

From Oppressed Nationalities to Ethno-Nationalists: Historicizing Ecuador's Indigenous Movement

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Abstract: Activists and academics alike celebrated the consolidation of an ethno-nationalist identity among Ecuador's Indigenous movements in the 1980s and 1990s as a novel and important development in the Andes. Many people, however, are unaware of the deeper historical roots of this discourse. In the 1920s the Moscow-based Communist International constructed Indigenous peoples as a nationality, and advocated an independent Indigenous republic in the Andes. By the 1930s Indigenous and leftist activists in Ecuador had made that construction their own as they commonly began to refer to Indigenous nationalities. Although little noted, this discourse persisted in leftist circles throughout the twentieth century. What emerged at the end of the century was not so much a new way of constructing identities, but a return to time-proven methods of organizing popular movements. Thus, it is not a break from the past but successfully building on previous struggles that explains a strong Indigenous movement in Ecuador.

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In 1933, Ecuadorian Communist Party leader Ricardo Paredes ran for the presidency of that country at the head of a Worker-Peasant Bloc. He campaigned as the “candidate of workers, peasants, Indians, and soldiers” and promised bread, work, land, and liberty for the people. Paredes presented a broad list of demands that included a call to defend “Indians and Blacks, not only as exploited and oppressed classes, but also as oppressed nationalities.”¹

In the 1980s, the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE), Ecuador's most visible Indigenous organization, returned to this construction of Indigenous nationalities as they embraced an increasingly stringent demand to rewrite the first article of the constitution to recognize Ecuador's diverse Indigenous nationalities as part of a pluri-national state. In the minds of many scholars and activists, CONAIE was the one to create and popularize this discourse. This was not, of course, the first use of such a concept. Salesian priest Juan Bottasso who studies catholic missionaries in Ecuador notes that “during the colonial period, it was very common to call indigenous groups ‘nations,’ but this term was simply used to refer to homogeneous human entities that had a territory, a tradition, and a common language. The term never suggested the most remote possibility of self-determination.”² Rather, Bottasso continues, “during the colonial period, non-evangelized autochthonous ethnic groups were called nations in the sense that the Bible used the term.”³ Others would sometimes use the term, but in a negative sense. For example, in 1916 *hacendado* Nicolás Martínez argued that “independent nations” needed to disappear in order for Indians to be civilized and become full citizens.⁴ By all accounts, however, Paredes' 1933 presidential campaign was the first published political reference to Indigenous peoples as a nationality.

The construction of “Indigenous nationalities” in the 1930s has been almost completely forgotten in Ecuador, with scholars commonly tracing its roots only back to the 1970s. For example, Hernán Ibarra argues that the term first emerged in Gladys Villavicencio Rivadeneira's 1973 book *Relaciones interétnicas en Otavalo-Ecuador. ¿Una nacionalidad india en formación?*⁵ Most scholars would echo Fredy Rivera who condemns the marxist left for having “displaced ethno-national problems to a second theoretical level since they would be solved in the new socialist society.”⁶ Such arguments either ignore or are ignorant of the critical role of the Communist International in constructing the concept of Indigenous nationalities in South America.

¹“Manifiesto del Bloque Obrero-Campesino” (Quito, May 2, 1932), Hojas Volantes, 1921-1932, D. Polit Partid., p. 247, Biblioteca Ecuatoriana Aurelio Espinosa Pólit (hereafter BEAEP), Cotacollao, Ecuador, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/bloque2mayo32.pdf>.

²Juan Bottasso, “Las nacionalidades indígenas, el estado y las misiones en el Ecuador,” *Ecuador Debate* 12 (December 1986): 151

³Juan Bottasso, *Minorías y democracia en el Ecuador* (Quito, Ecuador: Abya-Yala, 2006), 31.

⁴Nicolás Martínez, “La condición actual de la raza indígena en la provincia de Tungurahua,” in *Indianistas, indianofilos, indigenistas; Entre el enigma y la fascinación: una antología de textos sobre el 'problema' indígena*, ed. Jorge Trujillo (Quito: ILDIS, 1993), 218.

⁵Hernán Ibarra, “Intelectuales indígenas, neoindigenismo, e indianismo en el Ecuador,” *Ecuador Debate* , 48 (December 1999): 83.

⁶Fredy Rivera Vélez, “Los indigenismos en Ecuador: de paternalismos y otras representaciones,” in *Antología ciudadanía e identidad*, ed. Simón Pachano (Quito: FLACSO Sede Ecuador; ILDIS, 2003), 387.

In the 1920s, the Moscow-based Third or Communist International (Comintern) advocated the establishment of “independent native republics” for Blacks in South Africa and the United States. At the Comintern’s Sixth Congress in 1928, the organization recognized the revolutionary potential of anti-colonial struggles. Building on Vladimir Lenin’s interpretations of national and colonial questions, the Comintern defended the rights of self-determination for national minorities, including the right to secede from oppressive state structures.⁷ Although such discussions began in South Africa and the United States, they were soon extended to Latin America with the Comintern’s proposal to carve an Indigenous Republic out of the Quechua and Aymara peoples in the Andes. This controversial position triggered intense debates among communist activists as to whether marginalized and impoverished ethnic populations located within nation-states comprised national or racial minorities, and what the relationship of their identities to the larger class struggle should be. In Peru, José Carlos Mariátegui drafted a lengthy treatise “El problema de las razas en la América Latina” for a conference of Latin American communist parties in Buenos Aires in June of 1929 in which he adamantly maintained that the “Indian Question” was fundamentally one of class relations in which the bourgeois oppressed a rural proletariat, and that this situation could only be addressed through fundamental alterations to the land tenure system. He challenged the Comintern’s position that maintained that Indians, like Blacks in South Africa and the United States, formed a subjugated nationality and that their liberation would come through the formation of an independent nation-state. He made the materialist claim that at its core Indian oppression was a socio-economic issue rooted in the unequal distribution of land and the failure to overcome the legacy of feudalism in the Peruvian countryside. The solution lay in altering Peru’s class structure, not in retreating into a separate state.⁸

In contrast to Mariátegui’s resistance to Comintern dictates, his counterparts in neighboring Ecuador more closely followed Moscow’s lead.⁹ Although the first reference to Indigenous nationalities was not published until 1933, for at least five years communists had been increasingly organizing in rural communities. The Comintern’s 1928 Sixth Congress urged local parties to work in rural areas, organizing worker-peasant coalitions. In part, Paredes can be seen as responsible for this direction as he brought his experiences with Indigenous communities in Ecuador to the congress:

The revolutionary problem is linked up with that of the oppressed masses such as

⁷Communist International, *The Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies: Thesis on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies, Adopted by the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International, 1928* (New York: Workers Library, 1929), 58; V. I. Lenin, *Lenin on the National and Colonial Questions: Three Articles* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1970). For a critique on Lenin’s views on nationalism, see Michael Löwy, *Fatherland or Mother Earth? Essays on the National Question* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), particularly chapter three, “The Marxist Debate on Self-Determination.”

⁸José Carlos Mariátegui, “El problema de las razas en América Latina,” in *El movimiento revolucionario latinoamericano: Versiones de la primera conferencia comunista latinoamericana, junio de 1929*, ed. Secretariado Sudamericano de la Internacional Comunista (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Revista La Correspondencia Sudamericana, 1929), 263-90. Also see Marc Becker, “Mariátegui, the Comintern, and the Indigenous Question in Latin America,” *Science & Society* 70, no. 4 (October 2006): 450-79.

⁹Marc Becker, “Indigenous Nationalities in Ecuadorian Marxist Thought,” *A Contracorriente* (forthcoming Invierno 2008).

the Indians of Latin America. In some countries, Indians constitute the biggest section of the rural population; they suffer much more than white and half-caste workers from the exploitation of the landed proprietors. Indians who are considered an inferior race are treated more brutally. All these factors have created among the Indian workers and peasants a spirit of solidarity and a class spirit of the exploited. Therefore, Indians are very revolutionary elements. I think this problem of oppressed races must be dealt with in the programme.¹⁰

Even before the Comintern dictated that local parties should work with oppressed populations, communists (with Mexico taking the lead) developed strong connections with peasant movements.¹¹

In Ecuador, even though the communists had incorporated Indigenous peoples and issues into the founding of the party, the Sixth Congress triggered an intensification of rural activism. More significantly, what the Congress did was to change how communist militants talked about these issues. Instructions to the party in the late 1920s included a requirement to:

Expound with intensity the work of the Party among poor peasants and, particularly, among the Indians and large agrarian communities and haciendas in the sierra. The Communist Party should link itself completely with the Indian masses, uphold and lead their struggles for land and for national independence, unmasking the roles of priests and the Church. The Party should not consider the Indian problem as the problem only as one of land, but also one that includes the national question.¹²

The Comintern was key in pushing the terminology of Indigenous nationalities. For example, a 1933 Comintern document repeatedly referred to African and Indigenous as “oppressed nationalities,” and advocated increased organization among “Indian and Negro peasant masses” in order to bring about a revolutionary movement.¹³

Slowly activists in Ecuador picked up on this terminology and began to use it in their own statements. In November 1935, Indigenous leaders gathered at the Casa del Obrero in Quito to found a Conference of Indigenous Leaders (Conferencia de Cabecillas Indígenas). A flyer announcing the closing session noted that the meeting corresponded with the eighteenth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution that gave “liberty and support to all nationalities that previously had been oppressed (such as are the Indigenous nationalities in our country).”¹⁴ Several months later, the conference organizers published a list of instructions in the Indigenous

¹⁰Ricardo Paredes, “VI World Congress, Reply to Bukharin on Draft Programme,” *International Press Correspondence* 8, no. 66 (September 25, 1928): 1177, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/comunismo/paredes-ipc-25sept28.pdf>.

¹¹Barry Carr, *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 32.

¹²Quoted in Luis Gerardo Gallegos, *Rusia Soviética y la revolución mundial*, Suplemento no. 3 de la revista Rieles (III: 15 y 16), Mayo y junio 1931 (Quito: Imp. de la Universidad Central, 1931), 130-31.

¹³*Los partidos comunistas de América del Sur y del Caribe y el movimiento sindical revolucionario*, Doctrina y documentación (Barcelona: Publicaciones “Edeya”, 1933), 33.

¹⁴Presidium de la Conferencia de Cabecillas Indígenas, “Hoy se Claura la Conferencia de Cabecillas Indígenas” (Quito: Editorial de El Correo, November 7, 1935), Hojas Volantes, 1933-1938, p. 298, BAEAP, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/1935nov7.pdf>.

newspaper *Ñucanchic Allpa* to “unify and organize Indians for the defense of their class interests and as oppressed nationalities.” The organization noted that,

the Indian workers have something else that differentiates them from the other white, *mestizo*, black and mulatto workers and peasants: the Indians have languages that only they speak (Kichwa, Cayapa, Cofan, etc.), they have their own clothes and customs, they belong to their own races and nationalities or peoples that have lived free for more than four hundred years without being subjected as today to whites and *mestizos*. It is for this reason that Indians have been for more than four centuries subjected to a great oppression of their people or nationality, rejected as if they were an inferior race.¹⁵

A 1937 party document observes that backwardness, underdevelopment, and isolation prevented the emergence of a unified national identity in Ecuador, with an Indigenous “oppressed nationality” existing alongside that of the dominant white and *mestizo* classes.¹⁶

Paredes brought these ideas to the 1944-1945 Constituent Assembly in which he served as a functional representative for the “Indigenous Race.” In a lengthy speech on concepts of state formation during the first days of the constitutional debates, Paredes noted that different Indigenous groups would have different concerns, and hence a singular, unified solution could not be applied to the so-called “Indigenous problem.” Paredes maintained that it was a mistake to see Indians as racial or ethnic groups because their own history, language, territory, and cultural institutions in reality made them nationalities. He urged his fellow leftists not to see Indigenous poverty as a simple concern of class oppression, but rather a complicated issue that took into account their varying cultures and national characteristics.¹⁷ “There are class problems and there are nationality problems,” Paredes later argued. Indigenous peoples had their own unique characteristics including their own history, language, territory, and cultural institutions that in reality made them nationalities.¹⁸ *Ñucanchic Allpa* echoed in its pages that Indigenous oppression was a national problem and its solution would only be found in changes to the agrarian system. “Indigenous peoples are oppressed nationalities,” the newspaper editorialized. “The true solution rests in the right of self-determination.”¹⁹

In 1957, the Communist Party’s Central Committee distributed a draft of the platform for

¹⁵Conferencia de Cabecillas Indios, “Indicaciones,” *Ñucanchic Allpa* 1, no. 8 (March 17, 1936): 2, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/nucanchic/1936marzo17.pdf>.

¹⁶Comité Central del Partido Comunista, *Exposición a la Corte Suprema* (Pasto, Colombia: Imp. Nariño, April 1937), 9.

¹⁷“Actas de la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente de 1944,” t. 1, 720 (August 22, 1944), Archivo Palacio Legislativo (hereafter APL), Quito, Ecuador. Paredes returned to this point numerous times during the assembly’s debates. See “Actas de la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente de 1944,” t. 3, 326 (September 21, 1944), APL; “Actas de la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente de 1944,” t. 6, 436-37 (November 21, 1944), APL. Also see Marc Becker, “State Building and Ethnic Discourse in Ecuador’s 1944-1945 Asamblea Constituyente,” in *Highland Indians and the State in Modern Ecuador*, ed. A. Kim Clark and Marc Becker (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007), 105-19.

¹⁸“Actas de la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente de 1944,” t. 6, 435-38 (November 21, 1944), APL.

¹⁹“El problema del indio, problema nacional,” *Ñucanchic Allpa* Epoca II:16 (November 5, 1944): 2, <http://www.yachana.org/earchivo/nucanchic/1944nov5.pdf>.

the party's sixth congress that minimized Indigenous concerns.²⁰ A month before the congress, Indigenous leaders met at party headquarters and proposed various changes that appeared in the final draft.²¹ Some of the editing was rather cosmetic, such as adding references to Indians in a discussion of the feudal exploitation of the peasantry. What is noteworthy, though, was the addition of a new section on social classes with a special mention of "Ecuadorian Indians who occupy a special place within the peasant masses." The statement that Indigenous activists insisted be inserted asserted that "this Indian mass unquestionably has a series of national elements, a language, Kichwa and other autochthonous tongues, a tradition, their own cultural manifestations." They were denied education in their own language, and through literacy restrictions the right to vote. These small changes added up to altering a document from one that minimalized the importance of Indigenous struggles to making it central to the communist struggle.²² If previously communists had shaped Indigenous discourse, now the reverse was true with Indigenous activists shaping a leftist agenda. A statement at the eighth party congress in 1968 repeated these statements that Indigenous peoples possessed "national elements" including their own language, traditions, and cultures.²³ In a 1977 interview, long-time communist militant César Endara observed the double character of Indigenous exploitation in that "in addition to economic exploitation they were also exploited nationally."²⁴ Similarly, the newly founded communist-affiliated coalition Frente Amplio de Izquierda (FADI) called for the defense of "the specific rights of Indigenous communities and national groups in the country (Kichwa, Shuar, Cofan, etc.)."²⁵ Unlike the assumption of many academics, Indigenous leaders did not reclaim this identity on their own but it was a contribution from marxist intellectuals who kept these ideas alive throughout the twentieth century.²⁶

Working from Max Weber's interpretations of a cultural homogeneity combined with a coherent political and economic system that extended beyond a local environment, Gladys Villavicencio Rivadeneira asked almost in passing in her 1973 book *Relaciones interétnicas en Otavalo-Ecuador. ¿Una nacionalidad india en formación?* whether commercial success in

²⁰"Democracia, independencia y bienestar para el pueblo del Ecuador (Programa inmediato del Partido Comunista del Ecuador)," *El Pueblo*, December 22, 1956, 3-5 and Partido Comunista del Ecuador (PCE), *Proyecto de programa inmediato del Partido Comunista del Ecuador* (Quito: Ediciones El Pueblo, 1956).

²¹"Conferencia campesina de Pichincha, Imbabura y Cotopaxi," *El Pueblo*, May 6, 1957, 6.

²²Partido Comunista del Ecuador (PCE), *Democracia, independencia y paz para el pueblo del Ecuador: Lineamientos programáticos del Partido Comunista del Ecuador. Aprobados por su VI Congreso* (Quito: Editorial El Pueblo, May 1957), 14.

²³Partido Comunista del Ecuador (PCE), *Programa y estatutos* (Guayaquil: Editorial Claridad, 1968), 12.

²⁴César Endara in José Yáñez del Pozo, *Yo declaro con franqueza (Cashnami causashcanchic); memoria oral de Pesillo, Cayambe*, 2d ed., revised ed. (Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 1988), 27.

²⁵Frente Amplio de la Izquierda de Ecuador (FADI), *Documentos del proceso de constitución del Frente Amplio de la Izquierda de Ecuador (FADI) y primera declaración pública* (Montreal, Quebec: Agence latino-américaine d'information (ALAI), 1978).

²⁶For example, see Fernando Guerrero Cazar and Pablo Ospina Peralta, *El poder de la comunidad: Ajuste estructural y movimiento indígena en los Andes ecuatorianos*, Becas de investigación (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2003), 26.

Otavalo was leading to the formation of an Indigenous nationality.²⁷ More significant is anthropologist Iliana Almeida who interrogated the concept of “Indigenous nationalities” as an explicit category of political analysis. In 1979 after returning from studying in the Soviet Union, Almeida published an essay in which she conceptualized Indigenous peoples in the Andes as a Kichwa nationality. Drawing on a marxist tradition and analysis, she argued that a common history, territory, economy, culture, and language all meant that Indigenous peoples formed a true nationality. Furthermore, nations did not necessarily coincide with states, for several nations were included within the Ecuadorian state.²⁸ Later she expanded on this concept to note two contrasting constructions of nationalism, one being a homogenizing influence that emanated from the dominant classes and another representing an anti-colonial movement for national liberation that emerged out of Indigenous and other popular struggles that respected and embraced cultural diversity.²⁹ Almeida argues sympathetic leftists brought this concept of nationalities back from the Soviet Union in the 1970s and introduced it to the fledgling organizations in Ecuador.³⁰ Apparently she was unaware she was returning to themes that the Comintern had already introduced into Ecuador half a century earlier.

As the language of Indigenous nationalities began to make a comeback in the 1970s and 1980s, it was more commonly utilized by those on the non-Indigenous left than in the broader Indigenous movements. After Almeida’s 1979 essay, leftists increasingly wrote of “the existence of oppressed Indigenous nationalities within the State.”³¹ At a 1982 congress, the labor federation Centro Ecuatoriana de Organizaciones Clasistas (CEDOC) voted to send “revolutionary greetings to Ecuador’s Indigenous nationalities” who “for many years have been fighting for their inalienable rights.”³² The following year, Rafael Quintero, who served as vicepresident for FADI embraced the demands of Indigenous movements that were now being expressed “not only as peasants, but also as peoples and nationalities.”³³ In 1985, the PSE proposed a Law of Indigenous Nationalities to the national congress, even though it took years before such a law was promulgated.³⁴ In 1986 in commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of

²⁷Gladys Villavicencio Rivadeneira, *Relaciones interétnicas en Otavalo-Ecuador. ¿Una nacionalidad india en formación?*, Ediciones Especiales, 65 (México: Instituto Indigenista Interamericano, 1973), 6, 283.

²⁸Ileana Almeida, "Consideraciones sobre la nacionalidad Kechwa," in *Lengua y cultura en el Ecuador*, ed. Ileana Almeida and others (Otavalo, Ecuador: Instituto Otavaleño de Antropología, 1979), 15-16.

²⁹Ileana Almeida, "La cuestión indígena como cuestión nacional," *Antropología, Cuadernos de Investigación* 2 (January 1984): 26.

³⁰Melina Selverston-Scher, *Ethnopolitics in Ecuador: Indigenous Rights and the Strengthening of Democracy* (Coral Gables, Fla, Boulder, CO: North-South Center Press at the University of Miami. Distributed by Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 23.

³¹"El campesinado indígena y el estado," *Movimiento* (Movimiento Revolucionario de los Trabajadores, Quito) 1 (July 1980): 8. Also see Celso Fiallo and Galo Ramón, *La lucha de las comunidades indígenas del cantón Pujilí y su encuentro con el pensamiento comunista* (Quito: Documento CAAP, 1980), 10.

³²Centro de Estudios y Difusion Social (CEDIS) and Centro Ecuatoriana de Organizaciones Clasistas (CEDOC), *XIV Congreso Nacional CEDOC* (Quito: CEDIS/CEDOC, 1982), 47.

³³Rafael Quintero, "La cuestión de la tierra... única posibilidad de sobrevivencia de una cultura," *Cuadernos de Nueva* 7 (June 1983): 120.

³⁴Roberto Santana, *¿Ciudadanos en la etnicidad? Los indios en la política o la política de los indios*, Colección Biblioteca Abya-Yala 19 (Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 1995), 46-47, 264.

the founding of the communist party, leaders compiled a volume providing an overview of the party's history in which they included Paredes' 1944 statements to the Constituent Assembly in which he identified Indigenous peoples as nationalities.³⁵ In the preface to the volume, Xavier Garaycoa made a point of mentioning a long history of communist support for "the rights of people and oppressed nationalities."³⁶ At the Fourth Encounter of South American Communist Parties meeting in Quito in February 1990, the Communist Party Secretary General René Maugé Mosquera ended his presentation with a strong denunciation of the upcoming quicentennial celebrations:

We are in favor of the communists taking a position on the quicentennial of the arrival of the Spanish to Latin America ... in countries such as Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia where we have a strong Indigenous contingent--here in the Ecuador there are 4 million Indigenous peoples and 9 nationalities with their own languages--colonialism and colonial dominance meant a great defeat for our people.³⁷

Ecuador, the communists noted at their twelfth national congress in 1993, had a plurinational society comprised of a diversity of cultures, languages and peoples with different historical origins, and called for the "constitutional establishment of the rights of Indigenous nationalities and ethnic groups."³⁸ The party continued, "the true realization of a plurinational and multiethnic state can only be achieved with the unified struggle of all popular sectors."³⁹ Far from latecomers, the communists had consistently embraced this discourse.

During the 1980s, the "peasant" rather than "ethnic" wing of Indigenous movements were more likely to employ the language of Indigenous nationalities. For example, in 1982, the First Peasant and Indigenous National Encounter in Quito presented a right to land as "fundamental for the development of a nationality, of our culture, our language," and key to a political struggle "against imperialism and for an authentic democracy."⁴⁰ In 1987, the Federación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas (FENOC), the more "peasant" of the Indigenous organizations, called for a defense of "our rights as peoples and nationalities."⁴¹ Naturally, the communist-affiliated Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios (FEI) called for recognition of Ecuador as "a multinational and multicultural country" at their seventh congress in 1989. They affirmed the need to need to fight

³⁵Ricardo Paredes, "Acerca de la nacionalidad y el estado ecuatoriano," in *Los comunistas en la historia nacional*, ed. Domingo Paredes (Guayaquil: Editorial Claridad, S.A., 1987), 59-80.

³⁶Xavier Garaycoa, "Presentación," in *Los comunistas en la historia nacional*, 4.

³⁷René Maugé Mosquera, "Por ujna renovación que surja de las necesidades propias de la realidad nacional y de cada partido," *Revista Ecuatoriana de Pensamiento Marxista*, no. 16 (III Epoca) (September 1990): 94.

³⁸Partido Comunista del Ecuador (PCE), *Por la reconstitución histórica de la izquierda, hacia una nueva sociedad: Documento central de debate político del XII Congreso Nacional del Partido Comunista del Ecuador* (Quito: Partido Comunista del Ecuador, 1993), 14. Also see Richard F. Staar, ed., *Yearbook On International Communist Affairs* (Stanford, Calif: Hoover Institution Press, 1991), 80.

³⁹"El encuentro continental de pueblos indios y las libertades que persigue," *El Pueblo*, July 23-29, 1990, 8.

⁴⁰Primer Encuentro Unitario Campesino-Indígena," *Lucha Campesina* 17 (May 1982): 6-9

⁴¹Federación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas (Ecuador), "Organizaciones: FENOC: programa agrario y plataforma de lucha," *Acción: boletín informativo agrario* 2a época, no. 10 (October 1987): 49.

for the “recognition of a multinational state,” and noted that the 1917 Bolshevik revolution was the first to “resolve the problem of the nationalities.”⁴² The FEI’s eighth congress in 1995 linked neo-colonial dependency to racial discrimination and the need “to create a new power that represents the interests of the people and embraces the plurinational and pluricultural character of the Ecuadorian nation.” The country embodied a civil society with a rich “diversity of cultures, languages, and peoples with distinct historical origins.” Spanish colonization and subsequent elitist governments had excluded this diversity in their attempts to construct a unitary “Ecuadorian nationality” under a centralized state structure. The FEI called for the full participation of Indigenous nationalities in government so that they would have a voice in policies that affected them.⁴³

The first non-communist Indigenous organizations to embrace the language of nationalities were located in the Amazon. In August 1980, Indigenous organizations in the Ecuadorian Amazon formed the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana (CONFENIAE). CONFENIAE’s statutes declared its intent to “defend and value the cultures of the Indigenous nationalities in the Ecuadorian Amazon.”⁴⁴ “We have claimed the term nationalities,” Indigenous intellectual Alfredo Viteri observes, “as a category that includes all of the different Indigenous groups.”⁴⁵ The First Regional Conference of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon in August 1980 was originally to be called the First Regional Conference of Indigenous *Organizations* of the Ecuadorian Amazon, with the decision to change the name reflecting an increased concern with petitioning for territorial and political rights as nationalities. Shuar intellectual Ampam Karakras was the first Amazonian to articulate coherently that Indigenous peoples were “Indian nationalities” as expressed in economic, political, cultural, and linguistic aspects. “We want to use our own names, maintain our own identity and personalities,” Karakras wrote in 1984.⁴⁶ Local federations also began to shift their discourse, with the Federación de Organizaciones Indígenas del Napo (FOIN) moving from employing language of “Indigenous classes” in the 1970s to “Indigenous federations” in the 1980s and to “ethnic nationalities” in the 1990s.⁴⁷ Even in the highlands, grassroots organizations increasingly moved seamlessly between class, ethnic, and nationalist ideologies and identities. The provincial

⁴²Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios (FEI), *VII Congreso Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios FEI; Documents, Quito 27-28 de julio de 1989* (Quito: Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios (FEI), 1989), 10-11, 5.

⁴³Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios (FEI), *VIII Congreso Ordinario: Documento Central* (Riobamba, Ecuador: Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios (FEI), 1995), 1-3.

⁴⁴“Estatuto de la CONFENIAE,” reprinted in Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE), *Las nacionalidades indígenas en el Ecuador: Nuestro proceso organizativo*, 2d ed., 1992: 500 años de resistencia india, no. 0 (Quito: Ediciones Tincui - Abya-Yala, 1989), 116.

⁴⁵Alfredo Viteri, “Los pueblos de la Amazonía se unen,” *Cuadernos de Nueva*, no. 7 (June 1983): 46.

⁴⁶Ampam Karakras, “Las nacionalidades indias y el estado ecuatoriano,” *Antropología, Cuadernos de Investigación* 3 (November 1984): 106. CONAIE subsequently republished this essay after the June 1990 uprising as the first in a series of twenty pamphlets to advance their movement. See Ampam Karakras, *Las nacionalidades indias y el estado Ecuatoriano* (Quito: Editorial TINCUI--CONAIE, 1990).

⁴⁷Thomas Albert Perreault, “Shifting Ground: Agrarian Change, Political Mobilization and Identity Construction Among Quichua of the Alto Napo, Ecuadorian Amazonia” (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 2000), 225; Thomas J. Perreault, “Development Identities: Indigenous Mobilization, Rural Livelihoods and Resource Access in Ecuadorian Amazonia,” *Ecumene* 8, no. 4 (October 2001): 394.

Federación Indígena y Campesina de Imbabura (FICI) chose a name bridging ethnicity and class to signify its “political alliance with exploited classes as well as leftist political forces.” It engaged an “anticapitalist and antiimperialist” struggle for national liberation “as Indian nationalities.”⁴⁸ As political scientist José Antonio Lucero ascertains, “indigenous activists in Ecuador have taken a term from the lexicon of Marxist and European thought and ‘Indianized’ it.”⁴⁹

Subsequently, the discourse of Indigenous nationalities came largely under the purview of organizers utilizing the language to build their movements. Two months after the formation of CONFENIAE, Amazonian activists met with their highland counterparts to form the Consejo Nacional de Coordinación de las Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONACNIE). CONACNIE sought to build “only one national organization for the various Indigenous nationalities in the country.”⁵⁰ In order to realize success, it was “indispensable to unite the double dimension of our struggle” through a recognition of “the double character of our problems: as members of a class and as part of different Indigenous nationalities.”⁵¹ The theme was reiterated in CONACNIE’s second meeting in April 1984, which emphasized a “consciousness of their class position” while at the same time reaffirming an identity as peoples and nationalities.⁵² CONACNIE was the forerunner to the better known Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE) that was formed in 1986, and subsequently became the primary champion for a language of Indigenous nationalities.

In 1988, CONAIE presented its conceptualization of Ecuador as a plurinational state to the National Congress’ Indigenous Affairs Commission. In the proposed Law of Indigenous Nationalities, CONAIE declared that the republic of Ecuador was a plurinational state, and argued that the government must recognize Indigenous territoriality, organization, education, culture, medicine, and judicial systems.⁵³ CONAIE argued that their proposed plurinational state would not establish separate states for the various ethnic groups, as certain elements in Ecuadorian society feared, but rather it would “reflect the reality of the country and the continent in respect to different national cultures and to the reestablishment of social, political, and economic equality.”⁵⁴ Both academics and politicians increasingly relied on the language of Indigenous nationalities. Anthropologist José Sánchez Parga proposed that Indigenous movements had a “triple dimension.” In addition to class and ethnicity, they also included a

⁴⁸CONAIE, *Nacionalidades indígenas*, 136, 143.

⁴⁹Jose Antonio Lucero, "Arts of Unification: Political Representation and Indigenous Movements in Bolivia and Ecuador" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2002), 200.

⁵⁰Ecuadorunari-CONAIE, "Lineamientos políticos generales del movimiento indígena en el Ecuador," in ECUARUNARI, FENOC, and ALAI, *Nuestra voz, nuestra cultura. Memoria del Taller Andino de Intercambio de Experiencias en Educación y Comunicación de Organizaciones Campesinos Indígenas (Quito, 7-11 octubre 1987)* (Quito: ECUARUNARI/FENOC/ALAI, 1989), 42.

⁵¹CONAIE, *Nacionalidades indígenas*, 261.

⁵²"II Encuentro de Nacionalidades Indígenas," *Punto de Vista* 3:137 (May 2, 1984): 4.

⁵³Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE), "Anteproyecto de ley de nacionalidades indígenas del Ecuador, 1988," in *Documentos Indios: Declaraciones y pronunciamientos*, ed. José Juncosa (Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 1991), 202-12. For an examination of how *nacionalidades indias* and *pueblos indígenas* subsequently evolved, see Guerrero and Ospina, *El poder de la comunidad*, 186.

⁵⁴Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE), "500 años de resistencia india," *Casa de las Américas* 29:174 (May-June 1989), 117.

nationalist orientation, including citizenship demands, with each aspect informing the other two. Rather than being opposed to each other, class, ethnicity and nationalism formed a trinity that cannot be divided.⁵⁵ In the late 1980s, even centrist president Rodrigo Borja employed favorable rhetoric in speeches, proclaiming that “Ecuador is a plurinational and multicultural country.” Indigenous nationalities, he noted, had been here “many years before we invented our states.”⁵⁶ Historian and socialist activist Enrique Ayala Mora also contributed an essay on the topic of Indigenous nationalities.⁵⁷

Leaders used the discourse of Indigenous nationalities to mobilize their bases in street protests. “We peasants and Indigenous nationalities are the most affected by the economic crisis and the government’s social policies,” activists declared on the eve of a 1990 national uprising.⁵⁸ The bishop of Riobamba issued a statement supporting the uprising, condemning the oppression and exploitation that Indigenous peoples faced, and celebrating the “human values and rights of the Indigenous nationalities and ethnicities of our country.”⁵⁹ An April 1992 march or *caminata* of two thousand Kichwa, Shuar, and Achuar peoples from the Amazon to Quito demanded “the legalization of the territories they inhabit, and that the national constitution be reformed to reflect the plurinational and multicultural reality of Ecuador.”⁶⁰ Anthropologist Suzana Sawyer calls the *caminata* “a crucial juncture in the process of indigenous nation building.” The *caminata* provided an opportunity to weave “indigenous rights together with local understandings of identity and place,” leading to “a unique moment of indigenous agency.”⁶¹ In June 1994, peasant and Indigenous groups unified in “La Movilización Por la Vida” against proposed changes to the agrarian reform law. CONAIE criticized failed agricultural reforms because they “have not resolved the problem of Indigenous People and Nationalities.”⁶² Increasingly, this terminology gained an increasing amount of traction among Indigenous activists.

After years of agitation, activists scored a partial victory in 1998 when politicians revised the first article of the constitution to recognize its “pluricultural and multiethnic” nature (something that their Bolivian counterparts had already gained in 1994), but stopped short of

⁵⁵José Sánchez Parga, “Etnia, estado y la ‘forma’ clase,” *Ecuador Debate*, no. 12 (December 1986): 59; José Sánchez Parga, *Presente y futuro de los pueblos indígenas: análisis y propuestas* (Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 1992), 82. Also see José Sánchez Parga, ed., *Etnia, poder y diferencia en los andes septentrionales* (Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 1990).

⁵⁶Chad T. Black, *The Making of an Indigenous Movement: Culture, Ethnicity, and Post-Marxist Social Praxis in Ecuador*, Research paper series / Latin American Institute: Research paper series (University of New Mexico. Latin American Institute), no. 32 (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico, Latin American Institute, 1999), 31; Luis Macas, *El levantamiento indígena visto por sus protagonistas* (Quito: Instituto Científico de Culturas Indígenas (ICCI), 1991), 12.

⁵⁷Enrique Ayala Mora, *Las nacionalidades indígenas en el Ecuador: contribución para su estudio*, Serie Estudios, No. 3 (Ibarra: Corporación Imbabura, 1991).

⁵⁸Coordinadora Popular, “Manifiesto a la opinión pública,” *Punto de Vista* 9, no. 417 (May 14, 1990): 9.

⁵⁹“Iglesia de Riobamba apoya levantamiento indio,” *Punto de Vista* 9, no. 423 (June 25, 1990): 5.

⁶⁰SAIIC, “March on Quito: Amazon Indians Demand to be Heard,” *SAIIC Newsletter* 6:3 (Spring & Summer 1992): 4-7.

⁶¹Suzana Sawyer, “The 1992 Indian Mobilization in Lowland Ecuador,” *Latin American Perspectives* 24, no. 3 (94) (May 1997): 77, 65.

⁶²Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE), *Proyecto político de la CONAIE* (Quito: CONAIE, 1994), 31.

using the contentious term “plurinational.” A subsequent section on collective rights implicitly recognized this ideological construction with the statement that “Indigenous peoples, who self-define as nationalities of ancestral races, and Negro or Afro-Ecuadorian peoples, form part of an united and indivisible Ecuadorian state.” Indigenous and peasant organizations had fought hard to be included in a truly participatory constituent assembly; however, as elsewhere in Latin America, the desire to have Ecuador formally declared a plurinational or multinational state remained an illusive goal.⁶³ As Sawyer notes, “nation *is* a politically charged and volatile category,” and Indigenous success in subverting this imagery enabled them “to challenge exclusionary state rule and dominant notions of the nation.”⁶⁴

Long-time CONAIE leader Nina Pacari points to what she sees as a critical difference between earlier communist-led organizations such as the FEI and later ones such as CONAIE. The early organizations tended to focus on issues of wages, land, and even cultural issues such as bilingual education, but “without a broader political perspective.” Pacari contended, “while these concrete demands remain central concerns of the indigenous movement, they are now accompanied by demands of a more political stripe: the right to self-determination, the right to our cultural identity and our languages, and the right to develop economically according to our own values and beliefs.” Specifically, CONAIE added to the Indigenous movement a new political demand of “the construction of a plurinational state that tolerates and encourages diversity among different groups in society.”⁶⁵ Despite Pacari’s statement, this political language was neither as new nor as innovative as she would have us think. Most people either willfully ignore or are ignorant of the roots of the construction of Indigenous peoples as nationalities.

Lucero notes that nationalities “are not naturally existing units but rather the products of politics.” Indigenous movements can embrace a variety of mechanisms for advancing their agenda, including organizing themselves as ethnic communities (*pueblos*), federations, cooperatives, or *comunas*. In this context, “nationality became the discursive vehicle for CONAIE’s alternative democratic political project.” Rather than moving back toward a “tradition” or even reflecting an existing reality, nationality formed part of a strategy to construct political subjects designed to realize their agenda. CONAIE was successful in this project not so much because “nationalities” reflected reality but because they were able to mobilize around this discourse. Lucero contends that a discourse of nationalities was successful in Ecuador because it was rooted in a trajectory of civil society rather than around “the clientelistic dynamics of party politics” as developed in Bolivia, and probably to a lesser extent in Peru.⁶⁶ In employing the discourse of nationalities as an organizing tool, whether consciously or not, CONAIE built on a long, rich, previous tradition that can be traced back to Comintern proposals in the 1920s that subsequently contributed to a strong Indigenous movement in Ecuador.

⁶³“Constitución Política de Ecuador, 1998,”

<http://www.georgetown.edu/pdba/Constitutions/Ecuador/ecuador98.html>; Suzana Sawyer, “Indigenous/Peasant Protests Disrupt Ecuador,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 31:3 (November/December 1997): 2, 45.

⁶⁴Sawyer, “1992 Indian Mobilization,” 78.

⁶⁵Nina Pacari, “Taking On the Neoliberal Agenda,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 29, no. 5 (March/April 1996): 25.

⁶⁶José Antonio Lucero, “Locating the ‘Indian Problem’: Community, Nationality, and Contradiction in Ecuadorian Indigenous Politics,” *Latin American Perspectives* 30:1 (128) (January 2003): 36, 34; Lucero, “Arts of Unification: Political Representation and Indigenous Movements in Bolivia and Ecuador,” 172.