THE ECUADOR READER

HISTORY, CULTURE, POLITICS

CARLOS DE LA TORRE AND STEVE STRIFFLER, EDITORS
THE ECUADOR READER

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workers, peasants, indigenous peo­ple, and new actors have established remark­able results. New actors with new demands have won elections and now have an unprecedented opportunity. Ecuador's indigenous movement has not only challenged the profitability of their lands, but they have proven that they can bring about significant change. Likewise, labor unions have challenged the traditional economy and prevented the government's excesses. But they have done so without the support of the state.

Ecuador is undergoing racial and economic transformations. Regardless of political context, one of the most burdensome issues facing the country is the need to engage with the world market and attract investment. This is not to say that the country has been completely unable to attract foreign investment. However, the indigenous people and Afro-Ecuadorians have experimented with a range of agro-ecological strategies in order to combat the effects of extractivism. Some of these experiments reflect a basic fact: indigenous people know that gaining access to land and resources is not only fragmented, but also challenged by changes demanded by popular movements, environmental regulations, popular representations, and economic reality. A nationwide lesson: gaining access to land and resources is not only fragmented, but also challenged by changes demanded by popular movements, environmental regulations, popular representations, and economic reality.

The indigenous people have been slow to recognize the potential of their own self-esteem. They have not only shattered the stereotype of incapacity of the indigenous people, but they have also positioned them at an international level. The third potentiality is the quality of their public work, ethical and visionary, in the Ministry of Agriculture as well as in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Thus ends the interview, a two-hour conversation that provides a window into the world of the first woman and indigenous person to be appointed minister of foreign affairs. Doctor Pacari began the dialogue with details about her childhood.

Altogether, we are eight siblings: five females and three males, of which five of us are professionals but for one sister and two younger brothers.
who decided to become merchants and musicians. We are urban indig­
eneous, and came from the few families, almost the exception, who lived
in the urban area of Cotacachi. My father comes from a family of farmers
from the Quinchuqui community. My mother, from the Peguche com­
unity. My maternal grandparents had settled in Cotacachi, where they set
up weaving workshops. When my mother married my father, they settled
in Cotacachi. My father improved his economic situation with the weaving
business. He had prosperous moments as well as bad times. He did not
accumulate for the sake of it, but to give us an education.

Being urban indigenous we lived a double exclusion—exclusion from
the indigenous rural world because we did not live in a community, and
exclusion from the nonindigenous world. In those times, we were almost
the first indigenous students to go to school. My brother and uncle were
forced to cut their braids during the first year. By the second year, when
they transferred to the Franciscan nun's school, they made their first com-
munion with their complete attire and full braids. [This change] was a
result of the parent's struggle. An issue that had a very deep impact during
during school was a book reading contest, and the school had to be represented
by the best student. In those times, I was their best student; nevertheless,
I was not chosen to represent the school in the contest. I felt this was rac-
ism. It was a world where excellence was not acknowledged.

My father wanted me to become a teacher, and therefore I studied at
the San Pablo del Lago School. The indigenous classmates did not mingle
with the mestizo world; I got along with them, however. I also felt part
of the urban world, which was my background; at times, my indigenous
classmates were annoyed at me, and I felt forced to be exclusively with
them. I did not agree with this and explained that I also wanted to relate
with the mestizos. In order for them to understand that I was on both sides,
I became part of a dance group with the indigenous classmates. Finally, it
was established that an intercultural process is possible. It was a boarding
school where indigenous and mestizo students from different provinces of
the country "shared" together. This personal experience from our youth
taught us to recognize ourselves and share with the different races we
have in Ecuador.

At school I was taught history of the Incas, the Puruháes, the Caras; ev­
erything was in the past. I asked myself: And, what am I? I am indigenous,
I have not died, how is it that they affirm that all has ended? This was a
shock to me.

I studied law at Universidad Central in Quito, a very different experi-
ence from Cotacachi. I speak for myself, but I experienced more discrimi-
nation in Quito. For example, was a restaurant along 10 de A
but the four of us were not a
some Chinese rice. We agreed
not carrying books: "We must be
we are students," we said. So
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Indians, if we were seen with b
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into the restaurant. Then
be handled.

When riding a bus, we did not
the people in the bus said to us
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them. We just continued as if

Once, we went on a trip to

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about to enter, we were stop
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nation in Quito. For example, at a restaurant, we were not admitted. It
was a restaurant along de Agosto Avenue, I don't remember its name,
but the four of us were not allowed to enter, and were left deprived of
some Chinese rice. We agreed that the reason for this was that we were
not carrying books: "We must bring books if we want them to believe that
we are students," we said. So we started carrying books and notebooks
with us for them to believe that we were students; even though we are still
Indians, if we were seen with books, we were perceived differently. In fact,
when we appeared before them as students, we were immediately admit­
ted into the restaurant. Then we understood how such situations must
be handled.

When riding a bus, we did not speak Spanish. We spoke Quichua, and
the people in the bus said to us, "Talk like Christians." We just laughed.
I think they must have been annoyed, as we did not take notice or confront
them. We just continued as if nobody had said anything.

Once, we went on a trip to Baños with mestizo friends. When it was
time to enter the swimming pool, my friends went in first. As we were
about to enter, we were stopped: admittance to Indians was forbidden.
Auki Tituña [current mayor of Cotacachi] and my sister Arqui, Auki's
wife, were also there. My friend was enraged and complained. The owner
came out to apologize and make excuses. Our trip was ruined, so we ended
walking around Baños instead.

In 1987, I had to go to a conference. As it turned out, it was the very same
hotel where I was once denied admittance. This time, I was welcomed. I
explained to the hotel people that I had come to the hotel in such and such
a year and I was not allowed in. Naturally, those were other times, other
circumstances. There has been a process in which the indigenous people
have made themselves known, gained respect, and opened horizons; in
general, people have become more sensitive. There is now a new open­
ness as well.

After graduating as a lawyer at Universidad Central, I began to practice
law in Riobamba. I was linked to the indigenous movement of Chimbo­
razo; the movement took me in as their member. The communities of
Colta and Cajabamba integrated me as a member of their community as
well. Since 1989, at their request, I joined the Confederation of Indigenous
Nationalities of Ecuador [CONAIE], as a legal advisor to help manage the
land and territory administration. I was the first woman to hold this posi­
tion. At the end of 1995, we became the founding members of Pachakutik
together with comrade Luis Macas as president, José María Cabascango as
leader of the organization, and me as land and territory leader.
Within Pachakutik there are two paths, two criteria. One is that the indigenous movement is in charge and directs. The other is that the party should be more open, include more social movements, with the indigenous people being the backbone.

How do you interpret the mobilizations and the alliances with the military that ended with the removal of president Jamil Mahuad in January 2000?

The CONAIE Congress that took place in Santo Domingo de los Colorados in 1999 caused much concern among some sectors of the grass roots and some leaders, because of the relationship between Antonio Vargas and elements of the armed forces who were part of the high command. The army provided infrastructure, food, and field stoves for our congress. Second, when CONAIE decided to lead the mobilization against Mahuad, Pachakutik took a relatively subordinate attitude toward CONAIE. Some members of Pachakutik, such as Napoleón Saltos, stated that the same mistake of 1996 could not be repeated; that we needed a new strategy to forge an alliance with the military. My hair stood on end.

Hence, why the alliance with Gutiérrez’s party, Sociedad Patriótica, during the 2002 elections?

Several scenarios arose. Our objective was to have common Center-Left candidates. There was a process of dialogue with Izquierda Democrática, but they sustained that we would only be admitted as subordinates. The second scenario was to have León Roldós as presidential candidate and Auki Tituaña as vice-president. But Roldós resigned his candidacy. So we ran alone. When Antonio Vargas became the candidate for Amauta Jatari, the Indigenous Evangelical political party, there were two Indian candidates. Hence, CONAIE, instead of considering that we would both go—thinking not only as Indians, but also as a prospect for society with Tituaña as an influential administrative role model—decided not to endorse any candidate. Therefore, Auki decided not to participate, since he would not go against CONAIE’s decision. Consequently, we had to find a mestizo candidate. We spoke with Alberto Acosta, who did not show any interest. We were also talking to the Sociedad Patriótica simultaneously, and an alliance with ten programmatic points was agreed on.

Was there any objection with allying with a Golpista [coup leader]?

For us, the concept of coup d’état does not exist. Our analysis is different. But, despite the fact that he is an ex-military, there was still potential if the program is fulfilled.
Let's talk about your transit through power. Wasn't it a contradiction between a leftist discourse, and on the other hand, government practices such as signing an agreement with the International Monetary Fund?

First, you must understand that it was the government of an alliance and must not be perceived as if it were a single unit. Perhaps, the limitation was that the programmatic points could fail. In that case, we agreed to battle from within. Within the cabinet, we felt that the first draft of the economic measures proposed was absolutely appalling. Not all the measures were implemented, such as the increase of the price of gas. One of the political costs was that we had to sign the letter of intent with the IMF, which we could not stop because we were not "within" either the Ministry of Economy or presidency.

Wasn't the moment to break the alliance?

I don't think the timing was appropriate. It was not fitting to leave after only fifteen days in power. We would have been perceived as if fleeing from political office. And we even thought that we would be perceived as unable to hold office and govern.

What are you doing now?

I continue with my work at the international level, since I have been in academics and in the political world for twenty years. For example, I was invited to go to Mexico by the university; I was invited to teach a seminar on anthropology in Bogotá, after which I will go to Puerto Rico. I belong to Confederación de los Pueblos de Nacionalidad Kichua del Ecuador. The Pachakutik congressional block has requested me to be their advisor. On women's issues it is the same, either one activity or another. I thought I was going to rest a little, but I am still intensely busy in meetings, events, etc. I feel well, working eagerly, always with the same disposition.