Reflection on Tammy Lewis’ “Ecuador’s Environmental Revolutions”

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 Abstract

This chapter is about tracing the Ecuadorian Environmental Movement’s progress from its origins to the late 1970s. It also mentions how relevant this force was in Ecuadorian politics from the 70s to the 80s. After the founding of the most important organizations in this chapter, Fundacion Natura and Accion Ecologica, this movement grew and split into two dominant camps known as, the “ecodependent” ideal type and the “ecoresister” ideal type, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Fundación Natura, according to the Global 500 Environmental form, is “an Ecuadorian non-profit, non-governmental organization whose mission is to promote a national conscience dedicated to an improved, just and integrated quality of life for the population and the conservation of the environment.” Accion Ecologica, stated by Frontline Defenders, “is one of the main environmental organizations based in Ecuador. It campaigns on a range of issues including oil extraction, exploration and pipeline transport, Amazon Rainforest protection, food sovereignty, biofuels and plantations for carbon offsets.” What makes these organizations considered to be ecodependent is the fact that they became professionalized and worked hand-in-hand with international supporters. What makes these organizations “ecoresisters” is how they are against extractive development, how they mobilize communities and battle transnational polluters. The title of this chapter is “Origins, 1978 to 1987: Ambientalistas and Ecologistas Emerge” and Tammy Lewis represents this very well. Reading this chapter, you will notice the words “Ambientalistas” and “Ecologistas” mentioned quite frequently. Ambientalistas means “environmentalists” and Ecologistas means “ecologists”. You will also see the words “Environmental Movement” written many times. These three terms are the most important in this section of the book, in my opinion.

*Keywords: Ambientalistas, Ecologistas, Environmental Movement*

In my summary, I mentioned an organization called Fundación Natura. This group is small, but mighty. It consists of university-educated scientists and self-proclaimed “nature lovers”. These scientists played a major role in the Environmental Movement has they were the group that started it all. In 1978, it was registered as a nonprofit organization based in Quito. Their work focused on the conservation of species and ecosystems. These Ecuadorians wanted to raise consciousness and awareness to the environment. The organization started off with only volunteers who were part-time staff. It was considered to be the dominant organization from which many others spun off. One of their first projects was airing a television show called “Education for Nature” which was sponsored by Ecuadorian business that aired on Sunday nights. This organization saw hope in the private sector. Lewis states, “They believed that the private sector damaged the environment due to ignorance, not because there was an inherently problematic relationship between industry and the environment.” Fundación Natura is known for their reformist tactics. “They sought cooperation, negotiation, and compromise. They attempted to change the system within, and to create working relationships with the institutions of power, namely industry and government. They saw this as the best means to help Ecuador.”

*Keywords: Fundación Natura, Volunteers, Education*

The other sub-group mentioned in my summary is known as Acción Ecologica. This group is also known to be the most “radical green” group in Ecuador. Looking back, it is shown that their early work consisted of more social work than ecological which is ironic considered it was started by a bunch of biologists. Some projects they bravely take on include battling against the extraction and disturbances that surround mining, oil, mangroves and forests. What I found to be particularly interesting is that most of those making up the AE crew are women. They are known as “eco chicas” which I find to be really empowering, especially because I am a woman working towards being a scientist with knowledge in biology, ecology and many other sciences. Being the strong staff that they are, they fight against the government and industry’s extractive development paradigm. They have been fighting oil extraction in the Amazon since 1989. That shows dedication and passion for positive change.

*Keywords: Women, Biologists, “Eco Chicas”*

There are many similarities between the group but even more differences. An example of a commonality these two groups share is that they want to educate the people of Ecuador and others on the importance of the protection of the environment. A few examples of how they are different include, Acción Ecologica has never received funding by the United States Agency for International Development in which Fundación Natura has. Natura also tends to focus on biological diversity and conservation whereas Acción focused more on human-environmental interactions which included social and economic factors. Their approach was also more adversial than Fundación Natura’s approach. They were also more effective in at using the print media to draw attention to environmental concerns. Acción was a “go-to” source for journalists seeking information about the environment and its concerns. Fundación’s views are more neoliberal. However, Fundación Natura promoted better policies and enforcement whereas AE “sought an overhaul and thinking attuned to nature’s and humanities’ needs.”

*Keywords: Commonality, Differences, Education*

I personally support Acción Ecologica more than Fundación Natura because AE works more with campesinos, indigenous people, fisher folk and community women. They work with the people of Ecuador and I believe the people of Ecuador should have a say in what is to be done to their country and their land. Although I may be from the US, I respect that this group is creative and brings new and unique ways to fund themselves without receiving help from the US. I love the fact that most of the crew is made up of women scientists because women are highly intelligent and have relatively good judgement for the most part. I am not downplaying men nor am I saying they are lower. I am simply emphasizing the importance of women in science and the benefits that could follow putting women in that kind of power. I also love the fact that they are women helping other women but still helping Ecuadorian people as a whole. It is stated by, Alexander McNamara, “there have been many incredible and inspiring women who have changed our understanding of the world around us, and we don’t need to wait for Ada Lovelace Day to celebrate them.” I do not agree with the extraction of oil and they have been fighting these industries since 1989. I do, however, very much care about the education of biodiversity and conservation. That was the only factor that really spoke to me from the FN’s side. However, I am not against Fundación Natura. I think they are doing some very important, good things as well.

 *Keywords: Support, Ecuadorian People*

Also mentioned in this chapter, was the explanation of the “debt for nature swap” concept. Lewis describes this swap as “an organization from the Global North purchases a portion of an indebted nation’s (typically from the Global South) debt at a discount on the secondary 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, through smaller than their original debt payments, into the Trust Fund. The beneficiary of the fund is typically an NGO within the country. In Ecuador’s case, their debt was purchased by The Nature Conservancy, The World Wildlife Fund-US, the Missouri Botanical Garden, and the Frank Weeden Foundation. The recipient of these organizations was Fundación Natura. … Debt-for-nature swaps were a successful mechanism for creating funds for conservation in Ecuador.” This stage eventually came to an end because of the massive earthquake that rocked Ecuador which caused the loss of many human lives, and destruction of the primary oil pipeline. Keep in mind, Ecuador’s number one export was and is oil. “The period ends in 1987, not just for the environmental movement reasons above but because it coincides with these changes in the state’s debt repayment policies. … Under the military government, Ecuador became severely indebted.”

 *Keywords: Debt-For-Nature, CTF, Oil Pipeline*

Citations

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