



Ecuador: A country with ongoing allegiances to colonial customs and traditions

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by

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Ecuador is a country that is heavily influenced by ideologies embedded in society during Spanish colonialism. The hierarchical structure put in place at the time has survived generations to generations and currently gives power to the descendants of Spanish colonizers while taking away the power of indigenous people. Said stated that the real issue "is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they *are* representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the represented" (Richardson, 89). Ecuador is a true representation of a postcolonial society in which Spanish is the official language, a large portion of the population practices the catholic religion, the politicians in power are descendants of colonizers and Spanish traditions are widely practiced. We have accepted this way of life and do not question the segregation that exists between Spanish descendants and indigenous people in Ecuador.

Presently, I feel that Spanish colonialism still has an impact on my life even though it is an event that occurred centuries ago. I discovered that my family perceives themselves as being Ecuadorian and even though there is a strong Spanish influence to our lifestyle, we tend to appreciate local food and practices. Before inquiring about my family history, I was a bit nervous about causing pain and suffering during the process of recalling the family history. At first, when I approached my parents they were not open about providing me their grandparents last names because they themselves were not aware of them. They have not placed a lot emphasis in learning about their family history and where they come from because they have been in an environment in which they consider themselves Spanish descendants. Therefore, there is an underlying assumption that my family that we are descendants of Spanish colonizers; therefore, I think this has contributed to the fact that we do not engage in discussions about our family ancestry. This being said, when I asked them about what race they identified themselves with, they both mentioned Mestizo. A person is considered Mestizo if they have an indigenous mother or a father and a Spaniard mother or father. Well, at some point, way back, not necessarily *their* mother and father. The objective of Spanish colonizers was to 'whiten' the population to in order to 'improving' the population. A large percentage of the population consider themselves Mestizos and even though I cannot be certain what percentage can be allocated to each ethnic group, I consider myself Mestizo as well. But I do think it is problematic that we place so much emphasis on our ethnic background to the point that we feel disappointed if we are descendants of indigenous or African groups since it is negatively viewed by society. What did come through during our conversation was the fact that they consider themselves 'Guayaquileños'. They explained to me that there is a strong divide between Coast and the Highland region and as a result, you identify yourself based on where you are from which shows the power of regionalism. In addition, there is also a hierarchical system in place to whether you come from the 'big' city or if you come from a rural area. The regionalism that exists in Ecuador can be at times problematic because it divides the country into two sections. As for me, I also consider myself 'Guayaquileña' before I even consider myself Ecuadorian.

The action of discussing my family's heritage challenged the way I viewed skin colour and social class. Before taking this course, I often considered myself 'lucky' for having lighter skin. Individuals in my circle of family and friends place a lot of emphasis on skin colour and the 'neighborhood' you live in. In their eyes, you need to be associated with the wealthy and have a 'European' look in order to be accepted and succeed in life. Now, I would even consider myself lucky if I were able to trace ancestral indigenous blood in my family tree because that would mean that a small part of me is "pure". Rather than focus on whether or not I have indigenous or African blood, I would like to break down those barriers placed by society. Even to this day, skin colour and social class are directly related. Basing someone's worth on visible factors can be very damaging because it dehumanizes the individual.

During lecture, we came to the conclusion that imperialism is a theory or concept while colonialism is more of the practical approach to imperialism. Imperialism is material through ideologies embedded in colonial powers. Colonialism on the other hand, can be defined as the day-to-day operations of imperialism (01/13/16). By viewing the situation from a colonial perspective, a hierarchical relationship exists between Spain and the Indigenous people of Ecuador. Spain can be seen as the powerful nation while Ecuador is today under informal Spanish rule. Spanish customs and traditions are embedded in the way of life of Indigenous and local citizens. Spanish influence is now evident in the social, economic and social fabric of society. We also defined post-colonialism as being the moment in which locals gain independence from the colonizers, which is followed by the end of formal colonization. We also came to the conclusion that postcolonialism embodies the ongoing effects of colonization such as using the colonizer's language, people's identity as a hybrid, economic systems and the same people are in power (01/13/16). This is evident in Ecuador in which even to this day the people in power are the descendants of the colonizers. I believe the term postcolonialism better exemplifies the current situation in Ecuador when analyzing colonial influence and its aftermath. The term post-colonialism places a greater emphasis on the dissolve of the direct power Spain had over Ecuador. Ecuador became independent from Spain and local citizens who had a strong connection to Spanish colonizers who took over the country. On the other hand, the term postcolonialism can be defined as imposed values embedded in society during colonization are still relevant throughout the whole country. This shows that Spanish culture won out and defeated the aboriginal culture. Ecuador freed themselves from Spanish colonization and now can claim to be an independent nation. Nevertheless, indigenous people have fought by perceiving their culture through customs, traditions, language and music.

Through creating a relationship of us versus them, we often have an easier time validating our actions and dismissing the negative impact they may have on the other. This is problematic since "the process of creating the 'other' wherein persons or groups are labeled as deviant or non-normative happens through the constant repetition of characteristics about a group of people who are distinguished from the norm in some way" (Mountz, 329). Indigenous people are often seen as backward and unwilling to find ways to progress in life. The majority reside in rural areas and sustain themselves by working the land and selling their produce in big cities. A disconnect exists between city folks and indigenous people that ranges from physical appearance to what each group

holds valuable. Furthermore, we explored the geographic imaginary of the tropics and how 'othering' is tied up to space in our Tropicality lecture. The idea of being from a certain place makes you a certain way has been used to justify colonialism, creating a binary of us versus them (01/27/16). Through generations, certain ideologies have been formed in regards to certain groups. This have shaped the attitudes and how specific groups act towards other ethnic groups. During colonialism, pure "Spaniards" were viewed as the powerful and dominant race. This created an underlying assumption that being of Spanish descent makes one superior and this still holds true to this day. Due to the dynamics in place during the era of colonialism and the interaction between the motherland and settlers, race hierarchies in Asia, Latin America and Africa got entangled with class hierarchies, which were the normal in Europe. More specifically, in Latin America even to this day skin colour is associated with social status an individual has in society. Therefore, during colonialism "Europeans reproduced home life but with a difference. Race stood for class" (Sharp, 66). This has had negative after effects as indigenous people have been marginalized due to the darker colour of their skin and deprived from enjoying the same opportunities of those that have some sort of connection to Spanish colonizers.

The government has applied their power to take advantage of those living in low profile communities. Public officials promise vulnerable families that if they elect and support certain politicians, they will receive benefits and resources will be made available in their communities. Sadly, these promises are not kept and these groups are displaced. The government does take advantage of the vulnerable by presenting a very biased side of sensitive situations to influence their decisions. The lecture about the Letter of Oaxaca exemplifies similar situations that occur in Ecuador. This is problematic because the motives behind dividing the land and creating borders are not clear to the people that live in the area. This would later affect their standard of living, "what initially seemed to be a beneficial project for communities now leaves many of the participants feeling like victims of Geopiracy" (Wainwright, 2). The Oaxaca were told a very simplified version of the situation as well as were led to believe that the project would benefit the community and therefore, it was highly recommended for them to participate. Not only were the people Oaxaca not told the outer motives of the group of geographers but they were victims. They were robbed the right to protect the information about their lands and could be left without their land. Similarly, indigenous people throughout Latin America are displaced and other groups come to take over and manage the lands as they please. Indigenous people do not even receive monetary compensation for the land or the revenue generated through the usage of the land.

We as a group, we also discussed the "Why are native women taken?" and whether or not we as individuals contribute to the fact that the voices of the indigenous communities are being drowned. We identified possible contributors to this ongoing phenomenon. To begin with, the media suppresses their voices by not showing a complete picture of the hardships these women have had to face throughout their lives and the reasons why they find themselves in helpless situations. Also, victimizers are not held accountable for their actions against these women and have come to realize they can get away with suppressing this group due to their invisibility in Canadian society (01/20/16). Parallels can be drawn with the mistreatment of aboriginal people in Ecuador

and in Canada. In both countries, this group has been marginalized and treated like second-class citizens. More specifically in Ecuador, hierarchies are not only created by social status but also by the colour of your skin. This has allowed a specific group to use the privilege and power they have been granted to other indigenous people. Citizens do not question those who have been in positions of privilege and power due to the way the system has been structured since colonialism. This form of othering has been continuously taking place over centuries, as those who were in power at the moment are the descendants of the colonizers.

Harley's work has inspired me to analyze who established and created what is displayed on maps. In addition, the reading enabled me to gain a greater understanding of their hidden agenda behind their work. We no longer assume mappers are entirely correct in the way they represent the world, "yet despite these symptoms of change, we are still, willingly or unwillingly, the prisoners of our own past" (Harley, 1). This idea resonated with me, as I have never questioned the information displayed on maps. I have always seen them as an accurate representation of the world. This way of thinking was challenged when I recognized how colonizers' customs and traditions are embedded in my life.

We had a great guest speaker join our class and talk to us about the organization she belongs to. She explained to us that they actively participate in decolonization by dismantling present day colonialism through creating posters to resist colonialism collectively. Two posters were presented during lecture, one that focused on representing space in a way that supports decolonization and another one that focus on colonialism as a force that is exerted from the top down. The poster that takes on a decolonizing approach was created in a manner in which animals are used to represent a specific region in order to avoid stereotypes and purposefully decenter humans from the picture. The colonialist poster showcases the ongoing presence of colonialism and how capitalism is present in our day-to-day life. The presentation allowed the class to engage in a process of questioning how world powers have shaped our lives is as important as analyzing the relationships that exist between people and places. We came to the conclusion that colonialism and capitalism are forces that exert their power from the top down while decolonization happens from the ground up. Resistance to world powers occur when the people being affected by the system come together and decide to join forces to change current oppression patterns (03/02/16). In Ecuador, individuals in positions of power take advantage of their position to further increase their material wealth. The group that suffers the most from their corrupt way of imposing laws is indigenous people. Land has been unfairly taken away from them and as a result, they are forced to move to the city to look for work. They have very limited choices, as they must find a way to sustain themselves and their families. In many cases, indigenous people have not had the opportunity to obtain an education and therefore, often end up in the streets of major cities asking for money. There is also a structured way in which different messages are given out to different people. Those who are at the top are under the impression that the people at the bottom are in a less optimal position by choice rather than as a result of the actions of those in power. But it's also true that there has been a lot of bottom up organizing by indigenous people in Ecuador.

We also explored the term decolonization and whether it is possible to undo colonialism. We would have to assume that everything we know as true was shaped by colonialism and that there is nothing left untouched. (01/13/16) Decolonization can be defined as the return to a pre-colonized Ecuador in which indigenous people have control over their land and live a sustainable lifestyle according to their customs. During this period of time, hierarchy based on skin colour will be re-assessed by Ecuadorian society as a whole. In order to engage in this process, we should focus on the traditions that have resisted colonialism and work as a community to preserve them. I consider myself to be at a stage in my life in which I still act in a postcolonial manner. I still practice traditions and customs that are rooted to Spanish colonialism such as the language I speak and the religion I practice. I truly believe Spain is a beautiful country with an interesting culture and it has greatly been part of my life. I think it would be nearly impossible for me to fully exclude Spanish cultural traditions that have been part of my life from a young age. As Said mentioned in his lecture at York University, 'it is more rewarding and more difficult to think concretely and sympathetically about others than only about "us." But this also means not trying to rule others, not trying to classify them or put them in hierarchies, above all, not constantly to reiterate how our culture or country is number one, or not number one, for that matter' (Said, 2014). What I do see myself doing is critically analyzing the aftermath of colonialism, identifying what they did wrong and acknowledging the harm they caused to indigenous people in Ecuador.

I do think that I have taken a few steps to slowly decolonize my life over the past years and I am open to look into ways that could lead me to truly decolonize my life. The exposure and interaction with individuals from all over the world has led me to the conclusion that every human being is valuable regardless of their nationality, race, gender, and religious views. I think Canada seems closer to decolonization due to the fact that it is considered a multicultural hub and therefore, citizens tend to be more inclusive. I do hope Canada continues to put in the effort to create an inclusive society for all, especially aboriginal people who have been displaced and marginalized throughout history. It has challenges still ahead, for example, policies need to be in place to hold authorities accountable for missing and murdered aboriginal women. Aboriginal women in Canada have come together to fight the system to overcome various challenges they have experienced throughout their lives and I want to follow their example. By coming together as a community, "for the past 25 years, Indigenous elders, women, family and community members in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, unceded xwməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlilwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) territories, have marched to raise awareness about violence inflicted on the lives of women in this neighbourhood"(Walia). It is clear that in order to decolonize one's life, it is important to identify colonial patterns and bring awareness to the negative effects these had on indigenous people.

Personally, I plan to acknowledge how indirectly I contribute to the marginalization of indigenous people. I am now better equipped to empathize with their struggles. I have now greater awareness of the importance placed in empowering them by letting them decide what is best for their communities rather than impose rules and programs that we believe are right. My personal change in what I used to perceive as

important and what I hold to be true now shows how I have changed compared to how I would have lived in Ecuador. This shift has positively impacted the way I relate to, deal with, and think of others. Moving forward, it is important for me to now have a broader view of the other in terms of protecting the rights of people I have not met. Overall, I do think decolonization might be possible because I myself have changed a little bit over time, so I have a feeling that decolonization might be achievable but at the same time is very personal to each individual and to what extent they want to decolonize their lives.

Word Count: 3340

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Class Lectures

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Koopman, S. (01/27/16). *The Other (Tropicality and Wikipedia)*
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