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Ecuador Field Experience

Chapter 4

Title: Origins, 1978 to 1987: Ambientalistas and Ecologist Emerge

In this chapter it discuss how organizations in Ecuador made an impact as well as some tragedies for the people living in this country. The groups that will be discussed in further detail are Accion Ecologica they are considered the most radical green group in Ecuador. Fundacion Natura will also be discussed this group was created in Quito in 1978 and registered as a non profit organization. The chapter will discuss the crisis that happened in Ecuador that caused them to go into debt and become even more impoverished. The development of this Country will be talked about and how over time it became where it is now. This chapter traces the movement chronologically in order from the late 1970’s through to it’s recognition as a relevant force in Ecuadorian politics in the late 1980’s.

A group of university students who were called nature lovers created an environmental movement when they created the organization, Fundacion Natura in Quito in 1978, they registered as a non profit organization. This organizations work focused on the conservation of species ecosystems. The first period of the movement was to raise awareness to the Ecuadorian community about their environment and the changes that needed to be done. The group relied on volunteers and part time staff their first project to get their message across was a television nature show called “education for nature” sponsored by Ecuadorian businesses, the show aired on Sunday nights. Fundacion Natura was open to work with anyone. Due to the ignorance of some there were problems happen in relationship to industry and the environment. This group sought to work with businesses for the good of Ecuador. The strength of this group grew as more people became aware and started to watch. The group leader said that the strength also came from political persuasions. Later down the road other groups would use confrontation and radical tactics but in the beginning the movement focused on nature conservation as well as education, welcoming corporate sponsorship and sought compromise. This group wanted to bring awareness of the problems happening and demonstrate peace while doing it.

The organization Fundacion Natura entered a contract shortly after funding their organization with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to create an Environmental profile of Ecuador. The research was done for the profile as critical for helping them understand the connections among the different segments of the environment. Doing the environmental profile of Ecuador gave a better understanding of the main linkages of urban development, agriculture, forests, fisheries, air, chemicals, law and policy. A group called Accion Ecologica which was and is considered the most radical green group in Ecuador formed. This group projects focused on conflicts around mining, oil, mangroves, and forest. The members of AE are mostly women and they are sometimes referred to as “eco chicas”. The group was formally registered with the state in 1989 and they fought and still fight to protect the extracting methods of oil in the Amazon. They started a campaign called Amazonia por la vida (amazon for life), which focuses on the protection of the Amazonian Environment. This includes the protection of the people and helping the communities organize for solutions. The group AE has never been funded by the USAID which is a big difference from the group Natura. The two main differences between these groups and what they represent is Natura tended to be more concerned with the biological diversity and conservation, mostly the natural environment, AE group came along and they look for solutions within the system such as implementation of environmental policies, who sought cooperation and compromise and whose position was considered conservative. AE focuses on human environmental interactions. They took a stand against resource extraction and in particular petroleum development. Later they argued for more fundamental/radical changes.

Thinking of these groups and for the sake of saving repetition about what the groups do they both offer a great message. If I lived in Ecuador and I had to choose which group to go with it would most likely be the Accion Ecologica group. Not only because I am a woman and they are women but they require the people's voice and they want their votes and their opinions. Organizations that are run on volunteers and aren't bought out I feel have a bigger say in what should and can be done. If you have another agency interfering with your group who is much bigger than you, your voice becomes quiet. They have an amazing message they want to stop drilling and protecting the land of the people and give their rights back. The one thing that also steered my attention was the Amazon Rainforest. They protect the Amazon and that is currently on fire. I want to see how the group can come together and transform this tragedy into something amazing maybe both groups can.

In 1987 there was a movement taking place called the Debt versus nature swap. In a swap an organization from the Global North purchases a portion of an indebted nations debt at a discount on the second any debt market in exchange for a commitment by the indebted nation to establish a conservation trust fund to carry out environmental projects. The indebted country’s foreign debt is reduced but they continue to make payments, though smaller than their original debt payments into the trust fund. The beneficiary of the fund typically an NGO within the country. The second and third swaps generated over nine million dollars in conversation funds. Debt for nature swaps were a successful mechanism for creating funds for conservation in Ecuador. In 1970, Ecuador's total foreign debt was 242 million by 1982 it had increased to 12.5 billion. In 1985 over 57 percent of Ecuador exports went to the United States and over 35 percent of its imports come from the United States. The main export was petroleum. Debt caused the problems with oil that began before the debt crisis. The main reason that Ecuador went into debt was in 1987 Ecuador suffered a major earthquake causing mass destruction to the country. The amount of damage that happened after the earthquake caused damage so drilling can not take place. Since they could not export the goods the United state’s could not buy and since Ecuador was so dependant and relied on us to provide it put them in debt when we couldn’t buy.

This chapter was very informative on why this country is in such poverty. I didn’t really realize how much of an impact we have on countries this small when it comes to buying and selling goods. Its sounds like there is a lot of heated arguments that take place in governmental meetings when it comes to discussions in regard to what should and can be done to make this country healthy and green again.

*Lewis, T. L. (2016). Ecuador's environmental revolutions: ecoimperialists, ecodependents, and ecoresisters. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.*