

One State, Many Nations

I Introduction

On the morning of May 20, 2001, I walked with a small group of friends along the Avenida Naciones Unidas in Quito, Ecuador (figure 1.1). We were on our way to see a movie at a theater that was a few blocks away. It was my first time outside in more than a week—I had been bedridden in a friend's apartment with a miserable combination of strep throat and malaria. As we made our way up the increasingly steep street, we stopped to wait for traffic at the intersection with 10 de Agosto, another of Quito's major thoroughfares. I was glad for the rest as my stamina had yet to return and it gave me a minute to enjoy the warming effect of the equatorial sun. We bought a copy of *El Comercio*, Ecuador's largest daily newspaper, from a corner vendor to check movie times. I immediately forgot about the movie listings when I saw an article on the front page announcing that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had declared the Zápara "ethnicity" part of the "Intangible and Oral Patrimony of Humankind." The article explained that the Zápara were a small Indigenous group in Ecuador's Amazonian rain forest whose language was spoken by fewer than five elders and in danger of extinction as a result of the harms of "modernity, technological development and globalization" (*El Comercio* 2001). Another paper quoted an Ecuadorian anthropologist who said, "We should feel proud of our roots" because the Zápara are a national treasure (*El Universo* 2001).

Zápara is a member of the Zaparoan language family, a small group of Amazonian languages in eastern Ecuador and northern Peru, all of which are now dead or highly endangered (Peeke 1962, 1991; Stark 1981:12–13; Wise 1999:312). On May 18 UNESCO pledged to aid the Zápara in preserving their language and oral tradition.

In March 2001 I went to Ecuador to help document the Zápara language. The Zápara are one of the smallest Indigenous nationalities in Ecuador, with



Figure 1.1 Avenida Naciones Unidas in Quito. Photo by author.

roughly two hundred members, most of whom live along the Conambo and Pindoyacu rivers in Pastaza province. The Zápara were decimated during the rubber boom that swept through the Upper Amazon basin at the end of the nineteenth century. As a result of epidemics and forced labor at the hands of rubber merchants, the Zápara, like many other Indigenous peoples in the region, experienced a dramatic population decline during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Following the rubber boom, most of the remaining Zápara were assimilated by their Kichwa neighbors.¹ In 1998 four communities—Llanchamacocha, Jandiayacu, Mazaramu, and Cuyacocha—organized as the *Nacionalidad Zápara de Ecuador* (Zápara Nationality of Ecuador, NAZAE) with the intent of reasserting Zápara identity and establishing a legal Zápara territory distinct from those of other Indigenous nationalities in the region (figure 1.2). At the heart of this revitalization was an attempt to document the language of the remaining Zápara elders as proof of these communities' cultural uniqueness.

While I was sick in Quito, I forgot that UNESCO was due to announce its list of candidates for its Intangible Cultural Heritage project. I found a phone booth near the movie theater and called to congratulate a colleague who had worked on the project. Later that day, one of Ecuador's television stations ran a segment on the Zápara, including comments by an

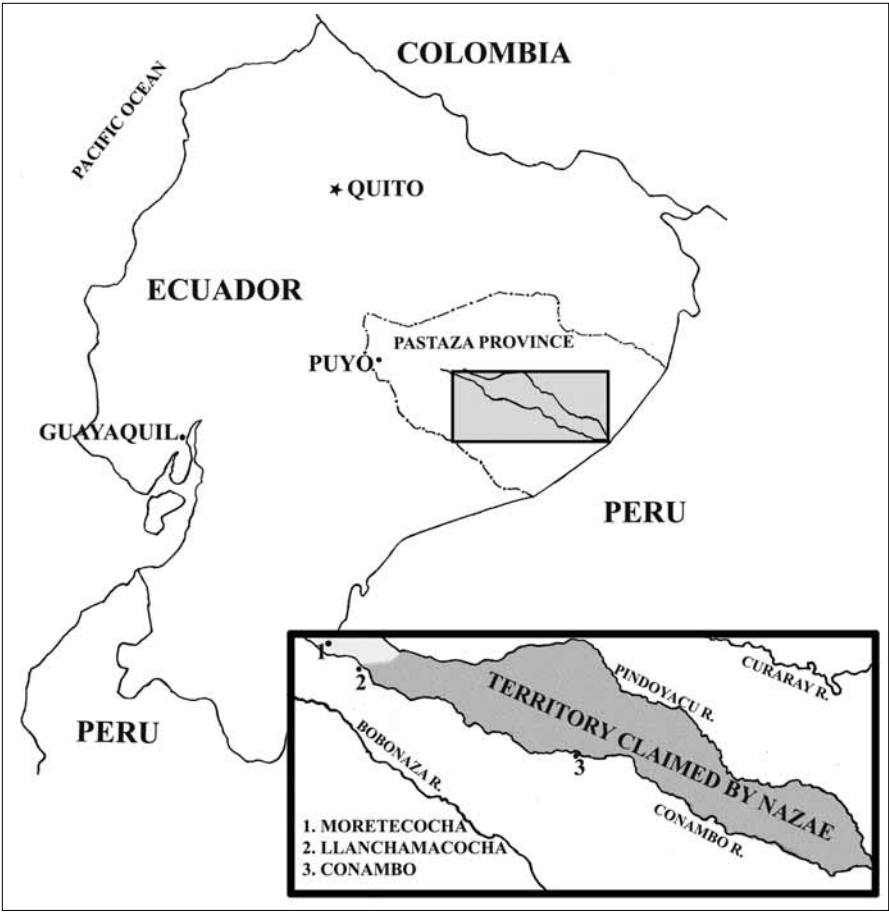


Figure 1.2 Geographic location of the Zápara nationality in Ecuador. Adapted from NAZAE's Mapa del territorio (2003).

Ecuadorian linguist and a Zápara leader on the importance of the language for the perpetuation of Zápara cultural identity. UNESCO's recognition was a boon for NAZAE and its efforts at revival—shortly afterwards, the Ecuadorian government followed suit by publicly recognizing the Zápara. In May 2001 Ecuador's congress celebrated the Záparas' UNESCO award, and Ecuador's Ministerio de Educación, Cultura, Deportes y Recreación (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Recreation, or MEC) bestowed the Medal of Cultural Merit of the First Class on the Zápara people. MEC's Ministerial Accord No. 552 recognized the Zápara for their "rich cultural tradition," expressed in their language, and their determination to save this component of Ecuador's "national cultural patrimony" from disappearance.

The Záparas' warm official reception stood in striking contrast to the government's reaction to Indigenous protests and political demands a few months earlier. In January and February 2001, Ecuador's most prominent Indigenous organization, the Confederación de las Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, or CONAIE) led a national mobilization demanding government action for the country's poor. Following the collapse of its banking system in 1999 and the adoption of the US dollar as its currency in 2000, Ecuador suffered inflation and heightened unemployment. CONAIE's protest was aimed at decreasing the price of transportation and stopping tax increases on public services (CONAIE 2001). In response, interim president Gustavo Noboa (2000–2003) deployed the military and police to halt the demonstrations. Indigenous people were forced from buses and detained, and protestors were denied access to their usual camp in Quito's central El Arbolito park (Macdonald 2002:188). Press coverage of the mobilization highlighted "the government's repressive and violent acts" while generally supporting Indigenous protestors (Macdonald 2002:188). However, as the year moved on and CONAIE maintained its opposition to the Noboa government, the Ecuadorian press took a more critical stance towards the Indigenous confederation, focusing on internal conflicts and alleged corruption within its leadership.

When compared, these two instances highlight a distinction between what Ecuadorian elites viewed as the "acceptable" and "inappropriate" boundaries of Indigenous identity (Hale 2002:507). Government representatives celebrated Zápara "ethnicity" as an important aspect of Ecuador's cultural past, something to be preserved for future generations. In contrast, when CONAIE demanded greater economic justice for Indigenous peoples and inclusion in government decision-making processes, elites opposed this expression of Indigenous ethnicity as a divisive force in national politics. What emerges from this scenario is a paradox: according to powerful actors and institutions, Indigenous identity is good in some cases but bad in others (Hale 2002:493, 2004:17; see also Gustafson 2002). Ethnicity is acceptable when it involves expressions of cultural difference such as clothing, dance, and music (Tilley 2002:536). However, it is objectionable when Indigenous peoples agitate for concrete improvements in their economic and political situations (Postero 2007:15).

Indigenous Rights in Neoliberal Times

The paradoxical treatment of Indigenous identity is the subject of this book. My purpose is to explore the official recognition of ethnic and cultural difference in Ecuador with the following question in mind: has the official

recognition of Indigenous rights provided new opportunities for Indigenous actors or further restricted their political action?

Ecuador has been at the vanguard of Latin America's Indigenous rights reforms. In 1998 the country's constitution was revised to give Indigenous peoples expanded linguistic, cultural, and territorial rights—what political scientist Donna Lee Van Cott (2005:126) believes was the “most progressive” package of Indigenous constitutional rights at the time. In 2008 Ecuador's new constitution declared the country a plurinational state. As Ecuadorian governments instituted some of their most extensive reforms, a host of other Latin American states with Indigenous populations, such as Colombia, Guatemala, and Bolivia, made similar constitutional modifications (Yashar 2005).

The question of how to interpret these reforms is one of the central topics in current studies of Latin American nation-states and Indigenous peoples. Anthropologists and other social scientists debate why these reforms have emerged in recent decades. I use the phrase *official multiculturalism* throughout this chapter to refer to elite-sponsored reforms that are concerned primarily with recognizing ethnic diversity, in contrast to Indigenous notions of *interculturalism* and *plurinationality*, which stress the need for more substantive economic and political rights.² A number of authors have argued that multicultural reforms are the result of powerful Indigenous movements pressuring traditional elites—weakened by economic crises and the return to formal democracy in much of Latin America—to accept more inclusive notions of citizenship.³

However, anthropologist Charles Hale (2002, 2005) has questioned the notion that Indigenous people were able to force ethnic reforms on reluctant states. Based on his own ethnographic research in Central America, Hale argues that official multicultural reforms represent an attempt by national and international elites to redefine citizenship and political participation by adopting a limited package of Indigenous rights that reinforces current forms of social, political, and economic dominance. Hale (2004) argues that Indigenous leaders and communities who stick to these “permitted” rights receive state recognition and resources (see also Rivera Cusicanqui 2008:143). However, those who choose to push for “unacceptable” rights, which contest existing political economies and social structures—such as the redistribution of concrete resources—are relegated to the political and economic margins (Hale 2002:491). The result is a deepening “division among different strands of cultural rights activism” that poses a greater “menace” to Indigenous movements than did previous doctrines of assimilation (Hale 2002:485, 491).

Anthropologists Shannon Speed and Nancy Grey Postero have contested

Hale's vision of official multiculturalism. They argue that although official discourses of Indigenous recognition have renewed prior histories of racial discrimination and ethnic marginalization, these have also created new spaces for Indigenous activism that contest dominant paradigms of exclusion. In southern Mexico, Speed (2006a) argues, Zapatista communities have avoided the traps of official multiculturalism by constructing their autonomy outside the legal frameworks of the state and developing a more expansive set of Indigenous rights than those advocated by government elites. In Postero's (2007:16) work on Bolivia, she suggests that Indigenous activists used the spaces created by multicultural reforms to question the very foundation upon which these reforms were built and to "push beyond" their limitations. The result, she argues, has been the emergence of a "post-multicultural" citizenship in Bolivia—Indigenous activists have created alliances with other sectors of society to fight for access to political power as Bolivian citizens, rather than demand greater rights based on their ethnic and racial difference (Postero 2007:18).

The core issue of this debate is whether multicultural reforms have stood in opposition to or have been seamlessly integrated into larger economic and political changes made by many Latin American states to improve their positions in the global marketplace. The 1980s and 1990s were decades of economic turmoil and political change throughout much of Latin America. Spurred by the 1982 worldwide economic crisis, countries in the region plunged into debt as international commodity prices fell and interest rates soared. As a result, most of Latin America's national governments were forced to take out expansive loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These institutions not only provided financing at inflated repayment rates but also required that debtor states undertake neoliberal economic, political, and social reforms. *Neoliberalism* refers to the ideology that the most effective means for maximizing social good is to liberate "individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade" (Harvey 2005:2; see also Ferguson 2006). In Latin America, neoliberalism has been characterized by a broad set of policies that have included governmental decentralization, privatization of state resources, decreased economic regulations, and cuts in social spending. These policies are aimed at decreasing government interference in the free market—except where military and legal means are necessary "to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets" (Harvey 2005:2).

In Ecuador, neoliberal reform has "been implemented in a less orthodox fashion and at a slower pace" than in other Latin American states (Lind

2005:62), such as Bolivia, which underwent perhaps the harshest economic adjustment in the region (see Gill 2000). Nevertheless, Ecuador's neoliberal policies have had a profound "effect on the organization of the economy, the state, and civil society" (Lind 2005:62). Beginning in the 1980s, Ecuador's governments introduced economic austerity measures to offset a domestic economic crisis caused by a plummet in international oil prices and a jump in interest rates. In 1971, service to foreign debts accounted for \$15 of every \$100 exported—by 1981, the ratio had grown to \$71 for every \$100 exported (Acosta 2003:79–80). Between 1982 and 1988, per capita income in Ecuador fell by 32 percent, and the country's foreign debt climbed from 37 percent to 122 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Treakle 1998:222). However, neoliberal adjustment proceeded in a start-and-stop manner throughout the 1980s because the general populace resisted cuts in government spending and some government elites opposed limiting state control of the national economy (see Sawyer 2004:11–15). It was not until the 1990s, when Ecuador's financial crisis worsened, that the country's governments pursued more severe economic austerity policies. Throughout much of the 1990s, Ecuador claimed the "highest per capita foreign debt...in Latin America" (Sawyer 2004:95). In response to Ecuador's fiscal crisis, the Durán Ballén administration (1992–1996) instituted the first comprehensive neoliberal reform package in Ecuador: dismantling tariff protections, deregulating domestic markets, eliminating subsidies, and partially deregulating the financing system (see Larrea and Sánchez 2003:8; Lind 2004:62; Sawyer 2004:11). Durán Ballén also withdrew Ecuador from the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1992 so that it could "produce in excess of the country's production quota," increasing its output of petroleum by almost one hundred thousand barrels per day (Sawyer 2004:95).

Rather than improve, Ecuador's economy deteriorated as the international price of oil declined. Between November 1998 and 1999, Ecuador's banking system collapsed. President Jamil Mahuad (1998–2000) attempted to bail out Ecuador's five main banks but was not able to resuscitate the failing institutions (Macdonald 2002:171). The value of Ecuador's national currency, the sucre, plummeted, and the country's GDP dropped more than 6 percent in 1999. As a sign of its deepening troubles, Ecuador defaulted on payment of its \$6 billion Brady Bond debt, further tarnishing its already battered reputation in the international financial markets. The country was at the mercy of the IMF and World Bank, which controlled 85 percent of its foreign loans and therefore "profoundly influenced policies, projects, and in many cases legislation in the country" (Treakle 1998:224).⁴ The IMF advised the Ecuadorian government to raise prices and cut expenditures. Between

1995 and 2001, government spending on education dropped from 63 percent of all social spending in the national budget to 46 percent, and spending on health care declined from 22 percent to 15 percent (Parandekar, Vos, and Winkler 2002:149). In 2001 the Ecuadorian government paid \$1.6 billion towards its foreign debts—more than double the amount it spent on education, health, and internal development combined (CAAP 2003:12).

This reduction in the scope of state social expenditures has led to what sociologist Leon Zamosc (2004) describes as a combined crisis of representation and state legitimacy. He argues that this “dual political crisis” resulted from the fact that neoliberal adjustments worsened Ecuador’s economic situation, causing a decline in the state’s authority because many Ecuadorians viewed their government as “ineffective and grossly unjust” (Zamosc 2004: 140, 151). This was exacerbated by the government’s weakened ability to provide for the well-being of its citizens and by Ecuador’s traditional political elites’ disregard for the impact of neoliberalism on the general populace (Zamosc 2004:143).

Anthropologist Suzana Sawyer (2004:15) asserts that the weakened credibility of Ecuador’s state system opened political space for the development of a radical Indigenous movement in the gap that neoliberalism created between the state and its citizenry. Sawyer (2004:15) argues that while neoliberalism increased the economic marginalization of Indigenous peoples in Ecuador, it also created “the conditions of possibility for a disruptive indigenous movement that denounced the government’s allegiances to transnational capital and its unresponsiveness to subaltern subjects.” For instance, the decentralization of traditional state responsibilities has been an important factor in establishing the political legitimacy of Ecuador’s Indigenous organizations, many of whom took over the administration of community social services from the state in the 1980s (see Crain 1990:48–49; Zamosc 1994:54). According to Sawyer, Indigenous organizations used this legitimacy to highlight the economic ills of neoliberalism. Moreover, they rejected the idea of official multiculturalism, advocating for intercultural cooperation and the acknowledgment that Ecuador was plurinational—a state consisting of multiple nationalities with equal rights in government, society, and the economy. Utilizing the concept of plurinationalism, Sawyer (2004:10) argues that Indigenous organizations reconfigured the way in which citizens conceptualized the Ecuadorian nation-state.

Building on Sawyer’s analysis, I show that official multicultural reforms have generated novel openings for Indigenous organizations. However, I argue that these reforms have simultaneously limited the parameters of Indigenous activism and produced new divisions in local movements.

Despite being riddled with “internal conflicts” (Striffler 2002:37–38), the Ecuadorian state’s “regulative and coercive” agencies have the ability to define “certain kinds of subjects and identities” while “ruling out” others (Roseberry 1994:355). Notwithstanding declines in state corporatist projects and funding for social welfare throughout Latin America, Indigenous organizations must register with the “right ministry, in accordance with the appropriate law,” work with traditional political parties to evoke constitutional changes, and petition government bureaus for land titles (Lucero 2003:41; see also Hodgson 2002:1041).

Moreover, the state is not the only powerful actor involved in articulating spaces of Indigenous recognition and participation in Ecuador. Although state spending for Indigenous education and social welfare has slowed to a trickle, the World Bank, the United Nations, and a multitude of NGOs have increased funding for Indigenous development, education, and environmental preservation projects. These state-like actors represent a significant source of human and financial capital for resource-poor Indigenous communities, especially in Ecuador’s Amazonian region—where the state historically has been absent from daily social life. As such, these state-like actors have the ability to shape Indigenous political participation by providing grants and training to organizations and community projects that fit their own financial, social, or political agendas. For example, World Bank staffers chose not to work directly with CONAIE and other national-level organizations when sponsoring a new “ethno-development” project in Ecuador (the subject of this book’s penultimate chapter), claiming that such organizations were too “politically motivated” and not responsive to local needs (Van Nieuwkoop and Uquillas 2000:12).

The result has been that official multicultural reforms have made it more difficult for Indigenous organizations to effect radical change. Ecuadorian scholar José Almeida Vinuesa (2005:93) argues that the Ecuadorian state, multinational lenders, and donor agencies have successfully “appropriated” the Indigenous movement’s concepts of interculturalism and plurinationalism, altering their meanings and stripping them of their potential for evoking more expansive notions of social change. As Almeida Vinuesa (2005: 93,104) suggests, dominant policies of multiculturalism have emphasized tangible aspects of local “cultures” over pan-Indigenous political identities, free-market initiatives over resource redistribution, and applications for development projects over collective political action. This has not spelled the end of Indigenous activism in Ecuador, but, as this book demonstrates, it has erected significant barriers for Indigenous federations pushing for far-reaching change and local communities seeking greater autonomy.

National Reforms, Local Concerns

A number of excellent studies on Indigenous politics in Ecuador exist. However, most have focused on Indigenous activism and Indigenous–state relationships at the national level.⁵ Although these studies have mapped out the major issues at play in Ecuador’s ethnic politics, they have overlooked the effects of these politics on local organizations (Lucero 2006a:32–33). The significance of Ecuador’s official multiculturalism for Indigenous peoples’ day-to-day lives has remained largely unexplored, despite the fact that such information is critical for assessing the full impact of these reforms.

Given this gap in the literature, I chose to ground my analysis of official multiculturalism in an ethnographic study of the Zápara nationality, the group mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. This book traces the Zápara nationality’s process of self-organization and emergence within Ecuador’s Indigenous movement from 1998 to 2008, to explore the complex role that multiculturalism has played in local Indigenous politics.

The Zápara provide an important perspective on official multiculturalism for a number of reasons. They were one of many grassroots Indigenous organizations to emerge at the time of Ecuador’s 1998 constitutional reforms. As political scientist Victor Bretón (2005:72) notes, the majority of these organizations were not able to take full advantage of emerging national reforms to solidify their organizational bases. In contrast, NAZAE appeared to exploit the openings created by official multicultural reforms in a manner incomparable to other grassroots Indigenous organizations. In the space of five years, the organization gained administrative control and government funding for education in its communities, obtained thousands of dollars from the World Bank, secured multiyear funding from UNESCO for language documentation, and received a host of smaller grants from environmental NGOs for ecological protection. For a new and relatively small organization, NAZAE was able to position itself effectively within regional, national, and international rights networks—providing what seemed to be an example of the opportunities created by official multicultural reforms for local organizations.

However, while official multicultural reforms opened new spaces for the assertion of Zápara political subjectivity in Ecuador, they also expanded and naturalized dominant understandings of Indigenous identity and political participation in NAZAE. Zápara leaders were able to draw tens of thousands of dollars from powerful supporters, but they did so by fashioning a version of local identity that fit elite spaces of recognition—one that dismissed important aspects of Zápara history, practice, and pan-community cooperation. Moreover, despite official multiculturalism’s initial promise of expanded autonomy for Indigenous organizations and their communities,

NAZAE increasingly found itself dependent on outside “experts.” Dominant institutions’ emphases on narrowly defined projects not only devalued the knowledge accrued by NAZAE leaders in community mobilization and collective activism but also stressed the importance of formal education and technical knowledge that these leaders did not yet possess.

Finally, official multiculturalism’s emphasis on local differences as the legitimate indicators of Indigenous identity—variations in dress, language, and economic production—led to bitter disputes within the Zápara nationality over which groups or families were most entitled to recognition and funding. Although NAZAE has consistently represented the majority of Zápara in Ecuador, another organization—which I refer to throughout the book as the Comuna Záparo (Záparo Commune)—has claimed Zápara identity since the mid-1990s (an issue I discuss in chapter 3). Over the past decade, the two organizations have fought each other through various government ministries, each petitioning at different points to have the other’s official status revoked. This is an unfortunate trend that has been mirrored in recent years at regional and national levels as state officials have actively sought to exploit rifts within Ecuador’s national Indigenous movement.

Although the Zápara are one of Ecuador’s smallest nationalities, their organization’s trajectory has paralleled important developments in official reform and Indigenous activism in Ecuador. This book is not only an in-depth ethnographic account of the diverse political actions in which NAZAE leaders have been engaged, but also a view of the broader problems and conflicts that Ecuador’s Indigenous organizations face. Each of the book’s chapters elucidates a different aspect of official multiculturalism in Ecuador and its role in constructing local Indigenous identities.

Chapter 2 provides the historical background for the Záparas’ emergence in Ecuadorian Indigenous politics. It outlines the ways in which Zápara practice and identity have been shaped through the nationality’s links to regional, national, and global political economies. Moreover, it shows that official multicultural reforms are the latest in a series of attempts by elite actors to shape Indigenous identities to fit Ecuador’s changing social landscape. Chapter 3 examines NAZAE’s entrance into Indigenous politics and reveals the complex manner in which Zápara leaders adapted their communities’ history and cultural practices—particularly in their use of language to symbolize cultural legitimacy—to fit emergent multicultural and plurinational paradigms. It also shows that, in the process of reshaping Zápara identity to fit new multicultural frameworks, these leaders reinforced dominant and often stereotypical understandings of Indigenous identity in their communities and in their relations with rival Zápara leaders.

Chapters 4 through 6 examine the role of official multiculturalism in creating space for Zápara activism and simultaneously reinforcing restricted parameters of identity and practice. Chapter 4 explores the difficulties of implementing bilingual, intercultural education in local Zápara schools. Although administrative control of local education augmented NAZAE's organizational capacities, government spending cuts precluded significant improvements in Zápara community education. Chapter 5 probes the function of sympathetic non-Indigenous advocates and their work with NAZAE leaders on UNESCO's project to document the Zápara language. It demonstrates that such advocacy has been essential for NAZAE's ability to exploit international discourses of Indigenous rights but has also produced relationships of dependency between Indigenous activists and their non-Indigenous counterparts. Chapter 6 looks at a World Bank-funded project aimed at mitigating Indigenous peoples' economic marginalization by augmenting their "social capital." Rather than enhance Zápara political and economic autonomy, I argue, this project reinforced a narrow (and decidedly apolitical) version of what "counted" as Zápara identity, encouraging a dependent relationship between NAZAE and the project apparatus.

In the book's final chapter, I discuss NAZAE's decline after a steady rise to prominence within regional Indigenous politics. I argue that, despite initial efforts to take advantage of the openings created by recent official multicultural discourses in Ecuador, the contradictory aspects of these reforms have made it difficult for the Zápara to sustain their political activism. I then discuss the ways in which the Záparas' situation has paralleled that of other Indigenous nationalities in Ecuador and the current situation of Indigenous activism in the country.

Studying Indigenous Activism

My book's analysis is rooted in more than a year of ethnographic research conducted during five visits to Ecuador between 2001 and 2004, with follow-up visits in 2006 and 2008. I spent most of these visits as a participant-observer in NAZAE, studying Zápara activism by being involved in it. I shadowed NAZAE activists during their day-to-day activities, observing their interactions with other Indigenous leaders, government officials, non-Indigenous volunteers, and NGO workers. I accompanied them on four trips, lasting from a few days to a month, to Zápara communities along the Conambo River (and once to meet a Zápara speaker on the Curaray River). During these trips, I observed Zápara leaders' interactions with their constituents and talked to community residents on their own. I conversed with Zápara-speaking elders, recorded linguistic information about Zápara,

collected oral histories, and discussed identity and politics with younger Zápara. Furthermore, I studied the “paper trail”—memos, legal documents, and proposals—that detailed NAZAE’s interactions with various state agencies and non-state institutions. I spoke with officials in relevant ministries and members of other Indigenous federations in Pastaza. Finally, I examined press releases and media interviews with Zápara leaders that documented their strategies for representing Zápara identity.

I intentionally submerged myself in NAZAE’s daily activities as a means to study the dynamics of the organization and the processes through which Zápara identity and political participation were constructed.⁶ In contrast to a broader comparative approach, focusing exclusively on NAZAE enabled me to examine the intricate spaces where local understandings of national identity and political inclusion took shape (Canessa 2005:6, 18). The compromise of this approach was that the resulting study represents an examination of Indigenous organizing from a relatively narrow, local perspective.

Furthermore, my research was driven and informed by my ongoing cooperation with NAZAE on the documentation of the language. Zápara leaders were cautious about working with social scientists, especially because Ecuadorian anthropologists had declared the Zápara “extinct” (Andrade Pallares 2001:20; Costales and Costales Samaniego 1975). My basic linguistic training was welcomed by NAZAE in its efforts to revive the Zápara language—I recorded Zápara narratives, worked on bilingual Zápara–Spanish pedagogical materials, and applied for (and received) grant money to carry out these small projects. I began my linguistic work with the Zápara as a project aimed at helping Indigenous communities to revalorize an endangered language. This soon morphed into an effort to help the Zápara document their language and oral history as a means for establishing government recognition and territorial rights.

My linguistic work positioned me as an advocate of the Záparas’ struggle and underpinned my ethnographic research within NAZAE. To understand the micropolitics of Indigenous organization, language use and identity, and cultural rights, I spent countless hours conversing, traveling, living, working, joking, and eating with NAZAE leaders. Such constant and close interaction with my research participants required a level of trust that my cooperative work granted me (Sawyer 2004:22). The result was that my research was situated in the tense middle ground between “activist research”—aligning oneself with a group of people and their struggle and using one’s academic authority to aid in their rights claims—and “cultural critique”—intellectual analysis of the complexities and contradictions of dominant and subaltern politics, uncompromised by the negotiations of on-the-ground struggles (Hale 2006:97–98; see also Speed 2006b).

To balance the narrow scope and subjective character of my study, throughout this book I situate NAZAE's activities within larger processes at work not only in Ecuador's Indigenous movement but also in Ecuadorian politics and transnational economics. Each chapter reveals how the dynamics at work within NAZAE often paralleled those of CONAIE and other Indigenous nationalities, and the significance of divergences between NAZAE's situation and those of other Indigenous peoples. Thus, this study examines CONAIE from the perspective of one of its small member organizations, providing a detailed local account of one of the hemisphere's most renowned social movements.

Names and Terms

I use pseudonyms to refer to most of the people who appear in this book—Zápara activists and their constituents, Zápara elders, and NGO workers. In several instances, I modified key aspects of individuals' life histories when I thought that a pseudonym was not sufficient to disguise their identities. However, I use the real names of Indigenous leaders such as NAZAE's president because they occupied prominent public roles.⁷ It would have been impossible to hide their identities and would have likely caused confusion for those acquainted with Ecuadorian Indigenous politics.

Within anthropology and Indigenous studies, there has been an ongoing debate about the terms used to refer to Indigenous peoples. There is no standardized term that is universally agreed upon by Indigenous peoples and scholars throughout the Americas, because different signifiers have different connotations in different countries (Warren and Jackson 2002:29). In Ecuador, Indigenous peoples have preferred to call themselves *Indígenas* over the somewhat pejorative *Indio* (Indian). For this reason, I have chosen not to use *Indian* in this book. Yet, there is no direct cognate of *Indígena* in English. The closest approximation would be *Indigene*, which is “not really English” (Warren and Jackson 2002:29). I finally decided on the term *Indigenous peoples*, capitalizing *Indigenous* throughout to retain its proper status in English. Although the word *peoples* has been contested by some academics because of its relationship to nineteenth-century European concepts of nationhood, it has been adopted by a number of Indigenous activists and scholars as an acceptable and, for some, even desirable term (see Holm, Pearson, and Chasis 2003).