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Mixed Feelings

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The other girls in the Oregon group, with Tayta Francisco and Anita, in a courtyard of the hosteria

This last weekend, we as an Oregon program visited a town south of Quito for a look at the indigenous culture of the Ecuadorian Andes. Our hosts, Tayta Francisco and his wife, Anita, make a living weaving and running the Hosteria Indi Wadi. Tayta Francisco was born there, and learned his textile trade and way of life from the generations that came before him...he and his family are proud representatives of a pure bloodline that the Incan Empire brought to South America from Mexico. Many people believe that the Quichua-speaking groups here were brought to Ecuador from Bolivia, but Tayta Francisco was firm that they are descended from the indigenous Mexicans. What he explained of their religious beliefs certainly lined up with what I remember about that area's ancient tribes from a Precolonial Hispanic Civilizations class my sophomore year; they pray to the volcanoes, the rain, the sun, and other natural elements, but are also extremely accepting, including and celebrating elements of Catholic worship from the Spanish.

Overall, I was struck by the outstanding *mestizaje*—“mixture” or “mixed-ness”—we witnessed this weekend. For all of the subsistence farming, use of medicinal herbs, and traditional practices of the *hosteria*'s residents' simpler lifestyle, so much modern influence shows through! All of the indigenous men we saw wore white pants and a very special handmade black poncho over whatever collared shirts and store-bought polar fleece pullovers they deem necessary for the weather. The women are always seen in black skirts with layers of shawls pinned over blouses and a distinctive simple sandal...except for the healer woman, who had pulled on well-worn black boots against the drizzle. They offered us wide-brimmed hats made of wool that were close to, if not more than, one hundred years old. (Some were floppier than others, but they told us that the newest one had been made eighty years ago, before the local hat-maker had died and taken his trade with him because he was too *orgulloso*—prideful—to

teach it to anyone else. That particular hat was very stiff, and surprisingly heavy!)

Somehow coexisting with long-held traditions like this was the information that Tayta Francisco's daughter works at an airport in Oregon. Though he has traveled to many countries, he hasn't yet made the long trip to our Northwestern neck of the woods. Even more incongruous was the shopping we did in the same town the day we arrived. Who would've thought that this place would be the heart of blue jeans production...in apparently the whole world? I was too overwhelmed by the sheer quantity to try and hunt for my size, but I have never seen so many mannequins in my life. They advertised brand-new—and either brand-name, or amusing-knockoff-brand-name—denim of every possible variety for as low as \$10, and shirts and hoodies and sweaters that seemed to never end.

It was hard to reconcile the transition between two worlds. And the inevitable tension between this kind of dual presence is a deeply-entrenched part of Ecuador.

[For those of you curious, my Quichua classes did not help me understand any more of what my hosts had to say, except that I could tell you that *tayta* is a term of respect that can mean “father” or “clan leader.” I couldn't even remember the suddenly-very-applicable word for “weaver,” and was too embarrassed to try and practice speaking with them. A few steps at a time.]

It was a quiet sort of thought-provoking trip, and I for one was solemn as we drove away. I'm not sure what triggered it...maybe the mental picture of our lunchtime *cuy*? (I'll never be able to think of guinea pigs the same way again.) But homesickness is also hitting a little more strongly these days. I feel a distinct lack of hugs...so if you're reading this from Quito right now, track me down at school, please! I've had two months—how is it March?!—of the greatest adventure I could have asked for, and there's only more to come.

'Til next time, *cuidense* (take care of yourselves),

Lexy:)