders who have pacted alliances with traditional "white-mestizo" groups, using the mobilization capacities of

indigenous communities as a means to change political outcomes. The main problem with these occurrences is that leaders are submitting their people to the mestizo will and authority, regressing to a state of subservience and old power structures. However, the relative success of the indigenous in gaining a voice in Ecuador's social communication sphere and in becoming included in citizenship projects, has come after centuries of struggles and long periods of reform. There is more to gain on the side of the indigenous people than there is to lose, and so it seems based on the historical evidence, that they have the unity and passion to continue to overcome internal and external shortcomings.

In spite of internal corruption and the persisting remnants of the colonial power structures, the overall strength of the indigenous union is based on making strategic alliances with other social movements and political parties. The CONAIE, as an umbrella organization, is the only one that has been able to bypass partisan fractures and succeed in making partnerships with other groups to achieve their social and political projects. The internal asset of the organization, though corrupt, is the coming together of a multitude of ethnic, regional and religious groups that seek to reclaim an equal place in Ecuador's history and society.

The dynamic of the indigenous mobilization is the product of many years of political negotiation. The first thoughts of forming an organization came from the social commitment of members of the Catholic Church, beginning with the Bishop of Indians, Monsignor Leonidas Proaño, whose idea was to promote the organization of the oppressed ethnic groups as an alternative to the only established indigenous movement, FEI (Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios), which operated under the control of the Ecuadorian Communist Party (Becker, 2007).

The communists had led the organization for a few decades without major advances in achieving social participation for native ethnic groups. Though the FEI served as a stepping-stone for congregating indigenes, their main focus was indoctrinating them in communist ideals. From the FEI emerged indigenous leaders that were later instrumental in the 1970s conferences, where they met with Catholic priests in the Episcopal Conference in Medellin, Colombia. These conferences ultimately led to the First Constitutive Congress for the ECUARUNARI in 1972, with the participation of over 200 indigenes (Lucas, 2000).

The ECUARUNARI (Ecuador Runacunapac Riccharimui) was the farmers' movement, which primarily sought to join together the indigenous communities in the Highlands and defend their land rights. Because of the conditions under which it was created, the organization had clear religious ties, which presented an underlying conflict: Would the organization serve the interests of all farmers or cater only to indigenous groups? The nature of the church made it clear that they could not exclude non-indigenous groups, which is why the indigenous leaders made the decision to make it solely an indigenous organization, and remove the influence of the Catholic Church. By taking full control of the organization, the ECUARUNARI was able to cater to the indigenes' needs and maintain the organization away from the action of the national union syndicates. With the ECUARUNARI as precedent, indigenous groups across the country began constituting organizations (Lucas, 2000).

After a long period of gestation the Ecuadorian Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities (CONAIE) was established in 1986, following the constitution of the Ecuadorian National Council for the Coordination of Indigenous Nationalities (CONACNIE). It is a national political movement that serves as an umbrella to all established indigenous movements. Its organization

is regionally structured, made up of three permanent organizations: the Amazonic Confederation CANFENIAE, the ECUARUNARI in the highlands, and the COICE in the coastlands. Under these three permanent organisms operate multiple social, cultural, environmental and political movements and organizations (CONAIE, 1990).

Within each of these confederations are represented diverse ethnic groups, as well as social and political indigenous movements. The CONAIE's primary objective is to defend the indigenous nationalities and their rights to self-management in economic, political and socio-cultural affairs. It also seeks to preserve their territories, indigenous identities and cultural traits, as well as to promote symmetrical interethnic relations (CONAIE, 1990).

Identity is an ever-changing social process in which identity and social constructions are continuously shaped by power struggles. The social dynamics between competing groups are evidenced in the history of the indigenous in Ecuador and the mestizo groups that have struggled with their heritage for so long. Since the times of colonization, the shaping and reshaping of a national citizenry has been characterized by political and social opportunities that have inadvertently given spaces for new voices to take center stage.

Discontent with the status quo in a country that is plagued with poverty and inequality is a natural development, and as such it instigates struggles for advancement and equality. Though Ecuador's colonial history was written with language of disdain for the natives—representing them as lazy, dirty and an economic burden—the reality is that they have always been the backbone of productive endeavors. Centuries of abusive labor relationships, led to the development of indigenous intercommunity communication channels, which has helped the indigenes to assert their power and value to the elites. This in turn has provided the indigenous people with tools to develop their own enterprises. While this may seem modest progress, these developments position the indigenes to assume a stronger place in a more global Ecuador.

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Author Note

This paper enabled me to reflect upon the ethnic struggles that underlie the political dynamics of Ecuador. I have sought to address interethnic relations from the indigenous perspective, recognizing the underestimated efforts of this group to assert their historical and social role in Ecuador after five centuries of oppression. My undergraduate degree in Political Science and International Studies at Trinity University (BA, 2011) will enhance my continuing research about the intercultural dimensions of community development in Ecuador. I would like to acknowledge Dr. Brooks Hill, Ph.D, for his encouragement, mentoring and help in preparing this article.