

“Seizing the Lake: Tourism, Identity and Power of the Indigenous Peoples of Quilotoa, Ecuador”

I. INTRODUCTION

The present paper is aimed at understanding how indigenous people in the highlands of Ecuador adapt to capitalist economic alternatives in order to complement their agrarian economies. Specifically this study examines the experience of the indigenous community Ponce-Quilotoa located next to the Volcanic Lake Quilotoa in the central highlands of Ecuador. This community is currently undertaking tourism as an alternative.

The case study focuses on understanding the different reasons that led the community to choose tourism, and how it has adapted to this activity at the individual and communal levels. In approaching this case study, it will be necessary to explain the framework of Agrarian Policy that shaped decision-making processes of earlier indigenous communities. The case study shows how the past policies continue to affect decision-making processes in the present despite the fact that such Agrarian Policies have changed radically.

This paper will demonstrate that the way local institutions have been constructed, especially the manner in which particular processes of empowerment have evolved, suggest that tourism should not just be considered an income-generating activity but also as a response to overcome a history of oppression and the indigenous struggle for land and resources. Tourism represents access to power historically held by the mestizo society.

The data collection took place during the summer of 2006 and was based on the techniques of Participant Observation and Formal Interviews. During this period of time, the researcher maintained a close relationship with the six families that own hostels in Quilotoa and volunteered in both of the community’s communitarian hostels. Formal interviews were conducted with local community leaders, members of the board of the local tourist organization, owners of tourist agencies working in Quilotoa, owners of surrounding hostels and national and international visitors to the area.

The study is divided into the following parts: Agrarian Policy Framework (II), Rationale (III), The Quilotoa Region (IV), Seizing the Lake (V), Social Capital (VI) and Conclusions (VII).

II. AGRARIAN POLICY FRAMEWORK

The agro-export model

Historically indigenous people in Latin America have remained under different forms of oppression since the arrival of the Spanish. During colonial times, indigenous people were seen as free labor and taxable subjects. Moreover, indigenous people were territorially separated from the rest of society in order to better control them.

These systems of oppression did not significantly change with the independence from Spain. During the nineteenth century, most Latin American countries produced raw materials and agrarian products for the developed world. The different states of the region privileged elite landowners and foreign investors with the consolidation of large plantations thus depriving indigenous communities from access to land and natural resources (Breton 1997:81-2).

In the highlands of Ecuador, during the nineteenth century, although the state was all but inexistent in the countryside, indigenous people were required to pay taxes and forced to engage in non-paying public works, resulting in a further complication of their economic stability. Therefore indigenous people looked for economic security and protection among landlords and their plantations (commonly known as Haciendas). At the same time the landlords found the space to maintain feudal systems of labor with the indigenous families. Families usually provided services in the farm house and agricultural related activities in exchange for low wages, the right to farm a piece of land and access resources such as water, pastures and forest¹ (Velasco 1983: 41-52; Costales 1971: Ch I, II; Galarza 1973: 36-51; Breton 1997: 56). This system usually led to abuses of payment, poor working conditions and bad treatment by the landlords.

The corporatist Regime

During the first half of the twentieth century, Ecuador undertakes corporatist policies oriented to the ISI (Import Substitution Industrialization) economic model. The model presented itself as an alternative to the agro-export economic period; the ISI model was aimed at strengthening local processes of industrialization by protecting and improving the capacity of local markets.

Under this model, the indigenous population acquires a new role in the economy, most notably by producing food products at a low cost for the country's growing cities and providing inexpensive labor for the industrial sector, not to mention occasionally laboring for export-oriented plantations. The State was interested in reorganizing the countryside in regards to its political structure, giving incentives for increasing agriculture and therefore increasing the state's presence. This would require a moderate redistribution of land to decrease social unrest created by the Hacienda system that concentrated land in few hands (Breton 1997:48-9).

The most important policies focused on the restructuring of the countryside were the "Ley de Comunas" in 1937 and the Agrarian Reform of 1964. Yashar explains that corporatist policies were used by the State to increase civil and social rights in exchange for clientelistic rewards (2005:61)

Ley de Comunas 1937

¹ The provision of free services in exchange for the right to use land and resources was known as "concertaje" and was abolished in 1918. Since that time the law required Haciendas to pay its indigenous labor, nevertheless established wages were extremely low and mechanisms to enforce the law were weak.

This law was aimed to incorporate indigenous groups into the State by legalizing indigenous communities under the name of “comunas” and protecting communal land and resources from private sale, legal fragmentation and market alienation. In this way the government tried to build bridges between the state and the countryside. The state sought to remap the countryside’s landscape through the homogenization of indigenous institutions and a better administration of agrarian production among the indigenous families organized in comunas.

Comunas could be formed with the participation of at least fifty people. Breton explains that most comunas conformed from 1937 to 1984 were integrated by individual units of production (families) of which each one owned a small plot of land (1997:85). The comuna elects a five-person council called a “cabildo” to officially represent them. The cabildo is responsible for assuring integrity of communal land and mediates with the government access to public services such as infrastructure and social services such as schools, hospitals and services oriented to increasing productivity such as credit and technology.

However, without owned land and due to indigenous people’s direct and indirect economic dependency on the Haciendas, it is not until after Agrarian Reform when organization of indigenous families in comunas increases.

Agrarian Reform of 1964

By 1963 the military regime concluded that modernization under a model of industrialization required the elimination of feudal work relations and the establishment of moderate policies aimed at restraining the continuing growth of the haciendas, all to the ends of creating more equitable land use among the peasantry. However, Agrarian Reform did not change the power structure in the highlands due to the fact that the law did not target productive landholdings for redistribution; rather, the reform merely sought an end to feudal systems and redistributed hacienda land considered to have low levels of production value, not to mention land identified for colonization purposes, located in unoccupied regions of the country. Policies for redistribution benefited medium size and large size landholders over the small ones, which were usually indigenous families² (Breton 1997:50-6, 88).

The indigenous families living under feudal conditions were given titles over the land they had used while providing services in the Hacienda, an average of three to five hectares per family (Galarza 1973: 128; Breton 1997:58). In most cases the given land presented problems of erosion, no access to water sources or was located on slopes.

Despite the fact that the abolition of feudal work freed indigenous labor, as Benalcázar (1971:16-20) points out, it had some disadvantages that depending on the circumstances affected families in different degrees. One disadvantage was limited access to complimentary resources. The previous feudal relationship allowed the indigenous family access to other ecological zones such as pastures, forest, not to mention water resources that belonged to the hacienda. Secondly, many indigenous families lost the little economic security they had when dependent on the hacienda owners that despite the abuses provided them with minimal conditions for assuring their

² In order to undertake agrarian reform, the State created the IERAC (Ecuadorian Institute of Agrarian Reform and Colonization). This institution was in charge of undertaking the liquidation of debts between Haciendas and indigenous people through the assignation of land, expropriation of Haciendas with low levels of productive (expropriation was followed by compensation) and the redistribution of land in areas of colonization (C. Benalcázar 1971).

livelihoods; suddenly indigenous peoples accustomed to a paternalistic structure had to find a way to survive.

In addition, agrarian reform did not account for the necessary social, technical and credit programs to help indigenous families undertake independent agrarian ventures or associational ways of production such as cooperatives that would produce enough to fulfill their basic necessities. By 1973 some improvements in the law increased the reach of social programs in the countryside; nevertheless, medium size landholders remained in better capacity to benefit from such provisions and certainly the large landholders were the major beneficiaries of such programs (Breton 1997:59-60).

Yashar's analysis of indigenous organization in Ecuador proves that in response, most indigenous families found the Law of Comunas as an alternative to the hacienda order (2005:61, 92-7). Indigenous families appropriated the comunas as their own and found in them a space to achieve some level of economic security, using them to access and secure land, pastures and water in different degrees. Possibilities of acquiring credit were also greater for comunas than for independent small landholders. Finally the comuna provided a space for social and cultural reproduction

Neo-liberal regime

The transition

By end of the 70's it was clear that governments had not been successful in mobilizing national savings and developing the national market. The crisis of the 80's, caused by a drop of oil prices, welcomed a new economic period that looked to market oriented strategies to manage the country's economy. In this regard agrarian policies backed away from the protection initially offered to indigenous communities.

Neo-liberalism coincided with the return to democracy in 1979, consequently, the state favors individual autonomy / responsibility and individual rights over social rights and corporatist organization (Yashar 2005:65).

The shift in economic policy brought advantages and disadvantages for the indigenous people. For example, the right to participate in elections is extended to the indigenous population in 1979, which was no longer subjected to literacy as a condition to vote; however in relation to social rights, the possibilities to increase communitarian land and access to communal credit is limited.

It is also important to note that by 1973 the military regime changed agrarian reform law to accommodate landlords' demands reducing the possibilities for intervening in more haciendas and redistribute their land (Yashar 98, Breton 66-7). Moreover, the agrarian law of 1994 opened the door for the liberalization of the land market; at such time the law enabled fragmentation of communal land among the families if the Communal General Assembly agrees. (Yashar 66-7; Breton 69-70). These provisions made the process easier to incorporate community land into the market.

In addition to the economic general landscape for the small farmers in the highlands, Yashar points out that despite the fact that indigenous people achieved full citizenship (equal rights for all Ecuadorians) they are denied equal treatment in their relationship with the State and suffer from discrimination that is still present among the mestizo society (2005:98-9)

Indigenous strategies of survival:

- a) Intensification of land use, and migration. - The increased dependency on cash income that indigenous families had faced since Agrarian Reform worsened during the Neo-liberal period. Indigenous families found it increasingly difficult to rely just on agriculture to survive. Among the strategies used to improve income there occurs an intensification of soil use, a process that led to significant erosion, and a temporary and intermittent migration to the cities in order to join the informal labor sector (Sanchez 29-43).
- b) Population pressure over land. – In those regions where indigenous population density has been high we also find an ever-growing pressure over family plots of land, leading to rapid fragmentation among later generations. Under these circumstances the productivity of the pieces of land decreases, making it still more difficult to rely on commercial agriculture to survive.
- c) Indigenous claims over land based on ethnic background. - Despite indigenous families' reliance on emigrational sources of work, they are still highly dependent on agriculture, especially for household subsistence. Combined with the necessity to protect cultural indigenous spaces have led indigenous people to continue fighting to secure what was achieved during the corporatist period in which comunas had legal protection³.

III. Rationale

Understanding the decision-making process at the communal level

As Yashar argues, corporatist policies were never aimed to provide spaces to strengthen local political autonomy among indigenous people. Moreover, political discourse during the ISI period tried to integrate indigenous people into the mestizo society as “peasants” (2005:60,1). Therefore, indigenous people took advantage of an opportunity that permitted them to restructure power at the local level, protect the comuna from external economic and social threats and provide the space for reshaping indigenous identity. Therefore, comunas in Ecuador constitute spaces in which indigenous people exercise a type of autonomy that reaffirms the differences between the indigenous world and the white – mestizo society.

I suggest that such differences take place in the cultural context and are based on an indigenous common history of oppression and the necessity to vindicate indigenous pride. On the other hand, since comunas in general do not maintain social economies but rather family-based economies, strategies of survival take place based on an individual context.

Therefore, survival in a comuna depends on individual economic strategies; those strategies do not always imply communal cooperation. However, cooperation is sought when resources are easier to secure through collective action, while at the same time a common identity is reinforced.

³Currently, the struggle for maintaining land and access to resources has grown from the local to the regional and national level. In this sense indigenous organizations that were born and strengthened during the corporatist period are claiming that the State recognize their rights over land and resources in the constitution based on their ethnic indigenous background (Yashar 2005 55-7, 85-150).

However as the present case study will show, the individual and the communal can be in conflict when the benefits of economic alternatives such as tourism lead family units to compete among themselves reducing greater benefits for the whole community.

IV. THE QUILOTOA REGION

Political, Geographical and Economical characteristics

The comuna under study is located in the highlands of Ecuador, province of Cotopaxi. In terms of the province's political structure, the comuna belongs to the parroquia of Zumbagua located in the cantón Pujilí, which is in the province of Cotopaxi. In this sense Ponce-Quilotoa is one of the 12 comunas of the parroquia and the last one to be legally constituted.

The area is dominated by the presence of the volcanic lake Quilotoa, a natural attraction visited nationally and internationally. This area corresponds to the bleak plateau zone ranging from 2,800 to 4,000 meters above sea level; the average temperature is less than 55 degrees Fahrenheit. The landscape is mountainous presenting slopes superior to 70%, winds, rain and significant deforestation. The quality of land owned by indigenous peoples is usually poor due to erosion (Martinez, Burbano 1994; CAAP 2004). Therefore indigenous farming activities take place in the lowlands surrounding the crater, and when it is possible families farm inside the crater.

The comuna's main populated area is located one kilometer away from the crater, where at least 585 families live. A second populated area has developed in the last seven years next to crater's border, where an average of 40 families resides. In both centers families have an average of four to six children (CAAP 2004).

The population is dedicated to agriculture for commercial and subsistence purposes. The closest center for agrarian commercialization is located in Zumbahua, and the community still uses this market to sell their products. However, most of the interviewees explained that production has decreased due to poor soil conditions and the absence of favorable market conditions. Sanchez confirms this data when explaining that most families are able to sell just 10% of their production (2002:32). Complementary economic activities are dominated by intermittent migration, and the increase of wage labor relationships.

Despite the fact that the characteristics of the local economy are common among most families in Ponce-Quilotoa and the surrounding comunas, we find that tourist activities have gained importance over the last two decades. Tourism has become important for the region and contributes to the household economies in different degrees. Tourism contribution depends on the given family's level of participation in the direct or indirect provision of tourist services.

In the comuna we find that the group of families living next to the crater (we will call this urban center Quilotoa) benefit directly from this activity while at least sixty more families living in the main village (we will call the main urban center Ponce-Quilotoa) benefit indirectly from it. In Quilotoa tourism provides at least 50% of the income for families, and in some cases the percentage is higher.

Tourism in the region

From conversations with owners of tour operators in the region and the indigenous pioneer families involved in the business, it is possible to conclude that the region began to attract visitors

at least twenty years ago. Most of the visitors were initially attracted by the province's snowcapped mountains and volcanoes and subsequently they became interested in the indigenous people living in the proximities of such natural resources.

Currently, it is possible to identify several tourist corridors in the province, however the one that most involves indigenous culture and folklore is the loop connecting the province's capital Latacunga with several comunas along the Zumbagua – Chugchilan road.

Every community specializes in different cultural and natural attractions such as indigenous festivals, indigenous markets, artisan work, traditional food and in general indigenous traditional life. Among natural attractions we find irregular mountainous landscapes, mosaics of agricultural patches, thermal springs, archaeological ruins, and indigenous and vernacular architecture among the most important.

Most tourist activity is not government-controlled; however, under certain circumstances, local governments sometimes intervene. The indigenous presence is high in the region and local cabildos oversee the entrance of visitors into the area. Cabildos assure that tourist activity does not present any threat to their survival but becomes an economic opportunity.

Comunas benefit from tourism depending on the degree of participation in the provision of services. Accommodation and food providers are concentrated in the city of Latacunga. Hostels within the region are small in number. During the field work it was possible to identify eight hostels in the aforementioned tourist corridor. Largely, mestizos or foreign entrepreneurs that have penetrated the area own these businesses.

In this sense it is important to note that the comuna at Quilotoa has achieved the development of all tourist services locally. In other words different from all the other comunas, Quilotoa benefits from full participation in the provision of all services with limitations in the area of transportation.

Land Reform and the struggles for land in the Quilotoa region

After land reform in 1964, the Hacienda Zumbagua passed to the administration of the governmental department of Asistencia Social⁴. This institution would decide what land was going to be used for productive and redistribution purposes, and the Quilotoa Region was part of the Hacienda property. A. Costales (1965) explains that the land of the Hacienda was initially distributed between two comunas: Zumbahua and la Cocha (most of the comunas that currently exist in the region were constituted later).

Of the total size of the Hacienda Zumbahua (11.000 has), just 45% of the land was considered productive, and of the total available land, just 31% was distributed among the indigenous population. The redistributed land was to be shared amongst approximately 1,114 families that in average had at least seven members per family.

Looking at the data provided, it is possible to expect that most of land given to indigenous people was mostly land eroded, poor in soil and far from water sources. The poor planning of a fair

⁴ Now part of the Social Security Administration.

redistribution in the Quilotoa region brought a) pressures over land, b) the use of land situated in *páramos*⁵ for agrarian purposes and c) an increased erosion of soils.

In this sense, one of the comuneros⁶ in Ponce-Quilotoa explains that after the Reform, his father was given land three kilometers away from what is now Ponce Quilotoa. By the end of the seventies the division of land among family members increased, causing he and other leaders to travel to Quito, the capital of the country, in order to ask for more land adjudications.

In fact documentation shows that during the seventies leaders of eight comunas requested new land adjudications from IERAC; some of the requested land had been historically occupied by the comunas but not legalized yet. The legalization is done not just to ease the pressures of increasing populations, but also because of assumptions that there existed mestizo and foreign interest over their land⁷.

The comunero continues by explaining that by those days the comuna Ponce-Quilotoa was not formed yet, that is why land was given to comuna “la Cocha”. The cabildo of La Cocha gave land to his family in the place where the comuna Ponce-Quilotoa is now located. However, titles over the land he owns in Ponce Quilotoa were acquired just eight years ago.

As we saw initially, corporatist policies dictated provisions in agrarian policy in order to maintain the integrity of communal land, in contrast to the neo-liberal regime whose objective was to incorporate land into the market. The provisions of the 1994 law enable communities to fragment the land among the members. In other words, the law gives the families the possibility of selling their land if they want to do it.

It is not until 2002⁸ when the comuna Ponce – Quilotoa is created and this urban unit becomes independent from comuna La Cocha. M Pastuña, one of the leaders in Ponce, explains that there were two reasons for the creation of this independent unit: a) The creation of a structure and administration that would solve problems locally and more effectively, and b) The possibility to enhance communitarian efforts to develop artisan production and the provision of tourist services as a complement to agriculture.

It is necessary to point out that the creation of a “comuna” in 2002 was unusual for the time. Zamosc (1995) shows that comunas are organization structures established during the time corporatist policies were encouraged by the government (1930’s – 1960’s), while cooperatives become important during the seventies, and during the eighties associations were the choice preferred by indigenous people when organizing.

Martinez (1998) points out that while Zamosc’s data seems to illustrate the reality of most of the Andes, the comuna is still prevalent in Cotopaxi and Chimborazo as a tool to access land. Therefore we can imply that the formation of comuna Ponce – Quilota in the beginning of the

⁵ Páramos are ecosystems located between the upper forest line and the snow line of the Andes. Páramos are crucial for capturing water resources at altitudes that range around 3000 meters above sea level. For these reasons agrarian activities are not recommended on such ecosystems.

⁶ A comunero is an inhabitant of a particular comuna.

⁷ Source: Document of adjudication legalized in favor of eight comunas, one of them was La Cocha, and legalized on November 27th of 1980 in the Notaria 2da, Canton Latacunga.

⁸ Document of legalization of comuna Ponce-Quilotoa through the Ministry of Agriculture: Ministerial Accord No- 340, August 13th of 2002.

new millennia was also aimed to bring land under direct control of Ponce-Quilotoa. This assumption is confirmed by leader Pastuña when he says:

“We needed to have more control over the lake and the land that we have historically occupied, so we could prevent INEFAN⁹ from taking away what is ours”

(Translation mine)

V. SEIZING THE LAKE

Reasons for the migration

Officially the area of the volcanic lake is part of the Illinizas Ecological Reserve. Leader Pastuña, a community member currently involved in indigenous politics, explains that from 1992 to 1994 the INEFAN tried to integrate the zone into the Illinizas Management Plan. Such a plan contemplated the implementation of programs of reforestation and the recuperation of water resources.

This governmental intervention increased the fears among the indigenous population that felt their land was being threatened. Therefore the cabildo with the support of the community resisted the INEFAN efforts. Pastuña indicates that by the nineties land was given to recently married couples close to the volcanic lake. This decision was made not just because land became scarce in the main village, but because of the necessity of having somebody permanently watching who enters to visit the lake.

Due to the fact that the land next to the crater is not adequate for agriculture, the area was historically designated to be used for pastures. Most often women and children were the ones in charge of bringing the sheep to eat *páramo* grass and drink water from the lake. There was nobody living in the Quilotoa area before the nineties when the first three families moved to the Quilotoa pastures; however, most of the current families migrated in the last six or seven years due to an increase of tourist demand.

Leader Pastuña and two other leaders explained that INEFAN wanted the community to move a certain number of kilometers away from the crater. Then, the community decided to apply customary indigenous justice and threaten the invaders with punishments such as cold showers and the use of “*ortiga*” (plant which causes small stings to human skin) to hit their bodies if they attempted to enter the community with the purpose to undertake those plans. The struggle included a public protest for control and administration of the lake in the capital city of Latacunga, a protest that the provincial governor supported. As a consequence, INEFAN decided to end the conflict in 2000 with an agreement between this institution and the community. The community would administer the natural resource under certain parameters that included conservation strategies.

Family based Tourism in Quilotoa

⁹ INEFAN (Ecuadorian Institute of Forestry, Natural Areas and Wildlife). This institution was in charge of the administration of National Protected Natural Areas. INEFAN’s function are presently performed by Ministerio de Medio Ambiente (Ministry of the Environment).

The pioneers

Of the three families that first started to live next to the crater of the volcanic lake, J. Latacunga and his family were the ones that first engaged in tourist activities. He explained that he started to work as a native tourist guide twenty years ago (even before the migration started) after meeting the owner of a tourist agency interested in bringing foreigners to hike along the mountains, valleys and canyons that provide the region its main attraction.

Latacunga explains that in those days it was very difficult for “white people” to enter or pass by indigenous communities. He remembers that people were afraid to see tall white men with beards and light colored eyes. He recalls,

“Foreigners brought us memories related with slavery and bad treatment during the Colonial and Hacienda times; now that we got our lands we did not want to close to us.”

(Translation mine)

For those reasons, indigenous people were hostile to visitors, they used to throw stones at cars approaching their communities and close the roads under the justification that “no visitors were allowed in free indigenous communities.”

When Jorge started to accompany the owner of the agency on his trips with foreigners, it was easier for the group to walk by and even across the communities. Latacunga’s job was not just to talk with the people of the community in order to prevent attacks, he was also the person that guided the group along the trip. Most of indigenous locals know the sinuous paths of the Andes so well that they can walk through them with their eyes closed. Latacunga proudly told me that he had walked from his hometown to the Coast and to the Amazon Region while performing his tourist trips.

With time, indigenous people saw they could also benefit from the visitors and little by little they started to bring commodities from nearby cities such as Latacunga, “food and drinks that foreigners are accustomed to eat and drink, such as colas (soda), cookies, crackers, cans, etc”. Indigenous people then sold these goods at higher prices to visitors¹⁰.

Under the suggestion of the owner of the agency Latacunga built a “*choza*” (small rustic accommodation) inside the crater of the volcanic lake, using a piece of land that belonged to his wife, but after an act of vandalism against him¹¹, he had to ask the cabildo to give him land next to the crater to build a new house there. Latacunga has been using that house as a hostel for 12 years.

Tourist services provided at the household level

Antonio Daquilema is one of the heads of household that recently decided to undertake tourism as a complement to agricultural activities. Most families living in Quilotoa are comprised of young couples (the average age of couples is in between the twenties and forties) such as Antonio and his wife that were given land after marriage.

¹⁰ Indigenous people have become consumers of such commodities too; these food products are now part of their daily alimentation.

¹¹ Jorge’s chozas was burned and destroyed. Jorge explained that the other comuneros envied him because he was benefiting from tourism that the others did not have.

Before engaging in tourism, most men living in Quilotoa migrated to the cities in their teens for long periods of time in order to save enough money to marry someone in their village. Most of the interviewees, such as Antonio, continued to migrate intermittently until they realized tourism was an alternative in which for the first time, as Antonio explains, he does not need to migrate any more.

Antonio's hostel is almost three years old, and by looking inside, it is possible to see that it was initially used as home for the family. Nowadays the family still lives in there, but they have arranged special spaces for the tourists to spend the night and eat. Most indigenous hostels in Quilotoa are very humble; however, most families have already made investments to "modernize" their hostels.

"Modernization" includes changing the traditional roofs that used to be made by natural *páramo* straw, changes in the floor that was usually made by compacted soil is now being replaced by cement and the walls that used to be made by clay and soil bricks are replaced by cement bricks. Indigenous people explain that changes are not just supposed to bring more "comfort" to the visitors but they are also a form of status among themselves.

Antonio indicates that he has not been able to make any of those "improvements" due to the fact that he has no savings yet. However he has bought beds and covers in order to replace the traditional straw and wood beds and he bought a metallic dinner table and chairs. In addition, he has built a bathroom that although does not have running water is better than not having one for the visitors.

Antonio's wife, as most of the women in the community, does not speak Spanish very well. While doing the fieldwork I could see that women are being encouraged by their husbands to learn. Moreover the community is undertaking an literacy program in cooperation with the government in which women are learning Spanish. Different from the past, indigenous women feel the necessity to learn the language in order to communicate better with the visitors¹².

Right now, it is the men who communicate with foreigners and national visitors while women are in charge of administering most of the hostel activities such as cooking and cleaning. Therefore her labor becomes extremely important for the husband and the survival of the family. In the case of Antonio, he consults with his wife before making any decision; moreover, it is his wife who mainly administers the cash income due to the fact that she knows better what replacements are needed in the hostel.

Children labor is still very important for the household, the boys are usually the ones who bring wood and keep the fires burning during the nights. The boys also work as guides when they are not in school or accompany their fathers on the trips. The girls usually help with the kitchen and to maintain the hostel clean and organized. Both girls and boys still help the parents in agriculture and usually take care of the sheep herds. In some hostels it is possible see that when the family is hosting a large number of visitors all the family works together in activities usually performed by women. In such cases, the women became the person who decides how labor is divided.

Infrastructure and Services at Quilotoa

¹² Women's participation in the economic decision-making process at the family level increased with the participation in tourist-oriented activities. However, since women labor is based on their ability to interact with the white-mestizo society, and since women in Quilotoa have been key in the reproduction of indigenous culture and tradition, it is possible to see that culture is changing rapidly in Quilotoa.

The improvement of basic infrastructure is developing fast. Currently the village counts with electricity (families have an average of five bulb lights), one phone line for the whole community and by March of 2007 they were supposed to have piped water and sewer system (CAAP 2004).

The access road to Quilotoa has recently been paved, making the entrance by the road coming from Zumbagua as the best alternative to arrive. However the rest of the road, from Quilotoa to Chugchilan and from Chugchilan to Saquisilí (the rest of the tourist corridor) remains dusty, rustic and dangerous during the rainy season.

The settlement can accommodate an average of one hundred seventy visitors. Twenty-five people can be housed in the communitarian hostels (two) and one hundred fifty five can be lodged in the private hostels (six). Besides accommodation and meals, other services provided by the community are artisan paintings and weavings, native guide services, the provision of horses and mules and the provision of boats to navigate in the lake. Communitarian hostels, the entrance toll, the boats and horses are administered by the communitarian organization, while most of the tourist ventures (six hostels, restaurants and craft sales) are administered privately.

The visitors

Most of the foreign visitors are backpackers or are brought by agencies dedicated to adventure tourism. Agencies work with individual family businesses rather than with communitarian businesses due to the fact that communication and accountability is easier to achieve. The high season takes place during the dry season from August to December; the rest of the year corresponds to the low season, which is the rainy season.

Tourist Competition – Outside threats.

The closest hostel to Quilotoa that is not inside the comuna and is not own by indigenous people has operated for only one year, is located right in front of the community and targets high-income visitors. It is owned by two mestizo entrepreneurs who bought land from one of the members of the comuna Ponce-Quilotoa.

C. Ordóñez, owner and manager of the hostel, explained that the Indigenous Tourist Organization has threatened him, alleging that his hostel occupies communal land, and that the new hostel's presence threatens the community's ability to manage tourism. C. Ordóñez explained he and his partner had legally bought the land where the hostel is located and therefore the comuna cannot proceed legally against them. However, from past experiences, there is the possibility that the community will decide to physically harm the business in order to put pressure over the hostel to leave the zone.

In order to provide insights about the indigenous position with regards to this conflict, one of the members of the tourist organization board of directors explained:

“Quilotoa was nothing before the community organized to have a road, bring electricity, water, etc. Without us working in tourism, there would be no visitors arriving here. Moreover, this land belonged to us; we struggled against the Hacienda and the government because we belong to here and these resources belong to us. That is why mestizos cannot benefit from what we have fought for. We think that it is not possible to mix our world with mestizo or foreign matters. If the hostel is planning to stay there, they have to understand that they occupy land that is historically ours. If they plan to stay there they have to compensate us by providing jobs in the hostel for all the community or giving the community

part of the profits. If they do not accommodate with this, they will have to go away.”

(Translation mine)

As explained in the initial argument, indigenous people found in the comuna a space for securing access to land, a space for cultural reproduction and the strengthening of an identity informed by resentment against the white - mestizo society, and by a history of common oppression and constant struggle to secure their land.

VI. SOCIAL CAPITAL

Community empowerment and community organization

As it has been described, in Quilotoa, tourism is undertaken at the household level. Therefore we see that indigenous families that historically have organized their economies at the family level continue to do the same when working with tourism. However as we already discussed in the theoretical frame, despite the fact that families have worked as independent economic units, the comuna has provided a space for communal organization in benefit of all the members of the comuna.

During the corporatist period, when law protected the comuna and its resources, we see that the cabildo was in charge of defending the integrity of land and functioned as a bridge with the state to mediate services to the community. As we will see in the case of Quilotoa, the process of empowerment and the building of social capital that led the community to choose and undertake tourism have maintained the same objectives and structure found in the model of the comuna during the corporatist period.

History of the organization of the community at the tourist level

With the help of an indigenous visionary leader, the community organized the School of Painting “Niño Rumi” that trained men in techniques of painting using sheep skin and acrylics. The school eventually received support from the Silesian Catholic Division and functioned from 1985 to 1988. By 1994 the school became an Artisan Center legalized as a cooperative.

As members increased, the leaders of the cooperative were continuously making requests for training workshops to the Government, the headquarters of the Catholic Church in Latacunga and non-governmental organization. The production of handcrafts was aimed to complement the agrarian activities of the families. Families used to congregate close to the crater of the volcanic lake in order to offer paintings and colorful masks to the visitors.

With agreements in between the community and INEFA and in order to administer the volcanic lake and its resources, the indigenous people legalized a local tourist organization called “Lago Verde Quilotoa”. This organization is in charge of taking care of the natural resources and the promotion of tourism in Quilotoa. Presently, most comuneros living next to crater in Quilotoa belong to the organization, an average of thirty-five families. And there is at least sixty families living in the main center of Ponce-Quilotoa that also belong to the Organization. The organization has approximately one hundred members.

In seven years, the organization has been able to build two communitarian hostels, establish a toll located at the entrance of the town and acquire boats for trips in the lake. The organization

provides rotating sources of work for the families in both hostels and the toll¹³. In addition the organization provides help for members with grave necessity (serious sickness or death) and supports local youth to pursue college degrees related with tourism. Students are supposed to return to Quilotoa and train other members of the community or provide professional services to the communitarian tourist organization.

As mentioned before, the organization is in charge of activities aimed to promote tourism and improve the quality of services provided by the community; however, one of the most important tasks of the organization is to defend the Quilotoa Lake and indigenous land for tourist purposes. In this sense the organization is a space for indigenous control over the monopoly of tourism in the zone. In several occasions the organization has reacted to any possible incursion of mestizo or white penetration for business purposes¹⁴, and as detailed above, the organization has opposed the operation of the new hostel located in front of the community, currently managed by mestizo entrepreneurs.

The organization became so important for the group of families living in Quilotoa that it seems to perform the functions of a former cabildo. In this sense the organization also administers customary law and justice, solving local conflicts and even those conflicts taking place in other communities, if the people seeking justice go to Quilotoa to find it.

The forces behind empowerment

From the historical events described above and the ways in which the community of Ponce – Quilotoa reacted to overcome difficulties, it is possible to describe the following forces as the most important during the process of empowerment:

a) **The necessity to assure control over the land and the necessity to feel free from a history of oppression.** In this regard comuneros that are in their fifties and sixties still remember their lives in the Hacienda, and they are aware that land is the asset through which they have been able to find some economic security they do not find with the white – mestizo society.

b) **The necessity to increase control over their lives and decrease seasonal and intermittent migration.** The hard conditions that ruled the agrarian market since the corporatist regime started to fail at the end of the seventies, encouraging indigenous peoples into processes of migration in order to complement their economies. Indigenous men explain that working in the cities is hard due to economic and social segregation. Indigenous people are usually paid and treated poorly. Tourism presented itself as an opportunity to decrease the levels of migration, finding a local economic alternative.

c) **The necessity of overcoming feelings of exclusion by the State and society.** As analyzed in the theoretical frame, indigenous people acquired full citizenship in 1979 (the right to vote); however, their experiences in relating with the State and society have been different and continue to be different from the rest of Ecuadorians. Feelings of exclusion are related with the idea that indigenous people and agricultural activities are “backwards”. Indigenous people in Quilotoa define themselves as situated in an ascending line towards “progress” still not achieved.

¹³ The toll is being used to control those who visit the Lake by the payment of an entrance fee.

¹⁴ Among the indigenous reactions of the Organization against foreign penetrations in the area, we can recall the case of Shalala, a hostel located two kilometers away from Ponce that went out of business under indigenous pressures. Actions include the stealing of private assets, the voicot of signal and advertising on the roads, the blocking of roads of access and legal actions.

d) Most of leaders that addressed how indigenous people cope with these feelings pointed out that **education has been the turning point**. Literacy arrived in 1978 and indigenous people remark on the importance of bilingual education as necessary to make wise decisions about their own lives.

e) **Tourism as a progressive economic activity**. Controlling the tourist natural resources and the chain of provision of services, indigenous people fully participate in an economic activity that takes place in their geographical setting, in an environment where they can be indigenous without facing segregation. More important is that indigenous people participate in an economic relationship with the white - mestizo society in which for the first time they are the ones that decide how the economic activity will be carried out and who participates in it.

Internal conflicts and fractures within the community

The communal indigenous organization has been successful in maintaining communitarian control over land and management of resources, but has failed in any initiative directed to organize family based businesses in a cooperative way. As in most of communities, indigenous people have strong ties among families, and conflicts among private businesses are weakening those ties.

Conflicts have led families to verbal and physical confrontation in which the tourist organization has intervened by proposing that visitors should be accommodated in all private hostels through a system of turns and should pay the same amount of money for the services provided in any hostel. However private owners have remained opposed to the idea.

In general, we can find two kinds of conflicts within the community. One among families that own private hostels and restaurants and a second kind of conflict between activities aimed to improve communitarian profits vs. family profits.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

1. The use of tourism as a new growing activity around the Quilotoa volcanic lake can be understood not just as the outcome of a continued search for alternatives to improve household income. Tourism in the comuna Ponce – Quilotoa can also be studied as a response to indigenous claims to access power historically held by the mestizo elite. Thus, the reasons for these groups of families to migrate and take advantage of tourism lies not just in economic incentives but also in the desire to regain respect from society and to avoid feelings of backwardness, usually associated with rural peasantry dedicated to agricultural work and indigenous race, culture and identity.
2. In addition, it is possible to conclude that the transition from agrarian economic practices to more capitalistic alternatives such as tourism resemble the same process of empowerment and institution building that indigenous people followed during the corporatist regime in which indigenous people organized as comunas. The most important similarities are the following:
 - a) The individualization of the agricultural economy and the decision-making process at the household level that characterizes the economic organization of

comunas during the corporatist regime is reproduced when the comuna Ponce - Quilotoa undertakes tourism as a complementary economic activity. In this sense family based agriculture is supplemented and replaced by family based tourism.

- b) The indigenous strategy used to give the community control over key resources for tourist activities as well as control of most of the tourist chain of services imitates strategies used by comunas and its cabildos to secure access to land and bridge services from the State. For instance, the migration from the center of the comuna Ponce – Quilotoa to the communitarian pastures around the volcanic lake was strategic in order to maintain physical presence around the lake and assure control over land and resources that were being threatened by environmental and recreational programs led by the government.

At the same time the exclusive migration of indigenous families from Ponce - Quilotoa facilitated the development and provision of all sources of tourist services now completely in control of the community. Finally we can find that the final product of the local process of organization: Tourist Organization Lago Verde Quilotoa performs the functions of a cabildo: First, it assures the integrity of natural resources and land and assures that such resources will remain in indigenous hands. Second, it bridges the relationship among the community with the State, and non-governmental institutions for the provision of services. Third, it defends the communal space from external intrusions.

- 3. The processes of empowerment that have led to the establishment of communitarian institutions that framed the development of tourist activities suggest high levels of social capital. However, the transition from an agrarian commercial economy into one that engages in aggressive capitalist practices brings competition among the members of the community. The same transition results in conflicts that challenge the community's ability to define their identity and maintain traditional cultural practices, specifically due to inevitable confrontations with the outside world and its agents (government, non-government institutions, mestizo society, and foreigners such as visitors or private businesses).
- 4. Finally, it is clear that tourism in Quilotoa is not leading the community to reinforce traditional agricultural practices and the culture engaged with it. Tourism in Quilotoa is leading to a rapid transformation in their economy and all cultural practices are being shaped according with it. In this process, indigenous identity might be transformed too. Transformation includes language, dress, gender, division of labor, migration patterns and communitarian ways of organization.

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Community Interviews with families whose identity is being protected:

- Conversation with the members of five families that own Hostels in Quilotoa.
- Conversation with one of the local Teachers in the community.
- Conversation with two members of the board of directors of Organization Lago Verde Quilotoa.
- Conversation with two members of the Cabildo of Comuna Ponce-Quilotoa.
- Conversation with the members of the “Junta de Agua” in Quilotoa.
- Conversation with a indigenous students currently benefiting by the support of Organization Lago Verde Quilotoa to study a Tourism related major in the Capital of Ecuador: Quito.
- Conversation with four young members of the community who had permanently migrated to the cities of Latacunga, Quito and Baños.

Personal Interviews

- Marcelo Pastuña, local leader involved in indigenous politics and elected as Substitute Congressmen for the MPD (Movimiento Popular Democrático) Party.
- Carlos Ordoñez, owner and manager of the Hostel Quilotoa Volcanic Lake, who currently live in the Hostel since it started its operations almost two years ago.
- Jan Lescauwat, General Manager of Biking Dutchman: Mountain Bike Tours, who currently undertakes operations in Quilotoa every year.

- Anibal Herrera and Hilda Herrera, Owners of the Hostel Mama Hilda – Chugchilan, who have lived in the area their whole lives and have follow the process of tourism in Quilotoa.
- Roberto Proaño, Engineer in charge of the Technical Team of CAAP (Centro Andino de Acción Popular) working in the Quilotoa area in a Water – Sewer Project.
- Franklin Montalvo, Engineer in charge of local supervision of the Water – Sewer CAAP Project in Ponce-Quilotoa.