



# Landmarks upon landmarks<sup>1</sup>: The equator, geodesic monuments, and the Museo Inti-Ñan

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*Abstract.* In the Lulumbamba Valley, 20 kilometers from Quito, there is an obelisk celebrating the equator. This article presents a summary of the ties between the Andean equator and geodesic science, ties that resulted in the construction of an original monument in 1936 and a subsequent vibrant tourist economy. Secondly, it presents an oral history narrated by the director of an alternative equatorial museum, Fabián Vera, whose family has been linked with equatorial tourism since the 1950s. This oral history demonstrates the conflictive nature of an imaginary landmark, such as the equator, as well as the possibilities of homegrown tourism.

*Keywords:* Equator; geodesy; Museo de Sitio Intiñan; cultural tourism; oral history; Ecuador.

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1 This text was originally written in Spanish. The title for this article stems from a repeated phrase deployed by Fabián Vera, who describes equatorial monuments as 'hitos sobre hitos.' 'Hitos' is a remarkably rich word, which can mean – among other things – a landmark, a geodesic marker, a hallmark, milestone, watershed, or – more broadly – a key person, object, or event within a particular context. Though translated here as 'landmarks upon landmarks,' these multiple meanings often overlap and coexist in Mr. Vera's remarks.

Internationally, geodesy – the branch of mathematics dealing with the shape and area of the Earth – is a little-known field. In Ecuador, however, any elementary school student can tell you about the Franco-Hispanic Geodesic Mission (*Misión Geodésica Franco-Hispana*) of 1736-1744, which measured the arc of the equatorial-meridian to determine the validity of the Newtonian theory of gravity (Safier, 2008; Lafuente & Mazuecos, 1987). What is less known is the link between this event and the monumental configuration of the science of geodesy, on the one hand, and Andean equatorial iconography on the other. In this article, I provide a summary of these processes by way of introduction to the oral history narrated by Fabián Vera, director of the Museo Inti-Nān in San Antonio de Pichincha – a town where, starting in the 1930s, a series of monuments were constructed to mark the equatorial line. As such, this study seeks to demonstrate how a general history of science and tourism impacted a specific locality (San Antonio de Pichincha) as well as the life of a specific person (Fabián Vera).

This oral history, published here for the first time, recounts the construction of the tourist economy of San Antonio de Pichincha. It highlights both the presence of equatorial monuments and the activities of Fabián Vera and his father, Humberto, who opened the first folk art store on the equator – activities that sustained an atmosphere of celebration of universal science at a specific site. This process operated in dialogue with the imaginary of the pre-Columbian past of Ecuador and, in particular, the Lulumbamba Valley, where the equatorial museums and the town of San Antonio de Pichincha are located. As Fabián Vera tells us, this site has become a place where landmarks upon landmarks, have been constructed to celebrate this history.

This article also takes into account – through a series of analytical segments intertwined within the oral history – the role that the Vera family played in the construction of this signification, both allegorical and politico-cultural. In particular, I present an argument that situates the representation of the Lulumbamba Valley provided by Fabián Vera within a schema of “mystical tourism,” as described by Michael Hill (2007) for the case of Cusco. This type of tourism operates as a space of cultural contestation where different operators offer an “authentic experience” of Inca culture. In contrast to Cusco, where we can observe a narrative focused on what Castro-Klarén (2004) calls an **archeospace** – in which existing prehispanic ruins are deployed for use in national narratives – the Ecuadorian state did not engage in mystical tourist boosterism until recent years. Consequently, though Fabián Vera’s mysticism existed in parallel with state tourism from the 1960s, it can also be considered a counternarrative to the dominant vision celebrating French-Spanish-Ecuadorian geodesy. The contestation that

ensued, therefore, not only demonstrates a conflict over specific landscapes, but also one concerning how to narrativize the nation when promoting economic tourism.

The article is divided into three sections. The first deals with the general history of the geodesic expeditions to Ecuador and their commemoration from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward. The second consists of Fabián Vera's oral history, complemented by some editorial comments, which I hope will provide the reader with an understanding of the context of this history. The concluding section, provides a summary of the central arguments and considers some possibilities of employing oral histories in the analysis of Andean tourism.

### **1. Geodesic expeditions and pyramidal monuments in Ecuador, 18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>2</sup>**

The Franco-Hispanic Geodesic Expedition attempted to resolve a dispute between the cosmological vision of Isaac Newton, based on his theory of universal gravitation, and Descartes' vortex theory, which proposed very different conceptions regarding the basic shape of the Earth. In 1730, this debate had already pervaded the Academy of Sciences in Paris, where Newton's supporters called for equatorial geodesic measurements in order to prove that the planet was an oblate spheroid, as his theory had suggested. (Shank, 2008; Terral, 2002). The geodesic expedition finally left Europe in 1736 to measure three degrees of the equatorial meridian in the Real Audiencia of Quito. Their conclusions ultimately supported Newtonian theory. Nevertheless, as Neil Safier (2008) notes, the expedition's legacy is due in great part to the talent for self-promotion of Charles Marie de La Condamine, a mathematician and close friend of Voltaire, who also provided most of the financing for the expedition and later wrote a series of diaries about his trip to "la terre de l'Equateur."

One of La Condamine's most exceptional performative gestures was his plan to erect commemorative pyramids in the equatorial Andes. Built on the Yaruquí plains, along the baseline of the geodesic triangulations, the monuments looked like truncated obelisks, consisting of a square pyramid on top of a cube, both made of stone. The four sides – aligned with the cardinal directions – bore plaques commemorating the wisdom of the French and Spanish academics, presented in their own languages as well as in Latin and Quechua. Despite this inclusive gesture, Spanish officials objected to

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2 This section is largely based on a previous, more detailed article (Capello, 2018).

the monuments, both because the Spanish scientists were represented as inferior to their French counterparts and because of the Bourbon *fleur-de-lis* which adorned the apex. This led to the monuments falling into disrepair and to their eventual destruction (La Condamine, 1751).

Nevertheless, the myth of the pyramids of Yaruquí continued to grow. Alexander von Humboldt, for example, visited their ruins and advocated their reconstruction. This was finally accomplished in 1836, with French financial assistance, to celebrate the centennial of the geodesic expedition. Decades later, when a second French geodesic expedition arrived at the turn of the century (1899-1906), this time led by the Geographical Service of the French Army, pyramids were also constructed to mark the measurements of the equatorial meridian. In addition, one of the military geographers, Georges Perrier, took part in promoting an Ecuadorian geographical study. Perrier also joined the Franco-Ecuadorian Committee, which built a new obelisk in Quito's Alameda Park to celebrate the two missions in 1913 (Capello, 2016).

The Alameda obelisk, designed by the French sculptor Paul Loiseau-Rousseau, ushered in a new stage of geodesic commemoration. On the one hand, its iconography incorporated allegorical symbols, including an Andean condor – a national symbol – that supports an armillary sphere, an icon of the geocentric cosmos (Remmert, 2011). On the other hand, its position on the Alameda began the separation of the geodesic imaginary from the sites of measurement. These two trends were repeated in 1936 for the bicentenary of the arrival of the first expedition. That year, a new obelisk was constructed on the equatorial line in the Lulumbamba Valley, some 20 kilometers north of Quito. Although this sector was never visited by the geodesic expeditions, it was chosen for its symbolism and also because of the opportunities it provided for the promotion of a tourist economy near the capital city (Capello, 2011, pp. 54-57).

The monument was designed by Luis Tufiño, director of the National Observatory, whose design recalled both La Condamine's pyramids and the Loiseau-Rousseau armillary sphere by including a globe at the apex of the obelisk. He also altered the obelisk's pyramidion by constructing it with steps in the Mesoamerican style, a design suggested by Paul Rivet, a French archaeologist who had served as medical officer for the second geodesic mission.

During later decades this structure became a Quito-area tourist destination since it was possible for visitors to straddle the equatorial line. As Fabían Vera mentions in the oral history that follows, this ritual led in the 1960s to an extemporaneous decision by Humberto Vera, local teacher, journalist, and merchant, to paint a line representing the equator on the road

in front of the monument.<sup>3</sup> Vera Sr., whose store Folclor Vera was the first to cater to equatorial tourists, also pioneered other basic rituals associated with visiting the site, which began to be called *Mitad del Mundo* (Middle of the World). And his wife was the first to reproduce the monument, starting with a meter-high wooden model – still displayed in the family home – that became the basis for smaller souvenirs sold to tourists to this day. This commercial activity altered the symbolic form of the monument, from a place to visit to a piece of merchandise whose form would eventually dominate the image of the Andean equatorial line.

The visibility of the monument in the 1970s convinced both tourist agencies and the national government of the viability of making the equatorial line a tourist destination. Already in 1978, the government of Pichincha Province approved a plan to dismantle Luis Tufiño's monument and replace it with a larger replica, 30 meters in height.<sup>4</sup> This would become the centerpiece of the *Ciudad Mitad del Mundo*, a still-existing complex which not only enables visits to the equator but also provides an introduction to the history of equatorial geodesy.

The entrance to the monument is dominated by the *Avenida de los Geodésicos*, where busts of the members of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Franco-Hispanic Geodesic Expedition are displayed. Pavilions representing each of the main countries that participated in the expedition line the sides of the avenue, together with a replica of a colonial Spanish city and, in a revealing gesture, an ethnographic museum inside the central monument, whose exhibits relate to indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian peoples.

The name *Mitad del Mundo* comes from a linguistic theory originally proposed by Alfredo Costales. According to this theory, the name "Quito" is a portmanteau derived from the Tsáchila nomenclature, in which the words *quitsa* (center-middle) and *to* (earth) combine to form "center of the earth." It is interesting that the museum makes no reference to Costales and his argument that it was the native indigenous peoples of the area who sought to live in the place closest to the *Tierra del Sol* (Land of the Sun) – that is, the equatorial zone. This omission has not been ignored by Costales' intellectual supporters, nor by local indigenous communities. By the 1990s this dissonance had led to the creation of two alternative museums dedicated to the equatorial line: one in San Antonio de Pichincha and the other in the province of Cayambe, in the shadow of the eponymous volcano that intersects the equatorial line.

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3 Interview with Fabián Vera (January 2014).

4 The original would be moved to Calacalí, directly to the east of San Antonio de Pichincha.

The first of these alternative equatorial museums, the Museo de Sitio Inti-Ñan (“Site Museum Path of the Sun”), was founded in 1995 by Fabían Vera, son of the merchant whose folk art store had played such an important role in tourist development in the region. The more accurate GPS<sup>5</sup> measurements showed that the equatorial line crossed the land of the Vera family, adjoining the Ciudad Mitad del Mundo. Given this information and the great interest in Humberto Vera’s research about indigenous religions and sun worship, the Museo Inti-Ñan celebrates sun cultures around the world and includes a totem museum with icons from heliocentric religions throughout the Americas (Figure 1). Visitors can also experience some of the unique properties of equatorial magnetic fields, such as the loss of one’s sense of balance when walking blindfolded, or the possibility of balancing an egg on the head of a nail.

Figure 1  
Museo Inti-Ñan



Photograph by the author; March 2013.

It remains to be seen whether this modest approach to the celebration of indigenous knowledge will prevail over the tourist spectacle of the Ciudad Mitad del Mundo. In 2012, the Gobernación of Pichincha submitted a plan to build the world's highest tower on the Equator. Designed by Rafael

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5 Global positioning system.

Viñoly, a Uruguayan architect residing in New York, this tower to the sun would have been 1.6 kilometers high and would have been similar in form to a surveying marker – that is, an abstraction of the obelisk or pyramid celebrated through equatorial geodesy since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. But financing shortfalls and the opposition of the population of San Antonio de Pichincha led to the cancellation of the project, as well as the incorporation of more indigenous-centric themes in the museum of the Ciudad Mitad del Mundo (Capello, 2018).

## **2. Fabián Vera's oral history**

The Museo de Sitio Inti-Ñan is located in the town of San Antonio de Pichincha, in the shadow of the Ciudad Mitad del Mundo. Its status as a museum legally classifies it as national heritage. As is the case internationally, a large number of site museums in Ecuador are located near places of archeological or architectural importance, frequently linked to pre-Columbian structures and populations. The Museo de Sitio Inti-Ñan, for its part, includes two huts that were originally constructed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and renovated in the 1990s. But their importance as national heritage, according to Fabián Vera, comes from their links to the construction of the first equatorial monument. The museum is also notable for its relationship with the development of equatorial tourism, through the work of both Fabián and Humberto Vera. Nevertheless, as is evident in Fabián Vera's testimony, the role of his family has generally been ignored in the official discourse of the Gobernación of Pichincha.

The oral history presented here was recorded during two evenings in January 2014. At the time, the museum faced the risk of closure if the tower designed by Viñoly was built. Despite the fact that the “shark's teeth” were visible, Fabián Vera wanted to focus his testimony on his extensive knowledge of the history of the development of an equatorial culture in San Antonio de Pichincha, both in the pre-Columbian era and the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the oral history concentrates on “equatorality” as an idea, an image, an economic aspect, a political issue, and a symbol both local and national.

As part of this oral history, Fabián Vera's insistence on his personal connections with both the touristic and scientific history of the sector is notable. For instance, he points to his father as the first person to establish a tourist store and details various manifestations of his family's innovations, including the invention of tourist rituals, such as painting the equatorial line in front of the first equatorial monument, and creating souvenirs for sale. On the other hand, we also see an effort to distance himself from the

practices of the Ciudad Mitad del Mundo, which he refers to regularly but without using its name, perhaps because of the conflict that was ongoing at the time between the Gobernación of Pichincha, which had not yet decided to drop the Viñoly tower project. In his testimony, Vera represents himself as rooted in the community and, sometimes, as an interpreter of ancestral knowledge; but at other times, he appears as an interlocutor within a dialogue spanning the centuries. At the same time, in my opinion, he is careful not to present himself as a spokesman for his ancestors, nor for the indigenous people of today. Thus, although we can consider his assertions as related to the mystical tourism of this sector, he also stresses that he is an ally rather than a leader of the indigenous community.

It is also worth mentioning that the two conversations included here took place some weeks after Fabián Vera transferred various objects – clippings, letters, mementoes, pamphlets, and reminiscences – from a storage room in his mother's house to his office in the museum. Thus, the content of our conversation was in part determined by the discovery and rediscovery of various texts and documents, many of them saved by his father, which Vera was seeing for the first time ever or the first time in many years. As such, this oral history can also be considered a report (albeit a partial one) on the exploration of a personal memory that had suddenly entered the expert testimony of the museum's director, who had worked in this area and this industry for most of his life. I have tried to point out when these sources are directly referenced. However, listing each of them would have interrupted the conversational flow and as such I have not identified each one in the presentation of this oral history.

With regards to the structure of this compilation, it should be noted that though the conversations took place over two evenings, I decided to organize Vera's comments first by subject and then by date. I took this decision in part because the conversation on January 5 was more extensive, and in part because during the January 13 session, Vera focused on providing additional commentary on topics covered during the first interview. I have also included some introductory or editorial comments, which are kept separate from the quotations of Vera. Nevertheless, though the quotes are lightly edited for clarity, in general have I decided to maintain the dialogue's conversational flow.

### a. The Lulumbamba valley and universal knowledge

As noted above, the Museo Inti-Ñan is a site museum, which puts it in the category of a cultural heritage museum associated with a particular site.<sup>6</sup> In our conversations, Fabián Vera began by paying homage to the indigenous cultures of the area now known as San Antonio de Pichincha, in the Lulumbamba Valley. During the first evening, January 5, he concentrated on how this name was linked to a description of two nearby mountains, now collectively known by the name of La Marca, but he notes that in general one can consider the valley as a space whose social existence was due as much to agricultural advantages as to the solar equatorial calendar. Similarly, on the second evening, January 13, his initial comments focused on local equatorial celebrations as an inspiration for a proposal to situate the zero meridian in the Lulumbamba Valley, something originally proposed by his father during a visit to Greenwich.

#### Conversation on January 5, 2014<sup>7</sup>

FV: I have a clipping that tells the history of how the Mitad del Mundo...this gentleman was one of the first...of the first merchants that entered the Ciudad Mitad del Mundo. Mr. Marcelo Pinto. He was the representative of a tourism company. So, he said that he had, if you can imagine...in 1997, he was interviewed and he had memories of what the Mitad del Mundo was thirty years ago, when the monument was by itself, there wasn't anything else. The monument was framed by this Lulumbamba Valley, or the Valley of the Eggs, that it was called. Unique, right? So the landscape was an eternal landscape, I would say. [...] As you can see, around us, all the mountains are egg-shaped. So then, of course. Each of the mountains was an indigenous heliocentric point of observation. And [on] these heliocentric points of observation, there, our indigenous people had marked certain triangulations...A triangulation that I call "the triangulation of mother sun."

[This] means that they all had practically one parameter, these cultures, of where [the sun] rose...In their philosophy, their cosmos, the cosmovision, [these cultures] practically coincide, with the same points where the sun rises, where the

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6 On the category of site museums as a global phenomenon, see: Hernández Hernández, F. (2007). La museología ante los retos del siglo XXI. *Revista Electrónica de Patrimonio Histórico* (1). Retrieved from <http://revistaseug.ugr.es/index.php/erph/article/view/3326>

7 From here on, my comments are marked with the initials EC and those of Fabián Vera with FV.

sun sets, the solar energy...So, the calendars coincide exactly. A little bit more clearly defined, like ours here, the Quitus. A little more sophisticated, like the Mayan calendar. Or the Aztec calendar.

[One] of the simplest and most exact calendars on the planet is the Quito calendar. Which is simply a cross which shows the path of the sun or the equatorial line. Today, the equatorial line, known as latitude 0°0", previously as *Inti-Nan*, or simply the rope that divides the planet, where the sun rose, is perpendicular at noon, and [where] the sun sets at six in the afternoon.

Here we have an equivalence of time. From six to six. Something that doesn't happen in the west, right? [...] The reason? Because mother Earth herself, the same Earth, mountain range, and its lands are very apt for cultivation. For planting. Because they were good astronomers, they were good agriculturalists. So they had time and they needed to maintain and have an exact solar calendar. Of six months of winter and six months of summer. [...] The dualism, the equity, the equality...winter-summer...right?

### **Conversation on January 13, 2014**

FV: And also, we could talk about the first equatorial festivals that took place here. Well, these were held by the indigenous people. The equatorial festivals were already an aboriginal tradition in the Lulumbamba Valley. But here, in the *Mitad del Mundo*, festivals began to be held when the first tourists came to this area, to this valley of Lulumbamba. [...] We even have some photos from 1969 with some personalities who visited us, such as, for example, the queen of New York, Samantha Rich, queen of New York, a goodwill tour, as ambassador of this city. Later, we were visited...one of the important visits was the [lord] mayor of London, Edward Howard, on his official visit to Quito, here at zero latitude. And he received a replica of the monument and a certificate. The first certificate as *Folclor Vera*.

EC: If I remember correctly, you once showed me a photo of your father taken when he was in London. What did he think [of] the Greenwich observatory?

FV: Well, when my father visited there, in the years [sic] 1969, more or less, well, for him it was an extraordinary experience. [...] From here point zero begins, and I think rather that the cradle of time, to divide the time, should be Ecuador. Logical, right?

[...] and just so, one of the things that the mayor [of London] laughed about...is how they left from zero [longitude] in the Pacific Ocean. [...] A triangulation that they carried out there, in London. So, they started from there [to the south] and ended up exactly in the sea. In zero latitude. So for them this was a mistake. And this is what the mayor laughed at. My father told [the story].

So, he said, well, why don't we start again from zero. Come to the Mitad del Mundo, Ecuador, and from there we'll start from zero, and we will create the first...the first equatorial calendar, starting from here in meridian 78. But do me a favor, if you give it the name 78, here we will call it equatorial zero. Equatorial meridian zero. [He] told them delightedly, we will sign an agreement and we will start from here...To start with the real equatorial hour. It would be the real equatorial hour...

#### **b. Landmarks upon Landmarks: from geodesic expeditions and pre-Columbian and contemporary science**

Again, on the evening of January 5, we talked about geodesic expeditions. In his comments, Fabián Vera demonstrated his knowledge of these studies while underlining the innovations of pre-Columbian peoples, in using natural landmarks such as the Cayambe Volcano and the La Marca mountains as points of reference. In establishing a relative concordance between modern science and ancestral science – from which the name of his museum, Museo Inti-Ñan is derived – we again see that he presents himself as an interlocutor. Nevertheless, the concept of “landmarks upon landmarks” stresses the importance of ancestral knowledge as a precursor and also an inspiration for modern science. This imaginary is at the center of the building of the Acoratene, a cylindrical observatory for determining the path of the sun, which was described by scientist Antonio de Ulloa in the 18<sup>th</sup> century but which was reconstructed and reimagined by Fabián Vera.

This process of detailing and celebrating this coexistence of signals and allegories can be considered as the central pedagogical mission of the Museo Inti-Ñan. But at the same time, there is a central factual error in this section, since the French geodesic scientists did not visit the Lulumbamba Valley, and nor did they try to mark the equatorial line. As we will see at the end of this section, Vera knows well that it is difficult to establish the actual site of the equatorial line and that even his museum model is based on the original error, the line having been marked where the Mitad del Mundo monument is located instead of on the Vera property.

## Conversation on January 5, 2014

FV: So, Imagine...there are things that simply, the only thing that the geodesic expeditions did was to adapt the knowledge of the West, adapt ancestral knowledge which had already been observed and calculated thousands of years ago now here in Quito and in Ecuador. That's why the points of the equatorial zone and its archaeological geography, of the Mitad del Mundo, were heliocentric points previously calculated thousands of years ago. Calculated in order to build solar temples or their exact triangulations where they could observe the exact dates of an equinox or a solstice, the exact dates of the position of a star or a planet. Only that Western civilizations when they arrived, with other names, simply changed them, because everything was already done.

Indigenous people already knew the earth was round. By simple observation of the sun rising at the foot of Cayambe, for example, and setting at the foot of the La Marca mountain. And this distance we now call kilometers, our indigenous people called the *chaquis* of *Inti-Nan*. How many feet the sun traveled along the equatorial line. So, they had already calculated it. So it doesn't surprise me that when the geodesic expeditions arrived they left landmarks upon indigenous landmarks. Doesn't surprise me.

[...]

So, by determining the equinoxes and knowing that the sun is at its zenith, a cylinder of stone and adobe was constructed 1500 years ago on the equatorial line at the foot of Cayambe. This was called the *Acoratene*, right? Eighteen meters in diameter and eight meters high. Without a roof. And this temple was called *Acoratene*, or a solar cylinder at the foot of the *Punteachil* mountain. And *Punteachil* or *Achil*, which means "where the large sun rises." The sun priests in charge of ritual observation climbed inside the cylinder, performed the ceremonies, lit [a *chaliz*] where they lit a sacred fire, the *mushugnín*. In all these ceremonies, when the solar cylinder was already lit, the day of the equinox, the whole cylinder was filled with light. So it was zero hour. So, that is when they made the offering of the *mushugnina* or a new sacred fire. It was from there that they determined zero degrees latitude, zero minutes, zero seconds from the position of the sun in relation to the earth. Because the earth was practically parallel to the sun. So, that was from where it was determined.

And later, the French academics, in 1736, they proceeded to put markers, mathematical according to them, in those places where our indigenous people had already determined the Mitad del Mundo. So it was from there that they started to do the triangulations. To Oyambaro, to Yaruquí, and other points such as the Pambamarca complex, in Quito itself... There is another point on the Ecuadorian coast, more or less in Esmeraldas... imagine.<sup>8</sup>

So they measured and determined the triangles, the triangulations, on latitude zero, they triangulated, triangulated, and obviously established the terrestrial quadrant with another expedition that was then in France... So they united the points and said, yes, the earth was... ellipsoid. And of course, they proved it, and certain indigenous heliocentric points were spotted where markers were put. Still, these markers were lost because no one after 1736... After 200 years this monument was constructed here, because it is closest to Quito. But they constructed it, it was for a sensible reason. For the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of the French and for the simple reason that no one had any idea where the Mitad del Mundo was, much less the equatorial line.

So, a point was determined, the one closest to Quito, which was the Lulumbamba Valley, this point, to build near the heliocentric markers of the Lulumbambas and the Quitus, and build the Luis Tufiño's monument in 1936. They built on a mathematical point and we can say they calculated with these... then with the instruments of the era of 1700, which are theodolites, quadrants, a compass, but for this [current] era too manual. Very old-fashioned instruments. But really they were not so wrong because they take an average from Catequilla.<sup>9</sup> First from Punteachil, from Cayambe, they take an average to Catequilla and an average to Caspigaci mountain. They take an average and then they measure another point equidistant to the indigenous [ones], which are the mountains of La Marca and the tolas<sup>10</sup> of Pomasqui. So, they take this middle point and they say it is the Mitad del Mundo.

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8 None of these points of geodesic markers are located on the equatorial line. The one in Esmeraldas is not a marker but an inscription on a boulder against which La Condamine was shipwrecked when he arrived at the coast of Ecuador.

9 Catequilla is a mountain close to San Antonio de Pichincha through which the equatorial line passes.

10 Translator's note: earth mound.

EC: So we are seeing this new tendency to construct landmarks upon landmarks.

FV: And landmarks upon landmarks began to be constructed. But looking at it with the observations made in 1936, history repeats itself, yes. On top of this, what's more, they didn't even construct landmarks upon landmarks, but destroyed the 1936 one. They threw it out and in 1975 a big one was built on Luis Tufiño's landmark that practically, today, with GPS, is a little further, some 40 meters [from the equator]. But it is still a marker observed by geodesic expeditions in our century, to this day it doesn't stop being a marker. It's a marker to this day because they still don't know where the equatorial line is.

### **c. The Museo Inti-Ñan as a repository of the memory of tourism**

The link between the Museo de Sitio Inti-Ñan and the history of tourism in the San Antonio de Pichincha began at the start of the 1960s, when Humberto Vera bought land next to the equatorial monument and set up a store called Folclor Vera for the exacting tourists who came to the town. However, this history predates the arrival of the Vera family, and begins with the construction of the equatorial monument, which started in the 1930s and was completed in 1936. The Caiza family, who then owned the land, rented out rooms to Luis Tufiño, who stayed in the two huts that still exist today. In 1998, one of Tufiño's assistants, Víctor Madrid Arias, visited the Museo Inti-Ñan and presented a framed document recounting Vera's personal history – a gesture that shows his role as pseudo-archivist. This document contains information that is not covered in newspapers or in the 1936 commemorative publications – in particular, a description of a replica of the inside of the monument and Tufiño's reaction to being decorated by Georges Perrier, the French representative.

### **Conversation on January 5, 2014**

EC: Let's talk a little bit about the first monument... In another conversation, you told me a little about the history of this area. I think that it was once the property of the Caiza family, which Luis Tufiño might have bought from them, and he lived in one of those huts that are close to where we are now, when they were building the monument.

FV: If I may, this framed document...it brings together a very, very significant history and [is] signed by one of the geographers that built the monument, so it's interesting to record it.

It condenses the history of the monument built by Luis Tufiño in 1936. And Mr. Víctor Manuel Madrid Arias, from Quito, who it is said was born here on Flores Street on December 13, 1900. He came to Mitad del Mundo when he turned 98. When he was 98. Unfortunately, he must be dead now. He came to the museum on August 30, 1998. He wrote to me and he said: I will give you this document that I have framed. It says that on January 1, 1930, he started his service at the Military Geographic Institute as a calculator under the command of Luis Tufiño. And he was "a faithful, industrious, and modest collaborator in his work and company to the scholar and master, and I dedicate this remembrance and grateful [sic] for the destiny that has been set aside for us together beyond life. The master lived in his monument and the two of us together in this framed document beyond time." This gentleman says:

"The first Stone was [placed] on Monday of Holy Week. [...] The real inauguration took place on July 17 with a large audience. The official and a whole entourage of delegates, both officials and invitees and a world of representatives, especially General Perrier, special delegate of France, who in the name of France, decorated the author of the monument, Engineer Professor Tufiño, with the highest universal award, proclaiming him Knight of the Legion of Honor, the only Ecuadorian to have been awarded this universal decoration of honor. Professor Tufiño, moved, only said *Merci*, thank you. It was the disciple Madrid and architect Carolos, son, who thanked [him]."

He couldn't say any more, Luis Tufiño was overcome with emotion. Interesting. He says "Final act. Before ending the ceremony, they signed the minutes, a series of documents that were nothing but a 'history' of the monument and together with a miniature replica, of the equatorial line, they deposited everything in a glass flask which was, itself, 'deposited' in something like a box of cement, in the subsoil of the central floor, the cover a marble plaque with the cardinal directions, in the center a 'ring' to open and close it."

And the new monument? He writes that "[I] don't know anything about the new monument. [Except that it was] decided to transfer it, in pieces, to the Calacalí parish; that's what I believe and that's what was done. Was this the place of Mitad del Mundo or not? Only some questions about this. The contents of the 'strongbox', the miniature replica of the Tufiño

monument, were they swallowed up by the earth? Are they somewhere? [So] asks a 98-year-old survivor who collaborated with Tufiño in the construction.”

Though they were not present during the construction of the original monument, the Vera family certainly established the first tourist store in San Antonio de Pichincha. In addition, Humberto Vera collaborated with a neighbor, Luciano Andrade Marín, a historian, journalist, and politician originally from Quito, who had already inaugurated the Solar Scientific Museum before the Veras arrived. Together, they developed tourism practices and inaugurated rituals still practiced in this sector. According to Fabián Vera, it was his father who focused on the pedagogical tasks and who invented the tourism practices, even though much of the scientific knowledge must have been originally gathered by Andrade Marín.

In describing this history, Fabián Vera focuses on the innovations of his father and also on his nostalgia for the original monument, which he considers the only legitimate one. Given the political situation in 2014, when the survival of the Museo Inti-Ñan was in doubt, his testimony is sometimes bitter and defensive, the first steps having been taken by the Veras themselves without the support of the Gobernación of Pichincha, which tried to take advantage of the tourist economy by constructing the Ciudad Mitad del Mundo.

#### **Conversation on January 5, 2014**

EC: Could you tell me a little about how the links developed between your family, I am speaking primarily of your father, and this sector of San Antonio de Pichincha, in general, and with the original monument as well?

FV: Sure. You'll see. Thanks to the fact that my father, in the 1960s came here, to the Mitad del Mundo, he thought it would be very interesting to bring this place to life because no one knew about the reason for the monument. But here's the thing. At the time, the government, the officials, knew very little. Worse still, the tourism agencies knew very little. The town itself, San Antonio de Pichincha, still doesn't know what the Mitad del Mundo is. That is, they don't have a clear idea of what it is, not from before, not after, and worse now.

So, in the 1960s, as I said, the history started to be gathered, a small exhibit was put together on the clear concepts of what the equinoctial line, the equatorial line, the monument itself is, what is the Quito of the Earth, what is Quito, which

civilizations existed here before the French committees came... So, all this was collected and a new image and a new condensed history began to be provided about what the Mitad del Mundo was, in the 1960s. The first postcards were printed. Photos were taken. The line was painted for the first time (Figure 2).

This painting of the line for the first time was *marketing*. **It is marketing**. As my father was practically the creator of this, of painting the line, and to say that it is, that here is the 0°0'0" latitude line and that tourists come and put their feet in the northern hemisphere and the southern hemisphere and when the sunlight falls perpendicular there is no shadow. So this was one of the first heartbeats of what is the Mitad del Mundo.

Figure 2

Fabián Vera in his office holding the theodolite of Paul Rivet. Behind him is a photo of the first painted equatorial line. Pancho, a giant tortoise brought from the Galápagos, is on the right; January 2014.



Photograph by the author; January 2014.

EC: If I remember correctly, you were also involved in the first painting of the line.

FV: Yes, totally. Because, of course, when I was only about 17 years old, I was a faithful collaborator with my father. Here we have this photo where the south, the north is painted there... And they began to come, I remember, groups of tourists. Small

groups. Each week they came...if the largest group was made up of six, seven people in the 1960s to visit once a week. Only once a week. I am talking [about] one tourist a day.

So, the moment it became known that at the Mitad del Mundo there was information, there was the first folk art store and Ecuadorian post office. So the first postcards [were] sent from Mitad del Mundo to various continents, especially to the United States. It was one of the first emotions that tourists had, sending a letter from Mitad del Mundo. So, it was from there that we started to construct a small building to create the first museum, philatelic at first, with information about Mitad del Mundo. And later in the 1970s we had the first Amazonian museum of Ecuador.

EC: So, before the philatelic or Amazonian museums were established, when your family first starting working here, was your folk art store there back then, and Luciano Andrade Marín's museum too?

FV: Of course.

EC: So, there were two buildings that...

FV: They were the first two historical-scientific and also commercial folk-art visitor centers. They were the first. There was also a restaurant which was called Bar Ecuador. Here is a photo of Bar Ecuador. Of a Mr. Pérez. They were the first service sites around the monument. The first mark that said Quito Latitude 0°0'0" [...] All this was being created. An information center was practically created for the tourists.

EC: And this developed, let's say, organically through private activities.

FV: Yes.

EC: And it had nothing to do with the government of Pichincha.

FV: No, nothing. Rather we first rented it from the Municipality of Quito, which had these spaces. So the Municipality of Quito rented it out, later we started the Ecuadorian post office [Correos del Ecuador], got the first license, which was [with]

Dituris,<sup>11</sup> with the number 200. Two-hundred in all of Quito! And we were 200! So this was the first license granted, it was... here it is. It was called Folclor Vera in the years [sic] 1965, December 22, 1965, under number 200...

Folclor Vera in the Mitad del Mundo. It started. And we began to write pamphlets, we started to write flyers about the history of the Mitad del Mundo. And that's how tourists began to arrive. So we even have the first register of visitors, the book of visitors for the years...for the year 1965. The first register or the first book of visitors for 1965.

So, when this started to turn into tourism growing...Tourists kept increasing in the 1970s, we started giving out one of the first cosmographic certificates of the Mitad del Mundo (Figure 3). [These] cosmographic certificates were a sensation for tourists because they were one of the cosmographic certificates of the Mitad del Mundo, which the *curaca*, that is, the person who provided this service, my father, who in this case was the head of Inti-Ñan, which certifies that the astronaut, Mr., whoever, "crossed the equatorial line and genuinely traveled through the four hemispheres of the Earth in two minutes, fifty seconds, at 2,483 meters altitude, more rapidly than an extraterrestrial satellite, before witnesses that hereby testify." So these were certificates that were given with an equatorial greeting. The first stamps exists, *Equator stamp* [in English], what do I know! And at that time people were already talking about Quito and the Galápagos Islands as world heritage, in 1979. So another certificate was also given for arrival to Inti-Ñan or Camino del Sol.

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11 Dituris was the Dirección Nacional de Turismo, established as an autonomous entity in 1973.

Figure 3  
Cosmographic Certificate in Mitrad del Mundo (Certificado Cosmográfico en la Mitrad del Mundo). Note the “equatorial greeting” (*saludo ecuatorial*) on the left, the coat of arms of Ecuador in the center, and the hemispheric iconography on the right



So, this was how people began to come. It wasn't seven tourists a week anymore, rather they began to come. The first agency was Metropolitan Touring, which called us to ask for our client services. Around here I have some photos from that period when tourists would stand on the line, their photo was taken, and each one was given a certificate and a photo of their visit to Mitad del Mundo. Anyway, it's practically then that talk began about the scientific mission that came in 1736 and information started to be provided to all of Ecuador and to the world that Mitad del Mundo is here. So, this practically didn't cost the state a cent. It was practically our work. But that this scientific, touristic, cultural promotion that has been going on since the 1970s until now, 2014, which we continue doing with effort, with dynamism, and more than anything with this mystique that they recognize as ours, and that we experience with what is ours, that we are Ecuadorians, from the Mitad del Mundo.

We never charged a single cent, or never paid a single cent to the media. They came themselves. Same goes for the journalists. Same goes for the historians. So we have always been people moved by history, by research and all that. We have had our doors open for any consultation, any type of information...

In the 1970s, the Vera family increased their landholdings, while a brother of Fabián Vera's, who had studied Petroleum Engineering, worked in Shushufindi in the Ecuadorian Amazon. At that time, their conception of the equator expanded to include both the Amazon and the Galápagos; they also imported a galápagos giant tortoise called Pancho for the museum. This wider perspective also had an impact on their scheduling, since the equatorial line does not end in San Antonio de Pichincha.

#### **Conversation on January 5, 2014**

FV: Through effort, through work, we obtained some lands near the monument. We had some lands. On one of these we built the first museum of the Amazon in Ecuador. For many years, information was provided about the ethnic history of the equinoctial peoples and the people of the Amazon in particular. The history of petroleum, about how it was in 1975, the first exploitation of petroleum. Shushufindi was talked about, the first oil well, and based on that stigma, that history of the first oil well, the Amazon museum showed what was done with petroleum until it was turned into plastic... We created a demon-

stration of the whole petroleum process until a raw material was obtained [sic]. This is what we showed here.

So, there was also this history of petroleum, because one of my brothers is a geologist and he worked in Shushufindi. It was then one of the bases for this process. And from there we had some live birds here, in their natural state. We had an eagle, a condor, and we had various animals from the Amazon. We had the Galápagos giant tortoises, we had three. And they even wrote a book on the history of the Galápagos and Ecuador, and the giant tortoises in Mitad del Mundo. And there is this tortoise, and this tortoise lived here, lived in the Mitad del Mundo [see the picture of the Galápagos giant tortoise in Figure 2]. It was one of best known pets in the Mitad del Mundo at the time.

EC: It looks like it's [standing] on both sides of the line...

FV: It's on the line. So this was also historic. This went on for a long time. Later, less so...Here is Panchito. He died here in the museum, but we keep him here as a historical reminder, a milestone.

By the middle of the 1970s, during the petroleum boom, the Provincial Council of Pichincha decided to increase tourism development in the central-northern highlands of the country. This enterprise focused on urban heritage – Quito was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1978. Moreover, the same year, the Ciudad Mitad del Mundo project was inaugurated. This led to the original monument being moved elsewhere. Initially it was to go to Cayambe, but finally Calacalí, some 10 kilometers from San Antonio de Pichincha, was selected. The replica was inaugurated in 1983.

When we talk about this period, we sense Vera's bitterness when he tells us about the lack of communication between the Gobernación of Pichincha and local businessmen during the development of Ciudad Mitad del Mundo. For example, he refers to his work taking care of the Luciano Andrade Marín museum after Andrade Marín died in 1972. He also mentions the lack of respect for opinions, such as those of his father, regarding the transfer of the original equatorial monument, with which he had lived for two decades. In addition, he recounts the idea of preserving the old monument within the current one, a "landmark upon a landmark," in a way that recalls the testimony of Mr. Madrid Arisa, whose description of the original monument is presented above.

The bitterness is also due to the situation in which Fabián Vera found himself in 2014, when he was faced with the possibility of the construction of the Viñoly tower. Nevertheless, though I tried to ask him directly about the current policy in the second conversation, on January 13, 2014, Vera refused to directly criticize the current directors, perhaps because of his knowledge of the local situation, given the difficulties in obtaining the funds necessary for the project. In addition, in recent years, his role as a historian, as a businessman, and as someone who challenged the disdain embodied in the Viñoly project has led to an expansion of his profile and a growing appreciation for him within the contemporary process of changes to the central monument, to such an extent that a black and white photo of a young Fabián Vera, smiling while installing a plaque displaying 0°0'0" latitude, has been placed inside the monument.

#### **Conversation on January 5, 2014**

FV: Well, in 1975, in Mitad del Mundo, there was a controversy. A controversy that the Provincial Council wanted to resolve...politics got into it. So when politics got into it, it started and here we say a bone of contention. He said, "before Mitad del Mundo was nobody's land," said council member Pedro Ruales. But once the Ciudad Mitad del Mundo was built, the Provincial Council built a typical Spanish town and spent eight years launching this as a white elephant. They never did anything.

We were the only ones who kept up the museum [of Luciano Andrade Marín]. But, since they removed us from there, we moved to this land. We bought this land previously from a lady named Rita Caiza Jácome. And she sold us the land; by 1969 we already owned it.

My father [predicted] what could happen. He already had an idea of what the equatorial line is, where more less an idea of the treatment which was given to the Mitad del Mundo. Well, the Mitad del Mundo took control of the Provincial Council. So we already knew where the equatorial line was according to the historical research which we had. So we said, well, I think that it would be a good idea to move to those lands and start again there. A clean slate, because they expropriated all the lands around Mitad del Mundo. That's why we moved here and started in 1990 to rebuild the huts of the lady Rita who lived there, of the Lulumbambas, because they are, in reality, landmarks. They are traditional huts and ancestral huts where our ancestors, that's how they lived. That's how they spent their

nights with their domestic guinea pigs, with their traditional foods, etc. And for us, it was very important to maintain this important ancestral life. That's why we kept the houses – the huts – here, and thank God, the mathematical marker according to Catequilla and Cayambe went through here. And today, with GPS, we have two or three codes that coincide with these lands where Inti-Ñan is. The Museum Inti-Ñan.

So, we have to... we are starting to rewrite this history, to make history, let's say, here. As the Museum Inti-Ñan, as Camino del Sol, we registered with the Institute of Intellectual Patrimony. And we said, well, let's go ahead. We continued with our project, since they took much of the land that we had around the monument, today called Ciudad de la Mitad del Mundo. But we opposed this, not because there was no progress. We opposed the situation of the lack of ethics in the construction of this city.

That is, it wasn't for the Mitad del Mundo. In the first place, we did not agree with the construction of the Ciudad de la Mitad del Mundo first of all because it was Spanish. It did not have any sites, harmony, not even ethnic or cultural, which could catch the attention of tourists. In fact, for seven, eight years it remained closed. It never opened. And they came to us to provide correct information and historical background. We started in this house we have here and we didn't agree. Rather, we said, well, because Luis Tufiño's historical monument, which they should have left there and built a great monument like the one which exists now, and leave that monument inside this monument. Landmark upon landmark. It would have been worthwhile. Leave the old one with all its characteristics, with all its history, with everything it had.

They didn't pay attention. They took it to Calacalí. Badly installed. Badly built. And wrongly oriented, practically. And today, it is a garbage dump. Today this monument is neglected. I don't even think that it is inventoried on the [list of] historical monuments. So it's simply there as an ornament, as the simple stone work it is. Nothing more. Of course. I would like something marking this to give it the importance that it has.

But, well in any case, they built a new monument. Inside, they put an ethnographic museum which has nothing to do with our identity. I mean the equatorial-equinoctial identity. Not even something about the history of the monument. It doesn't exist, it isn't there. Well, I have the history but it's never been required.

EC: One question about the ethnographic museum [of the Ciudad Mitad del Mundo]: were you consulted?

FV: No, that is, our idea about the old monument, when these were our lands, to create an ethnographic museum, of all the ethnic groups on the level of the equator. Of all the equatorial peoples or of all of the country, if that's what's wanted. To create an ancestral city. That was the idea. An ancestral city-museum. That was our idea. And this ancestral city-museum located in the Mitad del Mundo, crossed by the equatorial line, to conserve their customs, their ethnic groups, their ancestral knowledge, their astronomy. That was the idea. That is the idea, and that's what prevails today in this museum. In this Museo Inti-Nan.

But no one paid any attention to us [...] Nobody said anything. What they wanted was for us to disappear from the planet. For the real history of the Vera family to disappear. And well...out, everything out. They wanted to copy the idea, but badly copied. So, what they did was the same... That is, they didn't have this idea of what an open museum is, an interactive museum. Today, museums on the world level, internationally, are open, interactive museums. These...they don't get it. The closed museums, the museums with display cases, the museums that aren't interactive, which are not very open, elastic to the public...A museum is a bridge to the community, to society. This is the new concept of museums. And this is what we already had in the 1960s. This idea.

But politics enclosed itself within four walls. And what did it do? Ah, no! It has to be a first-rate museum, enclosed within four walls. And the idea that we had was closed within four walls which is now the equatorial monument, which doesn't tell us anything. It is not authentic. It is not natural, or anything. There are four faces [of the monument] there and that's it.

So this idea, it's like they copied us, but they copied us badly.

And we have fought all these years. From the 1990s, during which I already opened this museum, with the same idea. We fought with the Ciudad Mitad del Mundo, with the monument, with the administration of the monument. We have fought to see if they would open their doors or we would unite. Or whether these figures will become part of this museum through a signed agreement, I don't know. And open, open the doors with a wider scope, with a broader, more national, more ecological mentality. More interactive. But since there is this egoism and this egoism has always been around. That he

who feathers his own nest is better off. But I never presented things this way. I always suggested that the walls be opened up and brought down. Even to create a botanical garden here. That gardens be created and all that. But since an agreement was never reached, this dispute is there to this today. This dispute of economic power in which there is an enormous difference. I am such a tiny museum, but great in spirit. This is such a big city, such a big monument...A large economy but with a mentality of four walls. That is the difference. Here is the story. Over there, in contrast, is a very diminished history.

#### **d. What is Inti-Ñan?**

In this oral history, the focus of my research has been the history of the equatorial monuments and the development of tourism in San Antonio de Pichincha. For Fabián Vera, on the other hand, the idea of the Museo del Sitio Inti-Ñan is directly linked to the ideas of a museum open to the community, as he notes in the final sentences of the last section.

When I asked him about the exact purpose of his museum during our second conversation, on January 13, 2014, Fabián Vera provided a summary of the central ideas in this testimony, in which we can see, for example, the repetition of the idea of the importance of a mystical tourism linking the Museo Inti-Ñan to aboriginal cultures, both in the Lulumbamba Valley and in the Andean world. Additionally, Vera describes his visions regarding the links between sun cultures worldwide, which inspired his totem forest and also the building of the Acoratene cylinder. According to his description, he has a vision of a new human universality embraced by the equatorial line – that is, by the Camino del Sol or Inti-Ñan, a universal object, but also the particular creation of Fabián and Humberto Vera, in San Antonio de Pichincha, in the Mitad del Mundo.

#### **Conversation on January 13, 2014**

FV: Through the years and the research and histories that have been written and investigated, the Museo Inti-Ñan or Camino del Sol was practically created for a simple reason. First, because of the history itself that the name indicates. What is Inti-Ñan? It is the Camino del Sol. What is the Camino del Sol? It is latitude 0°0'0". What is latitude 0°0'0"? The Mitad del Mundo. What is Quito? It is the center of the earth.

And so we have these proper names, which nobody knew, nobody publicized. Fabián Vera... Well, before with my father, we publicized [these names] and an environment was really

created around these concepts, clear [ones], of what the Mitad del Mundo, the equinoctial line, the equatorial line...and led us to create one single project which is Inti-Ñan. The Camino del Sol, as it is known ancestrally. So, the Museum Inti-Ñan was created. The Museo Inti-Ñan was created on the basis of the history of the Lulumbamba Valley, with the aboriginal and natural huts there are here. That's why this is an *in situ* or site museum, where the Lulumbambas lived in huts. And since the huts were practically the first to be renovated because in the 1980s, indigenous people no longer lived in huts; these huts were converted into bodegas, covering them, because with bad weather their roofs which were thatched were damaged. So they put on zinc or *Eternit*,<sup>12</sup> [roofs], simply. So, the idea was to refurbish these huts that we have on this land where the Camino de Sol or the Inti-Ñan passes through. So that's why we created the Museo Inti-Ñan or Camino del Sol, where you find the life, the legend, and the customs, and the indigenous astronomical knowledge of the Lulumbambas. So here the site took body and form – historical, natural, and scientific.

EC: [Finally,] could you speak a little about the idea of the totem forest?

FV: The idea is very broad or we broadened it with various totems of the world, right? Because while that is true and we said that we have only one sun...and we are sheltered by only one sun, the same portion [of the sun], therefore, human beings have had the idea of creating totemic things within their culture, within their religion, within their customs. And it is a form of expression too. So this form of expression of each people, of each country, of each nation, of each continent, is different, right? But it is very singular in the creation of these totems as landmarks, some geographic, others reflecting local customs, and others religious. But they are all totems. The word says it: totem or totemism, they are deities for cultures. And these deities always have their history. Their cosmic history, their human, humanistic, anthropological history. And more than anything, these days, the totem forest is constructing a union. A link uniting the equinoctial peoples, of the entire world. So, this is my goal.

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12 Translator's note: fiber cement, popularly known by its brand name (Eternit) in Latin America and often used as roofing in shanty towns.

### 3. Conclusions

The oral history presented in this study places the Vera family at the center of a narrative on the development of both San Antonio de Pichincha and equatorial tourism. On the other hand, the framework that Fabián Vera provides us locates the importance of the Lulumbamba Valley within ancestral indigenous knowledge. This representation notes the centrality of this valley, the town, and the Vera family in the scientific-indigenous archeospace, and also sustains their demand regarding the need to continue the works of the Museo Inti-Ñan.

On the other hand, we see the interchange of the intellectual, history, local knowledge, and the personal and family-related in this oral history. Fabián Vera presents us with a vision of the imaginary of the indigenous person linked with local traditions but also in dialogue with the mythical themes of Ecuadorian indigenismo. In particular, he articulates the Lulumbamba Valley essentially as a global-mystical chakra – although without using these words – an articulation that reflects his activities in the tourism corridor.

At the same time, this oral history can be read as a challenge to the Ciudad Mitad del Mundo. Although Vera was careful not to directly mention it, the central argument of his story establishes an inherent link between the works of the Vera family and local indigenous and local history in the Lulumbamba Valley. In contrast, both the Ciudad Mitad del Mundo as well as the French geodesic missions are presented as intrusive and taking advantage of local knowledge to favor a foreign – it might perhaps even be termed a colonial – agenda.

Although an effort has been made to contextualize these interpretations, in these last paragraphs I want to more closely examine the importance of the strategies of self-representation as a reflection of the moment in time and the context in which our dialogues took place. Oral history, as Portelli (1979/2016) suggests, is considered less as the development of a linear narrative history than an investigation of the subjectivity of the informant, in this case Fabián Vera, who, in a dialogue with me – as a researcher – tries to establish himself within a narrative that is personal and at the same time public. It is precisely within this dialogue, in which the researcher participates and also influences, that we see the possibility of considering the strategies of the subject when he presents his version of the narrated history. This context is very important. It is worth noting that not only was the oral history presented here affected by the intrusion of the researcher as a interlocutor and an editor, but the researcher himself was drastically impacted by Vera's situation in January 2014, amid the crisis of the Viñoly tower, and also immediately after rediscovering the family archives. This subjectivity, both

of the moment and the story presented, for its part, is not an invention, but rather should be considered “a process of active creation of meanings” (Portelli 1979/2016, p. 54). It is these links between the subjectivity of the moment and the “active process” that offers the historian the possibility of reconsidering the links and interchanges between memory and history.

In this study, I have tried to demonstrate the political importance of the development of the Museo del Sitio Inti-Ñan as an alternative museum, even a counter-memorial. This importance is reflected in the particular and personal links with San Antonio de Pichincha, a town transformed by tourism in recent decades. At the same time, in presenting a study of an oral history with only minimal editing on my part, my intention was to also consider the possibility of oral history as a method of research to broaden our general understanding of the history of tourism.

Together with archival and ethnographic studies, oral history gives us the possibility of both expanding the historical archive and considering particular experiences and, perhaps most importantly, the way that individuals narrate their lives. Actors such as Fabián Vera – intermingled with state discourses, on the hand, and marginal or popular discourses, on the other – are common in populations that share a recent but decidedly tourism-driven economy. In addition, oral history such as this, instead of identifying the veracity of historical narrative or providing a singular vision of its importance, presents us with the possibility of considering a singular viewpoint, potentially in dialogue with neighboring viewpoints. As Trapp-Fallon (2003) argues, focusing on the singularity of the narrative and subjective voice also provides the possibility of decentralizing the essentially positivist viewpoint of the historian or social scientist, who attempts to manage the contradictions of the testimony and intertwine them with a model that is supposedly universal. In its most utopian form, oral history as a method can thus revalue the particularity and the singularity of the variety of actors interspersed across tourist activities.

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