

4-27-2023

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Recommended Citation

Klagge, Cassie, "An Analysis of Multi-Culturalism and Ecuador" (2023). *2022-23 Field Notes*. Essay. Submission 7.

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Cassie Klagge

Ecuador

April 27, 2023

An Analysis of Multi-Culturalism and Ecuador

When beginning my study abroad experience, I felt relatively prepared to integrate myself into all- things Ecuador. To prepare for my four months of experimental learning, I took a semester-long course that taught students various approaches and techniques on how to manage multi-culturalism, which is especially important for blending cultures that have significant differences. After being in Ecuador for almost four months now, I can say that this course, along with some pre-abroad discussions that I had with prior USFQ exchange students, did properly prepare me to keep an open, insightful, and conscientious mindset when observing Ecuador's culture. Even with this preparation, however, there were certain aspects of Ecuador that I found shocking or didn't realize were general aspects of culture.

An important component of Ecuadorian culture that I didn't realize would be influential is the presence of Catholicism; according to censuses, around 80% of Ecuadorians identify themselves as Catholic. As someone who comes from a culture where religion is viewed more as an individual activity than a communal obligation, these statistics were surprising, but also offered opportunities to experience traditional celebrations, rituals, and church. Another cultural aspect that I found a bit shocking was the general public's display of affection. During my first few weeks here, I became accustomed to the traditional Ecuador greeting: a friendly hug that is followed by an air-kiss. This greeting applies to almost everyone, including newly acquainted strangers. Additionally, it is common to witness couples showing intimate affection in public, which, if this were to occur in the U.S., many would consider it inappropriate. Even though I had been advised on Ecuador's social issues and additional need for spatial awareness prior to leaving the U.S., I think that it was hard to

gain an accurate mental image of these situations without experiencing them firsthand. The way that most Ecuadorians describe the status of their social issue is by saying that “Ecuador is relatively 25 years behind the U.S.”. Even though Ecuador has opened their first LGBTQ+ friendly discoteca in recent years, which was revolutionary, many locals still find this form of identification uneasy or invalid. This new social norm was a challenge adjusting to, as the U.S. is a lot more progressive on this particular social issue. In regard to safety, I am extremely grateful that nothing dangerous has happened yet, but it has been eye opening to hear and see some of the stories that others have within Ecuador; people being mugged, getting hit by vehicles, being called racial/insensitive slurs, etc. Even though I am very glad to come from a culture where the need for vigilance is minimal, it makes traveling to areas with higher crime rates a bit uneasy. Putting these cultural/habitual differences aside, the most prominent similarity I have found between Ecuador and the U.S. is their strong sense of national pride. Whenever I’ve had the opportunity to interact with Ecuadorians and ask them questions about Ecuador itself, they appear so joyful and willing to share their experiences. Additionally, Ecuadorians have no hesitation to share their heritage, providential, or communal identities, further emphasizing their shared passion and pride. The same can be said about the U.S., especially in relation to teaching history, sharing state-wide customs/orientations, and improving the nation to create more unity.

Since being exposed to Ecuadorian culture, I have been able to fulfill some self-discovery and process some realizations. Above everything, I absolutely cherish the keen sense of uniqueness and cultural execution that exists within Ecuador. When traveling from any country to Ecuador, you are automatically transcended into their culture through traditional clothing, celebratory foods, and linguistic variations, which contain significance through a rich history of Indigenous tribes, Spanish inquisitionists, and mestizas. This sense of sentimental cultural identity is something that I wish the U.S. had more of, as sometimes it feels that we go through the motions of experiencing U.S. culture without reflecting on its significance or purpose of existing. Furthermore, this cultural exposure has

helped me realize the true lack of knowledge I have about my own ancestries and cultural identities; I really don't have a strong connection to my German, French, or Chev. Ancestry. Upon returning to the United States, I hope I can use this knowledge as inspiration to provide myself with a self-identity that is unique and true to myself, even if I need to practice multi-culturalism to do so.