

## AIM

- To include ancestral knowledge as a cognitive dimension reinforcing collective identity.
- Challenge academic focus on external factors in the “construction” of a collective identity.
- Highlight fluidity and continuity of identities

# INDIGENOUS IDENTITY, ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE CONTINUUM OF A NEVER-ENDING PROCESS FOR COMUNEROS OF ST. ELENA, ECUADOR

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## INTRODUCTION

Academic discussions on collective identity in Latin American Indigenous peoples highlight the intertwined relations influencing the continuous process of identity “construction.”

Emphasis on external dimensions structuring collective identity abstract the social group from their own cultural history, narratives, and meanings of their collective identity. This ancestral knowledge consistently influences everyday lived experiences despite external nation state and globalization forces.

## LOCATION



Original people on the Pacific coast north of Santa Elena, Ecuador were not forcibly removed from their original land. Rather, everyday experiences constantly reinforce their attachment to their communally managed territory and resources. For 30 years, tourism businesses integrate them into the global tourism industry bringing people from around the world.

### ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge that constitutes a historical accumulation of beliefs and narratives that serves as a reference and experience for the relationship between nature, science, other peoples, and the world.

### INDIGENOUS CAPITALISM

The use of ancestral knowledge guiding Indigenous group’s livelihoods while resisting the penetrating capitalist perspective of labor and individual accumulation, which tends to approach the land and culture as a commodity.

## FINDINGS

- Slightly 1% self-identified as “Indigenous” peoples in the 2010 Census.
- Original people in the coastal province of Santa Elena, Ecuador do not express a particular ethnic identity during the study period.
- Collective identity shifts in a continuum to socio-political situations rather than “constructing” a new particular self-identification.
- Ancestral knowledge underlies tourism performance structuring their form of Indigenous capitalism through tourist enterprises such as beach cabanas, foods, arts, crafts, hotel lodging, cultural symbols, events, museums, and built environments.

Fig. 1 Self-identification in Santa Elena Province.

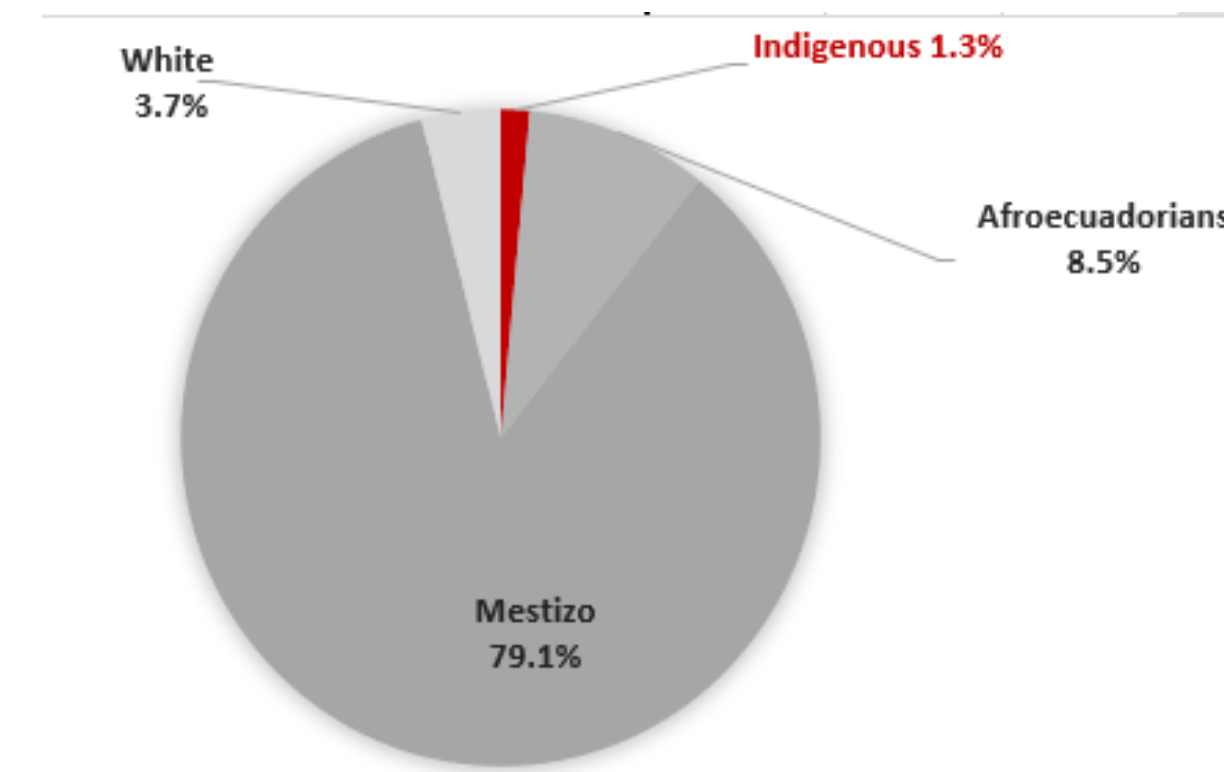


Fig. 2 Collective Identity shifts among the Original people in the Santa Elena Province.

Public Political Identity	Guancavilcas	Cholos	Comuneros	Guancavilcas	Cholos comuneros	Guancavilcas
State Led interventions	1500s Spaniard Encounter	1500s - 1830 Spaniard Colony	1937 Law of Communities	1986 Creation of National Confederation of Indigenous Communities	2007 Santa Elena's separation from Guayas Province	
Local organizational development			1964 Federation of Communities of Guayas Province	1987 National Indigenous Confederation enrolment	2002 Manta-Guancavilcas -Punaes Indigenous movement	2020 Guancavilcas Operations Committee COWE
			Agrarian Reform	National Program for Coastal Management	National Plan for Good Living	

## METHODS

This research is an ethnographic study conducted between the years 2015 – 2019 in communities of northern Santa Elena, Ecuador that have adopted a tourism-led economy for improving their livelihoods.

The study included systematic content analysis of the speeches, archives of the monthly meetings reviewed from the year 2003 through 2017, interviews with local leaders and informal encounters with locals.

## REFERENCES

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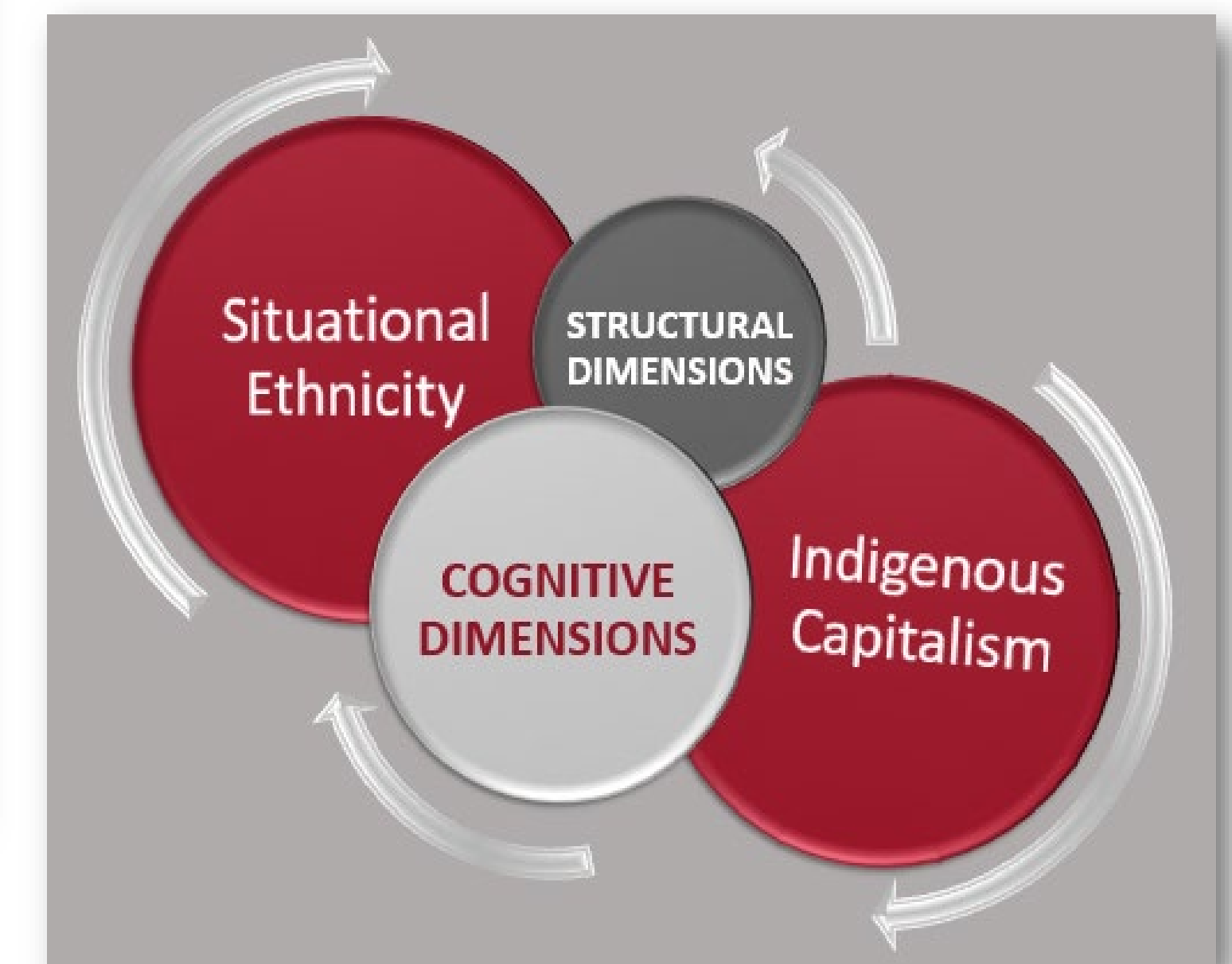
## CONCLUSIONS

Discussions on identity politics should emphasize the fluidity of cognitive dimensions, such as ancestral knowledge in everyday experiences, in addition to external factors constructing a collective identity.

Instead of an ongoing “construction “ of identity, original people in the Ecuadorian coast continually shift and adapt their ethnic identity in response to everyday situations and interactions with others.

Ancestral knowledge reinforces Indigenous capitalism manifested in everyday productive practices that brings value to communal empowerment rather than individual material gains.

Fig. 3 A model for comprehending the situational identity among Indigenous groups participating in globalized market.



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