Land Reform, Historical Consciousness and Indigenous Activism in Late Twentieth-Century Ecuador

SERGIO MIGUEL HUARCAYA

Abstract. Studies of the emergence of the Ecuadorian indigenous movement, which burst onto the national political scene in 1990, have not paid enough attention to indigenous historical consciousness. Using historical and ethnographic evidence, this study examines the emergence of historical consciousness among indigenous peasants involved in the land struggle for the Quinchuquí hacienda, in Otavalo, Ecuador. The research demonstrates that it was only during the struggle for the land that the peasants became aware of the colonial dispossession of indigenous lands. Legitimating their politics in terms of history, they articulated a political identity that increasingly emphasised ethnicity over class.

Keywords: indigenous historical consciousness, indigeneity, ethnic consciousness, indigenous movements, indigenous activism, land reform, Ecuador, Andes

No hay hacienda sin indios.¹

En cuanto a la reforma [agraria], no hubo, pero hubo la posibilidad de organizarse para tomarse las tierras.²

Many analyses of the emergence of the Ecuadorean indigenous movement, which burst onto the national political scene with a massive uprising in June 1990, have underlined an earlier political reorientation among indigenous Andeans from a class to an ethnic framing from the late 1970s onwards.³

Sergio Miguel Huarcaya is Professor in the Department of Social and Political Sciences at the Universidad del Pacífico, Lima, Peru. E-mail: sm.huarcayaf@up.edu.pe

¹ ‘Without Indians, there are no haciendas’: Manuel de Rojas, Jesuit hacienda administrator, 1686.
² ‘As far as the [agricultural] reform is concerned, it didn’t happen; but there was the possibility of organising in order to take the lands’: Miguel Ángel Carlosama, indigenous intellectual, 2007.
Turning to self-identification as indígenas (indigenous people) rather than campesinos (peasants), they started to occupy the ‘subject-position’ of the politically-conscious ethnic citizen. They also started to revitalise their cultures, challenge prevalent assimilationist ideologies, articulate a shared political identity with indigenous Amazonians, and demand indigenous rights.

In the context of the land reform struggles of the 1970s–1980s, several processes that differed regionally converged into a broader ethnic dynamism. Accordingly, scholars have viewed the emergence of ethnic consciousness in diverse ways, focusing on organisational processes (influenced by leftist, Church, and NGO agents and programmes), on the unique political work of the indigenous community, or on processes of cultural contestation. However, in explaining the ethnic consciousness of Ecuadorean indígenas, scholars have paid little attention, either theoretically or empirically, to historical consciousness—the awareness of an objectified past. Such oversight suggests that they have taken historical consciousness for granted, supposing that the springboard for the political reorientation of indigenous Andeans was an immemorial awareness of a pre-conquest past, free from colonial subjugation. This assumption also takes indigenous resistance for granted, reducing the

---

4 As argued by Stuart Hall, identities are ‘points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us’. An effective articulation of the subject to a subject-position ‘requires, not only that the subject is “hailed” [into place as a social subject of particular discourses], but that the subject invests in the position’. Stuart Hall, ‘Who Needs “Identity”?’, in Paul du Gay, Jessica Evans and Peter Redman (eds.), Identity: A Reader (London: Sage, 2000), p. 19.


complex entanglement of alterity, oppression and assimilation to a reified dichotomy of always-resisting *indígenas* and always-oppressing non-*indígenas*.

Historical consciousness is not a given. Ethnographic research has proven that, in some groups, reality might not go beyond what is immediately socially constructed; but, in others, it might be construed in terms of deep history.\(^7\) Ethnic consciousness, which entails the articulation of a political identity based on cultural difference, is strongly linked to historical consciousness. As Andrew Canessa argues, ‘a claim to indigeneity is a claim to justice based not simply on historical priority but a sense of historical injustice’. Moreover, a sense of continuity as a people lies ‘in the historical consciousness rather than specific cultural forms’.\(^8\)

In this study, I examine the emergence of historical consciousness among *indígenas* fighting for land in the canton of Otavalo, province of Imbabura, Ecuador. From 1977 to 1983, the *indígenas* of the communities of La Bolsa, Guanansi, Carabuela, Ilumán and Chimbaloma fought under the 1973 Land Reform for the expropriation of the Quinchuquí hacienda. They organised as a pre-cooperative – a pre-cooperative had legal status and would become a cooperative if land were granted – lost their first attempt at litigation, were subject to violent repression, but finally gained the legal ownership of the hacienda.

Focusing on the ways in which class and ethnicity were enacted and experienced on the ground, I demonstrate that before the land struggle there was no articulation of an ethnic political identity among *indígenas*. In addition, *indígenas* of the comunidades libres (free communities), who had their own sources of income, not only discriminated against those of comunidades de hacienda (hacienda communities), who had to provide labour to the haciendas, but also fought against the Quinchuquí pre-cooperative. In collusion with the hacendado (landowner), who had pledged that he would sell them some plots of land, the *indígenas* of the comunidades libres established a group of compradores (buyers) who tried to derail the expropriation process initiated by the members of the pre-cooperative (these were mostly from the comunidades de hacienda). Furthermore, in the communities involved, members did not produce narratives of a deep past that explained their historic distinction as the autochthonous inhabitants of the land. They did not hold a memory of a time before the hacienda, when blancos (whites) and mestizos were yet to appear. It was only during the land struggle that they learned about the conquest and the colonial dispossession of indigenous lands. Emphasising

---


historical continuity, they started to articulate a historical memory that would become the basis for their political action.

The land struggle was a present situation requiring decisions upon a course of action. The emergent historical consciousness bestowed a temporal orientation to the conflict, shaping moral values in the experience of time and guiding action intentionality. The leadership started to legitimate their politics in terms of history, framing the struggle as a recovery rather than an expropriation of land. In doing so, they seized the higher moral ground; this proved key to motivating members to action and invalidating the ownership claims of the hacendado. Providing a new understanding of their life experiences as historical indigenous subjects, historical consciousness also enabled them to overcome the pressure to assimilate into mainstream mestizo culture, and heal the historical divide between the comunidades libres and the comunidades de hacienda.

This research is based on historical and ethnographic evidence. I was granted access to the archives of the Instituto de Desarrollo Agrario (Agrarian Development Institute, INDA) – which replaced the Instituto Ecuatoriano de Reforma Agraria y Colonización (Ecuadorean Institute of Land Reform and Colonisation, IERAC) in 1994 – to the archives of the Comisión Eucuménica de Derechos Humanos (Ecumenical Human Rights Commission, CEDHU), and to the records of the Quinchuquí pre-cooperative. I also examined the considerable media coverage of the land struggle. The ethnographic data comes from almost two years of fieldwork in Otavalo.

A prevalent assumption in Andean studies has been that indigenous Andeans hold a memory of pre-conquest times. Thus, Sabine MacCormack argues that the Inca Empire ‘has remained present not just to historians but to the people of Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, and especially those of Peru for nearly half a millennium after its fall’. In the 1980s, Peruvian historians and anthropologists, in their efforts to redeem the Indian in the constitution of the Peruvian nation, spoke of an alternative historical consciousness fuelling an Andean utopia: an imagined indigenous future built upon indigenous values. This line of thought, according to Cecilia Méndez, was reductionist, subordinating history to a social change ‘vaguely desired by intellectuals’.

---

11 See Manuel Burga, Nacimiento de una utopía: muerte y resurrección de los incas (Lima: Instituto de Apoyo Agrario, 1988); and Alberto Flores Galindo, Buscando un inca: identidad y utopía en los Andes (Lima: Instituto de Apoyo Agrario, 1987).
In the Bolivian context, scholars have underlined the ways in which historical consciousness has shaped the contemporary indigenous political horizon. Forrest Hylton and Sinclair Thomson claim that historical awareness of revolutions, going back to that of Túpac Katari in 1781, has shaped two revolutionary currents, one indigenous and the other national/popular, which at times have come together. From an anthropological perspective, Andrew Canessa argues that historical consciousness shapes the sense of justice of the Aymara community of Wila Kjarka. This consciousness, however, is not genealogical. ‘What is much more important is a sense of kinship with people who lived before them and who, in their view, shared an understanding of how to relate to people and the spirits who animate the landscape.’

Since the 1980s, the Taller de Historia Oral Andina (Andean Oral History Workshop, THOA) in Bolivia has done important work promoting a history from below, questioning official historiography by conducting research into the ways in which indígenas have interpreted their own historical experience. In reconstructing a people’s history from fragmented memory, the THOA has been politically instrumental in the reconstitution of the ayllu, the Andean political community, leading to the establishment of the Consejo de Ayllus y Marcas del Kollasuyo (Council of Communities and Territories of the Kollasuyo). This work has reversed the long-standing trend in which the de-structuring of the ayllu meant the de-structuring of memory.

In Ecuador, according to Hugo Benavides, the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, CONAIE) understands the past as ‘a vital element of ideological reproduction and an important part of the strategic struggle but not as an empiric outcome of direct interest, study or recognition in the political platform of the movement’. Accordingly, the CONAIE’s perspective shares the limitations of the national imagination promoted by official history.

Mestizaje and the Hacienda Regime

As a system of domination for the provision of unfree labour, the hacienda regime, which lasted until the agrarian reform of the 1970s, rested on

constructing racialised subjects who did not ‘merit ordinary treatment as equals, a feature inherent in the condition of citizen’. Such a system was part and parcel of what Andrés Guerrero has called ‘the administration of dominated populations under a regime of customary citizenship’. After the abolition of the Indian tribute, in 1857, the state delegated the administration of the indígenas to the patriarchal sphere of the hacendados and the blurred authority of local petty functionaries. Under this regime, notions of citizenship were intertwined with a prerogative to exploit and discriminate against the indios at will.

Several scholars have emphasised that the hacienda regime owed its stability to ‘the moral economy on which the logic of the hacienda’s universe rested’. This consisted of the rights and obligations of hacendados and indigenous labourers in frequently ritualised ‘contests of material and symbolic reciprocity among unequals’. Peasant unrest was the corollary of the hacendados’ failure to fulfil their customary responsibilities. However, Brooke Larson has cautioned against analyses that rely overtly on the notion of moral economy, arguing that they might ‘conjure up seamless, transhistorical notions of lo andino’.

Few studies have paid attention to the ways in which assimilation into mainstream culture – mestizaje – contributed to the reproduction of the hacienda regime. Since the well-being of local non-indígenas depended on the exploitation of the indios, the former shared a normativity of complicity that dictated that they should never break rank, side with the indios, or treat them as equals. The discriminatory practices of non-indígenas normalised indigenous subordination, and the hacienda offered supposed protection to the indígenas from such harassment and exploitation.

As grievances caused by non-indígenas were nearly impossible to redress, many indígenas had a disempowering notion of their own agency. However, those indígenas or indigenous families who could assimilate, in one or more generations, moving to urban centres and going to school, became non-indígenas. In Otavalo, indígenas use the Kichwa term ‘mishutucushca’ –

---

someone who behaves like a *mishu*, like a non- *indígena*—to refer to a person in the process of assimilation.23

Responding to why and how Andean peasants started to articulate their political identity in terms of ethnicity, Víctor Bretón argues that land reform struggles stimulated a proliferation of grass-roots and second-tier organisations that later became the backbone of the emergent indigenous movement. Bretón emphasises the linkages between processes of social differentiation among the peasantry, which land reform sanctioned and accelerated, with the emergence of ‘organic intellectuals’ who articulated an indigenous counter-hegemonic discourse when the contest of responsibilities and obligations of the hacienda system of domination was breaking down. This process was strengthened by the proliferation of development agencies that emphasised identity-based projects.24

A pending issue, however, is that those organic intellectuals had to deal with the historical stigmatisation of indigeneity. Peasants could have fought for land without turning towards ethnicity, as has happened in Andean Peru. In Ecuador, when Andean peasants were free not to be ‘Indians’ any more, as Barry J. Lyons argues, they had to choose between ‘living with stigmatized identity, attempting to redefine that identity as a source of pride, or abandoning it and becoming mestizo’.25 Such ‘choosing’ was not merely strategic; it involved embodied sentiment- and power-laden re-negotiations of identity/alterity vis-à-vis non-*indígenas*. In what follows, I explain the ways in which historical consciousness contributed to the building up of a new indigeneity, freer from the stigma of the past, which would serve to legitimate the struggle as a recuperation of indigenous lands, and, later, to challenge the assimilationist ideologies of the Ecuadorean state.

Indigenous Revolutionaries

On 31 October 1980, the leftist magazine *Contrapunto* featured on its front page a photo of a young man behind bars, wearing a light-coloured cap and a white shirt with drawings of flowers. The caption read ‘Quinchuquí: la trampa del gamonal’ (‘Quinchuqui: The Gamonal’s Trap’).26 Quinchuqui was the hacienda undergoing expropriation proceedings. ‘Gamonal’ is a

pejorative term for an *hacendado* who exerts abusive and unrestricted local power. The *gamonal*’s ‘trap’ was to sell small plots to *indígenas* who were not members of the Quinchuquí pre-cooperative that was demanding the expropriation of the hacienda.

By selling a few marginal plots, the *hacendado* aimed at weakening the peasants’ organisation and sidetracking the expropriation demand. However, the sale was illegal because land earmarked for expropriation could not be sold. In addition, the sale provoked deadly confrontations between the *compradores* and the members of the Quinchuquí pre-cooperative. The *compradores* were mostly weavers and traders from the more affluent communities of Peguche and Quinchuquí who had little reason to demand the expropriation of the Quinchuquí hacienda; the members of the pre-cooperative were mostly peasants from the poorer communities of La Bolsa, Guanansi, Carabuela, Chimbaloma and Ilumán (see Figure 1).

Depicting the young man in prison, the magazine denounced the repression carried out against the indigenous peasants. However, the link between the photo and the caption is not self-evident because the young man does not look like an indigenous peasant. Rather, he looks like a mestizo, with his urban attire and short hair. In Otavalo, *indígenas* wear traditional attire and long hair, tied in a single braid. In fact, the young man was Segundo Ramos, one of the activists leading the expropriation demand. His older brother, Florentino Ramos, was the main leader. The *hacendado*’s henchmen had denounced Segundo Ramos, and a judicial authority had issued a warrant for his arrest. He was captured by a mob of *indígenas* who sided with the *compradores*. They beat him, accused him of being a land thief, and handed him over to the police.

Twenty-six years later, in 2006, I asked Segundo Ramos about his appearance in the photo, given that today he always wears indigenous attire and his hair long. He answered:

I was a staunch admirer of Che Guevara. I always wanted to look like Che, and many times in the city I wore a cap … I had a beret, yes, in the style of Che … Growing up, my role models were Fidel [Castro] and Che. I wanted to look like them. That was before I went to university; but after studying and reading, I realised that I should have my own identity … From then, I said no, I am going to be myself. I don’t want to look like somebody else.

Segundo Ramos’s trajectory, from raw leftist revolutionary to politically conscious *indígena*, reflects the complexities of the historical and personal processes of becoming rather than being an *indígena*. Like many other young *indígenas* growing up in the 1970s, Segundo Ramos was able to invest in the

---

27 Interview with Segundo Ramos, former member of the leadership of the Quinchuquí pre-cooperative, 9 Sept. 2006.
subject position of the politically conscious *indígena* only after being non-*indígena* for a while. Until then, given that the condition of being indigenous was heavily stigmatised, most *indígenas* who went to school assimilated into dominant, mestizo culture. As Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld argues, the equating of formal education with assimilation was a ‘basic tenet of national culture’.

The Ecuadorean Land Reforms, promulgated in 1964 and 1973, redistributed only 8 per cent of the arable land but still transformed the agrarian sector. The reforms abolished long-standing servile relations of production, and, by

---

Figure 1. *The Quinchuquí hacienda in 1981*

Source: Author’s elaboration from IERAC, Engineering Department, 19 June 1981, INDA archives, file 920.

---


29 Colloredo-Mansfeld, *Fighting Like a Community*, p. 92.
opening up a market for land, they reduced land concentration. Studies of agrarian processes have overlooked the ways in which the 1973 Land Reform was implemented. The state was both an institution responding to the peasants’ aspirations for land, expropriating land that was ‘not fulfilling its social function’, and a channel for influence peddling and corruption, hindering expropriation proceedings. The reform provoked direct, violent, and interminable confrontations between the campesinos and the hacendados. The former had to organise themselves not only to demand the expropriation of haciendas but also to protect themselves against repression.

In the land struggles, leftist activists provided legal and organisational support, and set out to raise class consciousness. For their part, the indigenous peasants were hesitant to identify themselves as indios or indígenas. As Amalia Pallares argues, participating in politics as campesinos – or as leftists, as Segundo Ramos’s account demonstrates – ‘lifted them from the status of Indians, empowered them in the public sphere, and offered them a public identity’.

The Quinchuquí Hacienda

Consolidating four farms of colonial origin, the Quinchuquí hacienda occupied more than 700 hectares of prime agricultural land, north-east of the city of Otavalo. The hacendado, Carlos Montúfar Barba Larrea, had adopted the surname of a hero of independence, the marquis Juan Pío Montúfar, to whom the Barba family was distantly related. Before the Land Reforms, according to journalist Jaime Galarza, seven families – Barba, Donoso, Gangotena, Jijón, Lasso, Plaza and Ponce – monopolised the land in the central and northern highlands, owning 160 haciendas. The leadership of the Quinchuquí pre-cooperative was aware of the extent of the land owned by the Montúfar Barba family. According to Eduardo Cachimuel, one of the leaders during the land struggle:

they had 19 haciendas in the country. When we started, 13 were subject to litigation. In the IERAC, we met other people who were also reclaiming land from the same family: the Montúfars.

30 Selverston-Scher, Ethnopolitics in Ecuador, p. 7; Guerrero Cazar and Ospina Peralta, El poder de la comunidad, p. 88.
32 In Andean Ecuador, until the early 1980s, the words indio and campesino had the same referent: indios were campesinos, and campesinos were indios. The term indio is also pejorative.
35 Interview with Eduardo Cachimuel, former member of the leadership of the Quinchuquí pre-cooperative, 13 Aug. 2005.
A notarised document from 1959 lists all 19 haciendas owned by the family.\textsuperscript{36} The Quinchuquí hacienda was part of a modernisation trend in the northern highlands, which involved improvements in infrastructure and mechanisation, strong control over resources, conversion from crops to milk production, direct management and the phasing out of servile labour.\textsuperscript{37} This trend was a response to increasing demand for dairy products and to criticism from liberal and leftist voices that argued that the hacienda regime was an obstacle to national development. By the early 1960s, not only had Bolivia and Cuba already implemented far-reaching land reforms, but in addition the United States was promoting them through the Alliance for Progress. Fearing that peasant unrest would lead to communist revolutions, John F. Kennedy’s programme emphasised the need for a more equitable land distribution throughout Latin America. In Ecuador, 'between 1960 and 1962, six agrarian reform measures were proposed by different – often diametrically opposed – groups. All called for abolishing servile labour arrangements and for redistributing some of the land.'\textsuperscript{38}

The 1964 Land Reform did little more than ban the \textit{huasipungo}, a form of servile labour in which the \textit{huasipunguero} (tenant) and his family worked four to six days a week in exchange for the usufruct of a small, marginal parcel of land. \textit{Huasipungueros} were considered part of the inventory of the hacienda and were sold as such. \textit{Yanapa} (the word means ‘help’) was another form of servile labour. Under this arrangement, the peasants worked two to three days a week in exchange for hacienda resources, including grass, firewood, water, harvest leftovers and use of paths.\textsuperscript{39} The 1973 Land Reform stated that servile labour was a cause for expropriation; however, the Quinchuquí hacienda continued to use \textit{yanapa} labour until the beginning of the expropriation demand in September 1977.\textsuperscript{40}

Most of the labour force of the Quinchuquí hacienda came from the communities of La Bolsa and Guanansi, and to a lesser extent from Carabuela. Some peasants from Illumán and Chimbaloma also worked for the hacienda. Peguche and Quinchuquí were located higher up the valley, and provided no labour to the hacienda. La Bolsa and Guanansi, at the foot of a steep

\textsuperscript{36} Donación. El Señor Don Alfonso Barba Aguirre y su mujer Doña Beatriz Larrea de Barba a favor de sus hijos Rafael Barba Larrea, Beatriz Barba Larrea de Vascones, Rosa Barba Larrea de Freile, Cecilia Barba Larrea de Jijón Caamaño y el señor Carlos Montúfar Barba Larrea, 25 Nov. 1959, INDA archives, file 920.


\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., pp. 122–3.

\textsuperscript{40} CONADE, ‘Determinación de la presión demográfica en los predios Quinchuquí Alto, Quinchuquí Bajo y Cotama’, 22 Nov. 1979, INDA archives, file 920, appendix 2, p. 3.
hill, were circumscribed by the hacienda. Carabuela was sandwiched between the Quinchuquí and Pinsaquí haciendas, of which the latter was further north. La Bolsa, Guanansi and Carabuela were comunidades de hacienda. They are not far from the Pan-American Highway, but their members could not walk freely in and out; they had to labour for the hacienda in exchange for the use of paths. In contrast, Peguche and Quinchuquí, across the highway, were haciendas libres. Owing mostly to textile production and itinerant trade, they were economically independent. Ilumán and Chimbaloma fell somewhere in between.

The families living in La Bolsa, Guanansi and Carabuela owned very little land, an average of 460 m² in La Bolsa, 600 m² in Guanansi, and 420 m² in Carabuela. Besides labouring for the hacienda as yanaperos (workers under the yanapa), they raised livestock – cows, sheep, pigs, chickens and guinea pigs – and produced some handmade textiles. In Carabuela, the development of commercial knitting during the 1970s reduced the dependency of some of its members on yanapa labour.

One administrator and three mayordomos (overseers) ran the hacienda. They were assisted by a few mayorales (foremen), recruited from the indigenous communities. Two of the mayordomos supervised those who worked with the cattle, and the other guarded hacienda resources and supervised the yanaperos. Eduardo Cachimuel recalls the way in which the mayordomo recruited labourers:

Mounted on horseback, he went around the communities and shouted, ‘¡A la minga!’ (‘To the collective work!’). People feared that if they did not show up, the mayordomo could catch them later. The mayordomo wrote down their names to keep records.

When the mayordomo caught somebody gathering in hacienda resources or using hacienda paths, ‘tomaba prenda’ (he would take a garment/item for security) – a hat, poncho or shawl. If an animal of an indígena entered hacienda pastures, the mayordomo would take the animal. He would not release the prenda or the animal until its owner or his/her family had worked for the hacienda. This exploitative practice was common across the Andes. To avoid being caught when gathering in resources, the indígenas were very aware of the mayordomo’s whereabouts. However, other indígenas often denounced the gatherers to the mayordomo.

The indígenas did not question the legitimacy of the yanapa as such; however, they resented the fact that they had to work in exchange for water

41 CONADE, ‘Determinación de la presión demográfica’, p. 11.
and the use of paths. They considered that the exchange under the yanapa had been unbalanced. Arguing that they and their parents and grandparents had spent their lives working for the hacienda, they considered that the labour provided had exceeded the resources taken.  

In particular, the indígenas resented the mistreatment meted out by the mayordomo. They considered that he always ‘mezquinaba’ (was stingy). He harassed people who were gathering in resources, even those who had worked in the minga. People recalled their frustration when the mayordomo tomaba prenda for reasons that they considered unfair. When catching people collecting water, the mayordomo would often break their pondos (large pottery jars). The mayordomo’s behaviour was harsh and explicitly racist. He could beat the supposed infringers or call the police to imprison them. This unfairness was a source of endemic conflict and resentment towards the mayordomo. Heads of families tried to improve their relations with the mayordomo by means of establishing relations of compadrazgo with him, asking him to be godfather to their children.

In contrast to their views on the mayordomo, the indígenas considered the hacendado a good person. The hacendado visited the hacienda two to three times per year, asked a few questions of the campesinos and was kind to them. No indígena would dare to complain to him about the abuses of the mayordomo.

Servile labour also included symbolic exchanges. According to David Kyle, traditional festivities ‘such as the cargo, or sponsorship of a ritual feast, central to village social status and manhood, incorporated the hacendado, or hacienda owner, as the central symbolic source of community authority’. As a ‘modern’ and absentee hacendado, Carlos Montúfar Barba did not participate in those festivities. Elite hacendados living in Quito, such as he, were too detached from the social life of their haciendas to engage in such ritual practice. It was the mayordomo who participated in those events.

Kyle has claimed that the communities tied to yanapa relations, La Bolsa and Guanansi, had a ‘worldview radically different from that of non-yanapa communities’, Peguche and Quinchuqui, ‘a worldview shaped by the physical borders of the hacienda and the social universe of the hacendado and the

44 Interview with José Carlos de la Torre, former president of the community council of Carabuela, 5 Aug. 2005.
This divide was reflected in their presentation of self. In their interactions with non-indígenas, the inhabitants of La Bolsa and Guanansi were submissive, whereas those of Peguche and Quinchuquí were self-assured.

Not tied to the coercive authority of the hacienda, and valuing their entrepreneurial spirit, the indígenas of Peguche and Quinchuquí considered themselves superior to the ‘indios de hacienda’. They viewed the inhabitants of La Bolsa and Guanansi as “silly, poor, weak”, as less advanced people, who let themselves be exploited by the hacendados. Adopting a racist discourse that characterised blancos as rational and indios as irrational, the indígenas of Peguche and Quinchuquí considered themselves rational, arguing that their lifestyle was conducive to commercial activity, whereas they called the indios de hacienda irrational, claiming that they wasted their money on sponsorship of festivities and excessive drinking.

The ideological divide between the communities of Peguche/Quinchuqui and those of La Bolsa/Guanansi supports Barbara Butler’s claim arguing that until the late 1970s there was no discourse or recognition among indígenas of a shared identity or purpose. Butler also witnessed that ethnicity was made salient by non-indígenas because their social status and economic well-being hinged on the quotidian reproduction and exploitation of the ethnic boundary.

**Imagining the Expropriation of the Hacienda**

Florentino Ramos learned about land reform through his work as a literacy teacher, in a campaign in 1977. Having completed primary school, he worked at night, teaching adults in the community of Cotama, around a kilometre from La Bolsa. The indígenas in Cotama had initiated land reform litigation to expropriate the bankrupted San Vicente hacienda, which was just east of the city of Otavalo, and Florentino Ramos started to participate in their meetings.

The indígenas of La Bolsa and Guanansi did not question the ownership of the Quinchuquí hacienda. On the contrary, in the mid-1970s, some indígenas of the older generation had wanted to buy some land – between La Bolsa and the Pan-American Highway – from the hacendado, so that their communities could have free access to the highway. They knew that the hacendado had sold...
ten hectares in the same area to a non-*indígena*. Taking as gifts chickens, guinea pigs, potatoes and lima beans, they went to the *hacendado’s* house in Quito and asked him to sell the land, but he refused. This prompted Florentino Ramos to start the litigation process.

Seeing the situation in Cotama, some youth of my generation asked ourselves, ‘Why don’t we organise as Cotama is doing?’ We started the litigation process for two reasons. First, because we saw that there were possibilities for expropriation through the law of land reform, as they were doing in Cotama; and second, because the owner of the hacienda would not sell land to us.\(^{53}\)

After establishing the Quinchuquí pre-cooperative, the leaders did nothing for a few months. ‘We did not know what we were doing. We had no experience, and did not know about the law [of land reform].’\(^{54}\) Because of this inaction, some of the initial supporters started to get worried and to doubt the capability of the organisation. In addition, the *mayordomo* was aware of their organising efforts; other *indígenas* had already reported their activities to him.

The leadership envisioned the expropriation of the same piece of land, around 20 hectares, that their parents had tried to buy from the *hacendado*, with only the communities of La Bolsa and Guanansi taking part.\(^{55}\) Not knowing what to do, Florentino Ramos went to Cotama to talk to José Clelio Cachimuel, the leader of the San Vicente pre-cooperative, who told him to contact the lawyer that had supported them. A few days later, Florentino Ramos led a delegation to the lawyer’s office in Quito.

The lawyer told us, ‘Why don’t you take the entire hacienda from the *hacendado*? Why don’t you organise all the nearby communities? You can take it all.’ For us, this was impossible. It was something we couldn’t do … All we wanted was to buy the little access to La Bolsa. So, when the lawyer told us that, we left frightened. We were unknown *guambra* (youths). People were not going to believe us. The lawyer said that organising all the communities, we would be stronger … And we dared. We took the risks and said, ‘Let’s do it, whatever happens.’\(^{56}\)

The 1973 Land Reform law explicitly prioritised agricultural productivity over land redistribution. Economic inefficiency and underuse of land were legal grounds for expropriation, but the law included a clause giving *hacendados* a two-year period of grace to improve their haciendas and avoid expropriation. The law also cited demographic pressure as another cause for expropriation. Demographic pressure existed in areas in which the *campesinos* did not have

\(^{53}\) Ibid.

\(^{54}\) Ibid.

\(^{55}\) Florentino Ramos, ‘Breve reseña histórica del conflicto agrario “Quinchuquí”’, p. 17.

\(^{56}\) Interview with Florentino Ramos, 14 June 2006.
enough land to meet their subsistence needs. However, since ‘it went against the modernizing “productivist” spirit of the land reform’, the clause was seldom used.\footnote{Tanya Korovkin, ‘Indians, Peasants, and the State: The Growth of a Community Movement in the Ecuadorian Andes’, \textit{CERLAC Occasional Paper} (1992), p. 18.}

The leaders of the Quinchuquí pre-cooperative faced several difficulties in recruiting members. If the IERAC issued an expropriation verdict, the state would compensate the \textit{hacendado}, and the beneficiaries would have to reimburse the state through a low-interest loan. (The leadership of the pre-cooperative often failed to inform prospective members of this.) In addition, the expropriated land was to be owned collectively through a cooperative. The leadership, therefore, could not appeal to the peasants’ aspiration for private ownership of land plots.

The leaders explained the land reform law, and suggested that in the future members would work for themselves, without \textit{patrones} (bosses) or \textit{mayordomos}. The main motivation to become a member of the pre-cooperative was the desire to stop the abuse of the \textit{mayordomo}. This resonated most strongly with the more educated younger generation. To recruit members in other communities, leaders took advantage of kinship relations, as many had family ties across communities. They also encouraged people to sign up at \textit{mingas}, festivities and sport events. The leadership primarily legitimated the proposed land expropriation in terms of class; they did not articulate a claim to justice in terms of indigeneity.

The fatalistic attitudes of many \textit{indígenas} proved a major obstacle for recruiting members. José Clelio Cachimuel recalls that, when he was recruiting members for the San Vicente pre-cooperative in Cotama, many asked, ‘How are we going to win if they are \textit{mishus} and we are \textit{indígenas}? How? We do not want problems here.’\footnote{Interview with José Clelio Cachimuel, former leader of the San Vicente pre-cooperative, 24 Aug. 2006.} Only 169 heads of household in Cotama enrolled, which was less than half. By the end of murky legal proceedings, in which the San Vicente pre-cooperative got 45 of the 240 hectares of the defunct hacienda, only 45 members remained.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}} As in Cotama, many \textit{indígenas} labouring for the Quinchuqui hacienda feared repression, and believed that a takeover of the hacienda was impossible. Responding to the question as to why people did not join the Quinchuqui pre-cooperative, a leader cited illiteracy, \textit{gamonalismo} (control by the \textit{gamonales}), sexual abuse by the \textit{mayordomo}, ignorance of the land reform law, and the conviction that they could not overcome the \textit{hacendado}.\footnote{Elizabeth M. Rogers, ‘Ethnicity, Property, and the State: The Politics of Community in an Andean Village’, unpubl. PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 2001, p. 295.}
Trying to convince people of Peguche to join the Quinchuqui pre-cooperative was even harder. According to Florentino Ramos,

since we were a very poor community [La Bolsa], they did not believe in us. [They said:] ‘How are those lluchos (very poor and thin people) going to take over a hacienda?’ At the beginning, they made fun of us, and we were not able to organise many people there.61

For many indígenas, taking over the hacienda was against their ‘sense of limits’, the way in which the social order is inscribed in people’s minds.62 As in Bretón’s study, in the civil parish of Toacazo, Cotopaxi province, ‘a world without haciendas or masters was unimaginable to the ordinary Andean peasantry, for whom this constituted the “natural order of things”, one that had been known “forever”’.63

For the leaders of the Quinchuqui pre-cooperative, it was imperative to demonstrate that winning was indeed possible. ‘If we did not demonstrate with some action, some practical feat [that we could succeed], the people would not believe in us. Very easily, we could lose the leadership.’ During the recruitment phase, the leaders organised entradas (entries), in which the peasants entered the hacienda pastures collectively to feed their animals. ‘Then, little by little, the people felt encouraged. They said, “Well, it seems that this is for real.” They started to enter the hacienda with their animals, and the mayordomo could not expel them.’64

On 2 September 1977, the pre-cooperative filed a demand for the expropriation of the Quinchuqui hacienda on the grounds of continuation of the yanapa system. The 303 members were distributed as shown in Table 1. In La Bolsa and Guanansi, just over half of the families joined. Chimbaloma provided yanapa labour to the San Vicente and Quinchuquí haciendas, and since they had not been included in the San Vicente pre-cooperative, they signed up en masse to the Quinchuquí pre-cooperative. In Peguche and Quinchuquí, most inhabitants distrusted the whole process.

Leftist Activism

Attending a wedding in Guanansi on July 2006, I saw two 16 mm film reels hung on the wall of an adobe house. The Federación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas (National Federation of Peasant Organisations, FENOC) had provided films and a projector to the Quinchuquí pre-

61 Interview with Florentino Ramos, 14 June 2006.
64 Interview with Eduardo Cachimuel, 9 July 2005.
cooperative to raise class consciousness in the communities. The films were cultural documentaries made in the Soviet Union, with Spanish voiceover. They were remnants of the work of leftist activists during the 1970s who taught about class struggle and revolution, and encouraged the campesinos to organise and initiate expropriation demands.\(^6^5\)

The FENOC supported the pre-cooperative by providing legal and public-relations assistance, writing letters to state authorities and newspapers, getting leaders out of prison, and building coalitions with other organisations. The FENOC also worked jointly with the pre-cooperative to organise talks to galvanise membership. These talks often featured indigenous leaders from other parts of the country, who spoke about their experiences in successful land claims.

For leftist activists, the increasing prosperity of some indigenous families living in Peguche, Quinchuquí, Agato and the city of Otavalo was problematic. They believed that indígenas had to be poor peasants to achieve class consciousness. Thus, ‘when the indígenas of Peguche built their own little house’, as recalled by indigenous intellectual José Quimbo, ‘leftist activists accused them of having become bourgeois’.\(^6^6\)

In 1978, the new constitution granted universal voting rights, enfranchising the indigenous population. Until the 1970s, most indígenas had been illiterate, and literacy had been a requirement for voting since the creation of Republic of Ecuador in 1830. Leftist activism took a different direction following the establishment of the new constitution and return to democracy. Whereas before 1978 few activists had visited indigenous communities to raise class consciousness, after that date the numbers increased, with the activists canvassing electoral support and trying to register indígenas as members of their parties.

\(^6^5\) Interview with Marco Burbano, former leftist activist, 16 Jan. 2006; interview with Augusto Parra, former leftist activist, 14 June 2005.

\(^6^6\) Interview with José Quimbo, indigenous intellectual, 22 Oct. 2006.
In contrast to the Peruvian land reform of 1969, the Ecuadorean land reform of 1973 did not abolish the chambers of agriculture, which represented the interests of the landowning elite. As an organised group, Ecuadorean landowners significantly influenced the ways in which the land reform law was written and implemented. They also conducted a media campaign against the reform, depicting the past as a period of great wealth and production, brought to chaos by the land reform; appealing to modernity as the destiny of the nation, a project in which they saw themselves as protagonists; and associating the indio with the minifundium, which, they argued, was the antithesis of modern agricultural production. Calling the peasants indios, not campesinos, the landowners argued that the Ecuadorean nation was at risk. They claimed that indios were pre-modern and unproductive, and as such unable to contribute to the development of the nation.67

The landowners also accused the reformist military government of being communist, and of being a threat to private property. In the land struggle for the Quinchuquí hacienda, the hacendado faction and most of the non-indigenous population of Otavalo called the members of the pre-cooperative communists. This discourse was copied by the indigenous compradores, who equated communism with land takeover rather than with public ownership of the means of production.

**Repression**

Between November 1977 and April 1978, the IERAC (North Region) ruled that the four farms comprising the Quinchuquí hacienda were not liable to expropriation; and on 20 June 1978, the Regional Committee of Appeals ratified this verdict. The IERAC argued that the owners were direct administrators, the pre-cooperative had not demonstrated grounds for expropriation, and the main occupation of its members was handicraft production rather than agricultural labour.68

Later, the Consejo Nacional de Desarrollo (National Development Council, CONADE) argued that there was no way that the campesinos could feed their sheep and cattle, around 1,000 animals, without access to the hacienda’s pastures, which the hacienda provided in exchange for yanapa labour. And in fact, in an interview with IERAC’s agents, the mayor-domo unwittingly revealed that the hacienda was indeed using yanapa labour: ‘We have conducted mingas with the voluntary participation of 15 to 20

---


persons fixing irrigation channels, ditches, etc. The *mingas* have been occasional, and we served food and drinks to the participants.\(^6^9\)

Surveyors hired by the IERAC had concluded, after interviewing the *campesinos*, that the main occupation of the members of the pre-cooperative was handicraft production. The leadership of the pre-cooperative recognised that they had not prepared the members for the interviews but also considered that the lawyer should have instructed them about this issue. Years later, Segundo Ramos met one of the surveyors, and the latter admitted that they had been paid by the *hacendado* to claim that the members of the pre-cooperative were mostly artisans and there was no *yanapa* labour.\(^7^0\)

Segundo Ramos first heard about the ratification of the verdict from his brother, Florentino.

My brother told me [the verdict], and we cried. [At the beginning,] only we and a person who supported the pre-cooperative knew. Following her advice, we focused on dealing with the psychological aspect. We realised that if we said that we had lost, the pre-cooperative would fall apart. We were committed. Some people were loyal, but others were against us. People had placed their trust and some of their money in us. We could not lose. So, we didn’t say anything. We did not tell them that the pre-cooperative had lost.\(^7^1\)

When the *mayordomo* went around the communities with a copy of the ratification of the verdict, the leadership of the pre-cooperative argued that he was lying. The defeat, nevertheless, took its toll, confirming the notion that the *indígenas* could not win. All 40 pre-cooperative members from Chimbaloma and all 20 from Peguche quit.\(^7^2\) The land struggle, however, was far from over. The leftist activist who supported the Quinchuquí pre-cooperative had also helped the San Vicente pre-cooperative, in Cotama. Following her suggestions, on 20 August 1978 the Quinchuquí pre-cooperative filed another expropriation demand, this time on the grounds of demographic pressure.

By then, the government’s land reform drive was waning. In January 1976, a military triumvirate forced General Guillermo Rodríguez Lara to resign. His ‘nationalist and revolutionary’ government was never free from the influence of the landowning oligarchy, but the officers who seized power were more sympathetic to the *hacendados*.\(^7^3\) Emphasising ‘productivity as

---

\(^6^9\) Oficio 4445, CONADE, Director Técnico al Director Regional Norte del IERAC, Nov. 1979, CEDHU archives.

\(^7^0\) Interview with Segundo Ramos, 20 Oct. 2006.

\(^7^1\) Interview with Segundo Ramos, 21 June 2006.

\(^7^2\) CONADE, ‘Determinación de la presión demográfica’, p. 10.

\(^7^3\) General Guillermo Rodríguez Lara, the key promoter of the land reform of 1973, was also an *hacendado*. General Guillermo Durán Arcentales, the strongman of the succeeding ruling triumvirate, was a rancher. Their estates were not expropriated. Anita Isaacs, *Military Rule and Transition in Ecuador, 1972–92* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993), p. 77.
the criteria for evaluating state policies’, they claimed, as did the hacendados, that modern haciendas were inherently more productive.\textsuperscript{74} The ruling triumvirate was also ‘far less tolerant of organised labor. It banned strikes and demonstrations and did not hesitate to use repression in quelling labour unrest.’\textsuperscript{75} In August 1979, trying to contain the increasing number of land invasions by campesinos, the government promulgated the Law of National Security, merging national development and security under military authority.

The repression began when police raided the community of La Bolsa, demanding the withdrawal of the expropriation demand. However, in this and other raids, the police encountered organised resistance and were easily outnumbered. Blocking access routes, throwing stones, and defending themselves with sticks and farming tools, the indígenas did not allow the police to enter their communities, even when they used tear gas. What followed were years of confrontation. A squad of seven policemen was detailed to guard the hacienda, and a squadron of army paratroopers camped there for several months and undertook target practice. Their presence, more than likely, was due to one of the sons of the hacendado being an army colonel.

The indígenas needed to feed their animals, but those caught grazing their sheep and cows in the hacienda were assaulted and/or arrested by the police. The mayordomo directed the repression but let the police do the dirty work. Several indígenas were fraudulently prosecuted as cattle thieves. In October 1978, in a television news programme, Florentino Ramos denounced the hacendado and the police for their repressive actions. In response, he was arrested and jailed for eight days.\textsuperscript{76}

The police attacked the members of the pre-cooperative, maltreated them in prison, broke up their meetings and seized their animals and goods, from bicycles to farm tools. Throughout the repression, the policemen were explicitly racist, calling the indígenas ‘indio hijo de puta’ (Indian son of a bitch) and ‘india puerca’ (filthy Indian). In Otavalo, they beat the indígenas in a volleyball court next to the prison. In Ibarra, they made them run around the jail yard carrying tyres on their shoulders, and tripped them up. They extorted money from the indígenas, making them pay abusive amounts of money to recover their animals, avoid arrest, or get out of jail. In addition, some policemen pursued their own personal vendettas against indígenas who had confronted them in police raids.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{74} Pallares, ‘Construcciones raciales’, p. 164.
\textsuperscript{75} Isaacs, \textit{Military Rule and Transition in Ecuador}, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Ibid.;} CEDHU, ‘Vejámenes sufridos por los campesinos de las comunas de Quinchuquí, Cotama y otras’, 1979, CEDHU archives; ‘Quinchuquí: la trampa del gamonal’.
Between September 1978 and February 1979, the lawyer for the Quinchuquí pre-cooperative arranged two meetings between the leadership and the owners of the hacienda to negotiate an out-of-court settlement. The owners offered the leaders the sale of part of the hacienda if they withdrew the expropriation demand. The meetings came to nothing but planted the suspicion among the leaders that the lawyer was conspiring with the owners.\(^7^8\)

On 6 March 1979, with the repression continuing, the leadership asked the CEDHU for help. Agreeing to support the pre-cooperative, the CEDHU resolved to find them a new lawyer, demonstrate support in explaining the situation to the communities, inform public and human rights organisations about the repressive actions of the hacendados, denounce the repression to the Ministry of Government, and get a ‘provisional resolution of possessory status’ from the IERAC. The latter meant that the peasants would have access to hacienda resources ‘until the end of the legal procedures, and that the hacendado should halt the illegal sale of land plots, until the public examination of the process’.\(^7^9\) A few weeks after the CEDHU’s intervention, the police squad and the paratroopers withdrew from the hacienda.

In April 1979, the leaders of the pre-cooperative, with assistance from FENOC, staged a demonstration in Otavalo, and wrote a declaration geared to influence opinion entitled ‘Our reason for the struggle’. In the declaration, they described the long-practised abuses against the campesinos, explained that the pre-cooperative was following the law, and denounced the hacendado for selling plots illegally. They also framed the struggle for land in terms of a class struggle. They wrote:

Our struggle is against all the exploiters, and our voice rises together with all the proletarians of the world.

Because in the countryside the spark of the revolution has been lit.
That is why ours is a combat cry.
Our struggle is class struggle!
Our struggle is the struggle of the poor.
Bosses and gamonales, get out of the countryside. The land belongs to those who work it.
Let’s go forward, fellow peasants, with the organised struggle.
*Jatarishun tucuilla runacuna! Tandanajushun!* [In Kichwa in the original: Let’s rise up, all the people (of the peasant communities)! Let’s unite!]\(^8^0\)

\(^7^8\) Interview with Eduardo Cachimuel, 13 Sept. 2005.
\(^7^9\) CEDHU, Sesión de Comisión General, 6 March 1979, CEDHU archives.
\(^8^0\) Pre-cooperativa Agrícola Quinchuquí, ‘Manifestamos nuestra razón de lucha a la opinión pública’, April 1979, CEDHU archives.
The leaders reproduced the then common leftist slogan that ‘land belongs to those who work it’. They did not frame the struggle in terms of recuperation of indigenous lands.

For the young activists, revolution was not merely rhetorical. The Marxist concept of class struggle was an epiphany for them to understand their social condition. Reflecting the political atmosphere of the 1970s, some of these activists committed to follow Che Guevara’s path of guerrilla war if the expropriation were to fail. They organised a defence committee, buying some old rifles, with the intention of scaring the police from entering the communities. Those who had been conscripts in the army conducted warfare training among their peers. They learned to make Molotov cocktails, crude incendiary devices. In a training session, one of the young activists sustained a burn to his hand when a Molotov cocktail exploded prematurely.

Under the military triumvirate, the IERAC was not predisposed to rule in favour of the pre-cooperative. However, in August 1979, Ecuador returned to democracy after seven years of military rule. The government of the young president Jaime Roldós Aguilera, who emphasised the protection of human rights, offered better prospects for the pre-cooperative.

On 22 October 1980, hundreds of indígenas from the compradores faction attacked the members of the pre-cooperative who had occupied the disputed area between La Bolsa and the Pan-American Highway. The ensuing battle left 35 indígenas injured. The compradores, who had created a housing cooperative, occupied the plots, but they were pressured to withdraw by the government, which they did after several weeks.

On 10 November 1980, the IERAC reached a verdict in favour of the expropriation of the Quinchuquí hacienda, excluding the smallest of the original farms, the Peguche hacienda. The verdict, however, did not put an end to the conflict. On 14 April 1981, the Regional Committee of Appeals confirmed the expropriation, and this, according to CEDHU activist Laura Glynn, provoked more violence against the campesinos of the Pre-cooperative. On April 29 they were attacked by members of the hacendado’s cooperative [the compradores’ housing co-operative]. About one hundred, armed with carbines, attacked the campesinos … Witnesses testify that the landowner himself was distributing the arms … From May 18 to 20 1981, the people sympathetic to the hacendado, with the tacit approval of the local police, succeeded in chasing the campesinos off the land with carbines and tear gas. Thirteen campesinos were wounded; ten makeshift shelters, two adobe houses and a tractor were burned along with blankets, ponchos, pots, pans and farm tools.

---

81 Interview with Miguel Angel Carlosama, indigenous intellectual, 3 April 2007.
82 President Roldós died on 24 May 1981 in a plane crash. His vice-president, the sociologist Osvaldo Hurtado, assumed the presidency.
The CEDHU denounced the collusion of the local police with the attackers, and succeeded in having the Ministry of Government send police from Quito to prevent more attacks.84

By this time, the conflict was on the national news. On 4 May 1981, in El Comercio, Argentine 1980 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel demanded justice for the campesinos of the pre-cooperative; and on 6 July 1981, Time Magazine published an article on the women who led the CEDHU, both members of the Roman Catholic Maryknoll Sisters missionary organisation.

Laura Glynn of Hartford, Conn., and Elsie Monge of Guayaquil, Ecuador, who organize destitute peasants in Ecuador and, as a result, endure constant denunciations as ‘Communist agitators’. Based in Quito, the nuns advise labor and peasant organizers and students. Just now they are obtaining medical aid for several hundred Andean Indians squatting on unused hilly farm land. More than 30 have been wounded by gunshots in repeated skirmishes with police and thugs hired by landowners, but local hospitals refuse to treat them.85

The compradores acted on the conviction that the pre-cooperative could not win the struggle. According to Elizabeth Rogers, ‘they simply did not believe that the Ramos brothers would or could be successful in their attempt to win the land of the Hacienda Quinchúqui’.86 As one elder from Peguche asked her, ‘How was one going to beat the patrón? The patrón is the owner!’87

### Historical Consciousness in Action

When I interviewed her in 2005, Carmen Yamberla, an indigenous activist who participated in the land struggle and was later president of the Federación Indígena y Campesina de Imbabura (Indigenous and Peasant Federation of Imbabura, FICI), framed the expropriation in terms of the recuperation of ancestral land. This prompted me to ask her about the local, indigenous reproduction of historical memory: ‘So, before the land struggle, was there a consciousness, a memory that the land had been yours, that the Spaniards took it away from your people?’ She answered that there was none. She said,

No, no, maybe because everything was passed down orally. Never, to the best of my knowledge, no. The organisations, the leftist political parties that collaborated with us in the land struggles, the socialists, and the members of the MPD [Movimiento

84 Ibid.
87 Ibid., p. 304.
Popular Democrático: Democratic Popular Movement], they talked to us about the past, 500 years ago and beyond, about what had happened in 1492, and about the way in which the land was owned before then. From then on, the people started to take [this information] in. They said, ‘This is true. This land is ours. So, why do we have to be serving the hacienda?’

I had taken for granted that indigenous Andeans had a customary way of accounting for the past before and after the conquest. I had assumed that they reproduced a sort of a ‘historical wound’, a mix of history and memory invoking ‘the past as the site of the original slight and as the site that calls for redress in the present’, framing their interpretations of their historical subjugation and disempowerment.

However, in the communities of the area, this was proving not to be the case. All my interlocutors told me that there was no deep memory in circulation. According to Segundo Ramos, who belongs to the first generation from La Bolsa and Guanansi that attended school (born in the late 1950s and early 1960s), old people there did not know about the past:

We, the young people, already understood, but old people were in total ignorance because the hacienda had stupefied them. They were not conscious of history because it was in school that one learned it.

In the early twentieth century, scholars noticed that indigenous Andeans in Ecuador did not reproduce a memory of pre-conquest times. According to Mercedes Prieto, the Ecuadorean archaeologist Jacinto Jijón y Caamaño (1890–1950), whose ancestors owned some of the farms comprising the Quinchuquí hacienda, claimed in 1918 that the indígenas did not know their past, that it remained a mystery to them, and the German-born archaeologist Max Uhle, who conducted research in Ecuador between 1919 and 1925, expressed doubts about the cultural continuity of the Ecuadorean indígenas because they did not remember the origins of their traditions.

After fieldwork in the early 1940s, Elsie C. Parsons, the first anthropologist to carry out fieldwork in the canton of Otavalo, noted that among the indígenas of Peguche ‘no world before the advent of the Spaniards is conceived of’.

88 The MPD was the electoral branch of the Partido Comunista Marxista Leninista del Ecuador (Communist Marxist-Leninist Party of Ecuador). Interview with Carmen Yamberla, indigenous activist, 7 Oct. 2005.
90 Interview with Segundo Ramos, 21 June 2006.
91 Mercedes Prieto, Liberalismo y temor (Quito: FLACSO, 2004), pp. 96–100.
Contemporary ethnographic fieldwork in the province of Chimborazo has also demonstrated no reproduction of deep memory. In the parish of Pangor, Barry J. Lyons was unable to find any articulation of pre-conquest identification.

Haciendas were simply a fact of life. Most villagers say that, before the changes of the last few decades, they and their parents did not know that there had ever been any other dominant form of land tenure. I was unable to learn about any ‘traditional’ narratives or practices that implied any special association with autochthony, any identification with the pre-Conquest inhabitants of the land, or indeed, any idea that the whites had their origins in a different place.\(^{93}\)

In the community of Shamanga, according to Carola Lentz, ‘a history of the time “before the hacienda” does not exist. There is no memory of an ancestral communal ownership of the land that was later usurped by the hacendado, no memory that could serve as basis for an oppositional ownership discourse.’\(^{94}\)

More recent ethnographies of the politicisation of indigeneity – by Emma Cervone in Tixán, Chimborazo province, and Rachel Corr in Salasaca, Tungurahua province – emphasise the way in which such politicisation is substantiated through festive performance, which constitutes another form of memory. Cervone argues that in Tixán the discourse of recuperation of indigenous lands was initiated by Church activists, and Corr claims that, among the Salasaca people, there is no consensus about their historical memory.\(^{95}\)

The young leaders of the Quinchuquí pre-cooperative became eager readers of history, especially that of the Incas. They also discussed national history and found contradictions. At school, they had learned that the marquis Juan Pío Montúfar was a national hero. The fact that the hacendado was also a Montúfar led them to question the marquis’s legitimacy as a national hero.\(^{96}\)

Fearing that members might leave the pre-cooperative, seeing that the hacendado was selling plots of land, and wanting to pressure the IERAC to finally cede the hacienda, in early 1981 the leadership of the pre-cooperative decided to occupy large areas of the hacienda. The invasion was illegal, and under the Law of National Security this action could have resulted in

\(^{93}\) Barry J. Lyons, Remembering the Hacienda: Religion, Authority, and Social Change in Highland Ecuador (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006), p. 129.


\(^{96}\) Interview with Segundo Ramos, 21 June 2006.
further repression and criminal charges. The pre-cooperative’s new lawyer did not support the land invasion and demanded that they hire another lawyer to deal with any criminal charges.

The plan was that each community would occupy adjacent hacienda land, build makeshift shelters, and till the soil. The invasion required a permanent presence of members of the pre-cooperative in the disputed land. According to Carmen Yamberla, it was then that the leaders started to speak about land recuperation. She said,

This moved people to action. The struggle was against the haciendas, to eliminate the haciendas, to transfer the land to the people who work it as a recuperation of their land. So, we viewed the struggle in those terms. To be sure, during the process, people justified the expropriation arguing that the mayordomo was a bad person, but by then, this was not the real issue for us. The issue was that this land had to be recuperated because it had been ours.97

According to Segundo Ramos, the process radicalised the indígenas, who lost their fear of confronting non-indígenas.98 Whereas at the beginning of the struggle the main motivation to join the pre-cooperative was to stop the abuses of the mayordomo, by the time of the invasion the struggle had turned into a legitimate recuperation, as the indígenas articulated a historical memory of colonial land dispossession. The previously unknown past became a useful past.99 During the night of 5 March 1981, hundreds of members of the pre-cooperative invaded the hacienda.

The invasion was well organised. With support from FENOC and other organisations, the pre-cooperative conducted a public-relations campaign, talked to sympathetic authorities – including President Jaime Roldós and Vice-President Osvaldo Hurtado – and put on a show of strength. The compradores and the police threatened to throw the campesinos out, but the latter stayed put. The pre-cooperative and the compradores met in order to try to find common ground but to no avail. In a bid to end the conflict, the pre-cooperative decided to grant four hectares to the compradores for housing, stipulating that the IERAC would select those families who needed land the most.100

Throughout the process, FENOC and other leftist activists provided vital support to the pre-cooperative, whereas FICI provided very little. It is significant that the FICI added the term ‘indigenous’ to its name only in 1982, changing it from ‘Organisation of Peasant Communities of Imbabura’ to ‘Indigenous and Peasant Federation of Imbabura’. Some indigenous leaders who emerged from the land struggles of the San Vicente and Quinchuquí

97 Interview with Carmen Yamberla, 4 Oct. 2005.
98 Interview with Segundo Ramos, 21 June 2006.
100 Florentino Ramos, ‘Breve reseña histórica del conflicto agrario “Quinchuqui’’, p. 36.
haciendas later led the FICI into supporting new land demands, mobilising the members of the communities as indígenas, rather than campesinos. According to Carmen Yamberla, they succeeded in eleven of twelve land struggles. This wave of land activism was largely motivated by the success in the expropriation of the Quinchuqui hacienda.  

On 23 November 1983, after seven years of struggle, the IERAC awarded the hacienda to the pre-cooperative. The expropriation did more than reshape the landscape of the valley; it also rewrote relations between the comunidades libres and the former comunidades de hacienda. As Rogers argues, ‘What previously had been unimaginable – the contestation of patronal authority and dominance – became not only imaginable but tangible with the Cooperative’s victory.’ She explains:

Regardless of the fact that he [Tayta Antonio] had been a leader in the competing Buyers’ [compradores] Group, he, like many other Otavaleños, perceived the Cooperative’s successful engagement of elite authority as a victory achieved by all indígenas. Describing the ultimate resolution of the conflict, he framed the appropriation of the hacienda by local indígenas as the surmounting of the hacendado by a collective ‘we’. In the words of Tayta Antonio, ‘The patrón was caught, he was strangled. We had him surrounded, we were choking him.’

The success of the expropriation was interpreted in terms of the new-found historical consciousness, and this became the foundation of a new moral ‘we’, that of social memory, which redefined the land struggle in terms of a victory of all the indígenas against the non-indígenas, and overcame the age-old feuding between the comunidades libres and the former comunidades de hacienda.

Conclusions

The Ecuadorean land reform offered indigenous peasants a window of opportunity to fight for land. The strength of their organisation increased their possibilities for success, but did not guarantee it. The half-hearted implementation of the land reform, which allowed the hacendados to retain a certain amount of control over the process, left to the indígenas the tasks of organising and defending themselves. Notwithstanding the odds against them, they achieved some significant victories that demonstrated the power of a new indigenous political agency.

Andrés Guerrero has argued that the Quinchuquí hacienda conflict started because the hacendado no longer complied with the customary ties of the moral economy. However, by the late 1970s, several developments had

---

103 Ibid., pp. 253–4.
104 Guerrero, De la economía a las mentalidades, p. 160.
undermined the relations of dependence and paternalism on which the hacienda regime rested. *Indígenas* had better access to schools and were migrating to other areas in order to find work; furthermore, they had started to refuse to sponsor festivities, which were a fundamental practice of the traditional moral economy, either because of conversion by many from Catholicism to Protestantism – Protestants denounced traditional festivities, claiming that they were against God’s will – or because they wanted to avoid the onerous expenses involved.

The political identity of the *indígenas* fighting for the Quinchuquí hacienda was a work in progress, ambiguous and inchoate. Such political identity was not the predetermined development of united, politically self-conscious subjects acting upon their historical consciousness. Instead, as Jean and John Comaroff argue for the Tswana in South Africa, when they confronted the new colonial situation brought about by the missionaries, the efforts ‘to fashion an understanding of, and gain conceptual mastery over, a changing world’ led to experimental practice. The responses of the Ecuadorean *indígenas* to the transformation of the rural social environment, far from being a reflection of their historical consciousness, were the practical means to produce it.

Literate and competent in Spanish, the young leaders of the pre-cooperative had much more cultural capital in mainstream society than their forefathers. They were not the stereotypical *indios* who, dependent on the non-*indígenas*, could not avoid being subject to their paternalistic exploitation and harsh discrimination. These young *indígenas* could easily have invested in the subject position of the mestizo, which, as a process of assimilation, involves the disavowal of indigenous memory.

Leftist supporters and pre-cooperative leaders first framed the land struggle in terms of class. The leaders self-identified as leftist revolutionaries and did not articulate claims of indigeneity. However, following long-standing discriminatory practice, the peasants were repressed as *indios*. The *hacendados’* media campaign also recruited the stereotype of the *indio* to discredit the land reform.

During the struggle, through the learning of history, the *campesinos* realised that the *hacendado* was not a legitimate land owner. The peasants then invested in the subject position of the historically-conscious *indígena*, and later framed the expropriation of the hacienda lands as a victory over non-*indígenas*. This enabled them not only to legitimise their appropriation of the hacienda, but also to see historical continuity in the exploitative actions of non-*indígenas*, who, sharing the immorality of the *conquistadores*, appropriated that which was not theirs. Participation in the land struggle also

transformed indigenous notions of agency, demonstrating that even a powerful hacendado could be defeated.

Blanca Chancoso, one of the historic leaders of the indigenous movement, once told me, ‘It was the strength of the community that defeated the hacienda [Quinchuquí].’ But it was not the traditional members of the comunidades de hacienda, united by ancestral loyalties, who won the struggle for land in Quinchuquí. The agents of social change were, rather, the young activists who, as leaders of the Quinchuquí pre-cooperative, articulated an indigenous historical consciousness which then spread amongst their community, contributing to victory against the hacienda.

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. Los estudios del surgimiento del movimiento indígena ecuatoriano, que irrumpió en la política nacional en 1990, no han prestado suficiente atención a la conciencia histórica indígena. Utilizando evidencia histórica y etnográfica, este estudio examina el desarrollo de una conciencia histórica en campesinos indígenas involucrados en la lucha de tierras de la hacienda Quinchuquí, en Otavalo, Ecuador. La investigación demuestra que fue solo durante la lucha de tierras que los campesinos llegaron a saber acerca de la usurpación colonial de tierras indígenas. Legitimando sus acciones políticas en términos de historia, ellos articularon una identidad política que enfatizaba cada vez más la etnicidad sobre la clase.

Spanish keywords: conciencia histórica indígena, indigeneidad, conciencia étnica, movimientos indígenas, activismo indígena, reforma agraria, Ecuador, Andes

Portuguese abstract. Os estudos sobre o surgimento do movimentos indígena no Equador, que irrompeu no cenário político nacional em 1990, não deram atenção devida à consciência histórica indígena. Utilizando evidências históricas e etnográficas, este estudo examina a emergência da consciência histórica entre povos indígenas campesinos envolvidos na luta por território da Hacienda Quinchuquí, em Otavalo, no Equador. Esta pesquisa demonstra que foi somente durante essa luta por território que os campesinos ficaram cientes da disposseção colonial de terras indígenas. Legitimando suas políticas sob uma perspectiva histórica, eles articularam uma identidade política que cada vez mais enfatizou etnia ao invés de classe.

Portuguese keywords: consciência indígena histórica, indigeneidade, consciência étnica, movimentos indígenas, ativismo indígena, reforma agrária, Equador, Andes