

# Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America

ISSN: 2572-3626 (online)

---

Volume 3

Issue 2 *Including Special Section: The Body in Amazonia*

Article 5

---

December 2005

## New Bodies, Ancient Blood: “Purity” and the Construction of Zápara Identity in the Ecuadorian Amazon

Maximilian Viatori

Iowa State University, viatori@iastate.edu

### Cover Page Footnote:

Acknowledgements. Research funding for this project was provided by a Dissertation Research Grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation, as well as grants from the University of California, Davis, and the Northern California Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa. I would like to thank Bartolo Ushigua, Gloria Ushigua, and Oscar Montahuano for their help in making this research possible in Ecuador.

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Viatori, Maximilian (2005). "New Bodies, Ancient Blood: “Purity” and the Construction of Zápara Identity in the Ecuadorian Amazon," *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America*: Vol. 3: Iss. 2, Article 5.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/tipiti/vol3/iss2/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Trinity. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Trinity. For more information, please contact [jcostanz@trinity.edu](mailto:jcostanz@trinity.edu).

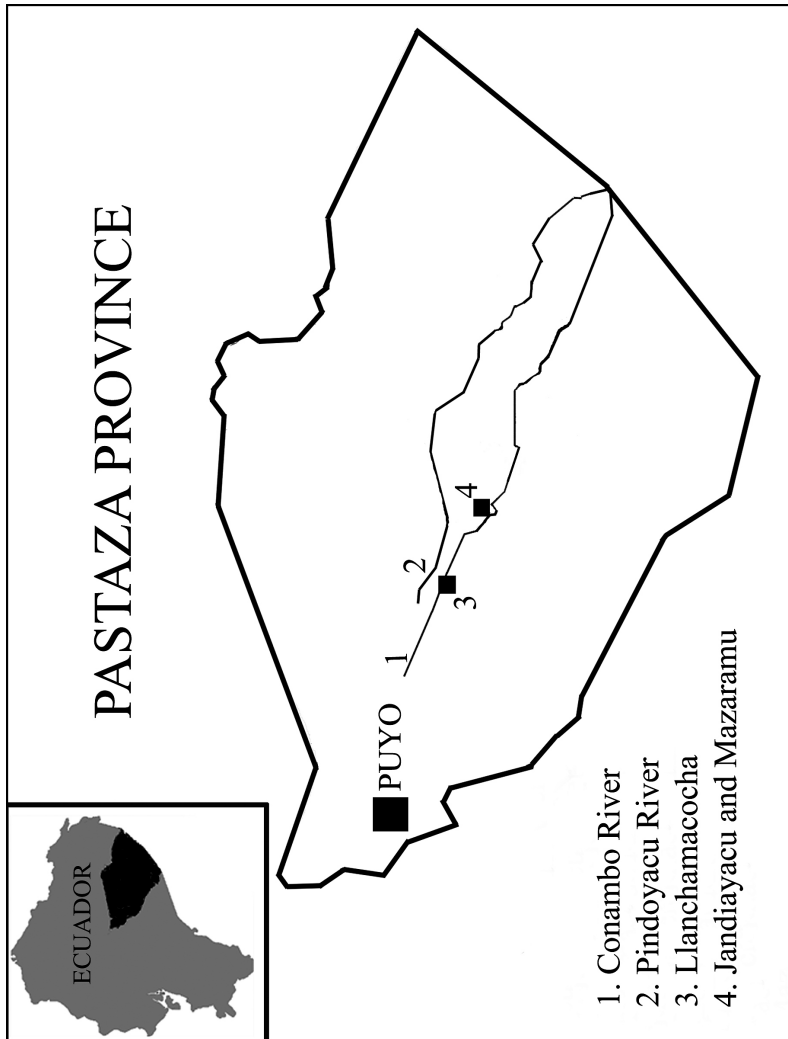
## **New Bodies, Ancient Blood: “Purity” and the Construction of Zápara Identity in the Ecuadorian Amazon**

**MAXIMILIAN VIATORI**

**Iowa State University**

**viatori@iastate.edu**

Anthropologists working in Amazonia have been particularly attuned to changes in the way that indigenous bodies are made to matter within the context of indigenous politics and representation. Almost without exception, however, Amazonian anthropologists with an interest in the body and indigenous representation have tended to focus on the semiotic quality of the body’s surface—skin, clothes, and adornment—and the role it plays in conveying identity (Turner 1980:112–114). For example, anthropologists have shown that as a result of contact and colonialism, many indigenous Amazonians adopted “Western” means of dress—shoes, t-shirts and pants—in local interethnic encounters in order to down-play their cultural distinctness and avoid non-Indians’ scrutiny, disrespect and rejection (Turner 1992:289; Conklin 1997:716). They have also shown that indigenous representatives are often reclaiming or adopting “local” indigenous dress—headdresses, body paint, and feathers—when addressing interethnic audiences (Turner 1992; Conklin and Graham 1995:697, 701–703; and Conklin 1997). Beth Conklin and Laura Graham (1995) explain this shift in indigenous adornment as a result of the capital that “Western” environmental groups place on images of “exotic” Indians as symbols of the untouched character of the Amazonian rainforest (1997). Consequently, indigenous representatives have found that such dress and adornment provide an important tool before international and national audiences to index and prove their “authenticity” as Indians.<sup>1</sup> The literature on the visual aspects of indigenous bodies in Amazonia has been important for demonstrating the ways in which indigenous bodies are produced as sites of difference, and highlighting the power indigenous political struggles have to alter meaning significantly. However, with its focus on the adornment of the body’s surface, this literature tends to assume a continuity and solidity to the bodies underneath the feathers, headdresses and paint, thus implying that although indigenous bodies have changed on the outside to adapt to political and social situations, the bodies underneath have remained the same.



Map 1. Approximate location of the Zapara communities studied

I begin with an examination of how Zápara identity has changed during the past decade as a result of the Záparas' engagement in Ecuadorian indigenous identity politics. I then discuss how blood relationships have become an important marker for individual Zápara identity, and explore the difficulties this has produced for Zápara individuals from "mixed" blood families. Finally, I demonstrate how the Zápara have used notions of blood purity to define themselves in opposition to another group, the Comuna Záparo, which also claims Zápara identity.

### LANGUAGE, HISTORY AND IDENTITY

The communities where I conducted this research<sup>2</sup> are located along the upper reaches of the Conambo River in the primary tropical rainforest of eastern Pastaza province, near Ecuador's border with Peru. These communities banded together in 1998, along with Cuyacocha (located on the Pindoyacu River), to organize as the Zápara Nationality of Ecuador. They formed an organization, which is based in Pastaza's provincial capital of Puyo, to act as their political representative to the "outside" world as well as to revive the Zápara identity and language in Ecuador. When I first began my research in Ecuador, the name of the Zápara's organization was the Asociación de la Nacionalidad Zápara de la Provincia de Pastaza (the Association of the Zápara Nationality of Pastaza Province, ANAZPPA) which changed in 2002 to the Organización de la Nacionalidad Zápara del Ecuador (Organization of the Zápara Nationality of Ecuador, ONZAE), and in 2003 became the Nacionalidad Zápara del Ecuador (the Zápara nationality of Ecuador, NAZAE). In addition to its four founding communities (Bilhaut 2005:11), the Zápara organization now represents the communities of Shiona, Pindoyacu, Balsaura and San José del Curaray. Each community has between twenty-five to sixty residents who engage primarily in subsistence hunting and farming in Ecuador's primary tropical rainforest, but who also make frequent trips outside their communities to sell their handicrafts, work, attend school, or serve in the military.

The Zápara are one of the smallest indigenous nationalities in Ecuador. The Zápara population is estimated conservatively to be around two hundred individuals living in eastern Ecuador (Andrade 2001:12). Over the past decade, the Zápara language has become the primary symbol of these individuals' identity as part of the Zápara nationality. The overwhelming majority of Zápara, however, do not speak this language; in fact, Zápara is spoken by fewer than ten elders. The Zápara language is a member of the Zaparoan language family—a group of languages spoken in

eastern Ecuador and Peru (Peeke 1962, 1991; Stark 1981:12–13; Whitten 1981:138; Wise 1999:312). Zápara speakers were likely numerous in eastern Ecuador and northeastern Peru prior to European contact (Rivet 1930:5; Steward and Métraux 1948:629). Even after European contact, the Zápara constituted a large ethnolinguistic group well into the nineteenth century. For example, the Italian traveler Gaetano Osculati (2001:139) estimated the Zápara still numbered 20,000 in Ecuador in 1846. By the early twentieth century, however, the Zápara had almost disappeared, despite having been a “large and prosperous tribe” (Loch 1938:52).

The drastic decline of Zápara in Amazonian Ecuador was the result of death from disease, forced migrations and enslavement (Sweet 1969:103; Reeve 1988b:22–23; Muratorio 1991:72–93; Descola 1994:17). Many Zápara also were absorbed and acculturated by neighboring indigenous groups. They often adopt the languages of their neighbors, leading to the almost complete death of Zápara language and identity in Ecuador (Whitten 1976:16). The best example of this process of acculturation was the emergence of the Canelos Kichwa or Pastaza Runa out of Quijos, Zápara and Achuar intermarriage (Obrerem 1974:347; Whitten 1976:7–8; Hudelson 1985:69; Reeve 1988a:87–88; Descola 1994:22). Although this process of ethnogenesis began during the colonial period, it was greatly accelerated by the ethnocide of the Amazonian rubber boom between 1880–1920, which led to the death of many Zápara and other Indians. The mediating language of these bi-ethnic unions was the regional lingua franca, Kichwa (also spelled “Quichua”) (Steward 1948:512; Orr and Wrisley 1965; Whitten 1981:125–128). By the beginning of the twentieth century the Zápara language had virtually vanished from eastern Ecuador, having been largely replaced by Kichwa (Jouanen 1941:442–448; Peeke 1962:125; Whitten 1981:139; Rival 2002:35). For this reason, Kichwa is the first language of almost all the individuals in the Zápara communities where I studied.

Spanish also became a significant part of Zápara linguistic practice in the twentieth century. Beginning in the 1940s, Zápara men left their communities to work for the Shell Oil Company, as well as plantations in the area around Puyo, the capital city of the province of Pastaza in which the Zápara are located. Currently, most Zápara men leave their communities (for periods of time ranging from several months to several years) to earn cash working for construction companies on the Ecuadorian coast or to enlist in the military. The result of this pattern of migration is that most Zápara men have some competence in Spanish. Increasingly, young men and women are also leaving the Zápara communities to attend high school in Puyo, where the language of instruction is Spanish.

Although Kichwa remains the first language of almost all Zápara (with a minute number who learned Zápara or Achuar as their mother tongues), Spanish is an important second language for many Zápara. Furthermore, Spanish is also an important aspect of Zápara self-representation. Zápara leaders working in their organization's office in Puyo have to interact daily with government officials, reporters, volunteers and other indigenous leaders. The common language of these interactions is Spanish, with few opportunities for the use of Kichwa. Spanish, for example, is the common language for indigenous representatives in the Ecuadorian Amazon who do not all share a common indigenous language.

The reality that most Zápara speak Kichwa and Spanish presented a problem for the Zápara communities when they decided to politically organize as a nationality in the 1990s. Over the last three decades, Ecuador's Amazonian Indians have increasingly organized and identified themselves and other ethnic groups in Ecuador as "nationalities," and have had some success institutionalizing the concept in the Ecuadorian state (Lucero 2003). The concept of nationality divides Amazonian Indians along linguistic lines into autonomous ethnic groups. Although a portion of each nationality is bilingual (which is encouraged by indigenous-administered, government-funded multilingual indigenous/Spanish language education programs), each nationality has its own unique language of identity. For example, the language of the Kichwa nationality is Kichwa, for the Waorani it is Wao teredo, and so on. Indigenous nationalities in Amazonian Ecuador have asserted that their languages provide the most tangible evidence of the continuity of indigenous cultures in the Amazon from precontact societies to the present. This continuity provides the basis for special indigenous rights and the foundation for indigenous cultural distinctness from the Spanish-speaking Hispanic nationality that historically has had an unequal control of resources in Ecuador.

The problem the Zápara faced was that after generations of assimilation and intermarriage with other ethnolinguistic groups, most Zápara spoke languages—Kichwa and Spanish—that were not specific or unique to them, but were shared with other nationalities. The use of Kichwa firmly situates the Zápara as "authentically" indigenous within the context of indigenous identity and politics in the Ecuadorian Amazon. However, Kichwa does not function as an effective symbol for Zápara identity, because it is not particular to the Zápara. Kichwa is the most spoken indigenous language in Ecuador, and the language of identity for the Kichwa nationality in the Ecuadorian Amazon.

Indians in the Ecuadorian Amazon, as well as throughout Latin America, have built their claims to official recognition and rights as Indians

on some kind of persistence in their identity—despite encroachment on their territories, reduction in their populations, and cultural prostration before the state—through time (Lazzari 2003:60). The problem that the Zápara have faced in their “return” is that they were “too” affected by colonialism, with the result that they did not fit the emergent standards of group identity in the Ecuadorian Amazon given the “absence” of their own national language. The Zápara were caught between what Axel Lazzari refers to as a “thick” past and a “thin” present (2003:60). Ecuadorian anthropologists had declared the Zápara “extinct” by the 1990’s given their apparent lack of ethnographic uniqueness and despite their rich past as a distinct “tribal” entity.

In order to assert their existence as a culturally unique group, the Zápara organized as a nationality in 1998. Since its organization, the Zápara nationality has been concerned primarily with the documentation and preservation of the Zápara language as an emblem of the Zápara’s cultural distinctness. Zápara leaders claimed that they had organized in a final attempt to save the disappearing Zápara culture—the foundation of which is the Zápara language. They claimed that the communities in the Conambo River area had always been Zápara, but over time, as a result of disease and displacement, had begun to be culturally and linguistically assimilated as Kichwa. In doing so, Zápara explained to outsiders (as well as to themselves) why they appeared to be Kichwa based on their linguistic and cultural practice, even though they define themselves first and foremost as distinctly Zápara.

Shortly after organizing, the Zápara were officially recognized by Ecuador’s most prominent Amazonian federation, the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Amazonian Ecuador, CONFENAIE), and by the largest national indigenous federation, the Confederación de las Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, CONAIE). In 2001, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared the Zápara language an “Intangible Masterpiece of Humankind” and promised financial support for the documentation and revitalization of the Zápara language. Additionally, the Zápara were given a seat on the executive board of the Consejo de Desarrollo de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos del Ecuador (Development Council of Nationalities and Peoples of Ecuador, CODENPE), a national ministry that oversees indigenous development in Ecuador. Such recognition was both implicitly and explicitly based on language being a prime symbol of Zápara identity.



## LANGUAGE AND BLOOD

As a nationality, the Zápara have consistently insisted that it is their language that defines them as a distinct cultural group. Yet the fact that fewer than ten individuals speak the Zápara language raises questions about how it is that approximately two hundred people who speak Kichwa as their first language identify as Zápara. The Zápara are in the process of creating and instituting a Zápara language curriculum into their child and adult education and literacy programs. However, this curriculum is far from being complete and what work the Zápara have done in this area has yet to produce new speakers. Excluding the remaining Zápara elders, knowledge and use of the Zápara language does not function as an effective marker of identity for individual Zápara. Although only a very few of the individuals in the aforementioned communities speak Zápara, all of the individuals in these communities that self-identify as Zápara are descendants of Zápara speakers and/or related to one of the living speakers of the language. Consequently, as a marker of their identity, individuals who currently self-identify as Zápara have emphasized the "blood" they share with the remaining Zápara speakers.

When Zápara speak about "blood," they use the Kichwa term *raway*.<sup>3</sup> In conversations I had with Zápara individuals and in conversations I observed among Zápara regarding blood kinship, whenever people said the word *raway*, they almost always passed their hand over their body and then pointed to the veins in their forearm. *Raway* is a corporeal substance that children inherit from their parents during conception and pregnancy, along with a spiritual substance, *aya* or "soul" (see Whitten 1976:56).<sup>4</sup> Individuals who self-identify as Zápara assert that part of the biological makeup of their bodies contains patently "Zápara" characteristics that have been passed on to them from their parents. Zápara use the phrase *nuka raway* ("my blood") to refer to the corporeal substance of their bodies which is *raway sápara* ("Zápara blood").

Almost all the individuals in the three Zápara communities where I conducted research for this article belong to the same extended family. Llanhamacocha, Jandiyacu, and Mazaramu were founded by siblings of the same nuclear family and their spouses. These siblings (four in total) are recognized within their communities as *puro Zápara* ("pure Zápara").<sup>5</sup> *Puro Zápara* is a special identity that is reserved primarily for individuals who learned the Zápara language as their first language, retained some fluency in Zápara, and were usually born to two Zápara-speaking parents (Bowser 2002:29). Each of these four siblings learned some Zápara as children, can still speak or at least sing in Zápara, and had two Zápara



parents. The eldest of these siblings, Anna,<sup>6</sup> lives in Mazaramu and sings and speaks in Zápara. Her brother Carlos, the patriarch of Jandiyacu, is perhaps the most fluent Zápara speaker on the upper Conambo River. Anna's and Carlos' sister, Luisa, lives in Llanhamacocha, and so did their sister Jacinta before dying in 2002. Luisa was young when her mother died, so she did not learn as much Zápara as the others. She can, however, sing in the language and is nonetheless considered a *puro* Zápara. Her sister, Jacinta, was perhaps the most fluent of the four siblings in Zápara.

Several of these *puro* Zápara siblings also married other *puro* Zápara. Luisa, for example, married Braulio who was also recognized as a *puro* Zápara (he died several years ago). Many of the Zápara individuals with whom I spoke in Llanhamacocha considered Braulio a powerful shaman and commented on his fluency in Zápara. Jacinta married Juan, who speaks little Zápara, but is recognized as a *puro* Zápara based on the fact that he was descended from two Zápara speakers who lived in Peru. While Luisa and Jacinta married *puro* Zápara, this was not the case for Carlos and Anna. Carlos married a Kichwa woman, while Anna married an Achuar man.

Luisa and Braulio made up one of the main families in Llanhamacocha, while Jacinta and Juan were at the head of the second. Carlos was the head of the main household in Jandiyacu, while his sister Jacinta and her husband were at the head of the main household in Mazaramu. All of the individuals in these three communities that currently self-identify as Zápara are descendents (children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces, etc.) of one of these *puro* Zápara. For example, Mario, a resident of Llanhamacocha, is the son of Luisa and Braulio. As such, Mario considers himself to be Zápara along with his ten other siblings, even though none of them speak Zápara. Mario's sister, Ermalinda, married a man from the community of Cuyacocha on the Pindoyacu River. Ermalinda, and her children as well, identify as Zápara because they are related to Luisa and Braulio by blood.

Brenda Bowser (2002:29) notes that in the early 1990s individuals in the Conambo River basin who had two Zápara parents, but did not speak Zápara, sometimes identified themselves as Zápara (although just as often they identified as Kichwa, because that was their first language). As the above examples demonstrate, this was certainly the case in the Zápara communities where I worked. In fact, children of two *puro* Zápara parents were also starting to refer to themselves as *puro* during my fieldwork. For example, when I asked Maria, a daughter of Luisa and Braulio, how she identified herself she told me that she was *puro* Zápara. I pointed out to her, however, that she did not speak Zápara. She explained to me that this

did not matter. What made her *puro*, she told me, was that her blood was "pure" Zápara—it had not been mixed with other indigenous or *mestizo* blood.

For Maria and her siblings who are descended from two *puro* Zápara parents, this modification of what it means to be *puro* Zápara represents an adaptation of previous understandings of Zápara identity. These previous understandings, as I have already stated, were based primarily on an individual's ability to speak the Zápara language in addition to possessing Zápara blood. This definition, however, excluded the majority of individuals who now identify as Zápara. By reversing the emphasis of Zápara identity from practice to parentage, Zápara identity can now include most individuals in the communities of Llanhamacocha, Jandiayacu and Mazaramu.

### "MIXED" MARRIAGES AND ZÁPARA IDENTITY

Children descended from two *puro* Zápara parents are not the only ones who currently claim Zápara identity. As I had mentioned before, only two of the four *puro* Zápara siblings in the communities of Llanhamacocha, Jandiayacu and Mazaramu are married to other *puro* Zápara. Carlos' and Anna's offspring self-identify as Zápara, even though only one of their parents is *puro* Zápara. The fact that children of "mixed" Zápara-Kichwa or Zápara-Achuar marriages identify as *puro* Zápara represents a dramatic shift from prior formulations of Zápara identity. Well into the 1990s, individuals of "mixed" Kichwa and Zápara descent in the Conambo River valley did not identify as *puro* Zápara, but generally identified as Kichwa or Runa,<sup>7</sup> although many acknowledged their Zápara ancestry (Bowser 2002:29). Whitten (1976:135) notes that among the Pastaza Runa, for example, there are different segments of the population who still trace their heritage to Achuaran, Zaparoan, or Quijos descent, and perpetuate certain aspects of these groups' cultural practices.<sup>8</sup>

The formation of *runa* identity in the Ecuadorian Amazon is a result of what Blanca Muratorio describes as "ethnocidal simplification (1991:42)." This process began during colonialism, when Jesuit missionaries forced different ethnolinguistic groups to live together and speak Kichwa as a lingua franca (Obrerem 1974:347; Whitten 1976:7). Initially, many Zápara had refused to intermarry with other ethnolinguistic groups well into the nineteenth century (Rival 2002:37). However, with the decimation of the Zápara-speaking population during the latter half of the nineteenth century, Zápara were forced to marry into other ethnolinguistic

groups in the region.<sup>9</sup> By the beginning of the twentieth century, most remaining Zápara in Ecuador had begun marrying Kichwa and/or Achuar, speaking Kichwa, and often identifying as Runa (Whitten 1976:210–121; Muratorio 1991:102–114; Rival 2002:33–37).

This practice of interethnic marriage has persisted in the Zápara communities where I conducted my research. In fact, the majority of Zápara in these communities are married to Kichwa (with a few also married to Achuar) from neighboring communities. For example, one of the two *puro* Zápara couples (Luisa and Braulio) in Llanhamacocha has eight married children, five of whom have Kichwa spouses from the nearby communities of Sarayaku, Moretecocha, and Cuyacocha. The remaining three married children wedded their cross-cousins, who were also children of *puro* Zápara.<sup>10</sup>

The preponderance of “mixed” ethnic marriages in the Zápara communities has proved problematic within emergent understandings of Zápara identity. The offspring of these marriages cannot claim to be Zápara based on their descent from two Zápara parents, nor do any of them speak Zápara. In order to solve this issue, many of the Zápara with whom I spoke claimed that an individual did not need to have two Zápara parents to be Zápara. Rather, many individuals told me that the father passed his identity on to his children. For example, José is the son of two of the *puro* Zápara in Llanhamacocha, Luisa and Braulio. José attended missionary school in the nearby community of Moretecocha where he met a Kichwa woman whom he married, and then returned to Llanhamacocha to live near his parents. José identifies his children as Zápara, not Kichwa, as does the rest of the community. On one occasion, I asked Maria, José’s sister, if José’s children were Zápara or Kichwa. Maria responded that, of course, José’s children were Zápara. She reasoned that this was because José was her brother, and their parents were both *puro* Zápara and, therefore, so were she and José. She also said that this was because the father passed his blood on to his children, not the mother.

The problem with this explanation of blood inheritance in “mixed” marriages is that it seems to contradict other explanations that posit the mother as the provider of identity. For example, one of the *puro* Zápara elders, Anna, is a woman who is married to an Achuar man. Anna is revered as *puro* Zápara in her community of Mazaramu and in the other Upper Conambo Zápara communities. Likewise, her children self-identify as Zápara, not Achuar, and are recognized as such in the Zápara communities. This is predominantly the case throughout the Zápara communities in which women who self-identify as Zápara and have married a Kichwa or Achuar man have children who are considered to be Zápara. For example,

Fernanda is the daughter of the *puro* Záparas Braulio and Luisa and is married to a Kichwa man from the community of Santana and now lives in Puyo. Fernanda and her husband, Octavio, however, consider their children to be Zápara. I asked Octavio if his children were Kichwa, because people in Llanhamacocha had told me that identity was passed through the father's blood. Octavio reasoned that his children were not Kichwa, but Zápara, because their mother was descended from *puro* Zápara.<sup>11</sup>

To a degree, these examples reflect the reality that, like other indigenous groups in the Ecuadorian Amazon (Whitten 1976:127–128; Reeve 1988a:160–167; MacDonald 1999:20), the Zápara do not subscribe to strict parameters of matrilineal or patrilineal inheritance or residence, which they could apply to blood inheritance. Rather, these discussions about which gender is responsible for passing on Zápara blood (and, therefore, ethnic identity) in "mixed" marriages reveal the unconsolidated, contradictory, and transitional state of current understandings of Zápara bodies as the grounds for identity. This confusion reflects attempts by Zápara individuals to understand and rationalize their position within, and connection to, Zápara identity vis-à-vis blood kinship. As I demonstrate in the next section, an important aspect of this process has been the repackaging of cultural differences between the Zápara and other indigenous groups according to notions of blood "purity."

## BLOOD AND DIFFERENCE

In the summer of 2004, I traveled with Maria (a woman from Llanhamacocha who considers herself *puro* Zápara) to the Curaray River to visit a Zápara-speaking elder named Donasco. He was at one time married to a Waorani woman, but is now married to a Kichwa woman. He also lives outside a large Kichwa community, Pitacocha. Maria regards him as a *puro* Zápara. "How do you know if he is *puro* Zápara, since he lives out here with all these Kichwa?" I asked her. She replied: "He's *puro* Zápara not just because he speaks some of the language, but he is also the cousin of my uncle, Carlos, who is *puro*." I asked her about the apparent contradictions regarding gender, parentage and *puro* Zápara identity that I had observed in the Zápara communities. Maria reflected on my question and said: "Look, we know who is Zápara. We are the real Zápara and we are all related through blood. It does not matter so much where it comes from because Zápara blood is stronger and will prevail over other blood." During my fieldwork it became apparent, however, that it was not always the case that the Zápara always know who is a real Zápara.

The issue of blood purity and Zápara identity also came up during my first trip to Llanhamacocha in 2001, where I visited one of the *puro* Zápara elders and her family. Before this trip, someone had told me that Antonio Vargas, a prominent indigenous politician in Ecuador, claimed that he was part Zápara. I asked one of the Zápara elders if she knew who Antonio Vargas was, and if it was true that he was Zápara. The elder laughed and said that Vargas was more “African” than he was Zápara. She explained that she had heard that Vargas had a Zápara grandmother, but that Vargas’ grandmother had been married to a “Black”—thus negating Vargas’ claim to Zápara identity in the eyes of the elder. The elder was likely using Vargas’ “Black” blood as a way to distance Vargas’ politics from her and the Zápara. However, the way that the elder created this distance was interesting in that she used blood purity—the fact that Vargas’ Zápara blood had been contaminated by outside “Black” blood—as the grounds for disproving Vargas’ connection to the Zápara.

As this example shows, emergent Zápara identity has been partially constituted through an idiom of blood purity that excludes the contaminations of the blood of an “Other.” Historically an important aspect of most indigenous identities in the Ecuadorian Amazon has been the definition of Others along cultural, mythological, and geographical divisions (see Whitten 1976:12–14; Reeve 1988a:24–26). The Zápara also have reconstructed local cultural differences along blood lines. The most salient example of this is the way in which Zápara have employed discourses of blood purity to define themselves in opposition to another group—the Comuna Záparo—that claims Zápara identity.

The Zápara communities I studied were not the first to reclaim Zápara identity in Ecuador. Another group—which I will refer to as the Comuna Záparo to avoid confusion with the Zápara I have been discussing—also claimed Zápara identity in eastern Ecuador during the 1990s. The Comuna Záparo communities are located on the lower portion of the Conambo River, close to Ecuador’s border with Peru in what is referred to as the Bloque Záparo (“the Zápara block”)—one of the nineteen land blocks created by the Ecuadorian government in 1993 following the *Marcha Indígena por La Vida* (“Indigenous March for Life”) in 1992 (Sawyer 1997:72–73, 2004:50–51). The government gave each *bloque* or *comuna* an indigenous name that had little or nothing to do with the area to which they referred, creating “the illusion that each of the nineteen land blocks corresponded to locally recognized social divisions” (Sawyer 2004:51, 1997:72). Bilhaut (2005:8) points out that the naming and creation of the Comuna Záparo (Land Block No.6), which runs approximately from the middle of the Conambo and Pindoyacu Rivers to

a point forty kilometers from the Peruvian border, was an administrative creation that is Zápara in name only. According to her, although several Zápara speakers live in the Bloque Zápara, the overwhelming majority of the roughly five hundred inhabitants of the Bloque Zápara identify as Kichwa or Achuar (Bilhaut 2005:8–9).

Individuals from these communities formed the Union de Centros del Territorio Zápara del Ecuador (Union of the Centers of the Zápara Territory of Ecuador, UCTZE) with the aid of the Asociación de Indígenas Evangélicos de Pastaza Región Amazónica (Association of Evangelical Indians of Pastaza in the Amazonian Region, AIEPRA) in 1996 (Bilhaut 2005:8). In 1997, UCTZE became the Organización de la Nacionalidad Zápara del Ecuador, ONAZE). Through archival information, as well as interviews, Bilhaut asserts that the individuals and communities that formed UCTZE appropriated the name "Zápara" as a reference to their location within the Comuna Zápara. They were not interested in forming a Zápara nationality because they did not identify as such (2005:9). Over the past decade, however, it has been increasingly expedient for communities in the Comuna Zápara to identify as Zápara as a means of gaining recognition by differentiating themselves from surrounding indigenous groups.

Since the creation of the Zápara nationality by communities on the upper portion of the Conambo River in 1998, there has been tension between the Zápara and the Comuna Zápara over who can legitimately claim Zápara identity. Outside the Zápara communities, Zápara leaders portrayed the Comuna Zápara representatives as Christianized *mestizos* who were trying to claim Zápara identity for personal gain. Within the Zápara communities, individuals distinguished themselves from those in the Comuna Zápara by insisting that members of the Comuna Zápara possessed insufficient Zápara blood.

For example, in the spring of 2003, I had a conversation with Maria in the community of Llanhamacocha about the Zápara's struggle to organize and obtain official recognition. During this conversation Maria criticized the president of the Comuna Zápara, who had taunted Maria by saying that he had a Zápara territory, while she did not. She replied to him saying: "Do you know what, compañero? [That] territory [the Bloque Zápara] is not just yours. We are Záparas. We have the right to this territory. You are not Zápara." When the Comuna Zápara president asked Maria how she was sure that he was not Zápara, she responded by saying, "Your grandfather is *mestizo*—your great-grandfather was Zápara—but you are *mestizo*." Maria told me that after this exchange she had traveled to Peru to visit with Zápara elders who lived on the Tigre River, northwest of the



city of Iquitos. According to Maria, these elders told her that “the person that is criticizing you is not Zápara. He is *mestizo*. His grandfather is from Iquitos. He came from Brazil, he was born there, but he married a Zápara [when he arrived in Peru].” In this example, Maria uses an apparent interethnic mixing of blood to invalidate the Comuna Záparo leader’s claims to Zápara identity based on the perceived contamination of his Zápara heritage, while insisting that the “purity” of her parentage makes her an authentic Zápara.

This sentiment was echoed throughout the Zápara communities during my fieldwork. Repeatedly, Zápara individuals would talk about how the Comuna Záparo were not “real” Zápara, because they were descended solely from Achuar and Kichwa parents, or had “mixed” Zápara blood. Moreover, many Zápara claimed that the use of the title “Comuna Záparo” was just one more way for Achuar and Kichwa to take more Zápara territory. During a meeting on a humid evening in September 2002, community members in Jandiayacu talked among themselves about the Comuna Záparo as being made up of Achuar who were trying to get more land by calling themselves Zápara. Earlier in the same month, I was privy to a conversation in Llanhamacocha, in which community members decried the Comuna Záparo as being lead by *hispanos corruptos* (“corrupt Hispanics”). In contrast, the same community members talked about how they, as “true” Zápara, had never had contact with outside groups like the Achuar, the Waorani (and one person claimed, even the Kichwa). By emphasizing their apparent lack of “mixing” with other indigenous (and nonindigenous) groups, Zápara were able to position themselves as the authentic Zápara in contrast to the “inauthentic” Comuna Záparo whose blood had been tainted by years of intermarriage.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, I have demonstrated that the way indigenous bodies mark identity in Amazonia has changed over time as a result of changes in indigenous identity politics. As such, my research concurs with existing literature on indigenous self-representation in lowland South America that has shown how indigenous peoples have used their bodies to index their authenticity. However, in contrast with this literature, I do not focus on how indigenous peoples have adapted the exterior surfaces of their bodies—such as clothes and jewelry—to convey particular aspects of their identities as “traditional.” I have argued that contemporary discourses of cultural essentialism construct indigenous bodies as “racial” (biologically



distinct and different) in addition to being "ethnic" (culturally distinct in language, dress, and so forth). Consequently, the somatic substance of bodies has also been the subject of changes in indigenous identity politics in Amazonia.

Specifically, I have shown how the Zápara in eastern Ecuador have called on their individual bodies as objective "proof" of the legitimacy and enduring quality of their identity. Within the Zápara communities, blood has become a vital component in defining and imagining Zápara identity. Redefining cultural identity according to the perceived biological attributes of blood has allowed a confident reshaping of Zápara identity to fit emerging parameters of indigenous identity and organization in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The trope of "pure" blood has come not only to stand in metonymically for Zápara cultural difference, but also to symbolize the idealized ahistorical nature of Zápara identity by stressing the continuity of Zápara blood through history. Individuals who now self-identify as Zápara assert that their Zápara blood links them in a perceived continuum with authentic precontact Zápara populations. While their cultural and linguistic practices have changed and shifted over time, by focusing on the apparently immutable biology of blood, the Zápara have asserted that the essence of their identity remains unchanged.

While this emphasis on blood and its "purity" has provided an effective basis for constructing a coherent Zápara identity, it is complicated by the fact that most individuals in the Zápara communities, even the Zápara-speaking elders, are descended from "mixed" marriages between Zápara and Kichwa, or sometimes Achuar. As a result, while Zápara rely on their blood as "proof" of the essence of their cultural identity, this blood also embodies the historically hybrid and tenuous nature of identity that undermines any attempts at fixing identity in the material attributes of the body. As Diane Nelson reminds us, bodies that are meant to mean one thing, always end up signifying too much (1999:209). The problem, Nelson explains, is that bodies break under the weight of meanings that they are made to carry, and as a result they overflow and obliterate the messages inscribed on them, "messing up" any clean, unified categories. The Zápara have attempted to create a single meaning out of their bodies by fixing their identity in something as material and seemingly objective as blood. However, in the process of doing so the hybridity of Zápara marriage practice has become readily apparent and threatens to "mess up" the continuity and objectivity that Zápara initially saw in their blood.

The Zápara have dealt with this hybridity in two ways. First, they have sought to minimize the significance of "mixed" marriages within their own communities by arguing that in such marriages Zápara blood will

always prevail. Second, they have stressed the “mixed” nature of marriage and descent in the Comuna Zápara communities, arguing that if these individuals possessed any Zápara blood, it has now been diluted beyond recognition by Achuar, Kichwa and *mestizo* parentage. In this manner, the Zápara have used blood to redefine and reassert the boundaries between themselves and neighboring indigenous groups.

## NOTES

*Acknowledgements.* Research funding for this project was provided by a Dissertation Research Grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation, as well as grants from the University of California, Davis, and the Northern California Chapter of Phi Beta Kappa. I would like to thank Bartolo Ushigua, Gloria Ushigua, and Oscar Montahuano for their help in making this research possible in Ecuador.

1. The concept of “authenticity” essentializes indigenous peoples as ahistorical and uncontaminated or unaltered by the processes and pressures of imperialism and modern capitalist society (Clifford 1988). “Local” dress, consequently, symbolizes the social stability and cultural timelessness of indigenous identity, while “Western” dress, conversely, has come to represent a corruption of local “purity” (Lutz and Collins 1993:92).

2. As one component of my dissertation research (which stretched from March 2001, to September 2004) on the recent re-emergence of Zápara identity, I conducted an analysis of kinship in the Zápara communities of Llanhamacocha, Jandiyacu, and Mazaramu in eastern Ecuador. Throughout my research, I also conducted formal and informal interviews with Zápara individuals in these communities on why they identified as Zápara, as well as the role that blood relationships played in the formation of Zápara identity.

3. The Zápara term for “blood,” *nánaka*, is rarely used except by the Zápara-speaking elders.

4. In his discussion of Napo Kichwa notions of the soul and body, Uzendoski notes that *raway* and *aya* (in Pastaza Kichwa; *yawar* and *samai* in Napo Kichwa) correspond roughly to a notion of body and soul, but not in the Western sense (2005:36–37). According to Uzendoski, the Napo Runa do not separate the two, but view the soul as “simply the inner perspective of the body” (2005:36). The *couvade* demonstrates the importance of this bond of shared substances between parents and their child (Rival 1998). Between one to four months after the child’s birth, Zápara parents avoid eating any foods that could harm the child, such as salt or *aji* (“hot pepper”). Moreover, for one month after the birth the father must be careful using sharp objects, such as axes. The reason for these restrictions is that the parents are thought to still be in the process of transferring their spiritual, or soul, substance to the child.

5. In Amazonian Ecuador, this notion of “purity” has historically been used to exclude indigenous peoples from national discourses of *mestizaje* (“racial mixing”)

(Whitten 1981:15–16; Uzendoski 2003:137). Indigenous people were considered to be racially “pure” because they had not “mixed” with Euro–American groups. This absence of mixing was used as a mechanism for marginalizing indigenous peoples because they were not part of the national *mestizo* culture. Within current identity politics, however, indigenous peoples in Ecuador have argued that because they developed outside of Ecuadorian national culture they thus represent unique social groups that merit special rights.

6. I have chosen to use pseudonyms or partial names in order to preserve my collaborators’ anonymity.

7. *Runa* is the term that Kichwa speakers use to refer to themselves. It literally means “human being” and Kichwa is called *runa shimi* by its speakers, or “human speech.” *Runapura* in Kichwa denotes “those people among whom we speak Kichwa” (Reeve 1988a:22).

8. Interestingly, Whitten notes that among the Canelos Kichwa there was a general reluctance to admit Zápara parentage because of a general stigma placed on it (1976:202). He hypothesizes that this is because of a strong Achuar hostility towards the Zápara in the Canelos area.

9. There is some discrepancy in the ethnographic and historical literature on the subject of interethnic marriages and the formation of Kichwa or Runa identity in the central Ecuadorian Amazon in regards to which ethnic groups married which. In her discussion of the process of transculturation in the Curaray River area, Reeve notes that the Záparas, Achuar, Kichwa and Quijos married among themselves during the nineteenth century (1988a:87). However, in examining a baptism registry created in Curaray Alto in 1910, she noticed that while there are records of Napo Kichwa to Zápara and Canelos Kichwa to Achuar marriages, there are no Achuar to Zápara unions recorded (Reeve 1988a:87). Reeve states that, in this area, it appears that Achuar and Zápara did not marry directly (although marriages occurred in which the children of an Achuar who spoke Kichwa would marry a Zápara or vice versa). Furthermore, Reeve notes that contemporary Achuar in the Pastaza, Copotaza, and Capahuari River areas never marry with people of Zápara origin, although she does note that east of this area Achuar do marry Zápara descendents (1988a:88). Whitten, however, argues that the Canelos Kichwa or Pastaza Runa were likely to have formed from Zápara/Achuar mergers (1976:7). He bases this assertion on two pieces of evidence. First, travelers, explorers, and missionaries “repeatedly encounter Canelos Quichua forming out of Zaparoan and Jivaroan marriages and alliances, with a mediating Quichua language” (1976:8). Second, marriage records kept by Dominican friars over the past two centuries in the Bobonazo River area indicate that “Záparo” to “Jívaro” (usually Achuara) marriages were common (1976:16, 1981:128–129). In the communities along the upper Conambo River, where I conducted most of my field research, there were Achuar individuals who married into Zápara families—in fact, one of the remaining Zápara speakers is married to an Achuar individual—however, it was much more common for Zápara to marry Kichwa. What these data appear to demonstrate is that while Achuar in southern and northern Pastaza province may not have married, or currently do not marry, Zápara or Zápara descendents, in central Pastaza province in the Bobonaza and

192 *Maximilian Viatori*

Conambo River areas Achuar /Zápara marriages did (and continue to) occur.

10. I found the number of cross-cousin marriages and marriages between children of *puro* Zápara to represent only a small proportion of the total number of marriages in Zápara communities, which is not surprising given Zápara and Runa extensive incest taboos. The instances of cross-cousin marriage that I observed in the field followed the pattern noted by Whitten (1976:128) for the Pastaza Runa, or Descola (1996) for the Achuar.

11. Zápara identity does seem to be connected at least partially to residence, with children who grow up in the Zápara communities identifying as Zápara despite having one non-Zápara parent. Exceptions to this generalization, however, exist. For example, the children of a Zápara woman married to an Achuar man in Jandiayacu are identified by their parents and by the rest of the community as Achuar. Similarly, the children of a Zápara woman and a Kichwa man in the community of Cuyacocha (which is predominantly Kichwa) are identified by their parents and their community as Zápara. This is clearly an area that requires further ethnographic study.

### REFERENCES CITED

- ANAZPPA (Asociación de la Nacionalidad Zápara de la Provincia de Pastaza)  
 2001 *Candidatura para la Proclamación de Obras Maestras del Patrimonio Oral y Herencia Intangible de la Humanidad*. Quito, Ecuador: ANAZPPA.
- Andrade Pallares, Carlos  
 2001 *Kwatupama Sapara, Palabra Zápara*. Quito: PRODEPINE.  
 2002 "Zaparo's Lost Secrets." *The Courier*. April:19–22.
- Bilhaut, Anne-Gaël  
 2005 "Situación de la Nacionalidad Zápara y sus Organizaciones: Ecuador y Perú." Unpublished manuscript.
- Bowser, Brenda J.  
 2002 *The Perceptive Potter: An Ethnoarchaeological Study of Pottery, Ethnicity, and Political Action in Amazonia*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms.
- Butler, Judith  
 1993 *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* London: Routledge.
- Conklin, Beth A.  
 1997 "Body Paint, Feathers, and VCRs: Aesthetics and Authenticity in Amazonian Activism." *American Ethnologist* 24 (4):711–737.
- Conklin, Beth A., and Laura R. Graham  
 1995 "The Shifting Middle Ground: Amazonian Indians and Eco-Politics." *American Anthropologist* 97 (4):695–710.
- Clifford, James  
 1988 *The Predicament of Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Descola, Phillipe  
 1994 *In the Society of Nature: A Native Ecology in Amazonia*, translated by Nora Scott. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
 1996 *The Spears of Twilight*. New York: The New Press.
- Hudelson, John E.  
 1985 "The Lowland Quichua as 'Tribe'." In *Political Anthropology of Ecuador*. Jeffrey Ehrenreich, editor, pp. 59–79. Society for Latin American Anthropology and the Center for the Caribbean and Latin America, State University of New York, Albany.
- Jouanen, José  
 1941 *Historia de la Compañía de Jesús en la Antigua Provincia de Quito*. Quito, Ecuador: Editorial Ecuatoriana.
- Lazzari, Axel  
 2003 "Aboriginal Recognition, Freedom, and Phantoms: The Vanishing of the Ranquel and the Return of the Rankulche in La Pampa." *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 8(3):59–83.
- Loch, Erskine E.  
 1938 *Fever, Famine and Gold: The Dramatic Story of the Adventures and Discoveries of the Andes-Amazon Expedition in the Uncharted Vastness of a Lost World in the Llanganatis Mountains*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- Lutz, Catherine A. and Jane L. Collins  
 1993 *Reading National Geographic*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Macdonald, Theodore, Jr.  
 1999 *Ethnicity and Culture Amidst New "Neighbors"*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.  
 2002 "Ecuador's Indian Movement: Pawn in a Short Game or Agent in State Reconfiguration?" In *The Politics of Ethnicity: Indigenous Peoples in Latin American States*. David Maybury-Lewis, editor, pp. 169–198. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Muratorio, Blanca  
 1991 *The Life and Times of Grandfather Alonso, Culture and History in the Upper Amazon*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Nelson, Diane M.  
 1999 *A Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Obrerem, Udo  
 1974 "Trade and Trade Goods in the Ecuadorian Montaña." In *Native South America: Ethnology of the Least Known Continent*. Patricia J. Lyon, editor, pp. 347–357. Boston: Little Brown.
- Orr, Carolyn and Betsy Wrisley  
 1965 *Vocabulario Quichua del Oriente*. Série de Vocabularios Indígenas 11. Quito, Ecuador: Instituto Lingüístico de Verano.
- Osculati, Gaetano  
 2001 [1848] *Exploración de las Regiones Ecuatoriales a través del Napo y del los Ríos de las Amazonas*. Quito: Abya Yala.

194 *Maximilian Viatori*

Peeke, Catherine

- 1962 "Structural Summary of Záparo." In *Studies in Ecuadorian Indian Languages 1*. Benjamin Elson, editor, pp. 125–216. Linguistic Series, 7. Norman: Summer Institute of Linguistics of the University of Oklahoma.
- 1991 "Bosquejo Grammatical del Záparo." Revised by Mary Ruth Wise and Stephen H. Levinson. *Cuadernos Ethnolingüísticos* 14. Quito, Ecuador: Instituto Lingüístico de Verano.

Reeve, Mary-Elizabeth

- 1988a *Los Quichuas del Curaray, el Proceso de Formación de la Identidad*. Quito, Ecuador: Ediciones Abya-Yala.
- 1988b "Cachu Uras: Lowland Quichua Histories of the Amazon Rubber Boom." In *Rethinking History and Myth, Indigenous South American Perspectives on the Past*. Jonathan D. Hill, editor, pp. 19–34. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Rival, Laura,

- 1998 "Androgenous Parents and Guest Children: The Huaorani Couvade." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, n.s., 4:619–42.
- 2002 *Trekking Through History: The Huaorani of Amazonian Ecuador*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Rivet, Paul

- 1930 "Contribucion al'etude des Tribus Indiennes de l'Orient Equatorien." *Bulletin de la Société des Americanistes de Belgique* Mars:7–8.

Sawyer, Suzana

- 1997 "Marching to Nation Across Ethnic Terrain: The 1992 Indian Mobilization in Lowland Ecuador." *Latin American Perspectives* 24 (3):65–82.
2004. *Crude Chronicles*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Simson, Alfred

- 1886 *Travels in the Wilds of Ecuador and the Exploration of the Putumayo River*. London: Simpson, Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington.

Stark, Louisa R.

- 1981 "La Lengua Zapara del Ecuador." *Miscelánea Antropológica Ecuatornia* 1:12–91.

Steward, Julian

- 1948 "Tribes of the Montaña: An Introduction." In *Handbook of South American Indians. Volume 3: Tropical Forest Tribes*. Julian H. Steward, editor, pp. 507–533. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 143.

Steward, Julian and Alfred Métraux

- 1948 "Tribes of the Peruvian and Ecuadorian Montana." In *Handbook of South American Indians. Volume 3: Tropical Forest Tribes*. Julian H. Steward, editor, pp. 628–651. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 143.



- Sweet, David G.  
 1969 *The Population of the Upper Amazon Valley, 17th and 18th Century*. Master's thesis, Department of History, University of Wisconsin, Madison.
- Turner, Terence  
 1980 "The Social Skin." In *Not Work Alone*. Jeremy Cherfas and Roger Lewin, editors, pp. 113–140. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.  
 1992 "Defiant Images: The Kayapo Appropriation of Video." *Anthropology Today* 8(6):5–15.
- Urban, Greg, and Joel Sherzer  
 1988 "The Linguistic Anthropology of Native South America." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 17:283–307.
- Uzendoski, Michael  
 2003 "Purgatory, Protestantism, and Peonage: Napo Runa Evangelicals and the Domestication of Masculine Will." In *Millennial Ecuador: Critical Essays on Cultural Transformations and Social Dynamics*. Norman E. Whitten, editor, pp. 129–153. Urbana: University of Illinois press.  
 2005 *The Napo Runa of Amazonian Ecuador*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Viatori, Maximilian  
 2005 *The Language of "Authenticity": Shifting Constructions of Zápara Identity, the Politics of Indigenous Representation, and the State in Ecuador*. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Davis.
- Warren, Kay B., and Jean E. Jackson (editors)  
 2002 *Indigenous Movements, Self-Representation and the State in Latin America*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Whitten, Norman E.  
 1976 *Sacha Runa: Ethnicity and Adaptation of Ecuadorian Jungle Quichua*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.  
 1981 "Introduction." In *Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador*. Norman Whitten, editor, pp.1–41. Urbana: University of Illinois press.  
 2003 "Symbolic Inversion, the Topology of El Mestizaje, and the Spaces of Las Razas in Ecuador." *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 8(1):52–85.
- Wise, Mary Ruth  
 1999 "Small Language Families and Isolates in Peru." In *The Amazonian Languages*. R.M.W. Dixon and Alexandra Aikhenvald, editors, pp.307–340. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



