

PLURINATIONALITY AND INTERCULTURALITY IN ECUADOR:
THE INDIGENOUS MOVEMENT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL
CONCEPTS

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades concepts such as culture, nation and identity have become important discursive dispositives in the Ecuadorian society. This discursive shift has been pushed mainly by the different organizations of the Indigenous movement (the most important ones being CONAIE¹, FENOCIN² and FEINE³). The political parties (especially the governmental party ALIANZA PAÍS) and other political actors began to assimilate parts of this identitarian discourse in their programs and policies.

The peoples in Ecuador belong to various cultural, historical and ethnic backgrounds. As a result, the population of Ecuador had different visions of Ecuatorianity and a distinctive national identity since independence. Ecuador was reconceptualized in a way that followed the ideal of the European nation state as the expression of an ethnically homogenous and socially diverse society. In a society understood as culturally homogeneous by the construct of the mestizo and -at the same time- mestizos in positions of political and economic power, these vision systematically excluded everything marked as non-mestizo; namely, the black and Indigenous peoples. This understanding of Latin-American societies is further detailed in the theories of Coloniality (see for example, Quijano 2000).

The concepts of Interculturality and Plurinationality were used to break the monocultural construct of identity. They aimed at an inclusion of the marginalized peoples or nationalities of Ecuador by constructing a new, inclusive national culture. Politically, these concepts play a double role: “When we speak about Interculturality, when we speak about Plurinationality, we are saying that we should think in two fundamental axes. First, in a political struggle; second, in a struggle from the epistemology” (Macas 2005:40).⁴ Therefore, there is always a specific political interest and strategy behind the different definitions, varying from

a change in the national discourse to revolutionary strategies.

The broad field of different interpretations of cultural or ethnic relations in Ecuador and Latin America is a problem also highlighted by some actors within the social movements. For example, in the summer of 2009 in the *IV Cumbre de los Pueblos Indígenas de la Abya Yala*, the Peruvian Epifanio Pacheco stated: “We have to define theories, concepts, so that we won’t be dispersed.”⁵ Also, ECUARUNARI’s⁶ Floresmilo Simbaña (interviewed, 19.6.2009) admitted that “There is no definition [of Interculturality, a.a.]” and further explained, “More than a social theory, it is a political project.”

This article will analyze different definitions of cultural relations in Ecuador, giving special attention to their political and economic implications. Its main proposal is to understand the meaning of the different concepts. In order to do so, firstly (in part II) the relevant international development of terms and concepts of ethnic pluralism are discussed, with a focus on the more diffused concept of Interculturality. The then following short introduction (part III) into the development of the indigenous movement and its discourse will locate the different concepts and the actors that fight for them. That allows a more detailed discussion of the two central concepts, Plurinationality and Interculturality in the context of the indigenous movement in Ecuador and their implications in part IV. Part V and VI point out shortly the consequences of these concepts and alternative interpretations of them.

II. GENERAL CONCEPTS

The concepts of Interculturality and Plurinationality with their respective backgrounds have a long and complicated history, which has not been treated in a holistic way yet. Nevertheless, it will be useful to analyze the different implications these concepts have on a general and international level. They express different understandings of the ideas of a people, nation, history, nationality and culture. It should be noted that these concepts are not merely academic descriptions of cultural relations, but also part of a political, economic and cultural struggle.

Inside the conceptual complex of Pluriethnicity, a distinction between Interculturality and Multiculturalism is to be made. Both concepts have a long history in the US-American scientific community. While Multiculturalism has been used mainly to describe a pluriethnic situation – that is, the fact that different ethnic groups live within one country – Interculturality is closely linked to education and pedagogical theories. “The proposal of the construction of Interculturality, as a theoretical

concept, was born in the so-called ‘first world’, in the United States in the 60s, in the field of education” (Ramón 2009:133). The concept of Interculturality gained importance especially in the 1980s and 1990s, while Multiculturalism acquired a negative connotation.

The European Council and the documents published by European official institutions in the decades of the eighties and nineties prefer to use the term intercultural when they want to put education in pluralistic contexts. At the same time, the word multicultural, related to education, acquires a negative value, being put frequently in opposition to intercultural. While multicultural education –it is often said– simply describes the given education in multicultural contexts, [...] it refers to a ‘de facto’ situation, the intercultural education defines the adopted pedagogical option (Bartolomé 2002:18-19).

Nevertheless, there are other definitions of the distinction between multicultural and intercultural. For instance, Costa and Gurza (2006:249) define an empirical concept of Interculturality which gets close to the definition of Multiculturalism explained earlier. When studying early texts about cultural and ethnic relations in Ecuador (for example Macas 1991), it is apparent that the Indigenous organizations did not always make an explicit difference between the terms multicultural and intercultural.

If Interculturality is understood as a normative concept within the context of countries that are composed of different cultural and ethnic groups, setting aside the concepts of multicultural and pluriethnic as merely descriptive, it is possible to establish the ideas of Plurinationality and Interculturality as political projects. For example, the Portuguese sociologist de Sousa Santos attempted just that by presenting his ideas in front of the Constitutive Assembly of Ecuador. De Sousa Santos’ interpretation has been widely adopted in the indigenous movements of Bolivia. In his way of thinking, Plurinationality – in combination with Interculturality – is forcibly tied to a post-colonial re-foundation of the modern state as it includes a rethinking of the traditional nation state (de Sousa Santos 2009:37). The condition is a stable cultural frame, which serves as an orientation for the cultural diversity within a state.

The important thing with intercultural constitutionalism is that there are differences, the objective is not a consensus by uniformity but a consensus by the acknowledgment of the differences. And here is a fundamental principle for intercultural constitutionalism: the differences demand appropriate institutions, similarities demand shared institutions. That is why the state should have shared institutions and institutions appropriate to the cultural identity of the plurinations inside the state (de Sousa Santos 2009:42).

By this, Plurinationality and Interculturality form a conceptual complex that has the potential to deeply change society and state. At this

level, no distinction between those two concepts is made.

These European and US-American schools of multi-/interculturalism had their repercussions in the Latin-American academic community, from where the concepts were adapted by different social movements. Especially the concept of Interculturality has inspired broad intellectual production. One of the most important academics in Ecuador who works on Interculturality is Catherine Walsh, an US expatriate. In a groundbreaking essay, Walsh analyzed the entry of these concepts into the Andean social space.

Even if there is no evidence about when exactly interculturality entered the Latin-American lexis, we know that it started to be of use in the field of education, especially the Indigenous bilingual education at the beginning of the eighties. [...] The adoption of the term intercultural, first used in the Andean countries, was assumed to be a duty not for the whole society, but a reflex of the cultural condition of the indigenous world (Walsh 2000:11).

In fact, the importance of bilingual education is not only significant for Interculturality but also for the Indigenous movement in Ecuador. Since its beginning, the fight for Indigenous rights has always been a fight for bilingual intercultural education as well, not only within the Indigenous communities, but in the Ecuadorian society as a whole. In fact, one of the actual demands of CONAIE is the expansion of bilingual intercultural education also to mestizo communities.

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ECUADORIAN INDIGENOUS MOVEMENT

It is not clear how many Indigenous persons live in Ecuador due to contradictory data. President Correa referred to a number of less than two per cent of the total population (quoted in Simbaña 2008). However, the national census from 2010 (INEC 2010) counted 1.018.176 persons, amounting to seven per cent of the total population, that describe themselves as Indigenous. Among the Indigenous population, the Kichwa are the largest group with a percentage of 49.2 per cent (Chisaguano 2008:105).

This cannot be the place to make a detailed resume of the history of the Ecuadorian indigenous movement, including its development from rural, class-based structures to the more culturally and politically inspired current tendencies, for instance the CONAIE⁷. In fact, the introduction of the concepts Interculturality and Plurinationality into the discourse of this movement changed the political orientation of the different organizations to some extent. Therefore, the indigenous organizations will be understood here according their discourse – and not their development. CONAIE is

without a doubt the most influential and the largest in quantitative terms. According to reliable sources, it organizes 45 per cent and FEINE 30 per cent of all Indigenous persons involved with the movement (Chisaguano 2008:99). A detailed history of the Indigenous movement in Ecuador can be found in Moreno and Figueroa 1992, Lucas 2000, Guamán 2003, Becker 2008.

The struggles of the Indigenous peoples in the twentieth century have been marked principally by three thematic complexes: fights for autonomy, especially in the sense of collective and land rights; fights for inclusion, for example bilingual intercultural education; and fights for political and economic participation, where we can speak of social movements in the classic sense, with participation of many non-indigenous actors. In this last complex, the political influence of the indigenous movement is notorious.

The constitution of a system of bilingual education has been one of the most important objectives for the Indigenous organizations, at least in the second half of the twentieth century. The possibility to have access to an inclusive and equal education which allows to preserve and develop an own ethnic identity was never given to the Indigenous communities. Instead, a centralist state engaged since the independence in the civilizing and disciplining project of building, through *mestizaje* and *blanqueamiento*, the new Latin-American race within the liberal context of the rational individual of post-enlightenment political conception (see further Walsh 2000:12). In short, the Ecuadorian state was deeply racist and exclusive in all of its institutions, especially in the educational ones. This phenomenon is described by Quijano (e.g. 2000) and others as coloniality of power.

FEI⁸, the first modern Indigenous organization, was established in this context. Therefore, the Indigenous leaders in the twentieth century won influence as institutional anti-racists.

But it is in the 20th century when the Indigenous of different regions of Ecuador start to integrate, and in the first decades women like Dolores Cacuango and Tránsito Amaguaña emerged, who created the first peasant union of the country, lead the first indigenous-peasant strike in 1944, participated in the foundation of the Ecuadorian Federation of Indians and initiated rural schools where for the first time the classes were taught in Kichwa (Lucas 2000:10).

Nevertheless, the Indigenous movement was not able to expand or exert much political influence at that time. Even if there were important strikes and revolts, they mostly focused on local contexts and specific topics. Lucas speaks of “more than half a century” (2000:10) before Indigenous peoples could gain political weight.

The objective of an institutionalization of bilingual intercultural education could finally be achieved – at least in part – by the construction

of the National Direction of Bilingual Intercultural Education (DINEIB) in 1988 (Guamán 2003:95) under the shared responsibility of CONAIE and the Ecuadorian government (Moreno and Figueroa 1992:44). Again, it is necessary to emphasize the strict limitations bilingual education suffers. There is not only the lack of resources and influence, but also a marked lack of interest in society restricting the range of the DINEIB to only a few rural Indigenous communities. This relative autonomy ended in 2009, when the government of Correa decided to reconstitute the DINEIB as an agency under the sole control of the ministry of education (Martinez Novo 2009a:174).

The struggles for autonomy and participation achieved a peak of political attention in the revolt of the *Inti Raymi* in 1990. This is when the Indigenous organizations, CONAIE in particular, finally gained influence in both the civil society and the political sphere.

The indigenous revolt of *Inti Raymi* of June 1990 changed principally the relationship of the indigenous peoples with the state. It is correct that it did not achieve all the objectives of the platform of struggle (of a political, social and ethnic character), but it did make clear that from then on the Indigenous sector could constitute itself via its organizations as an important actor, subject and social and political referent for the Ecuadorian society and state (Guamán 2003:102).

The revolt of 1990 has to be considered the turning point in the history of the Indigenous movement. In the years after the *Inti Raymi* revolt, political actions of Indigenous organizations became frequent to a point where direct influence on parliamentary politics became common.

From then on, the Ecuadorian indigenous movement became the most transcendent social movement in Ecuador, and one of the best organized in Latin America. The only one able to paralyze the country totally from one day to another, and an obligatory reference in the political life of Ecuador (Lucas 2000:11).

One product of the growing politicization of the Indigenous movement was the foundation of the Movement of Plurinational Unity Pachakutik in 1996. From there on, Pachakutik participated with growing success in elections at all levels. The most notorious outcome of this growth can be seen in the Constitution of 1998, where the Indigenous movement had decisive influence and Indigenous organizations were able to place some of their most important demands in the Constitution. However, this did not result in corresponding laws in favor of Indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, the inclusion of collective rights, the terms ‘pluricultural’ and ‘multiethnic’ (Article 1 of the Constitution of 1998)

and the recognition of the ILO Convention 169 about the rights of Indigenous peoples can be seen as a major progress (see further Lucas 2000:13). Only the ideas of Plurinationality and Interculturality remained excluded from the Constitution (Simbaña 2005:206).

After 1998, the Indigenous movement could still achieve more growth in influence and political participation, the highlight being the revolt of 2000, where a broad social movement including parts of the army and many other social movements forced president Mahuad out of government.

Even though the Indigenous movement has experienced a considerable gain in importance and influence, the participation in the government of Lucio Gutiérrez (2002-2005) marked the beginning of a sharp crisis and hard internal discussions about its political project. From 2005 on, the movement and its political representation, the Movement of Plurinational Unity Pachakutik⁹, started a reorientation towards local problems, connected with a certain radicalization.

On these heights, it is evident that the principal Indigenous organization suffers the insufficiency of a political project whose central axis is the construction of a Plurinational State; it suffers the construction of a social basis which does not build a bloc of strong alliances with other sectors of the exploited-excluded, and the loss of political directionality before the totality of the hegemonic program which is being implemented (Hidalgo 2005:344).

The concentration toward the concept of Plurinationality has indeed been a critical point, especially for those organizations which are characterized by a certain distance towards Indigenous issues. Most political parties simply cannot identify with the radical proposal of Plurinationality.

IV. CENTRAL CONCEPTS IN THE DISCOURSE OF THE INDIGENOUS MOVEMENT

Plurinationality

Plurinationality: Principle that establishes the existence of different nationalities and peoples, which constitute juridically and politically the Ecuadorian state, which promotes interculturality in order to harmonize their political, cultural, administrative and economic relations (Saltos and Vázquez 2007:384).

In Ecuador, there is not a lack of attempts to outline what a nation can be, aiming mostly at concepts like history, language and tradition (for example Saltos and Vázquez 2007:383). Especially the term nationality has been systematically inserted in the Ecuadorian context for the description of Indigenous peoples (see further Saltos and Vázquez 2005:145). Here,

FEI and CONAIE played a key role. “In employing the discourse of nationalities as an organizing tool, whether consciously or not, CONAIE built on a long, rich tradition” (Becker 2008:173). The variety of definitions is reflected by the concept of Plurinationality, which can be understood in many different ways, from a simple ethnic acknowledgment to a much more radical notion (Sánchez-Parga 1997:118). For the moment, it will suffice to say that the use of terms like the above has to be seen strictly in a context of a political struggle for access to power and not in the tradition of European academic definitions.

The concept of Plurinationality has been a claim especially by the CONAIE since the mid 1980s¹⁰, and became part of the political ideas of many of the Indigenous movements in Latin America. In the *II Cumbre Continental de los Pueblos Indígenas de América*, in Quito, June 2004, Plurinationality was proclaimed as a continental project (Simbaña 2008:106-107). For the Indigenous movement in Ecuador, Plurinationality has been a central concept, embedded in its discourse. “[A]s an invisible thread, as a symbolical and epistemic core, the notion of the Plurinationality of Ecuador remained constant since its first formulation” (Dávalos 2003:44).

In fact, the concept of Plurinationality proved to be an important discursive resource for CONAIE, which was able to use it in order to gain a position to speak from in the Ecuadorian civil society. It not only helped to increase the importance of the Indigenous movement as a whole, but was also a decisive factor for the hegemonic position of the CONAIE within the movement.

The call to acknowledge Ecuador's plurinational character became CONAIE's key and most contentious demand. [...] The success of CONAIE in this project was not so much because 'nationalities' reflected reality but because they were able to mobilize around this discourse (Becker 2008:173).

Perhaps, Ecuador is predestined to deal with the concepts of economic, political, and cultural difference. At least, not only the Indigenous movement perceives this country as a largely artificial construct with a lack of homogeneity that does not fit in the idea of a 'grown' nation.

Ecuador was born without national economic integration, without a defined territory, without a consolidated national culture, and with a dispersed and divided population: costeños-serranos, huasipungueros-land owners, mestizos-indios” (Simbaña 2005:201).

A nation which never has been one, a state which has been controlled almost all of its existence by local power groups, and an economy which could be taken as an example for dependency and

frustrated interior development, Ecuador has never been able to offer its citizens a common nationality or a homogeneous culture, which would be a prerequisite for a nation state in the classic, European sense¹¹. In this context, the Indigenous peoples as a whole are more likely a nation than the nation state itself – and this could be one explanation of their understanding of Plurinationality. However, the definition should be left to the actors. In their constitutional proposition in 2007, the CONAIE gave some key words which will be of help in trying to comprehend these concepts.

[T]he Plurinational State is, in the first place, a model of political organization for the decolonialization of our nationalities and peoples and to make reality the principle of a country with unity in diversity. In the framework of the actual political and economical situation of Latin America, it is a proposal to recover and strengthen the State and the society to guarantee the plain exercise of the popular sovereignty and to overcome the neoliberal economic model which privatized, weakened and used it for the benefit of tiny minorities” (CONAIE 2007:9).¹²

This plurinational state has to be built through constitutional and juridical reforms, modifying the state into a pluricultural, pluralist and democratic one (Macas 1991:11)¹³. As a result, it would be an inclusive state not only for the Indigenous but virtually for everyone. Here, the motto of ‘unity in diversity’ (for example: CONAIE 2007:10) becomes reality – and here, other minorities (ethnic, cultural and/or gender-based ones) could find a connection to the Indigenous movement. The collective oriented tendency in the concept of Plurinationality developed by CONAIE is remarkable (see further Simbaña 2008:112) and it has to be seen in relation to its core idea, the existence of different nationalities within the Ecuadorian nation.¹⁴

Until now, the concept of Plurinationality has proven to be not only inclusive in a political sense but also in a paradigmatic, semiotic one. A simple basic idea allows the addition for a series of widely different notions. This could be one of the reasons for its increasing importance.

The challenge is to see plurinationality as an exercise of inclusive democracy, but especially as a proposal for diverse life in greater harmony and closer to Nature. So, plurinationality has to be read together with other definitions which have to do with territory and the administration of the natural riches (Acosta 2009:17).

This inclusive structure of the proposal of Plurinationality has an integrative function for the Indigenous movement as a social movement. As such, it has to search continuously for coalitions and allies in order to strengthen its proposals and demands. This task to a certain degree is

related with the motto ‘unity in diversity’ and Plurinationality. By this, the Indigenous movement has a series of proposals and demands which allow – theoretically – very broad coalitions. Territory is not an issue for the urban middle-class. However, for the non-indigenous peasants ethnic pluralism may not be an issue and this may differ for the afrodescendents and so on.

This proposal of plurinationality of the State reveals itself as some kind of strategic-political mean of which the Indigenous make use to overcome their internal contradictions as their problems and conflicts with the political system and the State. A strategic mean which does not want to be defined as a concluded discourse nor as a wholly reflexive proposal, but as a political and historical-organizational process in constant change and reformulation from its bases and from its own organizational structure (Dávalos 2003:43).

Plurinationality, as a culture centered concept, cannot be thought without the inclusion of economy and politics. In fact, as Simbaña (interviewed, 19.6.2009) pointed out, the separation of these spheres is the common strategy used by the opponents of this concept. Therefore, as Vargas (2009:99) explains, the concept of Plurinationality is directed towards a radical deconstruction and transformation of society and the state. Diversity and difference have been suppressed for too long. Thus, a reconstruction of the social and political imaginary is necessary.

Although Plurinationality is an inclusive proposal, as a concept it is limited to the Indigenous movement itself. With regard to the differences between CONAIE, FENOCIN, FEINE and other Indigenous organizations, the conceptual framework has its power as a whole only inside the movement, above all, inside CONAIE as the protagonist of the implementation of Plurinationality. In fact, even if the Correa administration adapted the concepts of Plurinationality and Interculturality, we can by no means speak of unity of action.

The proposal of the Plurinational State in Ecuador is not new; from 1990 until today the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador – CONAIE, has presented the proposal four times, each time with more details. Nevertheless, being seen as a radical Indigenous proposal and not for the whole of the society, these proposals had hardly have acceptance, described as divisionist, antidemocratic, and against national unity (Walsh 2009:174).

In fact, most opponents of Plurinationality hold these arguments. “The demand of Ecuador as a plurinational country has been understood by some sectors as the geographical division in various states” (Lucas 2000:14). This opposition has forced CONAIE itself and independent researchers and politicians to a further description of their plans (Lucas 2000:14). An explanation by CONAIE will help to understand both the

concept of Plurinationality and its critics.

Far from division, the superior objective of the demand of the Plurinational State is the construction of a new, decentralized, culturally heterogeneous political-administrative structure, open to participative self-representation of all Indigenous nationalities and social sectors, especially those which have been marginalized and excluded from the state structure and the governing pattern of socio-economic development. It implies, in consequence, an institutional amplification that includes the socio-cultural diversity of Ecuador inside a new concept of State, Development and Citizenship that, instead of dominating, oppressing increases economically and politically that cultural richness and versatility” (CONAIE 1999:51-52).

From Multiculturalism to Interculturality

Interculturality: Acknowledgment and mutual respect for ethnic and cultural values. This is the right that any person, without consideration of his/her origin, culture, language, traditions, spirituality, etc., has to be acknowledged and respected as what he/she is. It is a space of self-reflection and self-esteem based in the valuation of oneself, holding up the own and respecting the other (Saltos and Vázquez 2007:383).

Interculturality needed a long time before it could leave the limited imaginary of Multiculturalism behind in order to become a central point in the agenda of many social movements. As we could already see, this concept is broader and politically more interesting when understood in a processual way instead of a structural one. However, Interculturality was not a product of social agents in the Latin American or Andean space. It was introduced by development agencies and some other organizations, often with a foreign background. Walsh (2000:13) gives as an example of the agreement of the Ecuadorian state with the German development agency GTZ in 1986, which referred explicitly to intercultural bilingual education – the topic, the Indigenous movement had fought for about 50 years.

This new concept offered a place for the Indigenous demands, which previously had been developed without a conceptual location. These demands could be described as cultural resistance (Macas 1991:8-9). Macas, long-time president of the CONAIE, explained just after the *Inti Raymi* uprising 1990 this position:

Our cultural values have been despised and an alienating culture that suppresses our own cultural expressions has been imposed on us. [...] This is why we search for the way of unity of the different peoples, because we face the hope of the construction of new societies, where the ethnic and cultural rights of the Indigenous peoples are appreciated; namely a plurinational and multicultural society which is based on the principle of legitimate democracy, which is solidary and respectful towards the cultural differences (Macas 1991:6).

In 1991, Multiculturalism was still in use as an alternative and a processual concept. It seemed to be able to overcome the racist and discriminatory structures of the Ecuadorian society. In 1995, FENOCIN reorganized following a long crisis and began to understand itself as a 'pluriethnic, intercultural' organization. A few years later, it described itself as "the only national organization that acknowledges at the same time the difference of the identities and the interculturality" (FENOCIN 2004:20). Now, the concept 'multicultural' has been completely replaced by the concept 'intercultural' even in the texts of CONAIE and the other Indigenous organizations. Sánchez-Parga (1997:112) contrasts Multiculturalism, which can be misunderstood as the description of a special situation or a merely quantitative term, with Interculturality. For him, the latter includes the grasp of a cultural other which has to be appreciated by every culture in order to appreciate itself. While Multiculturalism only acknowledges the existence of different cultures without pointing out its relations, Interculturality stresses out precisely these relations. Therefore, it is a much more relevant concept for the purpose of building a new society with a new kind of relationship between its parts.

Galo Ramón gives us a theoretically more sophisticated interpretation of this discursive shift.

The new concept 'interculturality' represents an important advance in comparison with the old concepts 'multiculturalism' and 'pluriculturalism'. These latter only described an empirical situation, the existence of multiple cultures in a certain place and brought up their acknowledgment, respect and tolerance in a scope of equality, notwithstanding, they were not useful to analyze the relations of conflict and community between the different cultures, they did not allow to examine other forms of regional, gender or generational diversity, but first of all, they did not permit to analyze the capacity which everyone of them has to contribute to the construction of relations of living together, equity, creativity and construction of the new. This new potentiality of the concept 'interculturality' opens a new political agenda: the construction of an intercultural society not only demands the acknowledgment of diversity, its respect and equality, but also raises the necessity to actively banish racism, promote permanent negotiations between the diverse (*entre los diversos*) to construct new synthesis (*inter-fecundation*), achieve a plural comprehension of the reality, canalize the conflicts and construct an equitable and inclusive future (Ramón 2009:134-135).

CONAIE itself defines Interculturality as the interrelation between different peoples, based on respect and aimed towards 'unity in diversity' (CONAIE 1999:72). It gave more precision to this concept, when it demands in its proposal for the 2008 Constitution:

The construction of real *interculturality* that implies the construction of a project of a country between all, that defends the respect and valuation of all forms of cultural expression, knowledge and spirituality, that demands the unity of the peoples and nationalities and of the whole society as basic condition for a plurinational democracy and a just and equitable economy (CONAIE 2007:10).

This concept of Interculturality is understood as contra-hegemonic process and praxis in relation to the mestizo culture and is thought to enforce alternative identities (Walsh 2000:12).

From its beginnings, interculturality has meant a struggle about affairs like cultural identification, right and difference, autonomy and nation. It is not strange at all, that one of the central places of this fight is education, because more than a pedagogic sphere, education is a political, social and cultural institution, the place of construction and reproduction of values, attitudes and identities and of the historic-hegemonic power of the state (Walsh 2000:14).

The step from Multiculturalism to Interculturality is basically a step towards a more concrete discursive place, a place in which a redefinition of identity, history and the national is allowed. One aspect the previous academics have not mentioned is the fact that Interculturality, especially considering the definition of CONAIE, is orientated towards an inside, a new center that can provide the acclaimed 'unity in diversity'. This new center, as it appears, is the renewed, plurinational nation state (see also Acosta 2009:19).

The relation between Interculturality and Plurinationality

Interculturality cannot be reduced to a merely identitarian project. Floresmilo Simbaña explained in an interview¹⁵ that it is indeed about relations between cultures, but these relations are also relations within a certain social structure. As a result, Simbaña and ECUARUNARI deduced that only a restructuring of economy and politics can make Interculturality possible. "Interculturality is an integral political project that wants to see economic problems from a cultural logic and vice versa." (Simbaña, interviewed 19.6.2009) By this, Interculturality is deemed a necessary precondition for Plurinationality. For the same reason, a distinction between a 'cultural', identitarian conception and a political and economic conception of Interculturality, which is often made by scholars and politicians, is not possible. This distinction works as a strategy of division, because it is not possible to understand Interculturality from only one side.

The complex Interculturality/Plurinationality is thought to overcome the repressive structures of the actual society and the state. One of its central parts is the autonomy of the Indigenous nationalities or peoples,

especially in a legal and an administrative sense (see also Macas 1991:11). This autonomy is planned as an autonomy within the nation state, which has to be rebuilt as explained earlier (further see Macas 1991:12). The demands for autonomy of the Indigenous movement may help to outline some characteristics of Interculturality/Plurinationality. Indigenous self-determination within a concept of autonomy is not only important in a legal, political and administrative sense but also in the fields of education and culture, especially in terms of bilingual intercultural education. Furthermore, the demand for respect towards traditional medicine can often be found in the discourse of the Indigenous movement (e.g. in Macas 1991:12). Macas makes it clear in the same text that “the most neuralgic points of our demand [...] are: the acknowledgment of the Ecuadorian state as plurinational and multicultural, the right to recovery of land and territories and natural resources” (Macas 1991:19).

We can find some other hints in Macas (2005), who develops in an interview some outlines of the complex Interculturality/Plurinationality. He states that this complex refers to a historical reconstruction of common attributes which permits respect towards the difference. This should be made possible with a participative and communitarian democracy as an alternative to the colonial, monocultural and vertical State of the moment. A basic condition for this new societal structure is a different economic system, which does not result in exploitation of anyone (Macas 2005:37-39)

Catherine Walsh points out that the construction of an intercultural and plurinational State needs a collaboration between diverse social sectors in order to ‘interculturalize’ social structures and the state itself (Walsh 2000:16). In another text, she explains more in-depth the relation between the two concepts:

For CONAIE, the organization which has lead the proposal of the plurinational state, plurinationality is: the acknowledgment of a multicultural society inside the indissoluble political unity of the State that acknowledges, respects and promotes unity, equality and solidarity between all peoples and nationalities existing in Ecuador, alongside their historical, political and cultural differences. The Plurinational State challenges the character of the existing unicultural State; it proposes a model of political organization for the decolonialization directed to: regain, strengthen and democratize the State, construct a real interculturality as project of the country, transform the structures and institutions to acknowledge the political and cultural diversity and acknowledge own communitarian forms of authority, to consolidate like this the unity in diversity (Walsh 2009: 176).

V. ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

The conceptual complex Interculturality/Plurinationality has many

connections to other areas that are more than movement related. Becker explained the successful combination of class and ethnic aspects in the demands of the CONAIE as one reason for its enormous gain in importance and ability to speak (2008:168). He even goes so far to interpret the ethnic component as in some way instrumental for economic demands: “CONAIE exploited ethnic identities to press an economic agenda. Class and ethnicity appeared at the same time to be mutually conflictive and reinforcing” (Becker 2008:170). By this, he agrees with Macas and Simbaña in stating: “Ecuador's national problems, CONAIE asserted, were not the result of the presence of distinct ethnic groups, but rather existed because of socioeconomic inequalities” (Becker 2008:173). Macas expressed the same relation much earlier and in clearer words: “We believe that there will not be a solution for the Indigenous problem if the problem of land is not solved, the essential for us is the recovery of land” (Macas 1991:10).

The cultural anthropologists Moreno and Figueroa also see this as the most important characteristic of CONAIE, adding, “The access to the land is the base for the creation of a multiethnic, pluricultural society that makes possible the economic, political and cultural development of the different peoples that constitute Ecuador” (Moreno/Figueroa 1992:23-24) They list the objectives that were formulated in the first Congress of CONAIE in 1986:

“[...] to pursue before the government the total restitution of Indigenous lands under a communitarian form of property; defend the Indigenous cultures, for what programs of bilingual bicultural education should be promoted that include the elaboration of didactic materials in all Indigenous languages; to make the society aware of the value of traditional medicine; to organize courses of ideological, political and technological qualification, with the assistance of the member organizations; to search for external financing for the realization of projects of the Indigenous nationalities, to pursue with them the formation of an Indigenous bank, with the contribution of the organizations themselves; finally, to coordinate on the national level the politics of all Indigenous organizations of Ecuador (Moreno/Figueroa 1992:43-44).

From the beginning, CONAIE combined cultural demands and strategies like the bilingual education and the promotion of traditional medicine with economic ones, such as the demand for land and the search for external financing.

VI. ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATIONS

The analysis above applies largely to the concepts CONAIE manages. As the concepts of Plurinationality and Interculturality became more accepted in the Ecuadorian public discourse, the other Indigenous

organizations were forced to deal with them. Mostly, they did this by distancing themselves from the concepts marked by CONAIE. This distance is often implicit. It is difficult to find documents by the organizations themselves that deal with these concepts – partly because of an overall institutional weakness. “There was no lack of groups within the movement itself that expressed their disagreement with this historical proposal, by confronting Plurinationality with Interculturality; the latter, foundational part of a plurinational State” (Acosta and Martínez 2009:8).

Catherine Walsh gives FENOCIN an opportunity to explain its point of view. The unionist organization FENOCIN had, for some time, a prominent position in the official discourse because of the participation of some of its members, most notably, its former president Pedro de la Cruz, in the governing ALIANZA PAÍS and in some federal and regional governments.

Interculturality has in our context a different legacy and significance than in other countries. It is a principle that comes from the Indigenous movement, it is thought as a political and social project that requires not only a relational but also a structural transformation of the Ecuadorian society and state; finally, it is considered a process and instrument of decolonialization. While multicultural and plurinational are descriptive terms that aim at diversity and acknowledgment (and inclusion) within the existing society, interculturality still does not exist. It is something that has to be built. It allows to imagine and to construct steps towards a different society based on conditions of respect, mutual legitimacy, equity, symmetry and equality, where the difference is a constitutive element and not a simple addition. This is why interculturality is central for the refoundation of the state: because of the relations and articulations to be built not only between groups but also between structures, institutions and rights that this state proposes, understanding that behind them there are different logics, rationalities, customs and knowledge (FENOCIN, quoted in Walsh 2009:178).

For this reason, FENOCIN aims at a refoundation of the Ecuadorian state in order to make Interculturality possible, it is a utopia which can lead today's struggles. Galo Ramón extends this point of view in a more analytical way. He understands Plurinationality as an empirical concept, which does not emphasize ‘unity in diversity’. Thus, it is incapable to transform the deeply racist and exclusionary Ecuadorian society. For Ramón, Plurinationality can only be applied to the regions where one ethnic group lives, but not to the regions populated by different groups. So, he concentrates on the aspect of autonomy and neglects the necessary connections between the different groups. Ramón contrasts this with his interpretation of Interculturality. Interculturality emphasizes difference and diversity but within a larger unity, creating institutions and mechanisms, which permit the creative encounter between different groups – it

penetrates the social structures of the state, not leaving anyone in a minority position. Finally, the concept of Interculturality is perfectly applicable to both multiethnic and monoethnic territories, promoting all citizens and their interrelations as different groups. Furthermore, Interculturality also applies to black people and the mestizo majority and integrates them in the construction of a new nation with a new identity (Ramón 2009:125-127).

This is a different interpretation of the concepts that CONAIE developed in the first place. Even if the above use of the concepts Plurinational and Intercultural is a minority position within the Indigenous movement itself, it has a certain influence in the overall societal discourse, in part because of the prominent position of some members of the FENOCIN in the governmental party and state policy.

VII. CONCLUSION

The concepts of Interculturality and Plurinationality in Ecuador are movement concepts in the sense of discursive instruments in political, social and cultural fights. These movement concepts often lack a clear definition, as they are thought to be instruments for political conflicts. They are to some degree empty in order to be re-filled in concrete situations with different contents. This article has attempted to trace the contents of Interculturality in Ecuador. It was made clear that there is almost no connection to the concept of Interculturality used in international academic discourse, a fact that may explain some of the misunderstandings or disagreements portrayed above.

The permanent contents of the conceptual complex Interculturality/Plurinationality can be reduced to demands for a more pluralistic and democratic society and a state with some degree of autonomy for ethnic groups. Nevertheless, they have implications for civil society as a whole in Ecuador, being an important part of the discussions and a discursive dispositif no actor in this society can evade. In this sense, it does not surprise that these concepts have been in the center of the conflicts between Indigenous movement and government in the aftermaths of the Constitution.

As both Interculturality and Plurinationality have been adopted in the discourse of the state, further fights over the definition of those concepts are to be expected. Their integration in the Constitution gives civil society actors a major legitimacy and open new fields of discursive contention. As the state already has accepted the words, it must eventually give them a definition. A definition that can be criticized easily by the Indigenous

movement and other actors in civil society.

It is remarkable that the discursive innovation concerning the concepts discussed in this text largely ends with the debate in the context of the Constitution of 2008. While the concept of Good Life or *Sumak Kawsay* has received much attention by the indigenous organizations, the development of the definitions of Interculturality and Plurinationality largely stopped. It could be due to the much discussed crisis of the indigenous movement, that since the years 2008 and 2009, there is a considerable lack of programmatic texts – and the few texts that exist do not engage in a clarification or extension of earlier meanings and definitions. Instead of continuing the development of an own and distinct vision of the country, the indigenous organizations usually stick to a critique of the government that is largely defensive. They do not any more point out what their project may be, but reduce their critique to arguments that question the legitimacy of the state usage of the concepts of the indigenous movement. For them, the declaration of Ecuador as a plurinational and intercultural country is nothing but mere words – the country still is not plurinational or intercultural.

As Delfín Tenesaca, former president of ECUARUNARI says:

Even if it may be attire, but in the Constitution is the Pachamama, even if it may be facade, there is also the plurinationality. But this facade, this title, this attire that is there, it serves us very well, because we will demand plurinationality and the exercise of plurinationality. If the colonialist political structure is not changed, there is no transformation, there is no democracy (Tenesaca 2010: 108-109).

NOTES

¹ Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador: Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador.

² Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas, Indígenas y Negras: National Confederation of Peasant, Indigenous and Black Organisations.

³ Federación Ecuatoriana de Indígenas Evangélicos: Ecuadorian Federation of Evangelican Indigenous; now: Consejo de Pueblos y Organizaciones Indígenas Evangélicas del Ecuador: Council of Indigenous Evangelican Peoples and Organizations of Ecuador (the acronym has been maintained).

⁴ All translations by the author.

⁵ The quotes above are taken from my field diary and interview protocols.

⁶ One of the three main sub-organisations of the CONAIE, based in the Sierra and mainly composed by Kichwa.

⁷ A comparative history of the different ideological orientation within the indigenous movement in Ecuador is yet to be written. Nevertheless, CONAIE (1989) and Becker

(2008) are important contributions

⁸ Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios, engl. Ecuadorian Federation of Indians

⁹ The relation between indigenous movement and Pachakutik is not as easy and clear as it might appear here.

¹⁰ The Plurinational State was first presented to state and society in the Project of a Law of Indigenous Nationalities in 1988 (*Comisión Especial de Asuntos Indígenas* 1988). Nevertheless, there have been earlier demands with less details since 1983 and 1984.

¹¹ Also the European nation-state itself is a construction that never was as homogenous as it was imagined. Nevertheless, it could achieve a much higher cohesion than most Latin American states.

¹² The italics are from the original author, as in any other quotation in this text.

¹³ This statement, written in the aftermaths of the *Inti Raymi* revolt of 1990, explains the principles of a Plurinational State. These principles have not changed much from then on.

¹⁴ It should be remarked that this concept also was slowly opened for non-indigenous peoples, as the definition from CONAIE in 1999 suggests (CONAIE 1999:72).

¹⁵ Taken from my field notes.

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