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# The Identity and Integration of the Quichua-speaking People of Highland Ecuador

Marie-Genevieve Sasseville Babecki

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***The Identity and Integration of the Quichua-  
speaking People of Highland Ecuador***

*By: Marie-Genevieve S Babecki*

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## **Abstract**

In the early 1990s massive pan-indigenous uprisings occurred throughout Ecuador. This brought attention to the politicized ethnicity of indigenous people as political actors with legitimized agency. This led to an increasingly contentious struggle for power, related to the historical verticality of classes based upon ethnicity and the newly adopted logic of neoliberal multiculturalism in contradiction with the previous logic of assimilationist nation-building.

Examining historical context, we trace the evolution of state discourse which greatly shapes identity from one of separation and segregation of indigenous peoples and Hispanic elites, to greater inclusion of all populations as citizens. Attempts have been made by the Ecuadorian state to integrate all populations. In this integration, for the sake of “modernization”, indigenous people were pushed to lose their languages and traditions in order to conform to a peasant class and to espouse a sense of citizenship and belonging to their government. With the rejection of this logic previous logic through the adaptation of neoliberal reforms in efforts to decentralize the state and modernize, the Ecuadorian state has created a contradiction with its previous efforts. In response indigenous peoples have politicized their ethnicity to become powerful actors who have demanded the recognition of pluri-ethnicity and multi-culturality in Ecuador, thereby establishing their minority rights.

The history of ethnic relations in Ecuador will be examined. The official national discourse from the state regarding identity and integration has been disseminated through vehicles like public schools, the national census, popular

folklore, and ethnographic museums. Through ethnography the reality of the fluidity of identity can be examined as a response to the state's official discourse, giving us knowledge of how theory and reality intersect.

## **Preface**

I was first interested in getting to know more about the Quichua people while completing a summer internship in Cuenca, Ecuador at the *Casa del Migrante*. The *Casa del Migrante* is located in downtown Cuenca, Ecuador in the province of Azuay in the Central Highlands of Ecuador. It is a municipal agency whose mission is to help individuals and families affected by transnational migration. Ecuador is one of the most geographically fragmented countries in South America. With a high population of self-identified indigenous Quichua people as well as descendents of European colonizers, one's ethnicity in Cuenca is a factor for discrimination. If someone in Cuenca has more indigenous traits than European, they were generally disenfranchised in social and economic contexts. Many self-identified indigenous people try to immigrate to the United States in search of economic prosperity, plans for migration are almost always temporary, and most people have grand hopes of coming back with riches which they hope will buy them a better place in Ecuadorian society. I wanted to understand why this phenomenon occurred and what were the conditions in the home country which might spawn such an exodus.

The cases I worked on that summer ranged from maltreated deportation cases to missing persons. Since Cuenca is the major city in the central highlands, a region whose economy has historically been an agricultural one, most migrants

were poor rural farmers who travelled from their rural homesteads to the city of Cuenca to seek assistance from the *Casa del Migrante*. In Ecuador, and in Andean nations in general, being a rural farmer is synonymous with being of indigenous ethnicity. The first day of my internship, the director of the *Casa del Migrante*, Doctora Alvarado Rios made the mission of the organization clear, she told me that our task was not to help people immigrate to the United States, but it was to help deal with the negative familial and societal effects that are the result of illegal and legal immigration. She gave me an idea of the scope of the problem, Azuay, the province in which the city of Cuenca is located, because of its failing agricultural economy, has a very large amount of residents who migrate to the US each year. The cases I helped Doctora Alvarado with as an intern involved helping recently deported Ecuadorians, helping families who had a member of the family try to immigrate to the United States illegally when it went wrong, trying to organize economic enterprises for families who lost their primary breadwinner because of migration, and cooperation with local authorities, agencies, and non-governmental organizations.

It is important note what the reality is of self-identified indigenous Ecuadorian citizens who seek help from their governments, which through this structure, is by seeking legal counsel and non-profit social services from the municipal government at the *Casa del Migrante*. In order to understand how neoliberal multiculturalist national laws, recently passed in Ecuador after pan-indigenous groups politicized their ethnicity and gained political agency, affect the daily lives of citizens. While new rhetoric is aimed at curbing discrimination

and giving tangible minority rights, many years of oppressive nationalist discourse has had a deep and lasting effect on the social order which permeates all means of how the public is administered to by the government. The neoliberal model allows individuals to either contribute or resist it. The cases I saw during my short time in Ecuador involving those seeking to leave Ecuador could be characterized as individuals resisting neoliberal multiculturalism by seeking opportunities for a better life, not only a better economic life but a better life within the social fabric. While it might be counterintuitive to say that migrants hold a better life in their host country since they are often victims of xenophobia, they are marginalized with all other immigrants since they are new arrivals. People who are discriminated against in their home country for their ethnicity will always be at the bottom of the social order unless they can change the perception of their ethnicity. A migrant in a host country is discriminated against because they cannot speak the language and are not well adjusted. However, the dynamic is skewed because of their choice to migrate to the host country for reasons, which for them, outweigh the costs. In the home country of Ecuador, the migrant is seen as a misfit who must be helped.

People who are marginal in their own societies have come to play a major role in social movements. They foment new directions which allow for ethnic differences to become much more central with the help and influence of non-profit organizations. Not taking this interest seriously and trying to neutralize differences by folklorizing indigenous identity has been attempted in Ecuador. This corporatist-assimilationist model is still practiced by some citizens as well as

the newer model of neoliberal multiculturalism. This creates contradictions which I have found fascinating to observe and which have driven me to explore the history and practice of both models throughout modern Ecuadorian history.

It is important to study the identity and integration of the Quichua people in their native Ecuador because it drastically affects the United States through immigration. The relationship between the United States and Ecuador makes for bittersweet people to people interactions for most migrants. Classically, the United States holds a promise of the American dream and economic prosperity however, the dream is bittersweet because it normally means separation from family and friends for extended periods of time. Illegal migration is especially difficult because anxious families are left in the home country; awaiting any news about their loved ones who have embarked on this dangerous journey. I helped with a particularly remarkable case involving a group of Ecuadorian women and children who self-identified as Quichua, wore traditional dress, and had one interpreter in the group at our meetings who spoke Spanish and translated for the other members of the group.

They came to ask for the *Casa del Migrante*'s help because they feared the worse for their husbands and fathers who had paid a coyote to smuggle them to the United States illegally "*por la pampa*" ("by land"). This is bittersweet on a personal interaction level because these migrants paid a coyote to smuggle them to the United States in search of better economic opportunities for their families. Most often the reason given by illegal migrants for not trying to migrate legally is the exasperating wait time they must face to even try to get an interview to be



granted a visa. It is a double edged sword because most migrants do not meet the educational or economic requirements to be granted a visa.

The other aspect of people to people interaction derived from immigration is the image of the United States abroad. Many migrants have less than glowing remarks to describe their experiences with the stewards of the United States and its people: representatives from federal agencies. Agents of the Department of Homeland Security for example, were often reported to not have treated Ecuadorian nationals in a caring or compassionate manner. I was told by an Ecuadorian national who had been recently deported from the US and was not given back his belongings, negating his rightful access to all funds he had earned while in US, that Homeland Security agents told him he was “no longer their problem” and promptly sent him to Ecuador without his belongings.

But, with the power of being a steward of US citizenship as an intern at *Casa del Migrante*, I feel that I helped change some of the negative generalization most migrants had made of US citizens because of their interaction with said US federal agency representatives. The experiences of many of the patrons of the *Casa del Migrante* in the United States left a common belief that US citizens are racist. Although inexcusable, the belief can be explained by the common response of fear and ignorance people have to demographic and cultural changes that come with influxes of new immigration populations. I was able to show the patrons of the Casa del Migrante whom I helped, through my actions and fair treatment of all, that not all Americans are racists.

The many economic problems facing Ecuador which drive the high rate of emigration are part of a vicious cycle of imperialism propagated by the country's physical and economic infrastructure. The Ecuadorian Office of Social Affairs has published that "in Ecuador, around 378.000 people went out to work in foreign countries between 1996 and 2001. This amount represents 8.3% of working population, and 3.1% of total population registered on the 2001 census" (Izquierdo: 2004).

The current United States economic aid policy for Ecuador needs improvement. One major roadblock in Ecuador's eligibility for economic aid is the US drug certification policy. This policy is often criticized as hypocritical and outdated. Each year, the president of the United States reviews the amount of illegal drugs allegedly being produced in countries receiving foreign aid. If the President deems the country is not doing enough to stop drug production, then the country can be placed on the "majors list". The economic aid to a country on the "majors list" can be severely cut or stopped. "On September 14, 2007, the President approved and sent to Congress the Majors List for 2008. The 20 countries included were: Afghanistan, The Bahamas, Bolivia, Brazil, Burma, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, India, Jamaica, Laos, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela" (Certification). Since the United States is the primary destination for these illegal drugs, the US government should concentrate its efforts on curbing consumption within its own borders rather than production in countries with weak democracies and huge needs for economic aid.

At the *Casa del Migrante*, the need for economic expansion was a theme we also dealt with. A group of self-identified indigenous Quichua women sought the *Casa del Migrante*'s help because their husbands and sons had paid a coyote to smuggle them to the United States. In this particular case, the families of these men had not heard from them in over a year and feared the worse. The *Casa del Migrante* did everything they could in a legal sense to help find the missing persons and bring justice to their relatives. However, the *Casa del Migrante* also realized that these women were left without income. There had been no remittances for these dependents in over a year. Workshops were arranged to start a bakery so that they would have some form of income. Therapy sessions were held with the staff psychologists to help deal with the emotional consequences. They needed to be comforted to face the possibility that their family member might be dead and to be able to cope with the stress of waiting, and their anger at the *coyote* who lived among them in their rural village but would not answer their many questions.

A challenge I faced while working on the self-identified Quichua women's case was the difficulty of working with other organizations that had interests in the case and figuring out what was which organization's responsibility. We asked for the help of the *defensoria del pueblo*, which is the US equivalent of public defender. But, his role became more symbolic as his hands were tied in bureaucracies since we did not have evidence linking the coyote to the disappearance. There also did not seem to be much outrage or motivation for this case in particular, since it was one of many the *Casa del Migrante* had asked for

support with from the *defensor's* office. We also asked for the help of local non-governmental organizations like *Fundación Humanitaria*, an organization which helped locate missing persons. As far as government to government relations, the families had last had contact with the group of migrants in question while they were traveling through Colombia, and the Ecuadorian and Colombia police tried to work together on the case. However, both entities were very slow to respond and it seemed time and hope of finding the missing persons was falling through our fingers.

After developments were made and the search to find the missing persons began, the attention was turned to the coyote. The reality was that there was nothing to be done other than “*denuncias*”, literally translated to allegations which are publicly filed with the *defensoria del pueblo* or public defender. We later found out that the coyote was paying off members of the group to go to the meetings and report back to him what was said, he was always a step ahead of whatever legal action the *Casa del Migrante* tried to bring against him.

I realized after speaking with the daughter of one of the self-identified Quichua women's daughter, that there was a need for more involvement in schools by the *Casa del Migrante* and other municipal and non-governmental agencies. The girl, whose father had paid a coyote to smuggle him to the United States, told me she is made fun of at school and that her teachers always see her as a problem child because she does not have a nuclear family and wears traditional indigenous dress to school. It is certainly not this child's fault that she is not part of a nuclear family and more awareness should be made for acceptance of

traditionally dressed pupils in schools. As I discovered through later research, it seemed that the minority rights granted by the Ecuadorian government to the indigenous peoples of Ecuador was only nominal and that tangible efforts were not made to promote acceptance in places where the government was able to disseminate its nationalist discourse, like in public schools.

This exposure to the injustices faced by indigenous people in Ecuador prompted me to want to explore the history of the region and its peoples, their past and current treatment by the State, and their current political agency in the hopes to understand what could be done to rectify these injustices.

I should like to thank Dr. David Robinson who kindly challenged and encouraged me, Drs. Judith-Maria and Hans Buechler who generously gave of their time and knowledge, Carolyn Ostrander for her invaluable advice, and my Father and Brother who have provided unconditional love and support.

### List of Illustrations



Figure 1 “Geographic Regions of Ecuador”

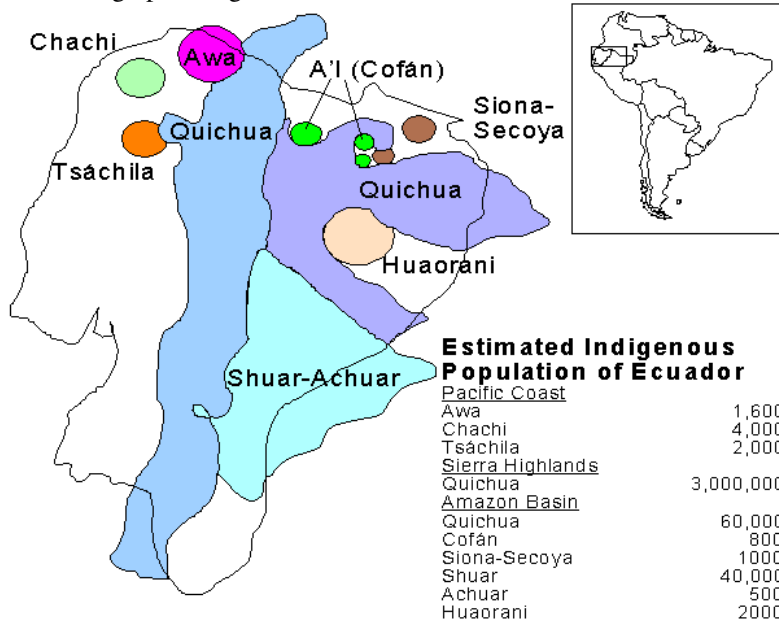


Figure 2 “Ethnically Indigenous Populations”

## Introduction

The entities which govern the territory of modern-day Ecuador have tried to promote an official identity-building discourse in order to foster within its heterogeneous people a notion of belonging to the nation-state since the Spanish conquest. This discourse aims to shape the common identity of all Ecuadorians; it in effect legitimizes the state's institutions. Every modern nation struggles to form a sense of cohesion among its citizens. This theme is important in Ecuador because it is argued that "the territory that forms contemporary Ecuador is riddled by ethnic, linguistic, and regional divisions which do not easily form the basis for a unified national community" (Crain 1990: 56). The many divisions of contemporary Ecuador have created several simultaneous identities that historically have existed in confrontation with the state's official identity-building discourses.

The modern evolution of the state's official discourse in which the indigenous peoples gain a greater importance may be noted. In this case, progress to gain greater power for indigenous peoples has led to the advancement of their minority rights by the politicization of their ethnic identity. By confronting the state which had historically only allowed ethnically indigenous peoples to be inserted into the political system as rural peasant actors, these activists demanded that the state recognize their claim to minority rights based on a collaborative pan-Indigenous confederacy. We will examine what led to the turning point for the indigenous movement, the 1990 uprisings in which these indigenous actors refused to disappear or assimilate by rejecting the state's goal of racial homogeneity by insisting that Ecuador must be recognized as pluri-national state

with permanent heterogeneity. We will also examine the state's current policy of neoliberal multiculturalism and how it grants and yet limits rights for indigenous peoples.

The evolution of state discourse regarding identity will be traced from one that did not see Indians as citizens in the colonial period, to one that encouraged miscegenation in Republican times, to a new and current official discourse of neoliberal multiculturalism. In order to understand what "neoliberal multiculturalism" means, one must first understand how "neoliberal" is used in this context. According to anthropologist Lynne Phillips, "neoliberalism stands for a cluster of policies driven by the logic of transnational capitalism" This means specifically free markets, smaller government with less social welfare responsibility, and the exercise of individuality in merit and choice" (Phillips 1998: xx).

This sets the stage for the current realities of the Ecuadorian states which has put into place neoliberal policies in order to reach market growth. We see a paradox of simultaneous cultural affirmation and economic marginalization since the shift to multiculturalism has occurred under international pressure from NGOs to recognize the cultural rights of indigenous peoples while also promoting neoliberal economic reforms which, as Hale points out, "are known to leave class-based societal inequities in place, if not exacerbated." (2002: 493)

Currently, Ecuador's official policy regarding identity of its citizens is multiculturalism. This issue is complicated when we realize that the Ecuadorian state has been undergoing neoliberal reform while implicating this



multiculturalism policy with regards to the identity of its citizenry. Neoliberal multiculturalism can be understood as the struggles of indigenous peoples for collective rights within a state which is undertaking measures to decentralize its government and make smaller its welfare responsibilities by promoting the free market economy for all citizens. This policy is the opposite of the previous attempts by the state to disband indigenous communities in order to eliminate Indians through miscegenation. Now Indigenous citizens are accepted as part of the nationalist identity discourse. We can see this for example in Ecuador's new constitution, passed in September 2008 which gives collective land rights to indigenous peoples.

While in the past, the state promoted erasure and disbandment of collective indigenous movements in favor of homogenizing its citizenry through miscegenation, it now recognizes the differences and heterogeneities of and among its citizens. While recognition is a most important step in reach minority rights, it does not automatically lead to tangible collective rights. While the state has currently quelled the intense political upheaval which came to a climax when a pan-indigenous confederation stormed the capital and took it over in June of 1990, there continues to be a power struggle between indigenous organizations who demand collective rights and the state which has the power to grant legitimacy to these rights or to reject them as "radical".

The critical turning point in what had shaped the current discourse of multiculturalism was the violent uprising which publically displayed the political agency of indigenous people as an ethnic-based conflict and not an economic-

based conflict. Pallares surmises: “Instead of positing a model of double consciousness-Indian and Ecuadorian- I propose that the central contradiction in the Ecuadorian highlands is a *campesinismo* or peasant consciousness vs an Indian consciousness” (2002: 30).

We see the inherent conflict in which a state is given the duty to protect both individual rights, which are a state’s classic duties, and the new duties it has acquired from proclaiming itself multicultural and pluri-ethnic, which entails protecting collective rights. Hale asks: “How can the state turn over clusters of rights to cultural groups without relinquishing its central responsibility to protect the individual rights of each and every member of society?” 2002: 492).

## **History of Region**

Ecuador is divided into three geographically quite distinctive regions: the coast, the sierra highlands, and the Amazonian lowlands. The ethnic group, which this study is focused on, is the Quichua of the central highlands in the Sierra region. As will be examined more in-depth, historically, indigenous identification in the national census was established based on language and place of origin. Therefore, those who speak Quichua and live in rural areas are, for demographic purposes, considered ethnically Quichua. Ecuador is currently recognized as a pluri-national state, in addition to whites, blacks, and *mestizos*, many Ecuadorians belong to indigenous nations. There are three theories which explain how the Quichua language became used in Ecuador. Some scholars believe that Inca influence spread from Cuzco northward to tribes of the Ecuadorian Highlands, as the Incan administration was imposed, establishing their language in the area.

Others believe that it was disseminated through trade routes prior to Inca conquest between neighboring administrative regions of Latin America. Still, others believe that the Quichua language originated in lowland Ecuador (Stark: 1985).

Prior to the Inca and Spanish conquests the area was home to loosely confederate kin-based indigenous communities. They lived in small village units of extended families and they exchanged non-wage labor and cultivated subsistence crops. During the 1480s Inca expansion northward into Ecuadorian highland region was initiated by the empire's ninth ruler, Inka Tupac Yupanki. His son and heir Huayna Capac was born in Tumipampa (modern-day Cuenca). Cuenca is the most populous city of the Ecuadorian Highlands. He helped establish the Inca presence in the region because of his ties to the region. However, Inca control of the region was short-lived because the Incas most successfully controlled areas with dense sedentary farming populations. As mentioned before, this region instead had dispersed communities which were difficult to control. This led to a period of near constant warfare between the indigenous kinship based communities of the Ecuadorian highland region and the Inca Empire. Claims to leadership of the Inca Empire were made by two brothers Atahualpa and Huáscar upon the death of their father, former Inca ruler Huayna Capac. The Ecuadorian highland region swore allegiance to Huascar and was destroyed by Atahualpa when he won the war and succeeded his father (Cieza de Leon 1965: 142-147). Atahualpa was executed in 1532 by Francisco Pizarro.

The Spanish colonists defeated the Inca Empire through military invasion, which led to the downfall of the empire already weakened by disease. The

colonists sought the extraction of labor and natural resources as efficiently as possible from the new territory. They established administrative control over indigenous populations in order to demand tribute and to establish tribute collection system as well as forced labor systems for extractivist operations. This is described by Lockhart as the Spaniard's vision of developing the "great estate" in the New World (Lockhart: 1969).

During the initial conquest, the Crown granted Spaniards the right to use native labor; this did not include rights to land. This labor grant was called the *encomienda* or *repartamiento* in the Antilles and Mexico (Lockhart 1969: 414). The Indians assigned to the *encomendero* would work on his properties. Lockhart clearly states: "the standard *encomienda* of the Conquest period was not in itself a grant of property, nor did it provide a specific legal vehicle for property acquisition. But it was addressed to a man presumed to be a property owner (1969: 416)."

It is important to our understanding of the preservation of traditional Indian society, and how these traditions effect the modern indigenous movement, to examine how Spanish colonization structured life and work. Many historians have assumed that the *encomienda* system, where the Crown granted a person a specified number of natives for whom they were to take responsibility, had evolved directly into the *hacienda* system, which granted land to a Spaniard in the New World and not natives (Lockhart 1969: 411). While the *hacienda* system granted land to the *hacendado*, Indian peons became involved in a feudal system associated with the *hacienda*, where they would cultivate subsistence plots

belonging to the *hacendado*. The hacienda was a protection from the tribute system, many Indians moved into hacienda areas in order to escape the *mit'a* and the mines, both forced labor tribute systems. However, since Indians would work at the hacienda in return for the subsistence plots provided by the *hacendado*, they forfeited their land rights and could be easily evicted. The *encomienda* system was essentially always in conflict with the Indian communities it ruled over, leading to the rise of the hacienda and *corregimiento* systems (Keith 1971: 431).

The Spaniards continued a system of forced labor like the *mit'a* system imposed upon the people of the central highlands of Ecuador by the Incas. These tribute systems could only be imposed on free communities, communities not part of the *encomienda* or *hacienda* system. When Spanish settlers arrived they began the *encomienda* system in which an *encomendero* was given the responsibility to take care of a group of Indians, from which he would extract labor, causing slavery-like conditions. “The *encomienda* system thus was based on the largely unconscious assumption that indigenous social, political, and economic organization would survive in more or less the same state in which the Spaniards found it, because there seemed to be no alternative to the control and exploitation of Indian populations through arrangements and patterns which already existed. In an anthropological sense, the institution's aims were fundamentally conservative” (Keith 1971: 435). While an attempt was made to keep Indian organization through the *encomienda* system, it did not succeed. This is because *encomiendas* were relatively rare; they were given to the initial Spanish conquerors and were meant to last for three generations. The *encomienda* system did not succeed in

maintaining indigenous organization because the system was pre-capitalistic and also because the Crown wanted to convert Indians to Christianity and to teach them to live as Spaniards.

After the initial conquest, the Catholic Church and Crown encouraged missionaries and administrators to “civilize” indigenous peoples who were seen as backwards and uncivilized. This influenced how “the great estate” would develop. Spanish colonizers tried to gain social control of the native populations through evangelization and by settling Indians living in dispersed homesteads into nucleated villages.

It is important to note that with “the new *corregimientos*, Indians could be ‘reduced’ from their depleted and isolated settlements to larger towns where conditions favored the combination of Indian and Spanish patterns of behavior and belief, thus making possible the development of a new ‘Indian’ society, which was not traditional but was still essentially indigenous (Keith 1971: 439)”

This new “Indian” society was considerably more resistant to Spanish pressures than the traditional Indian society had been, as may be seen from the increasing number of cases in which Indian communities were able to resist Spanish attempts to deprive them of land. The *corregimientos* were run by paid officials who were less likely to protect the Indians than the *encomenderos* had been-but it was nevertheless the establishment of the system of *corregimientos* which created the main indigenous nuclei of resistance to the expansion of haciendas. This more modern organization of Indigenous communities based on

collective rights allowed for a unified resistance to the expanding of haciendas on Indian's communal land.

The hacienda system then had “its basis in rights to land, its independence of traditional indigenous social and economic organization, and its ties to the expanding European economy (Keith 1971: 438).” This meant that the *hacienda* system helped to formalize the economic and social ties between the indigenous communities and the Spanish settlers.

During this period, *indígenas* were considered Ecuadorians but were not granted full citizenship rights since those were only extended to the Republics of the Whites, in contrast to the separate Republic of the Indians set-up by Spanish administrators. Selmeski explains that “they were classified as ‘miserable peoples’, who like children required the tutelage and protection of the state” (2007: 68). The system of tribute which was imposed by the Spanish administrators can, in some ways, be considered to working to the advantage of free indigenous communities since it “ensured their continued control of communal lands, permitted limited autonomy, perpetuated the existence of local elites, and excused them from many civic obligations—including military service” (Selmeski 2007: 68). The arrangement was also clearly beneficial to the Spanish administrators since “Indian taxation provided between 20 and 35% of government revenue during the first decade after independence” (Rodríguez 1985: 59-72).

Those who were not incorporated into the hacienda system continued to live as free, land-holding peasants, organized by traditional kinship systems with

no formal economy and dependent on the exchange of non-wage labor. This difference in social organization between indigenous communities which were integrated into the state system and those who continued to be independent affected the development and integration of each community into the national economy (Lockhart 1969: 420).

The establishment of *haciendas* in the central highland region can be seen as having some influence on the population density of the region now, as this region holds the majority of the Ecuadorian population. “Calculations of the percentage of Ecuadorians who claim indigenous descent vary greatly depending on the source, from 40% in the CONAIE documents to 12% in census reports based on self-reporting of native language” (Pallares 2002: 6). It is difficult to grasp who is recognized as indigenous since the National Census measures language not ethnicity. By not including a category regarding race in the census, official demographics from the census assumes that those who speak Quichua are ethnically Quichua. This can be problematic for people who would like to self-identify as ethnically Quichua but who do not speak the language. Furthermore, the census is based on self-reporting and therefore self-identification. This creates complex, fluid identities, on the national census, identifying native language as Quichua which meant that you were “Indian”. We can see an example which shows that reality is much more complex. A first generation rural to urban migrant could be ethnically Quichua, but also speak Spanish well. They might also be able to acquire an advanced education, be literate, and work in a blue or white collar position in an urban setting. It might be beneficial for this person to



identify themselves as *mestizo* and not Quichua if they wish to more easily integrate themselves into urban society with social stratification which place indigenous peoples on the lowest rung. This person, however, is ethnically Quichua and could claim indigenous identity, should they want to. However, in the past and sometimes currently it is not beneficial to claim indigenous identity. While indigenous identity is becoming more accepted and respected as the indigenous movement grows and as collective rights are recognized by the state, the social stigma of being “Indian” still carries a connotation of backward and undesirable in some circles. It will be interesting to see if the next national census, to be held in 2011, after the passing of a new national constitution granting extensive collective rights to indigenous communities, will ask questions of ethnicity or how it will directly or indirectly count who is “indigenous” (“ECUADOR Se Alista Para Próximo Censo De 2011”).

In gathering ethnic data to analyze the political geography and demographics of the area, it is important to understand how ethnicity is defined and determined. The rural to urban migration example shows that ethnicity is a dynamic term, which can change at any moment depending on social factors. Potentially, an individual may claim to be part of various ethnic groups, this is the popular expression of identity.

To fully understand the present day issues of contemporary Ecuadorian politics we must look at its progression in the last century with regards to socio-cultural factors and the expansion of the state’s sphere of influence. This has directly affected the evolution of nationalist discourse regarding identity. We can

trace this evolution from the nation's republican era of the 1820's, in which Indians were represented as inferior to their *mestizo* counterparts, who enjoyed all the rights of national citizenship. Indians were excluded from national politics since they did not have the right of suffrage because it was only granted to literate members of the citizenry. Almost all indigenous people of the Republican era were illiterate. This means that indigenous interests in domestic politics were represented by non-indigenous people. It will be argued that indigenous people were excluded from participation in the national political arena because they were seen as rural peasants on the lowest rung of social stratification because of their inability to assimilate to the homogenous national identity promoted by the state.

Changes to the status of indigenous people within domestic politics can be traced to the period between 1930 and 1950, in which substantial medical and anthropological research was undertaken regarding the unique physical qualities of indigenous peoples. This research discussed an "indigenous spirit", which was characterized by "the special strength of indigenous peoples, their intimate relation with the land, their naturally communal nature, and their ability to conceal their individual thoughts and desires" (Prieto 2004: 177). The dominant liberal discourse sought to promote this "indigenous spirit" and foment its reawakening from the slumber that conquest and oppression had cast on it. Awakening this spirit was a way to distance the "other," keeping indigenous people from integrating into the white, urban realm.

Several thinkers saw indigenous people as unable to ever become like whites; they would always be indigenous, they could only imitate whites (Prieto

2004). This period exemplifies the recognition of indigenous people as different. The refusal to allow indigenous people to have part in the national identity; is based on questionable medical and anthropological research. The state's official discourse at the time was one which recognized indigenous people as different but not equal to other Ecuadorian citizens.

This is illustrated on a fourth grade handbook published by the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education in 1946.

The cover image shows an Afro-Ecuadorian, a Mestizo, and an indigenous student. The handbook defines an Ecuadorian citizen as any man or woman 18 years or older who know how to read and write.

The period of 1960-1978 brought a considerable amount of economic and political



changes to Ecuador which brought about the integration of previously isolated indigenous people into the national economy. This greater interaction created the need to devise a new discourse to identify the place of indigenous people within

the national hegemonic discourse supported by the state. As Pallares points out “after land reform, class analysts were forced with the continued subordination of indigenous populations despite changes in landownership” (2002: 27).

The modernization of agriculture, following the agrarian reforms of 1963 and 1972, introduced indigenous communities to modern market economy. Indigenous communities struggled to compete in the modern market economy because of lack of access to loans to purchase land or credit for business. This is because individual families could not use land as collateral because it was communal, this meant that the only system which could work would have to be based on collective responsibility. Systems like this have only recently come into practice with the advent of micro-credit lending.

However, as Pallares points out, “for most Indians, agrarian modernization marked the transition from one form of rural subordination to another. Once Indians were displaced from the hacienda and entered the white-*mestizo* public sphere, socially constructed racial differences served to restructure economic and political oppression” (2002: 37).

Again, with the advent of micro-credit lending and agrarian land-reform, if it is not practiced then its effects are minimal. “By 1980 land reform had affected less than 15% of agricultural land in the country, and 68.4% of Indians had gained access to only 8.9% of land surface” (Handelman 1980, 74).

Previously, not all citizens were administered to by the State; mainly rural indigenous peasants who were not integrated into the national economy had very limited contact with the state. Modernization and neoliberal reforms like

decentralization brought for example greater access and attendance of public schools. Increased contact with the official nationalist discourse caused friction with conflicting popular identities, creating a greater awareness of differences. This awareness has contributed to the evolution in the past century of the nationalist discourse from one of exclusion of indigenous people to one which attempts to recognize their special status but still as Ecuadorian citizens through neoliberal multiculturalism. Neoliberal multiculturalism is the recognition of many different cultures making up one state's nationality. As Hale examines: "from 'recognition' other rights logically follow, justified in the spirit of intercultural equality: reforms in language and educational policy, anti-discrimination legislation, devolution of responsibility for governance to local institutions, measures to end indigenous peoples' political exclusion" (2002: 490).

While the state can declare itself multicultural and pluri-ethnic by recognizing the diversity of its citizenry, to reach minority rights for indigenous peoples the state faces difficulties in protecting individual rights and granting collective minority rights. "Specifically, powerful political and economic actors use neoliberal multiculturalism to affirm cultural difference, while retaining the prerogative to discern between cultural rights consistent with the ideal of liberal, democratic pluralism, and cultural rights inimical to that ideal" (Hale 2002: 491).

Neoliberal reforms were instituted by the state because earlier models of import substitution failed. As an oil exporting country, the oil crisis of the late 1970's increased the country's foreign debt. The solution of privatization was

promoted by Thatcher and Reagan, the leaders of the UK and the USA, and also by contributors of major funds of the international development aid. Through privatization many, if not all, state companies were dissolved, leading to greater unemployment. This form of modernization adversely affected the indigenous, poor people of Ecuador.

The post neoliberal reform era of Ecuadorian history has brought in the notion of integration of these several simultaneously occurring identities into a new national identity. In the quest for sameness, there are underlying failed attempts of the past which did not recognize those who reject the state discourse as national subjects with legitimate claims to minority rights. Principal motivation for resurgence of ethnic movements across the world has been the ability to resist and survive attempts of homogenization and integration to modernity (Tambiah 1989). However, neoliberal reforms can also help ethnicity based political and social movements because of the emphasis they place on decentralization and the importance they give non-governmental organizations.

### **Vehicles for Transmission of Nationalist Discourse**

To begin to deconstruct the state discourse and to understand its effects on the identity and integration of indigenous peoples, one must first understand what exactly it is and how it is promoted to the country's citizenry. Several vehicles are used for its transmission. Transmission occurs through government controlled schools, museums, and the census. This official government discourse is different

from the reality of how urban elites perceive indigenous people and how indigenous people perceive themselves within the Ecuadorian nation.

The relationship between the official government stance and the actual popular understandings has profound effects on the identity of indigenous peoples and how they are perceived by different members of the Ecuadorian nation. The evolution of how indigenous people were viewed by the state has been influenced by growing exposure of rural residents to the official government identity discourse.

Responses from indigenous peoples have varied greatly. Some are able to understand their own identity within the dominant *mestizo* identity, others attempt to incorporate specific aspects which define the dominant national identity with their own, and still others reject the nationalist construction completely. This is because “exposure to nationalist discourses does not necessarily entail their adoption. Contemporary cultures are often a mixture of popular, official and Creole expressions of nationalism” (Crain 1990: 19). The reactions by the indigenous peoples to the official discourse, which has continued to change since the inception of the Ecuadorian state, will be put into the present context of neoliberal multiculturalism to analyze how they have affected the minority rights and desires of organized indigenous movements.

According to Radcliffe and Westwood, one of the most obvious places where we see the implicit agenda of state is in its educational establishments. The official national discourse is easily identifiable in the “inculcation of national pride in schools. This uniformed inculcation occurs at all levels of education,

secular, private, and religious through teachers who are all formed in a limited number of national colleges” (Radcliffe et al 1996:50). The uniformed inculcation is present in Civic Education lessons which promote a common past. Radcliffe and Westwood include a quote from an official of the ministry of education boasting of the importance of the subject: “this is done because it is necessary to know the history of Ecuador” (Radcliffe et al 1996: 53). This official curriculum places much importance on historic struggles which base self-imagining on “us vs. them” rhetoric.

The inculcation promotes a state discourse in which there is no room for simultaneous identities. Historical figures to be studied during the civic moment are those who have united Ecuador in times of conflict, histories which are meant to stir the fires of nationalism, providing continuity for a shared history. Nation states promote homogeneous ideologies to extinguish ethnic and cultural differences for the sake of national identity (Tambiah 1989).

Yet, the reality of contemporary identity is quite different. When separating the official state identity from the contemporary, Crain sees that “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” (Crain 1990: 12). This is the foundation for the dichotomy between the state’s official view on its citizen’s identity and contemporary identity. Further examination of the national rhetoric in education can give us a more complete picture of how the two can attempt to be reconciled by those who are unable to identify fully with the official state discourse.



Every Monday morning every school population in Ecuador gathers for a “civic moment” in which students and teachers come together to raise the flag, sing the national anthem, and then commemorate a civic happening which relates to the calendar of that week (Radcliffe et al 1996: 53). It is important to note that symbols like the flag and national anthem are popular and easily transmittable ways to promote and remind the citizenry of the official state discourse which they represent. The “civic moment” reinforces national identity because

...nationalisms commonly provide secular dates whose appearance marks time in the secular-nationalist annual round, reinforcing the conceptualization of continuity and stability in the national space. This official history constitutes a process of hegemony which works to produce and install particular constructions of the past. (Crain 1990: 56)

A recent newspaper article published in Cuenca’s *El Tiempo* newspaper describes how 7<sup>th</sup> graders and high school juniors will undertake “the most important civil act of their primary and secondary education” by swearing their allegiance before their nation’s flag. This is done on the anniversary of the battle of Tarqui, which has been declared “el Dia del Civismo Ecuatoriano” (the day of Ecuadorian public-mindedness) and as the article points out is only done in the Sierra region of Ecuador. The battle of Tarqui was fought near Cuenca, against Peru over land disputes; Ecuador (then part of Gran Colombia) won the battle. This serves to emphasize historic military power of the state to protect its citizenry and its sovereignty.

The effects of this hegemonic discourse with regard to the factors which form identity, most importantly a common history, language, and ethnicity have marked the schism between identity promoted by the state and contemporary

identity in Ecuador. By promoting reverence for the national flag and the commemoration of a common history, the state tries to instill homogenous values in its citizenry.

Furthermore, when discussing participation in the education system we see a great divide between the urban elite and the rural peasantry. This divide occurs along ethnic and economic lines. Historically, rural residence, especially in the southern highlands of Ecuador, where the highest concentration of indigenous people is found, has been linked to being removed from the grasp of state institutions creating a clear division between a typically white or *mestizo* urban population and indigenous rural peasants. Until Agrarian land reforms which freed indigenous peoples from serf-like existence on *mestizo* elite-owned *haciendas*, many indigenous people had little or no formal education. Coastal industrialism in the port area of Guayaquil, the country's economic center, has added to the discrepancy in education rates among Ecuador's different regions.

A stronger attachment to kin and community than to the Ecuadorian state is common for rural peasants who were not part of landed estates in the colonial period. If one is not exposed to a vehicle by which nationalist discourse is disseminated, then its acceptance is limited. This lack of contact with the state has continued to foster separate national identities, no matter how much effort the state puts into promoting an official identity to its public, it will not work if that public has limited interaction with the state.

The failure to reach rural populations with official national discourse is exemplified in an article entitled, "Peasants Show a Very Low Level of National

Identity” featured November 2, 1973 in Quito’s leading news paper, *El Comercio*. Research by a national social science institute, CIESPAL, indicated that 60% of the inhabitants of a rural community located approximately 100 kilometers from Quito, did not know the colors of the Ecuadorian national flag. The evolution of nationalist discourse in the past century from an of exclusion of indigenous people to one which recognizes their special status is because of the expansion of the state’s vehicles for dissemination of its message to previously isolated communities as they were integrated into the national market.

As Hale points out, it is important to note the effects of market integration on indigenous political movements: “neoliberal reforms produce a series of effects-the dismantling of corporate structures, the devolution of responsibilities to local governments and NGOs, the further penetration of markets into remote areas- all of which generate greater strength and militancy of indigenous organizations, whether to respond the threats or seize opportunities” (2002: 506).

During the period of development which preceded neoliberal reforms, populations saw greater contact with the state. This period of corporatism happened through development programs which brought roads, schools, and formal connections to provincial government into their communities. As this nation-building through development occurred, local construction of identity based upon kinship traditions was challenged. These different logics of nationalist discourse happen are inter-meshing; they happen at the same time, the introduction of the neoliberal logic did not lead to the disappearance of the corporatist nation-building logic.

This expansion and development on the part of the state has allowed the concept of indigenous being synonymous with peasant and rural residence to begin to change in recent times. Since the 1970's, oil revenues allowed the military regime that then controlled the state apparatus to become the principal agent of development (Crain 1990: 49). With more state sponsored development projects in rural communities, as well as rural to urban migration, indigenous Quichua speakers have been brought into increasing contact with official state discourses. This important meeting of indigenous identity and state discourse continues to operate under neocolonialist principals under the corporatist-assimilationist model. When state institutions are in charge of development, they may implement their agenda and continue the hegemonic discourse of nationalist identity towards those who are seeking their development help to meet their basic needs.

The plight for recognition of distinct ethnicities in Ecuador rather than simple rural/urban demographics can be seen in the national census, which historically included only questions about native language and place of origin, which were vague attempts at understanding ethnic composition.

Other examples of the state discourse's public interaction with indigenous communities is demonstrated in museums like the one present at the ethnographic museum at the *Mitad del Mundo* complex which is the most visited by school children (Radcliffe et al. 1996: 74). The museum displays artifacts and photos from various indigenous groups throughout Ecuador. This public display of the heterogeneity of indigenous groups in a context of national unity opens discussion

for how minority identities, which have been historically not been allowed to be part of the official state discourse, can now begin to be integrated into the official national identity. The official history on display at this museum celebrates the diversity of the Ecuadorian peoples and yet continues to affect the quest for minority rights since indigenous peoples are not recognized as having identity separate from the national. While, contemporary Ecuadorian culture can be understood by some as having been shaped by an important contribution by indigenous peoples, the issue however, is of minority rights for those who identify as indigenous and not with state identity.

Another clear vehicle for the state's dissemination of nationalist discourse is the Military. Brian Selmeski in his doctoral thesis on *Multicultural Citizens, Monocultural Men: Indigeneity, Masculinity, and Conscription in Ecuador* analyzes how the military has shaped Indians' integration to the nation and what is currently happening in this new discourse of neoliberal multiculturalism.

He argues that "conscription provides a mechanism for the Army to redefine Indianness and recognize the positive aspects as integral to Ecuador's past and present. This is essential to military efforts to forge a shared national identity that selectively accommodates—rather than ignoring or seeking to eliminate diversity" (Selmeski 2007: 5).

Selmeski recognizes that the historical prejudice towards Indians and the general negative opinions that state has had towards Indians limits the neoliberal multi-culturalist model's impact and reach. "Ultimately, this paradox limits the model's transformative power, making it more palatable for soldiers and

applicable to other national minorities (Black, peasants, etc.) but less emancipatory for actual *indígenas*” (Selmeski 2007: 6). It is interesting to examine the way military service affects identity and integration of the Quichua-speaking people since often, military service to one’s nation is an essential step in achieving full and first-class citizenship (Selmeski 2007: 7). Selmeski notes that “*Indígenas* frequently fought for the *patria chica* (homeland) rather than the *Patria grande* (nation), from which they were again excluded after independence” (2007: 68).

The progress of the military’s policies regarding indigenous integration is tied with the political evolution described above in detail. In 1837 “*Indígenas* were required to register for the draft; however, the law rationalized their exclusion from service on account of “the contribution of their class.”<sup>13</sup> This clause effectively tied Indianness to financial relations with the state” (Selmeski 2007: 69).

The Liberal Revolution lead by President Alfaro rejected the Catholic Church’s strong control of the country by creating the necessary services for a secular state “schools, courts, a civil registry, and a professional military. These changes would eventually have profound effects on the conscription of *indígenas*” (Selmeski 2007: 74).

### **Deportation: the case of Molina Illescas**

While all of these structures described above disseminate the ideals for citizenry, their theory greatly varies from their effects in practice. While neoliberal multiculturalism seeks to recognize the diversity of citizens, the state is

bound in a paradox of its classic role of protecting individual rights, while granting collective rights to its indigenous minorities. This juxtaposition creates conflict. This conflict can be manifested as discrimination. The discrimination against indigenous people is seen twofold when examining specific cases of transnational Ecuadorian migrants to the United States. As an intern at the *Casa del Migrante* I was able to see this first-hand. I learned a lot about intercultural communication by working at *Casa del Migrante*. There was no guidebook, written tasks, or bureaucracy here that I had to follow and I had no administrative tasks to complete. This was liberating but also frustrating. When I was given a case it was up to me to plan the best way in which I could help. Sometimes this left me frustrated because I felt like I did not have the proper knowledge or background to “solve” the case. I was given the case of a deported man for example, and I did not personally have the legal expertise, nor did I have access to anyone who did, in order to better help him. I was unsure of his legal status as a deported person and therefore did not know how to search for his record in New York State, Federal, or Homeland Security systems.

Luis Antonio Molina Illescas came to ask for the help of the *Casa del Migrante*. The gentleman was a rural farmer, who identified as mestizo. Whenever I met with Mr. Molina Illescas he brought his wife, to whom he would translate everything I said in Spanish into Quichua, since she had limited knowledge of Spanish. While Mr. Molina Illescas identified himself as mestizo, it was clear that some other Ecuadorians did not. The first few times Mr. Molina and his wife came to meet with me, the guard at the door of the *Casa del*

*Migrante* would tell me that the “*indiecitos*” (“little indians”) had come to meet with me, until I asked him to please refer to them as Mr. and Mrs. Molina. Doctora Alvarado, asked me to work on this case because it required some one who spoke English.

Molina Illescas entered the US illegally and began working in New York City with a fake identity, which included a fake social security number. He opened a saving account through Banco del Austro, an Ecuadorian bank with offices in New York City and began putting away all of the money he earned in order to access it once he returned to Ecuador. He was arrested in New York City for driving without a license. Molina Illescas came to the *Casa del Migrante* with only a faded paper from the South Texas Detention Complex where he was held until he was deported from the Harligen Staging Facility in Harligen, Texas on April 10th 2008. When he was arrested he was brought into New York State custody, his belongings were taken from him and stored, as is standard procedure for all inmates. Inside his wallet was the ATM card to his savings account with Banco del Austro, which held his life savings and all money which he would travel to Ecuador with. Since Mr. Molina Illescas opened the account with a fake social security number and did not have anything to link him to the account, his only hope at accessing his savings was to find this ATM card.

The chain of custody was recounted to me by Molina Illescas and could not be verified by any accessible records. From Flushing he claims to have been taken to Queens Blvd Plaza, from there he says he was placed in Federal custody and taken to a federal correctional facility in the Bronx, after the Bronx he says he



was transferred to lower Manhattan federal, and then to Pennsylvania to a prison which he claims is named "George", which I could not confirm its existence through research. From Pennsylvania he claims to have been turned over to Homeland Security. I was trying to find a needle in a haystack. I contacted Maxwell alumni working in the non-profit field related to immigration in the New York City area. Most told me that it would basically be a waste of time to try to find the man's wallet, but I could not simply tell this man there was nothing I could do. I became personally invested in the case from seeing the desperation in Mr. Molina's eyes. I was determined to give it a shot. I called all the jails that I could find contact information for but I was only provided with Mr. Molina Illescas's alien number.

The problem was that I could not find out his legal status was while he was being held in all these institutions so that I might enter the correct database to definitively know who to contact in which jail regarding his possessions. From research I found out that Homeland Security has the power to have federal jails hold Homeland Security detainees, and they fall into a legal no man's land, making it extremely difficult to find a record of their movement through the system. It would seem obvious that if any authority strips someone of their belongings when they are taken into custody, then a better system should be used to track their belongings; it is certainly that organization's responsibility to return the belongings they take from people. Molina Illescas told me that when he was deported he asked the Homeland Security officers about his belongings and was told that "it's not our problem." There is a definite lack of accountability in the

US's current system of deportation. This left Mr. Molina Illescas to live from people's charity since he had been deported to Ecuador in April 2008; I was given his case in July 2008. This case also speaks to the human side of deportation. There are no illegal human beings, Molina Illescas was deported without a penny to his name, he was sent back to the country which he left because there were no economic opportunities for him there in the first place. While living in the US he paid social security tax in every pay check but would never be able to access it, and then he was deported and US officials told him that his belongings they had lost was "not their problem".

I called every jail for which I could find information for based on Mr. Molina Illescas' memory of where he was held. Every operator asked for his inmate number, which I did not have. With the little information Mr. Molina Illescas could provide me to identify him in these systems, his name and birthday, I was sometimes able to speak to a kind phone operator who was willing to search the jail's database. When a record of Mr. Molina Illescas' stay was located, the records showed that he had never checked in with any belongings. This seemed to be due to the failure to forward his belongings on when he was transferred to different jails and the lack of accountability immigration officials faced since they were not the ones who had been in charge of his belongings while he was held in county and federal jails. I noticed this clear lack of a system of accountability since it seemed clear to me that if deportee warehousing was to be outsourced to local and other federal agencies, communication and tracking systems should be in place linking the entire chain of custody a deportee faces.

The description of lack of information and varied access to rights is also described by Nancy Ann Hiemstra in a paper entitled *U.S. Migrant Detention and Deportation in the Contemporary Security Context: The view from Ecuador* given at the annual Conference on Latin American and Caribbean Studies at Syracuse University in April 2010. Hiemstra asserts: “Both family members’ attempts to search for detained migrants, and the experiences of detained migrants, reveal the often impenetrable, complicated nature of the ICE system. Migrants’ individual experiences of detention and deportation vary widely, according to where they are apprehended and by whom, as do family members’ success in accessing information about detained migrants. I argue that the rapid growth in the practices and economies of migrant detention has led to a system marked by uneven, inconsistent, and unpredictable practices, a system in which migrants – and migrants’ rights – often get lost in the cracks. I conclude by questioning the efficacy of migrant detention and deportation; research in Ecuador suggests that deported migrants frequently return to the U.S., and that the policy may actually create conditions in migrants’ origin countries that contribute to additional migration” (Hiemstra: 2010). It was great to realize that scholars are bringing attention to this irregular access to rights for migrants in US custody.

Molina Illescas told me that he had tried to access the savings account in question through the local office of the Banco del Austro. He did not know his account number and did not have any documentation of it with him in Ecuador because of his abrupt arrest and deportation. He said that since he had to walk from his rural home to the city, the best clothes which he donned to attempt to look

presentable often became muddy and dirtied. This attempt to fit into the urban reality of professionalism in Cuenca places Mr. Molina Illescas as a resistor to neoliberal multiculturalism. Mr. Molina Illescas tried to neutralize his ethnic difference in order to be able to access customer services at the bank. He was not successful in neutralizing his ethnic difference to the point where he was treated equally to more urbane and ethnically more European-looking patrons, this was his explanation for the mistreatment he told me he received at the bank in Cuenca. He said that he was made to wait until all of the “business peoples” in line had completed their business, which often meant that Mr. Molina Illescas would wait hours until being attended . He told me that the bank attendents searched in their computer for his account but were never able to locate it.

The overarching theme of unsuccessful illegal migrants brings attention to the great need for programs with other institutions and organizations to provide training and education for immigrants to migrate legally, trying to avoid illegal migration which leads to households left without income, with the permanent displacement of family and even with loss of life.

There is currently a very progressive agreement between Spain and Ecuador to curtail these specific problems rural, indigenous migrants face. In fact, one of the lawyers on staff at the *Casa del Migrante* was specifically assigned to work with Ecuadorians who would like to immigrate to Spain through a special agreement signed between Ecuador and Spain. This agreement makes benefits received by the Ecuadorian state transferable to Ecuadorian national living in Spain. The benefits are managed by the Spanish state while the

Ecuadorian national is living and working in Spanish territory. These benefits include “maternity, sick, and disabled health assistance, health and maternity social security, and work’s injury compensation” among others (Spain). This agreement signed between Ecuador and Spain is a progressive agreement which could be used as a successful template for US-Ecuadorian agreements for guest worker programs.

## **Folklorization**

As we have previously examined, rural to urban migration in the Andes has brought the intersection of different ethnicities and classes. This has led to the increasingly conflicting struggle for power, related to the historical verticality of classes based upon ethnicity. Since the 1990’s, however, indigenous peoples have politicized their ethnicity to become powerful actors who have demanded the recognition of pluri-ethnicity and multi-culturality in Ecuador, establishing their minority rights. A new constitution in 2008 has solidified these rights. These actions have allowed for the development of a more empowered ethnically indigenous middle class which through dress, religion, and speech have, in theory, blended the previously segregated indigenous peasant classes and Hispanic elites.

The reality of how people of indigenous ethnicity decide to align themselves with certain identities at certain times through particular dress, religion, and speech speaks to the continuing underlying racism and class structure prevalent and drive to succeed under such oppression. By trying to understand why certain peoples showcase certain aspects of their identities at

certain times we can begin to deconstruct these power relationships in order to better understand them.

The politicization of ethnicity by indigenous people to gain political clout through which they might attain minority rights has made those opposed to this new change argue that the indigenous people of the past were better integrated into society, therefore putting the previous system of segregation on a pedestal.

Historically, the folklorization of indigenous people in the Andes has resulted in an imagined reality which sees indigenous people as “docile” and “of the earth”, therefore favoring the power relationship of the past where indigenous people were not politically active as people who have legitimate claims to minority rights. This parallel of attempts to neutralize the past the state can be seen in socialist and post-socialist Bulgaria, as described by Deema Kaneff in his 2004 ethnography of a small Bulgarian village. Kaneff explains that: “aware that traditional practices could be, and often were, used as a way of expressing opposition, the state’s response was the development of folklore. Folklore was the way in which the state officials attempted to claim tradition for their own hegemonic purposes-through restructuring the population’s perceptions of the traditional past. Folklore thus served to transform a potentially oppositional past into a state-approved form” (2004: 12).

This historical folklorization of indigenous peoples by Hispanic elites in Ecuador has been described by Pribilsky as:

“an imagined bygone era when, above all, rural peoples knew their place in the social order: as industrious workers on the land, producers of artisanry, and humble servants of *hacendados* (hacienda owners). More sophisticated and refined than Indians but not quite as modern as urban mestizos, Azuyao-Canari

peasants are persistently taken to be the living embodiments of a fictionalized colonial past” (2007: 41).

The reality described by Pribilsky of these peasants holding a status between Indian and *mestizo* is demonstrated clearly in the case of *cholas*, women who are urban dwellers and actively blend aspects of mestizo and indigenous identity through their dress, speech, and religion.

It is interesting to note that this phenomenon only occurs with women and not men. Norman Whitten argues theoretically that this notion of “*chola*” was developed with the purpose to unite indigenous peasant classes and Hispanic elites, stating: “In Ecuador, Venezuela, Peru, Bolivia, Mexico, and Brazil, artists and intellectuals created these figures by borrowing well-known images of racial and cultural admixture from the popular cultures of their respective regions and infusing them with elite notion of femininity” (2003: 327). In theory, the notion of *chola* is based upon the fictionalized and made up beliefs that harmony may be reached through miscegenation as a permanent fix to the previously described power struggles and calls for recognition of minority rights between indigenous peoples and Hispanic elites. This theory seeks a homogenous people mixed between Indian and European.

In practice, miscegenation and cross cultural indoctrination has created a spectrum where the majority of the populations of Ecuador fall somewhere in-between Indian and European ethnically. However, there is no perfect homogenous mix between the two since identification is fluid and may be changed or certain characteristics enhanced for self-preservation. Ethnographic studies have shown that “although *cholas* shared a general dress code, they did

not necessarily regard themselves as a homogenous group” (Buechler and Buechler 1996:182).

The mixture of ethnicities has directly influenced new identities which continue the struggle for the definition of power but now on an even more complicated basis where indigenous people have gained more tangible rights through the state but where more European elites continue to perpetuate the folklorization of the peasant class. Pribilsky explains that this folklorization is challenged by indigenous peoples, they “confronted *nuestro folklórico* as racial and economic marginalization by means of the seemingly benign ‘country folk’ characterization- a marker that ultimately worked to discount their contributions historically to the country’s economic development” (2007: 41). The rejection of this characterization is clearly seen when those whose ethnicities and identities lay closer to Indian on the spectrum successfully manage their fluid identities to their advantage.

The ethnographic data put forth shows race as social category, not a biological one. However, theories regarding the origin of the *chola* identification do not provide a complete picture of the complexities surrounding decisions to identify as such. While forcing certain dress and therefore identities upon people reinforces historically disadvantaged positions, like demanding that domestic servants wear traditional dress, the freedom of choosing between *de vestido* and *de pollera* for middle class women of the Andes allows them to best advance their social status in various situations. *De vestido* is when a woman dresses in European styles and *de pollera* is when a woman dresses with traditional



indigenous dress. It shows that being indigenous in some cases is a choice of identity, but it is not always clear as what choice is better. The systems of stratification in Latin America are not necessarily all that predictable, but in some instance one may reach a higher position identifying more with a particular tradition. The issue of identification with a particular tradition is much more complex than simple ethnic tradition for those who are able to readily identify themselves somewhere along the spectrum between Indian and European.

Indigenous actors have had to overcome the belittling characterization through folklorization to claim political power. The state's attempt to neutralize tradition by promoting folklorization of the past is seen in other countries where the nationalist discourse has been drastically changed in modern times. In Ecuador we have seen this change as one from a corporatist-assimilationist logic which promoted the erasing of ethnic differences through miscegenation to one of neoliberal multiculturalist logic which recognizes and accepts the legitimacy and rights of the ethnically diverse citizenry. A change in the nationalist discourse logic can also be noted in socialist and post social Bulgaria, where folklorization was also used to neutralize tradition which did not fit well with the current logic promoted by the State. Deema Kaneff's *Who owns the past?* describes ethnography of a small Bulgarian village allows us to see clearly the attempt to negotiate tradition, history, and folklore by the State. Like in Ecuador, neoliberal reforms also occurred in postsocialist Bulgaria and it effected the relationship between individuals and the state, "privatisation, the establishment of a multi-party political system and decentralization-through the withdrawal of the state in

production and the encouragement of the market economy- have resulted in a renegotiation in the way in which the community connects with the state. (Kaneef 2004: 4) Indigenous social movements have allowed ethnic groups to enter political negotiation with the state because they represent a unified political body capable of exerting political pressure and power. This can be seen in the indigenous practice of community justice. Before, indigenous peoples suffered abuses and injustices. Now, by taking power into their own hands, they are able to exert power to penalize and punish. This breaks the image of backwardness and simplemindedness promoted by the folklorization of indigenous peoples because it proves their ability to self-govern. By circumventing state authorities, indigenous people exerting community justice are now independent of the state. This locally based identity which allows for the concept of community justice, the idea that community elders and not the state are the ones who can be administer justice can be seen as problematic for the state in establishing rule of law. The common past of an indigenous community unifies their identity into one based locally and not nationally, Kaneff also explores this in Bulgaria, stating “the conceptual and practical marginalization of traditions was a result of the fact that this past distinguished and unified humanity in a very different way from a historical temporal order, creating locally based identities defined in terms of gender, ethnicity, and religion. (2004: 12)”

While the national discourse on identity has incorporated this new pluri-ethnicity, some scholars argue that this neoliberal multiculturalism is working against those seeking minority rights. Juan Antonio Lucero argues this structural

view of opportunity is culturally thin, when does one stop being a peasant and become an indigenous actor? This question affects the national identity discourse since, as mentioned previously, indigenous peoples have been historically stereotyped as rural peasants. This has the potential to question the legitimacy of any indigenous movement by transforming the plight of indigenous people seeking minority rights into one of peasants adversely affected by market fluctuations. Lucero addresses the complexity of the issue by saying that “neoliberalism is no simple or single ‘cause’ of indigenous mobilization” (2009: 63).

Furthermore, the superficial recognition of the existence of indigenous cultures in Ecuador is used to promote the nationalist discourse. The only difference is that now the discourse celebrates a diverse Ecuador in order to finally try to build a hegemonic discourse which includes all citizens.

Neoliberal multiculturalism negates the recognition of “calls for comprehensive agrarian reform and for non-Western models of development, which conflict with its present policies regarding national development goals” (Crain 51). It is no wonder that some Indigenous organizations “adamantly reject the discourse of Ecuadorian nationalism and propose an alternative discourse of Indigenous nationalism. Such groups do not want to be represented by anyone and they demand a right to speak on their own behalf” (Crain 1990: 44).

Indigenous people have fought for the right to shape their own economies, cultures, and politics (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2002: 275). This comes from the recognition that the homogenous nationalist discourse promoted by the state is

cultural ethnocide. With the politicization of indigenous ethnicity by the new power taken by indigenous actors, they have effectively re-conceptualized a new role for their state. This new role is the state as protector of minority rights for indigenous people.

## **The Politicization of Ethnicity**

The indigenous movements of the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have forced negotiations of power between the state and unified indigenous social movements because indigenous groups have taken political power as citizens who are part of a minority group. This has forced the state to recognize their claims to minority rights. Where a group of people was once seen as peasant *indios*, in this new pluri-ethnic field, they have reclaimed their ethnic identity to be allowed power in negotiating with the government as indigenous actors.

The reclaiming of common ethnicity allowed for common ground which allows indigenous peoples to be represented on the political scene as one unified body. This is apparent in the institutionalization of power which can be seen in the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador or CONAIE. CONAIE was part to the organizing of the violent indigenous uprising of May and June 1990. These demonstrations are what lead to the declaration of the Ecuadorian state as pluri-national and multicultural. They also created a notion of power on the political scene among the indigenous people of Ecuador and made them active and present social actors in front of civil society.

We have seen the clear evolution of the state's discourse, from one of exclusion of rural indigenous peasants, to one which tried to integrate all peoples

into accepting the dominant Ecuadorian identity, and finally to a pluri-ethnic, neoliberal multi-culturalist state discourse. However, we have also seen that the current neoliberal multi-culturalist and pluri-ethnic nationalist discourse fails to address serious concerns by those who seek indigenous nationalism and non-Western development which include collective, rather than individualistic rights. The issue of development and integration of indigenous people into economic markets has been explained as detrimental to indigenous identities which are based on local, not national, traditions. As indigenous movements continue to demand an alternative discourse of indigenous nationalism, it will be interesting to see how the state's nationalist discourse continues to evolve.

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**Figure 1:** [http://www.exploringecuador.com/maps/region\\_todas.htm](http://www.exploringecuador.com/maps/region_todas.htm)

**Figure 2:** Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE), *Las nacionalidades indígenas en el Ecuador: Nuestro proceso organizativo*, 2d ed. (Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 1989), 284.