

## STATEMENT OF GRANT PURPOSE

William T. Fischer, Ecuador, Modern History  
Ecuadorianizing the *Oriente*, 1895-1972

Visitors to Ecuador (and Ecuadorian schoolchildren) quickly come to understand that the country is made up of three distinctly important regions: the Pacific *Costa*, the Andean *Sierra*, and the Amazonian *Oriente*. Despite nearly a century of minimal attention from national governments after Ecuador's independence in 1830, today the *Oriente*—the tropical, oil rich land that lies to the east of the Andes—is very much an important part of the nation. The *Oriente* region presents a paradox: on one hand, since the 1970s this Indian-inhabited and conflict-ridden region has been at the epicenter of a series of economic and political transformations that have redefined the nation and the place of indigenous peoples or "nations" in Ecuador; on the other hand, these transformations and conflicts—which are in many ways the expression of outside global forces—have never seriously questioned or brought into crisis the "Ecuadorian" identity of the region and its peoples. This fact raises an important question: How was the *Oriente* Ecuadorianized?

My dissertation project addresses the political, economic, and cultural dimensions of this critical question for the understudied but formative period leading up to the present era, which dates to the completion of the Trans-Ecuadorian Oil Pipeline in 1972. My project includes elite, provincial, and subaltern perspectives, and will thus make a contribution not only to Ecuadorian history, for which study of the *Oriente* is uncommon, but also to wider theoretical and historical debates on nationalism and state formation in the postcolonial world and in frontier areas.

The pre-1970s process of Ecuadorianization that I will study dates from the latter part of the nineteenth century. The *Oriente*, however, was the site of centuries of competition and conflict between the Spanish and Portuguese empires, in which this Amazonian land was mapped and imagined as a missionary borderlands. In the post-colonial period, the Ecuadorianization of the *Oriente* had as a key challenge Peruvian commercial and military intrusion into Ecuadorian territory. Ecuadorianization included the emergence of a set of intersecting administrative, military, economic, and cultural initiatives. The period I propose to study begins with the Liberal Revolution of Eloy Alfaro in 1895, after which the *Oriente*, which was treated by Ecuadorian legislation as a "special" region, not subject to the same political-administrative regime as the rest of the country, took on increasing importance as the site of infrastructural and administrative projects that elites believed would lead to economic development and prosperity. In 1941, Peruvian intrusion led to a war that denied Ecuador some of its Amazonian territory and changed the economic and political dynamics of the *Oriente* region. The period 1942-1972 saw developmentalist governments that brought new infrastructure to the *Oriente* and included an era of military rule in the 1960s that oversaw agrarian reform, which greatly affected the *Oriente* due to increased colonization. A sign of the region's Ecuadorianization was the 1969 decree that the *Oriente* no longer be governed by "special" laws, but instead be fully incorporated into the nation's general administrative structure. The capstone of this transformative period was the completion of the aforementioned oil pipeline, which ushered in the contemporary period of conflict for which my project provides the critical political, economic, and cultural context.

My approach is threefold. First, I will study the administration of the *Oriente*, which after 1895 included new political initiatives and increasing government presence, as well as a continued reliance on Catholic missions for the "civilization" and incorporation of native

populations. The Ecuadorian military, which at times recruited Amazonian indigenous soldiers, also played a role in governing and mapping this territory, as the threat of Peruvian intrusion was very real. Second, I will examine economic development in the region, which included infrastructural projects by both national and regional elites. Colonization by citizens from the highlands and the coast was an essential component of economic transformation. Finally, I will study the cultural and educational efforts to incorporate the *Oriente* into the Ecuadorian nation by examining intellectual, political, and literary discourse; my project will investigate how Ecuadorian elite and popular understandings of the *Oriente* changed as the region was incorporated throughout the twentieth century. For each of my themes, I will examine the subaltern perspective of the *Oriente's* indigenous inhabitants and poor colonists, which can be gleaned from missionary correspondence and administrative documentation of lawsuits, petitions, and land conflict. My multi-thematic approach distinguishes my research from that of scholars who have examined isolated portions of the *Oriente* using a limited variety of sources.

This project was approved by my doctoral committee in Latin American History at the University of Florida, and it will constitute the principal research necessary for my PhD. Based on my preliminary research, I estimate a research timetable of 10 months, including four to six months in Quito, in the north of Ecuador, and the remaining time in Cuenca, in the south. These highland cities were the most important centers for projects directed toward the *Oriente*. By examining these foci, I will avoid drawing conclusions based on only one segment of the Ecuadorian Amazon. I will also spend several weeks in the *Oriente* administrative city of Tena, where I will work in the *Archivo de la Gobernación del Napo*. I have arranged academic affiliation with FLACSO (*Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales*) in Quito as visiting researcher. In Quito, I will work in the *Archivo Nacional de Historia*, the *Archivo General del Ministerio de Gobierno* and the *Archivo-Biblioteca de la Función Legislativa*, which contain records of communication, administration, and congressional debate related to the *Oriente*. The *Archivo Histórico del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores* houses diplomatic records of the border dispute between Ecuador and Peru. The *Instituto Geográfico Militar* and the *Archivo del Ministerio de Defensa* contain the information necessary to study the military's administration of the *Oriente*. Published sources about the *Oriente*, including periodicals, books, and pamphlets, are held in the extensive collections of the *Banco Central del Ecuador*, the *Casa de Cultura*, and the *Biblioteca Ecuatoriana Aurelio Espinosa Pólit*. Various university libraries contain the textbooks necessary to study the incorporation of the *Oriente* via school curricula. In Cuenca, the *Archivo Nacional de Historia*, the archive of the Catholic hierarchy in Cuenca, and the *Archivo del Cabildo Municipal* hold the records of the activities of the provincial government and religious orders in the Amazon. The *Biblioteca de la Casa de Cultura* and the *Museo del Banco Central* hold vast collections of local periodicals and publications.

I have developed my project in close collaboration with Ecuadorian scholars at FLACSO, and I have publicly presented some preliminary research findings to colleagues at the *Archivo Nacional de Historia* in Quito. Under the Fulbright grant I will expand this engagement with local scholars and the Ecuadorian people at large. I feel strongly that my research must be tested against the knowledge and attitudes of Ecuadorians themselves. Such knowledge will contribute both to international understanding and, in my case, a stronger dissertation and, beyond that, a series of journal articles and a monograph that I hope to publish both in Spanish in Ecuador and in English in the United States.

## Personal Statement

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I grew up near Kalamazoo College, where my mother was an art history professor. When I was a child she would take my sister and me to art museums, where she taught us not only about the techniques used to make the art, but the cultural and historical contexts in which the art was made. In part because of my mother, then, I have always seen history this way; not as a series of names and dates, but as a milieu from which come fascinating artifacts, such as art, music, literature, and societal achievements. Discovering *what happened* is certainly important, but I have always been more interested in *how* events were viewed by contemporaries and later generations, and what kinds of stories people tell about history in order to make sense of their societies.

As an undergraduate at Carleton College, I learned that history may also be an arena for cultural or ideological conflict. My college professors assigned a variety of different kinds of readings; not just textbooks but also primary sources and revisionist accounts. It was, in retrospect, a valuable lesson for a budding research historian: one must consult a variety of different kinds of sources if one is to portray history as a multi-stranded experience. At Carleton, I also took many Spanish classes, and grew to love the language. It was in these classes about film, poetry, and literature from Spain and Latin America that I began to wish that I had studied Latin American history. I realized then that I had to spend some time in Latin America, and that I would make the region's culture the object of my graduate studies.

At the University of Florida, my graduate training in Andean and Latin American history has prepared me well for this research project. I have devoted much time to the study of nationalism, and I am particularly interested in how peoples often seen to be marginal to the dominant cultural group understand and contribute to a nation's narrative about itself. My interest in Andean indigenous peoples led me to spend two summers learning the languages of Quechua and its Ecuadorian variant, Quichua. However, it was Ecuador's Amazonian region that has most captured my interest. In Ecuador, I have witnessed the pride that Ecuadorians have for their country's human and geographic diversity; my proposed research project seeks to explain how the Amazonian part of Ecuador became such an important element of the national identity in the twentieth century, as well as how the region's diverse inhabitants came to occupy their particular political and social positions.

The proposed research project will make it possible to complete my dissertation and to seek a position as professor of Latin American history. I will use the opportunity that the Fulbright affords to engage with local scholars as I seek to contribute to debates of great interest to Ecuadorians and Latin Americans. My research experience in Ecuador will no doubt enrich and be a vital resource for my university teaching career in the United States as well. I strive to bring passion to my teaching as a graduate assistant at the University of Florida, and I believe the Graduate Teaching Award that I received last year attests to this fact. I find that students respond to Latin American history as a point of comparison for the United States; I push my students to consider the ways in which the two regions are more similar than they might think. The Fulbright offers an opportunity to contribute to Latin American history, but it will also allow me to become a better teacher as I gain more direct experience with aspects of Ecuadorian history that can be compared to the United States' own efforts to develop its frontier regions.