

Indigenous Peoples and State Formation in Modern Ecuador

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The formal political system is in crisis in Ecuador: the twentieth century ended with a four-year period that saw six different governments. Indeed, between 1997 and 2005, four of nine presidents in Latin America who were removed through irregular procedures were in Ecuador.¹ Sociologist Leon Zamosc calls Ecuador “one of the most, if not *the* most, unstable country in Latin America.”² At the same time, the Ecuadorian Indian movement made important gains in the last decade of the twentieth century, and for at least some sectors of society, at the turn of the twenty-first century had more prestige than traditional politicians did. The fact that Ecuador has a national-level indigenous organization sets it apart from other Latin American countries. National and international attention was drawn to this movement in June 1990, when an impressive indigenous uprising paralyzed the country for several weeks. Grassroots members of the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE, Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) marched on provincial capitals and on Quito, kept their agricultural produce off the market, and blocked the Pan-American Highway, the country’s main north-south artery. The mobilization was organized to draw attention to land disputes in the Ecuadorian Amazon (Oriente) and highlands (Sierra), and ended when the government agreed to negotiate a 16-point agenda presented by CONAIE.³

Since 1990, Ecuadorian Indians have become increasingly involved in national politics, not just through “uprising politics,” but also through

Pachakutik, an electoral movement representing an alliance of indigenous organizations with other social movements that has elected several indigenous members to congress. In January 2000 Indians participated directly in a change of government when they joined with disaffected military officers to oust President Jamil Mahuad in a context of economic crisis and political corruption. When one of the leaders of those events, retired Colonel Lucio Gutiérrez, was elected president in November 2002 with indigenous support, one of his first acts was to name two indigenous intellectuals and activists to important cabinet posts. Despite subsequent disillusionment and a break with the Gutiérrez government, Ecuadorian Indians are widely recognized as important political actors on the national scene.

Much has been written in recent years about the Ecuadorian Indian movement, notably the 1990 uprising and subsequent political mobilizations in 1992, 1994, and 2000, among other events. The image of erudite Indians, in indigenous dress, negotiating directly with the national government—particularly during the 1994 negotiations over proposed changes to the agrarian law, parts of which were widely televised in Ecuador—is a potent symbol of the changing relationship between Indians and the Ecuadorian state. However, for many Ecuadorians, including many scholars, when the Indian movement burst onto the national political scene in 1990, it seemed to emerge out of thin air. A study frequently cited in the 1980s, for instance, noted that in the 1970s Indians in an area of Chimborazo Province, when asked the meaning of *la patria* (fatherland or nation), identified it as the name of an interprovincial bus company.⁴ This has fed into images of highland indigenous peasants as isolated and disengaged from the Ecuadorian nation or state. Those who have conducted archival research, however, were not surprised by the growing indigenous activism, given the deliberate and strategic way in which at least some Indians, in some circumstances, have engaged the Ecuadorian state since the early nineteenth century. One purpose of this book is to demonstrate the deep historical roots of the relation between Indians and the state in highland Ecuador and to counteract the impression that this relationship barely existed until quite recently.

Another reason for undertaking this book is that Ecuador is often ignored in discussions of state formation or Indian-state relations in Latin America. This is no doubt because among Andean nations Ecuador is clearly the poor cousin of Peru and Bolivia in terms of research undertaken on relations between Indians and the state. Moreover, some of the research that has been carried out has not reached a wider audience. The relative lack of scholarly interest in Ecuador may result from the many historical differences between Ecuador and its neighbors. Unlike Peru and Bolivia, Ecuador did not experi-

ence spectacular indigenous rebellions during the late colonial period. Nor were Ecuadorian Indians important participants in international or civil wars in the late nineteenth century, such as the War of the Pacific in Peru or the Federal War in Bolivia, where Indians had clearly stated autonomous political projects. Perhaps there was less large-scale indigenous resistance in Ecuador in this period because rapid expansion of export production occurred primarily in the more sparsely populated and less indigenous coastal region, rather than in the indigenous heartland. In the second half of the twentieth century, there were no large-scale revolutions or civil wars involving the indigenous peasants in Ecuador, comparable to those in Peru, Guatemala, and elsewhere. In other words, in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Ecuador there were fewer violent conflicts between the state and indigenous peoples.

Many of these differences may be partly explained by the preponderance of the hacienda in highland Ecuador. Unlike Peru and Bolivia, where mining was the focal point of the colonial economy, Ecuador emphasized hacienda production, leading to a fusing of economic and political power in the hands of highland landowners who directly controlled Indian labor. As a result, there were proportionately fewer autonomous Indian communities in Ecuador than in Bolivia or Peru; in contrast, there appears to have been a subterranean process of concentration of indigenous population in the highest altitude zones *within* haciendas in the early twentieth century.⁵ Another important contrast between Peru and Ecuador is that in the agrarian reform period, Peru focused on creating state cooperatives that micromanaged agricultural production (dissatisfaction with which provided an opening for the Shining Path guerrillas in the 1980s), while in the same era Ecuadorian peasants seized upon a community model of development, drawing on 1937 legislation regulating the indigenous community. Paradoxically, there are more opportunities for building bonds of local cooperation in the communal model than in the top-down cooperative model as developed in Peru.⁶ To restate these points, in Ecuador the state historically has not intervened in indigenous life on a day-to-day basis, representing a primary source of the lived experience of oppression. State agents and institutions have at times acted instead as distant interlocutors in local conflicts. Certainly, the emergence of such a strong indigenous movement within the bounds of civil society, rather than outside it, suggests that something interesting and unusual occurred in Ecuador.

At various moments it has been possible for Ecuadorian Indians to pursue some of their interests *within* the bounds of state policies. This was not a result of the kindness of government authorities, but of conflicts among various elite groups or state institutions in which Indians were enlisted—often in

purely rhetorical terms—as components of these struggles. Regardless of the reason for the importance of the “Indian problem” at different times, Indians were able to use these political openings to press their own concerns. As they did so, their organizational experience and capacity also increased. In short, highland Indians have been central to the processes of Ecuadorian state formation, rather than simply the recipients of state policy. At times, their actions led to the generation of new laws or government orders, and their political strategies sometimes affected state policy by stretching the meaning of government discourse, and in the process, transforming it.

We explore three interlocking dimensions of state formation in Ecuador.⁷ First are specific projects of moral regulation conceived and carried out by the state. Regarding state projects imposed “from above,” we examine how governments sought to impose on Indians a common discursive framework that set the terms in which contention could take place. (This follows Roseberry’s reading of Gramsci.)⁸ Second, we consider how state formation was enabled “from below,” such as when indigenous groups might view state building as advantageous and thus embrace those efforts, helping to bring the state into being in new social arenas.⁹ David Nugent’s work on Peru provides fine examples, since the isolation of the zone he studied led subordinate groups there to conclude that it was the *absence* of the state that caused some of their most pressing problems, leading them to “invite the state in” to intervene in local social relations.¹⁰ Third, we view the state itself as fragmented and internally contradictory, sometimes loosely grouping together institutions and representatives with divergent and contradictory interests. Although Steve Striffler does not write about Indian-state relations in the highlands, some of his comments about the Ecuadorian state in a discussion of how the United Fruit Company gained access to land in Ecuador’s southern coast in the 1930s are also relevant here. He writes,

This minor set of disputes, involving a major multinational, a pseudo-capitalist, an Ecuadorian senator, members of Congress, the Cabinet, the president, a former U.S. ambassador, and various state institutions/agencies not only suggests that the Ecuadorian state was highly divided, extremely biased, and easily influenced by a range of interested actors. It indicates that the state can in no way be seen as a discrete policy-making actor that stands above or apart from entities called “society” and “economy.” It is worth remembering that Senator Navarro was negotiating a contract between (his) Congress and (his) Pacific Fruit Company in which the latter would purchase bananas from entrepreneurs/congressmen who could obtain financing through

the *State Mortgage Bank*, which was partially funded by the Pacific Fruit Company. This complex collusion between members of the Ecuadorian government and the emerging banana industry contradicts the notion of a sharp distinction between state and society/economy.¹¹

The point here is that the state is shot through with internal contradictions that can sometimes be exploited by social groups—including subordinate ones. To develop this perspective, we drew on Philip Abrams's discussion of the state as including a state system and a state idea. As Abrams described it, a state system is "a palpable nexus of practice and institutional structure centered in government and more or less extensive, unified and dominant in any given society"; here we take the phrase "more or less" as a research question. Equally important, Abrams argues that there is also an *idea* of the state that is "projected, purveyed and variously believed in different societies at different times."¹² Thus we should not confuse the actual functioning of the state system with the claims made in state discourse; nonetheless, how the state represents itself can end up constraining the actions of specific state institutions or authorities when subaltern groups, through political struggles, pressure the state to live up to its own self-image.

The research cited above has much to offer to an analysis of relations between subordinate groups and the state, and much of the most interesting recent work on the state is similarly informed by situating itself in the space between Gramsci's insights and those of Foucault. For instance, the essays in Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat's edited volume, *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State*, develop a number of points that parallel our findings here: the state should not be seen ahistorically and should be denaturalized; the state is not the same everywhere, but involves distinct characters and different historical trajectories; both the myth of the state and its everyday practices should be examined; the state should not be seen as a monolithic "social actor"; and the state should be seen as shot through with ambiguities and contradictions.¹³ Unlike Hansen and Stepputat's collection, however, we bring these notions together to examine state formation in relation to the indigenous population in a single country. While the case studies presented here cover different parts of the Ecuadorian highlands, at different times, and with rather different emphases, they build an image of the Ecuadorian state as permeable, tension-ridden, full of contradictions, and thus susceptible to the active and creative responses of subordinate groups. The Ecuadorian state is seen here as a historically specific configuration of practices and ideas.

The concept of the state that emerges from these studies is one in which many conflicting interests and projects coexist. Because some of the most serious problems for Indians at the local level were created precisely by local authorities who either contravened superior orders or used their positions to pursue their own economic interests, in some cases it was the absence of strong central state control over its own officials that subordinate groups saw as a problem. (David Nugent sees the same dynamic in Peru.) One strategy Indians used was to seek the intervention of higher state authorities to resolve local disputes. Such appeals to the central state further legitimized the state, although often by undermining the authority of local officials. This dynamic was surprisingly common in Ecuador, but whether this indicates a weak state or strong state is open to debate—or perhaps, the terms “weak” or “strong” simply do not adequately capture the complexity of the matter.

One aspect of this dynamic is explained by Ecuador’s dual system of political power: elected officials work side by side with authorities appointed by the central state. Elected officials include mayors and municipal councils, provincial assemblies, members of the national congress and senate (different constitutions mandated a unicameral or bicameral legislative branch), and the national president and vice president. Appointed officials in turn include political lieutenants (*tenientes políticos*) at the parish (*parroquia*) level, political administrators (*jefes políticos*) at the cantonal (*cantón*) level, provincial governors, and national cabinet ministers. While one might expect elected officials to be more closely linked to local interests (although perhaps merely to those of local elites) and appointed officials to be more closely associated with central state priorities, even appointed officials at the more local levels were often so deeply immersed in local social relations that national projects were jeopardized. This led to a process whereby indigenous social actors played off appointed and elected officials at different levels of the state in the pursuit of subaltern projects, as well as playing off state rhetoric against the reality of state rule.

Regionalism and Ethnicity in Ecuador

Ecuador is composed of four zones: the tropical Pacific coastal lowlands, the temperate Sierra highlands, the eastern upper Amazon basin, often called the Oriente, and the Galápagos archipelago 780 kilometers west of the mainland. These geographic divisions obscure even deeper and more persistent political and cultural divisions. Historically, these were manifested in the highland capital, Quito, which declared its independence from Spain in 1809 in an action separate from the coastal port of Guayaquil, which proclaimed its

independence in 1820. When Spanish forces were defeated outside Quito at the Battle of Pichincha on May 24, 1822, Quiteños watched while foreigners and Guayaquileños fought under the leadership of Antonio José de Sucre. When Ecuador separated from Gran Colombia in 1830, its constitution defined the new country as a weak federation of Guayas on the coast, Azuay in the southern highlands, and Quito in the northern highlands. Three decades later, this regionalism had clearly not been overcome. The country was nearly dissolved as four governments claimed to rule the national territory from the highland capital of Quito, from the port of Guayaquil, and from the two southern cities of Cuenca and Loja. This crisis was resolved by the strongly centralizing project of the government of Gabriel García Moreno, who came to power in 1860. Regionalism nonetheless continues to be a central feature of Ecuadorian politics, with Guayaquil still petitioning for more autonomy from the rest of the country.

Until well into the twentieth century, economically and demographically the highlands dominated the rest of the country. This emphasis dates to before the Spanish conquest, with the Inkas focusing their imperial efforts in the highlands largely to the exclusion of the coastal and Amazonian regions, where their civilizing project achieved much less success. In 1780 under Spanish colonial rule, 90 percent of the population in what is modern-day Ecuador lived in the highlands, with only 7 percent on the coast and 3 percent in the Oriente.¹⁴ In the last decades of the eighteenth century, rural workers from the central Sierra began to migrate to the coast in search of work on plantations, thereby causing a population shift to the coast. At the beginning of the twentieth century, only 20 percent of the population lived on the coast, but by 1950 this figure had risen to 40 percent. By the 1970s, more people lived on the coast than in the highlands, with less than 4 percent living in the eastern Amazon. Simultaneously, there was a shift from rural to urban areas. Ecuador's first national census, in 1950, determined that 71 percent of the population still lived in rural areas, and it was not until the 1980s that the urban population surpassed that of the rural population.¹⁵

Similarly, ethnic divisions have also had a notable impact on Indian-state relations and political developments in general. Scholars have divided Ecuador's population (somewhat simplistically) into four groups: whites, mestizos, Indians, and Afro-Ecuadorians.¹⁶ This rubric tends to gloss over a much more complex ethnographic landscape and ignores the variations that have occurred over time. In particular, the homogenous category of *Indian* incorporates many groups. In "The Historic Tribes of Ecuador" in the *Handbook of South American Indians*, John Murra lists the following ethnic groups at the time of the Inka and Spanish conquests: the Esmeralda, Manta, Huan-

cavilca, and Puná on the coast, and in the highlands the Pasto (near the Colombian border), Cara (in the current province of Imbabura), Panzaleo (near Quito), Puruhá (around Riobamba), and Cañari and Palta (in the southern highlands). “The tribal entities these names represent,” Murra writes, “have been disorganized and are completely obliterated. Their different, mutually unintelligible languages are gone and lost; no written documents have been preserved and the last speakers died in the 18th century.”¹⁷ To this list may be added the “forest tribes”: the Jívaro (Shuar), Záparo (Zápara), Cofán (A’I), and Quichua (Kichwa) in the eastern Amazon.¹⁸ Undoubtedly, before the Inka and Spanish conquests, many more indigenous groups existed in Ecuador than survive today. José Alcina Franch describes what has occurred as “ethnocide,” as the number of indigenous groups dropped from twenty-four before the Inka conquest to ten in the 1980s, including a drop from twelve to four on the coast.¹⁹

Spanish colonial administration attempted to simplify this ethnic landscape by dividing the population into two “republics,” one for the white Spaniards and another for the Indians. This division proved to be highly problematic, partly because of entrenched class divisions within both the indigenous and the Spanish societies. Elite Spaniards with access to economic resources or prestigious administrative posts enjoyed more rights and privileges than artisans or women.²⁰ Likewise, the survival of indigenous elites into the colonial period meant that not all Indians were equally subject to abusive and exploitative labor drafts, and in fact indigenous elites facilitated white dominance in the Americas.²¹ In addition, indigenous migration fostered economic and social inequalities, as not all Indians were subject to the same labor and taxation demands.²² Furthermore, divisions between European-born (*peninsular*) and American-born (*criollo*) whites led to cleavages within elite society that eventually resulted in Ecuador’s independence in the early nineteenth century. In addition, the proliferation of mestizo groups in the interstices of colonial society further undermined the neat bipartite division that the Spanish crown hoped to maintain.

The Spanish colonial administration treated Indians as wards of the state and considered them legally inferior to white and mestizo inhabitants of the Americas. Along with this status came the crown’s paternalistic policies that defended the Indians from some of the worst abuses at the hands of the colonial elite. With independence from Spain, liberal ideals flourished that did away with special privileges and obligations for certain groups of people while at the same time retaining aspects of Spanish colonial legislation and institutions that ensured the continued subjugation of Indians. All Ecuadorians (including Indians) were constitutionally declared to be equal, but racial dis-

crimination (including African slavery) continued. Indians still faced debtors' prison, laws against begging and vagrancy, demands for tithes and tribute, forced labor, and loss of land. Andrés Guerrero notes that until the abolition of obligatory tribute payments in 1857, Indians were objects of "ethnic administration," with the government defining them as "miserable people" who were incapable of exercising or defending their own rights. Continuing colonial traditions, the republican government still legislated for, represented, and protected the interests of the Indians.²³

The 1830 constitution established requirements for citizenship that included being married or at least 22 years of age, ownership of property worth at least 300 pesos or engagement in an independent "useful" profession or industry (this explicitly excluded domestic servants and day laborers), and the ability to read and write. Although this constitution declared the government to be "popular, representative, alternative, and responsible," only the 2,825 people (0.3 percent of the population) who met the stringent citizenship requirements selected the government that ruled over the rest of the country.²⁴ As Guillermo O'Donnell observes, although "equality before the law" was a liberal value, its reality was effectively skirted because the masses were excluded from the discourse of citizenship.²⁵ Nevertheless, liberal assimilationalist ideas persisted. For example, General Guillermo Rodríguez Lara, who came to power following the 1972 military coup, stated, "There is no more Indian problem. We all become white men when we accept the goals of the national culture."²⁶

In 1857, with the merging of interests of large landowners, manufacturers, and merchants from both the highlands and coast, tribute payments that "weighed exclusively on the most miserable class in society" were finally and definitively abolished.²⁷ This did not mean the extension of universal citizenship rights to Indians, and much less the termination of racism. After this act, the word "indigenous" virtually disappeared from public and legal discourse, and the government's ethnic administration of Indians ended. Similar to what Mark Thurner describes for neighboring Peru, Ecuador experienced a transition from two separate sets of laws governing white and Indian society to one set of laws that hid a deeply fractured and contradictory society.²⁸ Eloy Alfaro's 1895 Liberal Revolution led to a return to legislation that attempted to address the "Indian problem." Casting himself as the protector of the "indigenous race," Alfaro established a minimum wage, prohibited unpaid services, and gave peons the right to pay off their debts and leave haciendas. He declared that "public power must be used to alleviate the unfortunate state of the indigenous race."²⁹ The most extensive and significant liberal legislation to address indigenous issues was the 1918 *Reforma de la Ley de Jornaleros*

(Reform of the Day Laborer Law) that instituted an eight-hour workday, outlawed debt prison, and abolished the inheritance of a parent's debts. Reformers believed that freeing Indians from feudal economic relations and forcing them into a free wage labor system would help modernize the Ecuadorian economy. Notably, this occurred along with the growing importance of the coastal sugar elite, who required a steady supply of migrant labor. Nevertheless, land tenure and service tenancy patterns that ensured hacienda owners a large labor supply while holding wages down survived well into the twentieth century. Xavier Albó dismisses these changes as "a rhetorical modernization of Indian exploitation,"³⁰ and, indeed, the hacienda system survived until the 1964 agrarian reform. Nonetheless, changes in law did affect the political resources available to indigenous peasants.

It is difficult to estimate the ethnic composition of Ecuador's population, largely because of the fluidity of ethnic categories and a lack of reliable statistical data.³¹ Furthermore, as Jorge León and Joanne Rappaport note, "It is not always in one's interest to identify [oneself] as indigenous to a census-taker: hence many of the discrepancies in census figures."³² A study from 1942 estimated that about 40 percent of the population was indigenous, with another 40 percent mestizo, 10 percent white, 5 percent black and mulatto, and 5 percent "other."³³ The majority of Indians live in the highlands and are often grouped under the global category of "Quichua" (or Kichwa). They are part of the larger ethnolinguistic Quechua group, the largest surviving indigenous language in the Americas that stretches across the Andean highlands from Colombia to Chile and includes between eight and twelve million speakers.³⁴ Regional divisions, however, are significant, and identity remains overwhelmingly local.

In the highlands, indigenous populations have become integrated into national society through their economic roles. The Saraguro Indians of Ecuador's southern Loja Province have earned a degree of economic independence through cattle production on large ranches, which sometimes puts them at odds with the rest of the Indian movement, which is largely composed of poor people chronically short of land. The Cañar people, on the other hand, began manufacturing Panama hats in the late nineteenth century as a way to cope with increasing poverty caused by the fragmentation and erosion of their land base. Ironically, in 1532 the Cañaris were one of the groups that considered the Spanish invaders as their liberators from Inka tyranny, but now they have assumed an Inka identity as a strategy of adaptation to cultural imperialism and economic exploitation.³⁵ The central highland province of Chimborazo has the highest concentration of Indians in Ecuador. They have gained a reputation as Ecuador's most rebellious Indians, a legacy of Fernan-

do Daquilema's 1871 rebellion against taxes demanded by the church and the state.³⁶ Both the Salasacas of the central highland province of Tungurahua and Otavalos from Imbabura in the north have become integrated into the dominant economy through their weaving. The Otavalos in particular have achieved international renown as one of the most celebrated and prosperous indigenous groups in the Americas for their textile production and Saturday tourist market. Over the past fifty years, developments in the textile trade have led to the creation of a middle class of increasingly urbanized and Westernized Indian entrepreneurs, who exploit the labor of more traditional weavers and artisans in outlying villages. This has led to a process of social stratification whereby an indigenous elite controls the best locations in the Saturday Indian textile market to the exclusion of poorer members of society. This further challenges the perception of a homogenous indigenous population with common and undisputed interests.³⁷

Eight different indigenous groups survive today in Ecuador's Amazon region, the largest being various groups of Kichwa speakers. Even though these Indians share a language similar to that spoken by the highland Kichwas, their forest culture is quite different from that found in the Sierra.³⁸ Michael Harner characterizes the Shuar, the second largest and one of the most studied Amazonian groups, as the only indigenous group in the Americas "to have successfully revolted against the empire of Spain and to have thwarted all subsequent attempts by the Spaniards to reconquer them."³⁹ In 1964, with support from Salesian missionaries, the Shuar founded the first ethnic federation in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The Shuar used radio programs, a printing press, and other means to defend and revitalize their culture.

Related to the Shuar are the Achuar. Nearby are the Zápara, the smallest surviving group in the Amazon. In the northeastern Amazon live the Sionas, Secoyas, and Cofán (A'I), who have been devastated in recent decades by outside forces, particularly intensive petroleum exploitation and the accompanying influx of colonists. In November 1993, the Sionas and Secoyas fought back by suing Texaco for more than one billion dollars for a variety of environmental abuses, including dumping more than three thousand gallons of oil a day into their lagoons.⁴⁰ The Huaorani (sometimes called Aucas, a Kichwa word meaning "savages," by outsiders) have faced similar problems. They are perhaps best known for spearing five North American missionaries in 1956. David Stoll credits the Huaorani with defying "the world market like few others" by defending 7 percent of Ecuador's valuable jungle territory against those who wish to exploit the area for its natural resources and economic potential.⁴¹ To defend their interests in the face of outside intrusion (including oil companies, missionaries, environmental groups, and sometimes also

threats from the larger neighboring Kichwa and Shuar), all of these groups have formed indigenous organizations with varying degrees of success. Nevertheless, as Blanca Muratorio observes, “The process of conquest and initial evangelization brought about an ‘ethnocidal simplification’ of the Amazon’s rich ethnic variety.”⁴²

The four indigenous ethnic groups that survive on the coast are the Awa, Chachi, Epera, and Tsáchila. Each of these groups is small and has struggled to preserve its ethnic identity. The Chachi (traditionally called “Cayapas”) often clash over limited resources with the Afro-Ecuadorians who occupy the same region. Best known of the coastal groups are the Tsáchila, who are often called Colorados because of their red body paint. Their first sustained contact with the dominant culture was as a tourist curiosity. A road in the 1950s brought colonists into their territory, and now they have been integrated into the export-oriented agricultural economy. On the rest of the coast, indigenous ethnic groups have either died out or have disappeared into the mestizo culture, frequently through the economic influence of export-oriented agribusiness, which has resulted in the formation of a rural proletariat. This large group of lower-class mestizo peasants on the coast are known as *montuvios*, with traditional interpretations placing their biological makeup “scientifically” at 60 percent Indian, 30 percent African, and 10 percent European.⁴³

For most of its history, Ecuador has been primarily an agricultural country built on the manual labor of Indians. On the coast, Ecuadorian agricultural production has been oriented toward an export economy since the eighteenth century, whereas in the highlands agriculture served a domestic market. In the highlands, large haciendas owned by white elites functioned side by side with *minifundia* (small landholdings) cultivated by Indian peasants. *Teratenientes* (large landowners) were notorious for neglecting fertile land on their large estates. In contrast, on neighboring minifundia limited land resources were used intensively and continuously, often to their eventual degradation. Neither system provided an efficient or sustainable form of production.

The largest and most extensive estates emerged in the late nineteenth century in the central and northern highland provinces of Chimborazo, Pichincha, and Imbabura, which were also the areas of highest indigenous concentration. While the earlier part of the century saw the coexistence of large properties with numerous small ones in the north-central highlands, after 1870 the consolidation of large haciendas began. This was partly a response to the incentive offered by new possibilities of the internal market, associated with improved transportation links effected during the government of García Moreno. In the north-central highlands, a growing emphasis

on livestock production required large tracts of land and stimulated the land market. The consolidation of livestock production coincided with a crisis of artisanal production, generating labor migrations toward the coastal region, where cacao production was expanding.

Landowners were not always private individuals; religious orders became some of the largest hacienda owners. They acquired land through a variety of mechanisms, including donations and outright purchase. The religious orders were no more kind or generous with their land and labor dealings than private landowners and were often much more aggressive. In the aftermath of the 1895 Liberal Revolution, General Eloy Alfaro sought to turn back the power of the Catholic Church in Ecuador. This led to the 1904 *Ley de Cultos* (Law of Worship) that confiscated church lands and a subsequent 1908 *Ley de Beneficencia* (Law of Charity) that created *Juntas de Beneficencia* (welfare boards) to administer the previously church-owned haciendas, now in state hands.⁴⁴ The government rented these estates to private individuals on limited-term contracts, using the proceeds to fund social programs in urban areas. Since the rental system did not favor the limited relations of mutual constraint that existed on private estates,⁴⁵ these state-owned haciendas became the theater of some of the most militant peasant-indigenous movements in the twentieth century and were often converted to cooperatives after the 1964 agrarian reform.⁴⁶

In 1954, Ecuador conducted its first agricultural census, which revealed that 19,665 *huasipungueros* (service tenants who worked the estates in exchange for a hut and a plot of subsistence land) and their families comprised 22 percent of Ecuador's rural population. The majority of these (12,795) lived in only three provinces: Chimborazo, Cotopaxi, and Pichincha. Conversely, few *huasipungueros* lived in the southern provinces of Azuay, Cañar, and Loja, which had a much higher percentage of free Indians. Altogether, in 1954 elites owned about 700 estates larger than 500 hectares, comprising about half of Ecuador's agricultural land. Just over 1 percent of the population possessed estates larger than 100 hectares, which totaled almost two-thirds of the tillable land in the Sierra. Meanwhile, 2,500 peasant households farmed plots smaller than 50 hectares, which comprised less than one-third of Ecuador's tillable land. Eighty-two percent of the agricultural production units had access to only 14.4 percent of the tillable land, whereas 0.66 percent of agricultural estates controlled 54.4 percent of the land. Only 15 percent of the land on large estates was under permanent cultivation, whereas on the small estates this proportion could reach as high as 90 percent.⁴⁷

Regional differences reflect differentiation in the resources available for agricultural and livestock production.⁴⁸ The northern highlands (Carchi,

Imbabura, Pichincha, and Cotopaxi provinces) have the most fertile and productive lands, with valleys, a broad sub-Andean belt, and vast extensions of high-altitude *páramo* grasslands. The central highland provinces (Tungurahua, Chimborazo, and Bolívar) have similar characteristics, but with smaller agricultural and livestock zones than the north. Finally, the southern provinces (Cañar, Azuay, and Loja) have less fertile, more volcanic soil, with fewer possibilities for agricultural development. Where agriculture was undertaken in the south, an intense process of soil erosion occurred, which resulted in the disintegration of the haciendas and the emergence of *mini-fundista* peasants.

Explorations of Ecuadorian Indian-State Relations

From independence in the early nineteenth century through the beginning of the twenty-first century, this book examines how Indians approached the state in local contexts and how they attempted to navigate the political spaces created by conflicts among state officials at different levels. It challenges dominant ideologies about Indians in their gendered and racial dimensions, critiques political debates over the position of Indians in the national polity, and analyzes Indian-state relations in contexts that include agrarian reform, bilingual education programs, and military conscription. The concluding chapters explore indigenous organizing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Aleezé Sattar introduces the idea of a bifurcated state, a concept that applies both to the distinction between citizens and Indians, and to the divide between the central and local exercise of state power. The distinction between citizens and Indians was based primarily on the survival of a colonial institution, Indian tribute, well into the nineteenth century. By paying tribute, members of indigenous communities were exempted from paying most other taxes (with the exception of *diezmos*, an ecclesiastical tax that also provided some state revenues). The collection procedures legitimated the existence of traditional authorities (caciques) within indigenous communities, as well as the preservation of community lands. It was only after the “personal contribution” (as tribute was euphemistically called after the 1820s) was eliminated in 1857 that the ethnically based *legal* distinction between Indians and citizens was dissolved. Sattar shows how the state conceived of this distinction and how Indians themselves used their different status to protect their interests. Because tribute was the basis for certain rights and this distinction could be used to appeal to the central state for other forms of protection when local officials were abusive, Indians in Chimborazo Province protested when trib-

ute was abolished. Sattar's discussion of the bifurcation of the state itself in its local and central instances of power is particularly important to this book's argument. Indians were able to maneuver between central state and municipal authorities, which also indicates how the interests of the state varied at different levels. Since local elites sometimes competed among themselves for access to Indian taxes, land, and labor, these issues become more complex. Finally, because the other tax assessed on Indians, the *diezmo*, was farmed out for collection by quasi-state officials, this created yet another dynamic by which different local instances of state power were sometimes at odds.

Derek Williams's chapter moves north to Imbabura Province, home of the Otavalo Indians, regarded since the nineteenth century as model Indians for their industrious artisan production. Williams examines the shifting triangular relationship linking the state, large landowners, and Indians, during the transition from the era of popular liberalism under Urvina to a new period of conservative-Catholic rule under García Moreno. His emphasis is on how Indians figured into the relationship between the state and landowners. Locally based and national state actors had differing views of progress and therefore different approaches to governing Otavalo Indians. García Moreno's centralizing project was to subordinate local government and landlord interests to national imperatives, and, since one important way to achieve this was by constructing large-scale infrastructure, Indian labor figured centrally in this project.

Erin O'Connor focuses on a view of Indians "from above," examining state attempts at moral regulation that reflected gendered images of the Indian population.⁴⁹ Basing her analysis on newspaper writings and judicial documents, O'Connor shows how the dominant gender ideologies of late nineteenth-century Ecuador affected not only all women, but Indian men as well. State discourse constructed images of Indian men alternately as helpless children and undeserving patriarchs—images with real implications for people's lives when developed and applied in court cases. Ultimately, the failure of Indian men to serve as good fathers suggested that they were unworthy of becoming members of the political nation. Given the virtual disappearance of references to Indians and explicit concerns with race in nineteenth-century political discourse after the 1857 abolition of tribute, gender becomes an analytical window onto notions of inherited bases of inequality. Like Sattar, O'Connor bases her analysis on research in Chimborazo Province.

Michiel Baud takes us south to Cuenca, focusing on the period after the 1895 Liberal Revolution. He examines the nature of *indigenista* liberal rhetoric and the extent to which indigenous peoples used it to improve their lot. Indeed, the reappearance of the Indian in public discourse is notable in the

liberal period, after the submergence of this topic after 1857. This is likely for three reasons: the Liberal Revolution included some elements of an authentic popular mobilization (although we know little about what the subaltern followers of Eloy Alfaro might have been seeking through their participation); the liberals tried to distance themselves from the poor treatment of Indians under previous republican and colonial governments; and, related to this, labor issues were central to liberal concerns as they sought to undermine conservative highland landowners and promote labor migrations to the agro-export enterprises of the coast, whose owners tended to be liberals. Baud shows that the rhetoric of the liberal state helped Indians to resist the abuses of local landowners, as they selectively incorporated elements of liberal *indigenismo* into their struggles. The mere existence of national laws to which Indians could appeal changed their political strategies and their expectations. When peasants appealed successfully to the central state, this legitimated the state; however, the state's failure to meet these rising expectations was likely one of the causes of the increased radicalization of indigenous social actors in the 1920s. Baud notes that it is equally important to examine how the state incorporated certain aspects of subaltern projects into its own project and how Indians incorporated state discourse into their political strategies. In other words, state and popular discourse are mutually constitutive.

In examining labor issues in Chimborazo and Pichincha provinces, Kim Clark takes up some of the issues raised by Baud, extending the analysis from 1895 through 1950. Clark focuses on how Indians used deference as a strategy of negotiation with state officials at various levels. The deference offered to some officials (or acceptance of their paternalism) was clearly linked to a withdrawal of deference from others. The nature of indigenous discourse and strategies of resistance changed over time, as Indians incorporated new aspects of state rhetoric and dominant ideology into their appeals to state officials. Crucial to this dynamic were the fissures in the state system—differing interests among authorities at various levels or in diverse state institutions—that allowed Indians to appeal to some officials who were willing to undermine the authority of others. Ultimately, this may indicate a strength, not weakness, since it led to the legitimization of the central state and channeled indigenous resistance in particular ways. These strategies often allowed indigenous peasants to deal quite effectively with pressing everyday problems.

Marc Becker examines debates in the Constituent Assembly convoked after the Glorious Revolution of May 1944 that returned Ecuadorian populist José María Velasco Ibarra to power for the second of his five terms. For a brief period, it seemed possible to rethink the relationship between Indians and the state, as well as the structure of state-society relations more generally. The

1944–1945 Constituent Assembly saw heated debates regarding citizenship rights, suffrage, representation, and language. Delegates engaged fundamental issues of how state structures were designed and who controlled them. For the first time, indigenous organizations had an indirect voice through the presence of Communist leader Ricardo Paredes as the functional representation of the “indigenous race.” Indians were among the many groups disappointed a year later when Velasco Ibarra revoked the new constitution and declared himself dictator. In the meantime, Indians had taken advantage of the general political climate to establish their first organization, the Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios (FEI, Ecuadorian Federation of Indians). Ultimately, the frustration with the political process begun in 1944 demonstrated to Indians the limitations of trying to participate in formal politics while literacy requirements excluded them from voting or running for office. When Ecuadorian Indians emerged as important actors in formal politics in the 1990s, it was on the basis of significant gains in education. Nevertheless, whether to engage the state in the electoral realm or to organize as a social movement remained an issue that indigenous activists would debate for years to come.

William Waters’s chapter examines Indian-state relations in the context of agrarian reform in Cotopaxi Province. Even before the formation of the contemporary indigenous movement, Indian communities had emerged as actors engaged in struggles with local elites and the state. Indeed, the agrarian reform laws of 1964 and 1973 were only one component of a complex process in which both peasants and landowners sought to protect their own interests. Indigenous communities’ ability to negotiate with landowners, often through technocratic state agencies, led to a profound transformation of rural areas in the 1960s and 1970s. As Waters shows, this process was uneven, and depending on the availability and quality of land, some indigenous communities benefited more than others. However, the overall changes were crucial to the appearance of indigenous organizations. Autonomous peasant communities arose from among a sector that had been largely a dependent labor force living within or subject to haciendas. These communities gained the power to negotiate directly with state agencies: in many cases, they first gained experience negotiating with IERAC, the agrarian reform agency, and increasingly with other state agencies providing water or other basic services. Whereas most Latin American agrarian reform initiatives have had only partial success in improving the economic well-being of peasants, perhaps in the long run the political repercussions of these processes may be just as important.

Amalia Pallares examines the Ecuadorian indigenous movement of the 1980s and 1990s. Following the military regimes of the 1970s, the return to

democracy in 1979 saw new attempts to incorporate Indians into the nation-state. In the 1980s, these policies focused on cultural issues, especially on developing bilingual and bicultural educational programs. While indigenous organizations struggled for a greater voice in decision making over these programs at the national level, their success in controlling local programs and curricula gave an important impetus to their organizational capacity. It also stimulated broad discussions about what might be considered indigenous content in these programs. In the 1980s, Indians were frustrated in their attempt to move beyond sometimes narrowly defined “cultural” issues to economic issues in negotiations with the government. Following the 1990 indigenous uprising, however, the national government was more willing to address economic issues, including the resolution of land disputes; yet it often refused to negotiate over political autonomy. Indigenous organizations took up the state model of pluriculturalism in the 1980s but gave it different meanings. By the early 1990s, the indigenous movement began to speak of plurinationalism, which led the state and many other social groups to reject indigenous claims, arguing that the movement threatened the integrity of the Ecuadorian nation-state. Since then, indigenous groups have returned to some extent to concepts of pluriculturalism but have stretched this language to include their plurinational projects. Overall, the Indian movement has gained in organizational capacity over two decades, as state discourse and indigenous projects have evolved and have influenced each other. Moving beyond its traditional concern with the situation of Ecuador’s indigenous population, the Indian movement today is involved in national debates over issues of citizenship and inclusion that affect all Ecuadorians.

Brian Selmeski explores Indian-state relations in a quite different arena: the experience of Indian military conscripts. Military conscription is one of the clearest settings in which state projects to forge citizens are carried to fruition for a significant proportion of the Ecuadorian population. As with bilingual education, the military has also developed a pluricultural model of the nation that is inclusive enough to embrace Indians, rather than insisting on *mestizaje* (cultural or racial mixing), as earlier notions of Ecuadorian citizenship often did. Conscription promotes “personal formation,” which quite explicitly involves learning to become well-formed (but still Indian) citizens. The military has a rather different history in Ecuador than in many other Latin American countries: while armed force has sometimes been used to repress popular movements, in the twentieth century military governments of one kind or another have also passed some of Ecuador’s more progressive legislation. Currently, the institution is involved in development initiatives within indigenous communities; it also gives Indians a central role in Ecuador’s

history in classes offered to conscripts. Selmeski suggests that Indians are attracted to military service (which they could evade if they so desired) and the opportunities it affords to form themselves into national citizens. Many would also like to become professional soldiers, but few can satisfy the basic educational requirements. Clearly, in this arena, the state is successful in drawing Indians into a national project and in carrying out moral regulation. Selmeski attributes part of this success to the gendered and family ideologies promoted by the military.

The research materials available for these analyses of Indian-state relations in Ecuador vary with the era under study. For the earlier periods, documents produced by various state officials can reveal fissures in the state itself. These include court records inscribed by judges and officials at various levels and correspondence among assorted state officials and institutions. The often muffled voices of Indians can also be heard—in their petitions and complaints to the state (often written by cultural brokers), in their testimony in court (often translated, sometimes presented by their lawyers), in the record of their actions (often interpreted by others). Newspaper accounts and other published sources are also drawn upon for an understanding of both indigenous actions and of dominant ideologies toward them. Debates from the 1944–1945 Constituent Assembly also reveal the multiplicity of views of the “Indian problem,” although they reflect less of the reality of Indian life.

For the twentieth century, oral histories and interviews become increasingly important, allowing for rich analyses of indigenous views and experiences. While the archival sources for the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are not ideal, they can be mined for understanding many aspects of indigenous life. As Florencia Mallon pointed out some time ago, the difficulty of analyzing subaltern practices and discourses does not mean we should not try, even if our results are always partial.⁵⁰ We can draw some conclusions about indigenous political strategies, if not their intentions and experiences at a deeper level. This is a key point, since it is actual practices that subordinate groups and the state engage in that create and transform social relations. As Talal Asad observes about hegemony, “What is shared in such situations is not ‘belief’ as an interior state of mind but cultural discourses that constitute objective social conditions and thus define forms of behavior appropriate to them.”⁵¹

Four comparative chapters place the processes occurring in the Ecuadorian highlands in a larger Latin American context. All are concerned with the recent history of Ecuadorian indigenous organizations, since the emergence of a unified movement is the most visible sign of Ecuador’s distinctiveness. Juliet Erazo looks east of the Andes to examine how Indian-state relations in

the Ecuadorian Amazon (the Oriente) contrast with those in the highlands. In reviewing the history of Indian-state relations in the Oriente, Erazo emphasizes the importance of religious missions, which took on a quasi-state role in governing the indigenous population. Another factor was resource extraction in the region, which informed rather different approaches to labor in contrast to the settled agriculture in the highlands. Labor policies in the Oriente differed, too, because Indian laborers could flee into inaccessible territories if exploitation became too intense. Finally, indigenous organizing in the Ecuadorian Amazon eventually led to the emergence of a national organization linking highland and lowland confederations.

Shannon Mattiace compares Indian-state relations in twentieth-century Mexico and Ecuador, and finds important differences between the two countries. Indigenismo in Mexico arose from a revolutionary context, and in Ecuador from a liberal one. These nationalist ideologies, and the policies they informed, provided an important early frame for relations between Indians and the state. The last decades of the twentieth century saw a shift from indigenista-inspired assimilation to multiculturalism, in the context of economic liberalization and electoral democracy, as well as a changing international order. Mattiace discusses important differences between indigenous organizing in Ecuador and Mexico in organizing tactics, the state institutions and climate they confront, the articulation of these movements with formal politics, and the scale of their activities.

Like Mexico, Bolivia has not produced an umbrella indigenous organization with the strength of Ecuador's CONAIE. José Antonio Lucero compares the sequence, style, and structure of indigenous organizing in the two Andean countries. While in Ecuador, Amazonian groups (using a language of ethnicity) emerged "early," before or contemporaneous with the main highland organizations (who initially developed a language of class), in Bolivia lowland groups emerged "late," as lowland groups had to confront strong local elites. This sequence in Ecuador resulted in a strong lowland presence when the two regional federations joined together, which facilitated the adoption of a flexible language of nationalities by CONAIE, which was capable of encompassing many different indigenous groups and local organizations in a single national movement. The style of the Ecuadorian and Bolivian movements also differ substantially, with an emphasis on pre-Columbian and corporatist imaginaries in Bolivia that do not carry similar weight in Ecuador. Finally, the two movements have been confronted by rather different neoliberal economic policies; such policies managed to fragment indigenous politics in Bolivia, while they might be said to have strengthened indigenous mobilizing in Ecuador.

In the final chapter, José Antonio Lucero and María Elena García question common assumptions about the indigenous movements in Peru and in Ecuador. Peru stands out for the absence of a strong indigenous movement, especially when compared to its neighbor to the north. However, in light of García's ethnographic research on local Peruvian organizing efforts in pursuit of bilingual education, perhaps the problem is not that there is no indigenous movement in Peru, but that we cannot recognize where such a movement might exist. In particular, we must rethink evolutionary assumptions about scale, whereby a national movement is regarded as more "advanced" than local organizing. Lucero and Garcia emphasize the importance of recognizing in both the Ecuadorian and Peruvian contexts that indigenous identities are "plural, contested, and constructed in dialogue with a great number of actors." Finally, while the mobilizing tactics of Peruvian and Ecuadorian Indians differ significantly, we should avoid attributing more importance to mass mobilizations than to local resistance and organization; perhaps the successes of the Ecuadorian movement are not as great as some think, while the failures of the Peruvian movement are not so grave as others have assumed.

Together, these studies build an argument about how Indians in highland Ecuador gained political and organizational experience over the better part of two centuries, and how those gains are manifested in contemporary relations between Indians and the Ecuadorian state. This book provides a historical framework for understanding the politicization of ethnic identities and offers Ecuador as a particularly important case for understanding the range of historical alternatives in subaltern-state relations.