

## **Revisiting the «Revolution of the Poncho»: Catholic Activists and the Politics of Representation in Ecuador (1960s-1980s)**

This research project analyzes the entanglements between religious and lay actors related to the Catholic Church and the formation of the Indigenous Movement in Ecuador. The connection between these two subjects is perceptible through encounters of actors belonging to different social contexts on a transnational, national, regional, as well as on a local level.

In line with the ecclesiastical reforms resulting from the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), Latin American clerics criticized the elitist character of their institution and the many forms of repression and violence on the continent. Proclaiming “the option for the poor” by the late 1960s, their orientation towards the socially and economically disadvantaged became the nucleus of a strong but contested reform project. The focus on worldly problems came along with new pastoral practices and discourses, as well as new spaces of participation for the laity. Theologians and philosophers – mostly from Latin America – subsumed this wide range of manifestations and discourses related to Catholic Activism into the Theology of Liberation.

In Ecuador, religious actors with a liberationist mission were often working in rural areas where their interventions aimed at supporting the “Indians” to end their centuries-old state of oppression and at establishing a proper “Indigenous Church”. In the same period, grassroots mobilization became stronger in the area. Concentrating at the beginning mostly on issues of land rights, social movements turned their focus more and more on cultural rights, and more explicitly, indigenous rights. In 1990, when mass protests paralyzed the country, the Ecuadorian indigenous movement became internationally known as a powerful political player.

Drawing from archival research and oral history, it is argued that Catholic activists had a significant impact on the constitution and transformation of the indigenous movement by actively promoting a notion of “the indigenous” as a political resource. Nevertheless, through the conceptual framework of politics of representation, it is assumed that diverse and creative negotiations on identity were taking place within a contested space, where actors with different interests encountered, and where grassroots organizations as well as the Catholics, used their own understanding of the “other” as a strategic resource.

From an interdisciplinary perspective, the dissertation project combines social movement studies with an evaluation of religious and transnational networks and seeks to contribute to the understanding of ethnicity. This empirical investigation also aims at questioning dominant narratives on “the Indigenous” or “the poor”, and along with that, the prominent narratives of Ecuadorian Catholics that came to call this period of mobilization the “Revolution of the Poncho”.

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