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'Gonzalo Oleas, Defensor': Cultural Intermediation in Mid-Twentieth-Century Ecuador

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Abstract. Gonzalo Oleas Zambrano was a socialist lawyer from Quito who, from the 1930s to the 1970s, became deeply involved in assisting rural communities in Ecuador with their legal petitions. Intermediaries have a long and varied history in negotiating relationships between the city and the countryside, and one that is often not well understood. At various points in his career Oleas acted like a *tinterillo*, a socialist and an *indigenista*. An examination of Oleas' petitions quickly breaks down a simplistic characterisation of his actions and interpretation of his motivation. Rather, his ability to transcend existing categories helps explain why rural litigants so often turned to Oleas for assistance.

Keywords: Indigenous peoples, intermediaries, *tinterillos*, socialism, *indigenismo*, Ecuador, Gonzalo Oleas

In October 1942, Aparicio Copara and Isidro Allaunca, two Indigenous workers on the San Isidro estate in Ecuador's central highland province of Cotopaxi, wrote to the Ministro de Previsión Social (Minister of Social Welfare) to complain that the landowner, Víctor Elías Borja, had destroyed their houses and crops.[1] Citing the Civil Code and Labour Code, they protested against their 'violent and unjust eviction' from the estate and asked for the government to intervene on their behalf. The letter closed with a request for a response to be sent to the office of their defender at Calle Mejía 76 in Quito. Since the petitioners did not know how to write, they applied

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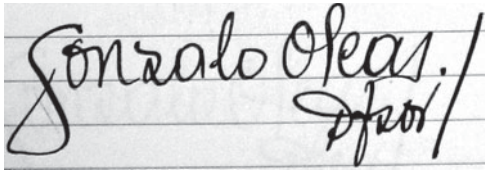
[1] The use of a capital 'I' in reference to Indigenous peoples is intentional, and is based on, and in respect for, the stated preference of the board of directors of the South and Meso American Indian Rights Center (SAIIC) as a strong affirmation of their ethnic identities.

Figure 1. *The Distinctive Signature of Gonzalo Oleas*



Source: Archivo del Ministerio de Previsión Social, Archivo Intermedio.

their thumbprints to the document. Finally, their advocate added his distinctively blue signature: 'Gonzalo Oleas, Defensor'.[2]

This letter launched a lengthy and increasingly repetitive series of petitions to the government complaining of abuses at San Isidro. Furthermore, this was only one of many cases in rural communities from the 1930s to the 1970s in which Oleas became involved during his long legal career. In the Ministry of Social Welfare archives in Quito, Oleas makes repeated appearances in cases throughout the country. The frequency of his appearances, which include surfacing in the middle of legal disputes in some of the most unexpected places, draws attention to him and the role he played in mediating relations between rural communities and the dominant culture. Although a public figure, the countless documents that Oleas drafted and signed say surprisingly little about who he was, what he thought, or what motivated his actions. What they do reveal, however, is that in many rural communities he was a trusted advocate. In selecting someone to defend their legal interests, Andrés Guerrero points out, petitioners needed to take care that this person had the proper political connections and did not have enemies who would prejudice their case.[3] In addition, because Oleas prioritised the interests of his clients rather than advancing a political cause or ideology, he became a valuable ally for Indigenous communities.

Cultural Brokers

The roles of intermediaries such as Oleas in negotiating relationships between the city and the countryside has a long and varied history, but one that is, for the most part, poorly understood. Their actions can be traced back to the colonial period, and even to Spain. For several decades after independence the office of the *protector de indios* (Indigenous protector) continued earlier patterns of having a person from white society mediate legal or cultural

[2] Aparicio Copara and others to Ministro de Previsión Social, 8 April 1943, Archivo del Ministerio de Previsión Social, Archivo Intermedio, Quito, 1–2 (hereafter AMPS), caja 194, carpeta 3.

[3] Andrés Guerrero, *Administración de poblaciones, ventriloquía y transescritura: análisis históricos, estudios teóricos* (Quito: FLACSO, 2010), p. 338.

conflicts on behalf of rural dwellers. An 1854 law in Ecuador removed Indigenous peoples from the tutelage of local political or religious officials, thereby shifting control of these negotiations from the government to private individuals.[4] Among those who subsequently provided such services in the nineteenth century was José Peralta, a well-known liberal journalist, politician, academic and lawyer, who supported rural litigations and in the process became a spokesperson for the poor.[5] Oleas was by no means the first person to petition on behalf of Indigenous communities, but he did represent the emergence in the twentieth century of heightened struggles over who would negotiate relationships between Indigenous communities and the dominant society, and the creation of a new layer of competition over who would benefit from the negotiation of cross-cultural contacts.

During his decades of work with rural communities in the Ecuadorean highlands, Oleas played the role of a cultural broker who could operate effectively in two very different environments, often thriving on the tensions inherent in linking dissimilar worlds. Eric Wolf argues that brokers not only worked to bridge differences, but also had a strong motivation to perpetuate these divides in order to retain their strategic advantages.[6] Margaret Szasz notes that mediating cultural boundaries requires extraordinary skill – 'Their grasp of different perspectives', she observes, 'led all sides to value them, although not all may have trusted them'.[7] The presence of cultural brokers in rural communities could not be easily defined in positive or negative terms, and often had consequences well beyond what intermediaries intended or what their clients may have immediately realised. Furthermore, Charles Wagley draws a distinction between 'traditional brokers' and 'new brokers'.[8]

[4] Alfredo Rubio Orbe (ed.), *Legislación indigenista del Ecuador* (Mexico City: Instituto Indigenista Interamericano, 1954), p. 58. Derek Williams examines this law in 'Popular Liberalism and Indian Servitude: The Making and Unmaking of Ecuador's Anti-Landlord State, 1845–1868', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 83: 4 (2003), pp. 697–733. In 1855, Ramón Castilla, the Peruvian president, enacted a similar reform that permitted people to pursue legal challenges without the need to contract the services of a lawyer: see Carlos Aguirre, 'Speaking for the Subaltern? The Role of Legal Intermediaries in the Shaping of Legal and Political Cultures in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Peru', unpublished manuscript.

[5] María Cristina Cárdenas Reyes, *Libertad y liberación en la obra de José Peralta* (Quito: Fundación Friedrich Naumann, 1989).

[6] Eric R. Wolf, 'Aspects of Group Relations in a Complex Society: Mexico', *American Anthropologist*, 58: 6 (1956), pp. 1065–78.

[7] Margaret Szasz, 'Introduction', in Margaret Szasz (ed.), *Between Indian and White Worlds: The Cultural Broker* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), pp. 6, 19. Also see Irwin Press, 'Ambiguity and Innovation: Implications for the Genesis of the Culture Broker', *American Anthropologist*, 71: 2 (1969), pp. 205–17; and Nancy Shoemaker (ed.), *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

[8] Charles Wagley, 'The Peasant', in John J. Johnson (ed.), *Continuity and Change in Latin America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964), pp. 46–7.

Traditional brokers, who included property owners, priests and informal lawyers known as *tinterillos*, focused on internal relations and were a force for continuity rather than change. On the other hand, new brokers interacted with a broader political economy as they became a force for change.

Oleas laboured during a period when Ecuador shifted from a pattern of traditional brokers to one of new brokers. Increasingly, popular intellectuals emerged in rural communities who displaced outside intermediaries and subsequently assumed a key role in formulating alliances with those who would place Indigenous peoples and their interests at the centre of debates on the shaping of Ecuador's future. Traditional brokers constructed what Guerrero has famously termed a 'ventriloquist's image'. A key issue is that of who was speaking in the documents that Oleas wrote. 'The words of the document are the work of a ventriloquist,' Guerrero argues, 'a social intermediary who knows the semantic field that has to be put into the mouth of the Indians, who knows the content, the range and the tone of what the Liberal State is willing and able to understand'.[9] The voice we are hearing, according to Guerrero, is not authentically Indigenous, but rather a mediated one that reflects to a certain degree the concerns and interests of the scribe.

Michiel Baud is less critical of intermediaries than Guerrero. As 'bridge' characters, he notes, people like Oleas 'recorded the grievances of the Quichua-speaking, illiterate population' and 'transformed local parlance into texts that were acceptable for legal or political purposes'. While elites typically cast intermediaries in a negative light, Baud postulates that instead they 'might more appropriately be called a local intelligentsia, popular intellectuals who were able to formulate more or less coherent ideas about society'.[10] As intellectuals, they contributed ideas and strategies to the communities with which they worked.

Like Baud, Hernán Ibarra applies Gramsci's ideas of organic intellectuals to the mediating roles that tinterillos and others played in negotiating relationships between the government and Indigenous communities. From Ibarra's perspective, Oleas would have 'filtered' Indigenous demands, 'giving them an appropriate form that would be acceptable and understandable for the authorities to whom they were addressed'. Although not having Indigenous authorship, his petitions could contain 'an expression that

[9] Andrés Guerrero, 'The Construction of a Ventriloquist's Image: Liberal Discourse and the "Miserable Indian Race" in Late 19th-Century Ecuador', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 29: 3 (1997), pp. 589–90.

[10] Michiel Baud, 'Liberal Ideology, Indigenismo and Social Mobilization in Late Nineteenth-Century Ecuador', in A. Kim Clark and Marc Becker (eds.), *Highland Indians and the State in Modern Ecuador* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007), p. 87. For a broader treatment of popular intellectuals, see Michiel Baud and Rosanne Rutten (eds.), *Popular Intellectuals and Social Movements: Framing Protest in Asia, Africa, and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

corresponded to Indigenous thought'. This discourse might include elements of piety and compassion, denunciations of Indigenous destruction and requests for protection. It often contained overtones of appeals to morality in addition to demands for legal justice.[11]

Broadly, in the twentieth-century Andes, intermediaries tended to fall into one of three categories. First were the tinterillos, commonly local intelligentsia with a little knowledge of the law who used their education and social status to assist rural communities with legal petitions. Tinterillos were often opportunists and were only rarely committed ideologically to the needs or concerns of the petitioners, but instead willingly inserted themselves into local disputes for their own financial gain. The Mexican anthropologist Moisés Sáenz complained in 1933 that tinterillos 'made a career of defending the Indian, complicating the trials, embroiling problems, making efforts, always with a view to charging a tribute payment, a gift, or payment of a greater amount in cash'.[12] Sáenz's study was one of a series of reports he wrote on Indigenous peoples in different countries in the Americas. He provided key inspiration for a second group of intermediaries who were known as *indigenistas*, educated outsiders who paternalistically sought to assist impoverished and exploited Indigenous peoples, often with the goal of assimilating them into the dominant *mestizo* culture as a path to overcoming their poverty. This group founded the Instituto Indigenista Ecuatoriano (Ecuadorean Indigenist Institute, IIE) in 1943, as the local branch of the Instituto Indigenista Interamericano (Inter-American Indigenist Institute, III), which was based in Mexico. A final group was comprised of politically motivated agents for social change. Like indigenistas, these activists were educated outsiders. Like tinterillos, they often developed close relationships with rural communities. Rather than using their position for personal gain, however, they used it to press a political agenda. The members of this group were commonly affiliated with the relatively small Partido Comunista Ecuatoriano (Ecuadorean Communist Party, PCE). In line with the dictates of the Moscow-led Communist International, this party emphasised the building of worker–peasant alliances as it attempted to increase its presence in rural communities.[13]

Despite his important and visible role as an intermediary, Oleas did not fit neatly into any of these three categories. Ecuadorean law defined tinterillos as 'those who exercise the profession of attorney without a legal title', and

[11] Hernán Ibarra, 'Intelectuales indígenas, neoindigenismo, e indianismo en el Ecuador', *Ecuador Debate*, 48 (Dec. 1999), pp. 80–1.

[12] Moisés Sáenz, *Sobre el indio ecuatoriano y su incorporación al medio nacional* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1933), p. 135.

[13] Marc Becker, 'Indigenous Nationalities in Ecuadorian Marxist Thought', *A Contracorriente*, 5: 2 (2008), pp. 1–46.

provided for a penalty of three months to three years in prison and a fine of 100 to 1,000 *sucres* for those who violated the statute.[14] Oleas did have a law degree, however, even if he tended to act as somewhat of an ambulance-chaser. Furthermore, it would be difficult to argue that Oleas was motivated purely by financial gain. He was actively involved in the Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano (Ecuadorean Socialist Party, PSE), serving as its secretary-general and as an elected official in government. The government repeatedly imprisoned Oleas for his political actions, a hardship that it is unlikely he would have been willing to suffer were he primarily interested in improving his financial situation. In the 1930s the PSE was the third-largest party in Ecuador and a serious contender in electoral battles to wrestle governmental control away from the traditional Liberal and Conservative parties. Unlike the Communists, who enjoyed a strong base of support in rural communities, the Socialists largely held sway among urban workers and intellectuals. It was less likely that someone from the Socialist Party would become politically involved in rural struggles than would a Communist adherent. Furthermore, Oleas came from a moderate wing of the Socialist Party, and his pursuit of electoral office as well as leadership roles in the party hints that a desire for personal power and prestige may have provided a stronger motivating factor for his actions than any leftist ideologies. Seeing Oleas as an indigenista is equally problematic, both because he did not run in the same circles as those who led the IIE, and because he had a more immediate and intimate involvement in local struggles than did most indigenistas – the majority of indigenistas remained far removed from the areas and people involved in the cases, with their professional careers in distant urban centres.[15]

Who exactly was Oleas, and why did he have such a heavy footprint in rural legal petitions? Was he a maverick out to make a name for himself through the exploitation of an ignorant and uneducated population? Was he altruistically (and perhaps paternalistically) attempting to protect marginalised peoples? Was he deeply committed to social justice and a political project designed to realise those objectives? Unfortunately, archives are too often silent on issues of motivation, and given the complicated nature of the human spirit, overlapping and even contradictory forces may have driven Oleas to action. From the perspective of the dominant culture, Oleas alternatively appeared to act as a tinterillo, indigenista or Marxist. In contrast, from the perspective of rural community leaders, the failure of Oleas to fall clearly into any of these

[14] Federico Páez, 'Ley para el juzgamiento de los tinterillos', *Registro Oficial*, 1: 210 (10 June 1936), pp. 360–1.

[15] A. Kim Clark, 'Shifting Paternalisms in Indian–State Relations, 1895–1950', in Clark and Becker (eds.), *Highland Indians and the State in Modern Ecuador*, pp. 89–104; Mercedes Prieto, *Liberalismo y temor: imaginando los sujetos indígenas en el Ecuador postcolonial, 1895–1950* (Quito: FLACSO, 2004).

categories worked to their advantage. Because Oleas was not closely identified with a clear and stated ideology or structural agenda, communities were able to maintain a greater degree of autonomy in their actions than if they had turned to opportunistic tinterillos, paternalistic indigenistas or politically motivated Communist activists. Furthermore, Oleas had the advantage of holding the credentials of an actual law degree, which many intermediaries lacked. In addition, he had familial and social connections to pivotal players, not only on a local but also on a national level, and these extended beyond what many local organic intellectuals could offer. In contracting Oleas' services, all of these factors played to the advantage of rural communities. Oleas was a successful and sought-after intermediary not because he fitted easily into one of these categories, but precisely because he transcended them.

Gonzalo Oleas

Gonzalo Oleas Zambrano was born on 16 February 1916 to Neptalí Oleas and Imelda Zambrano in Riobamba, the capital of Ecuador's central highland province of Chimborazo. The Zambranos were one of the most powerful and politically connected families in Ecuador. Family members occupied a variety of political posts – Gonzalo's older brother Neptalí, for example, served as mayor of Quito, governor of Carchi, director of prisons, sub-secretary of the Ministry of Public Works and director of the Junta Central de Asistencia Pública (Public Assistance Coordinating Body, JCAP).[16]

Oleas grew up in the midst of immense political shifts that rocked the country. In the 1920s the collapse of a cocoa export boom and growing economic disparities brought an end to a series of peaceful transitions of presidential power and led to a dramatic increase in political instability. On 15 November 1922 police forces massacred striking workers in Guayaquil, giving birth, through a baptism of fire, to Ecuador's modern labour movement. A military coup on 9 July 1925, known as the Revolución Juliana (July Revolution), attempted to modernise the country's governing structures.[17] Less than a year later, in May 1926, socialists held a national assembly in Quito to form the country's first leftist party. In the midst of these challenges to their power, traditional elites struggled to maintain their privileged position in society. Profound societal realignments provided opportunities for new

[16] *Diccionario biográfico ecuatoriano* (2nd edition, Quito: R 2 M Producciones, 1985/6), p. 120; 'Desígnose nuevo director de la Junta Central de Asistencia Pública', *El Comercio* (Quito), 3 Sept. 1951, Registros de Prensa desde Enero de 1950 a Enero de 1970, Archivo Nacional de Medicina del Museo Nacional de Medicina 'Dr. Eduardo Estrella', Fondo Junta Central de Asistencia Pública, Quito (hereafter JCAP).

[17] A. Kim Clark, *The Redemptive Work: Railway and Nation in Ecuador, 1895–1930* (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1998); Juan J. Paz y Miño Cepeda, *Revolución Juliana: nación, ejército y bancocracia* (Quito: Abya-Yala, 2000).

political players to rise to the surface and negotiate relationships between rural communities and the dominant elite ruling structures.

Oleas attended the San Felipe secondary school in Riobamba and graduated from the Pedro Vicente Maldonado high school. In an era and a province that still suffered from high illiteracy rates, Oleas benefited from the privilege of a good education. In 1934, at the age of 18, he enrolled in the Universidad Central (Central University) in Quito, where he quickly gained a reputation as a student activist and Socialist leader. In his first year at the university Oleas led about 50 students to the National Congress in protest against the conservative perennial populist leader José María Velasco Ibarra, who was serving the first of his five terms in office. In December 1934 Oleas helped lead a strike against university policy that first shut down the university and then led Velasco Ibarra to close the university.[18]

Four years later, with a freshly minted law degree and at the young age of 22, Oleas began his long career of petitioning on behalf of rural workers on landed estates. He always dressed in dark colours because he thought they made him 'appear more serious'.[19] In 1943 a North American writer, Albert Franklin, described Oleas as 'carrying on an important part in the fight to educate the Indian into a place in the modern world'. He had learned the Indigenous people's language in order to work more efficiently in their midst. Franklin depicted the lawyer as being at odds with wealthy landholders, while intellectuals were 'shocked by the intimacy with which *el Dr.* Oleas will discuss Ecuadorean social legislation in Quichua with red-ponchoed Indians'.[20] While Oleas might have been a maverick, Franklin did not find it that difficult to understand his role as a cultural broker. In a sense, as Guerrero observes, Oleas worked as an anthropologist who created an ethnographic subject and history to press subaltern demands with the government.[21]

While working closely with Indigenous petitioners, Oleas also maintained warm relations with those in power, including those who were known exploiters of rural communities. In 1947 Oleas sent a letter to Alfonso Zambrano (apparently a relative, perhaps a cousin) in the name of the Socialist Cell 'Chimborazo' congratulating him on being named director of the JCAP, the government agency that administered the state-owned haciendas which were the target of many of his petitions.[22] Zambrano responded that he hoped

[18] Luis Alfonso Ortiz Bilbao, *La historia que he vivido: de la 'guerra de los cuatro dias' a la dictadura de Páez* (Quito: Corporación Editora Nacional, 1989), pp. 163–6.

[19] Diego Oquendo, *Frente a frente: cien entrevistas a personajes nacionales y extranjeros* (Quito: Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, 1977), p. 15.

[20] Albert B. Franklin, *Ecuador: Portrait of a People* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1943), p. 77.

[21] Guerrero, *Administración de poblaciones*, p. 404.

[22] Gonzalo Oleas and Juan B. Barba Z., Secretarios General y de Actas y Comunicaciones de la Célula Socialista 'Chimborazo', to Alfonso Zambrano O., Director, Junta Central de Asistencia Pública, Quito, 10 Dec. 1947, JCAP, Oficio no. 72.

to use this position to advance a socialist agenda, but he made no mention of defending subaltern concerns.[23] Later that year, Neptalí Ulcuango, an Indigenous leader from the northern hacienda of Pesillo, brought his demands to Zambrano and the minister of social welfare, Alfredo Pérez Guerrero, without much success.[24] When Oleas' older brother Neptalí assumed the directorship of the JCAP several years later, he complained about the problem of private renters becoming wealthy from government-owned haciendas through unscrupulous administrative practices. Neptalí Oleas pressed for more efficient management with the aim of making the estates more profitable in order to fund the Junta's social welfare projects, but he said little about advancing the interests of Indigenous workers.[25] Such actions seem to indicate that these leaders came from a political class that was socialist in name only, or a Left with a strong Eurocentric orientation that embodied little interest in advancing subaltern concerns. Nevertheless, Oleas could play on his connections with power elites to the advantage of his petitioners. In 1944, for example, the administrator of the Colta Monjas hacienda denounced Manuel Chuqui Naula, one of Oleas' clients, to the authorities as a Communist because of his leadership of a land struggle. Fortunately Oleas had a nephew in charge of the police who arranged for him to be released.[26] Social and political connections of this kind meant that Oleas was a valuable intermediary for rural communities.

Zumbahua

One of the first cases in which Oleas became deeply involved concerned Indigenous workers demanding their rights on the government-owned Zumbahua hacienda in the province of Cotopaxi. Oleas directed most of his petitions to the current JCAP director, Gregorio Ormaza, or to other officials in the Ministry of Social Welfare in Quito. The workers turned to Oleas to help them petition government officials only after failing to gain redress from

[23] Alfonso Zambrano O., Director, JCAP, to Gonzalo Oleas and Juan B. Barba Z., Quito, 29 Dec. 1947, JCAP, Oficio no. 486-G, Comunicaciones Dirigidas 'G', Julio–Diciembre 1947.

[24] José Yánez del Pozo, *Yo declaro con franqueza (Cashnami causashcanchic); memoria oral de Pesillo, Cayambe* (2nd edition, Quito: Abya-Yala, 1988), p. 168. In his interview in this book, Ulcuango mistakenly states that the JCAP director was Gonzalo Oleas.

[25] Neptalí Oleas Z., 'De la beneficencia a la asistencia pública', *El año ecuatoriano 1952–1953*, 1: 1 (March 1953), pp. 129–32. At the same time, Oleas defended himself from charges of fraud: see Dr. Neptalí Oleas Z., 'He hecho todo lo humano y correcto para cumplir mi cometido', *El Día* (Quito), 12 March 1953, JCAP, Registros de Prensa desde Enero de 1950 a Enero de 1970.

[26] Eileen Maynard, 'Leadership Patterns', in Eileen Maynard (ed.), *The Indians of Colta: Essays on the Colta Lake Zone, Chimborazo (Ecuador)* (Ithaca, NY: Department of Anthropology, Cornell University, 1966), p. 111.

General Francisco Gómez de la Torre, who leased the estate. 'We have not obtained an answer or worse the intervention of the Junta, owner of the Zumbahua hacienda, in our favour', one letter stated. The leaders had been 'expelled after being labelled Indigenous agitators, simply for having requested a decrease in the tasks imposed by the administration, tasks that could not be completed in less than two days by the strongest man'.[27] In making these demands, Oleas emphasised a concern for social justice for an oppressed people.

Rather than responding to Indigenous concerns, Gómez de la Torre cast Oleas as exploiting the situation to his own benefit. Gómez de la Torre emphasised his reputation as a modern professional (he had been one of the leaders of the progressive 1925 July Revolution), and claimed that he was incapable of abusing people and was tired of seeing unscrupulous people cruelly exploiting the Indigenous workers. 'According to reports that the employees of Zumbahua have given me', Gómez de la Torre wrote, these agitators

> are presented as agents of doctor Oleas and they demand from those poor people large expenditures of money and specie under the pretext of payments for honorariums, etc. etc. If the authorities do not intervene in order to terminate these abuses, I think that very quickly the Indigenous peoples will end in misery, and this should be attributed neither to the Junta, nor the renter, nor the Labour Code, but to the activities of those who are said to be agents of doctor Oleas.[28]

Oleas was thus cast by Gómez de la Torre as being concerned only with undermining Gómez de la Torre's own noble attempts to improve the lot of rural workers and the country as a whole, rather than with advancing Indigenous concerns. From his perspective, Oleas' actions were little better than those of a tinterillo who was unnecessarily stirring up an otherwise calm situation for his own financial benefit.

It is unclear how and why Oleas became involved in the struggles at Zumbahua. On the one hand, his presence is part of a broader pattern of growing urban leftist involvement with rural struggles. In contrast to the relative isolation of Zumbahua in the Andean mountains, however, much of that activism took place on estates at Milagros and Cayambe, close to the urban centres of Guayaquil and Quito, which facilitated communication and

[27] Gonzalo Oleas to Director de la Junta Central de Asistencia Pública, Quito, 6 March 1939, JCAP, Comunicaciones Recibidas, Primer Semestre, 1939, 956, 957; Gonzalo Oleas to Señor Director de Asistencia Pública, Quito, 9 Feb. 1938, JCAP, Comunicaciones Recibidas, Primer Semestre, 1938, 1076–7. For more detail on the Zumbahua case, see Marc Becker, 'Indigenous Struggles for Land Rights in Twentieth-Century Ecuador', *Agricultural History*, 81: 2 (2007), pp. 159–81.

[28] Francisco Gómez de la Torre to Director de la Junta Central de Asistencia Pública, Quito, 3 Oct. 1939, JCAP, Comunicaciones Recibidas, Primer Semestre, 1939, p. 968.

the building of solidarity linkages between the two worlds.[29] Furthermore, other rural leaders commonly allied with the smaller Communist Party rather than Oleas' Socialist Party. Oleas also seemingly worked as a lone individual rather than as part of a broader political campaign. He played the role of an intermediary between rural communities and government structures, but the purposes of his actions are not readily apparent. Unlike the Communists, he was not following an established and mandated political line and strategy. Furthermore, Oleas travelled to new areas where other activists had not previously worked. It was as if he were a young hothead out to make a name for himself.

From his initial involvement in Zumbahua, Oleas quickly became enmeshed in a variety of other legal cases for Indigenous access to land rights. In 1942, for example, the lawyer defended community members in their land claims against the Cusín hacienda in Otavalo.[30] Two years later Oleas came to the defence of community members at Caluqui in Otavalo, who asked for the return of land that Luis Felipe Borja del Alcázar, the renter of the neighbouring state-owned hacienda, San Agustín, had occupied in an 'abusive and unjust' manner.[31] Many cases in which Oleas became involved, however, had little to do with struggles against the dominant classes or outside challenges to Indigenous people's rights, and instead focused on internal community conflicts. In August 1944, for example, Oleas signed a letter on behalf of the leaders of the Caluqui *comuna* in Otavalo who pointed to shortcomings in organising their community according to the stipulations of the 1937 Ley de Organización y Régimen de las Comunas (comunas law) that established rural local community structures. Therefore, they asked the Ministry of Social Welfare to intervene in the reorganisation of the comuna.[32] In 1945 Oleas assisted the leadership of the Camuendo comuna with a petition to divide communal property. Citing provisions of the comunas law, his letter underscored that this division 'would not compromise the future of the comuna because it leaves other collective lands in reserve for the

[29] John F. Uggen, *Tenencia de la tierra y movilizaciones campesinas: zona de Milagro* (Quito: Andean Center for Latin American Studies, 1993); Marc Becker, *Indians and Leftists in the Making of Ecuador's Modern Indigenous Movements* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

[30] 'Comisión de los Ministros de Previsión y Gobierno estuvo en San Pablo', *El Comercio* (Quito), 1 April 1942, p. 9.

[31] Andrés Andrango and others to Ministerio de Previsión Social, 22 Aug. 1944, Dirección Nacional de Desarrollo Campesino (hereafter DNDC), Ministerio de Agricultura, Quito, Oficio no. 96.

[32] *Ibid.* The comunas law was published as Federico Páez, 'Ley de Organización y Régimen de las Comunas', *Registro Oficial*, 2: 558 (6 Aug. 1937), pp. 1517–19. For an examination of the law, see Marc Becker, 'Comunas and Indigenous Protest in Cayambe, Ecuador', *The Americas*, 55: 4 (1999), pp. 531–59.

community's pasturing needs'. Given the support of the community and local political officials, Oleas hoped that the ministry would comply with their request.[33]

As a lawyer, Oleas was knowledgeable about Ecuador's laws, and his petitions commonly referenced new and existing legislation to justify his requests. For example, in 1947 he used a Ministry of Social Welfare resolution that authorised possession of communal land which a person had occupied and to which that person held legal title in order to defend Manuel Andrango's claims to his deceased mother's property in the community of Araque in the canton of Otavalo.[34] But neither did Oleas limit himself only to the defence of Indigenous communities. In particular, Oleas helped urban mestizos from Imbabura's provincial capital of Ibarra to colonise Indigenous lands from the Guanupamba and Puetaquí comunas in the canton of Mariano Acosta.[35] Such cases underscored Oleas' lack of ideological commitment and willingness to work for anyone who could afford to pay his lawyer's fees.

Oleas' actions in Zumbahua can also be contrasted with those of his Communist counterparts. When a Communist Party militant, Modesto Rivera, organised workers on the Razuyacu hacienda, the *hacendado*, José Antonio Tapia Vargas, accused him of being an abusive tinterillo who infiltrated rural communities, exploited their ignorance and stirred up social conflict. Tapia Vargas argued that Rivera did not have the professional title necessary to engage in legal work, and he urged the government to sanction Rivera as a tinterillo.[36] Rivera's supporters quickly came to his defence, denying that he was a tinterillo. 'He has never been involved in lawsuits', an Indigenous leader, Dolores Cacuango, stated, 'nor has he charged any honorarium'. Cacuango, in turn, accused Tapia Vargas of using an unscrupulous lawyer to dodge his legal responsibilities and to stir up problems.[37] In contrast to Rivera, not only did Oleas have a professional title, but he also became involved in lawsuits and charged honorariums, which placed him in a somewhat different category from either Communists or tinterillos. In becoming involved in local cases, Oleas transcended existing categories that defined cultural intermediaries.

A curious aspect of Oleas' legal involvement in the Ecuadorean countryside was that local activists who had a lengthy history of petitioning for subaltern

[33] Narciso Castañeda and others to Ministerio de Previsión Social, 1 Oct. 1945, DNDC; Marcos Castañeda and others to Ministerio de Previsión Social, 12 April 1946, DNDC, Oficio no. 352.

[34] Manuel Andrango to Ministerio de Previsión Social, 22 Aug. 1947, DNDC, Oficio no. 563.

[35] Jorge Jácome Varela to Ministro de Previsión Social y Colonización, 1943, AMPS, caja 195, carpeta 3, 1–5.

[36] J.A. Tapia Vargas, 'Desmintiendo las calumnias de un comunista', *El Comercio* (Quito), 24 Sept. 1949, p. 8.

[37] Dolores Cacuango, 'Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios', *El Día* (Quito), 27 Sept. 1949, p. 8.

rights contracted his services for seemingly non-political issues. An example is the case of Agustín Vega, who had come into contact with Communist militants in the 1920s while organising on the Tigua hacienda for an end to abuses and heavy debt burdens, and for peasant ownership of land. In 1940, as the vice-president of the Maca-Grande comuna, Vega contracted Oleas' services for assistance in a case where Jorge Coronel, from the neighbouring Salamálag hacienda, had accused Alberto Pazminó of stealing cattle. As the case went to trial, Oleas drafted witness lists and questions that would help the comuna to establish its land boundaries, and proceeded to represent the community in court. It was not at all surprising to find Oleas present at Maca-Grande – both the comuna and the Tigua hacienda were located in Cotopaxi in the canton of Pujilí, which neighboured Zumbahua, where he had begun his work. What was remarkable, however, was that rather than turning to his allies in the Communist Party, Vega appealed to Oleas for help with this case. The lawyer provided a different type of assistance, one that engaged Ecuador's legal rather than its political system.[38]

Oleas realised enough success to gain a positive reputation among Indigenous litigants and acquire a steady stream of business. His actions, however, raise the question of whether he was ideologically committed to the rights of rural communities, or whether he became involved in these cases simply for the financial rewards or other benefits he might gain. After Zumbahua, most of Oleas' petitions ceased to contain any clearly stated political pronunciations. The lack of an overtly stated motivation on his part is what contributes to the mystery of Oleas' role as a cultural broker, but it also helps explain his appeal to rural communities.

Cachimuel

In parallel to Zumbahua, and in many ways much more typical of his engagement with rural communities, was Oleas' involvement in local disputes in the comuna Cachimuel in the *parroquia* of San Rafael, located in the canton of Otavalo in the northern highland province of Imbabura. In contrast to Oleas' political statements at Zumbahua, his work in Cachimuel was much more complicated and contradictory, with his actions displaying clear slippages between those of a tinterillo, political activist and indigenista. Not only does his involvement at Cachimuel challenge simplistic interpretations of his motivation and point to the complicated roles that cultural brokers played in rural communities, it also highlights the fact that Oleas became an appealing intermediary precisely because he did not easily fall into one of these categories.

[38] Gonzalo Oleas and others to Juez Primero Provincial, 10 Oct. 1940, AMPS, caja 203, carpeta 3, 1–3.

Oleas' initial entry into Cachimuel was to assist with inter-community conflicts. In 1938 Calixto Isama, president of Cachimuel's *cabildo* (community government), contracted Oleas to write to the minister of social welfare and the president of the National Congress in favour of Cachimuel's attempts to maintain ownership of lands at Zanja Pamba. Isama complained that the Otavalo municipal council planned to give the land to Cachimuel's rivals at Tocagón, and this was leading to unease in his community. Isama asked the government to intervene on Cachimuel's behalf to ensure that the lands at Zanja Pamba would go to Cachimuel and not Tocagón. Community leaders asked Oleas to help them demand formal recognition of their rights.[39]

These initial letters gave rise to a lengthy exchange of increasingly repetitive and formulaic correspondence. Petitioners directed their letters to different governmental offices, including the president of the Council of State in Quito. Oleas always signed the letters, although subsequent letters also carried Isama's signature, even though the first letter identified him as illiterate. Had Oleas assumed that Isama could not sign his name only to find out otherwise later? Or had literacy been an intentional arena of political negotiation, and dropping this claim reflected a deliberate political or ideological shift in strategy? Perhaps Oleas had recommended that Isama should present himself as illiterate to gain the sympathy of government officials. Worse, given that this was one of Oleas' first cases, it betrays stereotyped assumptions and a paternalistic attitude that caused him not to even think to ask Isama if he could sign his name. Or perhaps Oleas attempted to position these issues in such a way that would ensure the necessity of his continued presence in the litigation. If community leaders knew how to write petitions, it would partially negate the purpose of bringing in outside intermediaries such as himself. The documents do not provide a clear explanation for his motivation, or indicate why he would choose to frame their legal concerns in the way he did.

From these initial land demands, Isama began to use Oleas' services to petition for other issues. In 1939 Isama and Oleas once again wrote to the minister of social welfare to complain that white inhabitants from the neighbouring parroquia of González Súarez and the town of San Rafaél were pasturing their animals on the comuna's land. Furthermore, the local *teniente político* (civil official) had done nothing to stop this abuse. If local government officials were unable or unwilling to end these incursions, Isama (or, rather, Oleas – it is always difficult to know exactly whose voice and ideas are being expressed in these documents) asked for authorisation to impose fines. To underscore Cachimuel's claims, Oleas appealed to the 1937 comunas law

[39] Calixto Isama to Ministerio de Previsión Social, 25 Oct. 1938, DNDC; Calixto Isama and others to Presidente del H. Consejo de Estado, 1938, DNDC.

to press the comuna's concerns regarding administration of communal property.[40] Repeated references to this law illustrated an awareness of a body of legislation designed to administer Indigenous peoples, as well as a concerted attempt to use these laws to advance their interests. Several months later the petitioners called on the minister of social welfare to order Otavalo's *jefe político* (chief civil official) to comply with the orders and resolutions of the cabildo.[41] This exchange provides an excellent example of subalterns playing off different levels of government against each other, apparently as a result of a suggestion or under the direction of Oleas in his role as a cultural broker.

The comuna leadership, however, did not speak with a unified voice, and rather than challenging structural systems of injustice, former allies now turned against each other. At the end of December 1941 the vice-president of the comuna, José Jacinto Cachimuel, and the treasurer, Antonio Cachimuel, employed the services of Oleas to write to the Ministry of Social Welfare in order to complain that Isama was abusing his position as president of the cabildo to sell comuna land without permission. Whereas previously Oleas had defended Isama, now he was facilitating attacks on the leader. Referring once again to the comunas law, the two petitioners appealed to the minister to send someone to review the situation and return the land to its rightful owners.[42]

A month later, the two Cachimuels repeated their request to have someone from the ministry review the situation in order to verify the legitimacy of their claims. A problem with relying on local officials, the petitions noted, was that they did not have enough independence and disinterested distance to make a fair decision.[43] In a rapid series of letters, they claimed that the president's actions 'demonstrate[d] a lack of honourability and solvency as the representative of the comuna, and this justifies our complaints as well as the desirability of sending a commissioner to establish the truth of these irregularities, because nobody has authorised nor could authorise Calixto Isama to sell that which does not belong to him'.[44] With Oleas' assistance, they asked for government intervention to resolve these problems. Instead of fighting external enemies, comuna members now used the law to battle each other. Rather than fighting the good fight against the dominant culture,

[40] Calixto Isama to Ministerio de Previsión Social, 30 Oct. 1939, DNDC, Oficio no. 3080; Páez, 'Ley de Organización y Régimen de las Comunas', pp. 1518–19.

[41] José Manuel Chalón and others to Ministerio de Previsión Social, 23 Feb. 1940, DNDC.

[42] José Jacinto Cachimuel and Antonio Cachimuel to Ministerio de Previsión Social, 29 Dec. 1941, DNDC, Oficio no. 103.

[43] José Jacinto Cachimuel and Antonio Cachimuel to Ministerio de Previsión Social, 23 Jan. 1942, DNDC, Oficio no. 228.

[44] José Jacinto Cachimuel and Antonio Cachimuel to Ministerio de Previsión Social, 30 Jan. 1942, DNDC, Oficio no. 338.

Oleas appeared to be fomenting internal divisions in order to assure the continuance of his role as a cultural broker, and one that would play out to his benefit rather than to that of the community.

In addition to illegal sales of land, the Cachimuels complained that Isama was not a direct descendant of the original cacique of Cachimuel who had received the colonial title to their land from the Spanish crown. As an outsider to the community in terms of both his birth and temperament, Isama had assumed an inappropriate leadership role and should be removed from office.[45] Another series of increasingly repetitive letters attempted to drive home this point, occasionally adding charges such as mismanagement of funds from an annual rodeo that was to benefit the community.[46] Eventually, the ministry ruled that the Cachimuels' charges were baseless.[47]

Despite an apparent resolution to the problem, internal disputes continued to drag on. In 1944 Jacinto Cachimuel once again employed Oleas' services to write to the Ministry of Social Welfare reiterating that according to the comunas law they should be allowed to make use of their community's land, and that Isama was monopolising these resources even though he was not part of the Cachimuel 'familial clan'.[48] Cachimuel claimed that the comuna's governing body was not acting in the interests of the community. He claimed an innate privilege in properly understanding those interests since his family provided the 'founding members of the community and furthermore the legitimate descendants of the cacique Cachimuel, the sole owner of the lands today converted into the collective patrimony of his descendants'.[49] Oleas' role as a cultural broker had moved far away from his initial involvement in the community as part of a struggle for expanded land rights.

In December 1944 Jacinto Cachimuel saw his opportunity to shift the balance of power in his favour, and in a communal assembly pushed forward his case to become the president of the comuna's governing board. Isama hit back hard in a letter to the minister of social welfare in which he responded to the charges levelled against him. He complained that Jacinto and Antonio Cachimuel had brought in people from neighbouring communities to assure their election to office. These dissidents, Isama claimed, were destroying all of the good work that he had done in the comuna since its founding in 1939. Interesting and significantly, Isama signed the typed letter on behalf of himself

[45] José Jacinto Cachimuel and Antonio Cachimuel to Ministerio de Previsión Social, 3 March 1942, DNDC, Oficio no. 636.
[46] José Jacinto Cachimuel and Antonio Cachimuel to Ministerio de Previsión Social, 31 March 1942, DNDC, Oficio no. 954.
[47] Quoted in Calixto Isama, Juan Villagrán, and José Manuel Antambo to Ministerio de Previsión Social, San Rafael, Otavalo, 16 Dec. 1944, DNDC.
[48] Jaciento Cachimuel to Ministerio de Previsión Social, 28 July 1944, DNDC.
[49] Jaciento Cachimuel to Ministerio de Previsión Social, 2 Oct. 1944, DNDC.

as well as Juan Villagrán and José Manuel Antambo, neither of whom knew how to sign.[50] The letter carries no indication of who might have typed it, or whether Isama had done so himself. Seemingly Isama was now positioning himself as an intermediary, a tinterillo, acquiring skills as a new cultural broker to supplant the actions of Oleas. For Isama, Oleas had reached the end of the useful services he could provide to the community.

Despite years of petitions and the Cachimuels' claims of inherent legitimacy, they were unable to marshal sufficient support to remove Isama from office. Surprisingly, these alliances dramatically reshuffled in 1948, bringing in new leaders and players who further complicated the conflicts. Now the comuna's vice-president, Manuel Cachimuel, its treasurer, Joaquín Cachimuel, and its secretary, Calixto Isama, along 'with all of the inhabitants of the comuna', wrote to the Ministry of Social Welfare to complain that the current president, José Anguaya, was causing problems in the comuna, and that he had assumed a leadership position even though he was not part of the community. His administration had allowed people from Tocagón, with whom Cachimuel had a long-standing conflict, to take over their land. Instead of using Oleas to write this letter, they had a new *defensor*, Doctor Rodríguez A., and asked that correspondence be directed to his house at Calle Ambato 752.[51] The documents contain no indication of how Anguaya managed to be elected and why Oleas had been squeezed out of his role as intermediary, but they do indicate a willingness to bring in new cultural brokers if the current one no longer served a community's interests.

On 19 December 1949, José Ignacio Talenguela, the teniente político of the parroquia of San Rafael, oversaw new elections for the comuna of Cachimuel. The election once again brought back the previous players, with Calixto Isama serving as president, Jacinto Cachimuel as vice-president, and Manuel Cachimuel and Antonio Cachimuel in other offices.[52] The underlying tensions never seemed to disappear, however. In 1957, writing now as president of the comuna, Jacinto Cachimuel asked the minister of social welfare to remove Calisto Isama and Vicente Jetacama from their positions as secretary and treasurer because of their disruptive behaviour. Furthermore, he added, 'more than anything they are exploiting the comuneros with their work as tinterillos'.[53] Even with Oleas now long gone from the scene, the community conflicts continued as before. From all appearances, these local

[50] Calixto Isama, Juan Villagrán and José Manuel Antambo to Ministerio de Previsión Social, San Rafael, Otavalo, 16 Dec. 1944, DNDC.

[51] Manuel Cachimuel, Joaquín Cachimuel and Calixto Isama to Ministerio de Previsión Social y Asuntos Indígenas, 1948, DNDC.

[52] José Ignacio Talenguela, Teniente Político, 19 Dec. 1949, DNDC.

[53] José Jacinto Cachimuel, President of the Comuna, to Ministerio de Previsión Social y Trabajo, 16 March 1957, DNDC.

political shifts were divorced from a growing agitation for agrarian reform that was sweeping the rest of the country.

The archives hold no indication of how or why Oleas left Cachimuel. Perhaps he had extracted as much wealth as he could and was now moving on to greener pastures. The emergence of new intermediaries may have undermined Oleas' ability to operate authoritatively and in a hegemonic fashion in the community. It is also possible that he had stirred up so much conflict and exhibited such paternalistic attitudes that community members finally turned against him and ran him out of town. Alternatively, Oleas may have grown weary of the incessant squabbling and finally decided that his presence no longer played a positive role in the community. Very likely, a combination of factors and motivations on Oleas' part as well as that of the community members led to his departure.

Tinterillos

As the events at Zumbahua and Cachimuel indicate, although on occasion landowners and political elites found Oleas' intervention into local affairs bothersome, he was motivated by much more than political concerns. As Franklin observed, Oleas was 'in the *business* of handling the Indian Communities' legal interests'. He was 'absolutely non-political', the author maintained. Instead, Oleas was engaged in this work 'for the money', which led some observers to see him as exploiting the Indigenous workers. Rather than addressing structural issues of exploitation, Oleas studied legislation in order to manipulate it in order to advance his petitions as far as the law might permit. 'He is a rare Ecuadorian example of rugged individualism', Franklin concluded.[54] While Oleas remained very aware of legislative changes and made active use of them to press the demands of his litigants, many of the cases in which he became enmeshed did not involve larger structural issues of oppression.

Because he had a law degree, technically Oleas could not be considered a tinterillo even though he often appeared to act like one, continually dragging out local conflicts for his own financial benefit. In 1944, for example, Manuel Chuqui Naula and Juan Remache Guillén, two Indigenous leaders from Colta in the central highland province of Chimborazo, contracted Oleas to assist their community in a struggle to reclaim land from the Colta Monjas hacienda. Chuqui Naula recounts that he personally spent 30,000 sucres (US$ 1,560) on these land claims. Charging such high prices quickly became a lucrative business for Oleas. If Oleas were politically motivated, his services should not have been so prohibitively expensive for his rural Indigenous

[54] Franklin, *Ecuador*, pp. 78–9.

petitioners. The presence of a profit motive would appear to cast Oleas in the same light as the tinterillos.

Remache Guillén recounts another struggle for land against the neighbouring landholder, León Pug, for which the Colta activists once again contracted Oleas to assist with their petitions. Pug proceeded to hire Gonzalo's brother, Neptalí, and the two brothers soon came to an agreement in which the Indigenous community lost their land. Even so, in subsequent attempts to gain access to land on the Colta Monjas hacienda they once again contracted Gonzalo's brother, Neptalí, to help with their petitions. The engineer that Neptalí hired to map the hacienda charged 4,000 sucres (US$ 208), seemingly treating the community as if it were a cash cow to serve the financial benefit of outsiders. Feeling betrayed and disillusioned, Remache Guillén stated that 'now they say Gonzalo Oleas only wants to defend the rich and not the Indians'.[55] Not only did local inhabitants challenge Oleas' motivation for becoming involved in their communities, but such statements also point to a political awareness and willingness to renegotiate the roles of cultural brokers when they ran against the communities' own local interests.

Perhaps referring to this part of Ecuador's history, in 1948 an anthropologist, Aníbal Buitrón, published an article in *América Indígena*, the organ of the Mexican-based Interamerican Indigenist Institute, in which he complained about intermediaries who drew Indigenous peoples into 'court cases that are lost before they begin'. Occasionally, these lawyers would represent both sides in a conflict and play the litigants off against each other to their own financial benefit. Without mentioning names but seemingly referring to the Colta case, Buitrón related the case of neighbouring villages that contracted two lawyers who were brothers in order to solve a land dispute. As a result, the peasants wasted all their money and resources on cases that went nowhere and did nothing but enrich the intermediaries, who manipulated the conflicts to their own financial gain.[56] As with the tinterillos, Oleas appeared to have become involved in these disputes purely for his own material benefit. As an anthropologist and well-known indigenista, Buitrón was very critical of the disruptions such intermediaries brought into Indigenous communities. His vision of the interests of Indigenous peoples remained quite at odds with Oleas' actions, even though the lawyer had much more extensive and intimate contact with rural communities and, as a result, arguably should have had a better understanding of their needs.

[55] Maynard, 'Leadership Patterns', pp. 113–14.
[56] Aníbal Buitrón, 'Vida y pasión del campesino ecuatoriano', *América Indígena*, 8: 2 (1948), p. 128.

Socialists

During his first term as president in 1935, Velasco Ibarra engaged in increasingly repressive actions against the Left and imprisoned his Socialist opponents, including Gonzalo Oleas. The following president, Frederico Páez, also arrested Oleas, and exiled him to the Galápagos Islands. This repression increased Oleas' stature among leftists, and subsequently he quickly moved up through the ranks of the Socialist Party. While still a university student, delegates to the party's fourth congress in 1937 designated Oleas as director of their inaugural session. At the end of the congress, in recognition of his skills and contributions, delegates elected Oleas as a member-at-large to their new Comité Ejecutivo Nacional (Executive National Committee, CEN). Half a year later, Oleas led the slate of pre-candidates for the province of Pichincha for the 1938 Constituent Assembly, although a falling-out with the party led to Antonio José Borja replacing him in this position in the July elections.[57] His exile was only temporary, and in November 1943 members once again elected Oleas to the CEN, with Manuel Agustín Aguirre as general secretary.

On 28 May 1944 a broad alliance of workers, students and soldiers overthrew the unpopular presidency of Carlos Arroyo del Río, bringing an end to the hegemony that Liberals had enjoyed for almost half a century. Velasco Ibarra returned to office for his second term in the midst of high expectations for deep social change. In the aftermath of what subsequently became known as the Glorious May Revolution, numerous sectors of civil society gathered to compile and present their demands to the government in the context of this new political environment. Among the groups that held an assembly were Indigenous militants and their allies, who formed the Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios (Ecuadorean Federation of Indians, FEI). In one of his most direct engagements with Indigenous political organising efforts, Oleas was a representative from the PSE to the FEI's founding congress.[58] The creation of Ecuador's first Indigenous federation led to a significant increase in petitions from rural communities agitating for their political rights. Half a year later, Oleas joined Luis F. Alvaro and Ricardo Paredes to intervene in the

[57] Germán Rodas Chaves, *Partido Socialista: casa adentro. Aproximación a sus dos primeras décadas* (Quito: Ediciones La Tierra, 2006), pp. 72, 84, 86; Gonzalo Oleas, 'Contestación del doctor Gonzalo Oleas al Comité Ejecutivo Socialista', Quito: Imp. Editorial de El Correo, 3 July 1938, p. 413, in Hojas Volantes, 1933–1938, D. Polit Partid., Biblioteca Ecuatoriana 'Aurelio Espinosa Polit' (BEAEP).

[58] 'Anoche se inauguró el primer congreso indígena ecuatoriano', *El Comercio* (Quito), 7 Aug. 1944, p. 4.

arrest of Feliciano Pilamunga and Toribio Chacaguaza in the aftermath of an uprising at Sanguicel in Chimborazo. Authorities targeted Oleas, Alvaro and Paredes as outside troublemakers who were to blame for instigating the uprising.[59] Alvaro and Paredes were Communist leaders who had long been advocates for Indigenous rights, but this was one of the few times that Oleas had intervened in Indigenous affairs on such a directly political level. It was also unusual for someone from the moderate wing of the Socialist Party to collaborate so openly with the Communist Party, which had historically maintained close relations with militant Indigenous communities.

Oleas maintained his Socialist allegiance throughout his lifetime, but in his role as a leader of the moderate wing of the party, he was also one of those most willing to ally with Liberals in an attempt to gain political power. In the 1948 election Oleas advocated collaborating with the candidacy of a modernising hacienda owner, Galo Plaza Lasso, in his successful run for the presidency. After two decades of frequent and extra-constitutional changes in government, the Plaza government represented a return to political stability. A banana export boom drove renewed economic growth that helped to create an environment for an unusual series of peaceful transitions between elected governments. The Socialist alliance with the Liberals was highly controversial and slowly began to pull the party in two, with Agustín Aguirre leading a more radical faction in opposition to Oleas' 'collaborationist' wing. After spending two years in opposition to Plaza, in 1950 the main current of the party finally shifted its position and began to collaborate with the government. Oleas took advantage of this opening to join the government as minister of the interior. Two other Socialists joined him in the cabinet in 1951, and served until the end of Plaza's term the following year.

With Oleas' collaborationist wing in the ascendancy, the Socialist Party once again allied with the Liberals in their failed 1952 and 1956 campaigns, and remained in opposition to the populist Velasco Ibarra and conservative Camilo Ponce administrations that followed. Rather surprisingly given his antagonism to communism, in June 1955 the police arrested Oleas together with Segundo Ramos and the Communist Party general secretary, Pedro Saad, for their involvement with a strike at Astral, a company associated with the United Fruit Company, in the coastal province of Esmeraldas.[60] Several years later the police once again arrested Oleas when, in a speech to the Liberal

[59] 'Versión oficial de levantamiento de los indígenas en el anejo Sanguicel', *El Comercio* (Quito), 13 Jan. 1945, p. 1.

[60] '¿Comunismo internacional en Esmeraldas?', *Surcos*, 13: 59 (1955), pp. 13–14; 'Combativo acto sindical fue el homenaje a los dirigentes que estuvieron presos', *El Pueblo,* Epoca 3: 161 (30 July 1955), p. 4; 'Ecuador', *Hispanic American Report*, 8: 7 (1955), p. 323.

Party, he made 'an open call for subversion' against Ponce's Conservative government.[61] Meanwhile, Oleas increased his presence in the party as well as on the broader political landscape. He served on Quito's city council, and in the National Congress in 1956. In April 1958 Oleas participated as an observer for the Ecuadorean Socialist Party at the third meeting of the Comité Consultivo de Partidos Socialistas de América Latina (Consultative Committee of Latin American Socialist Parties) in Santiago, Chile, and was the president of the Cuarta Conferencia del Socialismo (Fourth Socialist Conference), also meeting in Chile.[62] He was not a marginal figure in the Socialist Party, and in fact appears to have been a fairly dogged political climber.

At its national convention in 1960, long-simmering internal divisions brought to the surface by the successful 1959 Cuban Revolution finally led the Socialist Party to split in two. The current secretary-general, Guillermo Jaramillo Larrea, came from the leftist tendency of the party, which had lost the support of the now dominant moderate wing. The majority of delegates at the convention elected Oleas as the new secretary-general, but his nomination received such vocal minority opposition from the left that he stepped down to preserve party unity. When the two factions could not agree on a consensus candidate, they ended up separating. A key breaking point for the party was a disagreement over whom to support in the 1960 presidential elections. Oleas wanted to ally once again with the Liberal Party in a Frente Democrático Nacional (National Democratic Front) in support of the candidacy of a former president, Galo Plaza Lasso. Telmo Hidalgo and Edelberto Bonilla led a more radical group of Socialists who broke from Oleas and allied themselves instead with the Communists in support of Antonio Parra Velasco. Oleas criticised their decision, both because of his ideological opposition to communism and because he feared that this left-wing faction would undermine moderate socialism, pull votes away from the Liberals and hand victory to the Conservatives. Instead, the Oleas faction declared that 'liberalism and socialism had always stood for essentially the same political, economic, and social programmes'. Liberals who had refused to ally with the leftists welcomed the support of Oleas.[63]

Subsequently, left-wing members of the Socialist Party who defined themselves as Marxist revolutionaries formed a new pro-Cuban splinter group called the Partido Socialista Revolucionario Ecuatoriano (Ecuadorean

[61] 'Ecuador', *Hispanic American Report*, 11: 10 (1958), p. 565.
[62] *Quien es quien en Quito, 1966–67* (Guayaquil: Artes Graficas Senefelder, 1967), p. 27.
[63] 'Ecuador', *Hispanic American Report*, 13: 2 (1960), pp. 116–17; 'Socialismo argentino enviará una delegación al XXVIII Congreso del Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano', *El Comercio* (Quito), 24 Dec. 1960, p. 16; Laura Almeida Cabrera and Silvia Vega Ugalde, *Antología* (Quito: Ediciones La Tierra, 2007), p. 17.

Revolutionary Socialist Party, PSRE). The PSRE incorporated some of the most politically motivated dissidents in Ecuador. The two wings of the party traded barbs with each other, with Oleas' wing reaffirming a 'stand against imperialism–Communist and capitalism'. The PSRE retorted that their Socialist opponents were 'opportunists, merely an appendage of the bourgeoisie'.[64] Oleas led the Ecuadorean Left into one of its most difficult periods.

With the Left divided, just as Oleas had feared, Velasco Ibarra won the 1960 elections (his fourth time in office) with Conservative support.[65] Velasco Ibarra's presidency represented an end to economic growth from the 1950s banana boom, and a return of political instability with constant challenges to his rule from both the right and the left. When Velasco Ibarra's government collapsed in 1961, the moderate Socialists supported the government of his more progressive vice-president, Carlos Julio Arosemena. When Arosemena failed to follow through on his promised polices, both Oleas and the PSRE moved into opposition to his government. Oleas claimed that the president had sought their collaboration only to solidify his position in office and had no real interest in including them in governance. The Socialists proposed a popular front for the 1964 elections, and some party activists advanced Oleas' name as a potential presidential candidate.[66] Before that election could take place, however, and with the current president squeezed between left- and right-wing forces, the military stepped in and overthrew Arosemena in July 1963. Oleas' wing of the Socialist Party subsequently moved into permanent opposition to the military government as part of a broad-based 'Junta Constitucionalista' (Constitutionalist Junta).[67]

In January 1964 the military government arrested Oleas, together with Liberal leaders, for attacking the policies of the junta.[68] In May 1965 the military once again imprisoned Oleas for a week for 'political motives'. At that time Oleas claimed that he had been imprisoned on 50 occasions, five of them in the two years since the military had taken power. The imprisonments were 'always for political affairs', Oleas contended, and never for a common crime. He claimed to have successfully used the Habeas Corpus law more often than anyone else to gain liberty for those unjustly detained, including 15 times for himself and 25 times for others. For him, the legal profession was 'an instrument of redemption for the oppressed and persecuted'. Oleas argued that socialism was the future for Ecuador, and that it would emerge from the

[64] 'Ecuador', *Hispanic American Report*, 15: 2 (1962), p. 155.
[65] Darío Villamizar Herrera, *Ecuador: 1960–1990, insurgencia, democracia y dictadura* (2nd edition, Quito: Editorial El Conejo, 1994), p. 29.
[66] 'Ecuador', *Hispanic American Report*, 16: 1 (1963), p. 58.
[67] Marcelo Ortiz Villacis, *El control del poder (Ecuador, 1960–1984)* (Quito: Gráficas San Pablo, 1984), p. 4.
[68] 'Ecuador', *Hispanic American Report*, 17: 2 (1964), p. 151.

ashes after the imperialist capitalism of the United States and the state capitalism of the Soviet Union had destroyed each other.[69] Such comments position him as a serious leader and as possessing an ideology, even though it ran counter to the pro-Soviet Communist Party that engaged in most of the political work in Ecuador's rural communities.

The return to civilian rule in 1966 caught the divided Socialist Party by surprise. Pointing to his desire to build party unity, a year earlier Oleas had said that he looked forward to working together with his Socialist opponents, including the leftist leader Telmo Hidalgo, as well as Juan Francisco Leoro to his right, on behalf of marginalised and exploited people in pursuit of a better country.[70] Now Oleas organised a meeting to unify the different Socialist factions, but all this gathering achieved was that the most traditional or moderate wing of the party broke into two factions, with those unhappy with his personalistic leadership leaving to form a new and ironically named 'Socialismo Unificado' (Unified Socialism) party under the guidance of a former minister, Carlos Cueva Tamariz. In the 1968 elections this wing once again entered into a disastrous alliance with the Liberals that led to the disappearance of that party.

In the midst of all this political turmoil, Oleas maintained his professional activities. What is surprising is that while he kept himself abreast of legislative developments and used them as a basis to advance his cases, he rarely used his petitions to open up more political spaces for his subaltern clients. In 1962, for example, in the midst of growing debates over agrarian reform legislation, Oleas represented Indigenous workers on the Yanahurco hacienda in the province of Cotopaxi in a boundary dispute with the Universidad Central in Quito. When the university wanted to sell part of the estate to Francisco Amador Miño, community members claimed that the land had never belonged to Yanahurco but was in fact part of the neighbouring hacienda, Chalua. With Oleas' intervention, the contested land was excluded from the sale of Yanahurco.[71] This case did not challenge the structural basis of the land tenure system, however. For the previous two decades since the founding of the FEI in 1944, one of the most public and vocal Indigenous demands was for reform of Ecuador's archaic agrarian structures. Activists finally realised their dream, albeit in a partial and incomplete manner, when the military government promulgated agrarian reform legislation in July 1964. Even though Oleas worked extensively with Indigenous litigants, he remained largely removed from these debates. In contrast, Communists faced political persecution, including imprisonment and exile, for their work organising

[69] Oquendo, *Frente a frente*, pp. 15–16.
[70] *Ibid.*, p. 16.
[71] Alfredo Pérez Guerrero, *La universidad ultrajada* (2nd edition, Quito: Editorial Universitaria, 1974), pp. 196–7.

Indigenous movements. Oleas' activities in rural communities had taken him in a different direction – instead of risking arrest for addressing issues of oppression in rural communities where he earned his living as a lawyer, that danger came from his political work in the urban sphere.

In December 1964 Andrés Pallasco from the parroquia of Toacazo in the province of Cotopaxi contracted Oleas' services to write to the Ministry of Social Welfare to complain that a group of comuneros from Pilacumbe had occupied lands to which he held clear title. Reinaldo Guillén, the president of the Pilacumbe comuna, contracted his own lawyer, José María Betancourt Peralta, to challenge Pallasco's claim that the land, in reality, belonged to the comuna. While the archive does not indicate the outcome of the case, it is clear that it touched on issues of boundary disputes rather than altering the country's land tenure process. Furthermore, at the same time that Oleas was being persecuted for his political opposition to the coup government, the ministry's sub-secretary, Carlos Aníbal Jaramillo, commended him for presenting a petition that was clear and precise, and that met the necessary legal requirements. It did not hurt Oleas' petition that the military junta had named the independent Socialist, Carlos Andrade Marín, as head of the Ministry of Social Welfare. Because of his political connections, and because he did not demand structural or economic changes, Oleas could maintain friendly relations with bureaucrats in a government he opposed. Those friendly relations explain why Pallasco sought out his services in filing a complaint against his neighbours.[72]

In fact, Oleas appeared to have realised more success with litigation between neighbours than with cases against the government or elite interests. In January 1972, for example, a group of community members in Esmeraldas contracted Oleas to petition the government for the expropriation of ten hectares of land from the hacienda La Primavera, which belonged to the Fruit Trading Company. According to the petitioners, they comprised 100 families totalling more than 1,000 people who had been living on the edges of the hacienda for five years and needed land to build a civic centre. Appealing to provisions of the 1964 agrarian reform law, they pointed out that the hacienda had vacant land which the community could put to better use. While government officials claimed they had denied Oleas' request because the community did not meet the stipulations as laid out in the law, the case does provide an example of his shortcomings in using legal petitions to challenge political structures.[73]

[72] Gonzalo Oleas to Ministro de Previsión Social y Comunas, Quito, 14 Dec. 1964, AMPS, caja 369, carpeta 3, 1–2; Reinaldo Guillén and José María Betancourt Peralta to Ministro de Previsión Social y Comunas, Quito, 11 Feb. 1965, AMPS, caja 369, carpeta 3, 13.

[73] Gonzalo Oleas and Hugo Cevallos Angulo to Ministro de Previsión Social y Comunas, Quito, 27 Jan. 1972, AMPS, caja 374, carpeta 2, 1; Gonzalo Oleas and Artemio Valarezo

On 15 February 1972 General Guillermo Rodríguez Lara led a military coup against Velasco Ibarra, bringing an end to his fifth and final term as president. Rodríguez Lara suspended constitutional guarantees and exiled several political leaders to the eastern Amazon region. Among those expelled were Oleas, as well as a Velasquista leader, Manuel Araujo Hidalgo; the Liberal leader, Francisco Huerta Montalvo; an agricultural leader, Guillermo Enrique Castro Benítez; and a Socialist, Napoleón Lombeida. The minister of agriculture, Guillermo Maldonado Lince, and the director of the Instituto Ecuatoriano de Reforma Agraria y Colonización (Ecuadorian Institute for Agrarian Reform and Colonization, IERAC), Marco Herrera, also resigned their posts as a result of the coup.[74] This heightened period of repression took place in the context of a deepening conflict between the military government and its opponents. Oleas had denounced the military government and demanded a return to civilian rule, leading to charges that he was conspiring against the junta and spreading false rumours. He died in exile in the Amazon in March 1975 at the age of 59, a victim of a fungus that attacked his bronchio-pulmonary system.

Oleas' life and death raise the question of what exactly his politics were. Many of the party splits in which he was involved appeared to be more personal than ideological in nature.[75] Over the course of this history, Oleas' wing of the party faced criticism for engaging in a personalist style of politics rather than one dedicated to structural changes in society, but nevertheless he held on as leader.[76] Even though he came from the moderate wing of the party, Oleas remained a lifelong Socialist, repeatedly suffering until his death for his political actions. Following a leftward political shift in the late 1960s, he advocated renewing diplomatic relations with Cuba's leftist government. At a 1969 party conference he remarked that it was 'absurd that our international relations should be conditioned by the points of view of the State Department'.[77] When Fidel Castro visited Guayaquil in 1971, Oleas was

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Pinza to Ministro de Previsión Social y Comunas, Quito, 2 Feb. 1972, AMPS, caja 374, carpeta 2, 3.

[74] Gustavo Cosse, 'Reflexiones acerca del estado, el proceso político y la política agraria en el caso ecuatoriano', in Miguel Murmis et al. (eds.), *Ecuador: cambios en el agro serraño* (Quito: Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) – Centro de Planificación y Estudios Sociales (CEPLAES), 1980), p. 412.

[75] Enrique Ayala Mora, *El Partido Socialista Ecuatoriano en la historia* (Quito: Ediciones La Tierra, 1988), p. 19.

[76] Ortiz Villacis, *El control del poder*, p. 46.

[77] F. Parkinson, *Latin America, the Cold War and the World Powers, 1945–1973: A Study in Diplomatic History* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1974), pp. 234–5.

included among those invited to a dinner with the dignitary.[78] Despite opposing the more radical pro-Cuban wing of the party and rarely using his political position to advance subaltern concerns, Oleas still retained a principled anti-imperialist stance. At the same time, he faced repeated charges of operating in a personalistic and opportunistic fashion that raised questions as to his ideology and his motivation for becoming and remaining a Socialist Party militant.

Tinterillo, Socialist, Indigenista

Oleas' constant and very visible presence in Indigenous lawsuits raises the question of whether he was a tinterillo, socialist or indigenista. Rather than clearly falling into one of these categories, Oleas appeared to combine characteristics of all of these roles. He acted paternalistically as an indigenista, doing what he felt was best for the community. On occasion he appeared to be politically motivated, engaging with Indigenous petitioners in order to advance concerns for social justice. At other points his political affiliation seemed to be incidental or irrelevant to his chosen profession. At those times he operated as a tinterillo, opportunistically exploiting Indigenous poverty and marginalisation for his own financial gain. Alternatively, Oleas occasionally appeared to be working to advance his personal power and prestige rather than an overtly ideological agenda. Rarely did structural exploitation, or the much more explicitly political demands that the Communists were making, emerge in his petitions. In fact, Oleas became drawn into the types of land disputes between Indigenous communities that had long been the bread and butter of legal experts dating back to the colonial period. As with tinterillos, it seems that he was willing to follow the cases of whoever was able to pay for his petitions. But in pursuing these types of cases, he responded to the perceived needs of rural community members, even if he did not always agree with what they were seeking to accomplish. Because Oleas was imprisoned so often for his political actions and rose to leadership positions in the Socialist Party, it is difficult to cast him as someone entirely unconcerned with larger struggles for social justice.

A great deal of slippage exists between the categories of tinterillo, socialist and indigenista. In examining the 1885 Atusparia uprising in Peru, Mark Thurner ponders who were the 'masked men' behind the petitions that voiced the concerns of largely illiterate Indigenous leaders. While the authors simultaneously claimed and displaced Indigenous voices, Thurner suggests that the content of the petitions indicates that these mestizo intellectuals were not 'entirely removed from the history of peasant struggles'. Rather, Thurner's

[78] Germán Rodas Chaves, *Fidel en el Ecuador* (Quito: Abya-Yala, 2001), p. 20.

depiction of these intermediaries as 'Radical Red *tinterillos* with long experience as defenders of Indians' indicates an ideological engagement that extends far beyond financial motivations.[79]

In working in rural communities, Oleas did not remain masked; he proudly signed his petitions with the flourish of a blue pen. Nor did he exactly act as a ventriloquist, as Guerrero proposes, who privileged his own ideas and interests over those of his clients and petitioners. Even though Oleas was deeply involved in the Socialist Party, his political engagement in rural communities did not extend to the point of being a popular or organic intellectual in the sense that Baud and Ibarra describe for other local leaders. His interests and concerns led him in other directions.

The multiple roles that Oleas played in rural communities cannot easily be disentangled and reduced to simplistic categories. Rather, his actions lead to a rethinking of the complicated roles that intermediaries played in negotiating their relationships with subaltern actors, and of the reasons why rural communities should decide to turn to them for assistance. As the cases at Zumbahua, Cachimuel and elsewhere illustrate, outside intermediaries came and went, but the community remained and learned how to negotiate the presence of intermediaries such as Oleas to their own advantage. For them, Oleas was a useful ally not because he presented a particular political ideology, but because he had the legal credentials and social connections necessary to advance their local interests.

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. Gonzalo Oleas Zambrano fue un abogado socialista de Quito quien, entre la década de los 1930 y la de los 1970, se involucró profundamente en la asistencia a comunidades rurales en Ecuador con peticiones legales. Los intermediarios tienen una variada y larga historia en la negociación de relaciones entre la ciudad y el campo, lo que no siempre se entiende bien. En varios momentos de su carrera, Oleas actuó como un 'tinterillo', un socialista, y como un indigenista. Al examinar las peticiones de Oleas de inmediato se derrumban visiones simplistas de sus acciones y motivaciones. Más bien, su habilidad para trascender las categorías existentes ayuda a entender por qué los litigantes rurales buscaron tan seguido el apoyo de Oleas.

Spanish keywords: pueblos indígenas, intermediarios, tinterillos, socialismo, indigenismo, Ecuador, Gonzalo Oleas

Portuguese abstract. Da década de 1930 até a de 1970, Gonzalo Oleas Zambrano, advogado socialista de Quito, envolveu-se profundamente com as causas de

[79] Mark Thurner, *From Two Republics to One Divided: Contradictions of Postcolonial Nationmaking in Andean Peru* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 144.

comunidades rurais no Equador, auxiliando-as em suas petições legais. A história de intermediários que negociam as relações entre cidade e campo é longa, variada e normalmente pouco compreendida. Em vários momentos de sua carreira, Oleas agiu como *tinterillo*, socialista e indigenista. Após uma examinação de suas petições, qualquer simplismo na caracterização de suas ações e nas interpretações acerca de suas motivações é logo desmanchado; ao invés, sua destreza em superar categorias existentes explicam a frequente preferência de litigantes por Oleas.

Portuguese keywords: povos indígenas, intermediários, *tinterillos*, socialismo, indigenismo, Equador, Gonzalo Oleas