
2012-13 Postcards

Postcards from Abroad

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Indigenous Community

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INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY - TINGO PUCARÁ

10/19/12

Saludos desde Ecuador (Greetings from Ecuador)!

As a part of my Rural Sociology class, I had the unique experience last weekend of visiting one of Ecuador's many indigenous communities. My professor has worked in the community for many years (he has lived in Ecuador for almost 30 years). They were all very happy to see him and welcome the class into their community.

This particular community was located about four hours away from Quito to the south. It is on a párramo (the top of a mountain), so it was very chilly and windy. And, it was even higher than Quito (Quito is about 2.800m, and Tingo Pucará was over 3.000m). Because of the elevation, the sun was very strong.



FIGURE 1: MY RURAL SOCIOLOGY CLASS AND THE COMMUNITY OF TINGO PUCARÁ

As we drove in a bus out from Quito we began to observe farms, agriculture, and livestock, which is not visible in the country's capital city. As we climbed higher into the mountains, the types of crops, native plants, and animals were different. For example, at lower elevations we saw trees and cattle, but once we reached the párramo, we did not see any native trees nor cattle, but a pampas-type grass and llamas.

After we were greeted by every member of the community (which was more like an extended family -- there were only about 3 last names in the entire community), we were given a little bit of history about the community. Then, we split up into three groups and were

given a tour. We saw the conejos (rabbits) and cuy (guinea pig) that are raised there. The rabbits are a potential food source, although the majority of the time the people in Tingo Pucará do not eat meat. The cuy are only used for specific rituals and ceremonies. Although they are food, they have a much more sacred meaning than the rabbits.

We learned about the types of crops that are cultivated in Tingo Pucará, including multiple varieties of papas (potatoes), mashua (a tuber plant), zanahorias (carrots), oca (another tuber), uvillas (an acidic, grape-sized citrus fruit), frijoles (beans), and much more. Many of the plants that are grown have medicinal purposes, so the people rarely go to a hospital or doctor.

After our tour, some of the students in the class (including myself) joined in one of two different games of fútbol (soccer) that the children were playing. The older children, over about

6, were playing a more serious game, while I played with the kids from ages 2-5. We kicked the ball around, passed, and laughed a lot.

One of the things that I found very interesting about the community was that women wore the more "traditional" indigenous clothing while the men did not (they did wear warm ponchos for warmth, however). Women wore button-up blouses, skirts, knee high socks, shoes, a shawl, and a hat. Girls began wearing this attire at about age 4. The girls were even playing fútbol in their skirts and did not seem to be getting cold, even though with the wind it was a very chilly day.

After playing with the kids for at least a half hour, we were invited in for lunch, which was made with produce and products from the community. Interestingly, the community prides itself in growing organic crops because they know that this type of produce is more healthful (and it ends up being cheaper because they don't need to buy chemicals). We were fed a locro, which is a potato soup with milk or cheese in the broth, which had lots of vegetables in it. Then there was a main dish of fava beans, mashua, potatoes, corn, cheese, and meat for those who are not vegetarian. Then we had a nice light tea to finish off the meal.

Unfortunately due to the long commute back to Quito we were unable to stay long after lunch. The above picture was taken just before we left the community. The members of the community asked as we were leaving when we planned on returning. I felt very welcomed into their community and learned a lot about the pucará (a hill that was strategically used during the Incan empire as a place for the Incan ruler to sit and observe what was going on nearby, as well as communicate with other communities with pucarás) and how their community functioned (everyone has a job and is treated equal, no division via gender).

I hope to go back and visit Tingo Pucará, but I am not sure if I will be able to. However, I learned much more about the indigenous community by spending only 4 hours there. During the rest of my time here in Ecuador I am going to make an effort to visit at least one other indigenous community.

Linnaea Funk