

# Ecuadorean Strategic Culture

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FINDINGS REPORT

**FIU**

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The FIU-SOUTHCOM Academic Partnership  
Strategic Cultures Assessments

Florida International University's Applied Research Center (FIU ARC), in collaboration with the United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) and FIU's Latin American and Caribbean Center (LACC), has recently formed the FIUSOUTHCOM Academic Partnership. The partnership entails FIU providing the highest quality research-based knowledge to further explicative understanding of the political, strategic, and cultural dimensions of state behavior and foreign policy. This goal will be accomplished by employing a strategic culture approach. The initial phase of strategic culture assessments consists of a year-long research program that focuses on developing a standard analytical framework to identify and assess the strategic culture of ten Latin American countries. FIU will facilitate professional presentations of the following ten countries over the course of one year: Venezuela, Cuba, Haiti, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina. In addition, a findings report on the impact of Islam and Muslims within Latin America will be produced.

The overarching purpose of the project is two-fold: to generate a rich and dynamic base of knowledge pertaining to the political, social, and strategic factors that influence state behavior; and to contribute to SOUTHCOM's Socio-Cultural Dynamics (SCD) Program. Utilizing the notion of strategic culture, SOUTHCOM has commissioned FIU ARC to conduct country studies in order to explain how states comprehend, interpret, and implement national security policy vis-à-vis the international system.

SOUTHCOM defines strategic culture as follows: "the combination of internal and external influences and experiences – geographic, historical, cultural, economic, political and military – that shape and influence the way a country understands its relationship to the rest of the world, and how a state will behave in the international community." FIU will identify and expound upon the strategic and cultural factors that inform the rationale behind the perceptions and behavior of select states in the present political and security climate by analyzing demography, history, regional customs, traditions, belief systems, and other cultural and historical influences that have contributed to the development of a particular country's current security rationale and interpretation of national security.

To meet the stated goals, FIU ARC will host a series of professional workshops in Miami. These workshops bring subject matter experts from all over the US and Latin America together to explore and discuss a country's specific history, geography, culture, economic, political, and military climates vis-à-vis strategic culture. At the conclusion of each workshop, FIU publishes a findings report, which is presented at SOUTHCOM.

The following Ecuador Findings Report, authored by Dr. Jean Muteba Rahier, is the product of a working group held in Miami on November 5, 2009, which included 10 prominent academic and private sector experts in Ecuadorian history, culture, geography, economics, politics, and military affairs.

The views expressed in this findings report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the US Government, US Department of Defense, US Southern Command, FIU-ARC, or Florida International University.

On behalf of FIU-ARC, we wish to acknowledge and thank all of the participants for their contributions, which made the Ecuadorian Strategic Culture workshop a tremendous success.

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## Executive Summary

### *Origins of Ecuadorian Strategic Culture*

- One of the most significant realities that ground Ecuadorian Strategic Culture (hereinafter ESC) is the profound sense shared by many Ecuadorians that is powerfully expressed in the dominant narrative of national identity: that is, the geo-physical territory that defines Ecuador was a political unit long before the modern State was inaugurated.
- Ecuador continues to perceive Colombia and Peru as violent and aggressive neighbors (an example is the current conflict between Ecuador and Colombia regarding the FARC), even though they are generally non-hostile to, and sometimes allies of, Ecuador on specific issues in multilateral forums.
- Ecuador is and sees itself as multi-dimensionally diverse: the cultural and “racial” diversity of its population (whites, *mestizos*, indigenous peoples, black communities, Lebanese-Ecuadorians, Chinese-Ecuadorians, etc.), the diversity of its ecological environments (the Galapagos Islands, the coastal region, the Andean highlands, the Amazonian region), and the diversity of its economic activities all contribute to a rich, complex, and dynamic society.
- Historically, the idea of *Mestizaje* has been the “trope for the nation.” However, as expressed in the 2008 Constitution, multiculturalism has become central to the conceptualization of national identity in Ecuador.

### *Ecuadorian Strategic Culture: Keepers and Challenges*

- Just like anywhere else in the world, the keepers of ESC are found in the elite sectors of society. However, traditionally, Ecuadorian elites have been fragmented

due, in large part, to geographical divisions.

- Since the nineteenth century, coalitions of elites, in conjunction with middle class sectors and the military, have attempted to create a unitary national State. Military interventions in domestic politics have been justified with claims that the armed forces have acted on behalf of the general public interest and against the particularistic projects of regionally-fragmented elites.
- Since the early twentieth century, the military and technocratic sectors have seen themselves as the standard-bearers of national values such as “development,” “progress” and “modernity.” In different military governments, civilian technocratic elites have joined with military elites to carry out fundamental projects related to state and nation building.
- The hacienda system is a key concept to keep in mind when analyzing the culture of elites in Ecuador, as well as the forms of articulation and engagement between elites and subaltern groups. Paternalism and redistribution, in conjunction with occasional violence, which were central for the continuation of the system, remain salient values among elites. While the hacienda system has been discontinued in practice, it still affects the functioning of the Ecuadorian State and society.
- Historically, elites have received a rigorous religious education. Christian charity and paternalism have been important parts of this education. Nowadays, elites tend to receive a foreign education that, for the most part, also includes religious values. In the realm of education, elites are taught little about the history of the country, and even less about Ecuadorian society’s cultural diversity.
- A “new” elite, however, is emerging. The type of exploitation that existed in traditional haciendas is no longer well-regarded and is not allowed. The current government is engaged in a nationalist campaign that seeks to incorporate as opposed to alienate the diverse groups that comprise Ecuadorian society under a

single nationalist identity. The “new” elite recognizes the importance of engaging and promoting Ecuadorian history and national culture in strengthening its position of negotiating with contending cultural, economic and political groups and movements.

## **The Origins of ESC**

The origins of ESC are found in historical, geographic, and cultural realities and processes, both past and present. One of the most significant realities that informs ESC is the profound sense shared by many Ecuadorians of different backgrounds, who powerfully express the dominant narrative of Ecuadorian national identity, viz., that there is indeed a geo-physical territory that defines Ecuador as a political unit. That narrative establishes an almost “natural” relationship between ESC, geo-physical borders, national identity, politics, culture, and perceptions of security. It draws upon a long history that began even before the Spanish conquest of South America, and grounds the Nation-State of Ecuador into the *longue durée*.

As a relatively small country, Ecuador has had to face the necessity of defending what it perceives as its sovereignty—embedded in territorial integrity—from both Peru’s and Colombia’s (its two larger and more populous neighbors) ambitions to encroach upon portions of Ecuadorian physical territory. Although Colombia and Peru are now non-hostile to, and sometimes allies of, Ecuador on specific issues in multilateral forums, both countries continue to be perceived as violent and aggressive neighbors (for example, the current conflict between Ecuador and Colombia regarding Colombia’s illegal incursion into Ecuadorian territory to combat the FARC). Another important aspect of ESC is that Ecuador is and sees itself as multi-dimensionally diverse: the cultural and “racial” diversity of its population (whites, *mestizos*, indigenous peoples, blacks, Lebanese-Ecuadorians, Chinese-Ecuadorians, etc.), the diversity of its ecological environments (the Galapagos Islands, the coastal region, the Andean highlands, the Amazonian region), and the diversity of its economic activities all contribute to a rich, complex, and dynamic society. Finally, the sociological, political, and economic functioning of the Nation-State and its parts have been marked by a clear demarcation between white and white-*mestizo*

elites and middle classes on one side, and indigenous or Indian populations that more often than not are found at the bottom of the socio-economic strata on the other.

Recently, the relations of force between who could be seen in this context as the legitimate keepers of Strategic Culture—the whites, white-*mestizo* elites, the middle classes, and their indigenous challengers—have been changing, and indigenous political organizations have now become major players on the national political scene. Indeed, the indigenous national organization, that is, the CONAIE (*Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador*), through its marches, rallies, and its organization of road blockages, has been pivotal in provoking the removal from office of two presidents in recent history, that is, Abdalá Bucaram Ortiz and Jamil Mahuad.

## **National Culture, Territorial Integrity, and State Formation: A Historical Perspective**

Generally speaking, Ecuadorians feel that Ecuador has been victimized by both Colombia and Peru on various occasions throughout its history. Despite a mentality of relative powerlessness and victimhood, most Ecuadorians—of all racial and ethnic backgrounds—identify with their nation and express patriotic feelings toward it. They share a common sense of place, national identity and citizenship. The keepers of ECS, that is to say, Ecuadorian elites, have developed a dominant narrative of national identity and history that can be understood in light of the following historical periods or turning points when events profoundly influenced the political, economic, geographic, and strategic parameters of Ecuadorian society.

Pre-Columbian Ecuador was home to many important regional cultures (including the Quitus, Shyris, Huancavilcas, Manteños, and Cañaris), but prior to the sixteenth century these were not unified into a single political system or nation (Meggers 1966). Things began to change in 1463 when an Inca army, led by Huayna Capac, invaded “Ecuador” from “Peru.” The campaign to subdue the Ecuadorian tribes and chiefdoms lasted 37 years. In 1500, the Inca King Huayna Capac finally concluded the long war, and succeeded in extending the Inca Empire into “Ecuador.” He subsequently established a second Inca capital at Quito, where he took up residence. He preferred Quito to the traditional Inca capital at Cuzco. After Huayna Capac’s death in 1527, two of his sons,

Atahualpa (of Quito) and Huascar (of Cuzco), fought a civil war over succession. Atahualpa's army defeated the army of Huascar at a major battle in Ecuador in 1532. Huascar was ultimately executed on Atahualpa's orders. As a small country with limited armed forces, Ecuador has had relatively few historical military heroes to adulate. However, Huayna Capac's establishment of the northern Inca capital at Quito and Atahualpa's victory over Huascar in the war of succession are points of pride for many Ecuadorians. The Inca invasion of Ecuador in the fifteenth century was seen as a Peruvian attack, yet King Huayna Capac was "Ecuadorianized" when he established a new capital at Quito; his victorious son Atahualpa has historically been viewed as an authentic Ecuadorian hero. Following the defeat of Huascar, Atahualpa moved south to take possession of the traditional Inca capital of Cuzco. He was intercepted and captured by the Spanish expedition of Francisco Pizarro at Cajamarca, Peru in 1532. Atahualpa was held for a ransom of gold and silver, and then subsequently executed by the Spanish. Pizarro sent a force south to seize Cuzco in 1533. He sent another force north under the command of his lieutenant, Sebastian Benalcázar, who founded the Spanish city of San Francisco de Quito in 1534. Francisco Pizarro's brother, Gonzalo Pizarro, was named Captain-General of Quito in 1540.

Excited by accounts of abundant wealth (cinnamon and gold) in the jungles to the east of the Andes, Gonzalo Pizarro organized an expedition to explore the area east of Quito in 1541. After crossing the Andes range, Pizarro's men entered a dense but sparsely inhabited rainforest. Running low on supplies, they killed and ate their horses, and later consumed their leather boots and belts. Pizarro's lieutenant, Francisco Orellana, then volunteered to take a group of men downriver to search for Indian villages with food in their gardens. With considerable ingenuity, the desperate Spanish soldiers forged nails from their iron implements on the banks of the Coca River and built a small brigantine for Orellana's journey. After departing downstream and entering the larger Napo River, Orellana found he could not return against the strong current. In an incredible voyage of discovery, Orellana and his small party sailed down the Amazon River to the Atlantic Ocean, becoming the first Europeans to navigate the Amazon (Medina 1934). The amazing exploits of Gonzalo Pizarro and Francisco Orellana are seen as momentous events in Ecuadorian history, and laid the foundation for Ecuador's territorial claims

within the Amazon Basin. These historical claims have been challenged by both Peru and Colombia; Ecuador eventually lost considerable portions of its Amazonian lands through military defeats and because it was a signatory to unfavorable treaties. Still, long after the various defeats and treaties were *fait accompli*, a large sign on the cathedral facing Quito's Plaza de la Independencia proclaimed: *El descubrimiento del gran río Amazonas es gloria de Quito* ("The discovery of the great Amazon River is Quito's glory"), and the official stationery of Ecuadorian government agencies bears the statement, *Ecuador es, ha sido, y será país Amazónico* ("Ecuador is, has been, and always will be an Amazonian nation.").

Spain's conquests of native societies in North and South America divided large areas of its empire into administrative units known as viceroalties. *Audiencias* were smaller regional jurisdictions under the viceroalties, and were headed by presidents. The *Real Audiencia de Quito* ("Royal Audience of Quito") was established by royal decree in 1563 and was a colonial jurisdiction under the authority of the Viceroyalty of Peru, headquartered in Lima. In practice, however, the Audiencia of Quito operated with a degree of autonomy because of the geographic distance between Lima and Quito. Therefore, the Audiencia's president in Quito had the right to communicate directly with the royal officials in Spain on various political and economic matters (Phelan 1967). The territory administered by the Real Audiencia de Quito was considerably larger than the present nation of Ecuador, as it included parts of what are now southern Colombia and northern Peru, and extended along the Amazon River into present-day Brazil. The administration of these Amazonian lands by the Audiencia of Quito was another historical fact used by Ecuador until quite recently as legal justification for its land claims within the Amazon Basin.

From 1599 to 1767, the Jesuit religious order established a far-flung system of missions among native communities in the Amazon Basin (Chantre y Herrera 1901). This region east of the Andes was called the Province of Maynas, and the missions located there were administered by Jesuit priests headquartered in Quito. The work of these Jesuit missionaries among Amazonian Indians constituted a de facto projection of Quito's presence and authority in the Province of Maynas. From the Ecuadorian perspective, the Quito-based administration of the Jesuit missions in Maynas from the late sixteenth to

mid-eighteenth centuries was yet another historical precedent and justification for Ecuador's territorial claims to Amazonia.

During the Spanish colonial period, most important government offices were reserved for *peninsulares*, that is, people born in Spain and then posted to the Americas. American born people of Spanish or Spanish-Indian descent (whites and white-*mestizos*) were known as *criollos* and were not eligible for high government office. Regardless of their disadvantaged status, the *criollos* constituted an important and growing socioeconomic class that had eventual ambitions for self-rule. Things came to a head after Napoleon invaded Spain and placed his brother, Joseph Bonaparte, on the Spanish throne in 1808 (replacing King Ferdinand VII). On August 10, 1809, a junta of Quito citizens declared independence from Joseph Bonaparte, an act which has become known as the "primer grito" ("first call") for freedom from colonial rule. While the Quito rebellion of 1809 was swiftly crushed, by October 9, 1820, citizens of the important port city of Guayaquil had attempted to gain their freedom and declared their independence from Spanish rule as well. Antonio José de Sucre, a lieutenant of the "great liberator" Simon Bolivar, arrived in Guayaquil in May 1821, and assumed command of the revolutionary forces in Ecuador. Sucre's decisive victory over the royalist army came at the Battle of Pichincha on May 24, 1822. Although he was Venezuelan by birth, General Antonio José de Sucre is one of Ecuador's most revered national heroes. His name was given to what was Ecuador's currency until the adoption of the U.S. dollar in 2000.

The War of Independence ended the Real Audiencia de Quito and Spanish colonial rule in Ecuador. After the war, Ecuador joined Colombia and Venezuela to form the new nation of La República de Gran Colombia. This was an uneasy union because vast distances, poor communications and infrastructure, and regional differences complicated its efficient administration. Separatist sentiments grew; in 1830, Ecuador seceded from Gran Colombia. The new nation of Ecuador named itself after the equator, which passes through it. The territorial claims of the new State corresponded quite closely with the boundaries of the previous Real Audiencia de Quito, and included extensive lands within the Amazon Basin. However, these borders would be repeatedly challenged by the neighboring nations of Peru and Colombia during the post-colonial National Period.

For over 150 years after Ecuador's independence, its relations with Peru were troubled by diplomatic disputes, mutual suspicions, periodic skirmishes along the contested borders of the two nations, and major military conflicts. One of the more significant conflicts began on July 5, 1941, when Peruvian and Ecuadorian forces skirmished along the Zarumilla River. Peru soon invaded Ecuador from the south and east. The numerically-superior and better equipped Peruvian ground and air forces quickly overwhelmed Ecuadorian defenders in the south, and occupied El Oro Province on the coast of Ecuador and portions of Loja Province in the Sierra. The eastern attacks involved units that moved up various Amazon tributaries, including the Tigre and Napo Rivers. The fighting came to a halt on July 31, 1941, when Ecuador requested a cease-fire. Peace negotiations ensued in Río de Janeiro, when Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and the U.S. served as the guarantor nations for any peace accord reached. Given the Peruvian military victory, Ecuador was forced to negotiate from a severely disadvantaged position. To Ecuador's chagrin, the final treaty known as the 1942 Protocolo de Río de Janeiro ceded one third of Ecuador's claimed national territory to Peru. The greater part of this territorial loss was in the eastern Amazonian lowlands. Ecuador felt pressured into signing this treaty, and it created bitter resentments that still, in the present day, persist.

In the late 1940s, efforts began to demarcate the border between Ecuador and Peru as determined by the Protocolo de Río de Janeiro. However, Ecuador protested that the border established by the Protocol was "not executable" due to a geographical error in its language that did not recognize the existence of the watershed of the Cenepa River in the region of the Cordillera del Cóndor. In 1949, Ecuadorian president Galo Plaza halted the demarcation process, and about 78 kilometers of the Peru-Ecuador border were left unmarked. In 1960, Ecuadorian president Velasco Ibarra unilaterally declared the Río Protocol null and void, and the border dispute continued to sour relations with Peru.

In January and February of 1981, Ecuador and Peru engaged in a series of brief but significant battles that were collectively known as the "Paquisha Incident." Paquisha was one of three Ecuadorian Army outposts located on the eastern slopes of the Cordillera del Cóndor in the southern Oriente. Ecuadorian troops were forced to retreat from these outposts as Peru employed helicopter gunships and artillery against their positions. Although the Paquisha Incident was a nominal Peruvian victory, Ecuador's

military learned valuable lessons from the experience—lessons which would be put into practice against Peruvian forces in 1995.

In January 1995, the Ecuador-Peru border dispute again flared into open warfare along the Cordillera del Cóndor and in the adjacent Cenepa River Valley. This time, the Ecuadorian military was much better prepared. The Peruvian troops who advanced up the Cenepa River were forced to fight from the valley floor and met strong resistance from the entrenched Ecuadorians in the heights. Ecuador's Air Force also established air superiority by shooting down several Peruvian fighters, bombers, and strike aircraft (Cooper 2003).

After two months of bloody fighting, the Ecuadorians held their ground along the Cordillera del Cóndor. A ceasefire agreement was signed on February 17, but did not hold, and sporadic fighting continued for days afterward. On February 28, Ecuador and Peru signed the "Montevideo Declaration," which brought about a more effective ceasefire. In early March 1995, peacekeeping troops from the Río Protocol guarantor nations entered the combat zone and supervised the separation of the Ecuadorian and Peruvian forces. Although the Cenepa War ended in a stalemate, Ecuadorians viewed it as a victory and the whole nation celebrated with patriotic fervor. This was the first time in modern history that the Ecuadorian armed forces had withstood the Peruvian military machine. A final peace treaty, known as the "Acta de Brasilia," was signed on October 26, 1998; it sought to normalize relations between Ecuador and Peru. It called for a definitive demarcation of the common border, promotion of bilateral trade, joint development projects in border areas, and a reduction of forces along the border. It also guaranteed Ecuadorian access to the Amazon River via designated routes through Peruvian national territory (Herz and Pontes Nogueira 2002). The Cenepa War represented a psychological victory for Ecuador's armed forces, and greatly elevated its prestige and standing in the public's opinion. It was as if the 1995 fighting had reversed several centuries of defeat and retreat in the face of Peruvian pressures and aggression.

Territory and border integrity have thus informed security perceptions, and concomitantly presented challenges to Ecuador's security. Borders remain a salient historical theme vis-à-vis ESC: Ecuador's more powerful neighbors, narco-trafficking, terrorism, as well as oil exploration and extraction have all affected ESC. In 1964, for

example, the Ecuadorian government granted a 1,431,000 hectare oil concession to a consortium of the Texaco and Gulf oil companies in the northern Oriente (Martz 1987). This concession stretched from the San Miguel River in the north (the Ecuador-Colombia border), to south of the Aguarico River. This location was significant because oil had been discovered in adjacent areas of Colombia and “aroused hope that the field may extend into Ecuador” (Erickson et al. 1966:382-383). The Texaco-Gulf consortium soon began field operations, aided by a massive deployment of helicopters that overcame the transportation difficulties presented by the jungle. In April 1967, the Texaco-Gulf “spudded in its first wildcat at Lago Agrio, 45 miles southeast of Colombia’s Orito field” (Crist and Nissly 1973:80). Many more successful wells were drilled in the following months. While oil is a very important national and strategic resource for Ecuador, the most productive fields are located near the sensitive northern border with Colombia. Colombia’s Department of Putumayo produces half of Colombia’s illegal coca crop and shares a common border with Ecuador’s Sucumbíos Province. Large areas of the Department of Putumayo are controlled by the guerrillas of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC). While the FARC operates with relative impunity in the Putumayo region, its units take refuge on the Ecuadorian side of the border when pressed by the Colombian army or right-wing paramilitary forces. Sucumbíos Province has become increasingly dangerous due to the ongoing civil war in Colombia and its spreading effects (Vickers 2003).

By 2000, the worsening political situation in Colombia caused concern among U.S. politicians. Colombian President Andrés Pastrana proposed a \$7.5 billion program called “Plan Colombia,” of which \$4 billion to be contributed by the Colombian government and \$3.5 billion by the “international community” (U.S. Department of State 2000). Since 2000, the United States has been the primary foreign supporter of Plan Colombia, with allocations of nearly \$1.5 billion. While Plan Colombia is a multifaceted program, about 80 percent of its budget is focused on military and police assistance in the fight against guerrilla organizations and narcotics traffickers.

On March 1, 2008, Colombia’s armed forces attacked a FARC base on the Ecuadorian side of the border, killing Raul Reyes (FARC’s second in command) and about 20 others, including Ecuadorian citizen Franklin Aisalia. This violation of

Ecuadorian territorial sovereignty badly damaged Ecuador-Colombian diplomatic relations.

## **Ecuadorian National Geography**

In addition to sharing international borders with Colombia and Peru, Ecuador—just like its two neighboring countries—can be divided into three distinct regions extending from North to South: that is, the Coast, *la Costa*, the Highlands or the two cordilleras of the Andes, *la Sierra*, and the Amazonian region, *el Oriente*.<sup>1</sup> Because of the two cordilleras that separate the Coast from the *Oriente*, and the proximity of the equator, these regions present three very distinct climates.

The Coast, between the Pacific Ocean and the Western cordillera of the Andes, is a fertile alluvial plain from 0 to 1,200 meters above sea level, and enjoys a tropical climate all year round. The Province of Esmeraldas constitutes the northern extremity of the Coast and borders the Colombian Department of Nariño. In the south, Guayaquil—located at the mouth of the Guayas River and capital of the Province of Guayas—is the most populous city of the Coast (and of the country). Guayaquil is an important regional, economic and political hub; it is often called *el Puerto Principal*, “the country’s principal port,” which continues to be the case.

The *Sierra* is a region about 390 miles long and 45 miles wide. Its altitude varies between 1,200 and 6,300 meters above sea level. From the perspective of physical geography, the two cordilleras of the Andes are the regional backbones. Numerous snowcapped volcanoes are located on both the Eastern and the Western chains. In the inter-Andean valleys, Spaniards found important Indian communities which fell under the rule of the Incas less than a century before the beginning of the Spanish conquest. From the early colonial period on, the Spaniards established their principal settlements in the *Sierra*. The “abundance” of an indigenous labor force and a tempered climate, which is now often depicted in contemporary tourists’ brochures as an area of eternal spring-type climate, provided the Spanish conquistadors with decisive encouragement.

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<sup>1</sup> In Colombia, there is a fourth region: the Caribbean coast.

The *Oriente* is covered with dense, tropical rainforests, and constitutes a part of the drainage basin of the Amazon River and its tributaries (principally the Napo River). Until the mid-twentieth century, after the conflict with Peru in the 1940s and the beginning of oil exploitation—accompanied with governmental programs of colonization—it never played a significant role in the colonial and early republican economic history of the country. Explored during the heroic age of the conquest, it became the site of a few missionary settlements in the 1600s, but a difficult climate and hostile indigenous population “have kept mastery of the upper Amazon country [an] unfulfilled dream exciting the imagination and the cupidity of merchants, conquerors, and missionaries from the sixteenth century to the present” (Phelan 1967; see also Whitten 1981: Introduction).

The colonial and modern history of Ecuador is clearly marked by a strong antagonism between the *Sierra*, with Quito as its center, and the *Costa*, dominated by Guayaquil. It would be impossible to comprehend Ecuador as a political unit without keeping in mind this particular opposition, as well as the complementary relationship between the elite of the *Sierra* and the *guayaquileño* merchants and their allies. During the colonial and the early national periods, the Highlands landowners dominated the political scene. Despite the fact that the merchants of Guayaquil would sometimes have their voices heard by the Viceroy of Peru (Phelan 1967), most of the local power was concentrated in Quito (that is, the *Real Audiencia de Quito* and Kingdom of Quito). It was only at the end of the nineteenth century that the *Costa* was successful in challenging the power of the *Sierra*, when its production of tropical products (bananas, cacao, rice, sugar, coffee, and *toquilla* palm) became the principal exports of the country. In the liberal revolution of 1895, which was led by Eloy Alfaro, the *guayaquileña* merchant class and its allies, the bankers, and the *costeño* landowners (liberals) challenged control of the State by the *serrano* landowners, who were supported by the Church (conservatives) (Fernández 1994).

The opposition between the Coast and the Highlands is not limited to the economic and political history of Ecuador. Culturally, these two regions also differ by the way *costeños* and *serranos* speak Spanish, the music they like, the food they prefer and with which they identify, the way they make politics, etc. (Whitten 1981: Introduction).

The opposition has been institutionalized politically, in that—given the preoccupation that each government has with having accurate “national” representation—during every presidential election, when the candidate for the presidency is from the Sierra, the candidate for the vice-presidency is from the Costa, and vice versa.

### **Politics, Race, and Class in ESC: The Ideology of National Identity from Mono-Cultural *Mestizaje* to Multiculturalism**

A long tradition of scholarship on nationalism has emphasized the “homogenizing processes” of ideologies of national identity<sup>2</sup> from the end of the eighteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century. According to Benedict Anderson, “national cultures” help to accommodate and resolve ideological differences by positing as well as constructing a viable means to obtain a singular “national identity” (Anderson, 1991[1983] #496). National identities are not natural—they are constructed or “imagined.”

In the early twentieth century, many Latin American intellectuals (Strategic Culture developers and/or keepers) felt the need to proclaim both uniquely Latin American identities in contradistinction to European and North American identities, and to emphasize the value and respectability of original “Latin American cultures.” Accordingly, in many Latin American nation-states the idea of *Mestizaje*<sup>3</sup> became the “trope for the nation.” *Mestizaje* was seen as the source of all Latin American possibilities yet to come (with the exception of the Southern Cone, where notions of racial purity were more resilient). A new image of the “inferior races” eventually appeared. The racial and cultural mixing of perceived inferior with superior races provided Latin American nations with what would become their characteristic strength, superior even to the strength of the white race; it would become a fifth race, the “cosmic race,” as José Vasconcelos called it in Mexico (Rahier 2003).

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<sup>2</sup> In this context, we understand an “ideology of national identity” as a discursive field encompassing a number of narratives expressed in different media.

<sup>3</sup> *Mestizaje* can refer to “racial mixture” in general. The term is polysemic; it means different things in different national contexts. However, in the Andean region, *mestizaje* usually refers to mixture of white European and, more specifically, Spanish ancestry and indigenous or Native Ecuadorian origins.

In Ecuador, the story about *Mestizaje* is informed by two myths. These myths provide the basis for the ideology of “Ecuadorianness.” The first one, the “Myth of the Dominion on the Soil,” has to do with territoriality. It presents Ecuador as a country rich in natural resources, with a diverse environment blessed by nature. It also emphasizes the “crazy geography that the indigenous people could not dominate” (my translation; Silva, 1995 #457: 13). Only the Spanish conquistadors were able to vanquish the rebellious nature from their initial settlement in Quito, the country’s capital, from which they launched their enterprise of “discovery” and colonization. Numerous texts from Ecuadorian historiography and literature mythify Quito as the “heart of the mother country,” “the hub,” the command center of the national life and history (Silva, 1995 #457: 13). The second myth is the “Myth of the Vanquished Race.” The various Ecuadorian indigenous communities constitute a vanquished race because they were the victims of a triple conquest: the conquest of geography, the conquest of the Inca, and the Spanish conquest. The latter conquest, “by defeating them, brought about the possibility of the emergence of the nationality, because it gave birth to a new product: the *mestizo*, viewed as the unique and genuine son of the land of the Americas” (Silva, 1995 #457: 9). *Mestizaje* is therefore understood as the very beginning of Ecuadorian history. It is the essence of *Ecuadorianidad*. The Spanish conquest opened the road of national resurrection. However, Latin American indigenous and black movements have been struggling against this ideological narrative of national identity—more successfully in the past two decades, perhaps—by voicing their opposition to the keepers of ECS and to “official *Mestizaje*” because it both “invisibilizes” and “otherizes” non white-*mestizo* peoples and cultures. In the early 1990s, the actions of the CONAIE (*Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador*) provided probably the most notable example of resistance to *Mestizaje*. Its resistance emerged in the form of the demand that Ecuador be recognized as a “multi-national” or “pluri-national” Nation-State during the preparation for the celebration of 1992 as the year anniversary of 500 years of indigenous resistance. Their labeling of 1992 contrasted with celebrations of the same event prepared by the State called “500 years of discovery,” 1492 being the year of Christopher Columbus’ first trip to the Americas.

In the last two decades, following the adoption of “multicultural” policies specifically targeting indigenous and African diasporic populations by institutions of international development and global governance (for example, the United Nations, World Health Organization) and also as a result of the political activism of indigenous and African diasporic communities, many Latin American nation-states revised their Constitutions and sometimes passed special laws expressing a concern for greater inclusion of African diasporic and indigenous populations (Hale 2004, 2006). Within this context emerged what Charles Hale (2004) called “*el indio permitido*” (literally, the “allowed Indian,” or “permitted Indian identity”), and that Latin American African diasporic populations gained (relative) greater agency in comparison to the marked exclusion or construction as (ultimate) Others (see Rahier 1998, 1999) that characterized their situation during what could be called “mono-cultural *Mestizaje*” (Silva 1995, Polo 2002, Espinosa Apolo 2003, Ibarra Dávila 2002), which roughly extended, for Ecuador, from the early twentieth century until the major *levantamientos indígenas* (indigenous uprisings) of the early 1990s (see Clark and Becker 2007). This culminated in the adoption of a multicultural Constitution in 1998 by the National Constituent Assembly. Multiculturalism was also at the center of the new Constitution adopted by the Assembly in 2008. Scholars have discussed both continuities and discontinuities between “mono-cultural *Mestizaje*” and multiculturalism (Rahier 2008).

Since the 1990s, international conservation organizations have infiltrated large parts of Ecuador’s rural areas, as have U.S.AID, the German GTZ, and other bilateral organizations, all promoting sustainable development and conservation of biodiversity through ecotourism and other projects. The various indigenous movements in the country have forged multiple ties with these organizations. Tensions do exist between these two movements, as indigenous people increasingly see the larger emphasis placed on conservation and declaration of national parks (rather than indigenous territories), as a threat to their ability to pursue self-determination. As scholars Beth Conklin and Laura Graham (1995) argue, the alliances between indigenous movements and conservationists can be fragile. However, Ecuador’s leadership and the active leadership of NGOs downplay these tensions and cross purposes, striving rather to demonstrate that projects foster both cultural and biological diversity.

## **Ecuadorian Strategic Culture: Keepers and Challenges**

Just like anywhere else in the world, the keepers of ESC are found in the elite sectors of society. In the case of ESC, Ecuadorian elites have been fragmented. Scholars have argued that these divisions are based on geographical location, the different articulation of regional interests vis-à-vis the world market, ethnicity, and religious and political beliefs (Cueva 1988; Martz 1972). The Coast has been more open to the world market; liberal political beliefs were predominant from the nineteenth century to the 1970s; these beliefs were racialized as *mestizo*. On the contrary, the Highlands have been seen as a bastion of feudalism, conservatism, and Catholicism. For some nineteenth century scholars, the Highlands are perceived as being primitive due to the predominance of indigenous peoples, which historically have been seen as a barrier to development.

Even after modernization of the economy, urbanization, and limited industrialization provoked by the oil boom of the 1970s, the regional divide continued. Movements for regional autonomy emerged with force in Guayaquil and in the Amazon region while Ecuadorian political parties continued to be regional and not national in orientation. As in the past, political parties functioned as clientelist machines that articulated the interest of regionally fragmented elites (Pachano 2007).

Since the nineteenth century, coalitions of elites in tandem with middle class sectors and military elites, have attempted to create a unitary national State. Military interventions in domestic politics were justified with claims that the armed forces were acting on behalf of the general interest and against the particularistic projects of regionally-fragmented elites. “The military saw [itself as a servant]of an impartial and national public good, and of a state whose sovereignty was not grounded on a particular group but on the whole body of citizens” (Bustamante 2006: 232). The coup d'état of 1973, for example, was initiated to prevent *costeño* populist politician Assad Bucaram, leader of the regionalist party CFP, from becoming president. The goal of the armed forces and their civilian allies of the left were for the State to administer oil rents for national development and not to serve the interest of regional elites (Cueva 1988).

Since the early twentieth century, the military and technocratic sectors have seen themselves as the standard-bearers of national values such as “development,” “progress”

and “modernity.” In different military governments, civilian technocratic elites have joined with military elites to carry out fundamental projects related to state and nation building. In the late 1920s, during the military regimes of the Revolución Juliana, the Central Bank was established. The dictatorships of 1963-66 and 1973-79 promoted agrarian reform, import substitution industrialization, and an increasing role of the State in the economy through planning and intervention. During the 1980s and 1990s, limited market reforms, the shrinking of the State, and privatizations were resisted by indigenous movements, the armed forces, State employees, some middle class sectors, and sectors of economic elites who were going to suffer from the opening up of the economy and embracing globalization.

Rafael Correa won the election in 2006 with a nationalist platform to get rid of neo-liberalism and with the promise to overhaul a political system perceived as corrupt and dominated by a *partidocracia* or “partyarchy” (Conaghan 2008; de la Torre and Conaghan 2009). Correa was the self-proclaimed leader of a citizens’ revolution against the “partyarchy.” He promised to convene a National Assembly where all mobilized citizens could participate to collectively forge a new post-neoliberal and radically democratic social pact. The government plan of AP (Alianza País) called for the creation of “an active, radical, and deliberative democracy.” It aimed to establish a “participatory model that would allow citizens to exercise power, take part in public decisions, and control the actions of their representatives.”<sup>4</sup>

## **Elites and the Centrality of the Hacienda Socioeconomic System for ESC**

Scholars have argued that the advent of multiculturalism in Ecuador—which has provided a new political vocabulary to conceptualize the definition, purpose, and meaning of the Nation-State—has not fundamentally altered the structure of power, where white-*mestizo* elites and the middle classes continue to coalesce and remain at the helm of political power. Other scholars argue that, despite recent constitutional and social changes, the historical legacy of the socioeconomic structure of the hacienda continues to

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Endnotes

<sup>4</sup> Plan de Gobierno de Alianza País 2007-2011, p. 19.

form the way white and white-*mestizo* elites, as well as the middle classes, relate to indigenous people. The resilience of the hacienda system is thus central to understanding the culture of elites in Ecuador, as well as the forms of articulation and engagement between elites and subaltern groups. The culture of the hacienda is predominant in the Ecuadorian highlands and not so much in other regions like the coast or the Amazon, although these regions also had hacienda-like forms of social organization to some significant degree (Chiriboga 1980; Gerrero 1980; Muratorio 1991; Striffler 2002). However, the capital city and political power are located in the highlands. That is why it can be argued that the capital city and political elites' culture is very influential in ESC.

As a social system, the hacienda, or large-landed property, was based on the domination of persons of indigenous descent and sometimes Afro-Ecuadorians and *Mestizos* by a Creole elite who claimed to be mainly of European and particularly of Spanish descent. All members of indigenous families had to work on the hacienda in different service capacities, including housekeeping in the master's home in exchange for the use of a small plot of land and a nominal salary for the male head of household (Guerrero 1991; Lyons 2006). The landowner gave indigenous workers customary loans called *suplicos* and *socorros*. These loans consisted in clothing, produce (foodstuffs) in times of harvest, as well as produce and money for rituals of passage or in times of crisis, (such as baptisms, weddings, funerals, and periods of illness). Such loans kept workers indebted to landowners to the point that it became standard practice for salaries not to be paid; loans were perpetually discounted from the worker's ever-increasing debt (Gerrero 1991). These debts were inherited for generations, and workers could not leave the haciendas because they could be imprisoned for not paying debts. This system was originally called *concertaje*, and after imprisonment for not paying debts was abolished in 1918, it was called *huasipungo*. The elites called hacienda Indians "*indios propios*" (their own Indians), and sold the properties with the indigenous workers included as chattel. This system, which lasted until 1964, was based on a high degree of violence. Overseers used the whip and other forms of serious physical punishment for purposes of labor control.

However, as Andrés Guerrero (1991) has shown, the hacienda system was also based on respect for certain features of indigenous culture such as ritual celebrations and

ritual redistribution. For example, the master had to feed workers when he required extra effort from them during the harvest, and was obliged to give aid in times of need or for ritual purposes. Paternalism and redistribution, in conjunction with occasional violence, were central for the continuation of the hacienda system.

Many scholars have argued that the hacienda system ended in 1964 with the abolition of precarious forms of work, particularly the abolition of work in exchange for the usufruct of a plot of land. At the time, landowners had to give these plots in property to their peons. Also, public haciendas were distributed to the peons, and parts of private haciendas were sold at low prices—and with the help of public credit to indigenous peasants. These agrarian reforms were carried out during military dictatorships, which in turn provided some degree of legitimacy to the military government. However, the old masters kept the best lands in the valleys and granted small poor parcels in mountaintops and slopes to their peons. To this day, descendants of the old masters claim to be running haciendas.

The legacy of the hacienda continues to structure social relations and understandings of politics. We can associate this legacy with the preference for authoritarian political solutions. Both elites and the indigenous and popular sectors support the idea of a strong authoritarian leader such as the current president Correa. However, the leader, like the hacienda owner, has to be a good *patrón*. He has to be someone that will redistribute for ritual purposes and in times of need, and that will defend the people's "rights" (which are in actuality interpreted within this system as favors and not as rights). This may be directly connected to the importance of small-scale redistribution in Ecuadorian politics.

The legacy of the hacienda system also influences current economic relations. In Ecuador, salaries are still very low and the State does not provide enough effective social services, particularly health care. Employers are still expected to complement low salaries with bonuses for established social rituals such as graduations, baptisms, illness and financial need. An important point then is that paternalism effectively ameliorates the violence and inequality of the system. The idea of the good *patrón* is widespread, not only among elites but also among popular groups. This may explain why a system with high levels of inequality is able to avoid violence and volatility to a large degree.

Compared, for example, with Colombia or Peru, Ecuador may have as much inequality, but it does not show high levels of generalized repression or violence (there is, however, a problem in this interpretation because paternalism may also be important to understanding social relations in these other Latin American countries).

Historically, elites have received a rigorous religious education. Christian charity and paternalism were an important part of that education. As we saw above, redistribution interpreted culturally through Catholic values was a key element of the sustainability of the hacienda system and of socio-economic inequality beyond this system. Nowadays, elites tend to receive a foreign education that, for the most part, also includes religious values. They receive education in a foreign language, and are trained with a foreign curriculum (Andrés 2008; de la Torre and Martínez, in press 2010). There is a tendency for elites, generalized in Latin America, to value the foreign over the national that originated in the colonial past. This trait is more marked in Ecuador due to a history of national defeat in wars for territory against Peru, and because the country is perceived as less developed than other countries in the region. Nationalism is not strong in the education of elites, and they tend to view the country with pessimism. In the realm of education, elites are taught little about the history of the country, and even less about Ecuadorian society's cultural diversity. Older generations of the Ecuadorian elites claim that they learned about the country's diversity through the hacienda system. For example, they spoke Quichua, the native language, in order to be able to communicate with indigenous workers, and they had to learn about indigenous culture and customs in order to successfully negotiate ritual redistribution. The elderly elite complain that nowadays young elites no longer have this kind of contact with subaltern people, except with domestic service. Not learning about the country's diversity in school, elite youth tend to rely on racist stereotypes learned outside of the classroom. When they are taught egalitarian principles in more liberal schools, they learn these principles without experiencing encounters with other groups in equal terms. For this reason, these more progressive teachings lose sense and context. However, the idea of understanding difference as inequality through Christian charity and Catholic paternalism is still widespread in the schools of the elite. For example, in most elite schools, children have to

attend rituals in which they give to the poor and thus affirm a sense of duty and a paternalistic sense of superiority.

This elite culture originated in history and tradition. However, there have been some substantive changes in last decades. The type of exploitation that existed in traditional haciendas is no longer well-regarded or formally permitted. The indigenous movement has taught elites that other peoples have rights, and that they are important political actors. The weak nationalism of elites also seems to be changing. The current government is engaged in a nationalist campaign. The government is encouraging everybody to buy national products and to appreciate what is national, what is Ecuadorian. A “new” class of elite is thus emerging, and this new political elite is quite critical of the paucity of nationalism among the established traditional elites: for example, the fact that elites holiday in Miami, Florida was utilized by the government to ridicule and chastise traditional elites. The new political elite share the centrality of Catholicism with the old elite, but is more of the liberation theology-type.

## **Conclusions**

1. ESC is characterized by a strong sense, shared by Ecuadorians of different ethnic and racial backgrounds, that there is indeed a geo-physical territory that defines Ecuador as a political unit. The dominant narrative of Ecuadorian national identity establishes an almost “natural” relationship between geo-physical borders, national identity, politics, culture, and perceptions of security. It draws a long history that would have begun even before the Spanish conquest of South America. It grounds the Nation-State of Ecuador.

2. Historically, territorial integrity has been a fundamental preoccupation of ESC. Loss of territory has only very recently been put to rest, so to speak, but a legacy and a history of lost territory remains part of the experiential basis of ESC.

3. Ecuadorians share a sense that their country has been victimized on several occasions in its history by larger and more populous neighbors, viz., Colombia and Peru, which have aggressively occupied and appropriated parts of Ecuadorian national territory.

4. Ecuador is and sees itself as multi-dimensionally diverse: the cultural and “racial” diversity of its population, the diversity of its ecological environments, and the diversity of its economic activities serve as exemplars of the diversity that characterizes Ecuador as a political unit.

5. Finally, Ecuadorian history has been marked by a clear demarcation between white, white-*mestizo* elites and the middle classes on one side, and indigenous or Indian populations that are usually associated with the “lower” orders on the other. Recently, the relations of force between the keepers of Strategic Culture—the white, white-*mestizo* elites and middle classes—and their indigenous challengers have been changing, and indigenous political organizations have become major players on the national political scene. There is now more than one narrative of Ecuadorian national identity: a dominant one and a series of counter-narratives. However, despite greater indigenous agency, the narrative that constructs Ecuadorian national identity around the notion of *Mestizaje* continues to do its ideological work in various media, and remains in a position of dominance.

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