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# I

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The sun beat down with intensity as I walked down the dirt street toward the recently opened internet café. The café was housed in the living room, or *sala*, of a small cement house connected to several other homes and painted in a faded white paint. In the previous ten years the home had seen numerous residents, some of whom I came to know well and others I only recognized by face and not by name. I entered, passing under an awning covered in palm thatch, and made my way into the shade where the temperature felt twenty degrees cooler. Five small computer stations were lined neatly along the wall, separated by flimsy plywood dividers. Youth in their early teens, most of whom I had known since they were toddlers, smiled and joked with one another while they played on the computers—young boys, their dark black hair slicked back or spiked high with hair gel, and young girls sitting close and giggling while sharing the same computer. This sight would not have existed four years earlier, at least not in this community. As I stood there, with the hope of checking my e-mail, I reflected momentarily on the changes that had taken place in Salango since my initial introduction to the community ten years earlier.

## *Introduction*

### *Into the Field*

This is a book about change and continuity, the past and the present. It is concerned with life in a rural Ecuadorian fishing village and about understanding processes of culture change that impact the daily lives of residents. This book is about the economies, identities,

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political struggles, development practices, and local-global interactions experienced by people living in a small ocean-side community. Based on my experiences with local residents, political activists, and agents of change, I argue that local conceptions of identity play a prominent role in shaping economic and political transitions in Salango. I endeavor to demonstrate how Salanguueños, a group historically recognized as *mestizo* (of mixed European and Indigenous descent), make claims to an Indigenous identity by asserting a connection to the past through links to the archaeological record as well as processes of work that connect people to place. These intersecting themes provide Salanguueños with a foundation on which claims to identity and a sense of belonging are constructed. Moreover, I suggest that ethnic identity in Salango is part of a complex matrix that includes economics, politics, history, and the archaeological record and that is influenced by forces that extend well beyond the boundaries of the community.

In the pages that follow, I detail my experiences living and conducting research in coastal Ecuador while focusing on the dynamic nature of ethnic identity. At a general level, I explore the relationship between identity and economic practice in coastal Ecuador while simultaneously looking at the ways ethnic identity, history, and economic practice influence development and how development practices can foster new understandings of ethnic identities. While the focus of this book is on the particular community of Salango, I make a concerted effort to illustrate how the community is linked to global processes that extend far beyond the boundaries of the village. I also recognize that no ethnography gives a complete picture of the cultural context, and all ethnographies are partial, both in the sense that they reflect the perspective of the ethnographer and also by providing an incomplete account of the culture under study (Clifford 1986). Thus, I do not claim that this ethnography is a comprehensive account of culture in Salango, but it does reflect, albeit in part, the experiences of Salanguueños as well as my own experiences during a time of significant change in the community.

My interest in Latin America began with study abroad opportunities throughout high school and college and included trips to Costa Rica and Mexico that fostered my desire to expand my knowledge about culture in Latin America. I was drawn to contemporary culture as well as archaeology, and this interest expanded as I traveled to Mayan ruins and later spent time visiting villages in Amazonian Peru. My introduction to coastal Ecuador began under the auspices of a field program. Not unlike many early anthropologists, contemporary students are often introduced to the field by way of an adviser and mentor. My situation was no different, and I am extremely grateful for having had such an opportunity.

I first arrived in Ecuador in the summer of 2002. Despite my initial intention to conduct dissertation research in lowland Peru, I was quickly drawn to the Ecuadorian coast and its residents. Locals impressed me with their humility, work ethic, generosity, and sincerity. The initial six weeks I spent in the field proved valuable to introducing me to the local cultural context while affording me the opportunity to establish relationships that would influence my research in impactful and unanticipated ways. At the same time, my time spent in Ecuador would help shape me as an individual, an educator, and a scholar of Latin America.

It was late June 2002. While standing conspicuously in the middle of the street, I was greeted by a young man about my age. He waved me down from a distance as he stood inside what I was later told was his family's open-air restaurant. The restaurant consisted of a white painted wall extending about 1 meter up from ground level and a vast opening above that stretched to the beginnings of a large conical thatched roof. I looked in from a distance as my eyes adjusted to the change in light from the sun-penetrated street to the shadowed interior. He motioned multiple times by waving his arm in a manner that clearly indicated that he wanted me to come closer. I hesitated a bit and then made my way toward him.

With a somewhat perplexed look yet an inviting demeanor, he asked what I was doing. I responded that I was making a map, and he asked me to come inside and share it with him. I walked around the outside of the restaurant and into the entrance. The restaurant was humble but hospitable. The floors were cement, and a number of chairs and tables made of *caña* (bamboo) or local wood were arranged throughout. I began speaking with my inquisitor, whose name I would learn was Diego. His build was stocky and his features were slightly weathered beyond his age of twenty-four. He inquired about my backpack and water bottle. Diego informed me that he had recently returned from Venezuela where he had spent the previous couple of years working in the bustling capital city, Carácas. I could see in his eyes and hear in his voice that he was attempting to reestablish himself and make the transition from an urban experience in a foreign country to a return to his native community, a village he would later refer to as a place that does not exist on the map because of its decidedly rural characteristics and perceived remoteness and isolation. I left after a short time, without giving much thought to the fact that the brief conversation Diego and I shared would lead to a long-term friendship and a deep understanding of and respect for one another.

I left Salango in August of that year with a promise made to Diego and other friends and acquaintances that I would return, and I did so on numerous

occasions over subsequent years. Each time I returned, throughout the course of my dissertation research and succeeding postdoctoral trips, I paid attention to the changes that were taking place in Salango. There was a familiarity during each trip but also a sense of profound newness brought forth by visible changes, such as the paving of the main road that leads into town and the construction of new homes, as well as abstract changes related to community politics and a transitioning economy.

## FIELDWORK AND FRIENDSHIP

My initial foray into life in coastal Ecuador led to a longitudinal research project that included numerous trips back to the field on various occasions over more than a decade. In total, I spent approximately 30 months in the small community of Salango, with the majority of that time falling between the years 2006 and 2008. In my earliest research trips, I resided in the local archaeological museum known as CIMS (*Centro de Investigaciones Museo Salango*), and it was not until a set of unfortunate circumstances occurred that I was invited to reside with a local family. Through my experiences living with a family and the changes in my position from outsider to a known individual in the community, I was able to gain insights into life in an Ecuadorian fishing village. The fact that I traveled back and forth to Salango on no fewer than a dozen occasions also provided me with perspective throughout the duration of my research. Being at home for months at a time gave me the ability to pause and reflect on my research while also affording me the opportunity to formulate new research questions. This is something I do not feel I would have been able to accomplish if I had stayed in the field for a single period of time. However, being away from the field and then returning often left me with questions upon my return about things I had missed while I was away.

I arrived in Salango in May 2005 as part of my dissertation fieldwork, and I set up my room in one of the small wooden cabins in the museum compound near the beach. I unpacked some of my things as an evening breeze blew in from the nearby ocean. The smell of salt was thick in the air as the sun set to the west. Donald, an expat from the United States and a longtime administrator of the museum, invited me to meet with him and a fellow researcher for dinner at one of the two small restaurants in town. Donald was always happy to have someone to talk to and would often vent his frustrations about life in the village. He had spent nearly twenty years living in Salango, and his patience with local politics and life in the village often wore thin. We left the museum at about 6:00 p.m. and walked through the dimly lit streets.

We returned to the museum after a couple hours of conversation, and I walked through the darkness to my cabin at the edge of the museum compound. The compound extends along the riverbank on one side and is flanked by the main roadway that enters town on the other. There are a few homes nearby, but it is a solitary space that is covered in darkness at night because of large trees that block out much of the moonlight even on the brightest nights.

I had an uneasy feeling, as in the past I had experienced having items stolen when I had gone out in the evening. I walked slowly up the wooden steps and onto the front porch of the cabin. The air was dense, and the only sound was that of waves crashing against the shore. I faced the door and the window to the left that I had closed and locked from the inside before I went to dinner. Seeing that the door was closed, I reached up and pushed on the wooden shutters of the window. They opened. My heart sank, and my chest began pounding. Someone had managed to get into my cabin. I quickly unlocked the door and entered. At first inspection, everything appeared normal. Clothes were laid out tidily on the bed. Items were as I had left them when I had unpacked some things before going to dinner. I looked more closely and realized that my large duffle bag, which was only partially unpacked, was not tucked neatly below the bed where I had left it. It was gone. How did someone get in, I wondered. My eyes scanned the room. As I looked to the ceiling, I noticed that part of the bamboo wall had been broken away close to the point where it met the ceiling. I rushed outside and looked. My feet kicked up moist sand as I hustled around the side of the cabin. To my shock, there was a wooden ladder leading up to where the opening had been made. I realized then that the ladder, used for maintenance around the museum compound, had been previously under the elevated cabin. I ran to the office to notify Donald and told him I was going to head across town to tell Diego what had happened. My choice to tell Diego was based on our established friendship and the confidence I had built with him and his family.

I ran most of the 500 meters or so to the house of Diego's family. Diego and his mother, one sister, and three brothers were outside, Diego relaxing in a hammock and the rest of his family seated on plastic chairs and a crude wooden bench. "They robbed me," I said with a sense of urgency and desperation. Diego quickly asked "Who? What happened?" I tried my best to explain the situation in my state of distress. Diego and his brother Manuel, whom I had come to know quite well along with the rest of the family, agreed that we needed to call the police. Fortunately, the telephone was working. Service was and still is very unreliable, and at the time most houses in town did not have telephones. The police would have to come from the nearby town of Puerto

López and would probably arrive in twenty minutes or so. Diego, Manuel, and their brother Gustavo (referred to from here on as *los hermanos* [the brothers]), and I hurried back to the museum to wait for the police. The police said they would come back the next day to talk in more detail about what had happened. It was late and they seemed to have little interest in helping. The brothers decided that the best decision was for me to leave the museum and take up residence in a spare room in the upstairs of their parents' home.

The home of don Orlando and doña Luisa is humble. It is two stories and built of wood mixed with handmade brick. It is typical of an older home in Salango. The stairs leading to the second floor are narrow and steep, and, as they are today, they were heavily damaged as a result of termites. Care has to be taken not to step on any floor boards that are too soft to hold one's weight. Exposed electrical wires hang low where the stairs meet the second floor. The upstairs consists of two small rooms, divided by plywood walls with open doorways. At the time, the upstairs was not in use because of its poor condition and probably also because no children were living at home. Instead, it was more of a storage area, akin to an attic back home in the United States. The exception was a bed in one of the rooms that was covered in plastic sheeting to protect it from the pair of pigeons that had taken up residence in the rafters. It was dusty and unkempt, but it was safe. I went to bed that night feeling grateful for the support given to me by the family, although questions lingered in my mind as to how the burglary had happened and who was responsible for stealing my items.

I awoke in the middle of the night with terrible stomach pains. I scurried down the stairs and to the back of the house in desperate need of a bathroom. I had been in the house before but no further than the sala, so I did not know where to find the bathroom. I looked and looked, but no luck. There was only a small room at the back of the house with a cement basin for washing clothes. A doorway led to the backyard. No bathroom. The need was urgent. I ran outside in the darkness of night and over to the side door of the restaurant. It was unlocked. I knew there was a bathroom inside, and I quickly made it to my destination. The night continued with multiple trips up and down the stairs, in and out of the bathroom. When I awoke in the morning I was greeted by Diego and doña Luisa sitting outside. "Good morning . . . how did you sleep?" they asked, even though it was apparent that they knew I had suffered through a long night of intestinal discomfort. They likely also struggled to sleep as they heard me go up and down the stairs and in and out of the bathroom on no fewer than four occasions. I explained that I was a little under the weather, and they shared with me that until I felt better I would be sleeping in Diego's room in the restaurant,

which had a private bathroom. Doña Luisa offered to prepare me *unas tostadas* (some toast) and *un aguita* (an herbal remedy) to improve my stomach problems.

As the result of a precarious sequence of circumstances, I was invited into a household, and years later I can say that I have been treated like a member of the family. I would later build a small room attached to Manuel's house that I would ultimately turn over to him as his young family grew. We would celebrate birthdays, mourn deaths, and welcome new members into the family. At times we would argue, but more often we would agree. I have come to consider doña Luisa a second mother and Diego, Manuel, and all of their siblings brothers and sisters of my own, and they frequently refer to me as *un otro hermano* (another brother). I am the *padrino* (godfather) to Manuel's children as well as to the oldest son of his brother Gustavo. We share a close relationship of camaraderie and confidence despite our differences. Diego and Manuel are the youngest of nine siblings. They grew up in a rural Ecuadorian fishing village, where their childhood was spent living in a house made of bamboo. They both worked as fishermen and divers, and their work took them from the Ecuadorian coast to the Galapagos Islands. I, in contrast, am one of two siblings, and I was raised in Illinois in a small suburb of Chicago. I grew up on a gentleman's farm, and my formative years were spent doing daily chores, including caring for pigs, geese, goats, and horses and baling hay in the summer.

Beyond our cultural differences, one thing that undoubtedly framed my experiences in Salango is the fact that I am a white male. To locals, I am a *gringo*.<sup>1</sup> I am light skinned and light eyed, and in many ways I am viewed as somewhat exotic. This is not to say that residents of Salango have not had significant contact with outsiders, but they do note difference, and that difference carries meaning that shapes relationships and influences interactions. Would I have been invited into the home of doña Luisa and given Diego's room if it were not for my background as a white American? I am not so sure. If I were not a gringo, would other Ecuadorians who visited the family restaurant inquire about me while enjoying a meal? Would I have been freely accepted as a tagalong guest at birthday parties, graduation celebrations, and other events that are normally reserved for close friends and family members? Would I have been asked to provide financial support to help local schools in the area that were understaffed? Would I have been asked to judge local beauty pageants, as I was on numerous occasions? I suspect that in all these cases I would have been treated differently if it were not for my race and nationality. As such, I recognize that I was accepted in part because of how I was perceived by local residents. I was not viewed as a threat, and in some ways locals viewed forming relationships with me as advantageous as they attempted to build social capital.

Residents also positioned me with respect to their previous interactions with gringos, including researchers, ex-pats, and Peace Corps volunteers. The point is that race matters in Ecuador, and it most certainly impacted my research and how I understand the experiences I had in Salango. As a gringo, I did not carry the baggage associated with colonialism, and I stood outside the ethno-racial matrix that is prominent in Ecuadorian society. I would be cued into this reality on numerous occasions when locals were far more reticent to interact with Ecuadorian “outsiders” who represented ethnic, racial, and class differences than they were to interact with me. In times where interactions between local residents and Ecuadorian outsiders did occur, the tensions associated with status and difference were often present. In contrast, I was often treated with caution and care, not unlike the way a parent might treat a child. Friends and acquaintances were quick to look after me and to make sure I was safe and well-fed. This points not only to the warm and giving nature of Salanguños but also to the fact that I was an outsider (a gringo), and for that I was treated with a degree of difference.

Through my friendship with los hermanos, I gained perspective as to what it means to live life in a rural Ecuadorian village. By participating in daily activities, community events, the labor of fishing, and the joys and struggles of daily life, the themes of development, identity, continuity, and change emerged as foci of my research. This book is the story of that research. To protect the identity and respect the privacy of my consultants and friends, I use pseudonyms throughout this book when referring to individuals. The only exceptions are don Orlando, whose song is presented in chapter 2, and certain public figures.

I sat with Manuel while a karate action film played on the television screen at the front of the bus. It was one of the numerous films that are poorly made and too frequently shown on the bumpy ride from Guayaquil to the Manabí coast. The star of the film looked familiar. It was Dolph Lundgren, the actor who played the Russian boxer in *Rocky IV* and who has achieved a recent resurgence in Hollywood action films. Manuel focused little attention on the film and instead rested his eyes in the comfort of the air-conditioned bus. The combination of air conditioning and a movie seems to do the trick to induce sleep. I recall my second trip to Ecuador when Manuel, Diego, and three other friends met me in Guayaquil, Ecuador’s largest city and an industrial port about four hours south of Salango. I invited them to the movies, a treat for them considering that they only made trips to the city perhaps once a year and most of them had only been to a movie once in their lives. I looked around about fifteen minutes into the film and noticed that they were all asleep in their chairs.

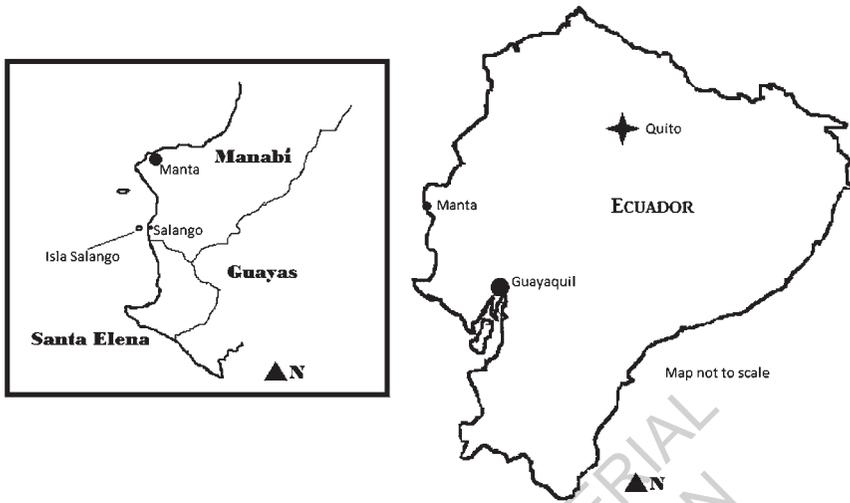


FIGURE 1.1. *Map of study region*

The ride to Salango out of the urban sprawl of Guayaquil is winding and bumpy, and it travels through agricultural land that produces rice, cacao, and bananas to the lush hills of Manabí province. As one moves closer to the Manabí coast, traffic decreases and the road is dominated by commercial trucks carrying agricultural goods and the ever-present buses loaded with passengers who use Ecuador's efficient public transportation system as the main means of moving from town to town and province to province. The gears of the large diesel buses grind as drivers push the speed to make it to the next stop in a timely fashion. The main line stops in the bustling city of Jipijapa, where the intense sun bakes the streets as dust blows in the air. Jipijapa was once known as the center of Ecuadorian coffee production, but production declined in the 1990s and most of the downtown warehouses closed. Today, the city is predominantly a transition point for travelers who switch from the inter-provincial bus line to one of the many local lines that provide service south from Jipijapa to the province of Santa Elena and north to cities, including the provincial capital of Portoviejo and the lively port city of Manta.

Manuel woke up. "*Vamos, Styk*" (Let's go, Styk). Manuel assigned to me the *apodo* (nickname) Styk a number of years ago. I do not know why Manuel decided to give me that nickname, but it has stuck and is now what he uses to refer to me on virtually all occasions. Nicknames are so commonplace in coastal Ecuador that almost everyone has one, and sometimes even distant

cousins only know each other by their nicknames. I was once told the story of three friends who were returning to the village after spending some time in Guayaquil. One of the friends spoke to his mother in the village shortly before getting on the bus in Guayaquil and relayed that he was traveling with *Fiebre* (fever) and *Paludismo* (malaria). The mother did not realize that Fiebre and Paludismo were the apodos of her son's traveling companions, and she urged her son not to travel if he was ill.

We scrambled to get off the bus and grab my bags. We made our way inside the terminal, followed by a quick turn toward the restroom. A small fee must be paid to an attendant sitting at a rickety table just outside the bathroom. The amount depends on the reason for your visit. The bathroom is dank and sticky. There is no running water, and the chance of having sufficient toilet paper is wholly dependent on your ability to convince the attendant to give you more than the standard three squares that come with the entrance fee. Despite this disparaging review, I cannot help but smile when I think of how this compares to the simple things that are taken for granted in public restrooms in the United States. In fact, there is something stimulating about the makings of life in rural Ecuador, even when life means making a visit to the restroom at the bus terminal in Jipijapa.

Our next stop was outside the terminal. The area is almost always bustling. Dust and diesel fumes fill the air; the organic sounds of conversations, calls, and laughter intermingle with the mechanical sounds of revving engines, squealing brakes, and automobile and bus horns. Vendors move about selling everything from candies to cigarettes to ready-to-eat *arroz con pollo* (chicken with rice), and the terminal is one of the only places to purchase coffee beans despite the prominent history of coffee production in Jipijapa and the surrounding region. I have a couple of things that I always purchase when making a stop in Jipijapa. We ordered two cups of coffee and two one-pound bags of ground beans. The coffee is dark, hot, and sweet. It invigorated us as we stretched our legs before the next leg of our journey. Next up was a loaf of banana bread. The gentleman who sells the bread appears to be in his fifties. He is slender and well dressed, always wearing a shirt, slacks, and tie with a gold cross suspended from a long gold chain that hangs around his neck. The bread was warm to the touch and wrapped in brown paper, then tucked snugly into a transparent plastic bag. I purchased a single loaf for Manuel and me to split. We were approached by another gentleman who carried a large, round plastic tub with oranges neatly stacked inside. I encounter him every time I pass through Jipijapa. In broken English he asked, "You from New York? You go to Montañita, my friend?" Montañita is a well-known gringo enclave

and surf/party town located on the southern coast. I politely told him “no, I am going to Manabí,” as I do every time. We engaged in casual conversation for a few moments before Manuel tapped me on the arm and pointed to the waiting bus.

The terminal of Jipijapa reflects salient features of regional culture, and a great deal can be gleaned from spending time there. The informal economy is alive and well. Cash is the currency, and local cuisine echoes the importance of agriculture and fishing throughout the region. The local cheese is sold fresh by merchants who have small stands, and vendors move about offering ready-to-eat meals that range from the mainstream *bolones* (balls of fried plantain mixed with cheese or pork) to more exotic dishes like *corviche* (fish wrapped and cooked in plantain dough that is deep fried) and *fritadas* (seasoned and fried pork pieces). Food is prepared in nearby homes and brought fresh to the terminal, where it is sold in plastic containers or bags. The same vendors, both children and adults, work day after day selling to travelers. The scene in Jipijapa is a drastic departure from the one at the terminal in Guayaquil, where most of the food options include global brands such as McDonald’s and KFC. Indeed, following a renovation in 2007, the Guayaquil terminal now looks more like a shopping center than a bus terminal—a clear sign of the growing US commercial influence in Ecuador.

A dusty ride south from Jipijapa takes you to the coast of Manabí. The southern Manabí region is decidedly rural, characterized by rolling hills and dense tropical vegetation in the form of both humid and dry tropical forests. Where the rugged hill region of the coast meets the Pacific Ocean, there are numerous natural bays on which many of the area’s towns and villages are located. The bus passes through a number of small port towns as it makes a long curve toward the ocean and a steady decline as it reaches Salango. The two-lane highway parallels the ocean and passes the local cemetery just before the bus comes to a jarring stop at the edge of town. Local residents quickly jump off the bus while others wait to climb on. It is a rarity to see anyone other than locals get on or off the bus in Salango, unless they are part of a student group that conducts field projects in the area or the occasional missionary who visits local households, something that is occurring with increasing frequency. The community is situated on a protected bay where low-lying hills meet the Pacific Ocean, and it is bisected by the coastal highway. A single paved road leads from the highway to the beach, and bicycles are far more common than automobiles. On any given afternoon one can witness children playing soccer in the streets while women converse on the stoops of their brightly colored homes and men congregate at the beachfront. In many ways Salango is a typical Ecuadorian fishing

village, and *tranquilo* (tranquil) is the word most locals use to describe the community. However, significant changes have occurred since the early 2000s. This book is about these changes and the lives of the residents of the rural fishing community that is situated along Ecuador's Pacific Coast.

## THEORETICAL CONCERNS

Two prominent themes emerged throughout my time spent in Salango: identity and development. I approach both with reference to how locals understand the past and the archaeological record while also emphasizing how a seemingly remote community is integrated into national and international discussions about identity and development. Moreover, my experiences suggest that what I witnessed in Salango stands in contrast to dominant homogenizing discourses on identity that have been historically prominent throughout Latin America.

I approach identity through the framework presented by Hill and Wilson that emphasizes the distinction between “identity politics” and the “politics of identities” (Hill and Wilson 2003). The former represents dominant, often top-down or state-mediated processes by which particular identities are given preference over, and deemed more appropriate than, subaltern identities. The latter refers to bottom-up processes, whereby traditionally marginalized or silenced identities are promoted as a means of challenging the hegemonic structures that favor a particular identity or set of identities.

*Mestizaje* is the most prevalent paradigm of identity politics in Latin America. It is an ideology that promotes cultural and racial mixing toward an ultimate goal of achieving a set of cultural, and in some cases phenotypical, characteristics associated with “whiteness” or European-ness. The ideology of mestizaje has origins in the colonial conquest of the Americas and the mixing of Indigenous, African, and Spanish peoples, both biologically and culturally. A vast literature exists with reference to mestizaje, and seminal contributions include that of Mexican author and educator José Vasconcelos. In his book *La Raza Cósmica*, Vasconcelos (1925) promotes mestizaje as a founding ideology of Latin American identity: “The lower types of the species will be absorbed by the superior type . . . the uglier stocks will give way to the more beautiful. Inferior races, upon being educated, would become less prolific, and the better specimens would go on ascending a scale of ethnic improvement” (30–31).<sup>2</sup> The result of this mixing, per Vasconcelos, is mestizo identity, an identity “made of the treasury of all of the previous races, the final race, the cosmic race” (41). As alluded to in the work of Vasconcelos, mestizo identity,

which is the product of *mestizaje*, occurs through acquiring markers *associated* with progress and modernity, including education, literacy, urban-ness, and mastery of the Spanish language. At the same time, *perceived* markers of indigeneity, such as traditional clothing, language, rural-ness, illiteracy, and lack of formal education, are viewed as having little value in contributing to a mestizo identity and society at large. Multiple scholars refer to the associated process as *blanqueamiento* (whitening) (Whitten 2003b; Whitten and Fine 1981; Whitten and Quiroga 1998). Thus, mestizo identity is a mixed identity that privileges a certain cultural form over all others and that is reinforced in the everyday interactions of many Latin Americans.

A fundamental component of the paradigm of *mestizaje* is the ability for individuals to achieve a mestizo identity through adopting the appropriate cultural markers and abandoning markers that are of lesser value. For example, Clara is a young woman in her early twenties of Indigenous Kichwa descent who now resides in Guayaquil. She and her mother own a small mini-market in an upscale residential neighborhood on the outskirts of the city. I became acquainted with Clara a number of years ago when I would visit family in Guayaquil and go to the mini-market for produce or other daily needs. At the time, Clara wore traditional Kichwa clothing, including a long skirt and an embroidered white blouse. She would speak with her mother in Kichwa and rarely looked customers in the eye. By all accounts, Clara was Indigenous, and a marked social distance existed between her and the middle- to upper-middle-class mestizos who frequented her family's store. More recently, Clara has taken to wearing blue jeans and T-shirts, and her teeth are being straightened with braces. "Did you notice Clara? She has a mestizo boyfriend, and she is converting herself to mestiza," was part of the commentary shared over lunch after visiting the mini-market earlier in the day. Such statements point to the plasticity of identity in Latin America and to the overwhelming presence of *mestizaje* in the day-to-day interactions of Ecuadorians.

On a different occasion, in 2009, a few years before I met Clara, I was invited to the home of an acquaintance in one of the most well-to-do residential areas of Guayaquil. The event was New Year's Day, and brunch was served in an elegant dining area that overlooked a vast living room with expansive marble floors and ornate furnishings. As we engaged in conversation, I was asked about my work on the coast and if I knew of a young man from one of the villages who was engaged to marry a young woman from England. "I do, he is from La Palma," I responded as I recalled a previous conversation with Manuel about the upcoming wedding. "They are improving the race on the coast," stated my host in a matter-of-fact manner. Statements such as these are

neither new nor rare in Ecuador. Indeed, prominent anthropologist Norman E. Whitten Jr. provides a similar example from a 1972 political speech by past Ecuadorian president Guillermo Rodríguez Lara. The speech was given in the Amazon city of Puyo at a time when Ecuador's Amazonian interior was gaining attention because of a growing petroleum industry: "There is no more Indian problem . . . we all become white when we accept the goals of national culture" (Whitten 1977:183).<sup>3</sup> The examples from my own experiences reflect the everyday manifestations of mestizaje as both ideology and practice, while Whitten's illustration is representative of what we might conceive of as state-sponsored mestizaje in Ecuador. However, in all of the aforementioned cases, mestizaje takes the form of identity politics; it is top-down and imposed upon those in marginalized or subordinate positions. Because of the politics of mestizaje, it is common for individuals to reject the label "Indigenous" in favor of a mestizo identity because the former inhibits socioeconomic mobility while the latter affords such mobility (Martínez Novo 2006).

The politics of identities contrasts with identity politics and is often expressed in the form of counter-hegemonic discourses that aim to valorize peoples and identities that have a history of being marginalized and subjugated. Referencing Rodríguez Lara, Indigenous identities would be one such example of a marginalized or subjugated identity. In fact, in practice, Indigenous Ecuadorians have historically been denied equal access to citizenship rights through forms of structural violence, including the *hacienda* and *huasipungo* systems.<sup>4</sup> However, beginning in the 1940s and with growing awareness in the 1990s, Indigenous Ecuadorians pushed for recognition of Indigenous rights through the formation of a variety of organizations at the local, regional, and national levels. The most prominent is Ecuador's national Indigenous organization, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE). CONAIE creates a space and a mechanism for Indigenous political organizing. While the focus of my work is not CONAIE or Indigenous politics at the national level, it is worth mentioning that CONAIE is representative of the politics of identities and has fostered political change in Ecuador. Moreover, CONAIE has challenged a singular view of Ecuadorian history that emphasizes mestizaje and a homogenized image of indigeneity while promoting a history that recognizes the different Indigenous communities that occupy Ecuador (Benavides 2011). This recognition manifests itself in the acknowledgment and promotion of plurinationalism, a theme addressed in depth in chapter 4. As I suggest in the following chapters, the politics of identities is not relegated to formal political institutions or organizational frameworks but instead is expressed through a variety of channels, including ritual practices,

communal politics, and symbolic connections to the past.

Ethnicity and ethnogenesis relate to identity politics and the politics of identities in a number of ways. The former refers in part to how people frame their identity in times of conflict (A. Cohen 1969). The implicit suggestion is that ethnic groups or claims to an ethnic identity represent collective responses to struggle and are instrumental in achieving a particular goal. However, manifestations of ethnicity can take different forms. In some cases, ethnicity is expressed through everyday practices such as language and dress, while in other instances ethnic identity only appears in times of tension and conflict (Sandstrom 2008). For outsiders as well as those who stake claim to a particular ethnic identity, there is often an asserted claim to continuity and the past. Such a primordial approach to ethnic identity suggests that ethnicity is permanent and fundamental to human identity (Banks 1996). While the aforementioned are appropriate for understanding ethnicity, anthropologists have moved beyond a perspective that emphasizes ethnic identity as a cohesive set of cultural traits—including language, ritual, ties to territory, and similar factors—and instead recognize the subjectivity of ethnicity while addressing “specific historical, political, and social contexts of power” as shaping ethnicity (Stephen 1996:32). The issue then becomes not what is “contained” within an ethnic group in terms of defining characteristics but instead how the ethnic group is shaped by outside influences as well as group responses to such influences. If we take this approach, we are left with a focus on the political dimensions of ethnicity while simultaneously recognizing its dynamic and fluid nature. The result of this perspective is the acknowledgment that ethnic identity can be used for instrumental purposes and is often the result of strategic constructions that allow people to be successful and to prosper (Sandstrom 2008).

Ethnogenesis is the creation or assertion of a collective identity (Sandstrom 2008), and it relates to ethnic identity as groups undergoing processes of assimilation and ethnocide partake in adaptive processes to counteract such changes while simultaneously reconfiguring their own symbolic relationships (Whitten 1976). A priority in recent studies of ethnogenesis is to push for recognition of the intersection of local and global processes while at the same time arguing against representations of Native peoples as static and isolated and instead acknowledging the dynamic nature of ethnic identity (see Hill 1996). Ethnogenesis often occurs as two groups come together to create a new ethnic group/identity. In other instances, ethnogenesis occurs when people express an identity that serves to differentiate them from homogenized identities that are the product of historical contact and assimilation. This corresponds closely to Stark and Chance’s (2008) position that acknowledges

ethnicity as based on a presumed common heritage or a presumed connection to the past. This newly articulated identity often extends beyond any known affinity or relationship and is instead based upon a shared understanding of the past and an asserted connection to the past, however thin the conjoining threads might be.

The recognition that connections to the past might be tenuous brings to bear the question of authenticity as it relates to claims to ethnicity. Relevant contributions to this discussion include the writings of Conklin (1997), French (2004), García and Lucero (2011), Gaytán (2008), Lucero (2006), Morales, Cano, and Mysyk (2004), and Smith (2015). While each provides a valuable contribution to the ongoing debates surrounding ethnic identities, it is not my intention going forward to endeavor to explore questions of authenticity. Instead, I find it useful to follow the perspective of Handler (1986), which recognizes the concept of authenticity as a cultural construct that is largely the product of a Western worldview. Given this, I find it problematic to apply the concept of authenticity to questions of ethnicity, Indigenous or otherwise. The end goal is therefore not to validate or question the relative authenticity of claims to an ethnic identity but instead to provide insight into the ways groups conceive of and negotiate their own identities.

The second dominant theme of this book is development. One of the things that sparked my interest in development in Ecuador was a billboard I passed in Guayas province in 2004. The billboard depicted a stylized image of a rising sun situated behind rolling mountains, with the ocean in the foreground. The rays of the sun were also cast into the foreground, projecting a sense of illuminated hope and prosperity. The words to the left reinforced the imagery: “A single path, a single road . . . the development of the country!” Despite the emphasis on a single development path, development practices vary widely. In general, scholars acknowledge two kinds of development: mainstream and alternative. My goal here is not to provide an exhaustive presentation of development practices or the scholarly literature that analyzes or critiques them. However, it is appropriate to address some of the basic meanings and attributes relevant to the case studies discussed in later chapters.

Like *mestizaje*, economic development exists as both practice and ideology, and the concept of development has multiple interpretations. On the one hand, economic development can be correlated with economic growth, an increase in exports and foreign trade, and a rise in gross domestic product (GDP). Alternatively, economic development is often understood in terms of improved livelihoods and a reduction in poverty. However, these directives are often obscured as a consequence or perhaps the intent of large bureaucratic

institutions, and most critics of mainstream development argue that development serves as a mechanism of economic and social domination through the control of economic resources (see Bebbington 1992 and Escobar 1995, for example). As linked to colonialism and post-colonialism, development, “although couched in terms of humanitarian goals and in the preservation of freedom[,] . . . sought to provide a new hold on countries and their resources” (Escobar 1995:26) by expanding markets and promoting capitalist agendas that replicate colonial relations by driving “developing” nations into cycles of debt and dependence.

Numerous critics place multinational development institutions, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), at the center of this critique; a brief examination of the Ecuadorian case will illustrate why. The World Bank and the IMF are major multilateral financial institutions that provide loans to developing nations the world over. From a neo-liberal perspective, development is associated with economic growth or progress by way of structural adjustment (Barkin 2001; Bretón Solo de Zaldívar 2002; Escobar 1995). In the 1980s and 1990s, the World Bank and the IMF promoted neo-liberal policies aimed at increasing international trade, financing industry, and making significant investments in developing nations while at the same time pushing for the privatization of public enterprises and limited government interventions and regulations in the name of progress, democracy, and freedom (Sunkel 2005). The latter were means of structural adjustment employed throughout much of Latin America. Critics of such policies point to greater disparities in wealth and increases in poverty as results of neo-liberal reforms (Barkin 2001; Escobar 1995). Simply put, the wealthy grew wealthier and the poor became poorer while developing countries increased their dependency on powerful foreign partners.

In Ecuador, neo-liberal policies preceded a significant economic decline that reached its lowest point in the late 1990s. President Jamil Mahuad Witt embraced neo-liberalism as the country took on significant external debt while decreasing financial regulations and allowing “state and private banks free reign [*sic*] to wheel and deal with millions of dollars of entrusted capital” (Whitten 2003a:2). By 1999 Ecuador had become one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere as the national currency, the sucre, declined in value from 370 sucres per US dollar in 1988 to over 24,000 sucres per US dollar in early 2000 (*Treasury Reporting Rates of Exchange as of March 31, 1988; Treasury Reporting Rates of Exchange as of March 31, 2000*). Wealthy elites who had the capacity to work and invest in US dollars rapidly increased their wealth, while average Ecuadorians became poorer each day as their currency

declined in value. Between March and September 2000, the government made a dramatic move and adopted the US dollar as the official currency (Solimano 2002). With an accumulation of debt from multilateral lending institutions, in 2008 Ecuador defaulted on \$3.9 billion in foreign debt (Faiola 2008).

Alternative models of development are qualitatively different than mainstream models. Alternative approaches take many forms, often referred to as grassroots and in some cases local economic development (LED). A key component of such models is an emphasis on humanitarian concerns and improved livelihoods. This differs markedly from neo-liberal practices that emphasize economic growth but often overlook local concerns. Binns and Nel, for example, suggest that local economic development appears “to be among the few realistic development options available to the ‘poorest of the poor,’ who seem to have been all but abandoned by the Western-dominated global economy” (Binns and Nel 1999:390). Bebbington (1997) suggests that alternative practices often take into account culturally appropriate forms of development. A recent perspective, which is a prominent component of this book, is community development.

Examples of alternative models of development include the formation of small-scale economic cooperatives, micro-credits for small-scale entrepreneurs, and similar types of projects. It is often the case that local community members or organizations initiate projects and seek funding from non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In recent years many development organizations that once embodied neo-liberal principles experienced philosophical changes, so development is no longer defined strictly as economic growth. Instead, a more nuanced perspective recognizes local concerns, including a recognition of rights, Indigenous and otherwise, that often challenge a neo-liberal framework (Gordon and Hale 2003). Thus, disentangling mainstream development and alternative development ideologies and practices is more difficult than it once was. However, the main distinction is still largely one of size as well as project implementation. In chapter 5 I provide more detail on this issue through multiple case studies that draw from my experiences with mainstream and alternative development practices, including World Bank-funded development projects in Salango.

Moving forward, I address both mainstream and alternative models for development within the context of Salango. I am most concerned with how development is negotiated at the local level: by the people of Salango. At the same time, I pay close attention to how identity and development are interwoven, particularly as related to questions of *mestizaje*. A final component that underlies questions of both identity and *mestizaje* is the presence of the past

in the form of the archaeological record and the knowledge residents have about the prehistory of their community. I suggest that identity and development are significantly influenced by local understandings of the past, as perceived connections to the region's prehistory are leveraged in the negotiation of development. Thus, this book is less about economic change and more about the social and cultural transformations associated with development as they relate to localized conceptions of identity.

A final note is that this book was written with students in mind. I gained a deep interest in Latin America in part because of exposure to engaging ethnographies when I was an undergraduate student. I was captivated and inspired by the experiences of ethnographers who wrote about life in rural communities and how people responded to and negotiated the transformations brought forth by living in an increasingly globalized context. It is my hope that this work can provide similar inspiration for students to take an interest in Latin America.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK**

Chapter 2 focuses on life in Salango by addressing the local economy, political organization, and social differentiation within the community. I emphasize the local fishing economy as a defining feature of life in Salango. I trace the rise of Salango's fishing economy from a small-scale subsistence-based fishery to the growth of a commercial fishing fleet. I introduce the connections between contemporary practice and localized conceptions of identity while paying special attention to local narratives about changes that have taken place since the 1970s. Throughout this chapter I suggest that local identity is embedded in the cultural practices of work associated with the local fishery. I emphasize that economic practices are not compartmentalized from other domains of culture but instead form the framework for understanding and asserting village identity.

In chapter 3 I address Salango's prehistory and suggest that the prehistory is of fundamental importance for understanding development and identity in Salango. The chapter emphasizes archaeology and community patrimony as important contributors to local identity. Throughout the chapter I focus on the prehistory of the region, as illuminated through the archaeological record, and on contemporary constructions of a place-based identity that leverages the archaeological record. I focus on local conceptions of the pre-Columbian past and on the role material connections, in the form of the archaeological record, play in the everyday lives of Salango residents. In addition, I present

two ethnographic examples that illustrate the significance of archaeology with reference to identity in Salango. The first example pre-references the annual festival that celebrates Indigenous heritage and the pre-Columbian *Manteño* population that inhabited the Ecuadorian coast at the time of Spanish contact.<sup>5</sup> The second example comes from the twentieth anniversary celebration of the local archaeology museum.

Chapter 4 highlights the claims to indigeneity in Salango and the associated tensions and subsequent struggles that led to Salango gaining government recognition as an ancestral community in 2004. The underlying theoretical concerns are ethnogenesis and the politics of identity. As such, I situate the case of Salango within the existent literature pertaining to these areas of scholarly interest. In addition, I focus on the concept of the road as both a symbol of and a realistic contributor to the emergence of an ethnic-based discourse in Salango. I suggest that the construction of Ecuador's main coastal highway in the 1970s and the integration of Salango into the regional and national economies served as a conduit for an increased archaeological presence in the region that ultimately played a role in claims of Indigenous identity. I also examine the protests of 2004, when this same highway was blocked to assert claims to territory and government recognition of Indigenous identity. An additional component of the chapter is to contextualize Salangueno claims to an Indigenous identity within the broader cultural context of national politics and constitutional reforms that recognize Ecuador as a plurinational state. In this chapter I bring together ideas about identity, belonging, the politics of identity, and identity politics. I trace recent Indigenous mobilizations in Ecuador, beginning with the *levantamiento indígena* (Indigenous uprising) of 1990, and the expansion of Indigenous politics from the highland and Amazonian regions to the Ecuadorian coast. I also present data on local conceptions of identity. I suggest that there is a difference between identity and belonging; the former has deep political implications, and the latter is about place and a sense of personhood with reference to community. Moreover, I address how identity is a contested terrain linked closely to community politics.

Chapter 5 examines issues of culture change and development in Salango, with special attention paid to how development is negotiated at the local level. I begin by situating Salango within the broader regional context, as related to tourism development. One component of that context is the fact that Salango is located on the outskirts of Ecuador's only coastal national park. As the chapter moves forward, I trace the origins of tourism development in Salango by addressing three cases: the formation of an NGO-sponsored tourism cooperative, a later World Bank-funded communal tourism initiative, and private

tourism enterprises in the community. I highlight the difficulties encountered by each of the three approaches while emphasizing the role of the national park in providing both opportunities and challenges.

The final chapter revisits the dominant theme of culture change while simultaneously suggesting that change in Salango follows two lines that are interwoven. The first is change in the form of increased regional and global connectivity by way of increased access to regional and national markets, the growth of the local fishing economy, and an increased outsider presence—including development specialists, tourists, and archaeologists. The second major change is related to ethnic politics at the local and national levels. I conclude that the growth of an ethnic-based discourse among the residents of Salango must be understood not as a uniquely local response to internal political tensions but as informed by the broader context of constitutional reform (chapter 4), regional development (chapter 5), identity politics and the politics of identity (chapter 4), and the perceived continuity between past and present (chapter 3).

## NOTES

1. In Ecuador the term *gringo* is not generally used in a derogatory manner, and it is not restricted as a descriptor of North Americans. The term is used to refer to North Americans, Europeans, Australians, and similar groups. The key components of its meaning are light-skinned and foreign.

2. Los tipos bajos de la especie serán absorbidos por el tipo superior. De esta suerte podría redimirse, por ejemplo, el negro, y poco a poco, por extinción voluntaria, los extirpes más feas irán cediendo el paso a las más hermosas. Las razas inferiores, al educarse, se harían menos prolíficas, y los mejores especímenes irán ascendiendo en una escala de mejoramiento étnico (Vasconcelos 1925:30–31). All translations are by the author.

3. No hay más problema en relación con los indígenas . . . todos nosotros pasamos a ser blancos cuando aceptamos las metas de la cultura nacional (Whitten 1977:183).

4. The term *hacienda* refers to a landed estate. As a system, the hacienda allowed for control of land and resources, including the labor resources of Indigenous peoples residing on hacienda lands. The term *huasipungo* refers to a relationship of tenancy and debt peonage associated with Indians living on hacienda lands.

5. I provide a similar account in an article published in the *Revista de Antropología Experimental* (Bauer 2010b), and Smith addresses the same issue in her more recent book on the coastal Ecuadorian community of Agua Blanca (Smith 2015).