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De Mestizas a Indígenas: Reindigenization as a Political Strategy in Ecuador

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De Mestizas a Indígenas:
Reindigenization as a Political Strategy in Ecuador

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the two women in my life who raised me, and who consistently show me the meaning of strength and the resilience inherent to womanhood, my mother Jackie and my sister María Delia.

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I would not have completed this thesis without the invaluable guidance and encouragement from Dr. Rachel May. I also want to thank Dr. Bernd Reiter and Dr. Harry Vanden for being part of my committee and showing me continuous support while providing their expertise.

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ABSTRACT

The 1990s were a period of intense socio-economic upheaval in Ecuador, in part due to the numerous protests that would come to be known as the Levantamiento Indígena. Notoriously disenfranchised since the bloody conquest of the Americas, peoples of various Indigenous nationalities that reside within Ecuador fought for the constitutional recognition of the nation as both plurinational and multicultural, in order to secure intercultural public policies that would affect patterns of agrarian distribution, indigenous education, health, and overall representation. The prominence of the Indigenous movement and the revalorization of the Indigenous identity throughout Ecuador became an attractive vehicle for which to leverage for rights with the state by coastal communities that were long considered to be mestizo as opposed to Indigenous. Communities in coastal Ecuador engaged in strategic identity construction in order to capitalize on the prominence of the Indigenous identity. By adopting external markers of indigeneity, mestiza women and men engaged in a process of reindigenization as a deliberate political strategy in order to be able to demand rights from the Ecuadorian state.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

After a hundred years of brutal colonization, the Andean highland population of indigenous peoples had declined from 9 million to about 1 million, with lowland populations declining from 8.54 million to .5 million by the end of the eighteenth century.¹ Similar to every other Latin American nation, the ethno-racial makeup of the territory that eventually became the Republic of Ecuador in 1830 is comprised of a mixture of the original Indigenous inhabitants of the territory, survivors of the brutal colonization process; the Afro-descendant survivors of the inhumane Transatlantic slave trade, as well as the descendants of the ruthless Spaniard colonizers themselves.

This thesis contends that deliberate reindigenization by individuals who previously identified as mestizo represents a methodical political strategy. Beginning with the uprisings, which achieved their maximum iteration during the protests that occurred on June 6, 1999; and culminating with the inclusion of plurinationality in the 2009 constitution, it became clear that an Indigenous identity, when conflated with active participation in Indigenous organizations may very well yield concrete political results. Results that remain unattainable to those individuals who self-identify as mestizo but are still recognized by the gaze of “the other” as phenotypically Indigenous. The ambiguities of what it means to be “Indigenous” and exactly who gets to decide if this identifier describes a specific individual allows for a level of fluidity which, if wielded effectively, may generate leverage with which to negotiate with the state. This research seeks to

1. Jonathan D. Hill, *History, Power, and Identity: Ethnogenesis in the Americas, 1492-*

isolate how Ecuadorian women in particular manipulate ethnic identity in order to take advantage of the prominent resurgence of Indigeneity, and thus have a better position from which to leverage for rights.

Citizens of modern day Ecuador, both in the private sector as well as public figures in charge of public policy, continue to grapple with the legacy of colonialism; mainly the reality that self-described indigenous individuals as well as self-described *mestizos*, or “mixed” folks who exhibit indigenous phenotypes and continue to have the poorest standards of living.² Additionally, according to the United Nation’s Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the data available regarding Indigenous groups across Latin America demonstrates in a systematic and sustained manner that Indigenous women in particular experience higher poverty rates, have diminished scholastic access and achievements, and have higher infant and maternal mortality rates as well as shorter life expectancies overall; additionally, they generally have limited access to sanitation and safe drinking water³

The grim realities of Indigenous communities throughout modern day Ecuador became inescapable to the white mestizo elite minority during the 1990’s, as a series of *levantamientos Indígenas*, or Indigenous Uprisings came to the forefront of national as well as international news.⁴ Oppressed Indigenous individuals traveled thousands of miles to congregate in Quito, the nation’s capital, in order to demand more equitable distribution of lands as well as Indigenous

2. CEPAL. 2013. Mujeres Indígenas en América Latina: Dinámicas demográficas y sociales en el marco de los derechos humanos, 14.

3. CEPAL. 2013. Mujeres Indígenas en América Latina: Dinámicas demográficas y sociales en el marco de los derechos humanos, 15.

4. Marc Becker, *Pachakutik: Indigenous Movements and Electoral Politics in Ecuador* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 12.

control over Indigenous affairs.⁵ Indigenous groups in Ecuador became, in the later part of the twentieth century, a loosely organized block of powerful factions capable of bringing the country to a standstill through *levantamientos* (uprisings). The significance and influence that these levantamientos wielded is best exemplified by their direct, most quantifiable result, the ousting of presidents who were deemed corrupt or inefficient: “Abdalá Bucaram in 1997, Jamil Mahuad in 2000, and Lucio Gutiérrez in 2005.”⁶

Although modest accretion of rights have occurred throughout the years for both Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations, including the constitutional recognition of the state as plurinational in 2008⁷, modern Ecuadorians live under an informal caste system deeply rooted in colonial patterns of land and wealth distribution based on a hierarchy of skin color and other phenotypical markers of ethnic belonging. Central to the maintenance and continuity of this informal system is the contending relationship between the ideology of *mestizaje*, espoused by state makers during the independent republican nation building process and that of *plurinationality*, a pivotal concept which Indigenous factions attempted and succeeded at including in the 2008 rewrite of the Ecuadorian Constitution. These two concepts seemingly stand at opposing ideological ends, with *mestizaje* being espoused by the state in order to foster an ethnoracial cohesive national front, and *plurinationality* being the first central demand at the

5. Marc Becker, *Pachakutik: Indigenous Movements and Electoral Politics in Ecuador* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 13-14.

6. Kimbra L. Smith, *Practically Invisible: Coastal Ecuador, Tourism, and the Politics of Authenticity* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015), 19.

7. Kenneth P. Jameson, “The Indigenous Movement in Ecuador: The Struggle for a Plurinational State,” *Latin American Perspectives* 38, no. 1 (2011): 69-70.

heart of the levantamientos in the 1990's; one that asked for recognition of the state as being home to a myriad of linguistically and culturally diverse ethnic groups.

Literature

Literature on the dialectical relationship between mestizaje and plurinationality as it pertains to the Ecuadorian case is scant at best, but much can be gathered from literature that engages mestizaje in Latin America as a whole. In Norman E. Whitten, Jr.'s (ed.) *Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador* (1981), Ronald Stutzman famously described mestizaje as an "all-inclusive ideology of exclusion."⁸ He goes on to state: "it is assumed that ethnicity and nationality tend to mutual exclusivity and that the cultural aspects of being ethnic are not simply a function of the national political economy [...] ethnicity is construed as an idiom of disengagement from the struggle over control of the state apparatus. Ethnicity is regarded as countercultural, as corresponding to a concept of the nature, meaning, and purpose of human existence at odds with state-sponsored perceptions of those realities."⁹ Stutzman goes on to engage with *blanqueamiento* (whitening) and its implicit position in the lived concept of mestizaje in Ecuador by exploring an assumption he contends not only predominates in Ecuador, "but in all multi-ethnic nation-states that boast a single dominant political culture. The assumption is that contemporary cultural and social dynamics are principally a matter of

8. Ronald Stutzman, "El Mestizaje: An All-Inclusive Ideology of Exclusion," in *Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador*, ed. Norman E. Whitten, Jr. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 45.

9. Ronald Stutzman, "El Mestizaje: An All-Inclusive Ideology of Exclusion," in *Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador*, ed. Norman E. Whitten, Jr. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 46.

acculturation and assimilation of subordinate peripheral heterogeneity to the dominant homogeneous center.”¹⁰ Blanqueamiento, as it is implied in the discourse of mestizaje, allows for Indigenous individuals to shed their ethnic identity in order to form part of a mestizo majority and enjoy the benefits of a culturally and socially homogenous society. This notion, however, does not reflect reality as skin color continues to be a determinant factor in standards of living for all individuals in Ecuador.

More recently, Peter Wade, Carlos López-Beltrán, Eduardo Restrepo, and Ricardo Ventura Santos explored the differences in the treatment of race mixture in the Global North, represented by the United States and the Global South, represented by Latin America at large. In *Mestizo Genomics: Race Mixture, Nation, and Science in Latin America* (2014), Wade explains that in Latin American societies, race and racism were deemed unimportant when compared to the racial dynamic in the United States. Due to the concentrated effort to homogenize the nation through mestizaje, racial identity was not considered as salient as other forms of identity.¹¹

Wade and his colleagues go on to state that Black and Indigenous people in Latin America, as well as the “working classes,” understood to be the impoverished large mestizo majority, never quite bought into constructions of racial equality. After the lived experiences of Black and Indigenous peoples started to manifest in political protest and other forms of ethnic

10. Ronald Stutzman, “El Mestizaje: An All-Inclusive Ideology of Exclusion,” in *Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador*, ed. Norman E. Whitten, Jr. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 49.

11. Peter Wade et al., *Mestizo Genomics: Race Mixture, Nation, and Science in Latin America* (Durham : Duke University Press, 2014), 14.

mobilization academic critiques also explained mestizaje as an elite ideology that sought to whiten the society by erasing non-white identities.¹²

Indigenous individuals in Ecuador shed their ethnic identity and became mestizos through cultural blanqueamiento as sanctioned by the state, given that auto-identification as Indigenous could make individuals vulnerable to both symbolic and physical violence. Consequently many formerly Indigenous people were strongly incentivized to refer to themselves as mestizo.¹³ Furthermore, “Indio” remains an insult of the lowest caliber in Ecuador, one that is linked to both the reality of Indigenous individuals having the lowest socioeconomic standing in the country as well as the despicable notion that being Indigenous inherently means backwardness and insalubrity.¹⁴ In spite of all the aforementioned factors, the levantamientos in the 1990’s represent a resurgence in Indigenous identity. For some, this resurgence meant a revalorization of what it means to be Indigenous in a nation that since before its inception has ceded to white supremacy and has espoused blanqueamiento through mestizaje; the deliberate reindigenization of phenotypically Indigenous individuals who self-identify as mestizos.

Norman E. Whitten Jr. has been conducting ethnographic research in Ecuador since 1961, covering Afro-Ecuadorians in the lowlands, Indigenous Canelos Quichua people in the Amazon, and most prominently, documenting the events prior, during, and the aftereffects of the levantamientos indígenas during the 1990’s. In his seminal tome *Histories of the Present: People and Power in Ecuador* (2011), Whitten, along with Dorothea Scott Whitten, presents a topology

12. Peter Wade et al., *Mestizo Genomics: Race Mixture, Nation, and Science in Latin America* (Durham : Duke University Press, 2014), 14.

13. Kimbra L. Smith, *Practically Invisible: Coastal Ecuador, Tourism, and the Politics of Authenticity* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015), 15.

14. Kate Swanson, *Begging as a Path to Progress: Indigenous Women and Children and the Struggle for Ecuador’s Urban Spaces* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 5.

of mestizaje, wherein they explore ethnic dynamics by engaging with the notion of symbolic inversion. Whitten Jr. asserts: “symbolic inversion refers to processes of resignification in multiple arenas such that hegemonic constructs become publicly re-cognized and thereby contested.”¹⁵ Whitten is able to deconstruct the perceived hegemony of the white-mestizo elites in Ecuador by exploring otherwise innocuous occurrences such as graffiti, and exploring their counterhegemonic effects. By centering his research in the region of Otavalo, an area which the Ecuadorian imaginary deems to be an authentic Indigenous territory, Whitten is able to deconstruct various ethnic identifiers both used by Indigenous individuals to describe themselves and those that are used to describe them by others who identify as mestizo or white-mestizo.

While Stutzman and Whitten engage with notions of mestizaje, ethnicity, and authenticity, they center a majority of their work around the highland region, which is where, according to the racialized geography of the Ecuadorian imagination, the vast majority of Indigenous individuals reside. Given that the levantamientos were centered around the capital, Quito, which is located in the highlands, most scholarly work overall regarding Indigeneity in Ecuador has been localized in said area, with a minority focusing on Indigenous groups in the Amazonian provinces. Emerging scholarly discussions of what constitutes Indigeneity have shifted the lens to the coastal provinces in Ecuador, understood to be largely devoid of Indigenous individuals and vastly populated by mestizos. Two emerging scholars that are spearheading this shift are Kimbra L. Smith and Daniel Eric Bauer.

In her illuminating work *Practically Invisible: Coastal Ecuador, Tourism, and the Politics of Authenticity* (2015), Kimbra L. Smith focuses on the politics of authenticity,

15. Norman E. Whitten, Jr. and Dorothea Scott Whitten, *Histories of the Present: People and Power in Ecuador* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 67.

globalized narratives regarding indigeneity, and the fluidity inherent in ethnicity. After carrying out ethnographic research for close to two years in the Agua Blanca community within the Manabí province in coastal Ecuador, Smith fully explores the concrete effects of Ecuadorian racialized geography and how coastal communities are organizing in order to combat its pernicious effects.¹⁶ Smith believes that because coastal communities such as the Agua Blanca commune lack external markers of indigeneity, they experience symbolic invisibility which carries concrete repercussions. Preliminary efforts for agrarian reform during the mid 1930's were implemented by the Ecuadorian state under the condition that redistributed lands go to *comunidades campesinas* (peasant communities) for self-governance. The possibility of exerting autonomy over their own lands represented a strong incentive that highlights the fluidity of identity, enticing Agua Blancans to present themselves as a peasant community as opposed to indigenous.

The fluidity of identity as it pertains to coastal communities in Ecuador is cemented with the emergence of the Indigenous movement that began with the levantamientos. Notoriously lacking external markers of indigeneity, Smith notes that the commune of Agua Blanca sought authenticity via links to ancestral communities. By linking their community to the Manta and Huancavilca civilizations, two of the most advanced ancient civilizations to have developed along the Ecuadorian coast, Agua Blancans sought to solidify their claim to their territories.

In addition to Kimbra L. Smith, Daniel Eric Bauer has also researched identity and authenticity in coastal Ecuador. In his article *Re-articulating Identity: The Shifting Landscape of Indigenous Politics and Power on the Ecuadorian Coast* (2010), Bauer explores the fluidity of identity by contextualizing the expansion of identity creation in the Macaboa community through

16. Kimbra L. Smith, *Practically Invisible: Coastal Ecuador, Tourism, and the Politics of Authenticity* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015), 3.

the adoption of an indigenist discourse that relies on the prominence of the Indigenous movement centralized in the highlands.¹⁷ Bauer emphasizes the central role that the creation of CONAIE had in the development of a cohesive Indigenous national movement given that Ecuador is home to a wide variety of Indigenous groups, each with their own specific culture and language.

Bauer demonstrates through his research that the decision to reindigenize, to deliberate implement external markers of Indigeneity in order to be recognized as such by the Ecuadorian government signifies a deliberate political strategy. The Macaboa community in coastal Ecuador would not have been granted constitutional protection for their lands had they identified as mestizo.

Theoretical Focus

The theoretical focus of this thesis will concentrate on notions of mestizaje, blanqueamiento, indigeneity, and authenticity; mainly performative indigeneity and reindigenization as a political strategy. Although Indigenous garb and customs have existed and evolved alongside Indigenous communities throughout Ecuador, Indigenous individuals, and women in particular, have been deemed to be “performing” indigeneity due to the renewed prominence in their garb post-Levantamiento Indígena. By donning their traditional garments, Ecuadorian women who may have been previously perceived as mestizas effectively

17. Daniel Eric Bauer, “Re-articulating Identity: The Shifting Landscape of Indigenous Politics and Power on the Ecuadorian Coast.” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 29 (2010): 173.

reindigenize in order to be able to have access to opportunities such as acquiring land which the state solely disburses to Indigenous communities as part of land reform legislation.

Methodology

My methodological approach will be interdisciplinary, in order to allow for the greatest amount of theoretical resources. This thesis relies on both first-hand accounts, interviews and secondary analysis to be able to identify how Indigenous and phenotypically Indigenous women who self-identify as mestizas manipulate identity in order to gain access as political actors in the struggle for rights within the Ecuadorian state. By conducting a case study of the development of Indigenous politics between the Levantamientos Indígenas of the 1990's to the present, I seek to ascertain the veracity of my claim of reindigenization as a political strategy. Additionally, I supplement this case study by conducting content analysis from a decolonial feminist perspective that highlights the role of women, mainly their labor, which is traditionally understood to exist within the confines of what is “expected” of women in a postcolonial patriarchal society and thus remains highly unremunerated and undervalued.¹⁸

Organization of Thesis

The content of this thesis is broken down as follows. In chapter 2, “*Agrarian Antecedents to the Levantamiento Indígena*,” I outline the historical agrarian antecedents that led

18. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 14.

to the deruralization of the Ecuadorian countryside and hyperurbanization of its two most prominent cities: Quito, the national capital located in the highlands, and Guayaquil, its main port and economic center on the Pacific coast. I introduce and contextualize the effects of *cultural blanqueamiento*, or cultural whitening, as the result of deruralization, and how this process has historically affected indigenous women most severely. The effect of forced internal migration when it occurs as a result of public policy, such as when agricultural workers are forced to relocate both physically as well as their line of work, can be recognized as violence perpetrated by the state, either unable or unwilling to protect through public policy the interests and livelihood of the individuals at the periphery of society. It is in the light of Guayaquil and Quito, where the vast majority of white mestizo elites reside, that the Ecuadorian state's emphasis on mestizaje, itself a tacit encouragement of blanqueamiento, is most apparent. The urban/rural dichotomy highlights a racialized geography¹⁹, as well as the preconceived notion that Indigenous individuals "belong" in rural areas whilst white mestizos "belong" in the cities. The hyperurbanization of Guayaquil and Quito, a direct result of deruralization caused by neoliberal agrarian policies, revealed a host of issues to contend with by cities lacking sufficient infrastructure, services, and formal employment to support the influx of impoverished and uneducated or undereducated rural individuals. This dynamic will be fully explored in the next chapter.

In chapter 3, "*Race and Ethnicity in Ecuador*," I provide an historical elaboration of racial and ethnic relations in Ecuador, starting with the republican conception of the nation and bringing this analysis up to the present. I will also analyze what mestizaje has meant to the

19. Kimbra L. Smith, *Practically Invisible: Coastal Ecuador, Tourism, and the Politics of Authenticity* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015), 17.

Ecuadorian state and its people, and explain how different ethnoracial groups have interpreted their role as citizens within the nation. It is important to note that the Ecuadorian state did not begin to quantify race or ethnicity in its census until 2001. The Ecuadorian National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, hereafter INEC), the governmental body in charge of carrying out the census, made deliberate changes in the wording of the ethno-racial question, from the 2001 census to the 2010 census. I will analyze and contrast the language used and changes by INEC, extrapolating meaning and linking it to the sociocultural temblor caused by the Levantamientos Indígenas in the 1990's, as well as the inclusion of plurinationality in the 2009 Constitution.

In chapter 4, "*La Realidad de la Mujer Ecuatoriana*" I present through statistical data how phenotypically Indigenous women who self-identified as Mestizas as well as Indigenous women themselves represent the most marginalized group in modern day Ecuador. Subsequently, I illustrate how phenotypically Indigenous women who self-identified as Mestizas reindigenized themselves to gain political leverage, effectively arming said reindigenization into a political strategy. I contextualize data from the 2001 and 2010 censuses, as well as other governmental reports that present the reality of the modern Ecuadorian woman in order to elucidate how indigeneity is deemed to be "performed" by women. The implication of the idea of performance is meant to erode the authenticity of the women's decisions. I incorporate data that demonstrates how unremunerated labor largely carried out by Indigenous women and self-identified mestizas who exhibit Indigenous phenotypes is central to reindigenization and the continuity of Indigenous identity in Ecuador and Latin America as a whole.

The process of depeasantization which emptied the Ecuadorian rural sector of Indigenous and mestizo individuals was the first step of a process of identity erosion. Land is so inherently

tied to Indigenous communities throughout Ecuador and it is a formidable component in their cosmology as well as their identity. In order to understand how deliberate reindigenization by individuals who previously identified as mestizo represents a methodical political strategy, it is paramount to first explore the connection that Indigenous peoples in Ecuador have to their land.

CHAPTER TWO:

AGRARIAN ANTECEDENTS TO THE LEVANTAMIENTO INDIGENA

The goal of the section that follows is to provide an historical background of the connection that Indigenous individuals throughout the Americas, and in this case Ecuador in particular, have to their land and how a forced separation from it not only affects their livelihood and ability to self-sustain but also disintegrates a fundamental part of their identity. By providing an accurate representation of how land is intrinsically tied to identity for Ecuadorian Indigenous individuals and contextualizing it in light of historical land tenure disenfranchisement, I aim to elucidate how the failure on part of the Ecuadorian state to prevent deruralization and massive hyperurbanization represents a tacit reinforcement of *blanqueamiento*. *Blanqueamiento*, or whitening, refers to an implicit aspect of mestizaje, wherein an Indigenous individual loses external factors of indigeneity, whether physical or spatial, and thus gets closer to the state-sponsored homogenous ideal of the “Ecuadorian citizen.”

Historical Land Tenure Patterns

Patterns of land distribution throughout Ecuador remain highly unequal, a legacy of the disastrous effects of the conquest of the Americas. Prior to the ransacking of their lands, during the ancient Inca Empire (which the territory that is now known as the Republic of Ecuador was part of) the lands, forests, and water sources were commonly shared by the native population. The locus of this system was the *Ayllu*, a unit of related families that collectively owned the

arable land and divided it into individual, non-transferable parcels. Collective ownership of water sources, grasslands, and forests, was managed by the federation of ayllus, established around a collective village. While the system maintained common cooperation during planting and harvest times, the products of the individual parcels of arable land belonged to that specific family unit.²⁰

Soon after the arrival of the Spanish colonizers and the ransacking frenzy that stripped sacred temples bare of silver, gold, and precious stones, systems of organized looting were developed. The *encomiendas* and *repartimientos* had arrived to forge a new age of misery for the natives and unprecedented wealth for the Spanish crown, the colonizers, and their select descendants.²¹

The encomienda was a system created by the Spanish crown that allowed for the principal colonizers (including members of the Catholic church) and their descendants, to be given large territories of land, along with the natives that populated it, and tasked with imparting the Christian faith, “protecting” the natives from opposing tribes and indoctrinating them into the Spanish language and culture.²²

After the colonizers stole power from the Inca Empire, they took advantage of an established form of indentured servitude, the *mit’a*, and redeveloped it into the repartimiento. The *mit’a* was a system of forced public labor demanded by the Inca Empire that assured the constant development of infrastructure. The repartimiento relegated the male native Indians to serfs, tasked with endless amounts of hard labor significantly crueler than what they had endured

20. J. Galarza Zavala, *El yugo feudal: Visión del campo Ecuatoriano* (Quito: Ediciones Solitierra, 1975), 18.

21. J. Galarza Zavala, *El yugo feudal: Visión del campo Ecuatoriano* (Quito: Ediciones Solitierra, 1975), 23.

22. J. Galarza Zavala, *El yugo feudal: Visión del campo Ecuatoriano* (Quito: Ediciones Solitierra, 1975), 24.

with the mit'a, which brought the colonizers as well as the crown extraordinary amounts of wealth. The repartimiento thus became the building block of a pseudo-cast system headed by wealthy Spaniards, white-mestizo Church leaders, and prominent criollos, or wealthy direct descendants of Spanish colonizers who owned large parcels of vastly unworked lands.²³ The brisk accumulation of land that followed culminated in a system that haunts the Republic of Ecuador as well as much of Latin America to this day, the *Latifundio*. The system of repartimiento, which sustained the latifundios, quickly began to decimate the native population; hungry, sick, and dismembered native males soon were not sufficiently working the lands and the latifunderos began importing African slaves.²⁴

José Santos Ditto divides the latifundios into three separate categories: economic, social, and natural.²⁵ The economic latifundio is the most prominent one; it is composed of extensive, poorly worked land and it exhibits unbalanced factors of production. The quantity of land may be vast, but the capital and labor force is scarce, exhibiting a largely unorganized structure. The social latifundio is composed of extensive lands as well, but these tend to be efficiently cultivated and organized. Though productive, this latifundio represents a social malady given that it belongs either to a single person or jurisdiction. The latifundio system affects more than just land distribution, from it emanates the local social systems through which the latifunderos become the majority group that monopolizes political power, prestige, and dominion over the

23. J. Galarza Zavala, *El yugo feudal: Visión del campo Ecuatoriano* (Quito: Ediciones Solitierra, 1975), 18.

24. J. Galarza Zavala, *El yugo feudal: Visión del campo Ecuatoriano* (Quito: Ediciones Solitierra, 1975), 22 - 26.

25. José Santos Ditto, *Nuevos Obstáculos para Detener la Reforma Agraria* (Guayaquil: Imprenta de la Universidad de Guayaquil, 1985), 47.

campesinos. The latifundio consists of extensive lands that are largely infertile and too distant from areas of commerce, making their production inefficient.

Along with the latifundios came the *minifundios*, smaller extensions of land that are not sufficiently profitable on their own. Characteristically they lack formal organization given that their owners are mostly uneducated campesinos. Some minifundios may appear consecutively within an area denominated as concentrated minifundios, whilst others may occur dispersedly along several hectares denominated as dispersed or fragmented minifundios. The rise of the minifundios is a direct result of the prevalence of the latifundio, which forces the campesinos to work “leftover” lands that yield low production in spite of the capital and labor invested. This arrangement bifurcates the campesino’s efforts into working his own small plot of land, insufficient by itself for self-sustenance, as well as that of the latifunderos.²⁶

The “conquerors” who ventured to the American continent in search of riches did not travel alone; with them came representatives of the Church. An immensely powerful and influential institution, the Catholic Church infected the New World with astounding speed, devouring riches under the pretense of catechizing. The acquisition of their vast latifundios came from royal gifts, donations, or purchases; the vast majority, however, they simply took for themselves from the natives. While different factions of the Church profited, one of the most prominent ones was the Jesuits. Along with vast portions of land, the disciples of Ignatius of Loyola developed enormous amounts of political power, which along with their participation in the slave trade as well as their introduction of alcohol caused them to fall out of favor in the

26. J. Galarza Zavala, *El yugo feudal: Visión del campo Ecuatoriano* (Quito: Ediciones Soliterra, 1975), 35.

Americas and eventually Spain; leading to their expulsion from both regions by King Charles III on August 20, 1767.²⁷

The inequity of access to natural resources, mainly land and water, for both indigenous communities as well as mestizo peasant farmers is a direct result of historic processes that allowed the implementation of neo-liberal policies that favored those who have continuously exerted the vast majority of political and economic power within agrarian production sectors; the *hacendados*, right-wing politicians and large corporations.²⁸

Contemporary Inequities in Land Tenure

Whilst the proper latifundios have been all but eradicated, its owners managed to withstand weak reform policies by utilizing dubious measures to convince small time farmers to sell their properties. The 1954 Censo Nacional Agropecuario (National Agrarian Census) revealed that 71.1% of properties encompassing 5 hectares or less possessed 7.2% of all Agrarian Production Units, or APU's; whilst 2% of properties encompassing 100 hectares or more possessed 64.4% of all APU's. Fifty years and three great agrarian reform laws later, not much has changed. The first phase of the 2000 National Agrarian Census disclosed that APU's of 5 hectares or less represented 63.5% of all APU's, whilst only representing 6.3% of the total land available for farming. APU's of 100 hectares or more represented 2.3% of all APU's, whilst

27. J. Galarza Zavala, *El yugo feudal: Visión del campo Ecuatoriano* (Quito: Ediciones Solitierra, 1975), 38.

28. Frank Brassel, Stalin Herrera, and Michel Laforge, *¿Reforma Agraria en el Ecuador?: Viejos Temas, Nuevos Argumentos* (Quito: SIPAE, 2008), 35

engulfing 42.6% of all lands available for agrarian uses. These numbers reflect an alarmingly unequal and unjust agrarian structure: data generated by the third phase of the 2000 National Agrarian Census informed that only 6.66% of all APU's are properties larger than 200 hectares that control 29.1% of the country's agricultural surface, almost 5 times more than the 6.26% of the country's agrarian surface which is distributed amongst 535.309 APU's of 5 hectares or less. The disappointing numerical variation in regards to equitable division of agrarian properties illustrates that Agrarian Reform efforts have failed to rectify this dreadful situation.

The Gini Coefficient is a statistical measure used to illustrate levels of income inequality among individuals or household per country, it is represented by a number between 0 and 1, where 0 corresponds to perfect equality and 1 corresponds to perfect inequality. When applied to measure land distribution in Ecuador, the results show inconsequential minor variations between 1954 and 2000; in 1954 the index was 0.86, in 1974 it was 0.85 and in 2000 it was 0.80. When analyzed within the context of Latin America as a whole, the Gini coefficient demonstrates that Ecuador has one of the largest levels of agrarian land ownership concentration, along with Perú, Guatemala, Venezuela, Paraguay, Colombia, Brazil, and Argentina. It must be noted that Latin America as a whole has the largest levels of agrarian land ownership inequality worldwide, a quality inherited from their shared colonial past.

The Ecuadorian Republic is made up of four distinct regions that possess vastly different climates and soil qualities, which affects the use of available arable lands; the Costa, Sierra, Oriente, and the Galapagos Islands. Levels of agrarian land ownership distribution vary per region within Ecuador, with the Sierra (Gini 0.810) and the Costa (Gini 0.753) boasting the largest rates of concentration. The Costa region is made up of seven provinces: Esmeraldas, Manabí, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, Los Ríos, Guayas, Santa Elena, and El Oro; of these

provinces, those that claim the largest amount of arable land concentration are Los Ríos and Guayas. In the Los Ríos province 5.1% of APU's command 48.7% of arable lands, and in the Guayas province 6.1% of APU's command 66.6%.²⁹

According to the *Encuesta de Superficie y Producción Agropecuaria Continua* (Continuous Poll of Agrarian Surface and Production), commissioned by INEC on 2013, the importance of the agrarian sector in Ecuador is due to three main reasons: first, the agrarian sector represents 6.79% of total annual GDP, the largest contributor behind Manufacturing, Petroleum, Mining, Construction, Commerce, and Health and Social Services; second, the sector constitutes a strong source of income emanating from the export of traditional products such as plantains, coffee, and cacao. Finally, it constitutes a base for the food sovereignty policy promulgated by Article 281 of the current National Constitution: "Food Sovereignty constitutes a strategic goal and an obligation of the State to guarantee that people, communities, villages, and nations can reach culturally appropriate nutritional self-sufficiency permanently".³⁰

The Continuous Poll of Agrarian Surface and Production reported in 2013 that land use in the rural sector of the Ecuadorian Republic was divided into 8 categories: permanent crops represent 12.49%, transient and fallow crops 8.53%, resting land 1.63%, cropped pastures 27.44%, natural pastures 13.80%, wastelands 4.18%, forests 30.09%, and others 1.84%. After analyzing the most important surfaces in relation to land use within the country as presented by the ESPAC from 2005 - 2013 one can conclude that the surface dedicated to Permanent Crops shows an average positive growth rate of 1.35%, with 2009 presenting the highest growth rate of

29. Frank Brassel, Stalin Herrera, and Michel Laforge, *¿Reforma Agraria en el Ecuador?: Viejos Temas, Nuevos Argumentos* (Quito: SIPAE, 2008), 25.

30. INEC, *Encuesta de Superficie y Producción Agropecuaria Continua*, (Quito: INEC, 2013), 3-4.

6.73%. The Transient and Fallow Crops category indicates an average variation rate of -0.57% between 2005 and 2013, with the most significant variation occurring during 2006 with a 5.01% decrease. Cropped Pastures present an average variation rate of -0.05% between 2005 and 2012, with an increment of 3.72% between 2011 and 2013. Natural Pastures present an average variation rate of 0.25% between 2005 and 2013, with an increment of 2.71% between 2011 and 2013.³¹

Rural to Urban Migration and Hyper-urbanization

The effect of forced internal migration when it occurs as a result of public policy, such as when agricultural workers are forced to relocate both physically as well as their line of work, can be recognized as violence in part of the state, either unable or unwilling to protect through public policy the interest and livelihood of the individuals at the periphery of society. It is in Guayaquil and Quito, where the vast majority of white mestizo elites reside, that the Ecuadorian state's emphasis on mestizaje, itself a tacit encouragement of blanqueamiento, is most apparent. The urban/rural dichotomy highlights a racialized geography³², as well as the preconceived notion that Indigenous individuals “belong” in rural areas whilst white mestizos “belong” in the cities. The hyperurbanization of Guayaquil and Quito, a direct result of deruralization caused by neoliberal agrarian policies, revealed a host of issues to contend with by cities lacking sufficient

31. INEC, *Encuesta de Superficie y Producción Agropecuaria Continua*, (Quito: INEC, 2013), 15.

32. Kimbra L. Smith, *Practically Invisible: Coastal Ecuador, Tourism, and the Politics of Authenticity* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015), 17.

infrastructure, services, and formal employment to support the influx of impoverished and uneducated or undereducated rural individuals.

Neoliberal policies, particularly that of structural adjustments imposed by the IMF and the World Bank have led countries throughout Latin America to lower their trade barriers, allowing for a large influx of inexpensive products, including agricultural products, to flood the markets, severely disadvantaging agricultural workers and peasants. Agrarian laborers have been struggling against a process of depeasantization since the middle of the 19th Century, but this process was exacerbated during the middle of the 20th century.

In 1999 Ecuador experienced its worst economic crisis up to that point. Inflation was widespread, which led then president Jamil Mahuad, a Harvard trained politician, to announce an abandonment of the national currency in favor of the American Dollar. Within three weeks of this highly unpopular move, Mahuad was overthrown with a coup d'état led by the military in alliance with the Indigenous sectors. Dollarization severely crippled the Ecuadorian economy, with the agrarian sector being struck the hardest. Small scale and peasant producers saw their way of life vanish in front of their eyes as basic factors of production such as seeds, credit, and land became unattainable due to skyrocketing prices. Unable to provide for their families, or even themselves, rural Indigenous peasants migrated to the large urban centers in the Ecuadorian capital of Quito and the Ecuadorian largest port, Guayaquil.

The hyperurbanization that followed depeasantization is a challenge that Ecuador struggles with to this day. Although there are large developed hubs throughout Quito and Guayaquil, they tend to be behind gated compounds, reserved only for the white mestizo elite; these developed hubs are in the minority, as the majority of cities in Ecuador lack sound infrastructure. The immense influx of largely uneducated ruralites into urban centers presents a

challenge to city planners, health departments, education departments, as well as posing an unprecedented toll on criminally underfunded welfare programs. Hyperurbanization in Ecuador has led to an immense rise of slum dwelling and a correlative rise in crime. Lack of technical or professional education in the rural sector means that whatever percentage of formal labor available in urban areas cannot be fulfilled by the recent migrants, and though labor markets in said areas provide far more opportunities than those of rural areas, the demand simply cannot keep up with the influx of rural supply.

Deruralization additionally implies a severing of ancient cultural practices which are inherently tied to the land, mainly the *minga*. The hispanicized spelling of the Quechua term *minka*, the minga is an ancient practice common to Indigenous groups throughout the Americas that could simply be reduced to communal work. Given the laborious aspect of agrarian work however, the minga implies ingrained levels of reciprocity that go beyond simple communal work. A minga may be called by any member of the community for any number of reasons requiring the aid of the entire community, be it any aspect of agrarian work, such as clearing, planting, or harvesting; as well as construction work or even digging new wells or clearing waterways.³³

Mingas were central to the establishment and development of Ayllus as such. Indigenous groups that became sedentary were able to do so due to the collaborative clearing and preparing of soil for planting. Mingas represent a level of reciprocity usually reserved for immediate blood relatives in other cultures. Entire communities understand that their survival is tied to their ability to work together and so this is a quality that is inculcated since birth. The forced

33. Dario Guevara, *Las Mingas en el Ecuador: Orígenes, Tránsito, Supervivencia* (Quito: Editorial Universitaria, 1957), 10.

migration which is inherent to deruralization severs these community ties by reducing the population in Indigenous communities as well as weakening the communities' ability to grow due to reduced numbers.³⁴ Cultural practices such as mingas remain highly visible forms of Indigenous authenticity throughout Ecuador, forced migrations that take individuals away from their communities reduces their perceived authenticity, effectively whitening them.

34. Dario Guevara, *Las Mingas en el Ecuador: Orígenes, Tránsito, Supervivencia* (Quito: Editorial Universitaria, 1957), 12-13.

CHAPTER THREE:

RACE AND ETHNICITY IN ECUADOR

Contemporary relations amongst different ethno-racial groups in Ecuador are a legacy of the colonial period; they are highly stratified and continue to subjugate individuals with darker skin tones. The mixture of native Indigenous Americans, the descendants of the Spanish colonizers and the descendants of the enslaved Africans brought to the continent through the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade has created a large variety of ethnic groupings. It should be noted that the various indigenous groups on the territory that is now Ecuador were twice colonized in a span of less than 50 years. Indigenous studies in South America most notoriously highlight the Inca Empire due to their extensive reach across the continent and impressive development of a wide array of technologies including advanced architectural structures, astronomy, mathematics, etc. While the Inca did not fully colonize territories in Ecuador until the early 1500s, archaeologists have ascertained that ancient peoples began cultivating the Guayas river basin as early as the 10th century BC.³⁵ By the time the Inca arrived in the territory that is now Ecuador, ready to impose the hegemony of the Quechua language, much like the Spaniards did with the Spanish language, there were myriads of cultures, each with their own distinct language and customs. Several of these languages remain in use in Ecuador today.

Ecuador, like several other Latin American nations, developed several monikers to identify ethnic groups. Depending on their phenotype, Black Ecuadorians are known as negro,

35. Tamara L. Bray, "Archaeological Survey in Northern Highland Ecuador: Inca Imperialism and the Pais Caranqui." *World Archaeology* 24 (1992): 220.

zambo, or moreno. Andean Quichua speaking individuals may be known as indio, longo, indígena, nativos, or Runa. Amazonian Indigenous peoples tend to be identified as indio, indígena, nativo, ribereños, selváticos, or salvajes. Due to their geographical location and the fact that they represent the most isolated groups, Amazonian Indigenous peoples are in the Ecuadorian imaginary the least “civilized” ethnic group. For the vast majority of Ecuadorians who either exhibit ambiguous phenotypes or want to participate in the mestizaje discourse, ethnic categories that denote mixed ethno-racial identity are known as mestizos, cholos, and montubios or montuvios.³⁶

The Ideology of Mestizaje

Similar to other ethnically heterogeneous nations in Latin America, since its republican inception, Ecuadorian state-makers have espoused a discourse of *mestizaje*, racial mixing or miscegenation, strategically implied in the nation-building process. Norman Whitten has been conducting ethnographic research in various Indigenous areas throughout Ecuador for over 50 years. He described this as follows:

Ethnically “non-national” peoples [...] are generally excluded from direct participation in planning changes in their habitat. The nationalization effort of Ecuador, with its Quito-Guayaquil contrapuntal centralization, like that of sister nations struggling in the grip of Euro-American dependency, often proclaims an ideology of ethnic homogenization. The product of homogenization is sometimes called *el hombre ecuatoriano*, but this promise of ‘inclusion’ as ‘Ecuadorian man’ is contradicted by a focus on white supremacy. The practical process of excluding those considered to be nonmixed is carried out by the very

36. Norman E. Whitten, *Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 13.

persons who espouse an ideology of inclusion based on racial mixture, *mestizaje*, and the resulting contradiction is obvious to ethnically identifiable black *costeño* and black *serrano* Ecuadorians as well as to indigenous Ecuadorian peoples.³⁷

Mestizaje is so imbedded in the national ideology of most Latin American nations that its use as a tool for cohesive nation-building may in fact go beyond a strategic implication, and into the realm of justification. The move towards independence from the Spanish crown, was spearheaded by the *criollos* (direct descendants of Spaniards born in the Americas), who were considered inferior by the *peninsulares* (individuals born in Spain and living in the Americas). Criollos such as Simón Bolívar, the lauded Latin American Liberator wanted control over the American lands and its peoples without having to pay tithes to the Spanish crown. Even when the creoles had before protected their racial superiority in opposition to the mestizo under-class, independence changed this dynamic to some extent. The elite class of the newly independent American states were distinct from their Spanish ancestors, and they promoted the idea that that their new nations were progressing and modernizing in a direction that was physically represented by mestizaje.³⁸ Mestizaje has indeed shaped Ecuador since its inception as a nation.

The ideology of mestizaje has had a two-fold effect on Ecuador and its citizens. First, it has allowed the nation to maintain an obtuse moral superiority over the United States, given that Jim-Crow-style laws were never passed. Despite this, and indeed because of this, Creole elites were able to practically ignore the highly unequal standard of living amongst the various ethnicities. By comparing themselves with the United States and the egregious, yet law-abiding treatment of Afro-descendants, Ecuadorians were able to promote mestizaje as the ultimate

37. Norman E. Whitten, *Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 15.

38. Kimbra L. Smith, *Practically Invisible: Coastal Ecuador, Tourism, and the Politics of Authenticity* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015), 33.

embrace of a heterogeneous future for the nation.³⁹ Absence of laws specifically segregating various ethnicities did, not, however, make Ecuador ethno-racially harmless. The pseudo-caste system that remains imbedded in Ecuadorian culture since its colonization functions to this day through an explicit hierarchy of color.⁴⁰

Though it did not include Ecuador, Princeton University's Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA) did survey the two nations that Ecuador shares borders as well as ethnic and cultural traits with, Colombia and Perú, in addition to México and Brazil. The main conclusion to emerge from this study was that "skin color is a central axis of social stratification."⁴¹ By using skin color palettes to identify the shade of respondents, researchers from Princeton University were able to comprehensively investigate skin color inequality beyond using traditional survey methods of direct questioning, and thus, according to the authors of the study:

Persuasively show that race and ethnicity are not simply a matter of identity or consciousness. Rather, race and ethnicity also involve the gaze of the "other" in ways that indicate skin color measures capture racial inequalities that solitary racial categories often miss. This is because racial fluidity in Latin America is based upon the premise that racial classifications are determined more closely by how one phenotypically appears to belong to one race rather than strictly by one's ancestors.⁴²

39. Christopher L. Busey and Bárbara C. Cruz, "Who is Afro-Latin@? Examining the Social Construction of Race and Négritude in Latin America and the Caribbean," *Social Education* 81, no. 1 (2017): 38.

40. Tanya Katerí Hernández, "Colorism and the Law in Latin America – Global Perspectives on Colorism Conference Remarks," *Washington University Global Studies Law Review* 14, no. 683 (2015): 683.

41. Tanya Katerí Hernández, "Colorism and the Law in Latin America – Global Perspectives on Colorism Conference Remarks," *Washington University Global Studies Law Review* 14, no. 683 (2015): 684.

42. Tanya Katerí Hernández, "Colorism and the Law in Latin America – Global Perspectives on Colorism Conference Remarks," *Washington University Global Studies Law Review* 14, no. 683 (2015): 684-685.

Regardless of how an individual may identify his or her ethnicity or race, either mestiza or indigenous for the purposes of this thesis, the PERLA study confirms that it is in fact phenotypical appearance and skin shade specifically that dictates standards of living for women. Women who self-identify as mestiza but are perceived by the “gaze of the other” as indigenous may in fact share the deplorable standards of living that indigenous women do. Mayte⁴³, a domestic worker currently living in the city of Guayaquil explained the transformation to her identity after her migration to the city: “in my community I dressed in the same clothes my mother, grandmothers and aunts did; traditional clothing. I was told by my mother before I emigrated to the city that I may have it ‘easier’ in the city if I start to dress like ‘them’ (them here being the white mestizos of Guayaquil). Ethnic self-identification and how this affects public policy aimed at ameliorating the living standards of those at the margins of society, is paramount given that Ecuador only first began keeping a national record of its inhabitants through a census in 1950.

Racial and Ethnic Identity in Contemporary Ecuador

There have been 6 censuses since the 1950’s, with the two most recent ones occurring in 2001 and 2010 respectively. It was not until 2001 that a question of ethnicity and race was included in the Ecuadorian census. A deconstruction of the wording between the ethnoracial question in 2001 and 2010 elucidates the evolution of the Ecuadorian state in regards to the perceived role and necessity of the question itself and its effects. Furthermore, the shift between the ethnicity and race question between 2001 and 2010 denotes a deliberate pivot from identification by skin tone to identification by culture and customs, effectively a switch from

43. Interview conducting by me in Guayaquil 2018. Per their request, names of interviewees have been changed to protect their identity.

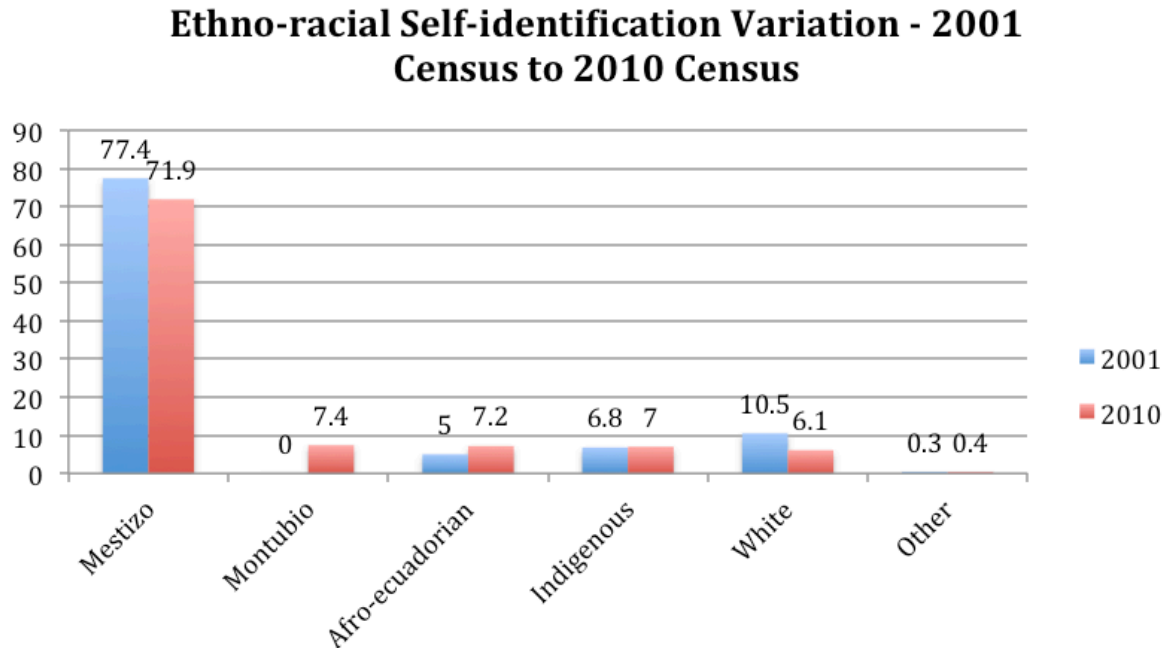
race to ethnicity. The 2001 question related to ethnicity and race was posited as follows: “Do you consider yourself: Indigenous, Black [Afro-Ecuadorian], Mestizo, Mulato, White, Other?” While in 2010 the question was posited as such: “How do you identify according to your culture and customs: Indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian or Afro-Descendant, Black, Mulato, Montubio, Mestizo, Blanco, Other?” The incorporation of culture and customs asserts an understanding of belonging beyond skin color, a methodical modification detailed in a report compiled by INEC thusly:

In relation to the subject of ethnicity, the council began in 2007 with the creation of the National Commission of Statistics for Indigenous and Afro-Descendant (CONEPIA) communities, and later incorporated Indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian, and Montubio organizations. The definitions of “race” and “ethnicity” were delineated, with “race” being determined as an archaic and discriminatory concept which solely recognizes phenotypical differences amongst humans and divides them according to physical characteristics. On the other hand, ethnicity was determined to allude to a community or village, it denotes a group of humans who are united by a singular conscience of identity, culture, history, and customs.⁴⁴

The language utilized by the Ecuadorian state in categories regarding ethnicity and race is central to the ability of mestizo and Indigenous communities to have access to state resources, the most salient one being land. For individuals who exhibit phenotypical Indigenous characteristics, there have been state incentives throughout the history of Ecuador to identify as either mestiza or Indigenous. While there were strong incentives to identify as mestizo throughout the 20th century, the strength of the Indigenous social movements in Ecuador during the 21st century provided a robust appeal for mestizo individuals to reconsider their ethnic self-identification. Table A illustrates the variations of ethno-racial self-identification between the 2001 census and the 2010 census:

44. Alba Pérez and Cynthia Salazar, *Mujeres y hombres del Ecuador en cifras III* (Quito, Ecuador: INEC, 2010), 34.

Table A



While the percentage of individuals who self-identify as Indigenous saw a minimal .2% increase, the percentage of individuals who self-identify as Mestizo decreased by 5.5%. Similarly, the percentage of individuals who self-identify as White decreased by 4.4%. The decrease of these two categories corresponds to the inclusion of Montubio as a new category in the 2010 census, with 7.4% of the Ecuadorian population identifying as such.⁴⁵ The Ecuadorian Montubio (sometimes spelled as Montuvio) describes a rural individual from the Coastal provinces, mainly Guayas and Manabí. These individuals work most prominently with cattle and with several number of agricultural enterprises throughout the Ecuadorian coast. The specific external markers of authenticity vary between men and women, though both tend to wear

45. INEC, *Resultados del Censo 2010 de Población y Vivienda en el Ecuador* (Quito: INEC, 2011), 2.

cowboy hats and carry a machete holstered on their hips.⁴⁶ Montubio as an ethno-racial identifier was included in the Ecuadorian census for the first time in 2010. The inclusion of this new identifier was seen by some as a political maneuver in part of then President Rafael Correa, in order to rein in the increased prominence and power of Indigenous social movements throughout the nation.⁴⁷ The increase of individuals that self-identify as Indigenous, as well as the emergence of a group that surpasses Afro-Ecuadorians, Whites, and Indigenous during its first inclusion in the national census is quite significant. These changes denote a move in part of groups throughout the rural Coastal provinces to align themselves with and benefit from the highly successful Indigenous social movement throughout Ecuador. Though Montubios may vary phenotypically, their dress is uniformly Western, which, via the discourse of mestizaje, effectively “whitens” them.

The second effect of the prominent mestizaje ideology in Ecuador is that it tacitly encourages *blanqueamiento*. This does not mean that the phenotypically “white” individuals gain indigenous characteristics, but rather that indigenous individuals can be “whitened” both racially and culturally.⁴⁸ Jean Muteba Rahier, a leading expert on Ecuadorian ethno-racial relations writes, “in Ecuador and in Latin America, the process of *blanqueamiento* is a dominant theme of the social, economic, and racial fabric of life. The popular expression *mejorar la raza* (to improve the race), denotes *blanqueamiento* by pointing to the publicly acknowledged ideal

46. Kimbra L. Smith, *Practically Invisible: Coastal Ecuador, Tourism, and the Politics of Authenticity* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015), 80-81.

47. Kimbra L. Smith, *Practically Invisible: Coastal Ecuador, Tourism, and the Politics of Authenticity* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015), 81-84.

48. Jean Muteba Rahier, “Body politics in black and white: Señoras, Mujeres, *Blanqueamiento* and Miss Esmeraldas 1997-1998, Ecuador,” *Women and Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 11, no. 1 (1999): 106.

followed by many darker skinned people to try to marry lighter skinned individuals to secure upward mobility.”⁴⁹

Cultural Blanqueamiento: Territories of Contention

Cultural blanqueamiento can be divided into three main territories of contention: spatial, performative, and linguistic. Spatial cultural blanqueamiento began as soon as the Spanish colonizers began forcibly removing indigenous individuals from their lands and displacing them at will, usually to work at colonizer-owned haciendas under the system of repartimiento, far away from their ancestral homes.⁵⁰ Under this process, families, both immediate and extended, were effectively estranged and a process of immense loss of life (due to inhumane working conditions) and culture began.

Though vast pockets of autochthonous communities remain intact throughout Ecuador, mostly around areas of difficult geographical access; many Indigenous and peasant individuals have nevertheless been forced to migrate to major urban hubs within the country such as Guayaquil and Quito, as well as emigrate to more affluent countries such as Spain and the United States. This has exacerbated the effects of cultural blanqueamiento by injecting Indigenous people into places commonly held by mestizo elites. This *de facto* process of depeasantization, deruralization and hyperurbanization has incrementally augmented since the nation adopted the

49. Jean Muteba Rahier, “Body politics in black and white: Señoras, Mujeres, Blanqueamiento and Miss Esmeraldas 1997-1998, Ecuador,” *Women and Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 11, no. 1 (1999): 108.

50. J. Galarza Zavala, *El yugo feudal: Visión del campo Ecuatoriano* (Quito: Ediciones Soliterra, 1975), 22.

dollar as its currency following rampant hyperinflation in 2000.⁵¹ It is in the light of the urban hubs of Guayaquil and Quito that the pernicious effects of cultural blanqueamiento and its three territories of contention are most clearly exemplified.

While the process of spatial cultural blanqueamiento began during colonial times, it was the development of neoliberal globalization and its accompanying structural adjustments which severely limited access to crucial resources (such as credit) that truly emptied the Ecuadorian rural sector of indigenous and self-described peasant individuals and families, by making small family plots unprofitable and making subservient work to wealthy landowners the only viable option for agricultural workers. According to Ronald Stutzman, “the assumption is that contemporary cultural and social dynamics are principally a matter of acculturation and assimilation of subordinate peripheral heterogeneity to the dominant homogeneous center [...] The cultural goals, the society, and even the physical characteristics of the dominant class are taken by members of that (heterogeneous) class to be the objective of all cultural, social, and biological movement for change.”⁵² By separating indigenous individuals from the space (land) that they had been ancestrally tied to and dropping them in a separate rural or urban setting where they are the cultural and ethnic minority, a vicious cycle of blanqueamiento began to homogenize the nation, under a state-sponsored and thus legitimized nationalistic discourse.⁵³

51. Luciano Martínez Valle, 2005. “Migración internacional y mercado de trabajo rural en Ecuador.” In *La Migración Ecuatoriana: Transnacionalismo, redes e identidades*. Edited by Gioconda Herrera, María Cristina Carrillo, Alicia Torres, 147-168.

52. Ronald Stutzman, “El Mestizaje: An All-Inclusive Ideology of Exclusion,” In *Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador*, edited by Norman E. Whitten (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 49.

53. Norman E Whitten, *Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 13.

Spatial cultural blanqueamiento as a progression of policing spaces, or who is allowed to be where by the white mestizo elite, is sanctioned by the Ecuadorian state through the revanchist policies in place in Guayaquil and Quito that specifically target phenotypically indigenous individuals. In hopes of attracting coveted tourism dollars, state-makers in Ecuador's two largest and most prominent cities have engaged in "urban regeneration" projects, that aside from building American-style public works are engaging in perverse controls of who is able to occupy city space:

Relying on the imagery of cleansing (Clean Quito!) and modernity (Twenty-First-Century Guayaquil), these cities' urban regeneration projects are sanitizing the streets of urban undesirables, many of whom are of indigenous descent [...] the urban renewal discourse of cleanliness and modern progress is projected against the image of the perceived 'backward,' 'rural,' and 'dirty' Indian. Keen to project a purified and sanitized image of the city, Ecuador's particular twist on revanchism is through its more transparent engagement with the project of blanqueamiento.⁵⁴

Despite its commonly espoused ideology of mestizaje, Ecuador's nationalist discourse driven by the minority white mestizo elite dictates that indigenous individuals live situated in geographically isolated zones in the mountains, and their presence in Quito and Guayaquil, as well as other prominent cities, is deemed a disturbance that must be controlled for the sake of maintaining a 'clean' perception of the cities. Beggars and street vendors are seen within the Ecuadorian imaginary as out of place pollutants, ragged individuals who putrefy the vision of the city and threaten its potential to develop into a proper urban space. That the urban indigenous population survives in spite of the high rates of poverty among any other group and that the response of governmental organizations is to sequester them to sections of the city where white

54. Kate Swanson, *Begging as a path to progress: Indigenous women and children and the struggle for Ecuador's urban spaces* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 92-93.

mestizo elites do not congregate is a damning indictment of Ecuadorian mestizaje.

Performative cultural blanqueamiento, or the second territory of contention of cultural blanqueamiento, denotes the loss or less prominent application of ethno-culturally charged indicators, mainly: traditional clothing, traditional hair length and styling, traditional jewelry and body modification (piercings, tattoos, scarification, etc.), and traditional decoration, along with any other non-phenotypical markers of ethnicity.⁵⁵ Proud of their heritage as they may be, living in poverty within areas where they are deemed to not only be out of place, but also actively contaminating both public space and the image of the city, leads many indigenous individuals to abandon their traditional practices as a survival measure, for more culturally homogeneous and inconspicuous clothing and grooming practices.

The ethno-cultural detachment and loss that indigenous individuals experience when they abandon their traditional garb and related practices is best expounded when contrasted with what Dr. Mercedes Prieto termed “self-aware identity construction”.⁵⁶ Following the Indigenous Uprising of 1999, traditional garb began to not only be utilized by female indigenous leaders, but it was effectively being deployed as a method to combat blanqueamiento. Adopting their traditional dress, female indigenous leaders were appealing directly to the identities of various indigenous nationalities within Ecuador. Through the revalorization of their traditional dresses, female indigenous leaders were signaling to indigenous women throughout Ecuador the power that lies in asserting their indigeneity. Prieto describes this as follows:

55. Norman E Whitten, *Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), xi.

56. Mercedes Prieto, et al., “Las mujeres indígenas y la búsqueda del respeto,” In *Mujeres Ecuatorianas: Entre las crisis y las oportunidades 1990-2004* (Quito: RISPERGRAF, 2005), 158.

Emphasizing “traditional” garb then becomes a political strategy that reinforces the feeling of belonging, whilst simultaneously demarcating borders with mestizo society. An example of this is the former Parliament member and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nina Pacari, who declared that after her graduate education she began to valorize and admit that before – dressed as a mestiza – she had been denying her “being”. From that moment she began to emphasize her indigenous ancestry, executing her the power of social and political representation. The possibility of “constructing herself” outside of the dominant society and through a process of vindication that aims to establish places of autonomy, would grant the indigenous world, and their female leaders specifically, an enhanced capacity for resistance and agency, one that is usually ignored or unknown.⁵⁷

Traditional garb representing an authenticating factor of Indigeneity, its use, as Nina Pacari asserted, solidifies Indigenous performance and it is deliberately utilized to enhanced the perceived presence of Indigenous individuals in urban centers. The third and last area of contention is that of linguistic cultural blanqueamiento. Part of the catechistic program that was central to the encomienda during colonial times was to teach the “godless savages” the Spanish language that would allow them to understand the “word of god”. From that point on, the use of indigenous languages, of which there were estimated to be over 1,500 at the time of the conquest of the Americas was either forcibly discouraged or explicitly outlawed.⁵⁸ On the relationship between language and society, eminent critical discourse analyst Norman Fairclough writes: “there is not an external relationship ‘between’ language and society, but an internal and dialectical relationship. Language is a part of society; linguistic phenomena are social phenomena of special sort, and social phenomena are (in part) linguistic phenomena.”⁵⁹

57. Mercedes Prieto, et al., “Las mujeres indígenas y la búsqueda del respeto,” In *Mujeres Ecuatorianas: Entre las crisis y las oportunidades 1990-2004* (Quito: RISPERGRAF, 2005), 158-159.

58. J. Galarza Zavala, *El yugo feudal: Visión del campo Ecuatoriano* (Quito: Ediciones Solitierra, 1975), 53.

59. Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (New York: Longman Inc., 1989), 23.

The dialectical relationship between language and society, as elucidated by Norman Fairclough, furthermore encapsulates the detrimental effects of *blanqueamiento* as an ideology of disorientation. By alienating indigenous individuals from their mother tongues, the colonizer effectively severed not only their cultural attachments, but also their place within their societies. An attack on language, more so than forced removal and physical displacement, alienates the individual and forces her or himself to relate to the world through foreign and violently imposed concepts.

The Levantamientos

The Levantamientos Indígenas and the events leading up to them were widely documented across Ecuador and Latin America given how destabilizing and thus effective they were. The first Levantamiento occurred in 1990, with subsequent uprisings occurring in 1994, 1998, 1999, and 2000. The strategies utilized by the participants of the levantamientos were as ingenuous as they were effective. Long disenfranchised, Indigenous peoples sought to loudly draw attention to their plight by bringing the nation to a stand still and focused on disrupting economic activity in order to garner not only the attention of the government but the private sector as well. In order to bring commerce to a halt, main highways leading up to major cities, mainly Quito, as well as Ambato and Cuenca were blocked. After taking over a prominent Catholic church in Quito and the announcement of a hunger strike by the individuals occupying the church, CONAIE announced a national *paro* (strike), which was then termed a Levantamiento Indígena, or Indigenous Uprising. What set these events apart from any similar ones that may have occurred before was that this time all efforts were emanating from a unified

source, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, or CONAIE.⁶⁰

Formed in 1986, CONAIE formulated a 16-point list of demands that was at the heart of the 1990 Levantamiento Indígena.⁶¹ The first demand called for the recognition of the Ecuadorian state as plurinational, the second called for agrarian redistribution and validation of precariously held indigenous lands. CONAIE represents the highland Kichwa, the eastern Amazonian Kichwa, the Achuar, the Cofán, Huaorani, Secoya, Shuar, Siona, and Zápara, the Awá, Chachi, Epera, Manta, Tsáchila, and Wankavilka.⁶² Together, these nations speak 13 indigenous languages recognized by the Ecuadorian state, with many of them in immediate danger of disappearing. Figure B identifies various Indigenous groups in Ecuador according to the most well known exterior marker of authentic indigeneity, language:

60. James Brooke, "Newly Militant Indians in Ecuador Unnerve Propertied Class," *New York Times*, 1991.

61. Marc Becker, *Pachakutik: Indigenous Movements and Electoral Politics in Ecuador* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 12-13.

62. Marc Becker, *Pachakutik: Indigenous Movements and Electoral Politics in Ecuador* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 14.

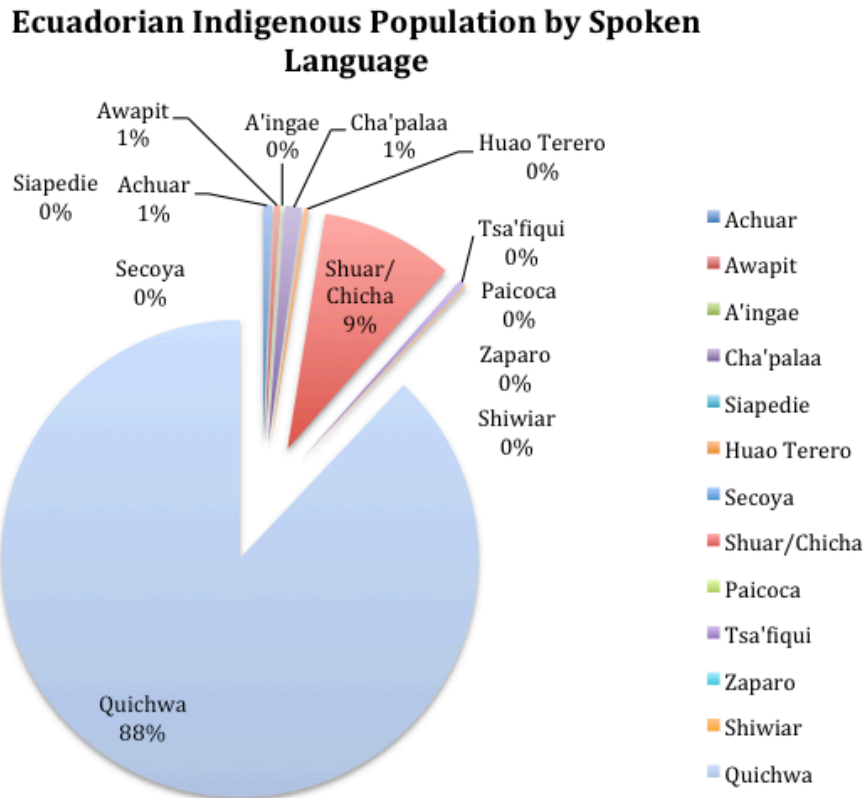


Figure A

As destabilizing to the mestizo white hegemonic rule of Ecuador as the Levantamiento Indígena of 1990 was, and in spite of subsequent periodical efforts, CONAIE was not able to secure the inclusion of the Ecuadorian state as plurinational in the Ecuadorian constitution until 2008. CONAIE leaders understood that the levantamientos served an awareness function first and foremost, to highlight the deplorable living conditions of Indigenous peoples across the nation. Though they had specific demands, the heart of the movement sought to reverse the invisibility that Indigenous individuals were subjected to. Aside from the levantamiento in 1999, the 2000 levantamiento became a singular event that had lasting effects in the political sphere of Ecuador. In association with other civic movements, the Levantamiento of 2000 was crucial to

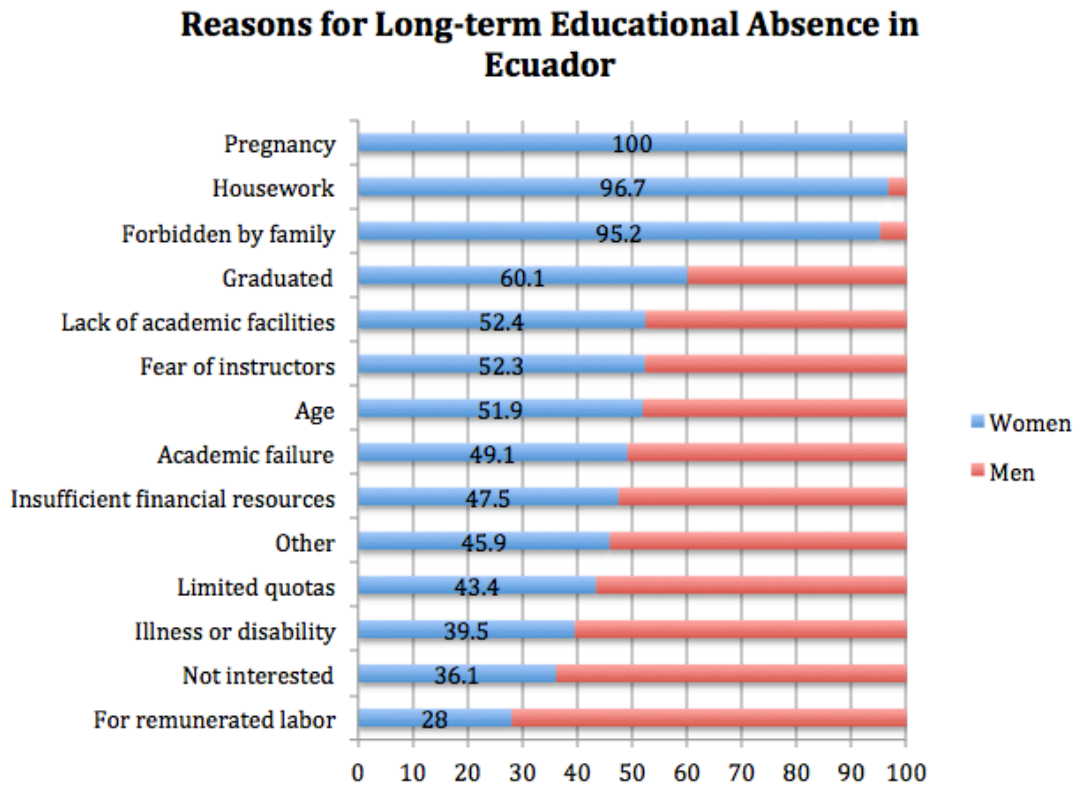
the ousting of President Jamil Mahuad after his highly unpopular move to dollarize the national currency.

Indigenous Women as Guardians of Identity

These three territories of contention, spatial, performative, and linguistic, over which cultural blanqueamiento operates, have reduced and deeply affected the indigenous population of Ecuador. In addition to these grievances endured by all phenotypically indigenous individuals, indigenous women must wrestle with the added the prejudices of being women in a highly conservative and patriarchal society. Data shows that the labor most prominently executed by indigenous women continues to be unremunerated. No doubt this is linked to their abysmally low levels of scholastic achievements and literacy, itself tied to the prevailing notion that women belong in the private sphere of the home whilst males exists in the public sphere where remunerated labor prevails.⁶³ Table A utilizes data collected by the National Statistics and Polling Institute (INEC) demonstrates the different reasons behind the lagging educational achievement of women in Ecuador, with the three main reasons for their absence from formal education being: pregnancy, household duties, and not being allowed to attend by their families:

63. Alba Pérez and Cynthia Salazar, *Mujeres y hombres del Ecuador en cifras III* (Quito, Ecuador: INEC, 2010), 32-33.

Table B



It is in the secluded spaces of the household where Ecuadorian indigenous women reproduce culturally charged tasks that safeguard the continuation and survival of their various identities and ethnic affiliations. By ensuring the continuous performance of age-old traditions, Ecuadorian indigenous women effectively become guardians of the people's culture and identity. Although this role as guardians may be unremunerated, the significance of its continuation cannot be understated. Table B illustrates the unremunerated labor which Ecuadorian women engage with the most, subsequently I will detail how this labor directly works to undermine the effects of the three territories of contention understood to be central to cultural blanqueamiento.

Table C

Annual Hours of Unremunerated Labor According to Gender in Ecuador						
Unremunerated Activities	Men		Women		Total	
	Hours	%	Hours	%	Hours	%
Culinary activities	570.555	11.77%	4,278.958	88.23%	4,849.513	39.17%
Household maintenance	653.660	29.38%	1,571.304	70.62%	2,224.964	17.95%
Clothing manufacture and repair	241.756	15%	1,370.247	85%	1,612.003	13.01%
Purchases and household organization	665.646	41.32%	945.169	58.68%	1,610.815	13%
Childcare	399.051	23.43%	1,304.75	76.57%	1,703.126	13.74%
Construction and repairs	58.138	80.23%	14.325	19.77%	72.463	0.58%
Activities of support and solidarity	70.702	37.04%	120.161	62.96%	190.863	1.54%
Care for individuals with disabilities	25.768	19.66%	105.296	80.34%	131.064	1.06%
Total	2,685.276	21.66%	9,709.535	78.34%	12,394.811	100%

Spatial cultural blanqueamiento is directly combated by simply existing in public spaces in spite of persecution from the state and civic monitoring. The convergence of indigenous individuals in Quito during the Levantamiento Indígena constitutes an emblematic example of subversion against spatial cultural blanqueamiento. Both performative and linguistic cultural blanqueamiento is directly combated by the activities most frequently performed by indigenous women in the household. Performing culinary activities, household maintenance, clothing manufacturing and repair, and childcare all ensure that ethno-cultural practices specific to any given group are protected for posterity. Through their daily practices, Ecuadorian indigenous

women are actively performing roles of guardianship of identity and culture for all indigenous individuals. By reproducing age-old practices they are able to subvert and directly combat state-sanctioned policies of exclusion towards indigenous individuals, a practice that began the day that the colonizers arrived in the Americas.

The reality of the modern day Ecuadorian woman, as reflected in Princeton's PERLA project as well as governmental data, is that their livelihoods exist within a hierarchy of power that places white urban males at the very top, and phenotypically indigenous rural women at the very bottom. The intersection of gender, race and ethnic identification, as well as class and geographical location continues to subjugate phenotypically indigenous women. Although language and other external factors of indigeneity such as clothing remain paramount insofar as how the state and international organizations quantify authenticity as it relates to indigeneity, geographical location remains the qualification utilized to certify whether a group is Indigenous or simply mestizo.

CHAPTER FOUR:

LA REALIDAD DE LA MUJER ECUATORIANA

Due to the gruesome history of displacement and its brutal repercussions, rural individuals who identify either as mestizo or indigenous are primarily demanding land ownership. Individuals and even communities as a whole that may have historically identified as indigenous thus had a substantial incentive to shed their indigenous identity in order to gain access to land via a mestizo campesino identity.

Land reform and redistribution legislation is thus intrinsically tied to the decision to claim either a mestizo or indigenous identity, particularly that of rural individuals in coastal provinces due to their perceived lack of authenticity tied to geographical location. Aside from the possibility of utilizing identity, taking advantage of the fluidity inherent in categorizing people based solely on phenotypical markers, in order to bargain for land ownership, an additional robust incentive for indigenous peoples to begin to identify as mestizo is the fact that the term “indio” remains pejorative in Ecuador, more so in areas which the Ecuadorian imaginary deems them to be out of place. Sarah Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood assert: “in Ecuador, our research found that ‘popular expressions’ of identity racialized the geography of the nation.”⁶⁴ In the “collective imaginations of citizens”⁶⁵ in Ecuador, mestizos populate Quito and Guayaquil, the

64. Sarah A. Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood, *Remaking the Nation: Place, Identity and Politics in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 28.

65. Sarah A. Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood, *Remaking the Nation: Place, Identity and Politics in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 28.

country's two largest cities, indigenous people exist in various pockets across the highlands as well as isolated areas in the amazon provinces, and Afro-descendants live in the province of Esmeraldas and in the Chota Valley.

The latter part of the twentieth century witnessed a contestation for the prominence of indigeneity. While there were state-sponsored incentives to shed the indigenous identity in favor of the more palatable, heterogeneous mestizo designation, indigenous individuals were organizing to defend the very identity the state was encouraging to fade away. In 1944, Dolores Cacuango founded the Ecuadorian Indigenous Federation (EIF), the first of its kind for a nation that would go on to have one of the strongest indigenous social movements in Latin America. Indigenous and campesino federations proliferated across Ecuador, culminating with the formation of CONAIE in 1986,⁶⁶ an organization that would ultimately contribute to the development of Ecuador's first indigenist political party, Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik, commonly known simply as Pachakutik.

The resurgence of the Indigenous identity in Ecuador encouraged a revaluation of self-identification from individuals who identified as mestizo. A process of reindigenization began to take place, particularly in areas which the Ecuadorian imagination deems devoid of Indigenous peoples, the coastal provinces. While the state may have encouraged abandoning the Indigenous designation in favor of mestizo by offering land titles, individuals who self-identified as mestizo began to recognize the possible benefit of identifying as Indigenous, by tapping into the discourses of emerging national Indigenous federations. Federations such as CONAIE, were

66. Daniel Eric Bauer, "Re-articulating Identity: The Shifting Landscape of Indigenous Politics and Power on the Ecuadorian Coast." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 29 (2010): 175.

central to the “establishment of a ‘national indigenous identity’. This identity is something that previously did not exist because Ecuador’s indigenous population vary dramatically in terms of linguistic and cultural characteristics [...] the leaders of CONAIE focused not on the vast differences that exist between participating indigenous nationalities, but instead on the similar struggle that is shared by all indigenous populations of Ecuador.”⁶⁷

Reindigenization in the Ecuadorian Coast

Reindigenization refers to “the way in which populations that have historically been considered mestizo, despite indigenous ancestry, collectively draw upon their own experiences in order to reframe their identity through the adoption of indigenous discourse.”⁶⁸ The advent of Indigenous valorization and identity, supported by the emergence and prominence of Indigenous federations, revealed an opportunity for disenfranchised rural mestizos to lay claim to territories that had been previously inaccessible or explicitly denied to them due to their self-identified identity. There is an inherent fluidity between the Indigenous and mestizo identifiers given that perception of their authenticity is tied to external markers of Indigeneity or lack thereof, markers such as language, clothing, geographical location, etc.⁶⁹ As elucidated in Chapter 3, female Indigenous leaders such as Nina Pacari have asserted their decision to reindigenize, to prominently display or utilize markers that are deemed by the population at large and the state to

67. Daniel Eric Bauer, “Re-articulating Identity: The Shifting Landscape of Indigenous Politics and Power on the Ecuadorian Coast.” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 29 (2010): 176.

68. Kimbra L. Smith, *Practically Invisible: Coastal Ecuador, Tourism, and the Politics of Authenticity* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015), 16.

denote indigeneity in order to emphasize belonging to a group that has, due to the concentrated efforts of Indigenous organizations, throughout the years accrued political clout. Nina Pacari, who hails from the Imbabura province in the Ecuadorian highlands, reindigenized by tapping into her Kichwa ancestry.⁷⁰ Given her geographical proximity to the ancestral land where her family has historically resided, the fact that Kichwa is her mother tongue, as well as several family members identifying as Indigenous themselves, Pacari's reindigenization was relatively simple given that all she had to do was accept factors that were already in place. For mestizo individuals and communities that did not share the aforementioned factors, the process of reindigenization has required them to link their practices and customs to a pan-indigenous imaginary.⁷¹

In the Ecuadorian coastal provinces, notoriously known for lacking an Indigenous presence in the national narrative, the process of reindigenization lacks immediate ties such as language, but it is rich in historical cultural heritage. "Heritage, of course, is culture named and projected into the past, and, simultaneously, the past congealed into culture."⁷² Mestizo communities in the Ecuadorian coast affirm that they have ties to the land due to being descendants of ancient cultures such as the Manteño-Huancavilca and Valdivia⁷³, two of the

69. Mercedes Prieto, et al., "Las mujeres indígenas y la búsqueda del respeto," In *Mujeres Ecuatorianas: Entre las crisis y las oportunidades 1990-2004* (Quito: RISPERGRAF, 2005), 158-159.

70. Kimbra L. Smith, "Like the Chameleon Who Takes on the Colors of the Hills: Indigeneity as Patrimony and Performance in Coastal Ecuador." *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 21 (2016): 24 – 26.

71. John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 25.

72. Schwarz, Frederick A. and J. Scott Raymond. "Formative Settlement Patterns in the Valdivia Valley, SW Coastal Ecuador." *Journal of Field Archaeology* 23 (1996): 205 – 206.

most advanced ancient civilizations in Ecuador. These communities, however, lack the basic external factors of indigeneity such as language or clothing, and so in order to be able to capitalize on the national Indigenous resurgence and the political acumen provided by the prominence of national Indigenous organizations, they have turned to performing generic indigeneity, drawing from groups as far north as Mexico and as far south as Bolivia.⁷⁴

During her studies of the Agua Blanca commune in coastal Ecuador, Kimbra Smith found that “in order to be perceived as appropriate denizens of otherwise public lands, Agua Blancans – who prefer not to declare a particular, limiting ethnic identity – have felt it necessary to perform more recognizable forms of embodied indigeneity.”⁷⁵ Although archaeological records conclusively prove that the territory which the Agua Blancans occupy has been continuously occupied for over 4,500 years, the Ecuadorian government has failed to categorize Agua Blancans as Indigenous, and as such, has deprived the community from legal ownership of the lands they inhabit. In order to be able to participate in the pan-indigenous movement generated by Indigenous federations throughout Ecuador, Agua Blancans began fabricating their own customs. Smith explains this, “while most people don necklaces borrowed from local artisans who make them for sale to tourists, others’ choices of adornment highlight just how effective Agua Blancans are at appropriating ‘suitable’ dispositions and thereby embodying cultural heritage”. Inspired by various sources throughout the Americas, Agua Blancans incorporated

73. Smith, Kimbra. “Like the Chameleon Who Takes on the Colors of the Hills: Indigeneity as Patrimony and Performance in Coastal Ecuador.” *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 21 (2016): 25.

74. Smith, Kimbra. “Like the Chameleon Who Takes on the Colors of the Hills: Indigeneity as Patrimony and Performance in Coastal Ecuador.” *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 21 (2016): 24.

various forms of head dresses into their monthly rituals, as well as distinct dresses, garbs meant to inspire participation in communal and political processes at large.

Concluding Remarks

The prominence of identity as tied to ethnicity in Ecuador and in Latin America at large, an Indigenous one in particular, can and has been utilized as a political strategy. Deliberately identifying as either Indigenous or mestizo in Ecuador has concrete consequences and benefits. The prominence of Indigenous social movements has allowed previously disenfranchised groups to lay claim to ancestral lands and by tapping into pan-indigenous customs, build a new imaginary of what it means to be Indigenous when they lack external factors of Indigeneity. Due to their role as homemakers, regardless of their workforce participation outside of the home, it is women who are mainly tasked with reproducing ancient and newly developed customs which tie communities to their land and validates their authenticity. External markers of Indigeneity such as language, clothing, and geographical location remain dominant factors in the struggle to be recognized by the state as Indigenous and as such, be able to lay claim to lands traditionally understood to belong to Indigenous individuals.

Indigenous women represent the most vulnerable group in Ecuador. In addition to their poor standards of living due to their Indigenous identity, they also have to contend with the nefarious effects of living in a highly machista and patriarchal society. Antiquated perceptions of what a woman “should be” severely limits educational attainment for Indigenous and mestiza women, which in turn severely limits them to a small pool of labor options. The fluidity inherent to identity for phenotypically Indigenous women has allowed them to strategically utilize

external markers of identity in order to capitalize on the massive Indigenous movement spearheaded by the levantamientos in during the 1990's. The mestiza identity when claimed by phenotypically Indigenous women renders them invisible by ignoring that skin tone remains a determinant factor in quality of life in Ecuador and Latin America as a whole. By aligning themselves with established movements for Indigenous rights, women and communities overall are able to access to state benefits previously unavailable to them under a mestiza identity. The deliberate reindigenization of Ecuadorian women represents a methodical political strategy that has granted them the ability to be recognized as full fledged citizens who receive the same protections from the state as any other individual.

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