

Redefining the State

Plurinationalism and Indigenous Resistance in Ecuador

By

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1990s, the Ecuadorian Indigenous movement has transformed the nation's political landscape. CONAIE, a nationwide pan-Indigenous organization, and its demands for plurinationalism have been at the forefront of this process. For CONAIE, the demand for a plurinational refounding of the state is meant as both as a critique of and an alternative to what the movement perceives to be an exclusionary and Eurocentric nation-state apparatus. In this paper, my focus is twofold. I *first* focus on the role of CONAIE as the central actor in organizing and mobilizing the groundswell of Indigenous activism in Ecuador. After an analysis of the historical roots of the movement, I trace the evolution of CONAIE from its rise in the 1990s, through a period of decline and fragmentation in the early 2000s, and toward possible signs of resurgence since 2006. In doing so, my hope is to provide a backdrop from which to better make sense both of CONAIE's plurinational project and of the implications of the 2008 constitutional recognition of Ecuador as a plurinational state. *Second*, I focus on an analysis of CONAIE's vision for a plurinational and intercultural Ecuador. While much has been written about the successes and failures of CONAIE, the literature that exists has tended to concern itself almost exclusively with questions of *how and why the movement emerged* or of which factors facilitate or hinder *the movement's success*. Missing from this scholarship is any serious attempt to engage the intellectual content of the movement's demands, their struggles, or their visions for the future. Rather than remain narrowly focused on these issues of coherence and efficacy, my analysis highlights the intellectual contributions of these activists. I argue that CONAIE's plurinational project represents a new vision of national unity and social inclusion that: 1) is based on the principles and values of Indigenous epistemologies; 2) simultaneously demands both the direct participation in state policy and communal territorial autonomy of Indigenous communities; and

3) illustrates a bottom-up attempt to reconstruct the state in such a way as to promote the common good while protecting the interests of particular groups.

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PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

In 1990, CONAIE (the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) led thousands of Indians in a nationwide *levantamiento* (uprising). Indigenous activists occupied city streets and public buildings. In the countryside they blocked highways with trees and boulders. For over a week, continued protests effectively brought the whole of Ecuador to a standstill. The dramatic success of the CONAIE-led protest shone light on the demands and struggles of the nation's Indigenous communities. At the same time, it thrust CONAIE into the arena of national politics as the united front of the country's Indigenous movements (Becker 2008:1). The 1990 uprising and rise of Indigenous activism that followed has been motivated by a long list of complaints by Indians concerning the persistent and everyday forms of inequality and exclusion they face. However, the problem of persistent inequality in Ecuador remains largely unresolved. In 2007, a national study found Indigenous communities still remained burdened by higher rates of poverty, at 70 percent, compared to the national average of 38 percent. Similarly, they had the lowest levels of participation in higher education, 2 percent compared to 10 percent nationally, and the highest rates of illiteracy, 28 percent compared to 9 percent (SIISE 2007).

Since the movement's formation as a national pan-Indigenous organization in 1986, CONAIE has repeatedly argued that this persistent problem of inequality is directly related to the exclusionary logic that underpins the modern Ecuadorian nation-state model. For CONAIE, the homogenizing, mono-cultural assumptions of the nation-state favors the voices of elites and works to marginalize and exclude those of Indians by negating the existence of their diverse national identities. As a result, CONAIE's activities have been primarily organized around a

desire to redefine the state such that it recognizes the pluri-national character of its population. Put simply, CONAIE's struggle for *plurinationalism* is twofold. On the one hand, plurinationalism calls for increased Indigenous participation in state and economic policy, while, on the other, demanding the local autonomy of Indigenous communities. In this light, CONAIE's demand for plurinationalism illustrates an attempt to articulate a project of social inclusion that also maintains the cultural and epistemic difference of Indigenous populations.

In this paper, my focus is twofold. I *first* focus on the role of CONAIE as the central actor in organizing and mobilizing a groundswell of Indigenous activism in Ecuador that has called for meaningful social inclusion in opposition to 500 years of marginalization and exclusion under colonial and state rule. Over the past thirty years, CONAIE's continued struggle for a plurinational and intercultural Ecuador has had profound impacts on the nation's political landscape. In order to illustrate these changes, I trace the evolution of the movement from its rise in the 1990s, through a period of decline and fragmentation in the early 2000s, toward recent signs of possible resurgence since 2006. This leads up to the constitutional recognition of Ecuador as a Plurinational and Intercultural State in 2008. In doing so, my hope is to provide a backdrop from which to better make sense of CONAIE's plurinational project.

Second, I focus on an analysis of CONAIE's vision for a plurinational and intercultural Ecuador. Underlying the logic of their demand for a refounding of the state is what I take to be a five point argument:

1. For CONAIE, plurinationalism begins with the recognition of a plurality of Indigenous national identities and their cultural and epistemic diversity.
2. These diverse epistemic communities have been historically marginalized and excluded for 500 years under the Eurocentrism of Western modernity.

3. The historical oppression and exclusion of Indigenous communities has undermined national unity and weakened state sovereignty.
4. This historically marginalized status affords a unique vantage to both specify the problems and limitations of the current state model and to identify possible alternatives.
5. As a result, CONAIE's demand for a plurinational and intercultural state also demands a radical form of social inclusion that extends beyond notions of political participation, material access, or cultural respect. For CONAIE, real social inclusion requires the direct participation of Indigenous peoples in transforming and redefining the very institutions of society, such that they are representative of the cultural values and epistemic principles of Indians.

Driving my analysis of the history of CONAIE and its struggle for plurinationalism is a set of three questions: 1) Does CONAIE's plurinational project point to a shift away from strategies of defensive opposition *against* exclusion toward an offensive protagonism to *reclaim* the voice of Indigenous peoples, as Walsh (2010) has suggested? 2) According to CONAIE, in what ways would a plurinational refounding of the state work to include the perspectives of Ecuador's historically marginalized Indigenous populations in the institutions and organization of society? And 3) What would such a transformation of the state suggest for national unity?

In responding to these questions, I argue that CONAIE's plurinational project represents a new vision of national unity and social inclusion that: 1) is based on the principles and values of Indigenous epistemologies; 2) simultaneously demands both the direct participation in state policy and communal territorial autonomy of Indigenous communities; and 3) illustrates a bottom-up attempt to reconstruct the state in such a way as to promote the common good while protecting the interests of particular groups.

Literature Review: Researching Resistance - Efficacy or Epistemology?

Research concerning the rise of Ecuador's Indigenous movement primarily focuses on some combination of four major themes: grievances; movement strength and available resources; identity construction and framing; and changes in political opportunities. Every author engages the theme of *grievances* to one degree or another. Whether the focus is on the implementation of neoliberal policy (Andolina 2012; Sawyer 2004; Yashar 2005), the material and political exclusion of Indigenous peoples (Birnir and Van Cott 2007; Beck 2011; Becker 2008), or a legacy of racism and ethnic difference (Pallares 2002; Lucero 2008), researchers recognize that Indigenous movements are responding to a number of grievances. The major division among researchers regarding the issue of grievances seems to center on its explanatory power. Most researchers view grievances as more or less constant and thus an unsatisfactory variable for explaining Indigenous activism. However, analyses that focus on local groups (Andolina 2012) or on specific instances of Indigenous mobilization (Sawyer 2004; Becker 2008) attenuate more closely to the details of grievances in shaping the demands and resistance strategies of these groups. For instance, Andolina (2012) discusses the impacts of a recent "irrigation development project designed to empower indigenous peoples in Cañar, Ecuador" (3). However, the project's neoliberal economic principles of efficiency and productivity, which "privileged the market as essential for empowerment," devalued local Indigenous culture, undermined the social fabric of the community, and were ultimately unsustainable for the small-scale community. Andolina argues that in response to these grievances, the Indigenous peoples of Cañar implemented a new social project "by aligning its aspirations with the values of the national indigenous movement and international agro-ecological movements" (Andolina 2012:22). Similarly, Sawyer (2004)

discusses in detail one Indigenous organization from the Amazon and their frustrations with the state's neoliberal policies that led to a number of dramatic uprisings throughout the 1990s.

Research that focuses on *movement strength and available resources* are primarily concerned with the identification of facilitating factors for movement success such as the capacity to mobilize, the role of leadership, and the formation of international alliances. For instance, Chartock (2011) argues that movement strength - measured by a movement's capacity to mobilize, its longevity, its inclusivity, its unity, and its local-national alliances - is the determining factor in bringing about changes in state and economic policy. Chartock finds the Ecuadorian Indigenous movement to be stronger than other national Indigenous movements in South America and, therefore, better suited to bring about policy change. Van Cott (2008), on the other hand, highlights the need for an effective local leadership in order to translate movement successes into meaningful changes at the community level and to facilitate negotiations with "higher-tier governments, external donors, and oppositional political actors" (Van Cott 2008:215). Finally, Andolina et al. (2009) argue that international alliances with transnational movements, advocacy networks, and nongovernmental organizations empower Indigenous organizations through the provision of resources and support and creating alternative avenues of protest in an international arena. However, the authors also note that interference from transnational actors can risk distorting the local demands of Indigenous activists and obscuring the issue of class (Andolina et al. 2009:224).

Research on *identity construction and framing* also makes central the issue of efficacy. However, framing research is interested in the identity construction and meaning making activities of Indigenous movements. Both Becker (2008) and Pallares (2002) argue that a concerted effort by Indigenous organizations in the 1970s and 1980s to redefine their demands

was essential to the formation of a strong national Indigenous coalition. Indigenous groups in the highland regions of Ecuador had been principally organized around class-based demands, while those in the Amazonian regions favored an ethnicity-based strategy. The formation of CONAIE in 1986, as a united national front of Indigenous resistance, was the result of a two decade long effort by Indigenous leaders to re-signify the meanings behind their demands in order to recognize the double dimension of their exclusion, as both Indians and peasants. Lalander (2010), in contrast, argues that the ethnicity-based identity of CONAIE is too rigid to navigate the local demands of communities with multiple ethnic identities and too weak as a "political resource, because of cultural, economic and social diversities within the movement" (Lalander 2010:514). Thus, he finds CONAIE to be "an exclusively indigenous organisation" and that this ethnocentrism has led to the weakening of both CONAIE and its political party, Pachakutik. In a similar vein, Zamosc (2007) argues that CONAIE's participation in the 2000 coup of President Jamil Mahuad, and the movement's subsequent decline in support in the following years, illustrate the movement's inability to reframe itself in order to "maintain coherence in situations of partial institutionalization" following their decision in 1996 to enter into the realm of party politics (Zamosc 2007:28). In other words, CONAIE was weakened by its inability to reframe "the movement's ideology by shifting the emphasis from anti-system representations to imageries of democratic renovation from within" (Zamosc 2007:28).

Finally, a number of researchers look to shifts in the political structure and *political opportunities* for explanations of how and why Indigenous movements have emerged. Yashar (2005) argues that the rise of the Ecuadorian Indigenous movement is the result of recent changes in state-society relations, which she refers to as "citizenship regimes." She suggests that until recently, the Ecuadorian state could be characterized as a "corporatist citizenship regime,"

which allowed for a degree of relative autonomy in Indigenous territories. However, "As the Ecuadorian state moved definitively from a corporatist to a neoliberal citizenship regime in the 1980s and 1990s," this autonomy was eroded, as was the possibility for reform. As a result, "CONAIE decided to move beyond the defense of local autonomy and toward a redefinition of democratic citizenship"(Yashar 2005:150). Lucero (2008) makes a similar argument, adding, however, the need to recognize that Indigenous activists and their activities also contribute to the redefinition and opening up of the political structure, further incentivizing Indigenous mobilization. Birnir and Van Cott (2007) suggest that openings in the political structure have also proven problematic both for Ecuador and for the nation's Indigenous movement. With the removal of literacy requirements in 1979, Ecuador's Indigenous population was finally allowed to participate in electoral politics. However, Birnir and Van Cott argue that the political incorporation of Indians has fragmented national party politics, weakened the Indigenous movement, and, as a result, inhibited democratic consolidation.

The body of literature that exists on the Ecuadorian Indigenous movement, regardless of whether the focus is on movement strength and framing or on grievances and political opportunities, has been primarily concerned with either the identification of what it is that *facilitates movement success* or the evaluation of Indigenous movements according to explanatory frameworks for *how and why movements occur*. Unfortunately, missing from this scholarship is any serious attempt to engage the intellectual content of the movement's demands, their struggles, or visions for the future. Put differently, by focusing on issues of efficacy and coherence, what it is that these movements are actually fighting for becomes significant, at least implicitly, only secondarily. As McMichael (2010) suggests, rather than simply invoke issues of coherence and efficacy, which "makes linear and cause-and-effect assumptions about 'social

change'...[and] risks cultural and historical abstraction," research should recognize "the significance of epistemic challenges to social change...viewing struggles as units of observation...in relation to a shared political-economic conjuncture" (McMichael 2010:4-5). Similarly, Walsh (2010) argues that research on Indigenous movements in Ecuador and elsewhere have largely constructed these movements as objects of study, characterizing them in oppositional and reactionary terms. This body of research has been unable or unwilling to conceive of Indigenous activists as intellectual agents, "making thought and intervening with and through this thought in social, political and ideological realms." However, Walsh argues that this intellectual agency is evidenced in the recent collective actions of Indigenous movements and "in the new political and epistemic paths that this action are opening, paths that lead to and enable new arrangements of thought, knowledge, and of thinking within and towards the political, and to new constructions of life, living, and societal articulation" (Walsh 2010:202). In other words, much of the existing research on the Ecuadorian Indigenous movement fail to account for the intellectual contributions of Indigenous activists and their struggles in specifying the limitations of regimes of domination and intervening with alternative visions for the future. *My paper contributes to the existing literature by focusing on the intellectual content of CONAIE's demands and their vision for a new plurinational Ecuadorian society.*

Theorizing Exclusion: Development, Coloniality, and the Nation-State

Recently, social theorists have become increasingly concerned with the relationship between epistemic exclusion and the cultural, political, and economic forms of social exclusion. These scholars worry that globalization and the hegemonic rise of neoliberal development as a

global regime of international governance has intensified the concentration of power and resources in the hands of elites, making national and international institutions less accountable and less democratic (McMichael 2011; Harvey 2005, 2007; Mignolo 2011; Evans 2008). At the turn of the century, Appadurai noted that:

In the public spheres of many societies there is concern that policy debates occurring around world trade, copyright, environment, science, and technology set the stage for life-and-death decisions for ordinary farmers, vendors, slum-dwellers, merchants, and urban populations. And running through these debates is the sense that social exclusion is ever more tied to epistemological exclusion and concern that the discourses of expertise that are setting the rules for global transactions, even in the progressive parts of the international system, have left ordinary people outside and behind (Appadurai 2000:2).

At the same time, Appadurai points to the activities of numerous popular movements who have begun to mobilize "from below" in order to challenge, critique, and resist their epistemic exclusion. Appadurai argues that, in doing so, these movements embody an nascent project of "'globalization from below'...which strives for a democratic and autonomous standing in respect to the various forms by which global power further seeks to extend its domination" (Appadurai 2000:3).

More recently, McMichael (2010) has argued that the logic of neoliberal development is premised upon the epistemic privilege of the "market calculus," which defines social progress and human well-being in a singular and universalized metric of economic growth. Other epistemological perspectives that are either unable or unwilling to conform to neoliberalism's market calculus have therefore been definitionally "rendered unviable, invisible, or unthinkable" (McMichael 2010:3). McMichael refers to those who have experienced the exclusionary face of neoliberalism as the "casualties of progress." These are the people "whose class, gender, racial/ethnic, sexual, or disability identities have served as axes of exploitation, as well as those regarded as redundant and at odds with the values and history of capitalist modernity"

(McMichael 2010:1). For McMichael, it is these people, and their struggles over resources and representation, which have emerged in response to intervene - with their particular knowledge forms and ways of living - to interrogate, to expose, and to contest this epistemological privileging of the market. In this way, their struggles specify the limitations of development and articulate innovative visions for social organization and the future (McMichael 2010:5).

Quijano (2000; 2007) uses his concept of the "coloniality of power" to argue that the hegemony of neoliberalism as a global power regime is premised upon, and structured by, the legacy of European colonialism. As he suggests, "With the conquest of the societies and the cultures which inhabit what today is called Latin America, began the constitution of a new world order, culminating, five hundred years later, in a global power covering the whole planet" (Quijano 2007:168). For Quijano, this coloniality of power refers to a confluence of three mutually constitutive elements, which were consolidated into a coherent structure of power and social domination during colonial expansion: 1) the use of race as a discourse of power; 2) the rise of global capitalism; and 3) an epistemic Eurocentrism. Together, these three elements were used to legitimize European domination of colonized peoples through the expropriation, repression, and devaluation of indigenous knowledges, cultures, and sociopolitical institutions (Quijano 2000:541).

In this way, European colonialism entailed the construction of a linear, progressive reinterpretation of human history and a racially defined hierarchical reorganization of society. Both of which pointed to European knowledge and culture as the pinnacle of science and the culmination of human civilization. Indigenous knowledges and cultures, on the other hand, were characterized as inferior relics of humanity's past. It is this totalizing episteme, then, that, for Quijano, underwrites the epistemic exclusion experienced by many today under the directives of

neoliberal development policy. We see this coloniality of power being played out on the global scale in the continued gap in the production of knowledge, where the opinions and perspectives of the North are favored over those of the South, as well as in the persistent inequality among North-South relations and the prominence of political and economic leaders of the North within the international institutions of governance. This leads Quijano to conclude that "the model of power that is globally hegemonic today presupposes an element of coloniality" (Quijano 2000:533).

The formation of the modern nation-state in Latin America, Quijano continues, helps to elucidate this process. As he suggests, "One of the clearest examples of this [coloniality of power] in Latin America is the history of the so-called national question: the problem of the modern nation-state in Latin America" (Quijano 2000:556). Quijano begins by pointing out that the nation-state model for society is Eurocentric because it is premised upon the particular historical contexts of Europe, which makes presuppositions regarding the existing social order prior to nation-state formation. Specifically, the formation of the nation-state assumes a relatively homogenized population, achieved through the democratization of social relations (Quijano 2000:559). In Europe, these two factors facilitated nation-state formation by fostering both a common national identity and a shared national interest. In Latin America, the coloniality of power made this impossible. In the wake of colonization, land - as well as political and economic power - throughout Latin America had been left highly concentrated within the hands of a white minority population, much of which taken from Indigenous populations (Quijano 2000:562). This meant that the interests of whites were "explicitly antagonistic" to those of Indians. As Quijano notes, the privileges enjoyed by this white minority "were made from precisely the dominance and exploitation of those peoples [Indigenous peoples] in such a way

that there was no area of common interest between whites and nonwhites and, consequently, no common national interest for all of them" (Quijano 2000:566). Instead, even as this white minority gained control of the newly independent states, they continued to identify with the interests of Europe and to look to Europe as the model society. As a result, homogenization efforts throughout Latin America were not driven by the democratization of social relations. Here, homogenization has been sought through concerted state efforts to eliminate, exclude, and assimilate Indigenous populations as well as other nonwhites. As Quijano notes, this was not "a process toward the development of modern nation-states, but was instead a rearticulation of the coloniality of power over new institutional bases" (Quijano 2000:567).

In her discussion over the debates concerning plurinationalism during Ecuador's National Constitutional Assembly in 2007-2008, Walsh (2009) uses Quijano's concept of coloniality to both identify several limitations of the nation-state model within the context of Ecuador. She views Indigenous demands for plurinationalism as both an effort to expose the state's "ongoing colonial relationship" and to illustrate the need for a plurinational project of state refounding "from below" - i.e., from the epistemological perspectives of historically excluded populations. First, as she argues, "this coloniality of power produced the ethnic-racial difference...as a historical-structural problem which continues to be integral to the Ecuadorian state, society and its social-political institutions...[which] continue to perpetrate and justify the colonial difference and inequality" (Walsh 2009:67-68). As evidence of this process, she points to the nation's persistent problems with racism, the disproportionately high rates of poverty among Indigenous populations, and the state's use of projects of racial whitening and cultural assimilation as metrics of progress and development. Second, and as a result, the Ecuadorian nation-state and its institutions have been premised upon the uni-national and monocultural assumptions - and

interests - of white-mestizo elites, which fail to recognize or represent the "literally plural character of the national." As Walsh points out, "When a state and society are created according to the interests of the dominant group and culture...the national is nothing more than a set of institutions which represent, reflect and privilege these groups to the detriment of the population as a whole" (Walsh 2009:68). This leads to Walsh's third point. She argues that this legacy of the social and epistemological exclusion of Indigenous populations has not only been detrimental to Indians, but to all of Ecuador's citizens. The exclusionary effects of coloniality have fragmented national unity, weakened state sovereignty, and inhibited democratic consolidation.

Thus, CONAIE's demand for plurinationalism puts forth a project of meaningful inclusion that requires a "refounding of the state...based on the profound transformation of the state-society relationship, its institutional structures, and the democratic system, and it must move away from the capitalist and neoliberal model and interests" (Walsh 2009:70). The plurinational vision for inclusion demands that the very structures and institutions of the state and of society be defined by, and representative of, the plurality of Indigenous nationalities of Ecuador, their diverse epistemologies, their cultural values and their sociopolitical systems. In this paper, I continue along this school of thought, providing a more detailed analysis of CONAIE's vision of plurinationalism. In doing so, I am interested in answering the question: What would such a project of social transformation suggest for national unity? I argue that plurinationalism requires a sincere engagement with the worldviews and values of Indigenous peoples and other historically excluded populations. It also entails a recognition of the relationship between social exclusion and the epistemic exclusion of these populations, negating their participation in decision making processes.

Methodology

In the summer of 2012, I spent two months collecting data and meeting with Indigenous leaders in Ecuador, after receiving approval for my project from the University of Kansas Human Subjects Committee. I already had a familiarity with the region prior to my fieldwork, having traveled to Ecuador on several occasions before, with each trip typically lasting about a month. My data collection took place in Quito, the nation's capital city, and the surrounding areas. While I was there, I repeatedly visited the headquarters of both CONAIE and Ecuarrunari, two prominent Indigenous organizations within Ecuador's highlands. I met several times with the president, vice-president, and the communications officer of CONAIE as well as a number of *dirigentes*, or Indigenous leaders. During these informal meetings, Indigenous leaders responded to my questions about the history of the movement and its struggles and demands. I was also able to learn more about the organization of CONAIE and the structure of communication and participation within the movement.

Unfortunately, I was never able to convince anyone within the movement to sit down with me in order to participate in any formal interviews. Several of those with whom I requested an interview informed me that they simply did not have the time. The president of CONAIE, for instance, told me he was working on a project of his own that summer which made it impossible for him to meet with me for any lengthy amount of time. Others would tell me that they were unable to provide me with the kind of information I was interested in and would politely direct me to contact other leaders or members within the organization. However, most of these contacts were similarly either unavailable or unwilling to sit down for an interview. Even the few who I was able to get to agree to an interview would invariably have something come up on the day of the interview and would have to cancel.

Everyone I spoke to within CONAIE seemed weary about my requests for an interview and the possible implications of my research. I was asked time and again about the nature of my research and to specify which institution I was affiliated with. There are a number of likely reasons behind this weariness and the general lack of interest to be interviewed. First, neither the movement nor its constituents owed me anything. They had no reason to make the sacrifice of going out of their way and taking time out of their day to make themselves available to me. Even so, everyone I met with did what they could in order to help me along with my project. Second, Ecuador's current president, Rafael Correa, has taken up an increasingly oppositional stance toward CONAIE and other Indigenous activists over recent years, accusing them of terrorism, sabotage, and of cooptation by the right. Coupled with this has been what CONAIE and outside observers perceive as a concerted effort by Correa to weaken and fragment the movement. As a result, CONAIE has reason to be adverse to the influence of outsiders. Lastly, racism remains very much a problem within Ecuador. Indigenous peoples are confronted with this racism daily. During my research, I was accompanied by a non-Indigenous Ecuadorian who helped with translation as needed. This undoubtedly contributed to their apparent weariness with my research.

Having been aware of these possible barriers to conduct interviews, I had also prepared to collect documents from CONAIE if possible and to do archival research. I was able to successfully acquire a number of documents which had been published by CONAIE. These documents were produced for the purpose of providing information about the movement and its demands to its members and to the public at large. These documents were concerned primarily with the history of the movement, its activities and protests over the years, the movement's interpretation of the problems facing Ecuador and Ecuadorians, as well as the significance and

meanings behind CONAIE's demands. The documents I collected came in a number of forms, including informative pamphlets, educational booklets and workbooks, songs, poems, and manifestos. The majority of these documents were collected during repeated visits to CONAIE's headquarters in Quito. I also located, through archival research in the university and national libraries of Quito, a few additional documents and a number of archival newspaper accounts of the movement and its activities. I acquired additional documents at a three-day long educational outreach seminar organized by CONAIE. The seminar, which I had been invited to attend by CONAIE's communications officer, was held at the *Nueva Vida* (New Life) campgrounds where CONAIE was originally founded in 1986. Its primary focus was on the issue of Indigenous rights as defined under the Ecuadorian constitution and by the international community. Additionally, the seminar served as a forum to discuss the struggles facing Indigenous peoples in Ecuador. The participants arrived at the campgrounds the first day and settled into the cabins where they would be staying for the next two nights. The second day was focused on Indigenous rights, while the third day focused specifically on the rights of Indigenous women. Throughout the meetings, guests were encouraged to participate in dialogue with the presenters and one another in order to express their interpretations of the problems confronted Indigenous peoples and their daily lives. I was invited by the organizers of this event to return to the Nueva Vida the following week for an assembly of CONAIE's leaders from across the country to assess the current state of the movement and discuss its future. However, when I arrived the following week, CONAIE's president informed me that this was meant to be a closed meeting and he requested that I leave the campgrounds.

Of the documents collected, I decided to focus on those published between 2006 and 2011, the years leading up to and following the 2008 constitutional recognition of Ecuador to be

a plurinational and intercultural state. Doing a qualitative content analysis, I began translating and coding for themes related to plurinationalism and exclusion while remaining open to emerging themes.

PART TWO

SITUATING PLURINATIONALISM: A LEGACY OF EXCLUSION AND INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE

In Part Two of this paper, I briefly summarize and discuss the five-hundred-year-long heritage of Indigenous resistance in Ecuador. I highlight the shifting nature and transformations of Indigenous activism throughout this period in order to contextualize the rise of modern Indigenous movements in Ecuador.

Formed in 1986 as a nationwide pan-Indigenous organization, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (*La Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador*, CONAIE) emerged as a central actor in Ecuador's civil society following a mass Indigenous uprising in the summer of 1990. As noted by Becker (2008), many scholars interested in CONAIE and the Indigenous movements of Ecuador identify with these movements the emergence of a new collective Indigenous identity or of new mobilizing capacities (Mijeski and Beck 2011; León 1994; Lucero 2005). Instead, CONAIE envisions recent Indigenous mobilizations, and their successes throughout the 1990s and 2000s, as building upon and continuing a legacy of Indigenous resistance and organizing efforts that can be traced back to the

mid-1400s when the Incan Empire first incorporated the territories of what would eventually become Ecuador.

Popular, community, syndicate, associate organizations, peasant and Indigenous movements do not appear overnight, nor are they the fruit of one or two people who meet and decide to create them. A movement does not appear because a group of leaders decides to call it by this or that name. A movement, a mass organization is the fruit of a long process of organization, of consciousness-raising, of decision making, of uniting many ideas. More than anything, it is the fruit of problems and contradictions that are produced between oppressors and the oppressed at a specific time and place (CONAIE 1989:147).

The image of Ecuador's Indigenous movements presented here by CONAIE resists the interpretive frameworks of researchers who attempt to explain these uprisings "as representing the birth of a new Indigenous ideology and organizational structure" (Becker 2008:3) and who, in doing so, risk inaccurately portraying Indigenous populations prior to the 1990s as largely passive, apolitical, and fragmented. Instead, CONAIE situates Indigenous movements within a broader socio-historical setting by pointing to four interrelated and constitutive elements that are central to any attempt to fully understand these movements.

The first, which I have already alluded to, recognizes that the recent success of Ecuador's Indigenous movements are "*the fruit of a long process of organization [and] consciousness-raising*". Their resistance strategies build upon the lessons learned from Ecuador's long history of Indigenous struggles, the decades of work to strengthen Indigenous organizations and revalue collective Indigenous identities, and the sense of legitimacy derived from these efforts. Second, Indigenous movements function as an expression of the "*problems and contradictions that are produced between oppressors and the oppressed*" as they are experienced in the minutia of everyday relations. In other words, Indigenous resistance works to specify the limitations of exclusionary regimes through their attempts to reconstruct dominant sociopolitical institutions.

Third, Indigenous movements and their demands are embedded within "*a specific time and place*". The forms and strategies of Indigenous resistance have varied significantly throughout its 500 year long lineage. This variation is due, on the one hand, to the shifting forms of exclusion and, on the other, to the shifting demands of Indigenous communities. The temporal and spatial specificity of these movements is neither meant to suggest that they are formed in isolation from other types of social resistance, such as class-based movements, nor that they cease to be relevant within other settings. The simple point is that any attempt to engage Indigenous movements must recognize the particularities within which they have been shaped.

Finally, the "*uniting of many ideas*" has been especially important to the recent rise and success of Indigenous movements. CONAIE solidified itself as a national coalition of numerous regional and local Indigenous nationalities through decades of work by Indigenous leaders to bring together the diverse demands of their constituent base under a common struggle for plurinationalism. Plurinationalism itself represents an innovative fusion of class and ethnicity that recognizes each as mutually constitutive of the dual character of Indigenous exclusion and exploitation. Some of CONAIE's most successful mobilizations have resulted when this fusion has been the most salient. Far from a specifically ethnic project, CONAIE has presented plurinationalism as benefitting all Ecuadorians by deepening processes of democratization, fostering social solidarity, and strengthening national sovereignty.

In what follows, I argue that these four elements are evident in Ecuador's history of Indigenous resistance. The powerful uprisings throughout the 1990s and 2000s were borne of a legacy of Indigenous organization and opposition to evolving systems of oppression. They draw from diverse strategies of contention shaped by and informed through the changing character of Indigenous grievances alongside successive shifts within the structure of political oppression.

However, it is the intellectual work of CONAIE, building on the lessons learned from the historical struggle of Indigenous peoples, which has resulted in the movement's unique capacity to intervene directly in reshaping state structures through a new political project of plurinationalism.

Early Indigenous Resistance in Ecuador (1400s-1920s)

Indigenous communities and organizations have resisted oppressive regimes, through a variety of strategies, beginning in the mid-1400s when the region that would become Ecuador was incorporated into the Incan Empire (Becker 2008; Corr and Powers 2012; Torre 2008). As regimes of oppression have transitioned from colonial to state structures of power, the character of Indigenous resistance has also transitioned from relatively isolated acts of sabotage and revolts toward increasingly coherent acts of collective contestation. Within the territory of Ecuador - which consists of three topographically distinct sub-regions: the Amazonian lowlands to the east; the mountainous Andean highlands in the middle; and the coastal lowlands to the west - there were a number of relatively isolated and decentralized Indigenous communities. Many of these communities resisted Incan expansion and conquest, some more successfully than others. As Torres (2008) notes, "Historical sources lack much in the way of detail, but chroniclers suggest that the Incas' military victories were hard fought, often requiring multiple expeditions and, in the case of lowland regions to the east and west, ending largely in failure" (10). Once under Incan authority, the most resistant groups were forced to relocate en masse in order to thwart continued mobilizations (Corr and Powers 2012:8; Torres 2008:10). For instance, the Salasacas, described as a fiercely proud and defiant Indigenous community located roughly

two hours south of Quito, are believed to consist in part of "several ethnic groups of the Inca Empire" who resisted Incan expansion and were thus forced to relocate to what is now the town of Salasaca (Corr and Powers 2012:8, 14). CONAIE similarly draws upon a history of anti-Incan resistance in their discussion on the history of Ecuadorean Indigenous movements:

It is worth noting that the Incan expansion into the territory of Ecuador produced a series of uprisings, such as the anti-Incan resistance supported by the Puruway and the war of more than 20 years in Cayambe, against which the Incas never could overcome and were forced to form diplomatic alliances (CONAIE 2009b:24).

Indigenous experiences with Incan conquest were far more brief and far less totalizing than those that followed under Spanish colonization. Under Spanish colonial rule, relations between conquistadors and Indigenous populations were characterized by the *encomienda* system. *Encomiendas* were "a grant of rights to collect tribute from a carefully defined indigenous population" that awarded the control and ownership of these Indigenous territories to conquistadors by the Spanish Crown (Torre 2008:11). *Encomenderos*, the recipients of *encomiendas*, were expected to "care for and convert 'his' Indians to Catholicism; in exchange they would provide him with agricultural services, cultivate his lands, and provide labor for textile mills, mines, and other projects (Torre 2008:11). *Encomenderos* legitimized their subjugation and exploitation of Indigenous peoples through a rhetoric of religious "salvation" that would later be translated in the 1800s to more secular terms as a "civilizing mission" (Mignolo 2000:281).

After 1830 with the independence of Ecuador the colonial *encomienda* system was reestablished under the *huasipungo* system that bound Indigenous communities to work as peasants for large landholders through Indian tribute obligations. In the 1850s the tribute system of the colonial era was abolished in an attempt to redefine Indigenous identity within a universal

notion of citizenship. Despite this attempt the Indigenous communities were still embedded within exploitative relations of the huasipungo system and were denied access to politics through literacy requirements. The state implemented an economic project in the 1870s that sought to assimilate Indigenous communities through a modernization development plan. This economic strategy "rested on three major premises: the moralizing nature of agriculture, the civilizing capacity of religion and, the concept that the Indians were perpetual children requiring the severe but paternalistic protection of the missionaries" (Muratorio 2008:92). Agriculture was believed to be a civilizing force for Indians as it rationalized and routinized their lives around labor, which facilitated their discipline and supervision by missionaries. In this way, missionaries imposed harsh punishments on Indians in order to assimilate them. The missionaries believed punishment was the only thing that would motivate the simple minded, lazy Indian. However, Muratorio's account suggests "the Napo Runa understood quite well the bureaucracy of the local white government, the psychology of the merchants, and the prime cause of their conflict with the missionaries" (2008:94). Indians were able to manipulate this system in order to further their own interests and survival. The capacity of the Napo Runa to resist oppression provides an example that contradicts the persistent image of Indigenous peoples as simple minded and easily manipulated.

In the 1890s Ecuador's Liberal party began to use an image of Indian oppression in order to challenge the political power of the church and conservatives (Guerrero 2008). With the abolition of the Indian tribute in 1857 the conservative government had attempted to definitionally assimilate Indigenous populations within the modern category of the citizen. The Indian tribute had been seen as being "incompatible with the notions of equality, citizenship and the notion of popular sovereignty, the three cornerstones of the new state" (Guerrero 2008:107).

In other words, conservatives believed that if the state ceased to treat Indigenous communities differently, they would cease to be different. Liberals argued that the political concealment of the Indian through this rhetoric of citizenship hid the persistent inequality and systemic oppression of Indigenous populations. Indians remained excluded from full citizenship and political participation through literacy requirements. Similarly, the labor laws of the *huasipungo* system that tied Indigenous communities to the land through debt obligations reproduced the subjugation of Indigenous communities. Ecuadorian liberals argued that it was this *huasipungo* system formulated by conservatives and the church that "produces a historic process of cultural, mental, and physical degeneration, which is the cause of the brutishness of the Indian population" (Guerrero 2008:109). The brutishness and passivity was thus an outcome of conservative and church elites and represented a threat to the social stability of the Ecuadorian state as a whole (Guerrero 2008:109). Ecuadorian liberals positioned themselves in opposition to conservatives as the protectors of Indigenous populations. By speaking 'on behalf' of Indigenous communities, the Liberal party inadvertently created new opportunities for Indigenous communities to begin to voice their own demands. Thus, Indigenous resistance during the 1800s was characterized by increasingly coherent collective actions "against taxes, labor drafts, land, and water rights" (Becker 2008:4).

Ecuador's liberal revolution lasted from 1895-1925, bolstered largely on the back of a cacao boom. That took off in 1880s and collapsed in 1920. (Torre 2008:100). According to Torre "the impact of the cacao boom was felt throughout Ecuador...[fostering] the visible presence of urban proletariats and the middle classes" (2008:155). As a result numerous popular movements and strikes arose following the collapse of the cacao industry when many found themselves unemployed. The General Strike in Guayaquil in November of 1922 exemplifies

this shift in toward popular power. CONAIE describes this strike as the first national workers strike and represented the "first efforts toward a workers' organization":

On the 14th at 12pm the general strike was declared; Guayaquil woke up paralyzed, by the workers on strike. For one day the workers assumed power and the control of the city to the point in which the governor had to ask for permission from the strike committee to travel in his vehicle.

However the bourgeois government had given orders to suppress the movement by blood and fire. Throughout the day the order was issued for the military contingents to go to Guayaquil, assassinating more than two thousand workers and throwing their corpses in the Guayas river (CONAIE 2009b:49).

The brutal suppression of the strikers by the state military signaled a crisis within liberal ideology and a rallying cry for further protests. From 1925-1948 Ecuador was "characterized by acute political instability" (Torre 2008:156). During this period socialism played an increasingly central role in both state projects and Indigenous communities (Becker 2008:12-13).

Populism, Socialism, and Indigenous Mobilization (1920s-1980s)

Indigenous mobilizations between the 1920s and 1980s can be characterized as articulating increasingly coherent political projects of resistance against the persistent exclusion and oppression of Indigenous populations under elitist state policies and capitalist development. In broad terms, Indigenous movements during these years move along a trajectory of three overlapping periods: 1) class-based *campesino* movements inspired by the rising socialist currents throughout Ecuador in the 1920s; 2) identity-based *indigenismo* movements during the 1960s and 1970s following the decline of class-based movements; and 3) movements of the 1990s that saw class and ethnicity as mutually constitutive elements of Indigenous struggles (Becker 2008:168).

With the collapse of Ecuador's cacao export economy, further complicated by inflation and rising consumer prices, the 1920s were marked by profound economic and political instability (Becker 2008:19; Torre 2008:156). During this period, urban leftists and rural Indigenous activists were organizing peasants and rural Indigenous communities into small unions and syndicates aimed at challenging the exploitative *huasipungo* system (Pallares 2002:12; Becker 2008:22). In 1926, one such Indigenous syndicate occupied the lands of a large *hacienda* in Cayambe, claiming rights to it as their own historical territory. According to Becker, "This was the first of a new type of organizational strategy that moved from defensive positions of protecting traditions to pushing more aggressive demands...Rather than the stereotype of peasants as isolated and conservative, these new syndicates began to engage in broad social issues" (Becker 2008:23). Though the Indigenous protesters were forced off the lands by the military, they succeeded in spurring further Indigenous mobilizations and inspired the formation of the Ecuadorian Socialist Party (PSE) that same year (Pallares 2002:12; Becker 2008:32).

Throughout the 1920s and 30s, rural Indigenous leaders, alongside the PSE and other urban leftists, sought to consolidate rural Indigenous organizations and the peasant labor force into a unified national social movement against the *huasipungo* system, "a system characterized by the economic, political, and social domination of indigenous peasants by the few landholders who owned most of the land" (Pallares 2002:12). Reflecting the *indigenista* image of the Indian, the oppression of Indigenous communities by the *huasipungo* system was criticized as weakening the productive potential of Indigenous peasants and, consequently, presented a barrier to modernization and capitalist development in Ecuador. Thus, efforts by leftists and Indigenous activists to build a united movement were seen as necessary in order to accelerate the

proletarianization of Indigenous peasants, which in turn could facilitate an agrarian revolution (Pallares 2002:13; Becker 2008:78).

The formation of the Ecuadorian Indian Federation (Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios, FEI) in 1944 built upon these earlier activities and represents Ecuador's first successful attempt to construct a national Indigenous movement. While many authors (Pallares 2002; Mijeski and Beck 2011; Van Cott 2005; Gerlach 2003; Sawyer 2004; Zamosc 1994) describe the FEI as an organization founded upon and led by white urban leftists and their interests, Becker (2008) argues that "the FEI was the first successful attempt in Ecuador to establish a national federation for and by Indigenous peoples" (78). In his analysis, collaboration between Indigenous movements and socialist political parties mutually shaped and strengthened one another. Thus, when Indigenous leaders and leftists gathered in 1944, "rather than letting [leftist] outsiders organize them, Indigenous peoples overtook these efforts and pressed their own agenda" as evidenced in their use of the ethnically charged term "indio" over the neutral "campesino" (Becker 2008:83, 87). For Becker, this distinction is important to understanding the later formation of CONAIE in 1986 and the mass uprisings that followed in the 1990s. In recognizing the formative role leftists played in the organization of Indigenous movements, we can see the movements' successes in the 1990s and 2000s as a continuation of earlier struggles that built upon the lessons learned from their efforts.

Indigenous activism in rural areas increased markedly following the formation of the FEI in 1944 (Becker 2008:95). Despite recognizing the unique ethnic character of Indigenous struggles, the FEI failed to build connections with the struggles of lowland Indigenous communities in the *oriente* and coastal regions. Instead, the FEI remained focused primarily on class-based demands in the *sierra*. Throughout the 1940s and 50s, the FEI fought to increase

Indigenous land rights, to improve the wages and working conditions of peasants, and for agrarian reform and the end of the *huasipungo* system (Pallares 2002:13; Beck 2011:11; Becker 2008:104). In 1961, the FEI mobilized a peaceful protest of twelve thousand Indians and peasants in Quito. "The FEI demanded an increase in wages, elimination of feudal work demands, land for huasipungueros [i.e., Indigenous peasants who worked on *huasipungos*], irrigation, schools, and universal suffrage" (Becker 2008:131). However, as it became clear that the government was unwilling or unable to meet their demands, unrest spread across Indigenous populations. The next two years were marked by "the dramatic increases in Indigenous activism" that ultimately led to a military coup in 1963 and the swift suppression of Indigenous and leftist protests. The military saw its actions as being "necessary to stop the terrorists and subversive wave that today shakes the country" (Becker 2008:136).

In 1964 and 1973, agrarian reform laws were enacted under military rule. The military's motivations for land reform mirrored the motivations of mid-nineteenth century conservatives to abolish the Indian tribute in 1857: if Indigenous populations ceased to be treated differently, they would cease to be different. This time, instead of using a discourse of citizenship, the military dictatorship attempted to redefine Indigenous populations as peasants. Agrarian reforms, through renewed modernization projects and rural development, would dissolve Indigenous ethnic identities into a single national culture (Becker 2008:142; Mijeski and Beck 2011:12). General Guillermo Rodríguez Lara, the military dictator from 1972 to 1976, expressed this sentiment clearly, "There is no more Indian problem. We all become white when we accept the goals of the national culture" (Whitten 1976:268). In some sense, the agrarian reform laws and the dissolution of the *huasipungo* system in 1964 represented a victory for the FEI and Indigenous activism. However, in many ways, agrarian reform remained limited. The military's land reform

laws, concerned primarily with modernization projects to increase the productivity of extractivist and agricultural sectors, failed to address persistent socioeconomic inequalities in rural Ecuador and "permitted capitalist penetration of agriculture" (Rodas Morales 1987:37). As a result, rural land ownership remained centralized under the control of large estate holders. "Statistically, the reform resulted in little positive gain for Indigenous workers. In 1974, 50.2 percent of tillable land (and largely the best land) remained in the hands of estates larger than one hundred hectares. From 1957 to 1974, the average landholding size for a peasant fell from 1.71 to 1.5 hectares"(Becker 2008:143). Alongside a number of related factors, the Agrarian Reform Laws of 1964 and 1973 marked the decline of the FEI's political influence. In its place, a number of local and regional Indigenous organizations emerged in the 1970s. These organizations and their demands increasingly brought Indigenous identity to the fore (Pallares 2002:16; Becker 2008:144; Zamosc 1994:47).

The FEI had been primarily organized around demands for land reforms. With the passage of agrarian reforms, the military dictatorship stole the wind from the FEI as it struggled to move beyond land issues. As Becker suggests, "The FEI did not adapt well to a new political context and changing agrarian order" (2008:146). The abolition of the *huasipungo* system freed Indian peasants of the debt obligations which had legally bound them to the lands of the *hacienda*. As a result, many Indigenous communities experienced an increase in rural-urban migration. Indians left the countryside, weakening existing Indigenous organizations and eroding the FEI's peasant base (Corr and Powers 2012:203). This erosion of support was exacerbated by rising anti-communist sentiments that viewed the FEI's socialist ties with suspicion and condemned leftist protests.

Post-agrarian reform rural development projects simultaneously contributed to the FEI's decline while promoting the emergence of local *indigenismo* organizations throughout both the *sierra* and the *oriente*. These new Indigenous movements viewed "the racial domination of whites and mestizos over Indians as the main impediment to Indians' socioeconomic advancement" arguing "that Indian, not peasant identity, was foremost in the definition, specification, and defense of indigenous people's interests" (Pallares 2002:21, 16). Rural development opened new sources of economic, ideological, and organizational support for Indigenous movements (Pallares 2002:22; Becker 2008:156,159). Indigenous organizations had previously relied upon the FEI and urban leftists for this support. In the 1960s and 1970s, Indians, frustrated by the limitations of class demands and a peasant identity, increasingly turned instead to progressive factions of the Catholic church for support. Inspired by liberation theology, these factions aligned with the interests of poor Indigenous communities (Guerrero Cezar and Ospina Peralta 2003:26-27; Novo 2008:203). The formation of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana, CONFENIAE) in the *oriente* in 1980 and the Confederation of Quichua People of Ecuador (Ecuador Runaunapac Richarimui, Ecuarunari) in the *sierra* in 1972 were two of the strongest Indigenous movements that resulted from collaborations between Indigenous organizations and progressive Catholic missionaries. These organizations functioned to unite a number of smaller Indigenous movements into regional confederations.

Missionaries were concerned that, in the wake of agrarian reforms and high rates of urban migration, Indigenous communities had been left fragmented and weak in the face of state-led economic development and capitalist expansion. They sought to strengthen Indigenous

organizations in order to help them in their struggles over land rights and land use. Missionaries saw efforts to promote economic self-sufficiency through the modernization of agricultural production as similarly important in fostering strong Indigenous organizations (Novo 2008:203; Becker 2008:156,160; Erazo 2007:189). While these movements were still motivated by struggles over land, as Ecuarunari suggests, "we saw that the struggle was not only for land, but also for education, cultural identity, and dignity" (1998:354). With the help of progressive church activists, these movements organized around grassroots efforts, building on existing local communities to create unified regional Indigenous confederations (Pallares 170;Erazo 189). Both lowland organizations in the *oriente* and those in the highlands of the *sierra* shared three general goals: 1) to reclaim and revalue Indigenous identities through bilingual education; 2) to demand the respect and recognition of Indigenous cultural difference; and 3) to bring an end to 500 years of oppression, exploitation, and discrimination (Pallares 2002:169; Erazo 2008:189).

Despite these similarities, persistent ideological conflicts and competition both within and between lowland and highland Indigenous organizations blocked early attempts in the 1970s and 1980s to unite Indigenous organizations at the national level. Lowland organizations "were much more clearly informed by ethnic affiliations [than their highland counterparts], as Quichuas, Huaoranis, and Shuaras had historically maintained their originary identity and sustained interethnic rivalries" (Pallares 2002:170). Lowland Indigenous territories had remained largely untouched by colonial and state authorities until the agrarian legislation in the 1960s. Lowland Indigenous communities never experienced anything like the attempts in the highlands to control and assimilate Indigenous populations, such as the *huasipungo* system. Similarly, lowland activists weren't influenced by leftists organizations and never identified as peasants (Mijeski and Beck 2011:14).

As a result, lowland communities maintained strong Indigenous identities. While in many ways, this facilitated organizational strength among lowland movements, at times it fueled interethnic conflicts and fragmentation (Sawyer 2004:60). In addition, lowland struggles focused on the protection of ancestral territories rather than on gaining access to land rights as in the highlands (Pallares 2002:171). In the highlands, there were ongoing debates among movements on whether they should identify themselves primarily as peasants or as Indians. These internal peasant/Indian debates were especially evident in the early years of Ecuarrunari (Becker 2008:160; Lucero 2008:99). On the one hand, proponents of maintaining a classist peasant orientation worried that a focus on ethnic difference would isolate the movement from other social movements and distract from the realities of their material oppression. On the other hand, those favored bringing ethnic difference to the fore of Ecuarrunari argued that a classist identity limited the movement's demands and hid the ethnic character of their oppression as Indians (Pallares 2002:162). However, after several years of talks, CONFENIAE and Ecuarrunari were able to reconcile these ideological differences, recognizing the "double dimension" of their struggle as both "members of a class and as part of different Indigenous nationalities" (Pallares 2002:174; CONAIE 1989:261). With this, Ecuarrunari and CONFENIAE began a process of collaboration between lowland and highland movements that ultimately led to the formation of Ecuador's first national pan-Indigenous movement CONAIE in 1986 (CONAIE 1989:269).

PART THREE

SITUATING PLURINATIONALISM: ARTICULATING A NEW VISION OF THE SOCIAL

The efforts between Ecuarrunari and CONFENIAE to organize at the national level were in large part motivated by concerns that outsider influences had created conflicts and divisions among Indigenous organizations, weakening the once strong Indigenous movements. As they noted, "If we do not reinforce our unity, there is a danger that various maneuvers would divide us and we would lose our presence" (Ecuarrunari-CONAIE 1989:41). CONAIE's demands for plurinationalism, which built upon the recognition of the dual character of Indigenous exclusion as both peasants and Indians, united the Indigenous movement as a prominent political actor throughout much of the 1990s. However, by the late 1990s, the movement had been weakened for a number of reasons, including internal conflicts - especially between lowland and highland organizations, allegations of corruption and cooptation, an increasingly vanguardist attitude among Indigenous leaders, and a sense that despite all their efforts Indigenous activism had done little to effect meaningful change within the political structures of Ecuador. In what follows, I trace the rise, decline, and possible signs of resurgence of CONAIE from the late 1980s to the present.

The Rise of the Ecuadorian Indigenous Movement and CONAIE (1986-1995)

In 1986, "five hundred delegates representing nine Indigenous nationalities and twenty-seven organizations" met just south of Quito to form CONAIE, uniting "all Indigenous peoples

into one large pan-Indian movement" (Becker 2008:169). The success of CONAIE rested on the "adoption of a double-dimension platform that embraced ethnic and class struggles simultaneously" (Pallares 2002:174). CONAIE rearticulated the ethnic and class demands of earlier Indigenous movements in the construction of a new political identity that is at the same time both classist and Indigenous. As Pallares suggests, "material concerns traditionally associated with class consciousness were rearticulated: land concerns were intertwined with notions of territory and political autonomy, and capitalism was linked with assimilation and ethnocide" (2002:182). The struggle of the Indigenous peasant class against capital oppression was redefined in the 1990s as a struggle of ethnic nationalities against an ethnocentric state. As Lucero explains, "indigenous activists in Ecuador have taken a term from the lexicon of Marxist and European thought and 'Indianized' it" (2002:200). By fusing together ethnic and class concerns, CONAIE succeeded in capturing the mobilizing power of ethnicity sustained through the structural challenges of class. As Becker argues, "CONAIE was most successful when it embraced rather than denied the class nature of Indigenous oppression" (2008:170).

In June 1990, CONAIE organized a powerful uprising that shocked the nation and mobilized thousands of protestors including many from non-Indigenous movements. In the capital, protestors took to the streets and took control of radios to press their demands on President Rodrigo Borja. In the countryside, protestors barricaded highways with trees and boulders in order to cut off food supplies to the cities. More militant activists occupied *haciendas* and redistributed supplies. (Becker 2011:31-33; Guerrero 2008:103). According to an account by Becker, "Starting in the central and northern highlands, [the uprising] spread across the country as a decentralized phenomenon with local activists taking individual initiatives to press their

demands" (2008:176). For more than a week, protestors succeeded in effectively shutting down the entire country.

Authors point to a number of different factors to explain what sparked the dramatic protests in 1990, including: neoliberal austerity policies (Hey and Klak 1999); high inflation and low wages (León 1994; Zamosc 1994); land disputes (Becker 2011; Sawyer 2004; Gerlach 2003); demands to recognize Ecuador as a plurinational country (Pallares 2002; Becker 2008; Yashar 2005), among others. While each of these played a part, I believe the 1990 uprising is best understood as a combination of growing popular frustrations with limited agrarian reforms and a calculated effort by CONAIE's leadership to force its demands on the government. On the one hand, as Meisch suggests, "the demand for genuine land reform...is the glue that binds the indigenous movement. Many *indígenas* do not have a clue, and could care less, about the rest of CONAIE's agenda" (2003:58). The agrarian reform programs of the 1960s and 1970s had done little for Indigenous communities and continued to favor large landholders (Becker 2011:31). During the 1980s, more than 200 land disputes had been left unresolved for years (Dubly and Granada 1991). In May 1990, Indigenous activists in both Quito and Otavalo had already begun to protest, demanding the resolution of land disputes (Becker 2008:177; Pallares 2002:210). On the other hand, CONAIE's leaders had decided in April 1990 to force their demands on the government through a nationwide uprising. CONAIE saw an opportunity to present its agenda to the national stage as the unified front of the Indigenous movement (Yashar 2005:145). CONAIE presented these demands to the government in its "sixteen points" (León 1994:19):

CONAIE's Sixteen Points

1. *A public declaration that Ecuador is a plurinational country (to be ratified by the constitution).*
2. *The government must grant lands and titles to land to the nationalities.*

3. *Solutions to water and irrigation needs.*
4. *Absolution of indigenous debts to FODERUMA and the National Development Bank.*
5. *Freezing of consumer prices.*
6. *Conclusion of priority projects in Indian communities.*
7. *Nonpayment of rural land taxes.*
8. *Expulsion of the Summer Institute of Linguistics.*
9. *Free commercial and handicraft activity.*
10. *CONAIE protection of archaeological sites.*
11. *Officialization of Indian medicine.*
12. *Cancellation of government decree that created parallel land-reform granting bodies.*
13. *The government should immediately grant funds to the nationalities.*
14. *The government should grant funds for bilingual education.*
15. *Respect for the rights of children.*
16. *The fixing of fair prices for products.*

Blockades and continued protest ultimately forced President Borja to agree to meet directly with Indigenous leaders in order to negotiate their demands - "an unprecedented event" in Ecuadorian national politics (Van Cott 2005:111). However, after just a few weeks CONAIE suspended their negotiations with the state as it became clear that the government was unwilling to make serious concessions on many of the movement's demands, especially their more revolutionary demands for self-determination and autonomy (Pallares 2002:211;Becker 2011:32). The CONAIE-led 1990 uprising, if measured in relation to its capacity to affect significant changes in state and economic policy, was largely unsuccessful. As Becker suggests, "When the dust cleared observers questioned what concrete objectives the 1990 uprising had achieved. Land conflicts remained intense even to the point of death squads executing Indigenous leaders...Two years later, not one of the land conflicts that CONAIE had presented to the government had been resolved" (Becker 2011:34). However, the dramatic mobilization of Indigenous protestors in the summer of 1990 was successful in two important respects. *First*, it marked a "seismic shift" in Ecuador's "national imaginary" and, *second*, it presented CONAIE's vision for a plurinational state as the central issue that would form the platform of the movement's future activities (Becker 2011:34; Yashar 2005:146).

First, the CONAIE-led uprising challenged the national imaginary of the 'simple savage' that portrayed Indigenous peoples as passive, unintelligent, and politically unmotivated. Internally, Indigenous communities began to see themselves as a capable and powerful force. In an interview, Yashar quotes one Indian who participated in the 1990 uprising as saying:

The 1990 uprising catalyzed a process of consciousness raising. Before 1990, civil society almost did not recognize that there were Indians. There was racism and segregation and society did not pay attention to that which was indigenous. Even with our own communities, some people did not want to be Indians and they began to lose touch with their community. The 1990 uprising, however, increased our sensitivity to these issues. It affected government circles and civil society (Yashar 2005:146).

The 1990 uprising shocked the dominant white-mestizo population. For many, Indians no longer existed. They existed merely as the cultural artifacts of a bygone era, a legacy of national history. However, CONAIE successfully brought the agrarian question and the struggles of Indians to the fore of national politics.

Second, while CONAIE's sixteen points focused simultaneously on cultural, economic, and political demand, of these demands, their struggle for *plurinationalism* increasingly took center stage, forming the lynchpin around which the movement's activities and demands revolved. Through the construction of a plurinational state, their other demands could be realized, such as meaningful land reform, increased direct political participation and local sovereignty, bilingual education, and economic redistribution to Indigenous communities. (Walsh 2009:70; Becker 2008:177). CONAIE's plurinational project built upon the demands of the 1980s for 'pluriculturalism'. These culturalist demands called for the recognition and respect of Indigenous cultural differences, mostly through bilingual education programs. As early as 1988, CONAIE had begun to add structural demands to their earlier culturalist projects by pressing the state for increased autonomy and self-determination. As Becker suggests:

CONAIE declared that the Republic of Ecuador was a plurinational state, and argued that the government must recognize Indigenous territoriality, organization, education, culture, medicine, and judicial systems...They came to see plurinationalism as a 'transversal axis' that should run throughout the entire organization of state structures, including forms of representation and participation that would lead to a 'revolution in knowledge' (Becker 2011:14-15).

Plurinationalism rejects the mono-national assumptions of the modern nation-state and calls for a redefinition of the state and society such that it recognizes and reflects the cultural and epistemic values of Indigenous peoples. According to CONAIE:

In the Ecuadorian territory, there existed and still exist a diversity of nations and original pueblos who have managed to survive despite the incredible violence of conquest and colonization and the present day neocolonial effects of authoritarian development...Despite the historical existence of our pueblos as original nations, the Modern State was constituted through the civil uniformity particular to the Western model. That is to say, it thought that its inhabitants were from only one culture, that they all had only one form of life, that they all talked the same language and believed in the same gods..the Modern State of America considered that there was only one nation, without differences, constituted by only one white mestizo culture (CONAIE 2011:11-12).

For CONAIE, the nation-state exists as a legacy of colonization and as such strives to negate and assimilate 'a diversity of nations and original *pueblos*' and their cultural and epistemic differences. The plurinational state, instead, begins with the recognition and celebration of this diversity.

The plurinational state recognizes the coexistence of various nations within one state, governed by the same constitution, that share between them and for themselves a life in common. They pursue common ends, as pueblos and nations, to promote the political unity and through intercultural relations that strengthen their differences (CONAIE 2011:13).

Plurinationalism articulates a re-imagination of national unity, an image of '*unity through diversity*', where difference becomes the constitutive, unifying element. The plurinational project attempts "*more than anything to decolonize the institutional structure of the state*" (CONAIE 2011:13). Rather than envisioning national unity as a single, monolithic identity, plurinationalism envisions a national unity constituted through a shared collective project of

sumak kawsay, an Indigenous principle of living well based centrally around ideals of cooperation, self-determination, and self-definition. Thus, *sumak kawsay* suggests a shared project of harmonious coexistence among diverse epistemic communities, one that strives toward the well-being of all regions, communities, and peoples within it. *Sumak kawsay*, to live well, is achieved processually by introducing new avenues for direct popular participation in national policy and through increases in territorial autonomy and communal sovereignty concerning local affairs. As Walsh suggests:

In the America of the South, State formation has, since its beginnings, found its ground in an alleged homogeneity and unity that is intimately tied to the dominant economic, political, social and cultural order and the interests of capital. As such, the present efforts in countries like Bolivia and Ecuador to transform State, shed it of its colonial, neoliberal and imperial weight, and re-found it from below - from the diversity of peoples, cultures, and historical practices - are transcendental (Walsh 2009:65).

Plurinationalism, as a project of state re-founding 'from below', takes cultural diversity and epistemic difference as central in promoting the well-being of each constituent group. Only in this way can a successful project of national unity emerge. As we have seen, CONAIE persistently draws upon their position, that the communal territorial sovereignty of Indigenous communities must be secured in order to establish an autonomous communal space from which Indigenous ways of knowing and living can be reproduced and strengthened, when they present their demands for a plurinational state. For this reason, CONAIE's plurinational project has been, and remains, inextricably tied to issues of agrarian reform and the resolution of disputes over land rights. Just two years later in 1992, the powerfully dramatic *Caminata* uprising, translated literally as a long walk or hike, once again challenged the state over the question of agrarian reform.

In 1992, CONAIE helped organize thousands of Indigenous protestors in a symbolic march from the jungles of the Amazon to the nation's capital in an effort to pressure the state on longstanding and yet-unresolved land disputes. The march was motivated by frustrations over the government's persistent inaction on the land disputes CONAIE had presented in the wake of the 1990 uprising. One of these demands, the *Acuerdo Territorial* (Territorial Agreement), had called for the return of ancestral territories to the ownership and control of Indigenous communities in the Amazon and for constitutional reform declaring Ecuador a plurinational state. Written up by the Organization of Indigenous Peoples of Pastaza (Organización de Pueblos Indígenas de Pastaza, OPIP), a local-level federation of Amazonian Indigenous communities within the province of Pastaza and a member affiliate of CONAIE, the *Acuerdo Territorial* requested the communal titling of over 2 million hectares of land and the "political, cultural, and economic control [of Indigenous communities] over them" (Sawyer 2004:46). OPIP argued that these lands were the rightful historical territories of Indigenous nationalities, which provided a communal "ancestral space" where Indigenous cultures and knowledges are developed, nurtured, and reproduced (Sawyer 2004:48; Becker 2011:34). Through the *Acuerdo Territorial*, OPIP and CONAIE pressured the government for the local autonomy and self-determination of Indigenous communities and for direct participation in decision making processes that impacted their territories. For them, self-determination was necessary in order to protect Indigenous communities from state and corporate interests to exploit their territories of natural resources. Autonomy would allow Indigenous communities to articulate their own worldviews and ways of living through a negotiation of traditional techniques and modern technologies (Becker 2011:34).

President Borja responded to Indigenous demands for sovereignty with open hostility. He accused the movement of being infiltrated and co-opted by Indian separationists and attempting

to establish a parallel state that threatened national unity. While the government had originally agreed to concessions over land rights, two years later OPIP's proposals remained unresolved. In April of 1992, CONAIE and OPIP organized the *Caminata*, or march, from the Amazonian city of Puyo to the nation's capital of Quito, a distance of 240 kilometers. Two thousand Indians left Puyo on a thirteen day long trek to the capital city. Along their march, Indigenous communities and sympathetic mestizos provided support and supplies. Many highland Indians joined in the *Caminata* as the marchers traveled through Indigenous communities along the countryside, including their "mountain brothers" the Salasacas. By the time the marchers entered Quito's city limits, "their numbers had grown to as many as ten thousand" (Becker 2011:35). Borja again agreed to meet face to face with Indigenous leaders, listening to their demands for three hours before agreeing to their demands for control over their territories. However, in the end "the Borja administration only partially conceded to indigenous demands, granting Indians only 55 percent of the ancestral territory they claimed" (Sawyer 2004:50-51). More importantly, the president continued to reject the movement's calls for plurinationalism and autonomy. While OPIP gained title to over one million hectares of land, the state maintained control and authority over subsoil rights in the exploration and exploitation of natural resources - particularly those regarding access to vast petroleum reserves beneath these territories (Pallares 2002:211; Becker 2011:37; Sawyer 2004:50-55). Despite its measured successes, the *caminata* represented "the culmination of highly coordinated activity between OPIP indigenous leaders, advisors, and community members, together with support from CONAIE, CONFENIAE, and several indigenous rights and environmental organizations" and became a prominent symbol of the mobilizing capacity and ideological conviction of the nation's Indigenous movement (Sawyer 2004:43).

In 1994, CONAIE again led Indigenous communities in an uprising against the state. The "*Movilización por la Vida*" (Mobilization for Life) targeted a recently proposed agrarian development law set forth by President Sixto Durán Ballén (1992-1996) that would effectively undo the last thirty years of agrarian reform legislation (Becker 2011:36). The proposal, which was voted into law by a congressional assembly of only seventeen members in the morning hours of June 3, sought to privatize land and water rights, allowed for the sale of communally held territories, favored large export-oriented agribusiness, and guaranteed the state's right to secure lands that were deemed 'unproductive' (Sawyer 2004:152-153; Yashar 2005:148; Van Cott 2005:112). For the president, these neoliberal reforms were necessary in order to alleviate that nation's mounting debt crisis - a legacy of the "lost decade" of economic turmoil throughout Latin America in the 1980s, which for Ecuador had been exacerbated in the 1990s by falling international prices of crude oil. By 1993, Ecuador faced a fiscal deficit of \$600 billion and, by 1994, the nation's foreign debt obligations had reached \$12 billion (Sawyer 2004:109, 114). Neoliberal adjustment policies were seen as the only path for the government to secure future loans from the IMF and World Bank and avoid defaulting on foreign debt obligations. Sawyer quotes the Vice President of CONAIE as saying "The bottom line is this: without a new agrarian law that appeases the World Bank and the InterAmerican [Development] Bank, there will be no more international credit. Those conquistadores had to pass that law to survive" (Sawyer 2004:156).

In response to the passage of the Agrarian Development Law, CONAIE called an assembly of Indigenous leaders to decide how the movement should respond. After two days of deliberations, CONAIE announced their plans to lead a nationwide uprising (Sawyer 2004:159). Over 3,500 Indigenous and peasant organizations participated in the Mobilization for Life

protests, which lasted for ten days while CONAIE negotiated their demands directly with President Ballén. Much like the uprising in 1990, activists throughout the countryside set up strategic roadblocks in order to halt the flow of traffic and commercial products, bringing the nation's economy to a standstill and starving Quito and other major cities of necessary supplies. In the cities, Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists collaborated in organizing mass street protests and occupied state buildings and banks (Van Cott 2005:112; Sawyer 2004:161).

CONAIE argued that the new law represented an attack on peasant and Indigenous communities alike. In the words of CONAIE's president, Louis Macas, "The law favors the large landowners who will begin to buy the land of poor communities so as to extend their properties...It will destroy community and cooperative systems" (Macas 1994). Indigenous leaders called for the immediate repeal of the 1994 agrarian law and once again presented the government with a list of demands that covered a number of economic, cultural, and political issues, including loan forgiveness, bilingual education, and the redistribution of oil revenues. However, CONAIE's focus remained centered around agrarian reforms and the plurinational project. Ultimately, "nationwide protests forced the government to retrace its steps. In response, the government formed a commission with 50 percent participation by indigenous leaders to reform the Agrarian Development Law. CONAIE negotiated [demands]...designed to support the reproduction and integrity of the indigenous communities" (Yashar 2005:148-149). The successes of the 1994 protests and negotiations fostered an increasingly favorable public image of CONAIE as the legitimate and powerful front of Indigenous demands. CONAIE was seen as a voice of reason in the face of an exclusionary state government, riddled by corruption and elitism, and its attempts at neoliberal reforms (Van Cott 2005:112). Yet, once again, the long-term and material consequences of the CONAIE-led uprising remained tempered. Sawyer points out that "at critical

junctures - articles pertaining to communal holdings, expropriation, water rights - CONAIE only succeeded in softening the wording...The overall thrust of the law - securing private property and facilitating further land acquisition in order to produce for export - had not substantially changed" (Sawyer 2004:208). Despite the mixed results of 1994, CONAIE had managed to establish itself as a central figure in Ecuadorean civil society and as a powerful force capable of shaping national politics. Their continued demands for plurinationalism had directly challenged the neoliberal aspirations of the new agrarian law.

It was during the 1994 protests that CONAIE began explicitly positioning plurinationalism as anti-neoliberal and representing an alternative to capitalism. As CONAIE suggests, "*In 1994 the struggle against neoliberalism begins. With the 'Mobilization for Life' we managed to stop the implementation of a Law of agrarian counter-reformation and the privatization of water*" (CONAIE 2007:7). The problem with neoliberal reforms, which commodify lands and natural resources through privatization, wasn't simply that they were incompatible with Indigenous worldviews. For CONAIE, neoliberalism represented a continuation of a 500 year long process of domination and humiliation at the hands of political and economic elites.

The project of Plurinationality was cast as an alternative to capitalism in 1994... In the long neoliberal night, the State was reduced to functions of control and social coercion; the economy and politics were in the hands of private capital, especially large international capital; the national oligarchic sectors of commercial and financial capital enriched themselves by subordinating to powerful United States and European transnationals who made deals appropriating [Ecuador's] natural resources (CONAIE 2011:7-8).

Neoliberalism directly threatened the lives and dignity of all peasant and rural communities and weakened the nation as a whole. Protestors argued that the new agrarian law would directly impact the majority of Indigenous and peasant communities, a group that

constituted over 50 percent of the nation's total population, in adverse ways. Additionally, 75 percent of all food consumed in Ecuador was produced by Indians and peasants. Sawyer points out that, "As CONAIE repeatedly noted...undermining small producers would weaken the country's food security and increase its dependency on the importation of basic foodstuffs, devastate subsistence agriculture, erode the agricultural gene pool, tighten the belt of misery in the rural sector, cause the reversion of Indians to serf labor, heighten violence in the countryside, and increase migration to urban centers" (Sawyer 2004:153-154). For Indigenous leaders, plurinationalism represented an alternative vision of social organization, in opposition to the Eurocentric model of capitalism with its colonial and neocolonial legacies, an alternative capable of strengthening national unity and empowering all Ecuadorians. However, this could only be made possible through the reciprocal recognition of historical differences and the direct participation of all in defining and transforming the Ecuadorian polity and its social, political, and economic institutions.

In an informational pamphlet on the plurinational project, CONAIE systematically lays out their vision for plurinationality as a model for national unity - one that is based on, and established through, cultural epistemic difference:

Plurinationality begins with the real and undeniable diversity of the existence of the Indigenous Nationalities and Pueblos in Ecuador as economic, political, spiritual, and linguistic entities, historically defined and differentiated.

The oppression and exclusion of Indigenous Nationalities and Pueblos has impeded the consolidation of the current Ecuadorian Nation-State. For this reason, the new State has to start from the recognition of diversity as the basis of its unity and integration.

Plurinationality advocates equity, justice, individual and collective liberty, respect, reciprocity, solidarity and the union of all Ecuadorians, based on the judicial, political, and cultural recognition of all Indigenous Nationalities and Pueblos that make up Ecuador. It provides these Nationalities the Right to their territorial and communal self-governance, that is to say, the right to

determine their own economic, social, cultural, scientific, and technological development in order to guarantee the strengthening of their cultural and political identity and, through this, the integral development of the country.

In this sense plurinationality is a model of political, economic and socio-cultural organization and a system of governance that looks for justice, liberty, and the equitable development of Ecuadorian society as a whole and of all its regions and cultures (CONAIE 2007c:8).

Plurinationality would provide the political space to begin a meaningful national dialogue on the agrarian question. CONAIE argued that earlier attempts at reform had largely failed to address the "the long-standing inequalities that had permeated Ecuador's agrarian reality since the Spanish invasion" because legislation concerning land rights had been written by and for the interests of political and economic national elites, who in turn favored the interests of international actors (Sawyer 2004:153). In order to protect the national interests of the people, CONAIE pointed out that it was necessary to demand the right for the direct political participation of popular sectors to define and decide on issues and policies that impact their daily lives. However, such a process must not seek to assimilate all Ecuadorians into a single, unified national identity.

In the 1994 Mobilization for Life uprising, CONAIE successfully strengthened alliances with a number of non-Indigenous popular organizations in opposition to the Agrarian Development Law. Together, they demanded a public forum in which all sectors of Ecuador could voice their concerns in a substantive nationwide conversation on the issue of land rights. As Sawyer notes, "Turning state rhetoric on its head, CONAIE deployed a language of citizenry, democracy, justice, and sovereignty to rally popular support for its cause and induce critical reflection on who governed and toward what ends. In particular, Indians rekindled their struggle to redefine the Ecuadorian polity such that Ecuador would be a plurinational state" (Sawyer 2004:151). The neoliberal structural adjustment policies, which dictates compliance with the

norms of international governance regimes through conditional lending agreements, threatened to further erode the capacity for popular participation in decision making processes. Indians worked closely alongside peasant, church, labor, and student activists to stop the new law and formulate an alternative proposal that would be more favorable to the interests of Indigenous communities and small landowners. Through their concerted efforts, they forced face-to-face negotiations between CONAIE and the president, followed by concessions granting the participation of Indigenous leaders in reforms to the new agrarian law. Together, the successes of 1994 marked an initial step toward the realization of a plurinational re-founding of the state, one based on Indigenous epistemologies and intercultural principles of direct participation.

In an effort to translate their success in the streets to success in shaping state policy, CONAIE decided to enter into party politics in 1996, with the formation of the political party Pachakutik. As Becker summarizes, "Despite their significant gains in raising the public profile of their concerns...activists had made very little headway in concretely altering government policies. To achieve that goal, some leaders argued that Indigenous organizations needed to move beyond social movement strategies and enter the messy world of electoral politics" (Becker 2011:37).

Pachakutik and Party Politics (1996-2000)

Internally, CONAIE's constituents were divided on the issue of whether or not to move into the realm of electoral party politics. In 1990, CONAIE refused to participate in elections, mandatory in Ecuador, and, in 1992, organized a boycott of the presidential elections. Most resistance to idea came from highland Indigenous activists, who preferred strategies that targeted

civil society over those aimed at political reform. Opponents argued that electoral strategies were incompatible with the principles and values of Indigenous peoples. They feared that the endemic corruption and elitism, which had plagued Ecuadorian politics, threatened to co-opt and weaken the movement. Proponents, on the other hand, tended to consist of lowland Indigenous activists from the Amazon. They felt that the formation of a political party represented a unique opportunity to transform the structure of power from within and to ensure changes in state policy would be enforced. They argued that, because Ecuador's political parties did not represent the interests or demands of Indians, the only way to make use of these electoral avenues for change was through the formation of a new political party. In 1995, CONAIE ultimately chose to adopt a two-pronged strategy of resistance as a compromise. Pachakutik would pursue electoral strategies as an autonomous political party, while CONAIE would continue its mobilization strategies through direct action and street protests. To this end, Pachakutik presented itself as a new progressive option in Ecuador's party politics that represented the interests of Indigenous and non-Indigenous citizens alike (see Becker 2011; Mijeski and Beck 2011; Van Cott 2005).

Despite having been formed just a few months earlier, Pachakutik was able to successfully establish itself as a legitimate contender in the 1996 elections. The party's presidential candidate placed a close third with seventeen percent of all votes. Similarly, Pachakutik won eight congressional seats, making it the "fourth largest bloc in Congress" (Mijeski and Beck 2011:48). As Becker points out, "Most significantly, longtime CONAIE leader Luis Macas won a congressional post as a national deputy, becoming the first Indigenous person elected to a nationwide office in Ecuador" (2011:52). Six months later, Congress impeached president elect Abdalá Bucaram for mental incompetence amidst widespread charges of corruption and public outcries opposing his implementation of a number of neoliberal

austerity policies. Pachakutik and CONAIE were central figures among the mounting popular and political dissent which culminated in Bucaram's removal from office.

Pachakutik and CONAIE used this momentum of support in the wake of Bucaram's ouster to call for a constituent assembly to rewrite the nation's constitution. Through their two-pronged strategy, Indigenous activists and political leaders succeeded in the ratification of a new constitution in 1998. CONAIE organized in the streets, demanding the constitutional reform to recognize Ecuador to be a plurinational state. According to Becker, "Their demand eventually gained wide popular support. In the lead-up to the assembly, CONAIE worked closely with other social movements to organize a people's assembly to press for changes they wished to see incorporated into a new constitution. This allowed Indigenous activists to bring a coherent proposal and organized presence to the assembly" (2011:57). Pachakutik emerged as "the third-largest political force in the assembly, and a significant player in a minority center-left bloc that pressed for a series of significant constitutional revisions including recognition of Indigenous rights" (Becker 2011:58). Despite this strong Indigenous presence, the constituent assembly ultimately refused to include the term "plurinational" in the final revision. Instead, the first article of the 1998 constitution includes the less politically charged terms "pluricultural and multiethnic" (Mijeski and Beck 2011:53; Becker 2011:58). While the new constitution fell short of the Indigenous movement's demands for plurinationalism, it still represented the nation's most progressive constitution to date.

In the 1998 elections, Pachakutik continued its success as a political party, especially in local level races. However, evidence of a number of internal divisions began to emerge, which threatened to weaken CONAIE and to undermine the movement's earlier achievements. According to Mijeski and Beck, "divisions within Pachakutik, between Pachakutik and

CONAIE, between the leadership of both organizations and their indigenous base, and between Pachakutik, CONAIE, and the one-time allies of both organizations were the conditions of the movement during the tumultuous years [between 1998 and 2000]" (2011:65). Within Pachakutik, there was growing concern regarding the self-serving behaviors of certain delegates and the party's inability to work together. Within CONAIE, disagreements over the direction of the movement and its leadership brought tensions between highland and lowland organizations back to the surface. Leaders of CONAIE became increasingly vocal in their criticisms of what they saw as a tendency within Pachakutik to sacrifice the Indigenous principles it was founded upon, as well as the interests of their constituents, in order to further their political careers (Mijeski and Beck 2011:64-65). Likewise, many Ecuadorians came to see the leaders of CONAIE and Pachakutik alike as no longer representing the demands of local Indigenous groups (Walsh 2001:198). As Becker suggests, these internal fractures "reflected a swing to the right in Ecuador, including a tendency in Indigenous movements to subordinate social questions to identity questions" (2011:59-60). As a result, CONAIE found itself at risk of eroding the broad based popular support the movement had enjoyed throughout much of the 1990s.

Taking the lead in a 1999 mass uprising of Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists, CONAIE seemed to have successfully overcome their earlier signs of internal fragmentation and reestablished itself as a central figure in bringing together Indigenous and popular movements in opposition to the state and its neoliberal trajectory. President Jamil Mahuad, who had won the presidential seat in 1998, implemented several unpopular neoliberal reforms shortly after taking office in an attempt to revitalize an Ecuadorean economy that was spiraling evermore toward collapse. A drop in oil prices in the world market and powerful El Niño storms had devastated the nation's export-based economy. Amidst rising inflation, repeated currency devaluations, and

a number of bank failures, Ecuador was at risk of defaulting on IMF loans and other foreign debt obligations (Becker 2011:67). Mahuad agreed to the IMF's demands for structural adjustments, privatizing state-owned industries and removing public subsidies on electricity, gasoline, natural gas, and propane (Mijeski and Beck 2011:66). The removal of subsidies hit poor sectors the hardest. At the same time, Mahuad froze personal bank accounts, while spending millions in an effort to prop up failing banks. As Becker notes, citizens were outraged that Mahuad was "supporting the banking industry rather than funding needed social services" (2011:67). CONAIE took particular issue with Mahuad's proposal to replace the national currency, the sucre, with the dollar. CONAIE argued that dollarization would "deepen Ecuador's external dependence and would fail to address the broken banking system or the country's high unemployment and even higher underemployment" (Mijeski and Beck 2011:66).

Continued protests forced Mahuad to back pedal on many of his neoliberal policies that sought to privatize national industries and cut subsidies. However, with Mahuad's refusal to compromise on his plan to dollarize the economy, CONAIE intensified their protests calling for the president's removal. On January 21, 2000, "thousands of Indigenous activists descended on Quito, where they met with army officers who shared their concerns and frustrations with the deteriorating economy" (Becker 2011:68). In an alliance with junior-ranking military officials, CONAIE overtook the presidential palace and established a *Parlamento de los Pueblos*, or People's Parliament, through a bloodless coup. They formed a triumvirate of "CONAIE president Antonio Vargas, Colonel Lucio Guterrez, and former Supreme Court president Carlos Solórzano, symbolizing a union of Indigenous peoples, soldiers, and the law" (Becker 2011:68). However, the junta lasted only a few hours when the military, facing pressure from the US,

dissolved the triumvirate and returned Ecuador to civilian rule under vice president Gustavo Noboa.

As many scholars have noted, the CONAIE's participation in the 2000 coup had mixed results for the movement (Becker 2011; Dávalos 2001; Mijeski and Beck 2011; Van Cott 2005; Walsh 2001; Zamosc 2007). On the one hand, the coup demonstrated in dramatic fashion CONAIE's power as a political actor and the movement's capacity to intervene directly in the affairs of the state (Dávalos 2001). The coup and the protests that led up to it also highlighted the movement's dedication to the fusion of class and ethnicity. Rather than take up an exclusively ethnic position, Indigenous activists denounced the state's neoliberal turn and lambasted political leaders with charges of corruption and for their inability to address the nation's persistent problem with poverty (Becker 2011:70). Together, these two outcomes contributed to a "sense of pride and power among many indigenous people about their central role in the removal of a corrupt and despised president" (Mijeski and Beck 2011:68). This may explain in part Pachakutik's electoral victories in the 2000 and 2002 elections. On the other hand, CONAIE's "vanguard isolationist attitude" in its decision to participate in the 2000 coup brought to the fore earlier divisions within the Indigenous movement and inspired many to complain that neither Pachakutik nor CONAIE were following two founding principles of the movement, transparency and consensus building (Walsh 2001:198; Mijeski and Beck 2011:70; Becker 2011:72). Moreover, after his ascent to presidency, Noboa went ahead with Mahuad's policies as the economy continued to decline, privatizing state-owned industries and social security and replacing the *sucre* with the dollar. Despite their efforts, it appeared that CONAIE had accomplished very little politically. Noboa completed his term as interim president to 2002, when Ecuador had its next round of presidential elections.

Signs of a Movement in Decline (2000-2005)

In 2002, with the political backing of Pachakutik and the grassroots support of CONAIE, Lucio Gutierrez won the presidential election. Internal disagreements within Pachakutik and CONAIE over who to run for the presidential seat had made it impossible for them to select an Indigenous candidate of their own. Instead, Pachakutik and CONAIE decided they would ally themselves with Gutierrez, who had collaborated with CONAIE in the 2000 coup, and his newly formed center-left political party. With Gutierrez's presidential victory, many Indigenous leaders felt they were finally in a position to have a direct influence on the reshaping of state structures in order to construct a plurinational Ecuador. Shortly after the elections, Van Cott quotes the then president of Pachakutik as telling a reporter that Pachakutik was not simply *part* of the government now; "We are the government" (2005:136). However, their alliance with Gutierrez would prove to be one of the most divisive forces for the Indigenous movement.

Despite his use of anti-neoliberal and leftist rhetoric during his campaign, once in office Gutierrez quickly began with new rounds of neoliberal reforms by cutting subsidies, moving forward with plans to join the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas agreement (FTAA), and maintaining the dollarization of the economy. Indigenous leaders found themselves in the precarious position of appearing to support a president whose policies were in direct opposition to the interests of their base. This created severe divisions within the movement. Ecuarrunari, CONAIE's regional federation for the highlands, denounced Gutierrez for failing to make good on his campaign promises just three months into his term. CONAIE attempted to maintain their alliance with the president at first, even going so far as to support his use of neoliberal structural

adjustment policies in exchange for funds for social programs. Six months into his presidency, CONAIE and Pachakutik joined Ecuarrunari in breaking their alliance with Gutierrez. Almost all of Pachakutik's delegates resigned their posts following their divorce with the president. Others were forced out by Gutierrez himself. But the damage had already been done. CONAIE's waffling had alienated members of its base and weakened its public image. CONFENIAE, CONAIE's regional federation for the Amazonian lowlands, continued their support for Gutierrez, which incited charges from CONAIE that the organization's leadership had become corrupted by petro dollars and foreign companies (Becker 2011:83-91). Gutierrez exploited these fractures in order to further weaken CONAIE. He gave money, supplies, and political positions to minority factions within CONAIE and smaller Indigenous organizations outside of CONAIE in exchange for their support. He also set up "phantom" Indigenous organizations to compete with CONAIE (Mijeski and Beck 2011:92). In doing so, he succeeded in deepening the existing cleavages within the movement, especially those between the highland organizations and those in the Amazon, leaving the once strong CONAIE in tatters. In January of 2004 and again in July of the same year, CONAIE announced plans to protest Gutierrez's government. However, both attempts ended in failure. The movement could no longer mobilize its Indigenous bases as it had before. Additionally, CONAIE and Pachakutik took up a stronger ethnicist position, blaming mestizo infiltration for the movement's waning strength. In doing so, they isolated themselves from many of the social movements and popular organizations that had supported CONAIE in its earlier uprisings. In 2005, when protests did materialize, CONAIE found itself relocated largely to the fringes. The popular uprising culminated with the president's removal from office (Becker 2011:89-94).

Possibilities of Resurgence: A Plurinational Ecuador (2006-Present)

The future of CONAIE appeared uncertain. Gutierrez's removal from office and Pachakutik's resignation created renewed openings for CONAIE to rebuild itself around and mobilize its base. Once again taking up an explicitly anti-neoliberal stance, CONAIE led a successful uprising in 2006 to block attempts by the interim government to sign a free trade agreement with the US and plans to further privatize the nation's petroleum enterprise.

Throughout the protests, CONAIE reiterated the need for a profound, plurinational refounding of the state and its institutions, calling for another constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution. However, the realities of a deeply fractured movement were made evident with Pachakutik's dismal results in the presidential elections later that year. CONAIE and Pachakutik decided to run long time Indigenous leader, Luis Macas, as their candidate for president. In their analysis of Ecuadorian voting patterns in the 2006 elections, Mijeski and Beck found that Macas had received only twenty-four percent of the Indigenous vote and only two percent of the total vote. They use these findings to underscore CONAIE's waning legitimacy and, consequently, its failure to maintain itself as a unifying force for Indigenous activism (2011:110-13).

Rafael Correa, a charismatic, US-trained economist, won the 2006 presidential race on a wave of popular support. During his campaign, he vehemently attacked what he saw as a corrupt and oligarchical political system. His plan for a "citizen's revolution" drew support from many of the nation's social movements and popular sectors. He denounced neoliberal ideology and dollarization while calling for a meaningful project to redistribute wealth and political power. As part of his project to rebuild Ecuador's broken political and economic institutions, he took up CONAIE's demand for a new constituent assembly to rewrite the constitution. CONAIE, who had originally been critical of Correa, tentatively moved to support the president's leftist

proposals. Concerns remained among the movement's leadership that Correa was co-opting Indigenous demands and usurping spaces which had traditionally been held by social movements in order to further weaken and divide CONAIE (Becker 2011:104). These initial tensions between CONAIE and Correa would only intensify in the years that followed.

Once in office, Correa moved forward with his plan to convene a constituent assembly, which began work on the rewriting of the constitution in late 2007. Seeing the Constituent Assembly as an opportunity to push for a meaningful transformation of the state, CONAIE organized a march of twenty thousand through the streets of Quito in early 2008 to show their support (Becker 2011:138). While Pachakutik won only a small minority of seats in the Constituent Assembly, CONAIE was able to reach out to a number of allies within the assembly, including the assembly president, in order to foster a dialogue between the demands of Indigenous activists and the assembly's proposal. The movement sent Correa a detailed proposal delimiting what changes they saw as necessary. As Becker notes, "The letter laid out a list of twenty-three demands, ranging through issues of opposition to resource extraction and militarism and support for Indigenous rights and institutions, including the ever-present call for recognition of plurinationality in the new constitution" (2011:139). Correa was less receptive to CONAIE's influence, inciting criticism from Indigenous leaders of the president's arrogant, antidemocratic stance. In response, CONAIE reiterated, as they had throughout the uprisings in the 1990s, their demands were meant to benefit all of Ecuador and responded to the interests of all Ecuadorians, not just those of Indigenous peoples. Despite Correa's efforts to minimize CONAIE's presence in the rewriting of the constitution, Indigenous activists managed to include many of their demands in the 2008 constitution. Perhaps most significant of all, the first article of the 2008

constitution defined Ecuador to be a plurinational state. As Becker concludes, "Indigenous movements finally had realized their long-sought-after and highly symbolic goal" (2011:143).

PART FOUR

ANALYSIS OF A PLURINATIONAL PROJECT: UNITY THROUGH DIVERSITY

My analysis focuses on the self-representation discourses of the Indigenous movement CONAIE through a qualitative content analysis of documents published by the movement. For my analysis, I used a wide range of documents published by the movement between the years 2006 and 2011, including informative pamphlets, educational booklets, manifestos, poems, and songs. After translating the documents from Spanish and Kechwa into English, I began coding the materials for themes related to plurinationalism and exclusion, while remaining open to other emerging themes. While numerous themes have emerged from my analysis, I chose to focus on: *knowledge and epistemic exclusion, colonialism and Eurocentrism, nature and biodiversity, sumak kawsay and harmonious living, territory, and unity through diversity.*

Plurinationalism first and foremost represents a critique of the Ecuadorian state in particular, and of the nation-state model in general, as an exclusionary legacy of colonialism.

After the fights for independence from Spain, in which many of our people participated; the criollos built the Ecuadorian mono-national State from the liberal European perspective, based on the landowning Spanish speaking hegemony, repeating what had historically happened in the colony. In this way, since the origin of the Ecuadorian state, the diversity of our historical and political constructions as pueblos and nationalities has been excluded (CONAIE 2007c:6).

CONAIE points out that even after Ecuador's struggles for decolonization, internal colonial relations persisted through the construction of the nation-state apparatus, as it privileged European perspectives and values and reproduced the sociopolitical dominance of wealthy Spanish speaking elites. McMichael similarly argues, "Nation-states were territorially defined political systems based on the government-citizen relationship that emerged in nineteenth century Europe. Colonialism exported...the nation-state system: a vehicle of containment of political desires and of extraction of resources" (2008:46-47).

The monocultural and uni-national assumptions of the Eurocentric nation-state invalidated the existing sociopolitical organizations of Indigenous communities as inferior, antiquated traditionalisms. CONAIE argues that under the Western model of the modern nation-state:

Our existence as diverse pueblos was simply negated, made invisible, and excluded from the political, economic, and social life of the Modern uni-national, monocultural, and colonial State. To save our lives and run away from servitude, exploitation, and alienation, we were forced to take refuge in the páramos and in the jungle. Otherwise we were made to submit to the paradigms designed from the violent visions of homogeneity (CONAIE 2011:11).

Here, CONAIE links the epistemic exclusion of Indigenous worldviews and lifestyles, under the nation-state apparatus, to their continued political, economic, and social exclusion. The demand for plurinationalism, then, represents a demand to include Indigenous epistemologies and institutions in the very structures of the state. Without this, Indigenous peoples will remain excluded and oppressed by the state. However, CONAIE extends this analysis, arguing that the Ecuadorian nation-state, as an oligarchic and elitist institution, is damaging to all Ecuadorians. Moreover, CONAIE suggests that this trend continues today under Correa, despite the constitutional definition of Ecuador's plurinational character.

Today, the trade of natural resources continues, directed by the State. [Correa's government] based their model of development on an 'economy first' model, through the expansion of the petroleum border and large-scale mining...This debilitates the economy of small and mid-sized producers, principally agrarian and artisanal producers and destroys Pachamama and nature and leads to the persistent environmental contamination.

In this model, the State disintegrates the organic networks of society, debilitates communal structures, pueblos, and nationalities, and creates new oligarchic sectors of power, that obstruct the construction of plurinationality and interculturality (CONAIE 2011:8).

For CONAIE, the Ecuadorian state continues to favor the economic and political interests of national and international elites. The interests of citizens - especially those of poor peasants and Indigenous populations - the environment, and the economic and social stability of Ecuador have been largely undermined as a consequence. This is because the nation-state model is embedded within an ahistorical, progressivist paradigm of development and modernity. Modern thought and developmentalism has and continues to systematically devalue the institutions and lifestyles of traditional societies as antiquated obstacles to economic development and social progress. McMichael argues that this linear view of human history creates "casualties of progress" - i.e., "those regarded as redundant and at odds with the values and history of capitalist modernity...The most obvious category is 'traditional,' coined as the opposite of 'modernity,' and designating cultures at odds with the process of development, and its particular calculus of value." As he continues, "the representation of human history as a linear journey through developmental stages etched forest-dwellers, artisanal fisher-folk, nomad-pastoralists, and peasants deeply into the modern consciousness as hangovers from a world left behind" (McMichael 2010:1-2). From such a logic, two conclusions readily follow. First, historical ways of living are seen to be, at best, insignificant to modern society. At worst, they represent a destabilizing force that threatens the social fabric and undermines human progress. Second, poverty and prosperity are derived from the integrity of a society and of the individual citizens

which constitute it. Together, these have worked as a mechanism to legitimize the elitism found within Ecuadorean society and the nation's politics.

CONAIE, however, articulates an alternative epistemic perspective which makes central the importance of historical ways of living in guiding present day social institutions. We can see this in a poem by the movement:

*Father and mother I feel you present in the strength-fatigue
the laughter-weeping, the hot-cold.
In the past-present which we have been and which we are.*

*Man-woman you said, sun-moon you said.
Here we are mindful of the sounds:
pum-pum, pum-pum, pum-pum...
mindful of life itself, of the colors,
of ourselves in our grandparents,
of our grandparents in ourselves.*

*With eyes in our backs: we observe our past
and in this way our feet walk in the now.*

*Our elders walked in a good way
in order to leave us in this great celestial vault,
to leave us like this so nice,
in the house for everyone.
They left us like that, with already sown and blooming roots,
so that later we would continue cultivating ourselves.
But to continue growing, we need to keep extending the roots.
We need to continue feeling them, to continue singing to them, painting them.
We need to continue singing to the children
and they in turn will tell their children as well
that we are like a little plant, like a tree.
That our purpose is to have good roots,
in order to paint ourselves green with the leaves,
in order to produce multicolored fruit (CONAIE 2009b:70-71).*

From a progressive view of human history, we stand in the present, walking forward into the future with our history behind us. However, in the cosmology of Ecuador's Indigenous peoples, we instead stand facing history, walking backwards into an unknown future. In the Kechwa language, Ecuador's largest Indigenous nationality, the word for "in front of" and "in old times" is the same, *ñawpa*. We can see, throughout the poem above, a thematic juxtaposition of the past

and the present. The present is depicted as inextricably tied to the past. With this view of human history, CONAIE argues that there is much to be learned from the ancestral practices of Indigenous peoples and that in order to live well in the present and in the future it is necessary to remember and build upon this heritage. For Indigenous activists, plurinationalism represents a project to redefine state structures and social institutions in order to reflect the epistemic principles, history, cultural values, and sociopolitical systems of Ecuador's Indigenous nationalities.

[Plurinationalism] respects the diversity of the pueblos and nationalities...other socially organized sector. At the same time it demands the unity of these pueblos in the economic, social, cultural, political, and judicial fields in order to transform the current dominant structure and construct the new Plurinational State in a frame of equality of rights, mutual respect, peace, and harmony (CONAIE 2011:9).

For CONAIE, part of a plurinational refounding of the state requires transforming the state's relationship with nature and, as such, its economic model of development. Walsh (2011) notes that underwriting Western modern thought has been a central binary of humanity over nature. From this perspective, nature is set apart from humanity as either a resource to be exploited or as something to be dominated and controlled. Coloniality points to the ways in which this binary has been used, and continues to be used, to legitimize systems of domination and coercion (Quijano 2000:556). "All associated with, or thought to be closer to nature, most especially women, native peoples and blacks, are considered inferior" (Walsh 2011:52). As a result, Indigenous peoples of Ecuador and their ways of living and knowing have been systematically devalued and excluded within the structures and institutions of Ecuadorian society and the nation-state. As Walsh explains:

Modernity and its alter-side, which is coloniality, have endeavored to undermine the principles, visions and systems of life of Afrodescendent and of indigenous peoples, while at the same time promoting a Western logic and rationality. It is a

logic and rationality that, with the desire/zeal of civilization, modernity and development, have been assumed by the Nation-State, and are reflected in its political and social structures and institutions. It is for this reason that the transformation of these structures and institutions, along with the reestablishment of the communion between humans and nature, are understood and positions today in the region as acts of decolonization and liberation, not just for indigenous and Afro peoples but for society as a whole (Walsh 2011:53-54).

CONAIE, through the plurinational project, bring into question this binary of humanity over nature. The movement argues that a plurinational state must include a transformation of state institutions such that they are representative of Indigenous epistememes, which envision a reciprocal relationship between humans and nature where each are coextensive and codependent of one another. In breaking with the binary logic of humanity over nature, not only are Indigenous worldviews revalued within the social institutions of Ecuador, but a project to decolonize the very structure of power and to create an alternative, sustainable economic model can begin.

In some sense, the 2008 constitution did just this. Included in the constitutional reforms, was the recognition of nature as an entity with its own rights:

Nature, or *Pacha Mama*, where life is materialized and reproduced, has the right to an integral respect of its existence and the right to the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions, and evolutionary processes. Nature as the right to its restoration or reparation (Constitución de la República del Ecuador, 2008, Art. 71-72).

Many observers applauded the nation's progressive constitution, which made Ecuador the first country to constitutionally recognize the rights of nature (Walsh 2011:60). Despite this, CONAIE continues to assert that the state, through its adherence to a capitalist and neoextractivist model of development based on exploitation, capital accumulation, and resource extraction, has failed to protect the constitutional rights of nature as guaranteed under the 2008 reforms. The movement has repeatedly made clear their view that a capitalist economy stands in opposition to the interests and lifestyles of Indigenous peoples. In their words:

The essence of Capitalism is accumulation. This accumulation happens through the exploitation of human labor. To achieve this the capitalists appropriate nature. That is to say, they strip man of his means of production (land, water, seeds, etc.) and his existence. In this way, they dispossess us of our capacity to live autonomously and they force us to sell our labor in order to subsist. That is to say, they turn us into merchandise that, like any other article, must be sold in the market and must submit to the competition that happens within it. We become workers that work for capital in their haciendas, companies, and factories capital.

Capital strips us of nature in order to convert it into natural resources (raw materials: water, petroleum, wood, etc.) that it transforms into other goods and allows it to get more capital (money). That is why, for the capitalist our territory, and all the life that is within it, is simply a resource that must be exploited in the fastest way possible (CONAIE 2007b:5).

CONAIE sees capitalism as a model of development which seeks to commodify everything. It seeks to commodify the creative capacity of human labor; land, food, and water; even nature itself. In doing so, capitalism attempts to convert everything it touches, through a totalizing metric, into capital. CONAIE argues that, in Ecuador, this has intensified social inequality, concentrated economic and political power in the hands of elites, repeatedly threatened and destroyed much of the region's biodiversity, and eroded national sovereignty. In contrast, for years Indigenous communities have cultivated and protected Ecuador's rich biodiversity through principles of redistribution and cooperation. CONAIE points to agriculture as an example of the ways in which Indigenous systems of production diverge from capitalist production.

Agriculture is more than 10,000 years old. All the products that now feed the planet were domesticated 10,000 years ago. The original pueblos and peasants around the world are the repositories of the knowledge and technological practices of today.

In contrast, modern agricultural technology is no more than 200 years old and it has not produced one single food for the planet. On the contrary, it has suppressed and damaged the ones that are still left.

Those who manage this knowledge did not produce it. They work for big corporations that make business off of food or prosper on world's hunger (CONAIE 2007b:9).

In order to prevent further ecological degradation, CONAIE maintains that Indigenous communities must play a central role in the management of biodiverse territories and natural

resources as well as in the production of food. CONAIE argues that this is fundamental for both the survival of Indigenous populations as well as the socioeconomic wellbeing of the nation's population as a whole.

Biodiversity is vital for our culture and our survival. Throughout history, we have freely exchanged the biodiversity and our knowledge among Indigenous communities, peasants, fisherman, and farmers. Through the domestication of plants that today are an important part of modern agriculture, we have selected and utilized the best varieties and we continue to do so. With adequate management, we have assured the conservation of this biodiversity. Biodiversity is the sustenance of the spirituality, culture, religiosity, health, worldview, and economy of our communities (CONAIE 2006:15).

Indigenous epistemes are deeply embedded within nature. Nature is not simply a resource or a commodity. Nor is it something to be dominated and controlled. Rather, it is a living being, which we are a part of and which we depend upon socially, culturally, and materially. In this light, a plurinational vision of development should point toward a project of living well, rather than living better; of living in equilibrium, rather than living for growth. This is what Indigenous activists refer to as *sumak kawsay*, an Indigenous belief that forms "the center of an Andean indigenous cosmovision, based in four principles: [*relationality, correspondence, complementarity, and reciprocity*]" (Walsh 2011:54-55). First, as Walsh explains, *relationality*, which views all things in the world to be coextensive, "affirms the integral co-existence of the cosmos with all of its constitutive variables." Second, *correspondence* refers to a belief in the codependence of each entity in the world to one another, including "the organic and inorganic, life and death, good and bad, the divine and the human, etc." Third, *complementarity* "affirms that no entity, action, or occurrence exists in isolation from the other, that there exists a complementary duality, a complementarity of opposites and of difference, the inclusion of which constructs the social totality." Finally, *reciprocity* puts the first three principles in motion, as a

moral obligation guiding all interactions "among humans, between humans and nature, and between humans and the divine" (Walsh 2011:54-55).

In other words, if everything in the world exists within a coextensive and codependent relation of complementarity, then we not only have a duty to promote the wellbeing of one another and of the world around us. From this worldview, it is also to our own benefit; we promote our own happiness and wellbeing by promoting that of others and of nature. As CONAIE elaborates:

The basis of the runa [Indigenous] philosophy is a conception of the human being as an integral part of Pachamama [Mother Earth] or the cosmos. In this understanding, the human being - the runa - is directly connected to the life of Mother Earth. At the same time, her life corresponds to the health, happiness, wellbeing, and life of her children, that is to say, us (CONAIE 2009b:19).

In this quote, CONAIE presents the quality of life of humanity as being directly related to the health of the natural world, and vice versa. The concept of *sumak kawsay*, then, expresses one of life in harmony, where the dualities and tensions of the world are in balance. According to CONAIE:

*This principle [of *sumak kawsay*] has been one of the axes molding the traditional societies in the Andes. The balance also refers to the search for wellbeing among all of the inhabitants of the *allpamama* [Mother Earth], the plants, rivers, animals, people, hills, wind, etc. It is the representation of the society our ancestors dreamed of, to live in a world where the fundamental axis would be the happiness of all the beings of nature (CONAIE 2009b:20).*

Sumak kawsay, then, calls for "harmonic, equitable and solidarity-based relations among humans and with nature, and in the necessary interrelation of beings, knowledges, cultures, rationalities, and logics of thinking, acting, and living" (Walsh 2011:55). Harmonious living, or life in balance, is incongruent with the growth imperative and the capital accumulation of capitalism. Instead, *sumak kawsay* expresses a new social vision, one that requires - among other things - the redistribution of wealth, the decentralization of power, respect for difference, and an adherence

to the natural cycles of ecological systems. However, such a vision is only possible once the binary of humanity over nature has been transcended. In the words of CONAIE:

*We are the páramo, we are the jungle, we are the enchanted islands, we are the city, we are cultures.
We defend life, water, land.
No one will commodify our life.
We are not for sale, nor are we to decorate museums.
We are here. Together we can. Here we stay (CONAIE 2006:20).*

For CONAIE, a plurinational refounding of the state, based on the principles of *sumak kawsay*, also requires the communal territorial autonomy of Indigenous communities. Through their demands, the movement makes clear "the intimate relation of territory, territoriality, knowledge, and nature, which...give base and place to collective memory" (Walsh 2011:53). CONAIE argues that this autonomy is necessary for the reproduction and maintenance of their ways of living and their forms of knowledge.

The Indigenous community is an institution that reproduces the social, political, and economic dynamics which strengthen the identities and ways of symbolizing traditional knowledges and wisdom. The communal space allows us to exercise the free autonomy of collective knowledge and wisdom, the self-determination in life, and the free expression of symbolic forms...

We, the Indigenous Pueblos and Nationalities, take the communal social organization as our foundation, which is to say, that the community, the centros, the ayllus, etc. are the essential bases where our own rights can and do apply (CONAIE 2007c:11).

The demand for autonomy represents, in part, a desire among Indigenous peoples for the government to recognize their sociopolitical systems as equally legitimate and foundational as those of the state. The call for autonomy is also indicative of Indigenous demands to be allowed to be different. State projects to construct a unified national identity have historically been premised on attempts to assimilate or exclude Indigenous groups. Instead, CONAIE argues for "unity through diversity;" a vision of national unity that takes difference to be its constitutive element. At the base of this vision is CONAIE's proposal for communal territorial governance.

The Communal Territory Government has the capacity of self-governance. That is, the capacity for dialog and management with the authorities and entities of the dominant State; with the government's means of control and management of natural resources; the control and organization of a new model of bilingual education; the control and development of a health model/plan; and the creation of own financial institutions, that will give a social answer to the families of the Indigenous pueblos, a communal government without dependency, but with the capacity of arranging financing with the Ecuadorian State in the frame of Rights. These are not for negotiation. Nor for sale, nor patronage, nor the object of political blackmail, but instead should be the Communal Territory Government (CONAIE 2007c:12).

The demand for communal territorial governance is not an attempt to withdraw from the Ecuadorian state or society. Rather, it suggests a new vision of national unity that simultaneously respects the cultural and epistemic difference of Indigenous nationalities while also institutionalizing new practices for Indigenous populations to engage the state and participate directly in decision making processes. Plurinationalism comes from a worldview outside of, and represents a break with, the Eurocentric episteme of coloniality. As such, CONAIE's plurinational project instantiates new openings and alternative visions for the future, openings and visions born of the lifestyles, experiences, struggles, and epistemologies of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous struggles for plurinationalism "express an indigenous episteme, a system of understanding the world that has a completely different basis for thinking about socio-political relations and practices, based on a model of horizontal solidarity that extends not only to all humans but also to non-humans in the natural and cosmological world" (Mignolo 2011:308). In the words of CONAIE:

We want to change Pachakamak [Ecuador], in order to be everything that our ancestors had kept watch over. In order to preserve it and to once again be one with Mother Earth. To remind those who have forgotten the old knowledge of our ancestors so that they will return to accept it once again.

Because within the memory and the remembrance are the fundamental senses of our life, because there can't be a fight without memories and remembrance, there can't be a fight without knowing that we have to fill ourselves with that great knowledge from our pueblos (CONAIE 2009b:74).

PART FIVE

CONCLUSION

Most of the scholarship on social movements continues to study movements and their struggles "as vehicles for general theories of *how and why social movements occur*" (McMichael 2010:12 note 12, emphasis added). In this paper, I have argued instead for an approach that directly engages and recognizes the intellectual work being done by social movement activists. Through their demands for plurinationalism and their struggles for inclusion, CONAIE and Indigenous activists not only specify the limitations and contradictions within existing social structures and state institutions of Ecuador. Their efforts also work toward the redefinition of the very categories of contention - such as citizenship, national unity, and democracy - and make innovative contributions to the possibilities of future visions of the social. As I have argued throughout this paper, for CONAIE, solutions to the many problems - of systemic inequality and poverty, sociopolitical and economic instability, underdevelopment and dependency, corruption - which daily confront Ecuador and Ecuadorians, must begin with the meaningful and sincere inclusion of Indigenous epistemologies. A strong, democratic, and united Ecuador can be made possible when the principles and values of the diversity of Indigenous epistemologies are revalorized - as constitutive elements of a new vision of national unity - and articulated throughout the whole of Ecuadorian society and its sociopolitical institutions. Indigenous epistemologies afford unique insights into the problems society; these insights create new openings for alternatives and solutions which are unthinkable within the dominant episteme of Eurocentrism. As Dussel notes, Indigenous epistemologies "respond *from another place, another*

location. They respond from the perspective of their own cultural experiences, which are distinct from those of Europeans/North Americans, and therefore have the capacity to respond with solutions that would be absolutely impossible for an exclusively modern culture" (2012:42-43).

While CONAIE's vision of a plurinational state concerns itself first and foremost with the particularities of Ecuadorean society and the Ecuadorian state, their struggles for plurinationalism remain embedded within a broader theater of transnational geopolitics and global capitalism. As CONAIE's plurinational project continues to unfold, it will have significant implications for, and be implicated in, the politics and policies within the region of Latin America as well as in the international arena more generally. It is with this in mind that I find myself in agreement with Walsh when she concludes, "While some might argue that they [Indigenous movements] are part and parcel of a new 'ethnic' or 'ethnicized' language of fashion, I believe instead that they are demonstrative of the shift that we are experiencing in the region, a shift where the principles and base of struggle and transformation are no longer simply about identity, access, recognition, or rights, but about perspectives of knowledge that have to do with the model and logic of life itself" (2011:49).

Even though the dramatic and highly symbolic mass uprisings - which were a cornerstone to CONAIE's strength and legitimacy throughout the 1990s - have in part subsided in recent years, I believe there remains much to be gained through future research on Indigenous movements, in Ecuador and elsewhere, as well as on the meanings and realities of constructing a plurinational state. Much of the existing literature on Indigenous movements focuses almost exclusively on meso-level analyses of the prominent national and regional organizations. Future research could benefit from the incorporation of micro-level accounts. Does plurinationalism mean the same thing for activists within small Indigenous organizations and communities? What

changes, if any, have local community members experienced in their daily lives since the 2008 constitutional declaration of Ecuador to be a plurinational state? Are there more pressing concerns within these communities? Have Indigenous activists experienced more or less success in changes within local level politics and policies? Questions such as these point to a need for a more nuanced understanding of Ecuador's Indigenous movements capable of attending to the internal dynamics and the multi-level relations of these movements. In a similar vein, little research has been done which addresses the role of Indigenous women within these movements. To what extent do internal patriarchal hierarchies exist within the movement or the community? In what ways do the interests and struggles of Indigenous women differ from men? Earlier Marxist and socialist movements were central in the formation of CONAIE and other Indigenous groups. What role, if any, has feminist scholarship or feminist activists played in shaping these movements? CONAIE's interest in epistemology and knowledge would seem to parallel nicely much of the work within feminist theories.

Lastly, future research will almost certainly need to deal with the issue of climate change. Whether it is a question of resource scarcity, extreme weather events, flooding, sustainability, or even the need to decarbonize the economy, Indigenous movements are certain to be central actors as the effects of global climate change become more pronounced. If one accepts the position of CONAIE and Indigenous intellectuals - that the inclusion of Indigenous epistemologies is necessary for the development of meaningful solutions and real alternatives to the problems of our contemporary social order, solutions which are unthinkable within the myopia of neoliberal developmentalism and its market calculus - then future research should seek further engagement with the intellectual works of Indigenous activists. Recently, CONAIE has participated in a number of protests, alongside other Indigenous and popular groups,

opposing Correa's plans to begin drilling for oil in Ecuador's Yasuni National Park. The Yasuni wildlife reserve is one of the most biodiverse regions in the world. Some observers refer to Yasuni as the "lungs of the Earth" because of the importance of this region for the planet's ecosystems (Haslam 2012). Home to two Indigenous tribes living in "voluntary isolation," Yasuni was established as a biosphere reserve by UNESCO in 1989 (Associated Press: August 15, 2013). Indigenous activists believe that Correa's plans will threaten the region's biodiversity, disrupt the ancestral lives of Indigenous peoples living within the park, and subsequently are in violation of nature's constitutional rights as laid out in the 2008 constitution. Scenarios such as this one are likely to become more frequent in the coming years.

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