AGRARIAN PROTEST AND THE INDIAN MOVEMENT IN THE ECUADORIAN HIGHLANDS*

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In June of 1990, the mountains of the Ecuadorian Sierra provided the setting for a spectacular display of protest. For an entire week, tens of thousands of Indian peasants stopped delivering farm produce to the towns and blocked the main highways, picketed on the roadsides and marched en masse in regional capitals. In some places, demonstrators seized the offices of government agencies, and in others, localized skirmishes reportedly broke out where landowners and Indian communities had been embroiled in unresolved land disputes.

The protest was called by CONAIE, the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador. The name given to the event, Levantamiento Nacional Indígena (National Indian Uprising), was chosen to establish continuity with the Indian insurrections of the colonial era and the nineteenth century. It soon became apparent, however, that this *levantamiento* was not actually cast in the mold of the localized, violent upheavals typical of the past. After Indian activists occupied one of the oldest churches in Quito in a symbolic opening move, popular protest swelled into a general civic strike, a massive moratorium suspending all normal activities in favor of an array of contentious acts. Caught by surprise, the social-democratic government of President Rodrigo Borja deployed the police and the army to restrain the mobilization. But the composed demeanor of the protesters and the prudence displayed by the authorities allowed the episode to wind down with little violence. The turnout was particularly heavy in the central highlands, where the largest concentrations of rural and Indian populations live. In Chimborazo, Cotopaxi,

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Tungurahua, and Bolívar, Indian delegates submitted lists of grievances, negotiated, and signed agreements with provincial authorities. The protest was called off at the national level when the Borja administration agreed to open a dialogue with the Indians on the economic situation, land conflicts, and other issues raised by CONAIE's sixteen-point memorandum to the nation.[1]

Since the levantamiento, the Catholic Church has been mediating intermittent negotiations between the government and CONAIE. Executive power was transferred to a new conservative administration, and regional branches of the Indian movement have staged additional protests.[2] While the major political parties have been hostile or noncommittal to the Indian cause, the Ecuadorian generals have denounced the movement as "subversive" and have effectively militarized entire Indian areas under the cover of a vast program of "community support."[3] Although the situation remains fluid and it would be premature to try to gauge the long-term consequences, the levantamiento is undoubtedly the major popular mobilization in recent Ecuadorian history. Two aspects are particularly noteworthy: the sheer magnitude, which revealed a widespread mood of discontent among the rural people of the highlands; and the defining of the event as an Indian mobilization, which opened the eyes of all Ecuadorians to the Indians' return as protagonists who are placing the national question back on the political agenda.

This Indian ethnic resurgence is not a uniquely Ecuadorian phenomenon but part of a broader trend in contemporary Latin America with many forms of expression in everyday practices and public life. Increasingly since the 1970s, the flowering of movements claiming to represent the aspirations of regional and national Indian constituencies has become the clearest political manifestation of this general trend.[4]

1. The press reports on the levantamiento were compiled in *Kipu, el Mundo Indígena en la Prensa Ecuatoriana*, nos. 14–15 (1990). In English, see Les W. Field, "Ecuador's Pan-Indian Uprising," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 25, no. 3 (1991):38–44. For the perspectives of various social and institutional actors, see *Indios: una reflexión sobre el levantamiento indígena de 1990*, edited by Diego Cornejo Menacho (Quito: Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales, 1991); and Comisión por la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos, *El levantamiento indígena y la cuestión nacional* (Quito: Abya-Yala, 1990).

2. In October 1991 and October 1992, sizable rallies were held protesting the Columbus Quincentenary. In May 1993, Indians participated substantially in a national strike organized by the trade-union centrals and the main popular organizations. The most important event was the impressive march for territorial autonomy staged in April 1992 by Indians from the Amazonian province of Pastaza. On this march, see the journalistic reports in *Kipu, el Mundo Indígena en la Prensa Ecuatoriana*, no. 18, Special Supplement (1992).

3. On the parties and the Indian question, see the interviews in *Los políticos y los indígenas*, edited by Erwin Frank, Ninfa Patiño, and Marta Rodríguez (Quito: Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales, 1992). On the activities of the military, see *Punto de Vista*, no. 459 (1991):12–13; and *Kipu, el Mundo Indígena en la Prensa Ecuatoriana*, no. 18 (1992):33–34, 55.

4. For a comprehensive compilation of statements and proclamations made by Indian

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While the ultimate impact will depend on conditions and processes particular to each case, these movements have major implications for the countries where they arise. From the perspective of social equity and economic growth, they are calling attention to the situation of rural groups among the poorest sectors who are sometimes located in environmentally sensitive areas where natural resources have been targeted for development by the state and multinational corporations. Moreover, the Indian movements seem to be actual or potential bearers of the demand to redefine citizenship in a way that would recognize Indian rights to cultural distinctiveness and political autonomy. Such a demand is at odds with both the model of liberal democracy being enjoined by political elites and the dominant cultural perceptions of national identity in Latin America.

The Ecuadorian levantamiento gave emblematic expression to the relevance of the Indian political comeback. Approaching this event from the social movement perspective, this article seeks to contribute to an emerging literature that is beginning to recast the Indian question in the light of new substantive and theoretical concerns.[5] Before proceeding, two caveats are in order. First, regarding the thematic focus of the discussion, this article has been framed as an inquiry into the origins and the significance of the levantamiento. I approach the 1990 protest as a peak of collective action in an ongoing cycle of mobilization.[6] Rather than dwelling on the details of the event or speculating on possible outcomes of the sequence as a whole, my purpose here is to provide an analytical outline of the factors involved in the ascending phase of the cycle.

The second caveat relates to the regional focus of the analysis. In terms of the Indian question, the most important Ecuadorian regions are the Sierra and Amazonia, the latter home to smaller groups that have always been viewed as more contentious than their Andean counterparts. In this context, the article's focus on the highlands is justified largely by the fact that Amazonian participation in the 1990 levantamiento was marginal. This contrast reemphasized important differences between the

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movements from virtually every Latin American country, see the two volumes of *Documentos indios: declaraciones y pronunciamientos*, edited by José Juncosa (Quito: Abya-Yala, 1992).

5. In English, excellent essays were published in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World*, edited by Steve Stern (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987); *Ethnicities and Nations: Processes of Interethnic Relations in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific*, edited by Remo Guidieri, Francesco Pellizzi, and Stanley Tambiah (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988); and *Nation-States and Indians in Latin America*, edited by Greg Urban and Joel Sherzer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991). For engaging comparative reflections, see Florencia Mallon, "Indian Communities, Political Cultures, and the State in Latin America, 1780–1990," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 24, Quincentenary Supplement (1992):35–53.

6. For a conceptual discussion of cycles of protest, see Sidney Tarrow, *Struggle, Politics, and Reform: Collective Action, Social Movements, and Cycles of Protest* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Western Societies Program, Cornell University, 1989).

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circumstances, demands, and patterns of mobilization of the Amazonian and Andean Indians.[7] I will return to the regional contrast in the concluding section. For now, it should be kept in mind that the sources of Indian protest cited herein apply to the highlands, which include the majority of Ecuadorian Indians but not all of them.

Considering the scope and intensity of the levantamiento, it might be tempting to view it as a classic case of collective catharsis. Such a perspective recalls traditional approaches that have viewed mass mobilization as a "release" of accumulated psychological or social tensions.[8] Since the 1970s, however, such mechanistic views have been superseded by theoretical perspectives that envision social movements as active agents and potential catalyzers of social, political, and cultural change. In the United States, two prominent currents converge around the strategic components of collective action: the resource mobilization approach, which emphasizes resource management and the pivotal role of organization; and rational choice theory, which conceives of actors as instrumental agents who behave rationally to maximize their own benefits.[9] In European sociology, the main contributions have tended to focus on two aspects that can also be perceived as convergent or at least complementary: the symbolic content of social movements and the processes of identity construction and transformation that furnish the bases for collective action.[10]

These approaches have led to greater sophistication in interpreting phenomena like the Indian struggles in Ecuador. But the replacement of paradigms is fraught with problems of its own. Many theorists make a point of completely rejecting the older conceptual perspectives, an approach that tends to underestimate the importance of the structural

7. The Ecuadorian Andean-Amazonian counterpoint exemplifies the more general contrast between highland and lowland Indians in many countries of Latin America. See Greg Urban and Joel Sherzer, "Introduction: Indians, Nation-States, and Culture," in Urban and Sherzer, *Nation-States and Indians*, 12–13.

8. The most sophisticated versions of these theories were articulated by Neil Smelser in *Theory of Collective Behavior* (New York: Free Press, 1963); and Ted Gurr in *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970).

9. On the first approach, see *The Dynamics of Social Movements: Resource Mobilization, Social Control, and Tactics*, edited by Meyer N. Zald and John D. McCarthy (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop, 1979); and J. Craig Jenkins, "Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 9 (1983):527–53. On the second approach, see the classic work of Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971); and *Rational Choice*, edited by Jon Elster (New York: New York University Press, 1986). The most interesting application of rational-choice theory to peasant collective action is found in Samuel L. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979).

10. See Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1989); and Alain Touraine, *Return of the Actor: Social Theory in Postindustrial Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

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factors shaping the possibilities for collective action. Furthermore, competition for preeminence seems to be feeding reductionist propensities in that the new approaches tend to overemphasize the centrality of certain factors and try to project their sometimes narrow explanatory logic onto every aspect of the process of social mobilization. Without pretending to resolve these problems completely, I will explore the possibilities of an integrated analysis that respects the different dimensions of collective action and connects them to structural processes. To lay the groundwork for the discussion, I will examine the changes marking the socioeconomic evolution of the Ecuadorian highlands over the last thirty years. Then, based on a conceptualization of the three essential components of collective action, I will examine the instrumental orientation, organizational foundations, and expressive significance of the Indian protest of June 1990. The article will conclude with some general reflections on the levantamiento as a turning point in the trajectory of the Ecuadorian Indian movement, calling attention to conditions that are changing its orientations and prospects.

THE CONTEXT: AGRARIAN TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE HIGHLANDS

Ecuador entered the second half of the twentieth century as an essentially agrarian country. In the Sierra, an elevated plateau flanked by the highest Andean ranges, almost three-quarters of the population lived in the countryside.[11] The region historically had been the main area of human settlement in the country. In contrast to the export orientation of tropical agriculture in the recently populated mestizo region of the Costa, the agriculture of the highlands remained focused on producing traditional foodstuffs for domestic markets. The first systematic study of the country's rural economy and society, conducted in the early 1960s, showed that much of this production came from the haciendas (the large estates in the highlands), which continued to control most of the land and operate as strategic hubs in the socioeconomic organization of the region.[12]

The reproduction of the hacienda-based agrarian regime hinged

11. In 1950 the rural population amounted to 73.8 percent of the total Sierra population of 1.8 million. The total population of Ecuador was 3.2 million. See the joint publication by the Consejo Nacional de Desarrollo (CONADE) and United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), *Población y cambios sociales: diagnóstico sociodemográfico del Ecuador, 1950–1982* (Quito: Corporación Editora Nacional, 1987), 16, 194, 218.

12. The study, coordinated by Rafael Baraona for the Comité Interamericano de Desarrollo Agrícola, was published as CIDA, *Ecuador: tenencia de la tierra y desarrollo socioeconómico del sector agrícola* (Washington, D.C.: CIDA, 1965). For other general works on the characteristics of the traditional agrarian regime, see Andrés Guerrero, *Haciendas, capital y lucha de clases andinas* (Quito: El Conejo, 1983); Fernando Velasco, *Reforma agraria y movimiento campesino indígena en la sierra* (Quito: El Conejo, 1983); and Osvaldo Barsky, *La reforma agraria ecuatoriana* (Quito: Corporación Editora Nacional, 1984). My brief description is based on these sources.

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on a dual articulation with subordinated peasant sectors. Internally, the hacienda economy incorporated communities of *huasipungueros*, peasant families who labored year after year for landowners in exchange for small subsistence plots and low supplementary wages. Externally, the haciendas maintained various relationships with poor peasants from neighboring Indian communities. Some of these peasants paid in kind for using plots of land, but most were required to contribute labor quotas in return for access to strategic resources such as pasture, water, firewood, and roads. Taking into account the centrality of these servile relations of production (and particularly the predominance of labor rent, the most primitive form of rent), it is not surprising that many viewed the Ecuadorian Sierra as one of the last bastions of feudalism in the Americas.

Agrarian Reform and the New Peasant Sectors

Agrarian reform played a decisive role in transforming this traditional structure. The first phase, during the 1960s, eliminated the servile relations within the haciendas and made the huasipungueros into legal owners of their subsistence plots.[13] The second phase of the reform in the 1970s achieved more visible redistributive effects, as new regulations broadened the criteria for state intervention and permitted effective transfer of some hacienda lands to peasants from neighboring communities.[14] These two stages were implemented by military governments who presented the attempt to modify the old agrarian regime as part of broader projects aimed at modernizing Ecuadorian society. The initiatives were responding to special circumstances: enhanced export-based economic growth, which was induced first by the short-lived boom in the banana sector during the late 1950s and early 1960s and was later renewed by expansion of the oil industry during the 1970s.

The agrarian reform had a considerable impact. Between 1954 and 1982, redistribution involved approximately one-quarter of the total area of haciendas larger than one hundred hectares.[15] An even more important indirect effect derived from the fact that the risk of expropriation convinced many landowners to put land on the market.[16] In the northern

13. See my overview of the first phase of the agrarian reform in Leon Zamosc, *Peasant Struggles and Agrarian Reform: The Ecuadorian Sierra and the Colombian Atlantic Coast in Comparative Perspective*, Latin American Issues Monograph no. 8 (Meadville, Pa.: Allegheny College, 1990), 5–27.

14. On the second phase, see Barsky, *La reforma agraria ecuatoriana*, 199–272; and Manuel Chiriboga, "La reforma agraria ecuatoriana y los cambios en la distribución de la propiedad de la tierra," in *Transformaciones agrarias en el Ecuador*, edited by Pierre Gondard, Juan León, and Paola Sylva (Quito: Centro Ecuatoriano de Investigación Geográfica, 1988), 39–57.

15. My estimate is 24.5 percent, based on data presented in Barsky, *La reforma agraria ecuatoriana*, 43; and Chiriboga, "La reforma agraria ecuatoriana y los cambios," 51.

16. On the activation of the land market, see José V. Zevallos, "Reforma agraria y cambio

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Sierra, where proximity to the main urban markets offered excellent prospects for dairy production, most landowners followed the strategy of selling portions of their haciendas in order to capitalize on smaller areas that, once redefined as modern agricultural units, were automatically exempted from the threat of agrarian reform. In the central and southern Sierra, where conditions were less amenable to this alternative, landowners tried to anticipate state intervention by selling the land privately in parcels, seeking always to maximize prices by fostering competition among potential buyers (usually peasants from the Indian communities linked to the hacienda or sometimes mestizos from nearby villages).

It is not possible to examine fully here the interactions between institutional reform, activation of the land market, and the other changes that played roles in the overall agrarian transformation in the Sierra. My purpose here is to highlight one major result of this process: a less concentrated ownership of land. In 1954, large haciendas monopolized more than three-quarters of the total area, but by the mid-1980s, agricultural land was distributed in similar proportions among large, medium, and small farms.[17] The spread reflects a combined pattern of agrarian development in the Ecuadorian Sierra, with different logics of production and reproduction coexisting side by side. This situation is by no means idyllic for the peasants, whose third of the agricultural land is physically insufficient to sustain the majority of the rural population and invariably includes the highest, driest, and least fertile tracts. Even so, as a result of the changes taking place in the highlands, most rural families emerged with some measure of access to land.

At this point, a closer look should be taken at the internal composition of the peasant sector, given that existing studies show great variations in access to land, living standards, and other conditions. These variations reflect processes of differentiation that cut across regions, local communities, and even households within each community. In broad analytical terms, two basic socioeconomic situations can be distinguished.[18] When families have enough land, they tend to concentrate on cultiva-

estructural: Ecuador desde 1964," *Ecuador Debate*, no. 20 (1990):47–54; and Mark Thurner, "Disolución de la hacienda, luchas campesinas y mercado de tierras en la sierra central del Ecuador," *Ecuador Debate*, no. 20 (1990):69–145. See also Gustavo Cosse, *Estado y agro en el Ecuador* (Quito: Corporación Editora Nacional, 1984), 44–46.

17. In 1954, 16.4 percent of the area was found in small units (consisting of less than twenty hectares), 19.2 percent in medium-sized units (twenty to one hundred hectares), and 64.4 percent in large units (more than one hundred hectares). By 1985, the land distribution was 33.5 percent in small units, 30.3 percent in medium-sized units, and 36.2 percent in the large units. See Barsky, *La reforma agraria ecuatoriana*, 43; and Chiriboga, "La reforma agraria ecuatoriana y los cambios," 51.

18. For a more detailed description of the strategies of both kinds of peasants, see William F. Waters and Frederick H. Buttel, "Diferenciación sin descampesinización: acceso a la tierra y persistencia del campesinado andino ecuatoriano," *Estudios Rurales Latinoamericanos* 10, no. 3 (1987):355–81.

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tion for their own consumption and market sale, goals that always entail some degree of specialization in one or more of the traditional crops of the highlands (cereals, leguminous plants, and tubers). Most visible in the northern Sierra, these small producers coexist with medium-sized units and modernized haciendas engaging in entrepreneurial production.

In the second socioeconomic situation, families lacking sufficient land are forced to combine subsistence farming with other activities, which at times include artisanal work and petty commerce. More typically, women and children are left to farm the plots while the men go elsewhere to work. Some of these migrants have adjusted to the seasonal labor demands of capitalist agriculture on the Costa, but the vast majority seek employment in the cities, primarily in the construction industry, returning home to spend weekends with their families. This semi-proletarian sector includes a large proportion of all peasant households in the Sierra and most rural inhabitants in the central provinces.[19]

For both types of peasants, the 1970s brought incorporation into the market and the national economy, along with some improvements in their living conditions. Spurred by the boom in oil exports and industrialization, brisk urban growth increased the demand for foodstuffs produced by market-oriented households while generating many new job opportunities for migrants in construction and other activities requiring unskilled labor.[20] The downside of these changes was that they also created tremendous dependencies. On the one hand, peasant incomes began to hinge on the price of agricultural commodities and also on urban demand for labor. On the other hand, because all these adjustments involved changes in patterns of production and consumption, Ecuadorian peasants found themselves relying more and more on the market for fertilizers, agricultural inputs, transportation, clothing, and even food.[21]

The distinction between small agricultural producers and semiproletarians is essential for understanding the circumstances of the rural population in Ecuador. Nevertheless, it represents only an initial step in conceptualizing the complex range of situations that can be found today in the Ecuadorian Sierra.[22] For example, those producing for the market

19. On the migratory processes, see *Población, migración y empleo en el Ecuador*, edited by Simón Pachano (Quito: Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales, 1988); and Gilda Farrel, Simón Pachano, and Hernán Carrasco, *Caminantes y retornos* (Quito: Instituto de Estudios Ecuatoriano, 1988).

20. On these processes, see Rob Vos, "Petróleo, estado y cambio agrario: Ecuador, 1972–1984," in Gondard et al., *Transformaciones*, 15–38.

21. The peasant diet now depends heavily on rice (which comes from the Costa) and cheap industrially processed starches (bread and pasta).

22. For studies illustrating this diversity, see Barsky, *La reforma agraria ecuatoriana*, 358–87; Asociación Latinoamericana de Organizaciones de Promoción, *La situación de los campesinos en ocho zonas del Ecuador* (Quito: ALOP, 1984); and *Los cimientos de una nueva sociedad: campesinos, cantones y desarrollo*, edited by Manuel Chiriboga, Renato Landín, and Jaime Borja (Quito: Instituto Interamericano de Cooperación para la Agricultura, 1989), 13–27.

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have different levels of access to land and other resources, and their prospects may also vary widely according to regional location and product specialization. Similarly, semi-proletarians display different degrees of involvement in the labor market and varied working and living conditions according to the activities in which they engage. Amidst all this variation, however, two constants can be identified. One is the relationship between socioeconomic situation and standard of living, which arises from the fact that market-oriented peasants are almost always much better-off than those who depend on migrating and working for wages.[23] The second constant is the relationship between socioeconomic situation and ethnic ascription, defined by the fact that small producers for the market are mostly mestizos, whereas semi-proletarian migrants are mostly Indians. Consider the striking contrast between Carchi and Chimborazo. The northernmost province of the Sierra, Carchi is evenly populated by mestizo potato-growing peasants who are some of the most successful small farmers in Ecuador. The central province of Chimborazo, one of the most solidly Indian areas in the country, has suffered massive labor migration and rural poverty.[24]

Peasant Organizations and the State

Agrarian reform, particularly during the administration of General Guillermo Rodríguez Lara (1972–1976), was part of an ambitious project seeking to modernize Ecuadorian society and the economy through state initiatives. In a country with a history of regional and political fragmentation, it was the military that tried to further this project via a national-developmentalist program. Until that time, Ecuador's economy had been an agro-export economy with little industry, low rates of urban growth, and a limited internal market. The real takeoff came during the first half of the 1970s, as the country began to extract and export Amazonian oil amid skyrocketing prices and achieved an average annual growth rate in gross national product of more than 10 percent.[25] With oil resources under state control, the military sought to implement the classic agenda

23. See the income figures in Rob Vos, "El modelo de desarrollo y el sector agrícola en el Ecuador, 1965–1982," *Trimestre Económico* 52, no. 4 (1985):1126; see also the data on poverty quoted by Vos in "Petróleo, estado y cambio agrario," 34.

24. See Emil B. Haney and Wava G. Haney, "La transición agraria en la sierra del Ecuador: del semifeudalismo al capitalismo en Chimborazo," *Ecuador Debate*, no. 20 (1990); Ignacio Llovet, Osvaldo Barsky, and Miguel Murmis, "Caracterización de estructuras de clase en el agro ecuatoriano," in *Clase y región en el agro ecuatoriano*, edited by Miguel Murmis (Quito: Corporación Editora Nacional, 1986):17–78; and David Lehmann, *Sharecropping and the Capitalist Transition in Agriculture: Some Evidence from the Highlands of Ecuador*, Working Paper no. 40 (Cambridge: Centre of Latin American Studies, University of Cambridge, 1985).

25. Alain De Janvry, Elisabeth Sadoulet, and André Fargeix, *Adjustment and Equity in Ecuador* (Paris: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1991), 22.

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for development via inwardly oriented industrial growth: investments in state enterprises, credits for new private businesses, subsidies and fiscal incentives, overvalued exchange rates, import restrictions, and borrowing from foreign banks when oil prices began to decline.[26] During the second half of the 1970s, the GNP grew at a more modest annual rate of 6.6 percent, but by then, the industrial, construction, and service sectors had become the most dynamic in the economy.[27] In this context, the policy of moderate agrarian reform had a dual purpose: to encourage landowners to modernize their haciendas and to establish a base of small agricultural producers who would contribute to the supply of foodstuffs while helping to enlarge the national market as consumers. These goals were reinforced with sizable public investments in credit programs, technical assistance for agriculture, infrastructural works, and improvement of services in rural areas.[28]

In considering the role of popular organizations in the countryside, two periods can be distinguished. During the period of the reform (the 1960s and 1970s), the key element was the struggle for land. Before that time, only the Communist party had been involved in active political opposition in the rural areas. The Communists failed to play a salient role in the battle over the agrarian reform, however, because they were influential on only a few haciendas and also because their organizational blueprint (which stressed worker demands and favored strikes) was not germane to the special nature of the struggle for land.[29] Moreover, the Communists were repressed by the military, who preferred to deal with FENOC (Federación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas), a new organization linked to Christian-Democratic political groups.

FENOC played a vital role in organizing land-acquisition committees and regional associations that circulated petitions, negotiated with landowners and IERAC (Instituto Ecuatoriano de la Reforma Agraria), and reinforced general pressure for land redistribution.[30] By 1975, when Socialist militants displaced the Christian Democrats in the FENOC leadership, the organization began to employ more radical methods, resorting more often to land seizures to force transactions. In the highlands, however, peasants were less belligerent than in the Costa, where land invasions proved far more pivotal to implementing agrarian reform.[31] FENOC's turn

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., 55.

28. Vos, "Petróleo, estado y cambio agrario," 26–29; and Cosse, *Estado y agro*, 46–56.

29. Zamosc, *Peasant Struggles*, 11–12.

30. See FENOC, *La FENOC y la movilización campesina: las luchas campesinas entre 1970 y 1978* (Quito: Centro de Estudios y Difusión Social, 1980).

31. On land invasions in the Costa region, see Michael R. Redclift, *Agrarian Reform and Peasant Organization on the Ecuadorian Coast* (London: Athlone, 1978). In the highlands, land invasions were rare. Rather than engaging in open confrontations, peasants waged a "war of attrition": on one hand, they vexed the landowners with constant pleas to relinquish or

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to the left coincided with the emergence of ECUARUNARI, a new Indian organization taking root in various areas of the Sierra under the influence of radical groups tied to the social programs of the Catholic Church. Like FENOC, ECUARUNARI operated as a federation of regional organizations (its full Indian name means "awakening of the Ecuadorian Indians"). At the local level, however, it sought a foothold in the organizational forms already existing in the Indian communities and their *cabildos* (committees in charge of the affairs of each community).[32] Yet for all the emphasis on ECUARUNARI's distinctiveness as an Indian organization, its discourse scarcely differed from that of FENOC in that it espoused a class-based ideology focused on the struggle for land, linking that struggle to the socialist ideals of the worker-peasant alliance and paying little attention to ethnicity as an issue in itself.

By the second half of the 1970s, it became clear that the military's reformist thrust was foundering rapidly for lack of popular support and due to strong opposition from political, landowning, and business elites. Bracing for an orderly retreat, the triumvirate of conservative generals that had replaced Rodríguez Lara in 1976 recanted on all fronts. One measure redefined the state's agrarian policy, emphasizing greater productivity and narrowing the criteria for further land redistribution.[33] The political space for agrarian reform appeared to be effectively closed, and the situation was not changed by the 1978 transition to democratic rule. Since the first civilian government of President Jaime Roldós, the various successive administrations have consistently followed policies seeking not to transform the agricultural sector but to regulate and stabilize it. Regarding the peasantry, governmental emphasis shifted to integrated rural development and selective assistance programs.[34]

During this second period (the 1980s), peasant organizations underwent significant changes. As the role of FENOC's regional associations as agents in the struggle for land was fulfilled or diminished, these groups began to wane—especially in the Sierra, where they had never attained much organizational consistency. The associations that remained active, particularly in the Costa region, were those that had redefined their role around representing the new demands of the peasants who had gained

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sell the land; on the other, they exerted relentless indirect pressure through pilfering, poaching, and petty sabotage against the haciendas. I categorized these tactics elsewhere according to the "Brechtian" forms of struggle analyzed by James C. Scott in *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985). See Zamosc, *Peasant Struggles*, 17–18.

32. See Roberto Santana, "El caso de ECUARUNARI," *Nariz del Diablo*, no. 7 (1981); and Jorge León, "Las organizaciones indígenas: igualdad y diferencia," in Cornejo Menacho, *Indios*, 392–96.

33. Barsky, *La reforma agraria ecuatoriana*, 237–52.

34. Manuel Chiriboga, "El estado y las políticas hacia el sector rural (1979–1982)," in *Ecuador agrario: ensayos de interpretación*, edited by Manuel Chiriboga et al. (Quito: El Conejo, 1984), 128–39. See also Cosse, *Estado y agro*, 57–68.

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access to the land.[35] At the national level, FENOC leaders continued to wave the banner of agrarian reform, but they showed little capacity to inspire action on the issue. The organization has languished because the stances taken by its leaders have not heeded changing national circumstances and the needs of FENOC's own grassroots associations. These groups are now largely composed of landed peasants whose chief problems are related to pricing their goods and obtaining support and services in their regions. When asked to account for FENOC's incapacity to respond in a dynamic fashion to the new conditions, most activists and observers point to two factors: the bureaucratic entrenchment of its national leaders, and the ideological crisis that has gripped the Socialist party and the Ecuadorian left in general.[36]

In the Sierra, where FENOC declined most conspicuously, the Indian movement gained ground rapidly due to simultaneous impulses from above and from below. At the grass roots, the key element was revitalizing the traditional organizational framework—the local communities and the cabildos, which began to coalesce into *federaciones de comunidades* and *uniones de cabildos* in parishes and *cantones*. At the regional level, the most important factor was ECUARUNARI's shift in orientation, which balanced standard calls for land reform with new demands arising from the struggle against ethnic discrimination and defense of Indian language and culture.[37] In 1986, ECUARUNARI's increasing cooperation and partnership with CONFENIAE (Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana) led to the formation of CONAIE as the national organization representing all Indian groups.[38]

Rather than insisting on traditional themes like the struggle for land and economic improvements, CONAIE concentrated on an ethnic agenda ranging from vindication of cultural rights to more ambitious programmatic demands such as redefinition of Ecuador as a plurinational country.[39] CONAIE's most notable achievement came in 1988, when it struck an unprecedented deal on bilingual education with the Borja

35. Based on interviews with national and regional peasant leaders. See also Manuel Chiriboga, "Crisis económica y movimiento campesino e indígena en Ecuador," *Revista Andina* 4, no. 1 (1986):7–30.

36. Interviews with political cadres, trade-union activists, and leaders of peasant and Indian organizations, obtained in July–Aug. 1989 and Oct.–Dec. 1990 in Quito, Guayaquil, and Cuenca.

37. Interviews with leaders of ECUARUNARI, July–Aug. 1989 and Oct.–Dec. 1990 in Quito, Riobamba, Cuenca, and Pujilí. See also CONAIE, *Las nacionalidades indígenas en el Ecuador: nuestro proceso organizativo* (Quito: Tinkui, 1988), 245–66; and Santana, "El caso de ECUARUNARI."

38. See CONAIE, *Las nacionalidades indígenas*, 293–306; and León, "Las organizaciones indígenas," 406–14.

39. I will return to CONAIE's activities later. For an official report, see CONAIE, *Memorias del Segundo Congreso* (Quito: Tinkui, 1988).

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administration.[40] Under this agreement, CONAIE assumed responsibility for helping manage a program of intercultural bilingual education in all Indian areas of the country. This program was to have the same official status as the government-run educational system, with its budget provided entirely by the state. In the leftist political camp and its associated popular organizations, critics of CONAIE denounced the agreement as a sellout to the state that was designed to emasculate the contentious potential of the Indian movement. To these critics and the many observers and government officials who shared such opinions about CONAIE's presumed co-optation, the levantamiento came as a stunning political surprise.

THREE ANALYTICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE LEVANTAMIENTO NACIONAL INDIGENA

A few theoretical and methodological clarifications are in order at this point. In my view, in order to account for an act of social protest, an approach based on the subjectivity of the social actors should provide at least clarification of who mobilized, how they did so, and what goals were being pursued. When considered in reverse order, these questions define the three basic coordinates of collective action: the instrumental dimension, related to the fact that the action is directed toward attaining shared goals; the organizational dimension, or the networking and articulation that make collective action possible; and the expressive dimension, which alludes to the fact that the form and content of collective action have denotative value regarding the social identity of the group in question. Taken together, these three dimensions can help explain a social mobilization from a broad and nonreductionist subjective perspective.

Such an explanation would be incomplete, however, because it would reveal nothing about the connection between agency and structure. The intrinsic handicap of a purely subjectivistic account lies in the fact that it is limited to the conditions and motives of the actors as perceived by the actors themselves. Such an account would overlook basic questions about the ways in which the actors' perceptions and behavior are actually fashioned by their involvement in broader sets of socioeconomic and political relationships. In other words, this kind of account would leave out the contextual structural factors that may condition specification of goals, availability of organizational resources, and definition of the social identity of the actors.

The present analysis of the roots of the Indian levantamiento will attempt to combine these two perspectives. Thematically, the analysis will focus on the three dimensions of collective action as guideposts for

40. See Ruth Moya, "A Decade of Bilingual Education and Indigenous Participation in Ecuador," *Prospects* 20, no. 3 (1990):337–42.

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tracing the links between the element of agency and the structural processes that shaped the context of the Indian protest. Because the methodological starting point is the subjective perspective of the actors, this analysis will be based on testimonies published in press reports, proclamations and documents circulated during the protest, several hours of unedited video footage (containing scenes of the levantamiento as well as statements by Indian leaders, participants, and observers from different provinces),[41] and a series of interviews that I carried out in the Sierra between October and December of 1990.

In reviewing the published testimonies, I listed the different motives cited to account for the massive Indian participation in the protest. Thus I made an inventory of the factors that, from the subjective perspective of the participants and observers, were considered most pertinent in explaining why individuals and groups participated in the levantamiento. Almost without exception, the items in this inventory can be catalogued within a taxonomy derived from the conceptual scheme of the three dimensions of collective action. Some explanations alluded to instrumentality in emphasizing the demands and rationalizing participation in terms of the declared aims of the protest. Other accounts referred to the logistical factors that made the mobilization possible, highlighting the relevance of what has been defined as the organizational dimension of collective action. Finally, some testimonies, by invoking the logic of social solidarity and belonging, offer clues to the expressive meaning of the levantamiento. The following sections will focus on each of these elements, systematically tracing the discussion back to the structural factors that set the stage for the mobilization.

Economic Recession, Adjustment Policies, and Agrarian Protest

In terms of the instrumental dimension, the most salient aspect of the testimonies were the affirmations that the purpose of the levantamiento was to protest the high cost of living and government indifference. Again and again, peasants repeated that they were getting less for the products they sold and paying more for everything they bought, especially food and fertilizer. They also stressed that the government was doing nothing to ameliorate conditions in the countryside. The question of land did not appear as a generalized theme, although it was a burning issue in places having ongoing conflicts between landowners and peasants. For purposes of this study, the central question revolves around the connection between these perceived grievances and the changes in the socioeconomic situation of the rural population in the Sierra.

41. Edited parts of this footage are included in the thirty-eight-minute video entitled "El levantamiento indígena de junio de 1990," coproduced by Centro de Estudios y Difusión Social (CEDIS) and CONAIE in 1990.

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The 1980s are now widely regarded as the "lost decade of development" in Latin America. Ecuador exhibited a typical pattern: economic stagnation caused by the exhaustion of import-substitution industrialization, followed by recession resulting from the foreign debt problem, the associated drain on resources, and austerity measures. The Ecuadorian recession was accompanied by aggravating circumstances tied to the collapse of the oil prices, similar to those in Mexico and Venezuela. The adjustment policies begun in 1982 under the Christian Democratic government of Osvaldo Hurtado became draconian during the Conservative administration of León Febres Cordero and were largely maintained by Social Democratic president Rodrigo Borja. Government measures sought to eliminate stimulus programs, abolish protection and subsidies, reduce price controls, promote exports, open up the economy to the international market, reduce public spending, devalue the currency, and foster increases in interest rates.[42] In the 1980s, the average annual growth in GNP fell to 2.4 percent (fluctuating into the negative numbers in 1983 and 1987).[43] The prospects for the 1990s do not look much brighter: between 1990 and 1993, growth in gross national product averaged 3.3 percent, but a decline has been predicted for the period from 1994 to 1997.[44]

What were the connections between economic recession, adjustment policies, and peasant protest? In the 1980s, the annual growth of the agricultural GNP averaged 4.9 percent, indicating that in aggregate terms the agricultural sector did better than the rest of the economy.[45] When one looks at the performance of various subsectors in agriculture, however, it becomes clear that the success story belonged to the agricultural exporters and the agro-industrial producers of the Costa and the northern Sierra.[46] These subsectors of entrepreneurial production benefited from devaluation and continued to be favored by the general trend among Ecuadorians toward increasing consumption of processed food.[47] One detailed analysis based on this and other evidence concluded that the crisis of the 1980s in the countryside hit the peasant economy, and most

42. De Janvry et al., *Adjustment and Equity*, 46–49.

43. Based on data quoted in ibid., 55; and in *Economist Intelligence Unit*, "Ecuador: Country Profile, 1992–1993" (1992):9.

44. Figures quoted from *Economist Intelligence Unit*, "Ecuador: Country Forecast," no. 1 (1994):12–13. The average GNP growth predicted for the 1994–1997 period is 2.3 percent.

45. Carlos Arcos and Gustavo Guerra, "Producción de alimentos y economía campesina en los ochenta," in *La crisis y el desarrollo social en el Ecuador, 1980–1990*, edited by César Montúfar (Quito: El Conejo, 1990), 127.

46. Ibid., 126–33, 138–40. See also De Janvry et al., *Adjustment and Equity*, 53; and Morris D. Whitaker and Jaime Alzamora, "The Performance of Agriculture," in *Agriculture and Economic Survival: The Role of Agriculture in Ecuador's Development*, edited by Whitaker and Dale Colyer (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1990), 47–51.

47. On the changing patterns of food consumption, see Arcos and Guerra, "Producción de alimentos," 140–46; and Whitaker and Alzamora, "Performance of Agriculture," 55–68.

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brutally in the poorest areas of the highlands.[48] Caught in the crunch of inflationary increases in the price of all basic necessities, reduced opportunity for obtaining credit, exorbitant interest rates, and contraction of state supports and services, the market-oriented peasants found their situation worsening as the real prices paid for their products deteriorated and the cost of the mostly imported agricultural inputs was driven up by the devaluations.

Many of these developments, particularly the rising cost of living, hurt the largest group, the semi-proletarian peasants. Two additional factors affecting them should be mentioned. One was the loss of occupational opportunities due to the slowdown in manufacturing and construction. By the end of the 1980s, employment in manufacturing had sunk 10 percent below the level at the beginning of the decade.[49] In the construction industry, activity declined by half between 1987 and 1990.[50] The second major factor was the drastic decline in real wages, which decreased by almost 30 percent between 1980 and 1985 and even further at an annual rate of 8 percent between 1986 and 1990.[51] The resurgence of land conflicts must be set against this economic backdrop. According to CONAIE data, seventy-two land disputes were pending between peasants and landowners in the Sierra on the eve of the levantamiento.[52] This information and my field observations in Alausí (a cantón in Chimborazo where six disputes were taking place) and at a national meeting in Pujilí in November 1990 of groups directly involved strongly suggest that these conflicts cannot be viewed as symptoms of a major new peasant offensive to obtain land. In most cases, they began as disagreements that evolved into legal disputes over the terms of ongoing land sales. Their exacerbation reflects the fact that after the recession narrowed the peasants' opportunities for migratory employment, they have become more aggressive in demanding resolution of such disputes.

The connection is unmistakable. In content, the 1990 levantamiento paralleled what appeared in other Latin American countries as "IMF riots," a display of popular protest induced by the profound impact of the

48. Arcos and Guerra, "Producción de alimentos," 133–38. See also Fernando Rosero, "Política agraria: crítica y propuestas," paper presented at the Séptimo Foro Nacional por los Derechos Humanos, Riobamba, 16–17 Nov. 1990.

49. The number of workers employed in manufacturing fell from 113,000 in 1980 to 102,000 in 1986. See De Janvry et al., *Adjustment and Equity*, 71.

50. Construction plummeted from three million square meters in 1987 to half of that in 1990. See *Economist Intelligence Unit*, "Ecuador: Country Profile," 26.

51. *Economist Intelligence Unit*, "Ecuador: Country Profile," 13; and Juan Falconi, Patricio León, and Salvador Marconi, "Ecuador de los años ochenta: entre el ajuste y la crisis," in Montúfar, *Crisis y desarrollo*, 71.

52. CONAIE, "Trámites y conflictos de tierras presentados por la CONAIE ante la Comisión de Diálogo," unpublished 1990 document. See also Fernando Rosero, "Defensa y recuperación de la tierra: campesinado, identidad etnocultural y nación," in Cornejo Menacho, *Indios*, 419–48.

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economic slump and the adjustment policies of the 1980s.[53] The shock was particularly painful in the Ecuadorian Sierra because the reforms of the 1970s had improved the situation of the peasants somewhat while dramatically increasing their dependence on the country's macroeconomic conditions. This context shaped the instrumental orientation of the levantamiento, defining it as a protest event aimed at ventilating the discontent of the rural population and demanding changes in state policies.

The Organizational Bases of Collective Action

The 1990 levantamiento was notable for its massive turnout of protesters. How were these multitudes assembled? What made individuals leave their homes in droves to picket along the roads and participate in the demonstrations? Most testimonies point to the initiatives taken by the Indian communities and their cabildos, although specifics varied from place to place. In some cases, meetings were held in which the entire community debated CONAIE's proposal, made the decision to join in the protest, and set up special committees to take charge of the preparations. In other places, the cabildos made the decision that the community would participate after consulting informally with the rank and file and took steps to coordinate the turnout. In other places, the decision to participate was made by the regional federations and unions and transmitted from the top down as "an order" to the member communities. The overriding point is that it was primarily the community-based local and regional organizations that took the initiative and coordinated popular participation by mobilizing their influence, resources, and at times capacity for coercion to guarantee contribution of the material resources needed as well as personal involvement in roadblocks, marches, and rallies. To clarify this matter, more needs to be determined about the communities' sources of strength. The following overview will discuss four factors that can be related to the socioeconomic and political changes of the last thirty years.

The first factor was a political power vacuum in the countryside. In the Ecuadorian Sierra, the system based on the hacienda had been more than an agrarian regime. It had also sustained the political and ideological domination that allowed landowners, directly or via the mediation of mestizo priests and village authorities, to monopolize power at the local levels. This local control helped the landowners consolidate as the hegemonic regional class and become involved in national politics as

53. On the "IMF riots," see John Walton, "Debt, Protest, and the State in Latin America," in *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements*, edited by Susan Eckstein (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 299–328.

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a conservative force.[54] Socioeconomic reorganization during the 1960s and 1970s altered the situation dramatically. Among the peasants who had to organize in order to fight for the land, a sense of collective purpose emerged based on appeals to primordial loyalties. In reactivating the ties of extended kinship and reciprocity, this process reinforced (and in many cases even regenerated) the old Indian community as the natural organizational framework for these relationships. At the same time, the direct and indirect effects of the agrarian reform had undermined the landowners' bases of power. The figure of the landowning *gamonal* (political boss) faded away, and no other political force seriously attempted to enter rural society and fill the void. These circumstances created space for the revitalized Indian community, which in taking up representation of the peasants and raising their new demands began to gain prominence as a relevant actor in local and regional political arenas.[55]

The second factor pertains to the role of external political agents, which is always pivotal to organizing and politicizing the rural population. The subject of peasants' political allies has a complex history in Ecuador. Two trends can be identified over the past twenty years. One was the diminishing influence of the leftist groups (Communists and Socialists). Eager to promote a unitary peasant-based class consciousness, they had always viewed ethnicity as a divisive factor inimical to their projects of social transformation. The other trend was the growing influence of progressive Catholic sectors, inspired by the idea that ethnicity could be useful in promoting a grassroots-based, self-managed model of development founded on the traditional organizational framework of the Indian community.[56] This important shift in external influences can be correlated with the structural changes already outlined here. The ascendancy of the left had been largely due to the fact that the struggle for land generated great receptivity to radical appeals. But the peasants' access to land redefined their situation, and they began to respond to other appeals

54. On the hacienda-based system of domination, see Cosse, *Estado y agro*, 20–25; Osvaldo Hurtado, "El proceso político," in *Ecuador hoy*, edited by Gerhard Drekonja et al. (Bogotá: Siglo Veintiuno, 1978), 166–69; and Andrés Guerrero, *La desintegración de la administración étnica en el Ecuador: de sujetos-indios a ciudadanos-étnicos*, CEDIME working paper (Quito: Centro de Investigación de los Movimientos Sociales del Ecuador, 1990), 10–20.

55. No systematic study has been published on the revitalization of the Indian communities. For partial references, see Galo Ramón, "La comunidad indígena ecuatoriana: planteos políticos," in *Comunidad andina: alternativas políticas de desarrollo*, edited by the Centro Andino de Acción Popular (Quito: CAAP, 1981), 69–70; León, "Las organizaciones indígenas," 384–89; and Guerrero, *La desintegración de la administración étnica*, 24–26. It would be interesting to analyze the process according to some of the insights offered by Victor V. Magagna in *Communities of Grain: Rural Rebellion in Comparative Perspective* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

56. These remarks are based on interviews with national leaders, regional activists, and external observers of peasant and Indian organizations. Despite the importance of the relationships among these organizations, the leftist groups, and the Catholic Church, they have not been systematically researched.

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perceived as more in tune with their new needs and the political realities of the period following the agrarian reform.

The third source of strength of the Indian grassroots organizations was their new role as mediators between the rural population and development agencies. This role was fostered by state policies of the late 1970s and early 1980s that, after shelving the land reform, began to emphasize assistance programs, infrastructure, and provision of services in the rural areas.[57] It is true that subsequent spending cuts and austerity policies resulted in a significant withdrawal by the state. But this change has not diminished the mediating functions of the communities because the state has been partly replaced by an array of national and foreign nongovernmental organizations that have acquired high visibility in the Ecuadorian countryside in bringing aid to foster small-scale projects of self-managed development.[58] The process has generally reinforced the Indian communities because while local members perceive the need for these groups as vehicles for obtaining the external aid, the state and the nongovernmental organizations appreciate their usefulness as organized "partners" who can facilitate realization of programs and the orderly transfer of resources. The interest of the external agencies in boosting the community is evidenced by the fact that many of their projects include special assistance for organizational development and leadership training.

The last favorable factor considered here is the existence of Indian personnel capable of assuming leadership roles. What are the origins of these leaders? A proper answer to this question would require a more detailed analysis of the new social conditions in the countryside, the situation of strategic segments of the Indian population, and the interactions involving development agencies and political allies. Here one can only refer briefly to the most relevant aspects. One of the new social conditions has been greater access to education, which added a basic dimension to incorporating the Indian population into the life of the country, raised the aptitude levels of younger generations, and enabled further qualification for those who managed to go on to institutions of higher learning.[59] A motivating factor within the groups from which many of the Indian leaders come is the "status inconsistency effect":

57. See Alicia Ibarra, *Los indígenas y el estado en el Ecuador* (Quito: Abya-Yala, 1987), 171–88; Jorge Almeida, "Vigencia de lo indígena en el Ecuador," in *Etnia en el Ecuador: situaciones y análisis*, edited by the Centro Andino de Acción Popular (Quito: CAAP, 1984), 21–23; and Mary Crain, "The Social Construction of National Identity in Highland Ecuador," *Anthropological Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (1990):48–49.

58. In the mid-1980s, fifty-six nongovernmental organizations (forty-one domestic and fifteen foreign) were running programs in Ecuador along with thirty-six international institutions (twelve bilateral and twenty-four multilateral). For a complete listing, see Food and Agriculture Organization–Ecuador, *Directorio de organizaciones no gubernamentales ecuatorianas para el desarrollo rural* (Quito: FAO-Ecuador, 1985).

59. For an interesting essay on the role of education, see Galo Ramón, "Ese secreto poder de la escritura," in Cornejo Menacho, *Indios*, 362–70.

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these better-off artisans, petty merchants, and peasants are caught in a contradiction between expectations raised by their economic mobility and the persistence of a negative valuation of their Indian condition by whites and mestizos.[60] Finally, regarding interactions with external agents, formation of an elite of Indian leaders was greatly assisted by the training of educators to carry out state-sponsored literacy campaigns and by countless consciousness-raising drives, community courses, and workshops for activists conducted over the years by leftist groups, the Catholic Church, and development agencies.[61]

Expression of a New Collective Identity

In analyzing the expressive significance of the levantamiento, I began with testimonies asserting that participants joined the mobilization because "we are Indians and this is a protest by all the Indians," or "we come to demand the rights that belong to us as Indians," or "we want to show that we Indians are united, organized, and can make our own demands." Many of such statements included references to the pride of being Indian and to five centuries of discrimination and denial of ancestral rights. These testimonies and other clues like the phenomenon of "participación por contagio" (contagious participation) that developed during the mobilization reveal a strong sense of ethnic solidarity. Expression of this sentiment charged the levantamiento with extraordinary meaning when Indians signaled to fellow Indians and to the rest of Ecuadorian society that a new collective identity was in the making. The key question for my analysis centers on the conditions that have been shaping development of this new identity.

As before, the task must begin with a retrospective look at the recent social history of the Sierra. As discussed, the agrarian regime in the highlands could also be viewed as a regime of political domination. The ethnic dimension of this power system was defined by a basic historical continuity: the use of ethnicity to mark social rank and reinforce relations of economic exploitation. Miscegenation and acculturation occurred extensively in the northern and southern extremes of the Sierra. But in the demographic core (the central axis of the highlands), *mestizaje* and *hispanización* was limited to towns and villages. In the countryside, Inca and Spanish reorganizations had induced a long process of ethnotransformation that blurred the differences among the original ethnic

60. See Erwin H. Frank, "Movimiento indígena, identidad étnica y el levantamiento: un proyecto político alternativo en el Ecuador," in Cornejo Menacho, *Indios*, 520–27.

61. In one way or another, participation in these activities and programs had been a key element in the formation of virtually every Indian activist I interviewed in Ecuador.

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groups and favored what has been aptly described as a "generic" Indian ascription and identity.[62]

In a world where the existence of mestizos softened racial boundaries, the new Indian identity was socially constructed around three basic elements: the Quichua (or Quechua) language, the social and cultural traits characteristic of a traditional peasantry, and subordinate status to white landowners and mestizos in the villages. Thus ethnicity was defined as a sociocultural and political referent that furnished the basis for specifying rank and imparting order and meaning to the collective experience of dominated and dominators. Among the dominated, this referent generated an Indian self-identification profoundly stigmatized by a sense of inferiority. The dominant groups used the ethnic referent to justify their own supremacy, which they rationalized as a necessary consequence of the alleged cultural chasm separating them from *la raza vencida* (the vanquished race).

The breakdown of the hacienda regime and the other changes reviewed here signaled disintegration of the system of "ethnic administration."[63] This outcome created conditions for a new ethnotransformation and for revamping the foundations of Indian collective identity in the Sierra. While this phenomenon can be approached from various perspectives, one can make a case for a sociological interpretation based on two premises: first, that redefining this identity is a process whose content is being gradually constructed through the circumstances of the Indians' encounter with the larger Ecuadorian society; second, that at least for now, the main significance of the process is that the Indians are proving capable of converting the negative connotations of their ethnic ascription into positive self-identification and using it as a strategy for collective action.

The logic of the first premise leads to the following argument. Until the 1950s, Indian identity was "generic" but fragmentary, pertaining to groups that were unrelated among themselves and isolated from the rest of society as a result of their subordination to the haciendas. Changes during the 1960s and 1970s allowed Indians to meet and interact with other groups like themselves and with other Ecuadorians, thus creating opportunities to perceive the specifics of their common situation and look at themselves as a different category within the broader society. This encounter and self-recognition has been taking place at a time when Ecuador is experiencing an accelerated modernization, and thus from the very moment when the Indians look out over the horizon of the country's public life, they are challenged by an existing white-mestizo project of

62. Blanca Muratorio, "Protestantism, Ethnicity, and Class in Chimborazo," in *Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador*, edited by Norman Whitten (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 520.

63. Guerrero, *La desintegración de la administración étnica*, 9–15.

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national integration and development. The situation calls for definitions because it poses the imperative of having to respond not only to the specifics of this challenge but also to the perception of new necessities generated by social change.

An excellent example here is the demand for bilingual education. When offered access to education as an integral part of the prevailing project of national integration, the Indians had to take a stand. They had to decide whether they wished to be educated like the rest of the Ecuadorians, or whether their education should incorporate and celebrate their linguistic and cultural differences. Democratizing local politics poses a similar test. What should be the institutional bases of this local democracy—those offered by the white-mestizo project or those existing within the Indian community? Unlike the issue of bilingual education, this is a question that has not yet been addressed systematically by the Indian movement. But at the grassroots level, Indian communities are strengthening their administrative and political functions, reviving and revising their customary laws, and demanding the appointment of Indian prefects in many parishes. Indians must confront other issues like these in their incorporation into national life. In taking stands, they will also be taking further steps toward gaining access to citizenship in a manner that would "acknowledge their difference."[64] Thus the content of the Indian identity, far from being a set of "givens," is something that will continue to be transformed as Indians respond to the challenges of integration according to their perceived needs and aspirations.

An influential thesis on ethnicity proposed by Fredrik Barth maintains that the essential element in inter-ethnic relations is the defining of boundaries between the groups in question.[65] This theory, which emphasizes form over content, is partially relevant to what is happening in Ecuador, where the Indians are gradually demarcating their differences. Unqualified application of the argument could be misleading, however, for the affirmation of cultural difference appears to be inseparable from the quest for integration and access to citizenship.

Clifford Geertz's substantive approach emphasizing the cultural content of ethnicity presents a similar difficulty.[66] For Geertz, one of the most troubling prospects in Asia and Africa is that ethnic conflicts may fragment the nations that emerged after colonialism. Geertz explains these conflicts as a contradiction between an integrative impulse that

64. I am borrowing the phrase "que se reconozca la diferencia" from León, "Las organizaciones indígenas," 416.

65. Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, edited by Barth (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1969).

66. Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States," in Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 255–310.

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seeks to create the homogenous identity deemed necessary for modernization and national development and the reactions of segments of the population whose sense of individual self-esteem and collective identity continues to be anchored in the daily realities of consanguinity, language, customs, and traditions. This approach might interpret the Ecuadorian Indian movement as a rejection of the white-mestizo project of integration. But on looking at the problem from this perspective, it is evident that what the Indians are rejecting is not the proposal of integration per se but the plans for cultural homogenization embedded in it. The weak point in Geertz's argument is its failure to question the intrinsic cultural intolerance of the liberal concept of citizenship. If it is accepted that citizenship implies or requires an "ironing out" of all cultural differences, then one cannot appreciate the significance of responses that while oriented toward integration also pose the challenge of forging a new concept of citizenship capable of acknowledging and reconciling cultural diversity. To deal with this complex reality, overarching theories of ethnicity (regardless of their formal or substantive emphasis) would be required to transcend the limits of the modernist attitude and come to terms with the concept of ambivalence.[67]

In the meantime, it might be useful to pay attention to "middle-range" theories that view ethnicity as a basis for collective action. For example, Charles Tilly and Craig Jenkins have argued that the potential for mobilization is greater when groups have a cohesive identity and when their members are connected by dense networks of interpersonal relations.[68] This finding is consistent with research showing that after a history of exploitation of subordinate ethnic groups, these groups tend to reaffirm their ethnicity as a basis for solidarity and resistance.[69]

In this light and following the arguments of Alain Touraine, ethnicity can be perceived as a claim to a capacity for action that enables some social groups to "fight out" their conflicts and try to realize their interests and goals.[70] Recent events in Ecuador clearly fit this conceptualization, given the redefinition of the way a social group perceives itself (from a stigmatized group to a collectivity with rights) and a bid to fulfill a broad array of aspirations based on this new awareness of collective identity. These outcomes were encouraged by the fact that the Ecuadorian state displayed some receptivity to the Indians. During the 1980s, the state approached the Indian communities with development programs,

67. On the modern mentality's abhorrence of "the scandal of ambivalence," see Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity, 1991).

68. Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1978), 52–97; and Jenkins, "Resource Mobilization Theory," 538.

69. David Mason, "Introduction: Controversies and Continuities in Race and Ethnic Relations Theory," in *Theories of Race and Ethnic Relations*, edited by John Rex and David Mason (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 8–9.

70. Touraine, *Return of the Actor*, 81–82.

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dealt with CONAIE and its member organizations, committed governmental support to bilingual education, and hinted at a willingness to negotiate some degree of territorial autonomy for Amazonian groups. In doing so, the state legitimized the Indian organizations and also reinforced the idea that ethnicity is a viable channel for advancing demands and gaining access to social benefits. This conclusion invites some final comments on CONAIE, the organization that represents the Indians vis-à-vis the state.

CONCLUSION: REDEFINITIONS WITHIN THE INDIAN MOVEMENT

In many ways, CONAIE's development reflects the processes outlined in this analysis. But in the national political arena, other factors must be reckoned with. To begin with, this is the stage on which the organization appears to be acting for all Indians before the broader society, the state, and other institutional and political actors. Inevitably, this role of representation draws CONAIE into the play of alliances and confrontations that defines the national political process, an outcome implying that the political process itself becomes one of the foremost influences on the development of CONAIE and its prospects of success. Yet from the perspective of the social base of the movement, the most decisive factor is the fact that the Amazonian Indian peoples are also represented by CONAIE. In numbers, the Amazonian groups (totaling some one hundred and twenty thousand persons) carry much less demographic weight that the Quichuas of the Sierra (estimated to number more than a million). But the Amazonians are prominent because they are located in a sparsely populated region that is rich in oil and other natural resources and also regarded as vital to national security.[71] Confronted by mestizo colonists, the state, and foreign companies seeking to exploit these resources, the Amazonian Indians have shown consistent organization, pugnacity, and greater projection of their demands on territoriality and autonomy. This contrast between the Andes and Amazonia creates an internal disparity that until now has stimulated the dynamism of CONAIE. But it also constrains CONAIE by compelling the organization to deal constantly with tensions that if left unresolved could diminish its ability to operate cohesively in the public arena.

To appraise CONAIE's trajectory prior to the levantamiento, it may be useful to examine its performance in the three operational fields suggested by my model of collective action. Furthermore, one should always pay attention to the strategic and tactical orientations of a social

71. On Amazonian Indian organizations, see Ernesto Salazar, "The Federación Shuar and the Colonization Frontier," in Whitten, *Cultural Transformations*, 589–613; Lucy Ruiz, "Pueblos indígenas y etnicidad en la Amazonía," in Cornejo Menacho, *Indios*, 449–97; and CONAIE, *Las nacionalidades indígenas*, 35–135.

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movement.[72] The balance of CONAIE's activities shows that its initial priorities were largely focused on the organizational front, as most energy went into networking, bridging differences between Andean and Amazonian groups, contacting nongovernmental organizations in search of material support, and stabilizing the internal arrangements essential to effective functioning.[73] From the instrumental perspective, CONAIE's accomplishments were meaningful but relatively narrow in scope. It achieved a significant breakthrough on the issue of bilingual education. But the process of negotiating the agreement with the government and subsequent assignment of most of the qualified activists to the program forced the organization to neglect initiatives on other issues. In the expressive domain, where organizations must articulate the symbols of the collective identity of their constituencies and convey these symbols to the rest of society, CONAIE's performance has been relatively weak. After five years of existence, the organization was still handicapped by lack of a regular bulletin or newspaper,[74] and little had been done to raise the level of the debates and develop the ideological underpinnings of the movement. Among CONAIE efforts at outreach was involvement in the nationwide campaign to repudiate the Columbus Quincentenary and commemorate instead the "Five Hundred Years of Resistance."[75] That experience was marred somewhat by conflicts with other participating organizations interested in introducing a "less Indian and more popular" content into the campaign.[76]

Analysis of CONAIE's discourse (as expressed in its documents and in the declarations of its leaders) indicates that its strategy from the beginning has been governed by two basic principles: the conviction that the struggle must be focused entirely on the aspirations of Indians as Indians; and preservation of the autonomy of the Indian peoples and the Indian movement at all costs. But the formulation of these principles is general and vague in that it offers no blueprints for incorporating them into specific proposals on the wide range of issues confronting the Indian movement. From this point of view, CONAIE's neglect of the tasks of ideological elaboration has clearly been a liability. To develop strategic

72. By *strategy,* I mean the definition of long-term objectives as well as prescriptions about the general ways in which these objectives should be pursued. In speaking of *tactics,* I refer to orientations that shape decisions about how to behave and use resources in specific conjunctures.

73. My appraisal of CONAIE's performance is based on materials produced by the organization (press releases, documents, reports) and on interviews with Indian activists and external observers.

74. Social movements give high priority to publishing journals regularly because of their usefulness as a means of publicizing the organizational viewpoint and because they fulfill the classic function of "collective organizer." In Colombia, for example, the monthly *Unidad Indígena* was crucial to consolidation of CRIC (Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca) and its leading role in the subsequent development of a nationwide Indian movement.

75. CONAIE, *Quiñientos años de resistencia india* (Quito: CONAIE, 1988).

76. Interviews with leaders of CONAIE and other organizations.

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competence, increase its capacity to define priorities, and impart direction to the long-term struggle, an organized social movement must be able to count on coherent ideological referents. With CONAIE, developing these referents would require a more deliberate and systematic effort to reflect on the nature of Ecuadorian society, the Indian condition, possible scenarios for ethnicity and nationhood, and the question of how to reconcile "bread-and-butter" demands with higher aspirations.

In terms of CONAIE's tactical orientation, prior to the 1990 levantamiento, the organization had consistently favored bargaining amicably with the state and refraining from contentious mobilizations. To grasp the logic of this pattern, one must keep in mind that tactical definitions are always shaped by the actor's perception of the immediate field of threats and opportunities. As a new organization aware of its vulnerability and facing difficulties in its own consolidation, CONAIE had good reasons to try to avoid the dangerous consequences of head-on confrontations with the state. At the same time, the state's receptivity was inviting in suggesting possible rapid gains that CONAIE could flaunt as "conquests" and in offering a relatively smooth admission into the political scene as the legitimate representative of the Indians.

One of the most puzzling Latin American paradoxes of recent times is the fact that, despite the regressive impact of the adjustment policies on the conditions of most of the population, popular movements appear to be ebbing. In Ecuador, as in other countries, this retreat can be traced to the ideological effects of the return of liberal democracy and the ongoing crisis within labor and peasant organizations, usually influenced by leftist political groups that have been unable to redefine their utopias or offer alternatives to neoliberal economics and social policy. In these circumstances, social protest tends to take spontaneous forms of expression that lack direction and organization and therefore have little prospect of being effective, as illustrated by the so-called IMF riots in several countries. In the Ecuadorian Sierra, however, the situation differed because as the conditions for rural protest matured, the rising Indian movement could channel a broad and orderly expression of grievances. Without planning or foresight, CONAIE found itself the only popular organization that could represent the distressed rural population of the Sierra. This point is demonstrated by the fact that the idea of undertaking a major mobilization came not from the national leadership (which was initially very reluctant) but was almost imposed by regional delegates. At a meeting convened in Pujilí in April 1990, they exposed the severity of the crisis and insisted that something had to be done to respond to calls for action that were pouring in from the communities.[77]

77. Based on interviews with national and regional leaders. See also Luis Macas, "El levantamiento indígena visto por sus protagonistas," in Cornejo Menacho, *Indios*, 30.

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During the levantamiento, CONAIE's unique position as the "right agent" to articulate rural protest was evidenced by expressions of support from mestizo peasant sectors and by the fact that several mestizo groups asked CONAIE to represent them in negotiations with the government on land disputes.[78]

Thus abruptly and without warning, CONAIE was forced by pressure from below to take up agrarian demands not central to its agenda and also to change tactics, shifting from pleading and lobbying to a more assertive stand backed by popular mobilization. Given the circumstances, the organization deserves high marks for its ability to respond. The summons to mobilize was conveyed effectively throughout the highlands. The list of demands aptly combined calls for immediate government action on pressing economic issues (price increases for peasant products, price freezes on inputs and essential consumer goods, and speedy resolution of the land conflicts) with programmatic ethnic demands (such as the constitutional definition of Ecuador as a plurinational country, territorial autonomy for the Amazonian groups, enactment of the bilingual education program, and legalization of Indian medicine).[79] Yet the popular turnout and the actual protest events were not the work of CONAIE but of grassroots-based local and regional organizations. Moreover, CONAIE showed limitations in subsequent negotiations with the government. In these dialogues, the Indian delegates appeared ill-informed on the issues, lacked a clear mandate to make decisions, and showed little capacity to set priorities, define agendas, and deal with the evasive tactics of government ministers.[80] Although these flaws can be attributed partly to limited time to prepare for the negotiations, they also reflect the rudimentary development of many of CONAIE's organizational abilities.

After considering all these factors and outcomes, I have arrived at the following interpretation of the levantamiento and its significance for the Indian movement. By the late 1980s, economic recession and the severe impact of the state's adjustment policies had sown the seeds for a strong expression of rural protest in the Ecuadorian highlands. Moreover, the socioeconomic and political changes of the previous thirty years had favored vigorous development of the Indian movement, which provided the organizational basis for channeling mounting discontent and coordinating mobilization of the rural population. For the Indian movement as a whole and CONAIE as its national agent, the levantamiento marked the incorporation of agrarian demands and adoption of a more combative attitude. This contentious turn amounts to a significant tactical change,

78. Interviews with CONAIE's legal advisor and delegates to the negotiations with the national government, Nov. 1990, Quito.

79. See the demands enumerated in Field, "Ecuador's Pan-Indian Uprising," 41.

80. Interviews with CONAIE delegates who negotiated with the national government, Nov. 1990, in Quito and Pujilí.

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particularly now that the new Conservative administration of Sixto Durán Ballén is expected to take steps to contain the Indian movement, isolate it from other popular organizations, and exploit its internal rifts to divide it. For CONAIE, the changing circumstances pose momentous challenges. On one hand, they underscore the need to strive for greater organizational refinement and efficacy. On the other, they add urgency to the need to formulate strategic definitions that spell out the organization's view of the connection between the agrarian issue and the ethnic-national question.

Finally, in terms of the broader Latin American context, this inquiry into the Ecuadorian Sierra has touched on factors that should be relevant to studying Indian movements in comparable highland regions of the other Andean countries, Mexico, and Central America. Taken as a whole, these factors suggest a general interpretive framework in which contemporary Indian movements can be read as a radical critique of the kind of modernity that has prevailed in Latin America. The "really existing" modernity that befell the Indians and the popular sectors was utterly alien to the ideal modernity that had been touted since the Enlightenment as rationalizing progress in the service of freedom and the enrichment of human life. What Indians experienced instead was a reckless modernity whose growth-centered models of capitalist development disregarded the basic needs of the people and failed to establish safety nets to attenuate the repercussions of its crises. It was a cowardly modernity whose sometimes truncated, often cosmetic, and always insufficient agrarian reforms led to rural transformations that shoved entire populations into the national mainstream without giving them a real chance at dignified economic and social integration. It was a hypocritical modernity whose rhetoric on universal political citizenship was never matched by consolidating democratic institutions that would allow and even encourage popular participation in decision making. It was a bigoted modernity whose imagery of national identity stereotyped Indianness as backward and justified humiliating discriminatory practices and repression or "folklorization" of Indian culture.

In Ecuador as elsewhere in Latin America, the Indian resurgence comes at a time when the modernist-nationalist-developmentalist project in its variants appears to have lost all vitality. A state that proved incapable of fulfilling the project of national integration, which in the warped modernist perspective should have included "turning the Indians into Ecuadorians," is now retreating to a minimalist role. Political and business elites have forsaken developmentalist agendas to embrace the do-nothing recipe of neoliberalism. The leftist avant-gardes that had always played a role in popular mobilization have evaporated as a relevant factor. And the Indians, free at last from the onslaught of modernizers of all stripes, are stepping in to claim their right to a better life, autonomy, and difference. In my view, it would be wrong to read their challenge as a wholesale rejection of modernity. The Indians' explicit demands show

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that they are interested in the material benefits of development and wish to be citizens of the Ecuadorian state. What they seem to want is a different kind of modernity: one that would provide self-determination, a space of their own to try to be what they are discovering they want to be. The ultimate irony is that if the Indians are allowed to do so, they may end up fulfilling for themselves the original emancipatory project of modernity that liberals, reformers, and socialists failed to accomplish.

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