Introduction

Well beyond a century and a quarter following his death, Gabriel García Moreno remains "the most argued about personality in the history of Ecuador."[1] His importance as Ecuador's leading political figure from 1859 to 1875, however, extended far beyond the borders of this small (about the size of Colorado) Andean nation, as his actions and ideas resonated throughout Latin America and Europe. Not surprisingly, then, writers in multiple languages have penned more than thirty full-length biographies of the man, although none in English since 1914.

Not only Ecuadorian intellectuals but also average citizens still hold strong opinions about García Moreno, as a personal anecdote will illustrate. I was sitting at a rooftop café in the town of Otavalo, awaiting the beginning of the San Juan Festival (also called *Inti raimi*), which thanks the deities for a good harvest while parading under the guise of a Catholic celebration. Some Ecuadorian acquaintances asked me why I was spending so much time in their country, and I mentioned my interest in writing a book about García Moreno. Almost immediately a good-natured domestic tiff ensued between a fellow who liked García Moreno because he wielded a strong hand and brought progress to the country, and his girlfriend who despised García Moreno for suppressing liberty and being so pro-Catholic. So right there we see part of the paradox that is García Moreno.

With this book, I aspire to tell much more than the tale of the life of an important historical personage or the history of Ecuador in the mid-nineteenth century. The book operates at the intersection of two other topics of scholarly interest: state formation and the "new political history." State formation, the process of creating a modern nation, saw some of its first experimental efforts in the Western Hemisphere during the postindependence era. As "imagined political communities," the new South American nations had difficulty seeking their identities in distinctive cultural

roots—unlike England, for example, where national precepts had developed over centuries.[2]

For many Andean nations, particularly Ecuador, cultural uniqueness proved a puzzling concept, for they shared with neighbors a common language (at least among the elite and middle classes), common historical experiences, and ill-defined boundaries. During the first few decades after independence, the new states waffled among regimes that sought to recreate Spanish colonial institutions, those that attempted state formation based on liberal ideals modified to fit local circumstances, or (worse yet) governments founded on the whims of self-identified military heroes.

García Moreno offered a thoughtful conservative alternative containing both ideological and pragmatic elements. Understanding the culture of highland Ecuador (as did Simón Bolívar, the great liberator), García Moreno argued that the common heritage of the Catholic faith could unite a nation divided by geography and ethnicity. Catholic education and a moral crusade would, he believed, bind Ecuador together culturally. At the same time, he undertook the development of transportation and communication networks that would literally tie the country together and modernize it. So successful was the Garcian experiment that conservatives throughout Europe in the late nineteenth century held up his state as a shining beacon for other would-be Catholic rulers.

García Moreno's state also succeeded, albeit temporarily, because his extensive powers of patronage—especially after 1869—allowed him to impose greater unity on Ecuador than had existed previously. Although the genre of biography tends to attribute earthshaking events to a single heroic individual, the "new political history" has emphasized the importance of networks of supporters and the use of patronage as key factors contributing to the durability of regimes.[3] Like many Latin American political leaders, García Moreno drew upon resources provided by friends and family. To a degree never before realized, his brothers helped him immeasurably in one geographical region, the coast, where his ideas met with much skepticism. Successive marriages into two interrelated and powerful families from the northern and central highlands enabled him to engender the support of many landlords from that region. While attending the university and later serving in the Senate, García Moreno acquired a network of friends throughout the highlands, including the south, who would serve in many roles during his administration—from cabinet officers to church employees to governors. As a result, in 1869 when García Moreno wrote a new constitution, he used the document to control patronage throughout

the country even down to the local level, a change that left liberals howling at the tyranny of this "Black Charter" (so nicknamed because of its highly centralized and authoritarian nature).

The implications of the state-formation process and the scholarship about patronage networks have restored the art of biography to respectability. A spate of biographies about the U.S. founding fathers has also rekindled public interest in the genre. The critical literature about biography, meanwhile, suggests a deep theoretical division about its purpose, dating back more than two thousand years to the time of Plutarch. One school contends that famous lives must serve a didactic rationale, whether good or evil. In the medieval period, the lives of saints fulfilled this purpose, as did much of the moralistic biographical literature produced in the Victorian era. A second school of biographers asserts that the life of any individual is worthy of study in and of itself because the reader comes to understand more about the human condition by learning about interesting and significant people. A third school began with Sigmund Freud's unfortunately error-prone psychobiography of Leonardo da Vinci.[4] All three types of biographies have been represented in previous studies of García Moreno, along with a fourth school justifying the inclusion of descriptive fiction to spice up the narrative.

Unfortunately almost all of the García Moreno biographies fall into the first and least satisfactory category. The frenzy of early biographies began in the 1880s with the work of Father Augustine Berthe, which became the source for biographies in many languages because conservative European writers saw García Moreno's Ecuador as the ideal Catholic state. These authors portrayed García Moreno as a secular saint who saved his country and led it to progress, only to be treacherously slain in his prime by liberals.[5] García Moreno's contemporary political enemies—led by Antonio Borrero, Pedro Moncayo, and Roberto Andrade—responded in kind, drawing portraits of García Moreno as a ruthless tyrant who snuffed out liberty and tried to return the nation to the sixteenth century.[6]

Both types of polemical biographies continue to be published up to the present, adding to the quantity of materials but rarely contributing any new interpretation.[7] Due to the polemical nature of these works, his second term ends up being underrepresented because few, if any, of the controversial events occurred during that time. The present study will also redress this imbalance. Only two works, produced in the 1940s, qualify as reasonably equitable accounts belonging to the second category of biographies, the humanistic genre—and neither, of course, had the advantage

of sixty years of subsequent research, the new theoretical literature, or access to the recently available archives (both public and private).[8] Hence another purpose here is to rewrite the life and times of García Moreno in a more measured way.

This book consists of eight chapters of nearly equal length. The first describes García Moreno's early years from his birth in 1821 to his involvement in national politics in 1859. This chapter examines the origins and development of García Moreno's national network of friends made during these decades. Chapter 2 covers the years of the civil war from 1859 to 1861, when the country nearly disintegrated. Here the focus shifts to the issue of regionalism, in part the result of topography, which divided the nation into four nearly irreconcilable sections.

Chapter 3 looks at the domestic side of García Moreno's first presidency from 1861 to 1865. Although members of his network (especially from the coast and the south) favored a federalistic system of government to protect their regional interests, García Moreno quickly became disillusioned with this model and sought greater central authority. Thus this chapter examines the rich intellectual debate between liberals and conservatives at midcentury about the nature of the state, a quarrel so bitter it led to conflicts in every Latin American nation. Chapter 4 studies García Moreno's foreign policy failures during the first term: two unsuccessful wars against Colombia and tension with Peru. While foreign wars promoted national identity elsewhere in South America, the case in Ecuador is more debatable. Chapter 5 discusses the interim regimes of Jerónimo Carrión from 1865 to 1867 and Javier Espinosa to 1869, focusing on the theme of *caudillismo*, a quintessentially nineteenth-century Latin American form of government. García Moreno's emergence as a caudillo in 1868 offended many of his moderate friends and splintered the coalition that had brought him to power in 1860.

The next two chapters concern themselves with García Moreno's final term in office, from 1869 to 1875, and the policies of conservative state formation for which he became famous (or infamous). Because religion and morality were so important to García Moreno's state-building project, chapter 6 details his attempts to introduce European monks and nuns into Ecuador to staff the schools (primary, secondary, and university), and also examines his attempt to create a moral nation by force of law. Chapter 7 explores the Garcian system of development: encouraging export earnings by diversifying agricultural production and allowing entrepreneurs full rein to exploit resources, and constructing modern systems of trans-

portation connecting various regions of the country in hopes of unifying it politically and economically. The final chapter relates the dissent against the "perpetual dictatorship" and considers the gory events of August 6, 1875, as well as the aftermath of that day. This section also analyzes García Moreno's significance, both for Ecuador and the Catholic world, to determine why he is still such a controversial figure, even in the twenty-first century.

In short the book devotes attention to "high politics," but these last three chapters also examine the social, economic, and racial issues that hindered García Moreno's attempt to create a viable nation state. The conclusion places García Moreno within the broader context of state-formation theory and illustrates why his life provides a deeper understanding of the critical issues facing nineteenth-century Latin America.

Ecuador during García Moreno's presidencies

Gabriel García Moreno and Conservative State Formation in the Andes

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