

Redefining Indigenous Politics

June 1990 marked a turning point for Ecuadorian politics, with events that changed Ecuadorian political culture and redefined the way different social forces related to the state. A large number of indigenous people from all over the country gathered in the streets of the capital Quito and in many other provincial capitals to claim their rights as ethnically and culturally diverse citizens. This powerful *levantamiento* (uprising), which paralyzed major roads and commercial activities for an entire week, was neither a sudden outburst, nor a chaotic and random protest. It was the result of almost a century of indigenous political organizing in a country in which, as in many others in Latin America, racial and ethnic discrimination has endured since the colonial era.

Equality in Diversity

As in other Andean countries, the process of formation of ethnic militancy in Ecuador began, in the early twentieth century, under the influence of left-wing parties and ideologies. As early as the 1920s, some indigenous activists, mostly in the highlands, presented the state with their first formal demands for education and against what they identified as mistreatment and abuse. The process of indigenous organizing consolidated in the 1950s around the struggle for agrarian reform laws, which gradually led to the formation of indigenous grassroots organizations, federations, and confederations, which in turn led to the formation of what scholars and activists define as the Ecuadorian indigenous movement. The *levantamiento* of 1990 marked the maturation of this political mobilization, officially elevating indigenous political presence to the national level and

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making visible indigenous peoples' quest for recognition as Ecuadorian citizens with rights to cultural and ethnic diversity, as well as with rights to equal access to resources and political participation.

The movement's struggle for recognition continued in the following years and marked what Ecuadorian social scientists have defined as the "won decade" (*la década ganada*) (Ramón Valarezo 1992). The constitutional reform of 1998 supposedly represented the completion of this process, since it officially recognized Ecuador's ethnic and cultural diversity by declaring the country multicultural and pluriethnic. Yet, rather than signifying a point of arrival, the multicultural era, inaugurated by the constitutional reform of 1998 and reinforced by the constitution approved in 2008, has signified for the indigenous movement a point of departure, the beginning of a new political phase. The postrecognition phase, as I call it, has posed new and unexpected challenges to both the movement and the Ecuadorian state. The political impasse and crisis that indigenous activism has faced since 1998, as it has consolidated its political presence within the state structure, underline the complexity of ethnic protest in the multicultural era. Due to the shift from the heightened ethnic focus of the 1990s to the postrecognition phase, the indigenous struggle cannot be pursued or contained within the limits of ethnicity. Indigenous activists have acknowledged that such a conjuncture was nevertheless propitious for forging new alliances with nonindigenous actors of Ecuadorian society, given that indigenous citizens were not alone in being adversely affected by neoliberal economics.

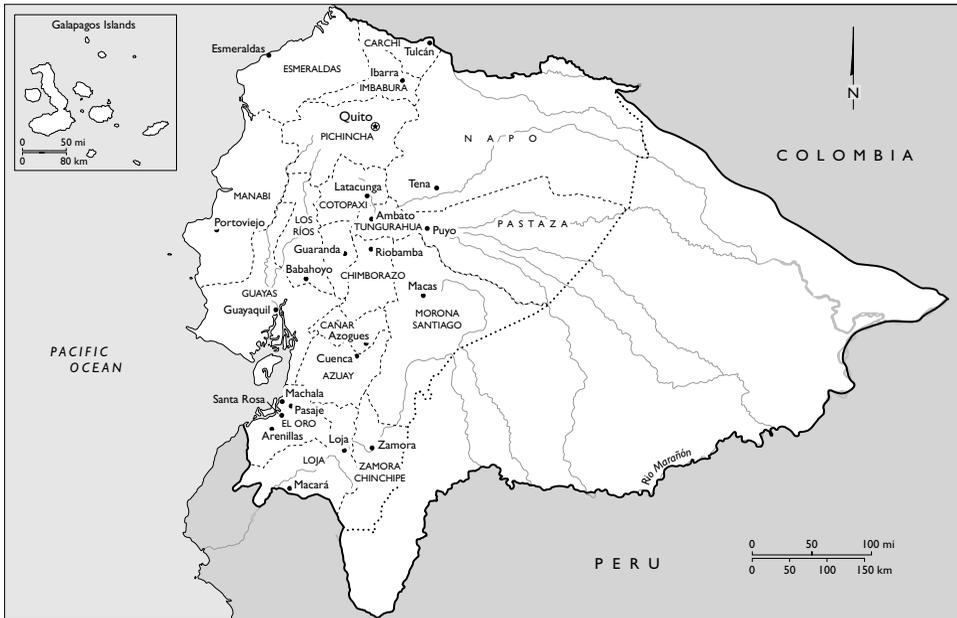
How, then, to best understand the different meanings, scopes, and possibilities of indigenous politics in contemporary Ecuador in this changed context? The Ecuadorian case offers an opportunity to examine the challenges that political participation poses to the indigenous movement and its constituency in a society where the contingency of economic neoliberalism and the endurance of the "coloniality of power" undermine the possibility for a more democratic exercise of power (Mignolo 2000; Moraña, Dussel, and Jáuregui 2008; Quijano 2000). My analysis of indigenous politics in Ecuador before, during, and after the implementation of economic and political measures under neoliberal agendas reveals that indigeneity cannot be reduced either to a matter of class or to a generalized fight against poverty. Such approaches do not address the protracted racial and ethnic discrimination that indigenous and Afro-descent citizens continue to suffer. The affirmation of indigenous rights becomes, therefore, a

highly contested terrain in which different meanings of social justice and nation are disputed.

This book highlights the contours of the politicization of ethnic identity and the process of political organizing, by reconstructing the various contested arenas and conjunctures in which indigenous struggle emerged, became meaningful, and promoted change. My analysis traces the mobilization of the Quichuas of the Ecuadorian highland parish of Tixán and the formation of their organization, Inca Atahualpa, within the national context of the politicization of ethnic identity. Rather than pursuing a historical trajectory, I have taken into account all those elements, past and present, that Quichua activists and inhabitants in the parish indicated as pivotal and meaningful in the process of formation of their political consciousness and militancy, then analyzed how such elements spoke to the larger context of indigenous political organizing nationally. I explore the extent to which the Ecuadorian indigenous movement has redefined both nationally and locally its relationship with the state and nonindigenous society by creating venues for indigenous participation in decision making.

My analysis draws on eight years of uninterrupted experience, reflection, work, and collaboration with indigenous activists. During those years, I assumed various roles—researcher, university professor, consultant. I first arrived in Ecuador in January 1991, with a research project on the indigenous movement, a largely understudied topic at the time. I was not only interested in the movement's political discourse, but also particularly in deconstructing the traditions and ideologies constituting its political inspiration and practice. Many Ecuadorian scholars I met joked about the timing of my arrival, which they characterized as a missed opportunity to have witnessed the historical levantamiento of 1990. Notwithstanding, I tried to learn as much as I could from press reports and a selection of articles that the publisher Abya-Yala, directed by Father Juan Bottasso, had compiled in a series of volumes titled *Kipu* (1990) to document those extraordinary events. From this material, I clearly recognized that it was specifically the language of ethnic rights in which indigenous demands had been articulated. Yet it also seemed that such specificity was rather fluid and open to constant reinterpretation. Ethnic rights were not limited to the defense of an abstract and disembodied notion of indigenous culture, but rather linked to economic and social policies meant to redefine the position of subordination that indigenous peoples, referred to as nationalities, had suffered since the colonial time. Therefore, in order to

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Map 1. Ecuador. Prepared by Bill Nelson.

understand the multifaceted ways in which indigeneity was produced and performed in political practice, I needed also to understand the circumstances in which it had emerged as well as the ways in which it was lived in quotidian practices.

The Ecuadorian sociologist Andrés Guerrero, who later became one of my mentors, told me about the Inca Atahualpa, a grassroots indigenous organization regarded as having been highly successful in negotiating power and in controlling abuses and racism locally. By the end of 1991, I had made my way to Tixán, a rural parish in the central highland province of Chimborazo, with one of the highest percentages of Quichua indigenous people.¹ In Tixán I worked, for two years, with the Inca Atahualpa leaders and residents of its affiliated communities, offering assistance in preparing an oral history on the formation of the organization and as a witness of its accomplishments. This journey took me from an examination of daily life interactions among indigenous and nonindigenous people, to the administration of indigenous justice in the parish, to the representation of indigenous cultural forms in ritual contexts. My analysis thus specifically explores the realm of cultural politics, self-determination, and ap-

plication of hybrid discourses on human rights and indigenous justice and their implication for social change.

Such ethnographic immersion in the local dimension, at the micro-level, also gave me the opportunity to explore how indigenous politics intertwined at the local, regional, and national levels. As emphasized in other studies of indigenous movements, it is impossible to understand indigenous activism in Latin America without accounting for the many levels and networks (what Bret Gustafson defines as scales) in which indigenous activists and people operate.² Accordingly, I took advantage of my uninterrupted stay in Ecuador from 1991 to 1998 (and the shorter trips to Ecuador I made after 2000) to reinterpret the political experience of the Inca Atahualpa within the context of indigenous politics at the national level. At the end of 1993, after my intense and indelible experience of living in Tixán, I returned to Quito to talk to national activists and to learn more about the complexities of national politics, multilateral agencies, and the percolating effects of transnational discourses on human rights, diversity, and indigeneity. Although I maintained my contacts with Tixán, during the next five years I focused primarily on the national dimension of indigenous struggle, often working as a consultant for national nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) collaborating with the indigenous movement and for agencies such as UNICEF and the Inter-American Development Bank, all of which had fully incorporated the language of ethnic rights and diversity in their agendas.

By then the indigenous movement was cresting, fully pursuing participation in the state structure via national elections. In 1996 indigenous candidates of the newly founded Pachakutik movement won seats in local administrations and gained representation in the national government. This political presence gave the movement the opportunity to push forward its agenda for constitutional reform, a measure that had already been adopted by other countries in the region, specifically the neighboring Colombia and Peru. The 1998 constitution was heralded as a pivotal moment in the history of Ecuadorian politics, a significant step forward in the process of democratization that had inaugurated the era of multiculturalism in the country. My analysis of the postrecognition phase is a depiction of such a process and of the multicultural shift, which came about because of the participation and efforts of many other grassroots organizations like the Inca Atahualpa.

What led indigenous activists around the country to proclaim a his-

torical victory were the 2002 national elections, when the alliance of the movement with the independent presidential candidate Lucio Gutiérrez (after the fall of two presidents) resulted in indigenous activists holding three cabinet ministries in the newly formed government, an achievement unprecedented in Ecuadorian political history. Yet my examination of the postrecognition phase reveals the many ambiguities of this process and the extent to which ethnic protest and the pursuit of political empowerment and social change are not only contested, but also contradictory.

During the nineteen years in which I have been engaged with the study of indigenous politics in Ecuador, the main focus of my anthropological interest has remained the intricate and complex process by which indigenous identity has been politicized, and the methodological and epistemological challenges thus posed to the discipline of anthropology. The complexity I encountered in the field also challenged my training as an anthropologist. At stake are ethical and methodological claims of detachment and objectivity, as well as anthropological notions of culture and identity that, while contesting essentialist renderings of indigeneity and indigenous politics, got trapped in formulaic notions of strategic essentialism or fluidity, failing to foreground the perceived immanent and overarching nature of cultural claims in the life of indigenous people.

Redefining Indigenous Politics

My analysis of grassroots indigenous politics is part of a more recent focus within anthropological studies of ethnicity in Latin America. The process of politicization of ethnic identity that clearly emerged during the commemoration, in 1992, of five hundred years of indigenous resistance has led to a shift in anthropological research interests and methodologies (Rappaport 1994, 17). Since the early 1990s, anthropological studies of indigeneity have moved beyond the synchronic analyses of indigenous societies as isolated entities to focus instead on the construction of political movements and identities among indigenous people.³ Urban's and Sherzer's (1991) emphasis on the politicization of ethnic identity in Latin America paved the way for new studies of indigeneity, which focus on the complex and ever-changing nature of a political process that involved both indigenous actors and states. Even studies that do not center on political organizing examine indigenous societies in interaction with economic policies and social changes at the national and transnational

levels.⁴ Accordingly, microlevel analyses are linked to larger national and global contexts in order to demonstrate how indigenous groups are constantly trying to redefine their position of subordination vis-à-vis states and nonindigenous societies.

My examination of the process of formation and expansion of the Inca Atahualpa highlights features of the highly complex process of political mobilization known within the social sciences as indigenous movements. As indigenous activists have stressed repeatedly, especially in the context of the celebrations in 1992, the struggle of indigenous peoples has been a long-standing one, dating to the Spanish conquest, when they struggled to preserve their social and cultural integrity in the face of colonial abuse. However, during the twentieth century, with the emergence of the modern nation-state and with state-led modernization, indigenous resistance gradually coalesced into political movements representing the voices of the indigenous population—in Ecuador, approximately 35 percent of the citizens (see CONAIE 1989).⁵

Starting in the 1980s, indigenous movements in Ecuador, Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, and later Peru foregrounded and further reinforced the ethnic component of indigenous struggles.⁶ In this context, the politicization of historical and cultural identity became key for redefining the structures of ethnic and racial domination. The right to self-determination that has become the central and highly contested demand of indigenous movements in the last three decades symbolically capitalizes on the injustice and discrimination suffered by the native peoples of the continent since the conquest. Their quest for recognition of their collective rights as *pueblos* (peoples) within the framework of citizenship rights has challenged both liberal notions of individual rights and the construction of monolithic and culturally homogenous national identities.⁷

Arturo Escobar and Sonia Alvarez (1992) have characterized this political phenomenon in terms of new social movements that formulate political demands based on cultural and social identities other than class. They contextualize this shift internationally as one of the many political changes of the post-Cold War era. Geopolitics have been profoundly altered by the implosion of the socialist bloc since the end of the 1980s. New social movements, therefore, are an expression of these changes in transnational alliances and equilibrium, and a response to global economic forces whose negative impacts are widely and variously denounced. In this context, human rights, women's rights, indigenous rights, and eco-

logical principles have become powerful moral and ideological inspiration for transnational forms of mobilization against poverty and inequality.⁸

Scholars of ethnic and social movements have framed this transition in terms of the politics of identity to emphasize the protagonist role that identities—whether defined by race, ethnicity, or gender—have acquired in the struggle of political actors who attempt to reverse conditions of domination.⁹ As cogently discussed by Kay Warren (1998) in her analysis of Pan-Maya activism in Guatemala, cultural distinctiveness has become the specific base for both indigenous political identity and practice in Latin America. Recent studies of contemporary ethnic struggles in the region show, however, that this transition from the old to the new paradigm is a highly complex and contested terrain that resists the simplification of ethnic versus class struggle. Both these dimensions have a distinctive role in defining the position of indigenous people in national society as well as their relationship with the state. As studies show, indigenous activists have stressed either of these two dimensions in response to political and social change affecting their subject position in society as well as their relationship to the state without treating them as mutually exclusive.¹⁰ In his seminal work on indigenous peasantry, Michael Kearney (1996) argues that indigenous economic strategies not only have redefined the divide between ethnicity and class, but also have expanded the boundaries of those social identities beyond national frontiers when indigenous people became global citizens who incorporated transnational migration into their economic strategies.

This book addresses the intricacies related to this process of constant redefinition of identity by examining the intersection of culture and power, and the interplay between cultural and political distinctiveness. In other words, how do we approach and interpret the specificity of indigenous politics, and what challenges does it pose to anthropological studies of identity? I discuss here the major implications posed by the study of identity politics for both indigenous political struggle and for the production of anthropological knowledge.

Cultural Distinctiveness in Political Practice

The politicization of ethnicity in Latin America is a contested process in which indigenous citizens negotiate space, resources, and political participation with the state, political parties, NGOs, religious institutions, and

other competitive local organizations.¹¹ Indigenous activists and leaders, therefore, are exposed to a broad spectrum of forces and political interests, as are activists and political leaders of labor unions, political parties, and other grassroots organizations at large. Thus, indigenous political affiliations and ascriptions are often multifaceted and situational (Warren and Jackson 2002, 11). Yet what are the specific implications of cultural distinctiveness for political practice? One primary implication relates to the multiplication of political subject positions within the same movement and the consequences of that. Because such movements focus on cultural distinctiveness, both as *indígenas* and as nationalities—that is, as distinctive ethnic groups within the broader racialized category of indigenous—the range of diversification and ethnic heterogeneity is further amplified within indigenous movements.

The highly heterogeneous composition of indigenous ethnic identities can provoke divergences based on cultural and social distinctions. As the account, presented in chapter 2, of the formation of the Inca reveals, this process of mobilization and identity formation does not rely on an uncomplicated and univocal understanding of oppression. Factors related to the production and reproduction of specific ethnic boundaries involving *páramo* (moorland) communities and lower land (valley) communities prompted Quichuas in Tixán to mobilize and ultimately create two competing organizations: the Inca Atahualpa and the Association of Autonomous Workers of the Zula Mines of Chimborazo (ATAMZICH).¹² In the context of political mobilization, these cultural and symbolic dimensions can acquire divergent political meanings, shaping intraethnic factions and alliances that connect to wider contexts of ethnic politicization in multifarious and sometimes contradictory ways.¹³

A second implication is the risk of internal political fragmentation. In Ecuador, for example, the regional specificities expressed in terms of state policies, local social networks, and economies generate substantial differences between the political agendas of highland indigenous organizations and of those of the Amazon basin. Often articulated as differences in demands over land and territory, these distinctions create discrepancies within the movement at both national and local levels of political action. Some scholars have suggested that this political multivocality is a danger that can lead indigenous movements to atomization (Van Cott 2002). For example, in her discussion of constitutional reforms in Ecuador, Donna Lee Van Cott highlights the risks that the ethnically based project of the

country's leading indigenous federation, Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE), represents for the unity of the movement (*ibid.*, 64). In an effort to gain control over rival national organizations, CONAIE rushed to restructure its internal structure as well as the structure of Consejo de Desarrollo de Nacionalidades y Pueblos del Ecuador (CODENPE).¹⁴ According to Van Cott, the redefinition of both CONAIE's and CODENPE's constituencies not by organization but by nationality and peoples—that is, specific ethnic identities within the larger ethnic groups—further reinforced divisions within the movement and hindered the potential for direct representation of indigenous actors who, especially in the highlands, had joined peasant or evangelical organizations.¹⁵

Ethnic and cultural distinctiveness force indigenous actors to negotiate with multiple identities—racial as Indian, class as peasant, and ethnic in terms of their sociocultural membership—and create internal fragmentation. Researchers analyzing these complexities face many questions. How, for example, do we measure the impact of internal divisions on political practice today? Many of the rivalries Van Cott mentions are historical rivalries (Amazon and highland, regional and national federations) that have been reframed and reshaped along different ideological matrices and political practices over time, possibly dating as far back as the pre-Colombian period.¹⁶ Studies show that these diverse internal discourses can be considered as expressions of different strategies of empowerment adopted by indigenous actors in specific circumstances in order to access resources.¹⁷ Therefore, affiliations with multiethnic organizations, even if antagonistic to the CONAIE model, do not necessarily imply atomization *per se*, since they may represent a different channel for accessing resources and power. This was evident in Ecuador's national elections in 1992, when many indigenous grassroots organizations chose to present their candidates despite CONAIE's mandate not to participate in the electoral process; when I discussed this with indigenous grassroots activists, they made it clear that local politics required different strategies and that their decisions were not to be understood as attempts to undermine CONAIE's legitimacy.

This tension between fragmentation and unity deriving from the politicization of cultural distinctiveness is a feature of ethnic struggle in contemporary Latin America. I therefore do not treat unity and fragmentation as contradictory or mutually exclusive. As maintained by Charles Hale in his analysis of racial ambivalence in Guatemala, the study of tensions cannot provide clear answers, but can instead allow for the different modes

to “disrupt and trouble each other” (Hale 2008, 17). If cultural and ethnic heterogeneity can lead to heterogeneous political choices and strategies of empowerment, internal fragmentation and unity can be treated as situational forces that exist simultaneously, rather than as mutually exclusive and reified political realities. While not denying that internal heterogeneity has the potential to fragment and disrupt the indigenous movement, I do not treat it as an intrinsic force leading to atomization, but rather argue that it is important to understand the specific circumstances and conditions under which such heterogeneity becomes disempowering for indigenous activism.

Furthermore, if indigenous political identities within their movement are heterogeneous and contested, how does one reconcile their quest for what at times appears to be a totalizing rendering of indigenous cultures and their related rights? Constructivist critiques of indigenous politics emphasize the risks of adopting essentialist notions of indigenous identity in political action. Such immutable understandings of ethnic and cultural specificity are seen as exclusionary and therefore as undermining indigenous movements’ capacity to promote social change on behalf of nonindigenous people (Radcliffe, Laurie, and Andolina 2002). The underlying assumption in such antiessentialist critiques is that indigenous politics are by definition inclusive, cohesive, and ultimately egalitarian, simply because they fight against exclusion and oppression—a political noble savage. But such antiessentialist critiques are problematic in their own terms. They downplay the cultural, social, and historical variation under which indigenous movements operate. Such distinctions are key to understanding and contextualizing the conditions of production of such supposedly essentialist formulations. Paradoxically, this antiessentialist critique essentializes and idealizes the realm of indigenous politics and underestimates the political maturity of indigenous activists as well as the ability of subaltern political actors, indigenous and otherwise, to constantly reshape their alliances and defend their integrity. Moreover, as I discuss later in relation to ethics and methodology, the deconstruction of indigenous activism’s political and cultural discourse can have consequences that affect the foundations of indigenous struggle.

Democratic Distinctiveness

The intertwining of cultural and political distinctiveness has, therefore, further implications. If fragmentation and unity are understood as a tension rather than a dichotomy, how do we understand the political and social changes that these multifaceted and culturally distinctive movements are promoting? Or, as many scholars of social movements wonder, how can we measure the success of these movements without simply assuming or anticipating their political goals and projects?

As suggested by Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald (1988) and by more recent ethnographic studies (see, among others, Gustafson 2009; Speed 2008b; Viatori 2010), it is important to distinguish between the macrolevel and microlevel of indigenous politics, where the former engages with national and transnational complexities, and the latter with local complexities. Albeit profoundly intertwined, these dimensions present different sets of challenges and predicaments to which indigenous activists and people must respond. The quest for inclusion and recognition as formulated by many national indigenous federations in Latin America constitutes the general ideological foundation of indigenous movements when negotiating with the state, political parties, and other entities representing national and international nonindigenous society for a more democratic and equitable redistribution of resources and power. Although these claims serve as frames for the political agenda at macro- and micro-levels, in practice the strategies and goals of indigenous activists vary according to the specific circumstances of different sectors of the indigenous population. Thus, when comparing indigenous movements across Latin America, it is important also to take into account the broad variety of their political strategies (Postero and Zamosc 2004, 25). These variations depend on the historical specificities of ethnic relations in each country and, as Deborah Yashar (2005) argues when comparing indigenous movements in the Andean region, on the way Indian-state relations have been shaped and redefined over time.

What, then, are the meanings of democratization and social change when applied to indigenous politics at large? An examination of different arenas of indigenous political practice shows a lack of agreement about the process of democratization. The process occurs in a contested terrain, where the struggle to participate in defining the political rules may present contradictory outcomes. The contradictions between human rights and

cultural rights that emerged in a community in Western Mexico offer an excellent example (de la Peña 2002). In this case, a conflict arose when indigenous authorities of the Santa Catarina Cuexomatitlán community in Jalisco decided to expel all the members of an extended family who had converted to evangelism. Because of their conversion, the family members no longer were able to properly fulfill ritual obligations. The normative principles of equality and inclusion defended by indigenous activists in their language of contention vis-à-vis the state became irrelevant when applied to intracommunity politics. The freedom of religion included among the ethnic specificities to be respected by state policies was perceived as a threat to the integrity of the sociocultural life of the immediate community and was therefore denied. Thus, an understanding of democratization does not merely refer to the issues of governability and stability of the formal political institutions (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998, 11–13). Nor does it refer only to a univocal strategy for gaining access to the decision-making process.

Democratization in multicultural societies is a highly contextual and multifaceted political process in which multiple meanings are expressed and negotiated while multiple allegiances are established (Kymlicka and Wayne 2000). The language of contention used by indigenous activists to negotiate power and resources with the state is incorporated but utterly redefined when applied to community affairs and negotiations with local authorities. The articulation of normative principles with political practice, therefore, varies according to the specific fields of force or contexts in which indigenous actors operate. In the realm of the politicization of ethnicity, analyses of political change have to incorporate the multiple levels and conditions under which changes occur. As the analysis of the western Mexican case shows, the need to defend both their political legitimacy and the integrity of their cultural distinctiveness pushed indigenous activists to adopt measures—namely, the expulsion of the evangelical family—that other social actors considered as contradictory or even unpopular. In the field of indigenous politics, different definitions of democracy and democratic practice are produced. The various meanings that democracy can acquire highlight the tension between collective and individual rights, the latter being the guiding principle of the universal definition of human rights. Yet both dimensions of rights implicit in the affirmation—and even in the essentializing—of indigenous cultural distinctiveness are principles deployed by indigenous activists in order to reverse their subaltern posi-

tion vis-à-vis the state and nonindigenous society. In this case, cultural and political distinctiveness entails redefining liberal notions of citizenship and democratization.

At the macropolitical level, democratic change transcends the boundaries of intraethnic politics. Although the contradictions pertaining to community affairs are often indirectly related to indigenous people's subordinate position nationally, state and society are directly implicated in the democratization process at large in the case of macropolitics. In state and elite discourses, forceful political measures (such as armed struggle in Chiapas Mexico, and coups in Ecuador and Bolivia) have been considered contradictory to indigenous politics for movements that fight for a more democratic exercise of power in their own countries.¹⁸ Yet these contradictions are embedded within another set of contradictions intrinsic to state projects. Although substantially different, the examples of Chiapas, Ecuador, and Bolivia have a common denominator: the negative impact of neoliberal economic policies on indigenous economic and social stability since the late 1980s.¹⁹ At the same time, different and long-standing processes of mobilization have led to the formation and affirmation of an indigenous intelligentsia and leadership whose voice cannot be silenced or ignored. Additionally, in Ecuador and Bolivia constitutional reforms officially recognized the right of indigenous people to self-determination. Indigenous activists adopted forceful political measures after state authorities ignored popular protests against economic measures that drastically increased the cost of living for most of the population. The contradictory combination of multicultural recognition with neoliberal economics presents challenges, both to indigenous movements and to the state, for containing ethnic protest within the boundaries of democracy. Furthermore, the profound discrepancies and lack of consensus among ruling elites in many Latin American countries make democratization and political stability a more difficult task.²⁰

The Fluidity of Identity

The complexity of the process of politicization of ethnic identity promoted by indigenous movements in Latin America and elsewhere (including Australia, Canada, and the United States) has prompted anthropologists to redefine their analytical categories and epistemologies related to the study of identity. Kay Warren and Jean Jackson (2005) offer a cogent synthesis of

anthropological debate on this topic. Arguing that the two main dichotomies in this debate focus on essentialism and authenticity and their corresponding opposites, they take the lead in questioning fixed notions of “culture,” “indigenous,” or “development” understood as immutable essences characterizing the “authentic” identity of indigenous people and their lifestyles. Since the 1990s, scholars and anthropologists of ethnicity and indigenous movements have emphasized the socially and historically constructed, and ever-changing, nature of social identities. Accordingly, the focus of analysis has shifted from defining identities to asking how identities were forged and produced, and by whom. Such poststructuralist analytical approaches have centered on deconstructing the elements and processes that produce identity, thereby underscoring the complex and often contradictory nature of identity formation, and the many actors and situated discourses that participate in the forging of a given identity.

As a similarly situated discourse, the forging of indigeneity has its roots in the specific histories of social interactions between different ethnic groups and the states (or the colonial administrations) that have ruled over them, and it therefore varies according to such histories (Hodgson 2002). In her analysis of multiculturalism in Australia, Elizabeth Povinelli (2002) cogently discussed the extent to which the Australian state contributed to the production of a specific “authentic” aborigine identity by establishing legal parameters according to which such populations could or could not prove their rights to lands. In the indigenous case in Latin America, the forging of the colonial category of Indian changed over time to acquire different meanings according to the context and actors involved. With the process of modern nation building and throughout the twentieth century, dominant notions of indigenes depicted indigenous cultures as cradles of tradition and primordialism, where tradition was equated with backwardness and antimodernity.²¹ Such notions competed with left-wing and reformist discourses that held the regimes that exploited the peasantry to be the main cause hindering the development of indigenous people as modern citizens and with humanitarian views of indigenous people as victims of discrimination and violence, as promoted by the progressive Catholic Church. More recently, the politicized discourse on ethnic identity, as produced by indigenous activists and intellectuals themselves, rejected discriminatory rendering of their cultures by resignifying the notions of tradition and modernity as not mutually exclusive. Since the late 1980s, another competing discourse, channeled through

transnational networks and NGOs, has also introduced the notion of rights, under the definition of human rights and collective rights. Accordingly, indigeneity became not only a platform for asserting rights, but also, at times, a romanticized alternative to the destructive and damaging individualism of capitalism or of Western societies in general (de la Cadena and Starn 2007).

Anthropological studies of identity formation in Latin America, therefore, came to terms with the situated and political nature of such processes (Warren and Jackson 2005). Many ethnographic analyses of indigenous identity formation emphasize the multivocality of such processes, whereby different actors and institutions participate in defining what is and is not to be considered authentically “indigenous.”²² The emphasis on the relational and on interconnectedness in identity formation also debunked the dichotomy of authenticity and inauthenticity, including in this approach a critique to the poststructuralist claim of “invented traditions,” which was found to be problematic, for it potentially delegitimized the political struggle of indigenous movements. Drawing on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s notion of strategic essentialism (1988), such critiques often demonstrated the extent to which cultural claims had to be understood as political strategies adopted by movements in order to access resources and political participation from which they were otherwise excluded on account of their “backwardness.” Yet the notion of strategic essentialism also proved to be too close to instrumentalist views of ethnicity, according to which identities are reduced to tools that political actors manipulate for specific ends (Govers and Vermeulen 1997). As argued by Shannon Speed (2008a) in her analysis of Zapatista political struggles, such an approach has been contested by indigenous political actors engaged in the struggle for social justice; they have maintained that their indigenous identity is not an opportunistic or new invention, but a practice rooted in their history and integrity as a people. Ever-changing and strategic notions of identity in anthropology, therefore, are insufficient for conveying the vitality and complexity of indigenous cultures and politics.

In her analysis of essentialism and authenticity among indigenous Nasa intellectuals in Colombia, Joanne Rappaport argues that indigenous culture is conceived by such intellectuals less as a preexisting immutable essence than as “a tool for delineating a project within which people can build an ethnic polity protected from the hegemonic forces that surround them” (2005, 38). In these political processes different actors reinterpret,

represent, and redefine their identity in order to gain access to or defend resources and power—and ultimately to maintain their own sense of integrity and purpose. Indigenous identities become contested terrains in which different meanings and values are produced. Beyond notions of strategic essentialism, therefore, indigenous identity becomes a political project that defines difference and at the same time is subject to change and redefinition. For example, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted in 2007, has served as an international framework by which many ethnic groups not traditionally self-identified as indigenous have adopted the language of indigeneity to frame their claims over resources and land. Indigenous identity, therefore, “is not natural or inevitable, but neither is it simply invented, adopted, or imposed. It is rather a *positioning* which draws upon historically sedimented practices, landscapes, and repertoires of meaning, and emerges through particular patterns of engagements and struggles” (Murray Li 2000, 151).

In his critique of poststructuralism, Jonathan Friedman (1994) argues that the emphasis on the constructed and shifting nature of identity runs the risk of trivializing values and beliefs that are “deadly serious” for those who subscribe to them. In the ongoing debate around the production and politicization of indigenous identity and cultures, the concept of “fluidity” has been introduced to address these complex, shifting, yet vital elements. This concept moves beyond the notion of constructed identity and strategic essentialism to foreground not only the continuously changing process of identity formation, but also the dynamic coexistence within such processes of multiple and sometimes supposedly contradictory tropes of modernity, tradition, urban, rural, local, and global.²³ Yet not even the notion of fluidity resolves the ephemeral and slippery nature attributed to identity as it has been contested either vocally by indigenous activists (see Speed 2008a) or in the lived experience of many indigenous people. How, therefore, can the anthropological study of indigenous politics do justice to the “seriousness” and relevance of identity for indigenous people?

Identity, Politics, and the Everyday

The study of politics and the everyday offers an opportunity to overcome such disconnects in anthropological theories of identity politics, and to argue for a rendering of political identity that is about “becoming” as much as it is about “being” (Hall 1995, 8, 14). Many studies of the politicization

of indigenous identity have privileged analyses of indigenous movements and the ideological discourses and practices as produced by indigenous activists and organizations over the dynamics of the quotidian experience of subscribing to and living a specific identity in asymmetrical relationships. My fieldwork on indigenous politics in Tixán, however, made me keenly aware of two intrinsically related dimensions of the politicization of identity in antidiscrimination struggles. Organized political actions and strategies constituted only one component in the complex mapping of the Quichuas' political practice. The everyday lived experience of domination and its related responses as based on a perceived identity were its complementary component. I quickly realized that these two aspects of the Quichuas' experience of ethnic struggle locally were so interdependent that political actions and the ideological premises on which they were based could not be understood unless analyzed in connection with the quotidian dealings of the interethnic conflict. By building on the local history of political mobilization, the political discourse of the Inca Atahualpa was the manifest and visible form of a less visible, more indecipherable political practice which rests in the everyday. These two dimensions were connected by what I call a mutual boomerang response, according to which the organization and its constituency respond to each other when they mobilize and negotiate their political values in the public square as well as in "so called apolitical locations" such as shops, markets, ritual kinship, and canteens (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998, 14). To paraphrase Stuart Hall, the ethnographic examination of political actions in articulation with everyday practices allows one to go beyond both the supposed fixity of identity and its critique to underline the conditions that make the forging of indigenous identity possible. Such articulation, or set of articulations, underscores the historical memory, the multiple voices, and the constraints that all participate in indigenous people's self-identification as a way of making sense of their life and of their struggle.

What are the implications for the anthropological study of identity politics when one focuses on the articulation of politics with the quotidian expressions and manifestations of social conflict in spaces where this conflict is apparently dormant? Beyond notions of fluidity and strategic essentialism, it is precisely in the quotidian sociality of this conflict that the relevance of identity politics emerges and make sense. The combined study of indigenous politics and the everyday can shed light on the way in which identities are constructed, lived, and "cast in stone" (Sutton 1998).

The political relevance of the everyday has been foregrounded by scholars such as James Scott, Michel de Certeau, and Pierre Bourdieu. More recently, in his analysis of quotidian politics, Michael Hanchard affirms that “imagination, organization and will more than rational choice and deliberation are the foundational nonprocedural bases of politics” (2006, 6). As the Gramscian understanding of the role of ideologies and culture suggests, ideas have a fundamental relevance in the dealings of everyday life. Political ideologies, therefore, have social and affective aspects that extend beyond their use by political institutions or organizations. My study, therefore, works at the frontier of culture, identity, and power to explore the meanings generated in the everyday by the people who resist domination. My analysis of interethnic conflict in Tixán claims that the performative, affective, and reiterated aspects of identity politics in the everyday contribute to validating a specific identity and culture for political action. In this realm the elements, dynamics, and behavioral codes deployed in quotidian interactions have a history and a materiality that constitute identity’s “seriousness” and its perceived continuity against claims of endless reinventions.

A goal of my anthropological study of indigenous politics is, then, to reveal the connections between the lived and affective dimensions of identity in quotidian politics as expressed by Quichuas in Tixán and the political actions and strategies led by their grassroots organizations—what it means for the people involved in these political processes to live their perceived identity and ideals and act on them both in their political practice and in the “normality” of their everyday existence. This connection works as a boomerang, according to which the discourse of the Inca Atahualpa and the Quichuas’ politics of the quotidian nurture and feed each other to generate political meanings. In my examination of the Inca and of the Quichuas’ and *tixaneños*’ interactions in markets, shops, festive occasions, and in ritual kinship relations, I combine Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and its correlated *docta ignorancia* (Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu 1990, 53) with de Certeau’s distinction between tactics and strategies. I do this in order to discuss to what extent the domain of everyday life in Tixán acquires political meanings and how a habitus of resistance (Brechtian resistance or Scott’s weapons of the weak) constitutes a form of political “capital” that allows a grassroots organization such as the Inca Atahualpa to effectively fight against domination and abuses, and enable the redistribution of power and resources. There are moments when words, acts, and attitudes

are consciously directed to a specific interlocutor with a specific goal, which de Certeau defines as strategies (1988, xix). Yet in other moments people are responding to circumstances as they arise, making choices and defending their integrity based on their own sense of truth and value, or acting within a habitus that has a social history whose goals are not necessarily disclosed or manifested (*docta ignorantia*). Thus, even if the dominated know they are dominated, awareness of their condition not only is perceived as a potential motivation for political action, but also is cognitively and affectively incorporated as part of ordinary life (Das 2007; Scott 1992).

In his analysis of the Gramscian notion of hegemony, William Roseberry argues that the ways in which subordinate populations either accommodate or resist domination “are shaped by the process of domination itself” (1994, 361). The same condition of domination renders culturally defined codes of interaction and social values from within available repertoires more attuned to the conditions and the feelings experienced by dominated individuals and collectivities. In Raymond Williams’s terms (1977), the structural condition of domination generates a “structure of feeling” that informs how the dominated imagine, act, socialize, and make sense of their lives. Domination is incorporated into their imaginations of what constitutes the ordinary in their lives. The “normality” of daily life is thereby established according to different parameters than those indicated in hegemonic narratives on social and cultural values and norms by dominant, middle-class, bourgeois, and white society. As the case of indigenous people in Tixán shows, the lived experience of domination implies a constant process of negotiation between two major affective poles: those of acceptance and of rejection of both the status quo and dominant values. This structure of feeling pervades the political actions of the dominated, as well as their leisure time, sense of humor, and intimate relations, such that either acceptance or rejection of being dominated is made recognizable especially to those who share the same condition. The lived experience of domination makes the personal into the social and political by generating a community of people who share the same “structure of feeling” and a “perceived commonality of subordination,” thus rendering the affective experience of political struggle meaningful to anthropological studies of identity politics (Hanchard 2006, 34; Williams 1977, 131).

Accordingly, if domination is not limited to its structural dimension, then claims of authenticity are not limited to their political purposes—

that is, directed toward achieving a specific goal—but also are related to affects through which people attempt to make sense of their world and their position in it (Warren and Jackson 2002, 10). Quichuas' culture and identity are not simply fluid and ever-changing, but have an affective and situated component, expressed, for example, in the materiality of “traditional” clothing in the celebration of the harvest festival in Tixán (which I analyze in chapter 6). What makes the clothing traditional or “authentically” indigenous in that context is less a disembodied and monolithic notion of culture and identity than a “dressed” history engraved in the family histories of those who continued to wear such clothing in different moments and circumstances of their own lives. In my analysis of cultural politics in Tixán, rather than rendering identity as constantly reinvented, redefined, fluid, and reshaped according to the circumstances, I analyze claims of cultural “authenticity” as affective practices that go beyond their political dimension. Clothing in the context of a political struggle foregrounding ethnic identity connects to personal histories, awakens feelings of familiarity and belonging, and functions as a reminder of cultural as well as human integrity that goes beyond the institutionalized discourse of empowerment as produced by the Inca Atahualpa. The “apolitical” clothing of the past thus becomes political and relevant to the individual and collective sense of self for people who identify themselves as indigenous today.

At issue, therefore, is to understand the contexts and conditions in which claims of authenticity become meaningful or contested and lead people and collectivities to make political choices. Similarly, deconstructive analyses of identity politics also limit our understanding of the elements that prompt people to mobilize, manifest, and protest. As cogently argued by Elias Canetti (1984), collective action is powerful not only because of the morality and consistency of political discourses, but also because of the physical and emotional resonances of such action. Forms of physical contact with strangers that one might avoid when traveling on a bus become fundamental when they occur in a crowd unified by a common goal (Canetti 1984, 15–16). Marching together in the streets can be exciting and invigorating. Indigenous people protesting in the streets of Ecuador in the 1990 uprising vividly addressed this component: “It was like a dream, all together, we were strong, everybody with ponchos and hats, *reeeed* [red]!” (in León 1994, 34).²⁴ In the context of the harvest festival in Tixán for example, deconstructing the elements that are assembled together in a festival to represent indigeneity does not necessarily explain

what prompts participants to join the festive dancing, singing, or competitions. Beyond the manifest politicization of their identity, people are motivated to participate by the social and affective aspect of the celebration, the specific joy of the celebration, and the participants' experiences of sharing, showing off, and feeling creative and alive. An analytical perspective that focuses on the politicization of indigenous identity in its intertwining of political actions and the everyday sheds light on elements that have the potential to motivate individuals and collectivities to engage in or withdraw from political action. In some circumstances it is the political reification or essentializing of elements that is considered the "authentic" component of an identity and culture that motivates individuals as well as collectivities to act and mobilize.

The emphasis on "structure of feelings" and political struggle also helps to clarify the discourse of those who are identified as and act in the position of political leaders. Studies of indigenous politics and identity in Latin America have mostly focused on leaders and activists who have thought of indigenous identity from their subject positions as formally educated and trained activists (see Pallares 2002; Sawyer 2004; Rappaport 2005; Kay Warren 1998). In her cogent discussion of the role of Nasa indigenous intelligentsia in Colombia, Rappaport draws on Du Bois's notion of double consciousness in order to explain the position of such leaders, who see themselves as frontier individuals affectively placed between two cultural universes and functioning as mediators. Political leaders always occupy a position that is somehow at the frontier. Yet the notion of frontier is relational, since the position of mediation it implies varies according to the specificity of the spheres with which leaders intersect. Nasa intellectuals' analysis of their identity is complex and nuanced since it reflects their own predicament of belonging. Their analysis also addresses different interlocutors—the indigenous people of the communities, state and NGOs representatives, and a heterogeneous crowd of *colaboradores*—and the way those actors perceive them as different, more "modern" and emancipated than rural indigenous inhabitants.

The case I analyze in this volume presents a different perspective, that of grassroots activists, the vast majority of whom have not had more than primary education, and who are mostly self-trained in political activism. They belong to a generation who did not experience the intervention of the first indigenous national coalition, the Federation of Ecuadorian Indians (FEI), or of any other union, and largely learned about the conundrums of

activism by evoking and reinterpreting the legacy of the native *cabecillas* (political leaders) of earlier times.²⁵ Such re-evocation represents to grassroots activists the path to the political continuity of their struggle locally, as well as the acknowledgment of its translocal dimension.

I have examined elsewhere the extent to which the difference in the political discourses, strategies, and actions of indigenous female leaders relates to the specific challenges that both grassroots and national leaders face in exercising their leadership (Cervone 2002). Similarly, the Inca Atahualpa leaders' discourse on justice, political change, and indigenous culture responds to the specific environment in which they operate and therefore participates in those narratives that are intelligible to their direct interlocutors. These grassroots leaders remain strongly tied to the lived experience of domination posed by the local distribution of power and resources and to local networks of social relations. They can still be considered to occupy a position at the frontier when compared to indigenous commoners since they interact with the nonindigenous world and negotiate for resources on behalf of their affiliated communities. Yet, in these interactions, nonindigenous people do not perceive these grassroots leaders as being different or more "modern" than the rest of the local indigenous population. In the midst of different narratives on indigenous identity and on the place of indigenous people in politics and the national economy, grassroots leaders therefore share a subject position that is similar to the subject position of other local Quichuas, all of whom nonindigenous people view in terms of the brutish Indian stereotype. These indigenous leaders share the same lived experience of domination with the rest of the indigenous population. Thus, their subject position does not involve the mediation of different cultural universes, but rather the revalorization of the most immediate evidence of their identity.

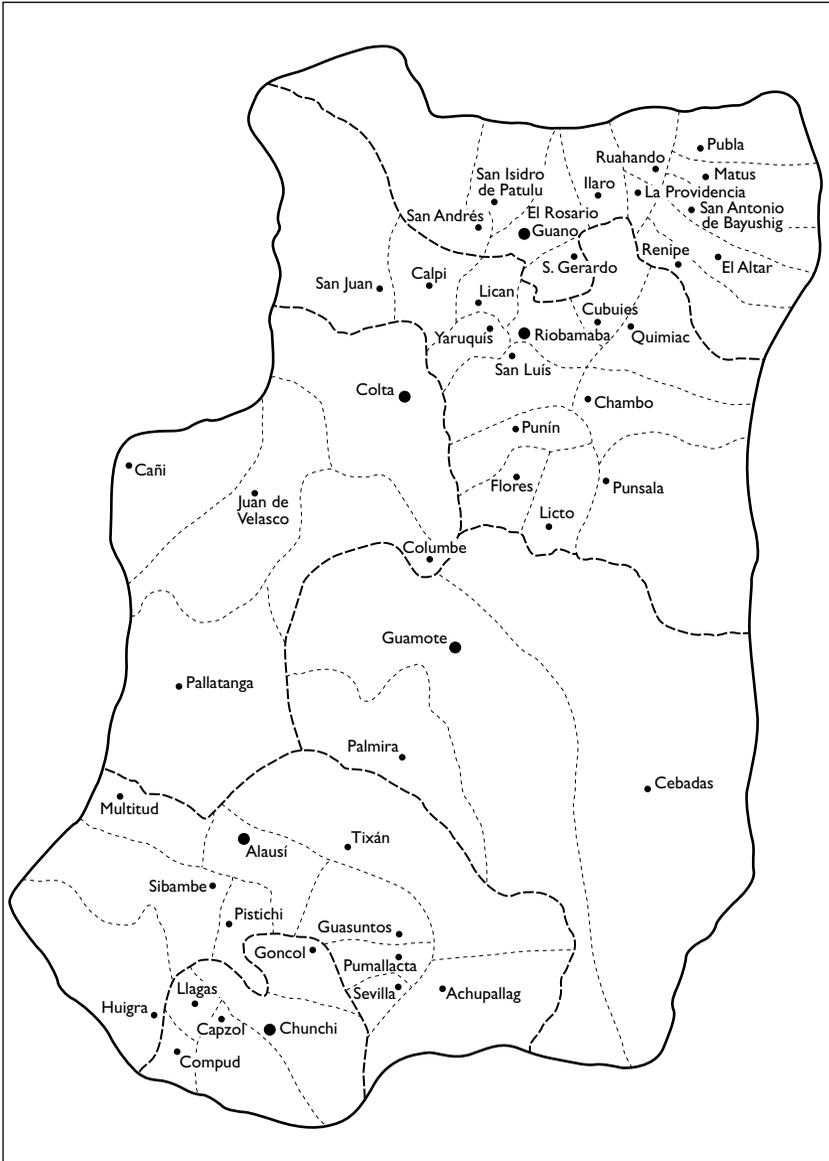
As a result, in their representation of indigeneity—that is, in their application of *derecho propio* (literally, "our own law") and in their ritual display of Quichua identity—the leaders of the Inca Atahualpa do not reproduce the same complexity and heterogeneity of and about indigenous identity that is found in the discourse of national or urbanized indigenous leaders. Yet they often capitalize on hegemonic notions of modernity and indigenous identity. For example, they understand modernity as linked to degrees of literacy and to a more general notion of technical ability—"we know how to . . . (read, write, control crime, make profits, progress)"—while their representation of indigenous identity relates to images of tra-

ditional authenticity that become almost folkloric, such as the display of indigeneity during the harvest festival. This apparent simplification is not to be understood as a lack of sophistication, but rather as a communicative choice in the production of their political discourse that responds to a specific asymmetric interethnic context.

Contextualizing Indigenous Politics

Tixán is a rural parish in the canton of Alausí, in Chimborazo Province. Its capital is a small town in the Ecuadorian Andes situated 2,900 meters above sea level and surrounded by two Andean ranges, the western and the eastern *cordilleras*. According to the 2001 census, the majority of the 9,203 inhabitants of Tixán parish live in the surrounding mountains.²⁶ Rural inhabitants are divided among twenty-nine communities and four autonomous peasants' and workers' associations.²⁷ Although the town dwellers, tixaneños, are mostly nonindigenous, rural inhabitants are indigenous and nonindigenous farmers and peasants, either self-identified as Quichuas or known as *chagras* in the case of nonindigenous rural dwellers. The presence of *chagras* in the area dates to the first half of the twentieth century, when they worked either as administrators or waged peons on behalf of the local landowners.

My analysis follows both Quichuas and the Inca Atahualpa as they interact with tixaneños, *chagras*, local authorities, the Catholic Church, and other different social actors in order to achieve control over their lives as individuals, as communities, and as Quichuas. Historical reconstructions of the initial phase of indigenous activism nationally have focused on the northern province of Imbabura, around the figures of Tránsito Amaguaña and Dolores Cacuango, indigenous women leaders who concentrated their struggle around issues of literacy and against discrimination. However, mobilization against abuses and the exploitation of indigenous labor and land under the landed-estate regime (*hacienda*) also interested other highland and coastal provinces and eventually culminated in the agrarian reform struggle of the 1960s (see Becker 1997; Pallares 2002; Prieto 1980; Yashar 2005). In chapters 1 and 2, I present a historical account of the process of formation of modern highland societies and their hierarchies by looking at the restructuring of social relations in Tixán following the disintegration of the *hacienda* regime and the mobilization that led to the agrarian reform laws. I focus on the major changes in the parish follow-



Map 2. Cantons and parishes, Chimborazo. Prepared by Bill Nelson.

ing the agrarian reform, their implications on the reconfiguration of local hierarchies, and the principles on which they were premised.

The Tixán case exemplifies the process of formation of subaltern politics in Ecuador. The partition of the local hacienda Moyocancha among the Salem family's younger generation in the late 1930s, well before the passing of the agrarian reform laws, did not alter the regime of exploitation of indigenous labor and resources. Recurrent abuses, coupled with the lack of knowledge of basic indigenous cultural codes among the young Salem landowners, fueled indigenous mobilization for land and labor rights. The mobilization continued during the 1980s throughout the province in the form of protracted land conflicts whose resolution sometimes required extralegal means. This phase led to the formation of many grassroots organizations in the province. As I analyze in greater detail in chapter 2, the role of a renewed and progressive Catholic Church was pivotal for consolidating this process of mobilization at both the local and national levels.

The permanent state of potential insurgency begun by the agrarian struggle functioned as a fertile ground for indigenous actors to fight against both new and old enemies: racism and the inequitable distribution of land and resources. In many rural towns in the Andean highlands, the slow process of land tenure readjustment that started in the 1960s with the agrarian reform laws led to a profound redefinition of the local power structure. In Tixán, the gradual extinction of the landowning regime created new opportunities for indigenous people to gain access to land, to the detriment of non-elite tixaneño families who found themselves depending increasingly on indigenous agricultural production and land. At the same time, the chagras took advantage of the agrarian reforms by adopting the community status required by the agrarian legislation in order to buy land.

The new distribution of resources also led to the creation of different conditions and spaces for interethnic interaction. Slowly but surely the local indigenous population started to exert control over its own production and fair market prices. Additionally, they gained access to another important resource, transportation, by acquiring control over the traditional practice of interethnic ritual kinship, *compadrazgo*, which had previously functioned as a mechanism to exploit indigenous labor and production. Drawing on de Certeau's analysis of everyday life tactics, I explore, in chapter 3, "so-called apolitical locations," which in the case of Tixán refer to spaces of quotidian life where local interethnic conflict takes place (de Cer-

teau 1988; Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998, 14). Marketplaces, shops, and a variety of communal spaces became arenas for the “art of the weak.” By using their opponents’ cultural and symbolic codes and behaviors as tactics that encroach on their territory, the Quichuas succeeded in temporarily reversing their “weaker” position (de Certeau 1998, 37).

The tactics of this quotidian conflict acquired greater significance after the formation of the Inca Atahualpa and the other three local indigenous organizations (ATAMZICH, General Rumiñahui, and the Federation of Achupallas), which came to represent public affirmation and consolidation of local indigenous power. A combination of the post-agrarian reform structural readjustments and the long-lasting habitus of ethnic resistance gradually led indigenous activists to gain control over power and resources at the local level. Within the general framework of the politicization of ethnic identity, the Inca Atahualpa gradually became the major producer of cultural identity on behalf of the local indigenous population. As I analyze in chapters 4, 5, and 6, the organization institutionalized the reshaping of ethnic identity in political, social, and cultural terms for use as a tool in local consolidation of indigenous power. In chapter 4, I analyze the processes of affirmation and consolidation of the Inca Atahualpa. The organization’s role as mediator of land conflicts allowed the Inca Atahualpa not only to become the canton’s most powerful organization, but also to define the parameters for a new modern indigenous leadership. In chapter 5, I further examine the Inca Atahualpa’s political performance, analyzing the extent to which its role as justice maker at the parish level challenged state sovereignty by “invading” the jurisdiction of state authorities. The Inca Atahualpa became a powerful alternative to the local authorities for the resolution of local conflicts for indigenous and non-elite tixaneños alike. However, the controversial and contradictory applications of customary rights (*derecho propio*) analyzed in chapter 5 underscore the intricacies of ethnic politicization in multicultural societies. The examination of the Inca Atahualpa’s political strategies also discloses the implications of cultural distinctiveness for political practice and the risks of fragmentation. The cultural and ethnic distinctions that led to the formation of the Inca Atahualpa and the ATAMZICH defined a state of intraethnic competition in which four local organizations fought for power and control. On the occasion discussed in chapter 5, the administration of indigenous justice became the arena for the articulation of this power struggle involving all four indigenous organizations. In this context, redundant punishment to

address the robbery of a tractor violated principles that many local and national indigenous activists regard as foundations of their justice system.

The case study highlights complexities related to the institutionalization of indigenous politics. The contradictions evinced resemble those in western Mexico, analyzed by Guillermo de la Peña. The redundant punishment in this case contradicted basic principles of human rights, the same principles that the indigenous movement nationally claims as the framework of its own quest for recognition. The difference is that in the Tixán case the infringement of those rights was not for safeguarding the integrity of the community. It was, rather, a consequence of the power struggle among competing grassroots organizations that risked discrediting their political legitimacy. The discussion of indigenous justice here highlights the question of the extent to which grassroots organizations can contribute to the democratization of the local power structure despite interorganizational rivalries.

The harvest festival discussed in chapter 6 allows investigation of the semantics of cultural politics. Although the festival in its current form is a recent creation that involves several indigenous communities, activists, and the Catholic Church, it incorporates elements of indigenous harvest practices and celebrations that have been transmitted from generation to generation in different local ethnic groups. With the Inca Atahualpa gradually assuming leadership in the festival's organization, indigenous practices became exemplary of the local *costumbre indígena* (indigenous custom) and were publicly performed in the town square for an audience of tixaneños, local and provincial authorities, representatives of NGOs, and indigenous guests from other parishes. At the intersection of culture and power, the display of indigenous custom not only affirms cultural distinctiveness; as a concrete political body exercising power, the Inca Atahualpa also adopts strategies and discourses that prioritize its own reproduction as an institution of power, beyond the achievement of its major cause, that is, the well-being of the affiliated communities and their development. Music, songs, costumes, and other performances become a way of celebrating not only the empowerment of the local Quichuas, but also the organization that empowered them. Thus, the harvest festival becomes an act celebrating the harvest, local indigenous culture, and the Inca Atahualpa at large.

The intervention of the Inca Atahualpa in the production of Quichua identity highlights the extent to which indigenous culture is understood

as a political project rather than as an immutable essence. The politicization of culture allowed Quichuas in Tixán to redefine power relations and, at a more symbolic level, to transform the hegemonic and racist imagery that portrayed Indians as brutish, ignorant, and premodern. Inclusion and exclusion are simultaneously at work here. If exclusiveness is constructed around “essentialized” notions of *costumbre indígena* as represented in the harvest festival, in areas such as the administration of justice, *derecho propio* has given opportunities to nonindigenous people to escape the network of local elites and their elitist politics. Therefore, the production of cultural and ethnic identities in this case is not only related to culture, but also to social relations and to the process of creation of new political subjects.

The political practice of a grassroots organization such as the Inca Atahualpa must be contextualized within the national process of ethnic mobilization. Whatever the specific motivations leading to the formation of the Inca Atahualpa, the organization incorporated the demands formulated nationally by the indigenous movement and adapted them to its local reality. While integrating my analysis of the local political struggle, in chapter 7 I present a reconstruction of the process of mobilization at the national level and highlight the many challenges that the indigenous movement faces in relation to larger dimensions of conflict involving national and transnational forces. The clash between the constitutional recognition of indigenous rights, in 1998, and the adoption of neoliberal economic measures, which further impoverished indigenous and non-indigenous marginal sectors, reveals the ambiguities and contradictions of official multicultural rhetoric and projects. In this context the recognition of indigenous rights appears to be instrumental to the neoliberal restructuring of state functions, rather than derived from an attempt to democratize Ecuadorian society and its power structure. Although multicultural recognition represents an accomplishment of historical proportions for the indigenous movement, indigenous citizens have still had to struggle against a society that has remained profoundly undemocratic and racist.

The participation of CONAIE in the coup that overthrew the democratically elected president Jamil Mahuad, in January 2000, intensified the debate on issues of democratization and the role of the indigenous movement in that process. Unlike other collective actions organized by the indigenous movement throughout the 1990s that generated a consensus

of public opinion, in the case of the attempted coup indigenous activists were publicly accused of destabilizing the country and impeding an already difficult path to national economic and political recovery.²⁸ Ironically, one of the colonels who led the military faction that joined the condemned coup, Lucio Gutiérrez, was elected president, in 2002.

In chapter 7 I also discuss the limitations of multicultural recognition in light of the participation of Ecuadorian indigenous activists in the Gutiérrez government (2002–2005). By August 2003, the political alliance that had been established between indigenous activists and Gutiérrez during the electoral campaign was broken. A variety of factors pushed indigenous activists to the opposition. Yet Gutiérrez's attempt to delegitimize indigenous leadership by interfering in areas in which indigenous leaders had full decision-making powers exacerbated the confrontation.

The Ecuadorian case underscores the tensions and contradictions of multiculturalism. The constitutional recognition of indigenous rights to difference formulated by many Latin American countries during the 1990s does not automatically result in enacting these rights in political practice (Van Cott 2002). Official inclusion of indigenous people and their institutions under the umbrella of multiculturalism seems to be less an indication of the maturity of Ecuadorian society and its political structure regarding issues of ethnic discrimination, and more a neoliberal political device for streamlining the public sector and public spending via decentralization. Within the framework of devolution of state functions and responsibilities to local government, opportunistic recognition of indigenous authorities is useful in areas densely populated by indigenous people. In practice, however, the latter still have to fight against attitudes and behaviors that limit, control, and undermine their political participation and the full exercise of their rights as citizens (Hale 2002; Hale 2008b).

Such multicultural ambiguities also affected the Ecuadorian indigenous movement in its capacity to formulate a new political project. Inconsistencies between the inclusiveness expressed in constitutional rhetoric and the exclusiveness of political practice made it difficult for indigenous leadership to envision a viable and diverse society and state. As self-critically expressed by the indigenous intellectual Luis Maldonado, a significant challenge for the movement is to formulate a feasible social project that can solve the country's problems: "The experience of co-governing has shown us that once we assumed the responsibility of conducting the state and governing, we did not have viable and specific projects that could lead

to effective and positive resolutions of complex national problems” (Maldonado 2003). Maldonado’s statement expresses the challenges facing the indigenous movement, not only to consolidate its recognition in political practice, but also to democratize Ecuadorian society.

The ambiguity of the multicultural shift in Ecuador resonates with other cases in Latin America (Hale 2008b; Hooker 2005; Van Cott 2002). Recognition of multiple social identities is not synonymous with equality among different groups. As discussed by Hale in the case of Guatemala, neoliberal multiculturalism has brought about new forms of governance according to which indigenous subjects are at once recognized and domesticated (Hale 2002; Hale 2008b, 35). As I argue in chapter 7, new multicultural governance also meant the establishment of a hierarchy of cultures and knowledge systems according to which the “national” one is left unquestioned. The challenges facing indigenous activism, therefore, are not simplistically related to internal tensions within the movement. It is necessary to contextualize these tensions within a broader analytical framework in order to understand how and in what circumstances tensions, contradictions, and divergences undermine and advance indigenous politics.

My analysis of indigenous politics underscores the different faces and phases of indigenous struggle for equality, and therefore points to different manifestations of power contention. I have therefore intercalated the sequence of the chapters with quotes that introduce different types of tactics in power struggles and the everyday (as seen by Canetti), which evocatively suggest the changing subject position and characteristics of the parties involved in the struggle.

Engaging Methodology

Along with many colleagues who have been involved in the study of indigenous struggle in Latin America, I, too, have come to embrace and defend a form of methodology and anthropological practice that I define in general terms as politically engaged.²⁹ My positioning is a response founded on my personal formation and my fieldwork experience.

When I was about to start my fieldwork in Tixán, another foreign anthropologist already had begun research in the same area, on a comparative study of land tenure in Ecuador and Peru. Both of our research proposals received the requisite approval by the Inca Atahualpa. A few months later, I learned from a friend collaborating with the Inca Atahualpa on be-

half of an Ecuadorian NGO that the other anthropologist had left at the request of the leaders of the organization, who had found out that the topic under study was not land tenure but indigenous movements. The president of the Inca Atahualpa at that time informed me that I need not worry, but at the same time he made sure that I knew he had questioned the Inca Atahualpa's relationship with foreign researchers: "These gringos still believe they can do what they please. Well, now we are the ones who decide what we want them to do" (M. P., 1992).

Studying processes of politicization of ethnicity poses serious methodological and ethical dilemmas for researchers by renewing past unresolved debates about the conditions of production of scientific knowledge and its impact on society (Cervone 2007; Hale 2008a; Speed 2008a). As I have analyzed elsewhere in greater detail, despite the existence of a significant body of literature that exploded the fiction of value-free, detached research practice in social science, this debate reappeared at the end of the 1990s with the proposition that engagement in anthropological practice cannot lead to "excellence" (Gross and Plattner 2002). Discarded as social work or advocacy, rather than representing excellence in anthropology, political engagement was portrayed as the opposite of "objectivity" and therefore as biased and subjective rather than scientific. At stake here is not the dichotomy objective versus subjective, and the related values attached to them, but definition of objectivity itself. Engaged anthropology is objective insofar as it exhibits methodological rigor rather than an abstract and self-contained notion of empirical "Truth" (Cervone 2007; Hale 2008a; Fabian 2001).

This debate has to be understood as situated and mostly rooted in the North American and European anthropological community. Thus they respond to preoccupations and debates as they emerge in milieus in which anthropology, situated mostly as an academic discipline, often has been deemed irreconcilable with political engagement and even more so with activism. However, since the 1970s, in the context of the growing power of dictatorships in Latin America, social scientists in the region have positioned themselves politically. Most of them have done so by defending the need to decolonize their disciplines and to fight for justice and democracy in their countries. Such commitment has endured, taking different methodological forms known as action research or participatory research. It has become common for social scientists in Latin America to fill a range of roles—as academics, activists, public intellectuals, NGO members—

without feeling that any of them jeopardize their legitimacy as producers of knowledge.

During my eight years in Ecuador, I came to consider my engagement inevitable. As a member of the North American anthropological community, like many of my colleagues I felt compelled not only to defend knowledge produced by engaged forms of anthropological practice, but also to address the conditions that led us to embrace engagement versus detachment in our profession. What does engagement mean in anthropological practice? Although the defense of engagement in anthropological practice originated in the debate about the need to decolonialize the discipline (Asad 1973; Berreman, Gjessing, and Gough 1968; Stavenhagen 1971), I have argued elsewhere that this is not necessarily or exclusively a form of anthropological inquiry based on a preexisting commitment to political activism (activist anthropology as formulated in Hale 2001). It is a form of inquiry that often is the result of a longer process of fieldwork in which anthropologists and study communities gradually build a mutual relationship of trust and forge a common political understanding. In the course of such interactions members of the study community become research partners rather than informants; research topics and methodologies are discussed and formulated collaboratively.

Although the different forms of political engagement in anthropology (activism, collaborative, participatory, etc.) have in common the repositioning of the anthropologist and the study community as research partners who develop research and produce knowledge together and in support of social justice, there is no one formula for political engagement. My case, for example, resonates more with the path followed by Gustafson than with the one described by Speed (2008b). Unlike Speed's commitment, which stemmed from a long personal history of political activism, my own commitment resulted from a combination of the political views I had formed in the effervescent political environment to which I was exposed as a high-school student in the late 1970s in Italy and the ethical questions raised in my discipline when I was a graduate student in the early 1990s, a period when debates on subjectivity and reflexivity were questioning anthropological "Truth" and methodologies. Although I arrived in the field laden with open-ended questions and uncertainties, once I was there it quickly became clear, as M. P.'s statement blatantly indicates, that a neutral or detached research practice involving indigenous societies would be both unethical and epistemologically unsustainable.

Undertaking fieldwork in Tixán was not simply a matter of asking for approval, but an occasion for acting on the understanding that research topics need to serve the interests of the community involved in the project. Without this previous agreement, researchers would not be permitted access to data key to understanding the processes under study. Engagement, then, became for me not only necessary but inevitable, if “excellence” in anthropology were to be achieved. This implies a drastic change in the subject position of the researcher in his or her research practice. Research practice is now under the other’s gaze, constantly scrutinized by the study community (Warren and Jackson 2002).

During my two years of fieldwork in Tixán, I gradually established a relationship of mutual trust and collaboration with the Inca Atahualpa and other indigenous activists with whom I worked.³⁰ Many complex dynamics shaped these relationships. The legacy of decades of anthropological practice that objectified indigenous people still percolates in imageries and discourses of fieldwork practice. After I had been in Tixán for over one year, everybody in town and in the communities of the area knew who I was—*compañera* or *comrade* to some, *gringa* or *gringuita* to others.³¹ Less commonly known or understood by people not directly involved in my research project was what exactly I was doing there. Yet echoes of my collaboration with the Inca Atahualpa in an oral-history project on the formation of the organization had reached the communities of the ATAMZICH.

One of the leaders of that organization at the time asked my NGO friend if he knew anybody who could help them prepare a history of their organization. When my friend told him that I was an anthropologist working on this same topic with the Inca Atahualpa, his interlocutor, rather puzzled, replied: “Really? I thought gringa anthropologists studied the sex [*sic*] of the Indians.” Aside from this highly sexualized perception of the relationship between a female anthropologist and her supposed male object of study, possibly fueled by rumors about romantic interactions between gringa researchers and indigenous national activists, the comment underscores the perception of a relationship that is imposed on indigenous subjects, regardless of the possible responses to the imposition. The sexual innuendo of the comment points to the breach of intimacy as perceived by those who have been denied the right to decide what knowledge about themselves—if any at all—is produced.

Misinformation or simple denial are common responses to this form of symbolic aggression and are a control mechanism over unwanted dis-

closure of knowledge. I believe that even if it does not eliminate this type of negative response, engagement leads to more unambiguous agreement about the boundaries that may or may not be crossed. As Craig Calhoun declares, “activist scholarship is a matter of critique not of advocacy” (in Hale 2008a, xxv). In a more general sense, therefore, engaged forms of anthropological practice have questioned the power imbalance inherent in modernist fieldwork practices by trying to redefine the outsider-insider dichotomy. These two dimensions, expressed in my situation by the terms *gringa* and *compañera*, are not fixed categories, but identities that can be negotiated in the field. By the end of my fieldwork, my allegiances were clear, and it had become known that I had not been studying the “sex of the Indians” (read either as indigenous sexual habits or otherwise). I did not engage in any personal relationship with any indigenous man, and the fact that I had become a *compañera* did not erase my identity as a foreigner, which continued to give rise to jokes, laughter, and, in isolated cases, mistrust.

Thus, redefining the power relations implicit in engaged forms of anthropological practice is not an uncomplicated task. The balance of power in fieldwork practice can only be negotiated at the level of individual and interpersonal relationships. Such relationships are rewarding yet rarely straightforward encounters between individuals who may or may not share common ideals and interests. The individual dimension of this experience should not create an illusion of equality in anthropological practice; it does not erase the inequalities that characterize relationships between the societies anthropologists represent and those they work in. During my second year in Tixán, I worked in close contact with other *colaboradores* (nonindigenous supporters) (see Rappaport 2005, 55–82). Javier worked with the Inca on behalf of the Ecuadorian NGO Center for Studies and Social Diffusion (CEDIS) based in Quito. Alfonso was an agronomy student at the Polytechnic in Riobamba, and Luc and Ameliè were two Canadian volunteers, who worked respectively on irrigation-systems design and on early childhood education. All of us comprised what the leaders of the Inca came to term as the *equipo técnico* (technical team). As foreigners living in Tixán, Luc, Ameliè, and I were reminded by the local people on many different occasions of our position as privileged citizens from rich countries. In somewhat simplistic yet still powerful terms, the hierarchies of the world order were demonstrated not only in obvious economic differences, but also more profoundly in the ease of our

international travel compared to the legal impediments of visa requirements that make persons from developing countries second- and third-class world citizens.

Engagement in anthropology also poses dilemmas for knowledge production. Engaged anthropology seems to be trapped by its own predicament of split loyalties: scientific “excellence” on the one side, and political and ethical commitment on the other. One question addresses the public aspect of knowledge production: how do we render the complexity of the political process we study while making sure that the critical information we may disclose is not used against the people we work with?³² The question remains open, for example, about the impacts on the political legitimacy of indigenous movements when deconstructing claims to cultural authenticity. The argument that such claims in indigenous political discourse are problematic because identities are not immutable essences can also disempower indigenous movements (Friedman 1994; Thomas 1994).

For example, in the early 1990s in Ecuador, the landowning sector started to push toward revitalizing the land market. The main target of their efforts was indigenous land, since its inalienable and indivisible nature as defined by law made it unsuitable for the land market. By borrowing from social-science discourses and methodologies, the powerful landowning lobby created the Institute of Agrarian Studies (IDEA), which sponsored research on land tenure in the highlands. This research claimed that the concept of indigenous communities and identity as being tied to collective lands was flawed, since in practice indigenous people divided their land among individuals. This “scientific” discovery was later used as ideological justification for the proposed Law of Agrarian Modernization (*Ley de Modernización Agraria*), which would have allowed indigenous lands to be sold on the market. Strictly speaking, IDEA researchers deconstructed the concept of an ethnic identity built on collective identity, in this case applied to collective land tenure, which is used in indigenous political discourse to legitimate access to land and agricultural resources. Heavily biased in favor of the landowning sector, in this case deconstruction of indigenous discourse attempted to delegitimize and discredit indigenous political struggle by dismantling the foundations of its cultural distinctiveness.

Another question refers to the potential conflict between political commitment and professional ethics. In his study of racial ambivalence among Ladinos in Guatemala, Hale (2008b) reveals the challenges that he faced

as an activist anthropologist allied with the Mayan indigenous movement's cause when embarking on fieldwork practice with the supposed dominants. He argues that neoliberal multiculturalism, with its ambiguities, has allowed for different understandings of racial politics among Ladinos, therefore rendering their positioning toward Mayas more complex, ranging from racist prejudices to a declared commitment to cultural equality. In working with Ladinos along such a wide spectrum, Hale seems to suggest that his overt and clear positioning as a Maya supporter and the disengagement from his analysis of those voices who did not give permission to be revealed were enough to safeguard his activist stand. Yet his account reveals that political commitment in anthropological practice in circumstances like those he describes can conflict with professional ethics by establishing different ethical standards for research involving those who retain power and privileges in society. Even if anonymous, the unwilling voices of Ladinos are indeed reported. The old proposal by Rodolfo Stavenhagen (1971) to decolonialize anthropology by doing research on the "powerful" appears thus more complex than expected.

Although complicated, engagement is a form anthropological inquiry that allows for a redefinition of power relations in anthropological practice. This book is the result of my collaboration with many indigenous activists and friends. This collaboration enabled me to encounter the importance of conviviality in indigenous people's struggles in Tixán and emphasize the vitality and humanity of their struggles. This dimension of political activism highlights the extent to which quotidian victories are found not so much in the subversion of the status quo as in people's ability to make sense of their quotidian existence no matter the circumstances. This affective dimension allows people engaged in political struggle to make sense of who they are, to move ahead, to keep on struggling and to win battles, and to lose some without being defeated.