Actualidades

Ecuador in the New Millennium

25 Years of Democracy

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Twenty-Five Years of Democracy

Díez de agosto, 2004, formally marked the 25th continuous year of democracy for the Republic of Ecuador, and the media and scholarly reminiscences and projections of its pathway since emerging from nine long years of military dictatorship constituted significant public and private commentary from May on. As the rebirth of democracy was celebrated, the death of the populist president, elected in 1979, was mourned. On 24 de mayo, 1981—Ecuador’s independence day—Jaime Roldós Aguilera, his wife, Martha Bucarám de Roldós and a small entourage, perished in a plane crash in Loja. At his inauguration in 1979 Roldós spoke in Quichua, a language understood by at least one third of the people, Kunan punchaka, mana pushaita japi- inchik (‘Today we are no longer entrapped [as in the year past]’), he said, and he went on to name, and thereby recognize, the indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian, those who come from other lands, and other people of Ecuador. His last words in 1981, delivered in a speech in Quito an hour before he boarded the military Beechcraft plane especially designed in the United States for mountain flying and landing in difficult terrain, were Ecuador amazónico desde siempre y hasta siempre, ¡Viva la patria!

In its 25th year of democracy, it is very widely acknowledged throughout the country that the nation-state of Ecuador in 2004 seems to be turning in on itself, going nowhere, and that it has lost all sense of direction. Seen from Amazonia, the nation seems to be moving on a trajectory characterized in Quichua of Pastaza Province as mana tuparina ñambi, a path or road that leads into the unknown where strange and powerful forces reside, and from which no one knows how to return.
Forks, mazeways, switch backs and spirals exist to confound the traveler; there are few if any signposts for guidance, turning back is impossible, and the end is anything but what it may be envisioned at the outset of the journey. This pathway constitutes a labyrinth within which the seeker encounters the possibility of paju, dangerous powers beyond his or her control. To move into the realm of paju is to encounter enshrouded and fearsome imagery of unrecognizable and unknown entities. Paju can cause severe illness, and even death.

Two interrelated consistencies that enshroud this path are the increased presence of Colombian drug traffickers, paramilitaries and guerrillas, and the dominance and hegemony of the United States of America—both seen by indigenous, among other, Ecuadorian people as analogous to great pajus. Reports, editorials and commentaries in the national media from May, 2004, on, stress, in order of magnitude of information: Plan Colombia; the escalating drug scene emanating from Colombia; Colombia’s policies towards, and interpretations of, its southern neighbor; divisiveness among Ecuadorian members of the “political class” and among indigenous people; Ecuadorian emigration, most of it expensive and illegal; U.S. dominance and hegemony; petroleum exploitation in Amazonia; attempts to overthrow the government; racism; and the protest movements of the jubilados.

These are all intertwined and constitute the labyrinth of conjunctures through which one can move only with caution and with danger on all sides. The way out may come through a great and wrenching change, known in Quichua as pachacutic, taken here as an episteme of transformation from one space-time system to another. In Spanish the neologism recambio (to change again) emerged to reflect this need for radical change. It transformed from the concept refundar el país (to refound the country) that was a millennial element in the 2003 assumption of office of President Lucio Gutiérrez Borbúa.

**Interculturality**

Beneath the surface of the newspaper publications, radio broadcasts, and television presentations lies the indefatigable social movement toward interculturalidad (interculturality) together with its seemingly paradoxical complement of reinforced cultural and ethnic boundaries. Interculturality is very different from an ethos of hybridity or social or cultural pluralism. It is multicultural but it is also intercultural. There is no hybridity involved. Interculturality stresses a movement from one cultural system to another, with the explicit purpose of understanding other ways of thought and action, whereas social and cultural pluralism stresses the institutional separation forced by the blanco (white) elite on peoples. The ideologies of hybridity and pluralism are national, regional and static; formal consciousness of
interculturality is local, regional, pluri-national, diasporic, global and dynamic.

The ideological focus of interculturalidad is the polar opposite of *el mestizaje*. More than a quarter century ago Roldós picked up the then inchoate concept of interculturalidad, and after his tragic death it was again suppressed in the national ideology of *el mestizaje*, the blending and “whitening” of phenotype and culture, until reemerging vigorously in public discourse during the *Levantamiento Indígena* of 1990 (Whitten 1996), and then again in the *Caminata* of 1992 (Whitten, Whitten and Chango 1997). I will not review here the phenomenon of mestizaje as an ideology of exclusion (Stutzman 1981, Whitten 1981, Rahier 1998, Whitten 1993a, 1993b). Suffice it to say that interculturality specifically opposes this doctrine (e.g. Salomon 1981, Whitten 2003a, 2003b).

In 1995 during the war with Peru multiculturalism gained strength within the military, as well as in the more depressed sectors of the expanding populace. Abdalá Bucaram Ortíz was driven to exile in Panama in 1997 by an indigenous-populist movement that engaged people in all classes and walks of life, and the dramatic ouster of Jamil Mahuad Witt by a combination of indigenous and military rebellion on 21 January, 2000, further strengthened interculturality in some sectors, while promoting class and regional divisions in others. The conjoined idioms of military victory, rebellion, and multiculturality carried the principal colonel in this rebellion, Lucio Gutiérrez Borbúa, into a victorious presidential race in 2002 (Whitten 2003c).

After a transformational moment in early 2003 that witnessed the president’s appointment of two indigenous people, Nina Pacari (Cotacachi-Imbabura) and Luis Macas (Saraguro-Loja) to prominent cabinet positions—together with 400 or so members of the *Pachakutik* social movement to positions nation wide—the president completely reversed his millennial moves and succumbed to morbid modernity, allying with global hegemonic forces represented by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, high-level representatives of the United States such as Otto Reich and George W. Bush, as promulgated by his previous arch rivals—great coastal barons and power wielders of Guayaquil epitomized in the persona of León Febres Cordero, called by many *el dueño del Ecuador*, who was lauded by the late Ronald Reagan as a “champion of free enterprise” (Corkill and Cubit 1988:77).

On August 6, 2003, Gutiérrez rescinded all 400 or more of his Pachakutik appointments and reestablished a nation based on a rudderless ship of state foundering on reefs of capitalist modernity and neoliberalism. He took the country into the mana tuparina ñambi, which features, especially, a rising and record high price of oil for a country for which this is the number one revenue source, together with serious indigenous and populist protests about present, past, and future petroleum exploitation.
Recent Events: Ecuador on the Global Stage, 2004

Recent salient public events in Ecuador include the most recent of a number of quick visits by General James Hill, chief of the Southern Command of the United States; the Miss Universe contest and multiple ceremonies taking place in May and June; the meeting of the Organization of American States, in June; the indigenous parliament of the Americas and an indigenous forum on racism, neoliberalism, and interculturality at about the same time. FMI officials came and went, Chevron-Texaco initiated a law suit against Petroecuador to counter the ten-year suit against Texaco brought by indigenous people of Ecuador, and Robert Zoellick arrived to chant the virtues of the Free Trade Agreement where he was met and confronted by sustained indigenous and popular resistance.

The grand finale of the Miss Universe spectacular featured Donald Trump’s appearance on the night of the crowning, which prompted the U.S. Ambassador to Ecuador, Kristie Kenney, to say on national television, “with more events like this Ecuador could enter the modern world” (El Comercio, 1 June). Trump’s presence is significant for this glimpse of modernity as seen through a U.S. fortune lens since the debt for the “misses” amounted to 13.5 million dollars, with no tangible benefits noted by the vast majority of spokespeople of Ecuador. If anyone knows how to sell and profit from debt, it would seem to be Donald Trump (e.g. O’Brien and Dash 2004). Social commentator Raúl Vallejo (2004), in an editorial entitled “Neocolonizados” (Neocolonized), referred to the event as an “embobamiento colectivo” (collective stupefaction). A caller to a newscast the next morning commented to Andrés Carrión that the event celebrated “Miss Miseria and Miss Corrupción,” the twin features of modern Ecuador represented by barely concealed female flesh: misery for the masses and corruption at the top and in the middle of the class-prestige pyramid.

In sharp contradiction to the Miss Universe rhetoric was the indigenous parliament and forum where, among other things, an alternative to neoliberal debt-oriented development and wealth for the rich was promulgated. Here the model offered to people of the Americas and the world was that of an intercultural portal to globalization, one where understanding across cultural lines would help to construct transformative radical changes toward a democracy that allows the real voices within the vast majority of nation-states to be heard, and new actions to be initiated. These included the rejection of U.S. domination and hegemony, the end of corruption in all branches of government and especially in banking establishments and a respect for human livelihood, social justice, local-level and regional welfare and human diversity.

The visit by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell on the last day of the meeting of the OAS was dramatic and decisive. Only a few days before his visit the U.S. Ambas-
sador, Kristie Kenney, had publicly proclaimed that the President of Ecuador would soon terminate his term of office. But Powell came to Ecuador with another message: he proclaimed the U.S. to be an aggressive supporter of democracy in Ecuador (if not in Venezuela). He was seen by many as saving President Gutiérrez from indigenous and other political forces that could lead to his early demise. The difference between the U.S. ambassador’s take on Ecuadorian affairs and that of the U.S. Secretary of State could not be more striking.

Hyper Racialization in Public Spheres, 2004

Pernicious racism through the Ecuadorian media was explicitly revealed following Powell’s brief visit. Writers for the weekly satire page of El Comercio referred to Powell as negrito and azabache (ebony, jet black), as well as negro, afroamericano and afrodescendiente. In this cartoon Pancho Cajas captures the obsession manifest in the Quito press about Powell’s blackness:

Suerte o Muerte • Pancho Cajas. Lucio se compró su propio San Martín de Porres (Copyright © Pancho Cajas / El Comercio / June 11, 2004, All Rights Reserved)
On the left is a cannon that has just backfired, its smoke and black powder covering the faces of León Febres Cordero and Rodrigo Borja, who fired it. Behind them Leonidas Iza comes running with a big rock. Looking annoyed at these characters is Colin Powell garbed in angel wings and a flowing white robe. He holds Lucio Gutiérrez to protect him from the firepower of ex-presidents-as-caudillos and the rocks of the indigenous movement. President Gutiérrez, dressed in white pants and striped jacket, looks back over his shoulder and sticks his tongue out at his protagonists. He carries a shepherd’s crook to guide the white-faced black sheep of his PSP (Partido Sociedad Patriótica) party. Powell is portrayed here as the black priest of Peru—San Martín de Porres—who, while in jail, fed his own meals to the dog, cat, and rat, ancient enemies who sat together to sup at the foot of the saint. The current saint now protects the president of Ecuador from his enemies, the rat, cat, or dog behind the cannon (“Actualidad,” El Comercio, Friday, 11 June, 2004, A2, reprinted by permission).

The “family” magazine section of this same newspaper on the same day featured a whole page of advice about how and what to do to avoid mal olor, bad [body] odor, which is mentioned eight times. In the center of the page is a prominent color photograph of Dr. Condoleezza Rice jogging. No mention is made of her in the text: the juxtaposition serves effectively to racialize body odor.

The rhetoric of racialization, illustrated above, snakes through the public discourses of publicists and politicians. Blackness is especially salient in 2004 (for background on this subject see especially Rahier 1998, 2003; Whitten 2003a). At the Miss Universe gala two former Miss Ecuadors tagged as “black,” were excluded from the invitation list, causing protests alleging deliberate prejudicial planning against people of color. In interviews on national television with black spokespeople and politicians, the focus invariably zooms in on the lips of the speaker, especially if a regional dialect is spoken.

Editorials about Canciller Patricio Zuquilanda often refer to him as Suquilanda (con Z) to lampoon him as having indigenous background (Suquilanda is a Saraguro surname, whereas Zuquilanda is what the canciller insists on as the “proper” spelling). For his part, Zuquilanda recently removed from the Ecuadorian embassy in Washington, D.C., the only two representatives of blackness and indigenousness of any Andean nation, ever—Mae Montaño (Esmeraldian-Afro-Ecuadorean) and Silvia González (Saraguran-Indigenous Ecuadorian)—both of whom are highly qualified women for their positions. They were appointed by the Ecuadorian ambassador, Raúl Gangotena, with the approval of President Gutiérrez.

Intraindigenous rhetoric, especially attendant on the appointment of Antonio Vargas as Minister of Social Welfare (below) falls into this pattern of racialization, as does the press’s systematic denigration of Vargas as an “unqualified” and “unprepared” person, without discussing his accomplishments in endeavoring to build a new democracy in Ecuador and with no reference to the expected qualities one
requires to be “qualified” or “prepared.”

Colombia, Plan Colombia, and U.S. Hegemony

Michael Taussig (2004:145), in his postmodernist discourse on Colombian realities, uses his literary license to characterize Ecuador as follows: “clean-living Ecuador, the Switzerland of South America, safe haven of the U.S. imperium complete with its dollarized currency and spanking new U.S. Air Force base on the Pacific Coast at Manta to make strikes into Colombia.” If one compares the average income of different Swiss socioeconomic classes and the poverty levels of Switzerland and Ecuador, Taussig’s flippant and gratuitous comparison becomes highlighted in its absurdity. Switzerland has one of the lowest poverty and unemployment rates in the world, Ecuador one of the highest; income distribution in Switzerland is quite equitable, whereas the differential between the extraordinarily wealthy and the 70% or more poor in Ecuador is enormous, and increasing regularly. Moreover, Swiss banks are internationally known as safe depositories, whereas Ecuadorian banks are notoriously risky and seem to be run by corrupt manipulators. Today in Ecuador the trope banquero corrupto is standard parlance. Ecuador is no Switzerland.

Ecuador is not Colombia writ small, either. It is, however, increasingly tied to the fate of that country through a highly porous and unstable border region, and through the U.S. coopted Plan Colombia, with its military base in Manta and with its use of various regions of coastal and Amazonian Ecuador for training special troops. The borderland between Ecuador and Colombia, going west to east, includes the coastal province of Esmeraldas, the mostly Andean province of Carchi, and the Amazonian province of Sucumbíos. Together, these border provinces constitute about one-third of the territory of the nation. The Colombian military has no permanent base along this entire region, which is controlled in Colombia by the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self Defense System of Colombia—AUC), the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—FARC), and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (Army of National Liberation—ELN). The Ecuadorian military, reduced in budget after the war with Peru in 1995 by ensuing presidents, has the responsibility of patrolling the entire region, but lacks bases and must develop new tactics to fight narcoterrorist activities. Just south of these provinces lie Manabí (Coast), Imbabura (Sierra) and Napo and Orellana (Oriente); these provinces are also affected by ongoing processes attendant on the spread of drugs, crime, and terror.

The most aggressive and dangerous aggregation of terrorists are the AUC, which control the entire sector of rain-forest—riverine Nariño Province that abuts Esmeraldas and Carchi. While images of horror and death abound, no one from the
northwest sector of Esmeraldas—inhabited primarily by Afro-Ecuadorians, Chachi and Awá indigenous people—can forget the day that the AUC came to the small settlement of Mataje, on the San Juan River that forms the border between Colombia and Ecuador, captured the Teniente Político of the community, ordered all people present to watch as they tied his arms and legs to a tree, so that his head and torso faced the gathering, and cut him in half from head to crotch with a chain saw. In September of 2004 news comes to us that the AUC have also entered the Oriente Province of Sucumbíos to spread terror and death.

The President of Colombia, Álvaro Uribe Vélez, long a friend of the AUC movement, is working hard to grant an amnesty that will allow a sizable number of the 13,000-member movement to reenter civil society and probably engage in activities including military operations and private guard duties. In late July three members of the AUC, Salvador Mancuso (a prominent leader and drug czar, who the U.S. wishes to extradite for his shipment of 17 tons of cocaine), Ramón Isaza and Iván Roberto Duque visited the national congress by invitation to expound on the sacrifices the AUC had made in freeing Colombia from the grips of the FARC and ELN. They were flown there in a military helicopter. William Wood, U.S. ambassador to Colombia, called the event a “scandal” and Koffi Annan said that Colombia ought not to permit general amnesty or de facto impunity for crimes committed by the paras who, since 1980, have protected narcotraffic (El Comercio 4 July 2004, A10; Leech 2004).

Coca growing, marketing and export have come under the auspices of the AUC, who may also control about one-third of the Colombian Congress. According to Peter Canby (2004: 34), “Diego Fernando Murillo [successor as an AUC leader after the disappearance of Carlos Castaño], [is] known as Don Berna, a man who once took a giant step up the slippery cocaine slope by betraying his boss, Pablo Escobar.” At least in western Nariño, Cauca and Valle, cocaine traffic is virtually synonymous with the AUC’s operations, which move inexorably into Ecuador. To the east the FARC prevail, with their own cocaine trade which uses routes into and out of northern Ecuador as the major conduit to foreign markets.

Plan Colombia was conceived by Colombians and U.S. personnel in 1999 but soon was coopted by the U.S. to move its strategic Southern Command base from Panama to Manta-Manabi. This base is far more sophisticated in its surveillance apparatus than was the Panama base, and it is coordinated with Tres Esquinas deep in the rain forest of southern Colombia, in the Caquetá Department, just north of the Putumayo River region that forms the border between Ecuador and Colombia. Manta is the key in a U.S.-controlled triangulation around Colombia that includes the base of Palmerola in Honduras and Reina Beatriz in Aruba. Its original mission was to interdict Colombian cocaine trade, and to destroy coca gardens and plantations, especially by massive spraying of coca fields with Monsanto’s Ultra Roundup
(or Roundup Ultra) mixed with a powerful Colombian toxicant called Cosmoflux. This deadly herbicide combination kills all plant life, including the rain-forest canopy and subsistence crops, pollutes rivers, and causes innumerable illnesses in people and animals. Ironically, the first plant to recover from such spraying is coca. The spraying reaches into Ecuador at times, and even when it doesn’t the fallout does. After 9/11, 2001, the U.S. mandated that the war on terrorism be expanded to include Colombia’s FARC, ELN, and even AUC, the result being a U.S. military, and U.S. contract mercenary soldier and espionage buildup in many areas of Colombia. The buildup continues.

This whole system of severe disruption penetrates at least one-third of Ecuador’s territory. Moreover, President Uribe has developed a program called Plan Patriota, that calls on all five abutting countries—Panama, Venezuela, Peru, Brazil and Ecuador—to defend with vigor their boundaries with Colombia, and where possible to pursue paramilitaries and revolutionaries into Colombia, itself. Ecuador has vigorously and vociferously rejected this plan, even to the point of nearly breaking diplomatic relations with Colombia. In turn, Uribe blames what he calls a corrupt Ecuadorian military for supplying the FARC with weapons and explosives.

When Ecuadorian military and diplomatic spokespeople requested U.S. military assistance, as part of Plan Colombia, and pursuant to the base at Manta to help with its buildup of police and military along its northern border, they were curtly refused. Secretary of State Colin Powell said, in Ecuador, and this was repeated and reiterated by Ambassador Kristie Kenney, that Ecuador would have to take care of its own borders. As the U.S. presence escalates in Colombia and its budget for the internal war there increases, and as the U.S. uses Ecuadorian bases in the Coast and Amazonia for training special forces, and as the base in Manta grants all kinds of privileges, including imports and exports without customs intervention, it denies Ecuador the very aid required to maintain its sovereignty. Moreover, as the United States steps up its financial aid to Colombia, mostly for military activity, more and more AUC and FARC personnel enter northern Ecuador (and perhaps elsewhere) to continue their plans and activities, ranging from assassination and kidnapping to growing coca, making cocaine paste, and shipping refined cocaine out of Ecuador in various ways to various destinations in South America, Central America, Europe, and the United States.

In 2004 the fact came to light that not only does the U.S. deny support to Ecuadorian sovereignty, it also seems to have taken action against Ecuadorian vessels on both the high seas and in sovereign territorial waters (albeit the disputed 200-mile limit radiating out from the mainland and from the Galápagos Islands). Specifically, the U.S. navy, operating out of Manta, is alleged to have intercepted ships carrying illegal migrants north from Ecuador to Guatemala, and then sunk the ships after evacuating the migrants back to Manta or Guayaquil. As of this writing the issue is unresolved, but the sovereignty of the Ecuadorian national territory and...
possessions seems threatened by the U.S. as well as by Colombia. Vallejo (2004: A 4) ends his piece with this phrase: “National Sovereignty? For the neocolonized this is an obsolete concept.”

Indigenous Politics and Divisions, 2004

Contrary to some popular and academic opinions and positions, indigenous people are Ecuadorians and subject to the same forces as are other members of civil society. Their reactions to being placed in a mana tupa ita mambi are varied and sometimes appear to be contradictory when lumped together as a monolithic bloc of indios by unreflective commentators and analysts. The indigenous movement has three focal organizations, ECUARUNARI (Ecuador Runacunapac Riccharimui—Ecuadorian Indigenous People Awaken) in the Sierra, CONFENAIE (Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonia Ecuatoriana—Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Amazonian Ecuador) in the Región Amazónica, and COICE (Coordinadora de Movimientos Sociales—Social Movements Coordinator) on the coast. All three are coordinated by CONAIE, which has its centralized office in Quito.

There has long been a wide division between the leaders of ECUARUNARI and those of CONFENAIE, and the new coastal organization seems to take a lot of clues as to its movements and positions from indigenous people of the Oriente. In the Sierra dominant blocs of indigenous people come from every region. All speak Quichua and most are bilingual in Spanish. The coastal nationalities include the indigenous Awá, Chachi, and Tsháchila, all speaking Barbacoan, the Spanish-speaking Afro-Ecuadorians and Epera (who also speak Siapedia), and the newly organized “Montuvios.” In the Oriente are Cofán (unclassified), Siona (Western Tucanoan), Secoya (Western Tucanoan), Waorani (Huaorani—unclassified), Naporuna (Napó/Quíjos Quichua), Canelos Quichua (Pastaza Runa-Canelos Quichua), Záparo (Zaparoan), Andoa (Zaparoan), Shiwiar (Achuar, Quichua, maybe other languages), Achuar (Achuar), and Shuar (Shuar). People from these nationalities range from subsistence-oriented to urbane; many are bilingual or multilingual; intercultural, inter-language marriage is not uncommon.

The Amazonian and coastal nationalities in their diversity would seem intuitively very difficult to coordinate, but their ethos of interculturality that emerges strongly at times of perceived collective crisis binds them together into a powerful ethnic bloc allied with the Andean bloc of indigenous people capable of remarkable mobilization. This was first evidenced during the Levantamiento Indígena of 1990 when indigenous peoples from Sierra and Oriente rose as one to occupy the rural sectors of the Sierra and much of the Oriente, and to block all access to roads in and
out of the Sierra, Oriente, and Costa. This movement involved political coordination greater than any seen in the entire history of the republic. Again, as 1992 approached, and the epitomizing symbol “1492–1992” reached high salience, word went out from Puyo to all Canelos Quicha, Shiwiar, and Achuar people that we must march on Quito now or lose our opportunities to regain our lands. One of the leaders of this march was Carlos Antonio Vargas Guatatuca, a Canelos Quicha man from Unión Base, one of 23 hamlets of the Comuna San Jacinto del Pindo, just south of Puyo.

Subsequently, Antonio Vargas was elected president of CONAIE, in Quito, serving for two terms, during which time presidents Abdalá Bucaram (1997) and Jamil Mahuad (2000) were expelled by combined indigenous-populist (Bucaram) and indigenous-military (Mahuad) forces. In the latter, Antonio Vargas teamed up with Lucio Gutiérrez to create a triumvirate (including the coastal judge and lawyer Carlos Solórzano), which lasted for about three hours until the crushing political-economic weight of the United States intervened (e.g. Whitten 2003b). After the coup indigenous fragmentation was reported by the media, and active and public white racism, sometimes attributed to a shadowy Legión Blanca (white legion) reemerged. Sierra-Oriente schisms became salient as the election of 2002 took place, and Antonio Vargas, who had run for president of the republic in 2002 on his Jatari Amauta party, was expelled from the organization. He moved his base of operations to Guayaquil, on the coast, where he continued to organize people into a movement for an “alternative government.”

In 2004 the elected president of CONAIE, Leonidas Iza, from Cotopaxi, was returning to his office from a trip to Cuba with his wife and son, when an attempted assassination took place in front of the CONAIE building. He and his wife escaped and survived, but at the time of this writing, the fate of his son, the most gravely wounded from the gun shots, is not known.

Some blamed the Legión Blanca, others Colombian sicarios, but the case has not been resolved. The indigenous movement is tied in its modernity to national politics, to which it is often opposed. At the level of the national clase política, also known as the clase dirigente, the political class or the class that directs, enormous ferment is underway. The mana tuparina ñambi is constructed constantly by the incredibly narcissistic clashes of powerful caudillos operating in their own self interest. In breaking with the transformational agenda of his campaign and dismissing indigenous people and the Pachakutik social movement, which sometimes acts as the political arm of CONAIE, Gutiérrez allied himself and his Sociedad Patriótica party with the Social Christian party, dominated by León Febres Cordero and Jaime Nebot Saadi.

As this alliance took place, Febres Cordero was also allied with his one-time political enemy, Rodrigo Borja Cevallos, leader of the Democratic Left party. Before
long Borja and Febres Cordero decided to remove Gutiérrez from the presidency—constitutionally, if possible—and Iza and the CONAIE went along with these caudillos as the storm troops-to-be (see the above cartoon). Iza, as president of CONAIE, with strong support of leaders of ECUARUNARI, called for a Levantamiento Indigena to do away with the wrongs of the country, seemingly attached full-force to Gutiérrez and his family, friends, compadres, and military colleagues involved in the “golpe del 21 de enero.” As the May 31 day for the uprising and coup approached, it became clear that the bases of support for CONAIE were not mobilizing, and just why CONAIE should do the bidding of el dueño del Ecuador, was anything but clear.

Moreover, neither CONFENAIE nor COICE subscribed to the Levantamiento idea in 2004. In the face of all of this Iza and some ECUARUNARI leaders continued to assert their ability to force the government from office and create a new form of democracy. Rhetoric echoed that of the public indigenous ideology of early 2000, late 2002, and early 2003—especially as promulgated by Antonio Vargas—but it failed to motivate those who had to undertake considerable risks to join a transformational social movement in a time of great uncertainty. Gutiérrez was working with leaders of indigenous bases in all three mainland regions of the republic by granting rights, giving tractors and farm tools, and making contracts with and promises to grassroots organizations.

Finally, perhaps, as a trump card in the unfolding dissatisfaction with the government and with the pinnacle of indigenous leadership, the President appointed Antonio Vargas to his cabinet as Ministro de Bienestar Social, the minister of social welfare. This position was vigorously and in some cases viciously attacked by the president of CONAIE, and by spokespeople for ECUARUNARI. One young indigenous woman from Chimborazo, speaking in highly articulate Spanish on an early morning television newscast, affirmed that although Vargas was an “indigenous person,” he was also an “Amazonian Indian” (indio amazónico) who lacked consciousness of the social movement, indigenous democracy, and the indigenous ideology of change. With words such as these the long-standing rift between Amazonian and Sierran indigenous people reemerged with high salience, and pernicious racism, discussed above, entered the intraindigenous system straining toward transformation, but caught in its national modernity. The day of the announced Levantamiento came and went without incident, and those of CONAIE and ECUARUNARI who came to stand in the Parque El Arbolito in Quito, soon dispersed. Ecuador remained on a course of mana tuparina nambi, the trail into the unknown full of strange and frightening dangers for which one cannot find one’s way back.
Internal (National) Politics and Divisiveness, 2004

Divisiveness characterized the narcissistic moods, motivations, and modus operandi of political activity. Appointments intended to heal enmities or win allies frequently backfired as in the case of the almost constantly changing ministers of education, health, and social welfare. During 2004 the infighting among prominent men (less so women) of the clase política underscored the extraordinary caudillismo of coastal and Andean politics. Not only former political enemies, or at least rivals, Borja and Febres Cordero, aligned to destroy Gutiérrez “constitutionally,” but Febres Cordero became involved in a very public and very nasty dispute with his one-time strongman, Renán Borbúa, first cousin of the president and a prominent figure in 2004 politics. One cartoon portrayed “the lion” as shouting in fury that Borbúa (portrayed as a mouse or rat) planned to kill him and then sue him. This is how ridiculous these fights are, but they are part and parcel of Ecuadorian egomaniacal rhetoric within the “class that directs” the country.

Such rhetoric permeated a remarkably successful social movement by the elderly and the retired. The revolt of the jubilados that took place from June through August (and continues in confusion) and cost 18 lives due to hunger strikes conjoined with closing of health facilities, succeeded in achieving a minimal retirement salary that exceeded the terminal work-earnings of thousands. But as success occurred political-class-like bickering broke out at high levels, and the jubilados began to fight one another over what sort of scale would be applied; as they did so pension checks ceased arriving. The issues here are unresolved, but attract considerable media attention.

Migration

Mary Weismantel (2003:331) writes: “The mestiza nation . . . is simultaneously imploding and exploding: imploding as the rural indigenous population takes over the centers of white urbanity and exploding as Ecuadorians from all walks of life abandon the land of their birth for the United States [and Europe]).” Not only are poor people hocking everything they, their relatives, friends and neighbors have to make a treacherous journey, skilled laborers from Ambato and Cuenca are also making such a sacrificial journey. As Ecuador’s skilled labor force diminishes jobs are filled by Peruvian immigrants. Of a population estimated at 13 million, 70 percent live in poverty or subpoverty, and 7–10 percent, maybe more, live abroad (e.g. Weismantel 2003, Miles 2004, Spencer 2003, Hoy 7 August 2004). Probably 70 percent of the Diaspora population is in another country illegally. Some years ago we were surprised to learn of fees of from $6,000 to $10,000 paid to coyotes who arrange
passage to another country thence through extraordinary time and travail, into the United States. But now we learn of fees from $12,000 to $18,500 for this service. Payment comes not just by upfront money, but by obligations to pay a percentage of one's wages once one finds work; mortgage of every piece of property of the migrant and his or her relatives, friends, compadres, and inlaws is also common or standard.

The sending of remittances to Ecuador by its swelling Diaspora population exceed every single other legal source of revenue in the Gross National Product except that of petroleum. The earnings of the illegal coyotes nearly equal that of the illegal drug exporters. The latter amounts to an estimated 50 million dollars per year and the traffic in illegal emigrants comes to 40 million per year (Hoy “Blanco y Negro” Saturday, 7 August 2004). Ecuador is not only a petroleum exporting nation, it is also a poverty exporting nation. Profit has immense human costs, and Ecuadorians in their Diaspora have established an organization called llactacaru (distant territory) to press their rights as human beings and as Ecuadorians. Llactacaru, with its own international newsletter and web site (http://www.llacta.org/organize/llactacaru/) and email address (llactacaru@llacta.org) stretches from the United States to Spain, where Ecuadorians constitute the second-largest immigrant group after Moroccans (New York Times, April 19, 2002) and includes smaller aggregates in Italy, France, Germany, Holland and Canada.

Illegal migrants endure incredible dangers, such as being captured prior to departure or on the high seas or in territorial waters, usually by U.S. Navy vessels. On board ship hunger, thirst, and sickness are compounded by robbery, abuse, and rape of women by coyotes and boat captains and crews. Then come the arduous journeys into and through Guatemala and Mexico, and across the border into the United States and, with luck, travel within the U.S. to a remunerative destination such as Queens, New York (Miles 2004) or Danbury, Connecticut (Spencer 2003) among many other destinations. Many are turned back at one point or another in the journey, often after considerable abuse, only to try again—and if they don't make it, again. In detention centers such would-be emigrants compete with others from South and Central America as well as from India and China. Here danger abounds, as the packed surroundings in detention put the Ecuadorians seeking livelihood in competition for space, food, and dignity with drug smugglers and those engaged in other illegal activities (e.g. Spencer 2003:22).

**Dominance and Hegemony by the United States**

The possibility of dollarization was first raised by then president Abdalá Bucaram in 1996. The Argentine model of pegging the dollar to the sucre (the Ecuadorian currency until 2000) led to great consternation in the republic. Yet movement in
that direction continued. Jamil Mahuad suggested actually adopting the Yankee Greenback, for which he was severely criticized, but then Gustavo Noboa Bejarano, who became president following the golpe del 21 de enero, 2000, operationalized Mahuad’s plan and the dollar—at 25,000 sucre per dollar—became the only Ecuadorian currency in that year. Imagine the shock to the poor and the rural residents, those whose use of money revolves around the equivalent of 30,000 sucre per day for wage laborers and much less for those balancing subsistence and cash economic life. Suddenly one earns a dollar and perhaps a few cents a day. This in a country where the price of gasoline in 2004 ranges from $1.50 per gallon for “extra” to $2.10 per gallon for “super.”

The logic of the U.S. coins, which are used in most Ecuadorian transactions below the middle sector, was initially incomprehensible: 50-cent coin is larger than the dollar, which is about the size of a quarter; and the five-cent piece is much larger than the 10-cent piece. It should not take much imagination to figure multiple ways to swindle the unsophisticated. “Here’s the jatun (big) dollar (the 50-cent coin); please give me two of the ichilla (little) dollars (one-dollar coins),” etc.

For those with money in a bank, ranging from the equivalent of a few hundred to hundreds of thousands of dollars, the radical devaluation of the sucre reduced savings by 75%. Then the banks closed, accounts were frozen, and several banks crashed and never reopened. The largest, Filanbanco, a national state bank, has yet to open, and the scandals involving who took the money where and how it is to be returned seem legion. Consensus in Ecuador seems to be that for the wealthy and the middle-class adoption of the dollar has been beneficial, but for the rest of the country the question of benefit remains open. As the macroeconomy has improved significantly in its neoliberal framework, the livelihood of the vast majority of Ecuadorians has worsened proportionately.

The United States air force base at Manta is complemented by its alleged use of navy ships to interdict and sink private Ecuadorian vessels in territorial waters as well as on the high seas. When the Latin American Association of Human Rights broke the news publicly in June, 2004, the Canciller (Secretary of State) Patricio Zuquilanda said there was no evidence of this just as Ambassador Kristie Kenney announced that this was standard U.S. policy backed by Ecuadorian requests. While Ecuadorian navy officials denied knowledge of these events and stated that the U.S. had no rights to sink Ecuadorian ships, joint Ecuadorian-U.S. commissions declared that such activities were requested by the Ecuadorian navy.

The ongoing collective negotiations between Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia with the United States, and those individual negotiations going on “bilaterally” between each of these Andean nations and the United States are championed and led by the Minister of Foreign Commerce, Ivonne Baki, and supported by Zuquilanda. It seems, at times, that for Baki and Zuquilanda anything that ben-
efits the colossus to the north benefits Ecuador. Baki argues strongly that even without an easing of internal subsidies to agriculture in the United States, together with a removal of Ecuadorian subsidies, inflows of cheap foods to Ecuador will benefit the people of the republic.

She cannot be thinking of the poorer of Ecuador’s citizens, the 70% or more who live on far less money than their daily lives require. It is this same high-profile woman who once served as ambassador to the U.S. in the Mahuad regime, who returned to run for president within her own Metamorphosis party in 2002, and who insisted and insists that Ecuador reaped great benefits from its $13.5 million dollar debt to host the Miss Universe contest (called in some vulgar street settings “Miss Putita”). And, she is a personal friend of Donald Trump. Add to this to the statement by Ambassador Kristie Kenney that Ecuador could enter the modern world with more such events and the allegedly unauthorized (by the Ecuadorian military) sinking of Ecuadorian ships by the U.S. ships on the high seas and in territorial waters, and the structure of U.S. imperialist hegemony should emerge clearly.

There is more to the mana tuparina ñambi story. It is appropriate to elaborate here with the U.S. in mind. One of the paju powers to be encountered is the cutu amarun, the “monkey [sounding] anaconda.” One takes an unknown fork, comes upon an unknown lagoon, and is completely lost. Moving to another trail on another fork one comes to an area enshrouded by dark clouds; above is the tail and lower body of the great constrictor, but one cannot see this. The head of the cutu amarun is in the earth in a dangerous cave occupied by dangerous spirits, juctu supais. What brings the person to this place is that the boa constrictor knows how to make the sounds of the red howler monkey, which is food for the indigenous Amazonian people. But the gift of monkey meat from the forest spirit master is an illusion, for above it all is the great constrictor, the great paju, that in seeming to offer food actually presents great danger, the awful threat of being crushed and devoured.

This and other stories are used as tropes of simile or metaphor for the deceptive tactics and devouring potential of the United States of America by many indigenous people of Amazonia, but still some voluntarily take the trail that leads them to such conjunctures of political and economic life. As I wrote elsewhere (Whitten 2003b:29), “Between the promise of wealth and the reality of poverty lie dynamic symbol systems to enhance critical insights and to sustain movements into and out of liminality and into new dimensions of social relationships” (see also Quiroga 2003).

This takes us again to relationships between indigenous and national politics (and the conjuncture of the two), set in the mana tuparina ñambi enshrouded by the two great and interrelated pajus of Colombian guerrilla, paramilitary, terrorist activity, and cocaine production, and distribution; and the hegemonic policies,
strategies, practices, and affects of the United States and its international affiliates. We turn now to the arena of petroleum exploration and exploitation.

**Petroleum Exploration and Exploitation**

Oil was rediscovered in the northern Oriente (Amazonian Region) of Ecuador in the mid-1960s and within a few years exploration companies blanketed the area. This followed widespread exploration by Royal Dutch Shell Oil from the 1920s to the early 1940s that featured considerable disruption throughout the central Amazonian region. In 1992 Ecuador became the first country to leave the OPEC cartel with plans to greatly increase production and hence revenues. But where petroleum brought in wealth for the few, the situation for the majority of the country worsened. Ecological and environmental damage have been catastrophic. According to Suzana Sawyer (2004:101): “Between 1972 and 1990 the Texaco-operated Trans-Andean pipeline spilled an estimated 16.8 million gallons of crude into Amazonian headwaters—over one and a half times the amount spilled by the Exxon Valdez.” Other spills in the northern sector affecting especially Cofán, Siona, Secoya, and colonists, receive daily attention in Ecuadorian media. The suit against Texaco by the Cofán and a coalition of colonists is not resolved, and a decade later Texaco is now blaming and suing the Ecuadorian Petroecuador corporation that has the dual and contradictory roles of both making and increasing profits for the state, and policing the pipelines and oil companies.

For Amazonian indigenous people and coastal and Andean colonists, petroleum is nearing its fortieth year of severe and dramatic influence on their lives, either direct or indirect. This constitutes a human span of over two generations of real people of the Upper Amazon-Andean Piedmont. It is part and parcel of the road that seemingly leads nowhere, where great promise of economic wherewithal and wealth for some combines with utter destruction of natural resources, ecological systems, and environmental management systems that have characterized the Amazonian region since time immemorial. Sawyer (2004) documents some of the Arco-OPIP (Organización de los Pueblos Indígenas de Pastaza—Organization of Indigenous Peoples of Pastaza) interactions over issues of oil exploitation in Pastaza Province during much of the 1990s. The subject is of highest salience today in Ecuador as a major moneymaking company, Occidental Petroleum (OXY) may have 150 million dollars in state withheld taxes returned to it because petroleum is a natural product, not one manufactured. This case comes at a time when the state is desperate for revenues to cover its ever-increasing external and internal debts.

There is a dramatic indigenous / oil company standoff in Pastaza Province that threatens to break into a “war” between allied indigenous people—Quichua-speak-
ers of Sarayacu, Achuar of the Pastaza drainage, and Shuar from the Macuma River region to Taisha—and the forces of petroleum companies—CGC (the Argentine Compañía General de Combustibles), in the north and Burlington in the south. Each of these was once a subsidiary of Arco.

The indigenous people who reside in two blocks of territory wherein subsurface rights have been ceded to the companies are also stewards of the land, forest, and rivers ceded to them in 1992 and guaranteed to them by the National constitution of 1998. The only legitimate force that the companies can draw on is that of the Ecuadorian military. The interaction of indigenous forces, petroleum forces, and the military in the Oriente are of critical importance to the entire nation. During the March for Land and Life in 1992, some 12 years ago, the indigenous people, specifically Canelos Quichua, Achuar, and Shiwiar, gained the national concession of 1,115,574 hectares in their rain-forest—riparian zone of Pastaza Province, about 65% of their initial request. This territory was originally granted to the Organización de Pueblos Indígenas de Pastaza (OPIP) and to the Evangelical organization. It then became divided up among different nationalities, including the Waorani, Záparo, Shiwiar, Achuar, and Amazonian Quichua of different organizations. Other organizations and ethnicities (Andoa most recently) emerged to claim portions of the redistribution of surface land. But the subsurface rights to exploration and exploitation were retained by the state. In 2004 the state has its rights to wealth that lies beneath the surface, and by the constitutional change of 1998 the indigenous people have their rights to health, welfare, and a satisfactory life in their territory, that includes healthy and uncontaminated flora and fauna of forest and water systems.

In this situation people struggle with the paradoxes and contradictions before them on their unknown trails in modernity, just as those guardians of la patria—the military—increase the numbers of indigenous people in their ranks, and enter at every level into the debate about whether or not they should be placed in a killing situation vis-à-vis their cultural congeners and family members. Throughout the military it is recognized that the collaboration of indigenous Shuar people in the Cenepa River region of southeast Ecuador was crucial in Ecuador’s victory over Peru, so the idea of killing indigenous people over the rights of foreign oil companies rankles and divides.

The analogue to the petroleum situation is that of logging, and especially illegal logging. The people of northern Esmeraldas, mostly Afro-Ecuadorian and Chachi, have been subject to large scale, illegal logging since the 1970s. To make things worse, like the indigenous people of the Oriente, their lands were long declared tierras baldias, unoccupied lands, even though, in northern Esmeraldas, as in the Pacific Lowlands and the Chocó of Colombia, these were the most densely populated of the moist tropics of the Americas prior to industrialized exploitation of marginal terri-
tories. In response, Afro-Ecuadorians have been organizing their land into indigenous-like comunas for many years, as have the Chachi and Epera; indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorians have also cooperated in a myriad of manners and have developed organizations to resist illegal and some legal logging (the line between the two is at best hazy). Added to this is the explosive expansion of shrimp farming in the past quarter century that has devastated the mangrove forest-swamps, some of the largest and most biodiverse in the world (e.g. Quiroga 2003).

In Amazonia great tragedy has befallen small groupings of indigenous people in Pastaza Province. On May 26, 2003, a well-known group of Waorani living on the Via Auca, a road built and named by Texaco from Lago Agrio south to the Tigüíno River, made a well-planned raid on a long house, or several long houses, of what were thought to be Tagaeri people, but seem to have turned out to be the legendary Taromenane (Taromenga) people near the Curaray River region. The known results are the corpses of eight women, five children, and an uncertain (if any) number of men and the severed head of one man brought on a pole by Waorani raiders back to the “Auca Road” to be photographed by journalists from Quito and Guayaquil (e.g. Cabodevilla, Smith and Rivas 2004). Auca, by the way, is a very pejorative word meaning “savage” of the forest.

It turned out that the Waorani making the raid did so at the behest of illegal Colombian loggers in the zone. An investigation was made at a national level confirming this, but the Colombian loggers are still operating illegally along the Tigüíno River, using the Via Auca as their roadway to industrial wealth by the illegal exploitation of the tropical forest of Amazonian Ecuador. For their part, the Waorani organization, ONHAE (Organización de la Nacionalidad Huaorani de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana—Organization of the Waorani Nationality of Amazonian Ecuador), whose president, Armando Boya, is the brother of one of the Waorani raiders, and other organizational leaders from OPIP and CONFENAIE, blamed the petroleum companies for the massacre, and asked state officials to invoke the concept of “indigenous justice” to exonerate those who raided and speared to death Taromenane people, a small and threatened group of Huaorani speakers generally unknown to others in Ecuador or elsewhere until their massacre in 2003. As of August, 2004, the illegal logging continues, and the raiders live at home, unmolested by internal or external legal sanctions.

A Long Road Going Nowhere?

It would seem to be a long road—a mana tuparina ñambi—that twists and turns from the colossus of the United States to a rain-forest setting of death and terror in the region between the Curaray and Tigüíno Rivers of Amazonian Ecuador. But the
road connects in a serpentine manner—even if most U.S. citizens and none of the surviving Taromenane are aware of it—the huge and mighty and those threatened with extinction by cultural congeners speaking their own language. Two great pajus signify danger and possible death on the road of modernity in contemporary Ecuador. Some Colombians who are at the periphery of their own violence, introduce and sustain terror and death into Ecuador. They play an increasingly important role in constructing this labyrinth. They would seem, in 2004, to represent the covert dimensions of the cutu amarun that complement the overt dimensions of the distant but powerful norteamericanos—the second great paju—who seek to control land, life, and destiny of diverse people of a small and beleaguered nation.

These are some of the actualities of modern Ecuador in its morbid dimensions. Since 1990 indigenous people (with others) in intercultural unity have made sporadic break outs from this road to nowhere, but their heroic endeavors to transform the republic in peaceful ways have again and again been enshrouded by forces sketched above.

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