

Contradictions of Progress: Visions of Modernity, Infrastructure, and Labor in Late Nineteenth-Century Ecuador

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An abiding sense of history . . . coupled with attunement to the rhetorical dimensions of knowledge-production and policymaking, can instruct us in how we are to understand 'progress' and all that passes in its name.

—Deepika Bahri

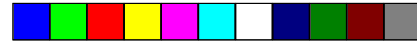
[In Ecuador,] while horses and mules are called *bagajes mayores*, asses and Indians are called *bagajes menores*; that is to say, as a beast of burden, the Indian is considered below the horse and the mule, and on a level with the donkey.

—Friedrich Hassaurek

This essay is a micro-history of nationalism and transnationalism in a rhetorical mode. Focused on topoi of modernity and progress in nineteenth-century Ecuador, it traces the circulation of values, ideas, and dispositions that build nationalism across continents and national borders and finds that circulation at work in the actions of rhetors from indigenous peons to foreign scientists. The larger goals of this micro-history are two-fold: 1) to explore the benefits that accrue to rhetorical historians through attention to recent work in transnational studies; and 2) to illustrate the contributions—methodological and theoretical—that rhetorical historians can make to studies of transnationalism.

Scholars of transnationalism have long acknowledged, but only occasionally examined, the long histories that prefigure and inform our

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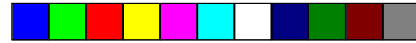


present transnational moment (see, for example, Bahri “Response”; Friedman; Hutchings; Khagram and Levitt; Randeria). For our part, scholars in composition and rhetoric are increasingly aware of the effects that contemporary transnationalisms have on contemporary rhetorical practices (see, for example, Bahri “Terms”; Dingo; Hesford and Schell; Kang; Schell). This article, in turn, brings to light existing but implicit resonances between recent work in rhetorical history and the theories and methodologies currently shaping transnational studies within and beyond composition and rhetoric. It demonstrates how paying attention to rhetorical circulation *as transnational* can enrich our historical understandings of local rhetorical practice, of the constitution of national publics, and of the nature of nationalism.

The article begins, however, with three character sketches—three positions from which to encounter the transnational intricacies of national infrastructure, national sovereignty, and national identity at work in a specific local context: late nineteenth-century highland Ecuador. Through these sketches and the details that follow them, I elaborate one example of how agents-in-conflict have long adopted and adapted transnational concerns in their efforts to stabilize or contest national identities. Throughout this essay, the three figures introduced below embody a larger context, standing in for and highlighting the historical and social complexities that underlie and inform my analysis.

The Foreign Traveler

First: Imagine yourself as a European or North American visitor arriving in Ecuador by sea during the late nineteenth century. Perhaps you are a private citizen in search of new experiences, one of a small body of global tourists. More likely you are a semi-professional—a mountaineer looking to best previous attempts at scaling Ecuador’s Andean peaks; a naturalist hoping to expand understanding about flora, climate, and animal life; or a priest sent (or summoned) to add to the religious and intellectual life of this relatively new nation. In any case, you plan to travel from the coast to Ecuador’s capitol, the highland city of Quito. You therefore face a daunting journey. From the port of Guayaquil, you must trek through

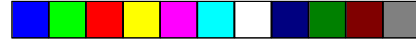


tropical forests, scale the western *cordillera* of the Andes, and then trek through a series of inter-Andean basins before arriving in Quito several weeks later, assuming you are fortunate in weather and roads (and avoid illness, infection, and hypothermia). If you are like many of your foreign peers, your travel journals will be filled with harrowing accounts of tropical heat and mountain frost; mudslides and rain; disreputable guides and sullen indigenous porters. You will be yet another “shivering traveler” who “hurries over the lofty pass to avoid the dreadful gusts that may hurl the rider from his horse” (Hassaurek 8). You might very well return home to publish the story of your adventures in that backwards but exotic country to the south. In those public tales you might, like the British mountain climber Edward Whymper or the U.S. diplomat Friedrich Hassaurek, comment regularly and with some disdain on Ecuador’s social infrastructure: the former describing the “gangs of unkempt Indians, who humbly doffed their hats as they passed by” on mountain trails (6); the latter noting that “[in Ecuador,] [w]hile horses and mules are called *bagages* [sic] *mayores* [heavy draft animals], asses and Indians are called *bagages* [sic] *menores* [light draft animals]; that is to say, as a beast of burden, the Indian is considered below the horse and the mule, and on a level with the donkey”(186).

In your version of those descriptions and your accompanying commentary, you will likely make clear that the state of the roads, the foibles of the local population, and even the extremes of geography and climate that you encountered all mark the new Republic as marginal, underdeveloped, and unable to properly care for (or exploit) the raw materials available to it. Though you, like the Ecuadorian elites who host you, think of Indians as your natural inferiors and complain of their recalcitrance, laziness, or dishonesty, you will also almost certainly link your critiques of their mistreatment by Ecuadorian *mestizos* and *Criollos* to your overall judgment as to the character of the nation, its government, and its citizens.

The *Criollo* Citizen

Now, change places and become an upstanding Ecuadorian citizen of the same time. You are most likely light skinned and trace your cultural



heritage to Spain (you are, in other words, a *Criollo*). You are literate. And you are male.¹ For the purposes of this sketch, you are a member of the highland *Criollo* elite—you live part-time in Quito or one of the other highland cities, but own a large parcel of farmland outside the city. You may have traveled outside the boundaries of Ecuador and likely do your best to be informed about political and cultural trends in key Latin American urban centers and in Europe.² When you now ponder that trek from the coast to the highlands, you face a somewhat different daunting journey than you did when in the guise of the foreign visitor. Like the visitor, you might well need to travel from the coast to the highlands: you might seek to bring imported goods into the mountains or sell highland produce outside the reaches of your local Andean valley. In this sense, you have much the same infrastructure problem as the traveler. You complain regularly that bad roads, dishonest muleteers, and resistant indigenous laborers make transport costly, complicated, and sometimes impossible. You also, likely, perceive yourself to have a modernity problem, one made palpable in the critiques that travelers voice as they stay in your home or that you read when their published work makes its way back to Ecuador. Educated and culturally identified with Europe, you chafe at the descriptions of your nation that circulate beyond its borders and hope to foster instead a narrative of Ecuador as a nation progressing toward modernity (a modernity defined by the Euro-American texts you read, the local scientific discussions you encounter, and the civil associations you join).³ You seek to establish and circulate an idea of Ecuador that upholds what you view as the ideal qualities of civilized Europe but also brings them into being in a particularly American or Ecuadorian way, correcting the excesses and failings of the Old World. At the same time, you harbor a fear that the travelers are right, at least about the majority of your compatriots. As you reflect on national geography or agriculture, you might well complain, like the geographer Manuel Villavicencio, that though Ecuador is “rich and fecund in all species of products . . . all those elements of prosperity are found in the state of nature because the hand of man has done nothing to take advantage of them” (vii). You might also, like the novelist Juan Leon Mera, link that failure to exploit resources to your sense that Ecuador’s increasingly mixed-race people have too readily assimilated the passive nature of the Indian (33). In order to attain

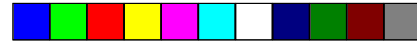


modernity and national greatness, you might argue, Ecuador must return to the active, *Criollo* tense: develop its natural resources and establish efficient means of transport so that those goods might travel within and beyond the country.

These two basic problems of infrastructure and of modernity haunt you, by the way, whichever of the day's strongly held and diametrically opposed political beliefs you happen to subscribe to. Whether you are a Catholic Conservative or a secular Liberal, you likely feel strongly that the central government must focus on infrastructure development, building the highways and railways that prompt what you might, like one Conservative official in 1862, describe as the "dawning of national progress" (Laso 8) or, like a Liberal delegate to the 1896 Constitutional Assembly, "the civilizing ideal" that circulates "generous blood" through the nation (Mora Lopez 38). Similarly, even if you are a Liberal who in other contexts would decry the oppression of indigenous debt slaves on highland *haciendas*, in your hortatory appeals for progress through infrastructure development you will likely not mention the fact that much of that development will be carried out through the conscripted, underpaid, and often forced labor of indigenous peons.

The Indigenous *Comunero*

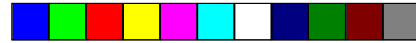
That *Criollo* citizen's exploitation of his Indian compatriot, of course, brings us to the third sketch. I'd like you to stand now in the place of a highlands indigenous man. Though you may well never travel beyond the boundaries of Ecuador, your life and labor are implicated in a wide circuit of exchange and intimately connected to those questions of infrastructure and modernity that trouble the foreign visitor and the *Criollo* citizen. For the sake of this sketch, you are a *comunero*, meaning that you hold your land in common with your indigenous neighbors and keep yourself somewhat separate (to the extent possible) from your *Criollo* and *mestizo* compatriots. In particular, you have avoided contracting your labor out to any of the nearby large landholders and have thus evaded the status of *concierto*.⁴ However, your freedom from formal debt obligations makes you vulnerable to the excesses of local authorities. You and your



neighbors are the major source of labor for public works projects designed to improve infrastructure and promote modernization. If you live in a community near Quito, it's quite possible that you already have a standing obligation to provide labor that benefits the order and hygiene of the city: tending street lamps, sweeping streets, or removing garbage. You and your neighbors are also regularly summoned to repair local bridges and roads and to work on larger projects like the construction of the railroad from Quito to Guayaquil. When foreign travelers seek local government help for their scientific explorations, you are likely to be conscripted to carry their equipment over mountain passes and through jungles.

Whatever your particular situation, you are likely accustomed to evading conscription when possible by heading for the hills when local authorities come looking, putting forward your existing obligations to your family or to religious festivals, and petitioning local representatives of the central government to intervene on your behalf in order to stop exploitative labor practices. You might, like the residents of Nayón in 1897, find yourself using one set of obligations to evade another. They based their objection to being conscripted for rebuilding a local bridge on the fact that “we are obliged to provide our labor every fifteen days for the public hygiene of Quito and, in addition, we are currently engaged to work the road and bridge that the Jesuits are planning to build” (“Nayón & Zámiza”).⁵

Of course, in a context where access to literacy, affluence, and ethnic privilege all put your community at a disadvantage, your efforts to avoid conscription are complicated, piecemeal, and unevenly effective. In the case of that petition from Nayón, for instance, the petitioners themselves seem to have avoided direct recruitment, but only because the municipality directed the request for laborers to another indigenous community that had fewer resources for resistance (Guzman). Still, as Kim Clark (a present-day historical anthropologist) says of you: “Repeatedly, Indians appropriated the discourse of the central state, and rather forcefully and cogently argued that they were timid and ignorant and thus deserved protection from the state, particularly in relation to labour issues” (56).⁶



From Sketches to Paintings

My attempt to sketch something of the transnational circumstances of nineteenth-century Ecuador via textual images of three social types has dual purposes: it provides readers a shorthand introduction to the scene in which this essay unfolds, and it invokes a larger history of social-type depiction in Ecuador, one that plays a role in the transnational circulation of ideas, values, and capital during the nineteenth century. Paradoxically, by emphasizing the local, that tradition of identifying and depicting social types linked naturalists, authors, and artists in Ecuador with a wide network of travelers, artistic genres, work opportunities, and philosophical orientations that exceeded the grasp of, yet was intimately connected to, the nation-state.

In the pages below, I explore nationalism and transnationalism through the types introduced above and through related artifacts of visual culture. In other words, I will link those initial *sketches* of Ecuadorian subjects to *paintings* of Ecuadorian subjects in order to illuminate something of the transnational processes by which notions of modernity and progress infused the creation and discussion of Ecuadorian sovereignty and, along the way, helped the idea of the nation wield rhetorical force.

As they appeared both in the bodies of the three figures introduced above and the artistic genre examined below, the problems of infrastructure and modernity—their nature and definition and the available means of response—were problems with transnational scope and implications. The ideas of modernity at work were local and global. They emerged in the interactions of metropolitan values, neocolonial paternalism, and State centralizing. Similarly, projects of infrastructure development served national and transnational objectives. They allowed for the dispersal of central government authority within the borders of the nation and the influx of foreign investments from outside those borders; they made national territory and populace available to the economic, political, and cultural influence of the central State and the outside visitor. Arguments invoking progress and modernity, then, simultaneously fomented national sovereignty and imbricated the nation in global flows of value and capital that complicated, modified, and perforated the supposedly sovereign state.

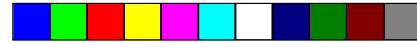


An underlying goal of this essay is to prompt greater acknowledgment of the reality that national sovereignty, both in nineteenth-century Ecuador and in present-day nation-states, is always intersectional. In this sense, my argument aligns with Etienne Balibar's assertion that "the formation of independent, sovereign, unified, or homogenous nation-states . . . *failed* in a very large part of the world, or it was *thrown into question*" (75). Where Balibar sees failure, though, this essay sees the inevitable rhetoricity of sovereignty and the nation-state. One of the conceptual resources that rhetorical history contributes to transnational studies, in other words, is the idea that sovereignty, far from being a fixed state of control that preceded a recent emergence of transnationalism, has always been a constitutive notion that negotiates internal and external material conditions and cross-border movement. Sovereignty, at any given moment, is as much a rhetorical tool as it is a verifiable status.

It might seem strange to pursue questions of national sovereignty, infrastructure development and modernity by looking at paintings. Indeed, the pages that follow will show that discussions about progress and public works in Ecuador did occur regularly in textual contexts. However, it is in the guise of *costumbrismo*, an intricately transnational nineteenth-century genre, that we can today most clearly see how the three figures above, their inter-relations, their involvement in infrastructure, and their shared immersion in anxieties of modernity emerge into arguments about and for the nation. *Costumbrismo* condenses the layered concerns of this essay, making them visible in watercolor brushstrokes and the lines of pencil sketches.

Costumbrismo, or "customs and habits" painting, is a form of romantic realism that developed in Europe and the Americas alongside an increased interest in local character and the idea of the nation.⁷ Its primary subjects are popular social types and picturesque figures. In Ecuador, *costumbrista* artists depicted a wide array of popular scenes, focusing especially on religious festivals, everyday street life, and popular commerce. They identified and repeated stereotyped local figures like the bread seller, the porter, and the washer-woman. Indigenous laborers were among their most frequent subjects.

Costumbrismo developed in Ecuador in large part thanks to foreign travelers who wanted to take home series of social type images as



mentos of their visit. Some of those travelers were artists themselves who shared their work with Ecuadorian artists, some brought artist companions who did the sharing, and others commissioned Ecuadorian artists who had learned the style from previous visitors. Upper-class Ecuadorians soon joined those foreign visitors as the market for *costumbrista* images.

Through their depictions of the popular classes and quotidian affairs, *costumbrista* paintings gave the nation (and its foreign visitors) a bounded and easily circulated vision of itself. Though the modes of depiction specific to *costumbrismo* clearly owe a deep debt to outsiders like the foreign travelers, the genre's ability to link images of popular figures to national identity has a wider history in local art history. Ecuadorian *costumbrismo* draws on other [also European-inflected] genres such as eighteenth-century caste painting (which identified and cataloged the "race" mixtures emerging out of the colonial encounter between Spain and the Americans) and historical paintings that attempted to recapture the glory of the Incan empire in order to provide a non-colonial history for the newly independent American state.

Art historians generally agree that Ecuadorian *costumbrista* images should be seen in terms of an emerging national identity (see, for example, Muratorio; Pérez). Images that depict the indigenous men who were recruited to build roads, clean streets, and light lamps, then, link *costumbrista* artists' work to larger projects of public infrastructure creation—projects designed and carried out to promote national well-being and, symbolically, enter Ecuador in the pantheon of modern nations. My analysis of such images suggests that they helped circulate a narrative of progress and modernity that covered over a more contentious history of indigenous exploitation and resistance. That narrative worked, in part, by picturing indigenous men as docile laborers in need of *Criollo* paternalism rather than as threateningly resistant leaders of communities who might interrupt the development of *Criollo* national sovereignty and national identity. In turn, such images of docile, available laborers helped support *Criollo* citizens' arguments about the modernity of their nation even as they depicted visually non-modern laborers.

In the remainder of this essay, I make two moves related to that argument. First, I explore *costumbrismo* and its nationalist impulses as

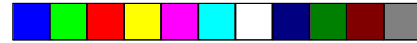
transnationally constituted. That elaboration draws on scholarship in both transnational studies and rhetorical history, using its close analysis of *costumbrismo* to gesture toward the valuable resonances between those two bodies of scholarship. Then, I turn more particularly to *costumbrista* images of public works labor to suggest how that transnationally constituted idea of the nation allowed Ecuadorian *Criollos* to imagine national coherence and justify their dominance.

Moving Rhetoric and Transnational Nationalism

In their introduction to *The Transnational Studies Reader*, Sanjeev Khagram and Peggy Levitt elaborate a working definition for transnational studies and outline five intellectual foundations or approaches to the field. While each of those approaches offers a point of entrance for rhetorical scholarship, the final two approaches (which Khagram and Levitt suggest have been least explored by scholars to date) resonate particularly with the concerns and projects of rhetorical studies. The fifth foundation, which Khagram and Levitt term “public transnationalism,” speaks most to rhetorical criticism with a contemporary focus. The fourth, “philosophical transnationalism,” offers, despite its invocation of rhetoric’s old antagonist, a significant point of entry for rhetorical historians. According to Khagram and Levitt, “Philosophical Transnationalism starts from the metaphysical assumption that social worlds and lives are inherently transnational” (2). They continue,

Such a view requires an epistemological lens or way of researching, theorizing, and understanding social relations that allows analysts to uncover and explain the transnational dynamics in which bounded and bordered entities are embedded and by which the latter are constituted.

That assertion “does [not] mean that every question evokes a transnational answer or that cross-border forces and factors are always at play,” but it does “bring into sharp focus the interaction between different levels and sites of social experience” (2). This call for epistemologies and methodologies that explain bounded constructs like nations in terms of wider



flows offers a perfect opening for the insights of rhetorical historians who are fundamentally interested in the resources available for argument, the shapes those arguments take, and the ways those arguments move within and beyond their immediate context.

By suggesting that this approach to transnational studies offers particular resonances for rhetorical historians, I do not mean to suggest that rhetorical history is always transnational or that all rhetorical historians attend to “the interaction[s] between different levels and sites of social experience” (2). A proliferation of influential scholarship in rhetorical history, however, does suggest that rhetorical historians have begun to elaborate theory and criticism that examine rhetorical practices and objects as dynamic (see, for example, Finnegan and Kang; Hawhee; Olson, “Resisting”). This trend has produced new ways of approaching rhetorical artifacts that directly offer those “way[s] of researching, theorizing, and understanding social relations” in terms of the transnational that Khagram and Levitt advocate (2).

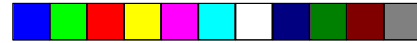
One of the primary ways that rhetorical historians have indirectly engaged what Khagram and Levitt term “philosophical transnationalism” is through reconsiderations of rhetoric’s moving force as physical, social, and circulatory. *Movement* has long been a key feature of the rhetorical. From the three classical offices of rhetoric (to delight, to instruct, and to move) to the themes of Kenneth Burke’s unfinished “Motives” triptych, rhetoricians have repeatedly articulated rhetorical force in terms drawn from the Latin root *movere*. Historically, perhaps, that use has emphasized the cognitive sense of rhetoric’s persuasive impact. Recent scholarship, however, suggests that physical movement is as key to the rhetorical as is the notion of “being moved.” That work positions itself as pushing rhetorical scholarship itself into motion: breaking a reliance on Cartesian dichotomies (Hawhee 166), flushing out stagnant frameworks (Edbauer 9), animating rhetorical artifacts (Hawhee and Olson 132–35), or displacing antiquated talk-and-text models (Deluca and Wilferth 13). Each of these authors also makes clear that rhetorical force is more than a matter of directional persuasion—it moves, pervades, turns back on itself, and circulates.

It is that last descriptor for the movement of rhetorical force that is of particular use for approaching transnational phenomena like *costumbrismo*

from a rhetorical perspective. When Lester Olson invokes the importance of movement in the history of rhetoric, he reminds his readers that rhetoric moves (and makes changes) via patterns and repetitions: *move*, *motive* and *motif* share a common root (*Emblems* xvii). Olson, in *Emblems* and in subsequent scholarship (see, for example, *Franklin*; “Resisting”), demonstrates that the movement of images and their appropriations requires rhetoricians to maintain rigorous notions of audience and author, production and situation that take into account flows of economic and social capital. John Trimbur similarly urges scholars in composition and rhetoric to pay attention to the delivery, or circulation, of texts in order to see how they differently wield “the productive means to name the world, to give it shape and coherent meaning” (209). Such emphasis on the circulation and differential constitutive force of rhetorical objects and actions resonates as well with theories of publicity that play major roles in recent rhetorical scholarship emphasizing ideas of democracy, nationalism, and national identity (see, for example, Finnegan and Kang; Hariman and Lucaites; Warner).

In the case of *costumbrista* painting, it is essential to emphasize the economies of scientific exploration, tourism, and art consumption that drive the genre’s development and situate its rhetorical force both in Ecuador and beyond. We must follow how *costumbrismo*, *costumbrista* artists, and artistic ideologies *moved*. I have already suggested something of Ecuadorian *costumbrismo*’s generic transnational heritage. That transnational nature, visible in the interactions of travelers and local artists and in the adaptation of European ideas to the local context, is echoed in the training and experiences of the genre’s key actors. Understanding local manifestations of *costumbrismo* and the bounded aims of its producers and purchasers in terms of the transnational flows in which they developed and to which they responded is key to understanding the local rhetorical force those artifacts wielded.

Nineteenth-century Ecuadorian artists, including some who produced *costumbrista* images, often journeyed to Europe for training in the academies of Spain, Italy, and France, using metropolitan credentials to gain legitimacy as artists in their home country. Those artists who did not travel often studied with or sought training from artists who had.⁸ During *costumbrismo*’s heyday, Ecuador’s emerging central State specifically

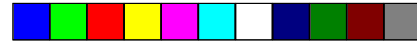


promoted artists' travel and linked it to both the development of national identity and the promotion of modernity. In particular, the administrations of Gabriel García Moreno, who dominated Ecuadorian politics from 1859 through 1875, funded scholarships for artists to study in Europe as part of a concerted campaign to promote Ecuadorian national identity.⁹ García Moreno was also responsible for bringing into Ecuador many of the scientists and travelers who introduced Ecuadorian artists to the techniques and ways of seeing that underlay *costumbrista* artwork. Ecuadorian artists gained local prominence and recognition through their ability to demonstrate the values and techniques whose prestige moved across borders and carried with it assumptions about modernity and progress that, though often Euro-centric in origin, were incorporated in different ways in each new locale.

One of the key ideological orientations that *costumbrista* artists and their compatriots picked up from scientific visitors was an interest in realistic positivism (Kennedy-Troya). Placing high value on painting "from life" and experiencing the natural world directly, those artists produced their work based on photographs taken by expeditions and went out into the city and country to observe the landscapes, flora, and social types they depicted. Even the genre's deep fascination with the local, in other words, evinces transnational influence.

It is difficult to make generalizations about the audience for *costumbrista* artwork in Ecuador. Using archival documents, artists' writing, and images to trace connections and interrelations among artists, scientists, and political figures, however, suggests that *costumbrista* images did pass before the eyes of those responsible for promoting the idea of the nation and guiding the young nation-state toward modernity. For the sake of space, I'll trace just one of those circuits which, though perhaps among the more extensive, nevertheless suggests the ways *costumbrismo* filtered into the interstices of Ecuadorian political and intellectual life. This particular circuit traces the movement of work by the artist Joaquín Pinto.

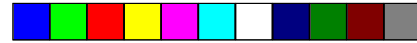
In his own period, though Pinto was closely connected with the prominent artists of the day, his inability to study in Europe, his relative economic marginality, and his interest in popular subjects kept him at the edges of prominence. Still, Pinto held several important teaching posi-



tions, including stints as a painting instructor at the School of Painting in Cuenca (Ecuador's third largest city) and at the School of Fine Arts in Quito. His appointment to those positions suggests that he was recognized and respected by artists with greater political pull.

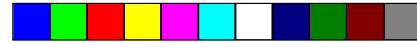
Those connections included the artist, mountaineer, and Liberal politician Luís A. Martínez, who appointed Pinto to Quito's School of Fine Arts in 1904. Martínez played important roles in Ecuador's artistic and political life and expended significant energy toward establishing Ecuador as a modern nation with a dignified history. He published two treatises on modern agriculture that sought to integrate Anglo-American techniques into the Ecuadorian context and, as a young man, learned to love mountaineering thanks to interactions with foreign explorers. Similarly, Pinto enjoyed a life-long collaboration with the priest, historian, and archeologist Federico Gonzalez Suárez, a prominent figure in Ecuador's religious and political life at the turn of the nineteenth century. As archbishop of Quito, Gonzalez Suárez brokered compromises between the Liberal administrations in power between 1895 and 1911 and the conservative interests of the Catholic Church. In both his historical treatises and his apostolic publications, Gonzalez Suárez elaborated a vision of Ecuadorian national identity that, though more conservative than Martínez's, similarly depended on a blended narrative of indigenous history and *Criollo* modernity. In both these cases, though it would be a mistake to suggest that Pinto's artwork had been primarily influential in shaping later ideological positions, it is clear that the ideas about the nation that Pinto elaborated in his artwork were part of the imported fabric of national identity on which those more politically prominent men drew when they imagined the nation.

Similarly, we know from these interactions that Pinto himself was interested in elaborating ideas about the nation in his artwork, often using strategies imported from elsewhere. In addition to the artistic influences shaping his focus on local character, his ongoing dialogue with figures like Martínez, Gonzalez Suárez, and the French-Ecuadorian naturalist Agustín Cousín surely deepened Pinto's appreciation for local history and culture through encounters with far more widely circulating notions. Pinto's illustrations for Gonzalez Suárez's archeological projects and Cousín's compendium on Ecuadorian snails would have introduced the



artist not only to the techniques of natural history realism that influenced his painting style but also to those scientists' larger projects of elaborating evidence about and for the sake of the nation-state. The idea that establishing history, attending to everyday objects, or depicting local plant and animal life was tied to the identity and nature of the nation was certainly part of Cousín and Gonzalez Suárez's modern, scientific orientations. Since Pinto worked closely with both men and established long-term connections with them, it is reasonable to imagine that these themes and interests developed for him in concert with those of his collaborators. In addition, Pinto evidently encountered and was intrigued by the folkloric-nationalist projects of his older compatriot, the Conservative novelist, intellectual, and politician Juan Leon Mera. On the back of several of his *costumbrista* sketches, Pinto reproduced snippets of a popular song taken from a compilation put together by Mera. Mera's writing was explicitly nationalist, grounding Ecuadorian national identity in the popular, even as Mera the politician supported *Criollo* policies of progress and development and Mera the intellectual engaged in extensive transnational debates over the justifications for American independence.¹⁰ Pinto, well read and well connected, if not himself politically prominent, engaged both the visual styles advanced by these various collaborators and the ideological inclinations that fed them. Whether or not Pinto's artwork directly influenced the thinking of those more politically and socially powerful colleagues, it was certainly part of the larger milieu in which those artists, intellectuals, scientists, and politicians imagined their nation. Like them, Pinto advanced national identity using tools both profoundly local and utterly transnational.

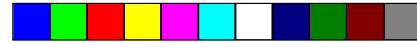
What this extended example of the circuits in which Joaquín Pinto's artwork moved tells us about *costumbrismo* and national identity is that the identifications at work in even an apparently local, romantic, and minor genre must be seen in terms of larger trends and complexes of circulation and re-circulation. *Costumbrismo* and its vision of the nation emerged out of interactions among foreign and national rhetors, economies, and ideologies. They were not tied to specific nation-states but, in their movement among them, helped constitute national edges. *Costumbrista* objects, in turn, circulated in both national and transnational contexts. They were purchased, carried, and exchanged by travelers,



diplomats, and scientists who crossed borders yet used those images to imagine stable places. *Costumbrismo*, in other words, aggregated local and transnational trends to achieve its meaning and force. The inspiration, production, and sale of *costumbrista* images depended on forces and values that exceeded national boundaries and carried constitutive influence outside the purview of national sovereignties, all while forwarding a particular ethos of the local. The images, their producers, and their purchasers crossed national boundaries, made arguments about the nature of the nation through pictorial scenes, and circulated a vision of the Ecuadorian nation-state in ways strikingly similar to how other artists in other places were simultaneously depicting the uniqueness of other nation-states.

The ways that *costumbrista* images moved and the complexes of production and value that accompanied them should be familiar to anyone conversant with ideas of the transnational. The terms that Nancy Fraser uses to describe our current transnational moment might just as well be applied to late nineteenth-century Ecuador and *costumbrismo*: the “mobilizations of public opinion” embedded within those late-nineteenth-century images “seldom stop at the borders of territorial states” and the “interlocutors [positing visual definitions of national identity] do not constitute a *demos* or political citizenry” (14), yet they are intimately involved in creating and sustaining an idea of the nation.

The multiple levels on which *costumbrismo* and related materials circulated suggest the need for new elaborations of those rhetorical treatments of circulation and publicity outlined above, particularly in terms of the ways such circulation constitutes publics and nationalisms. To date, most explorations of rhetorical circulation have focused on the circulation and appropriation of specific artifacts within specific national boundaries. Lester Olson, Cara Finnegan and Jiyeon Kang, and Robert Hariman and Lohn Lucaites all trace particular objects and demonstrate how those objects contribute to larger understandings, serve as arguments about the nation and national sovereignty, and illustrate larger trends. Implicit in all those treatments of rhetorical circulation (though especially in Olson) is the idea that the circulation of rhetorical objects themselves is not the only means of rhetorical circulation that is important for the constitution of publics or even the rhetorical force of specific



objects. Paying attention to the values and ideas that circulated within and behind specific *costumbrista* objects makes that realization explicit. In order to fully appreciate the complexly transnational constitution of national publics, whether in the contemporary moment or historically, we must pay attention to the ways that values and ideas circulate **across** not just **within** specific artifacts. To understand *costumbrismo*, as my brief elaboration on Pinto's milieu above suggests, we must also attend to scientific documents, to the movements of tourists and adventurers, to the textual and experiential transposition of ideologies, and to the circulation of aesthetic and economic value. When our goal is to understand the rhetorical force borne by any specific *costumbrista* image, it matters as much where and via what means those inter-related ideas and values traveled as it does who painted, commissioned, or purchased a particular print. The wider approach sketched briefly in this discussion of *costumbrismo*, then, stretches the scope of rhetorical circulation and rhetorical history, examining not only the movement of individual images (as they are produced, sold, published, moved) but also the public-making, constitutive circulation of the values and common sense that accumulate across images, public documents, and private exchanges.

It is this broader notion of rhetorical circulation as something that occurs in both the movement of distinct objects and in the recurrence of themes, ideas, and commonplaces over time that I believe is most in concert with recent work on transnational publics, both benefitting from it and contributing to it. In the case of the three figures from my introduction and the artistic genre examined here, we can fairly easily see that not only did the major players themselves and the artifacts they produced move transnationally, the assumptions and ideas that informed and gave value to those artifacts circulated widely and were appropriated for new uses in new locales. Thus, the national public the three figures engaged and the national public that *costumbrista* paintings imagined was a public built in ways that extended well beyond traditional theories of the public in which participants must have the ability to act as citizens and in which nation-states wield a hermetic sovereignty.

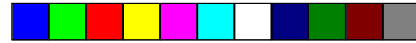


Customs of Modernity

As the previous section established, *costumbrista* images were persuasive artifacts that contributed to the formation of Ecuadorian national identity in the early republican moment, working in concert with widely circulated artistic, scientific, and economic trends. Because *costumbrista* images attempt to depict local life, function as condensations of disparate social forces, and were frequently repeated by different artists in different contexts, there are a number of stories about the idea of the nation and the historical force of transnationalism that can be gleaned from viewing *costumbrista* paintings. This final section will elaborate on one such possible narrative about the nation in which transnational forces collude in nation building: one about public works, labor, and modernity. The tale below may seem less transnational than the material above. And yet, my larger point is that the apparently internal nation-making work described here emerges from and substantially depends on those larger patterns of circulation.

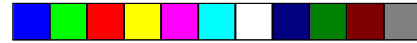
During the late nineteenth century, political leaders in Ecuador launched public works projects with hortatory exclamations about a coherent national progress toward modernity. At the same time, public documents from the era show a more complex history of indigenous organizing and resistance that stalled infrastructure development and obviated the feudal labor structures that underlay the supposedly republican processes of modernization. *Costumbrista* images, for their part, played a middle role between the hortatory words of political leaders and the conflicts of actual labor conscription. They frequently chronicle the activity of public works labor within and around Quito. On the one hand, such images of indigenous laborers make visible the nation-building project's reliance on exploited indigenous effort. On the other hand, they show indigenous workers as fundamentally *available* to *Criollo* leaders and as acquiescing to their demands, subsuming their labor to the good of the nation. In these images, the indigenous laborer, though exploited, is a mostly-docile subject actively engaged in realizing the projects of modernity.

In light of the history of indigenous resistance to labor conscription, that simple fact of depicted availability and acceptance must be seen as



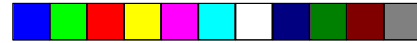
an ideological move. This figure of the docile, pliable indigenous male laborer fits well with the analysis of gendered terms in the process of Ecuadorian nation-building offered by historian Erin O'Connor. O'Connor notes that depictions of indigenous men in court documents and political speeches from the late nineteenth century offer seemingly contradictory images—sometimes positioning those men as helpless, passive children in need of State paternalism and other times depicting them as brutishly violent (especially with regard to their home life). O'Connor writes, “These paradoxical representations of Indian men as both submissive and violent served the same purpose: Indian men’s failure to meet stated gender norms indirectly suggested that Indians failed to contribute significantly to the nation” (55). Thus, O'Connor concludes, images of indigenous men showing them either as brutish or as passive “presented Ecuadorian statesmen with a way to justify Indians’ ongoing exclusion from the nation-state” (xiv) through their extra legal status as perpetual children lacking in the rationality necessary for masculine citizenship. Though O'Connor’s argument, when premised in terms of indigenous access to citizenship, offers essential insights into the constitution of Ecuadorian democracy in the nineteenth century, *costumbrista* images allow us to make an even more nuanced claim in which indigenous people were, in fact, enveloped within ideas of Ecuadorian national identity but were held separate from assumptions about citizenship and active engagement with the national public. In general, *costumbrista* paintings helped *Criollo* elites imagine the passive indigenous laborer as providing a romantic narrative of pastoral nationalism, distinguishing American Ecuador from other nation-states via visual strategies that were simultaneously doing the same work in those other nation-states. In this way, *costumbrismo* defined for indigenous people a secure place in the idea of the nation without threatening the political dominance of *Criollos* or disrupting *Criollo* Ecuador’s effort to access a particular version of global modernity. Paintings of available indigenous laborers gave those laborers national place by way of their work to build the nation and, in turn, invoked the paternalistic, care-taking responsibilities that such labor and docility demanded of *Criollo* viewers.

It is, of course, possible to argue that these *costumbrista* paintings of conscripted laborers merely depict reality rather than advancing a gendered



explanation for political exclusion. Despite resistance and evasion, for the entire nineteenth century (and into the twentieth), *Criollo* elites in Quito were often able to secure the labor of indigenous people for a range of public projects of maintenance and construction. This claim to labor was accomplished sometimes through force and sometimes through coercion, but it did mean that indigenous laborers were common figures at work on the roads and bridges of the region and their appearance in *costumbrista* scenes would have been easily recognizable. However, the depiction of mere reality is never an ideologically neutral activity.

The chosen point of view in these images and their attendant framing of reality tell us a great deal about the assumptions that organize them and give them their force as suasive objects. In the case of Pinto, for example, it is worth noting the difference between the sketch of a landscape titled “where there was an indigenous rebellion in the time of García Moreno” and the images of a lamp lighter from Nayón and an indigenous *peón* wielding a shovel that appeared in Pinto’s album of popular personages produced between 1899 and 1901. All three paintings reference the history of public works labor. The rebellion that Pinto mentions in the title of his sketch began as an attack on two officials responsible for drafting labor for a road construction project (Becker 5). In addition, historians suggest that the increase in indigenous rebellion during President García Moreno’s administrations can be tied directly to his systematic programs of forced labor conscription for national infrastructure construction (Kingman Garcés, Goetschel and Mantilla 365). However, Pinto’s scene of rebellion is depopulated, the indigenous agency of the title has faded into the land and been washed over by the passing decades of *Criollo* dominance. Pinto’s *costumbrista* figures, on the other hand, are visibly engaged in the tasks set for them by elites, and it is those power-holders whose influencing hand is markedly absent. If these images of indigenous people as available means of production are strategic framings of reality, they are also part of the “available means of persuasion” for *Criollo* elites who would have been simultaneously aware of indigenous resistance and deeply invested in imaging a nation-state in control of its corps of indigenous labor and enroute to a national modernity that would eventually supplant those a-modern laborers.



My suggestion that *costumbrista* painting ought to be viewed as ideologically and socially charged is supported by the fact that *costumbrista* artists themselves imbued their work with social messages directed toward the idea of the nation. The early *costumbrista* artist, Juan Agustín Guerrero, for example, painted several sardonic depictions of the relationship between *Criollo* elites and indigenous people, including a painting of an indigenous street sweeper titled “Indian of Zámbez who brought the Police Force to Sweep the Streets.” Guerrero was a committed Liberal whose work regularly denounced the abuses of authority and systems of tribute that exacerbated the poverty of the popular classes, especially indigenous people (Halló 13). Guerrero traveled widely and shared his artwork with colleagues in other Andean nations and beyond. He sought, regularly, to goad his Ecuadorian interlocutors to live up to their own paternalistic ideals and improve the nation. Pinto, whose political leanings are less clear than Guerrero’s, similarly integrated social commentary into his *costumbrismo*. In Pinto’s case, such commentary takes the form of fragments of popular songs appropriate to the subject of his paintings written on the back of his sketches. Those verses, many of which offer gentle social commentary, came from the 1892 compilation of popular songs put together by Juan Leon Mera. In using Mera’s songs to caption his paintings and sketches, Pinto positions his work in conversation both with the social critique offered by the songs themselves and the folkloric project essayed by Mera. The combination of those moves suggests that Pinto wanted his viewers to see the subjects of his paintings as typically Ecuadorian and as meriting the attention of *Criollo* elites. Both Pinto and Guerrero were invested, in other words, in using their art to make the nation visible. They used commonplace images of Indians to call attention to the exploitation and use of indigenous labor and to the roles that indigenous people played in making the nation.

At the same time, this accumulation of *costumbrista* work that gestures toward the social status of indigenous people cannot be seen only through the lens of social commentary because it seeks simultaneously to offer the *Criollo* nation a vision of itself. In its effort to picture the nation, *costumbrismo* practices what Margaret LaWare calls “visual epideictic”: it forwards “claims about the community it addresses, [and] about how [that community] should view itself” in ways that encourage that commu-

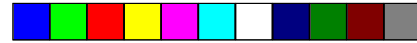


nity to “witness the present” and that “make visible the previously invisible” (230). In this sense of national praise and blame, the mild social commentary of *costumbrismo* overlaps significantly with its portrayal of the available laborer. Making visible the means of national progress, these images of indigenous labor call *Criollos* not so much to a changed vision of the future, as to a renewed sense of paternal obligation toward indigenous laborers as part of the progress of the nation. These images provide a hortatory moderation for *Criollo* elites. They de-emphasize the active resistance of indigenous laborers in favor of the paternalistic responsibility of *Criollos*. In this way, the images of indigenous labor circulated in *costumbrista* watercolors identify the problem of exploitation and, while gently chastising viewers, alter the terms of conflict. They place the worker in service of the nation and invoke a corollary obligation in elites based on that service. These images authorized a vision of the nation for *Criollo* Ecuadorians in which indigenous resistance was anomaly rather than norm and indigenous participation in the national future was safely picturesque. The images also, in their valorization of local customs and their emphasis on local relationships, helped narrate a sense of national sufficiency and national sovereignty whose coherence was complicated even by the medium through which that narrative circulated.

That apparently local negotiation of labor, infrastructure, and modernity in service of sufficiency and sovereignty, however, was far from truly local. The stakes of modernity were oriented both internally and externally. The means for depicting local character were drawn from global aesthetic trends. And the artists and audiences for those images were themselves in motion. The apparent parochialism of *costumbrismo* and its orientation toward internal definition belie its larger context. Keeping that context in mind makes clear that the unique, coherent, and stable nation-state being imagined was, in fact, profoundly porous.

For a Vibrant Rhetorical Historiography

Rhetorical historians are increasingly interested in how nations and publics come into being through the circulation of texts, images, people,



and ideas. That renewed interest in nations and publics from a historical perspective comes at a time when scholars of more contemporary moments have recognized the ways that transnational movement of ideas, people, and capital unsettle many of the nation-state-based assumptions of rhetorical studies. The co-incidence of these trends is, I suggest, not actually coincidental. Bringing greater attention to the resonances between recent contemporary and historical scholarship can allow rhetorical scholars to rejuvenate work in all periods and make greater contributions to the larger body of scholarship on transnationalism, both historical and contemporary. As Wendy Hesford notes,

Rhetorical methods are particularly conducive to identifying how nation-states instantiate and empower certain elements of transnationality and its imagined publics. Transnational publics may be protean, but they are no less governed by rhetorical principles, hermeneutic methods, cultural norms and identifications, and national formations and imperatives . . . we need to explore how transnational public spheres are bound to and intersect with national publics and their discourses. (61)

Rhetorical scholars are particularly well positioned, in other words, to analyze and articulate the interventions and influences of a wide variety of social actors as they move within and across the boundaries of nation-states. Our disciplinary interest in the force exerted by images and texts, rhetors and artifacts, ideas and values pre-disposes us to examine circulation and context.

And yet, rhetorical historians need to hear the same call that K. Dian Kriz recently articulated for art historians. If rhetorical history, like art history, “is to remain vibrant at a time when scholars across the disciplines are recognizing the inadequacy of ‘the nation,’ narrowly defined, its practitioners must acknowledge how much the production of domestic art [or rhetorics] depended on the movement of goods (including images and texts), ideas, people, and capital around the world” (3). This essay has aimed to offer one example of what such scholarship might look like as elaborated in the rhetorical mode. It has traced the transnational scope and influences of a specific genre, *costumbrismo*. That tracing has, in turn, allowed me to gesture toward the wider networks in which the idea of the

Ecuadorian nation and practices of national sovereignty were embedded. Along the way, I have drawn in existing notions of rhetorical circulation and expanded them in order to bring our attention more fully to the complexes in which individual artifacts, genres, and rhetors move. This ranging history, its elaborate staging, and its myriad objects coalesce, I hope, in a greater recognition of the sources, objects, and influences of rhetorical force.

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Notes

1. Ecuadorian Constitutions until 1979 required literacy for citizenship. Women gained access to citizenship in 1929. While some indigenous people and poor *mestizos* did achieve citizenship during the second half of the nineteenth century, citizenship numbers were sufficiently low, access to education in indigenous areas sufficiently limited, and *Criollo* dominance sufficiently established that citizenship remained an elite (and largely light-skinned) status. According to Maiguashca, voter participation records suggest that approximately three percent of the population exercised suffrage in the national elections of 1888 and 1894 (Maiguashca 93). Since voting was legally mandated for citizens (and only citizens had suffrage), those numbers offer a reasonable estimate of citizenship at the time.

2. The pages of literary magazines and reports from cultural societies suggest that such groups regularly sent notices of their activities to similar organizations in other Latin American countries. Those texts also evince significant interest in intellectual trends, influential ideas, and political events well beyond Ecuador's borders.

3. The ideas of modernity and progress embraced by the Ecuadorian *Criollo* elite were multiple and existed in both harmony and tension with the assumptions about modernity carried by foreign visitors. As Friedman has suggested, it is imperative to avoid notions of modernity that posit a true European modernity and a derivative postcolonial modernity. At the same time, at least for the Ecuadorian case, it is essential to acknowledge how postcolonial leaders, in particular, negotiated an internal tension based in precisely the "humiliations and ambivalence of [the] modernity/tradition opposition" that Friedman cautions present-day scholars to avoid recreating (434). As they articulated their own place in modernity, Ecuadorian *Criollo* elites drew on and rejected both the traditions and the modernities of the European world and, similarly, claimed and denied those features of their Andean context.



4. *Concertaje* or debt peonage was a politically, socially, and economically contentious institution in Ecuador from the end of the colonial period through the first quarter of the twentieth century. Political debates over *concertaje* raised basic questions about whether indigenous people were competent to form contracts and whether they inherently needed the care of *Criollo* patrons. *Concertaje* allowed highlands large landowners to hold their own, economically, against the agro-exporters of the coast. Indigenous people, for their part, both evaded *concertaje* as exploitative and sought out debt relations with landholders in order to evade the sometimes worse exploitation of parochial authorities and church officials.

5. The role of the Catholic Church in both the local lives of Ecuadorian peasants and the transnational creation of Ecuadorian national identity cannot be understated. Agreements with Rome brought foreign scholars, scientists, and engineers into Ecuador and helped establish the sovereignty of the central State. The *diezmo*, or obligatory tithe, was extracted primarily from indigenous men and used to maintain the Church's influence at the local and national level. Until its abolition in 1895, the *diezmo* was sometimes collected by the State rather than directly by the Church, further interweaving church and state in economic and political terms. The idea of Catholic Modernity, promulgated by transnational Catholic intellectuals during the papacy of Pius IX, shaped Ecuadorian Conservatism and its approach to state governance and progress.

6. Clark goes on to say that such indigenous petitions, during the period from 1895 to 1925, played a major role in bringing the State into being, given that those petitions called the central government into local affairs, displacing the authority of local leaders.

7. In Europe, "customs and habits" painting emerged on the heels of neoclassicism. Artists moved from the outward-looking, historical focus of neoclassicism to a romantic fascination with their own place and time. It is not coincidental that such attention to the local in artistic genres developed at about the same time that the idea of the modern nation-state came into being.

8. Ecuador's most prominent *costumbrista* artist, Joaquín Pinto, was among those who did not travel outside the country. Though some art historians have linked Pinto's fascination with local types to his lack of European training, it is important to note that Pinto's work and his self-education all carry the marks of his era's transnationalism. Pinto spoke his native Spanish and likely knew Portuguese as well. He also taught himself Latin, Greek, English, French and German. He studied anatomy, theories of perspective, and geometry through imported texts. He worked closely with local intellectuals and foreign travelers more directly immersed in transnational flows. He also developed friendships with his artistic contemporaries and learned from them some of the techniques and approaches popular in the exterior.

9. Several of García Moreno's other projects evince similar fondness for

bolstering national sovereignty via the importation of extra-national population, values, and even political sovereignty. García Moreno's administrations hired foreign scholars and professionals to be the primary professors at a polytechnic institute in Quito, funded traveler-scientists on mountaineering expeditions, and established a covenant with Rome to guarantee religious orthodoxy in Ecuador and secure economic, cultural, and economic concessions from Rome.

10. Unlike many of his Conservative colleagues, Mera actively campaigned for a change to citizenship law that would allow non-literate Ecuadorians access to citizenship.

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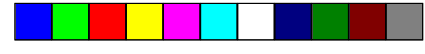
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