

**CONCEPTUALIZING CUY(R)NESS: KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION
REGARDING GENDER & SEXUALITY IN ECUADOR**

By

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Introduction

The amount of literature available regarding queer theory has grown extensively within the past few decades. This has allowed for queerness to be discussed in a wide range of contexts and positionalities. Much of queer theory discusses the ways queer people navigate the world in relation to oppressive, cisheteronormative systems. On the other hand, queer theory also describes the ways queerness interacts with other aspects of one's life, such as gender and class. However, the written knowledge surrounding queerness in the context of the Global South is scarce compared to that produced in the Global North. Even within Latin America and the Caribbean, there is not as much available when considering the many countries with distinctive histories and legacies of queer life. This lack of visibility for those in Latin America is reflected in the gap in literature that examines the ways non-cisgender/heterosexual people in Ecuador are uniquely affected by colonialism and state oppression, as well as the activist groups and initiatives that have formed to combat it. With the limited amount of works describing developments in academia and grassroots movements occurring in Ecuador, the understanding of queer personhood and community in Ecuador is expected to be analyzed using concepts produced by the Global North. The limited amount of literature currently available that addresses these issues signal to a truth worth deconstructing- Western understandings of queer identities displace varied experiences of gender and sexuality in Latin America.

Structure

In this paper, I intend to explore the ways queer/cuir/cuy(r) Ecuadorians are uniquely affected by their cultural, political, and historical landscape. In order to do this, I have divided this thesis into 3 topics that investigate different aspects of this landscape. My first chapter will

chronicle the development of cuy(r) theory in academic spaces in Ecuador and the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean. In order to understand how gender and sexuality is understood within Ecuador, I will interrogate the inequality present in the global academic community and the ways scholars and activists are modifying language to center the Global South. For my second chapter, I will delve into the various transfeminist movements that have formed in Ecuador, whether they are rooted in policy advocacy or prefer to focus on fostering community. For my final chapter, I will discuss the identities of the enchaquirados, a role of a coastal community in Ecuador that has been reinterpreted to include cuy(r) understandings of gender and sexuality. Most importantly, each section of my thesis works to contribute to the central idea of my last chapter, which is the cultivation of the cuy(r) archive- a compilation of history and experiences that form an Ecuadorian canon.

Research Methods

In order to develop this research, I will be taking a mixed method, qualitative approach. I will be focusing primarily on texts produced by Ecuadorian and other Latin American theorists in order to stage the foundation for the research. The texts will primarily speak to the question of how Latin Americans define and conceptualize gender and sexuality beyond being cisgender and heterosexual. However, given the gap in text discussing queer politics in Latin America, I will utilize other forms of media that explain how the Ecuadorian state and societal attitudes impact the lives of cuy(r) individuals. present the ideas of cuy(r) Ecuadorian activists and movements. This research will be primarily textual and discourse analysis, as majority of my research will come from the written accounts of cuy(r) scholars who have documented developments in theory in Ecuador and wider scope of Latin America and the Caribbean.

When discussing expressions of gender and sexuality that operate beyond cisgender heterosexuality, the knowledge that is currently available could benefit from becoming more expansive. The normative standards presented are often derived from Western configurations of how the two-gender binary is meant to operate, and how people are meant to perform these gendered traits. Due to the persisting legacy of colonial influence in the Global South, these structures are just as prevalent in Latin America and the Caribbean. This leaves little room for Latin American experiences of queerness to be represented, as the hegemonic knowledge on queer people often confines experiences of queerness to the context of Western society and culture. Within both academia and grassroots movements in Ecuador, the understanding of queer personhood in society and political structures is done through the decentering of the Global North, and the investment in developing valuable knowledge from primary sources in Ecuador.

In the work to redefine what it means to be outside of normative society (specifically in Ecuador), language changes, and movements are born that address the ways non-cisgender/heterosexual people are ostracized within society. Ultimately, the activist work and literature centered around these issues signal to a truth worth deconstructing- the Global North's understandings of LGBT+ identities often displace queer experiences in Latin America and the Caribbean. Ultimately, the main questions I am looking to answer will allow me to test my claim that Western understandings of gender and sexuality displace cuy(r) experiences in Latin America. In examining the concepts and events that have shaped how the state and its citizens view cuy(r)ness, I will analyze the ways cuy(r)phobia is instilled in Ecuadorians. With the support of these texts, I will determine that trans and non-binary identity is processed differently in Latin America than in countries that are more visible in global conversations of cuy(r)ness.

Research Limitations

By attempting to assess Ecuadorian experiences of being cuy(r) with the English language, it is highly likely some of the nuances might be missed, especially when referring to texts and media produced in Spanish. Due to the short amount of time allotted to complete this project, I do not have the ability to properly synthesize readings produced in English and Spanish. A way to combat this is to place a focus on how queer Ecuadorians are making note of this very issue- as well as modifying English terms commonly used within queer theory to fit their language, rather than forcing themselves to accommodate terms that are not in their native languages into their everyday vernacular. Additionally, providing sources that present terms in the Spanish language that are modified and created to fit within a cuy(r) context is a way to redirect from the Western canon and focus on the development of Ecuadorian knowledge on what it means to be cuy(r)/cuir.

Literature Review

Framing Cuy(r)ness

When describing varying experiences of gender and sexuality in Ecuador, there is a larger conversation concerning the ways queerness is defined and understood within Latin America. Due to the Global North often dominating international conversations concerning this topic, scholars and activists present in Ecuador and Latin America have created spaces for information to be shared and contested in a constructive manner. Travéz & Myers (2022) detail the origins of cuir/cuy(r)/cuy-rness as documented during the Rethinking Queerness in Latin America colloquium in 2012 and the Queering Paradigms V: Queering Narratives of Modernity Conference in 2013. They discuss the false premise of translatability of queer experiences in the Global North to those in the Global South. Therefore, Cuir/Cuy(r)ness is not simply a translation of queerness, but is instead a motion to continue developing perspectives within the Global South. The emergence of cuir/cuy(r) identification is meant to question what is currently acceptable in the global conversation of divergent expressions of gender and sexuality, rather than becoming a solid label or identification tool. The focus on *cuy* represents a resistance against coloniality, as well as a focus on Andean countries and the perspectives already present within them. This is not to say, however, that the conclusions garnered from these discussions will appear monolithic- clashes and conflicts are part of this process. Pierce et al. (2021) support this by describing the emergence of *encuentros* and *desencuentros*, a way to describe differences in opinions when discussing gender and sexuality. Factoring in levels of privilege in other areas such as race and class is not new to the Global South, but is instead embedded in its history due to colonization. These *encuentros/desencuentros* are crucial to the deconstruction of gender and sexuality. Both Travéz & Myers (2022) and Pierce et al. (2021) indicate that *cuyrness* should not

be sought to be defined within the colonial frameworks that are already present, but should instead be viewed as a multidimensional experience that will be defined in a number of different ways, and might often contradict itself. The legacy of colonialism in the Global South, as well as other points of marginalization within society must be confronted in order to truly create equity for cuyr people in Ecuador.

Production of Cuy(r) Knowledge

In order to continue producing knowledge on cuyrness within the Global South, scholars have begun to formally document historical events and movements that have sought to improve the quality of life for cuyr people in Ecuador. Composed of interviews, articles, and other forms of testimony, Ordoñez & Platero (2018) sought to produce a methodology describing the trans movement in Ecuador over the last 20 years. Recording events such as the criminalization of homosexuality, travesti discrimination, and the mobilization of trans activists, the piece produces its own history in the form of a comprehensive document, independent of more represented understandings of dissident gender and sexuality. Its inclusion of Ecuadorian cuyr history is not only important to the development of its own hegemonic knowledge, but also its legacy as a place where cuyr resistance is present. Due to colonization, the documented history of cuyr life in pre-Hispanic Andean societies is heavily underrepresented. Viteri et al. (2021) combat this by reporting on transgender activism in Ecuador, highlighting activists such as Purito Pelayo (instrumental in the movement to decriminalize homosexuality in 1997) and her activist group Coccinelle (primarily comprised of sex workers from La Mariscal in Quito). Pelayo and others are seeking recognition as survivors of state violence and reparations for the Ecuadorian government's lack of support towards trans people, especially those forced into sex work and

harmful living conditions. The recording of these events within the past few decades only proves to be more necessary as the scholars also mention the existence of varied expressions of gender and sexuality in pre-colonial Ecuador. Viteri et al. (2021) as well as Ugalde & Benavides (2016) provide visibility to *Enchaquirados*, a transgender group present within Ecuador's history prior to colonial influence that remains largely unrecognized by Ecuador. Described as young men of high status within society that also engaged in same-sex acts, the article points out the irony in the Global North's being perceived as advanced with queerness, despite being the source of the extermination of Indigenous societies with these identities being integral to their structures. Ugalde & Benavides (2016) join the past and the present by including the community of Engabao (located on the Ecuadorian coast), where many have reclaimed the identity of enchaquirados. Due to current discussions amongst transgender activists in Ecuador, enchaquirados were given a line of connection to the present. Ultimately, the article notes the fact that the reclamation of enchaquirados amongst transgender people in Ecuador today not only validates the country's presence of cuyr individuals, but also the indigenous cultures present prior to its colonization. The production of this knowledge is not only important within a global context, but is also pivotal to Ecuador's indigenous history and those wishing to decolonize and unify their experiences of indigeneity and cuyrness.

Conflicts Concerning Public Policy

Seeing concrete, effective change within the Ecuadorian government has been made possible with the efforts of transfeminist groups, but is not achieved without complications. Viteri (2022) describes *IntenSiones*, (a play on both *intenciones* (intentions) and tensions) that were encountered during conversations amongst the Queer/Cuir/Cuyr Américas Working Group. Viteri claims that political activism for cuyr people will always be entangled with violence due to

its necessitated cooperation with the state. This is evident as López (2016) describes the initiative by transfeminists to improve public policy and gain rights for trans people in Ecuador over the past decade. Rooted in feminist theory, the My Gender on My ID campaign worked to distinguish sex and gender in order to keep one's sex private, and have their documentation match their gender. However, the Ecuadorian government's passage of the Organic Law of National Identity and Civil Data Management in 2015 not only undermined the campaign, but also created additional systemic issues for *cuyr* Ecuadorians. The Organic Law's continuation of sex instead of gender being noted on state-issued IDs, as well as a refusal to recognize same-sex parents and single parents of any identity was met with heavy criticism amongst trans activists. Aspiazu (2023) also provides information regarding the desired rights of *cuyr* youth in global conversations in an effort to call Ecuador to action. Due to advances proposed by international human rights groups stating that minors are entitled to rights concerning gender and sexuality, the research concludes that Ecuador should grant minors the ability to determine their own gender and sexual identities, with protection by the state. The piece frames the advancement of human rights concerning gender and sexuality as a public health responsibility. Ultimately, it presents the implementation of these rights as part of an individual's right to self-determination without fear of harm or discrimination. Moreover, Viteri raises concern over what is acceptable within the view of the state- *políticas secas* (dry policies) and *deseos mojados* (wet desires) are constantly in conflict as governments struggle to make change that satisfy the needs of queer people and properly address the state's enabling of marginalization. Viteri (2016) ultimately claims that deconstructing what it means to seek justice for marginalized groups, there must be acknowledgement of the ways political activism as we know it today continues to harm those it seeks to protect. The difficulties of navigating human rights within oppressive governmental

structures rooted in colonialism must not only be addressed, but fully exposed in order to expand protections for cuyr people in Ecuador.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that literature on cuyr politics and identity in Latin America continues to expand, there is still a prominent gap in literature pertaining specifically to Ecuador. The emergence of cuir/cuy(r) conversations being heavily tied to Ecuador is not only notable, but should be considered crucial to the understanding of its development. The production of published works concerning Ecuador's involvement in cuyr identity in the Global South is important to both the international recognition of these experiences, but also to the continued effort to decolonize Ecuador's history. The documentation of grassroots movements is necessary to establish its existence. Ultimately, future research will not only strengthen the body of knowledge concerning cuyrness- but will also provide visibility to Andean histories that are typically underrepresented due to the effects of colonial influence.

Chapter One: Defining Cuy(r)ness

Colonial influence is long-lasting- its effects linger across time, drastically affecting indigenous histories and creating new narratives that replace what was once present. This is a common story across Latin America, and Ecuador is no exception. Academics and grassroots activists are working to answer an important question: in the face of massive amounts of hegemonic knowledge being produced around queerness, how are Ecuadorians choosing to analyze their encounters with varying experiences of gender and sexuality? While there are more discussions of fairness within the wider context of Latin America and the Caribbean, Ecuador plays a unique role in the formulation of queer thought, and contains its own unique legacies of varied experiences regarding gender and sexuality. With the growing research and literature on gender identity in Latin America and the Caribbean, many leaders within the movement for human rights have presented ideas on how to decenter the knowledge from the Global North that has been integrated into Latin American movements surrounding queer/LGBTQ+ issues. Some have opted to alter the language being used to challenge existing epistemological hegemonies present within society and institutions of learning.

Perceptions of the Global North as the pioneers of conversations of gender and sexuality (particularly after the rise of queer theory since its emergence in the early 1990's) have left voices in the Global South unnoticed. Travéz & Myers (2022) raise attention to this when discussing the difficulties sharing work in the Global South:

Should English remain the lingua franca of the Southern academy in order to facilitate dialogues with the North, pushing languages like Portuguese or Quechua, which hinder a South-South dialogue, into the background? Which authors get cited in paper presentations, and in which language? Why do Northern

norms of publication indexing, and the pressure to translate into English, seem to carry more weight in the South?¹⁴ What basic repertoire of queerness reaches the North in translation as a basis for the discussion? (p. 3)

In having to adhere to the systems and understandings upheld by the Global North, perspectives within Latin America and the Caribbean are rendered second to those produced in the North. If not given much acknowledgment outside of the spaces already formed within conferences held in Latin America, many academics make the difficult decision to confine their work within the parameters of Northern academia. These scholars may choose to have their work published by institutions in the Global North in hopes of more visibility. However, this reinforces the assumption that this knowledge is only capable of being produced in the Global North, leaving academic institutions in the Global South underserved and undervalued. Academics have stressed the importance of interrogating these notions, stating “we feel the persistent desire to question the relationship between queerness and coloniality... We reject the notion of the South as deficient or always developing and shaping itself in the image of the North,” (Pierce et al., 2021, p. 322). Despite these discussions of queer activism and identity in Latin America having been held for a while, Latin American narratives are continuously being displaced due to the fact that knowledge on these topics are primarily produced with a focus on North American/Anglo-centric perspectives. These occurrences are rooted in the assumption that what is experienced in the Global North must be mimicked by those in the Global South- a strange perspective to have, given that “chronicles from the first centuries of the Colonial Period make it very clear that in the pre-Hispanic Americas there were varied manifestations of sexual preference, practiced freely and openly, without any social sanction, to the explicit horror of the Spanish,” (Ugalde & Benavides, 2016, p. 171). Even with the historical presence of varied

sexual expressions, those in Latin America are stifled by narratives claiming these concepts are new to the Global South. These issues made cause for attempting to confront the ways queer politics and laws can still reinforce hegemonic systems of knowledge that oppress those in Latin America on more fronts than solely gender and sexuality.

Negotiating tensions discussing theory and activism in academia led to the introduction of *lo queer/cuir/cuy(r)*, which is meant to redirect these experiences away from queer ideologies that are embedded with colonial concepts. Cuir/cuy(r)ness, a purposefully imperfect term meant to interrogate popularized notions surrounding gender and sexuality, speaks to the dissonance faced by those in the Global South attempting to define their own experiences. The Queering Paradigms V: Queering Narratives of Modernity conference was held in 2013 in Quito, Ecuador, making Ecuador an essential point of contact in the emergence of cuirness. Notably, the event “interrogated and sought to translate queer theories and practice generated in response to certain events observed in the asymmetries produced by unequal global geopolitics,” (Travéz & Myers, 2022, p. 1). The term is meant to encompass the endless differing experiences of gender and sexuality experienced within the Global South. This modification of widely accepted verbiage is necessary in order to articulate the ways Latin Americans are often left out of Northern conversations of queerness, and to promote the development of Latin American queer knowledge and thought. It also serves as a gesture of acknowledgment towards the indigenous histories that have been erased and purposefully misinterpreted- a lasting effect of colonization. Thus, the introduction of the term challenges hegemonic understandings of gender and sexuality, centering Latin American and Caribbean experiences and thoughts surrounding queer theory and activism.

As previously stated, the proposal of cuir/cuy(r) is also meant to signal the need for a change in the way gender and sexuality is viewed in academic spaces. Especially when

discussing the ways values and geopolitics shape the standard of living for non-cisgender/heterosexual people, being specific about these factors and their effects will provide a breadth of knowledge to the international academic community. Particularly, the *cuy(r)* modification is derived directly from cultural experiences within Latin America, as expanded on by those present at these formative conferences:

“The Andean *cuy* of the activist proposal was a "bad translation" of queerness. *Cuy* comes from the guinea pig: the *cuy*, which could be referenced in Spanish as "el *cuy*," masculine; "la *cuy*," feminine; or "lx *cuy*," gender-inclusive, one of the pre-Hispanic animals domesticated by our ancestral communities (Diamond) and subsequently by mestizo communities as well. El/la/lx *cuy* and its metaphorical use with respect to queerness does not constitute a literal translation (a recurring move in Spain, which at one point sought, with its monopoly on the language, to textually translate this word into Spanish)¹⁶ so much as it took up a word (*cuy*) that is similar enough sonically to parody the term "queer" (*cuy...r*) and to propose a differentiated signifier and signified. A *cuir* translation of queer that, through sexual and regional cheekiness, politically distinguishes a series of localized people and practices that refused to allow a post-colonial concept and apparatus, which rendered them circular, to name and universalize their practices as queer. (Travéz & Myers, 2022, p. 4)

The emergence of *cuir/cuy(r)* identification is meant to question what is currently acceptable in the global conversation of divergent expressions of gender and sexuality, rather than becoming a solid label or identification tool. The focus on *cuy* represents a resistance against coloniality, as well as a focus on Andean countries and the perspectives already present within them. In recognizing these variations in self-expressions that are heavily tied to culture and societal

attitudes towards queer people in Latin America, a greater amount of knowledge can be produced and shared that involves more diverse experiences. Considered a delicacy in Ecuador and other Andean countries, “cuy anticolonialism, since the cuy is an animal designated mostly for human consumption, sparks horror in certain Westernizing eyes, which view hamsters or guinea pigs as pets; this makes it possible for a veiled ethnocentrism to insert itself,” (Travéz & Myers, 2022, p. 5). The adaption of cuy(r)ness implies an inter-communal conversation, and yet, is a conversation that demands acknowledgment in environments that center Western productions of knowledge. The term also allows for greater visibility for Andean countries, especially those not widely discussed in global conversations such as Ecuador. Ultimately, these modifications call for a recognition of the cuirness that was present in Latin America long before colonial influence.

Additionally, by facing the ways colonization has affected groups across Latin America and the Caribbean, many groups within the movement hope to create more space for *cuir* individuals that are not easily understood within Western culture. Cuirness should not be sought to be defined within the colonial frameworks that are already present, but should instead be viewed as a multidimensional experience that will be defined in a number of different ways, and might often contradict itself. The increased production of theory and academic work is necessary, as “if there is one thing we have learned from decolonial praxis, in particular as enacted by Indigenous, Afro Diasporic, and other communities eccentric to the various *falo*/logocentric projects of modernity, it is that knowledge is not monolithic,” (Pierce et al., 2021). Even in embracing the presence of cuir thought in the Global South, there are still a wide variety of experiences that have yet to be shared. This is especially true within the context of Latin America and the Caribbean, where narratives are often homogenized by the Global North- often

for the purpose of easier consumption for those who refuse to see the unique cultural contexts present in each island and country. Scholars in Latin America and the Caribbean are not catching up to queer studies in the Global North, but are instead seeking acknowledgment of the fact that queer studies must make room for the other important factors that affect cuy(r) people. Much of the beginning of queer studies strictly speaks to gender and sexuality, while “the word ‘intersectionality’ is currently used in the academy for what queers have known from our very sexualized beginnings... our sexual agency and identification is not separate from that of our racial, ethnic, national, generational and class characteristics,” (Ugalde & Benavides, 2016, p. 160). The legacy of colonialism in the Global South, as well as other points of privilege within the Global North must be confronted in order to truly create equity for cuir legacies and bodies of knowledge.

Even with these developments in cuir thought, it must be stressed that its purpose is not to become an enclosing term- its purpose is to amplify conversations occurring in the Global South. It has no intentions of becoming a definitive label, and “would not represent the Andean region in the international queer space. Rather, it would appear as a questioning gesture, inscribed into a contradictory postcolonial history of gender in the territory of a Latin America that strives to become Abya Yala,” (Travéz & Myers, 2022, p. 5). The emphasis on the lack of commitment to the term enforces the idea that cuy(r)ness is meant to shed light on these inequalities in academia and global discussions. This is not an instance of separation from global conversations- it is instead a declaration of existence, cementing the stories and research of Latin Americans/Caribbeans into the foundation of cuir studies. Rather than having it become a term used in these global conversations, it functions as a reminder to nurture the growth of this information. Its emergence signifies a shift in knowledge production in the Global South-

cuy(r)ness centers the experiences of those in Latin America longing for the gap between decolonial studies and queer thought to be closed. There is much to be contrived when considering the ways countries in the Global South have been uniquely impacted by colonization, and the documentation of diverse identities and embodiments will only drive home the point that there is still much to uncover.

Chapter Two: Cuy(r) Transfeminist Activism

Across Latin America and the Caribbean, activist groups and public figures have had many different approaches to fighting for cuy(r) rights. There are various ways advocacy can be done- in local communities, in digital spaces, through performance, etc.). Some individuals have created movements to develop protective legislation, as cuy(r)/trans people are often unprotected by the state due to the lack of recognition of differing sexualities and gender identities. While it can be argued that policy in countries such as the United States can serve as inspiration for legislation in Latin America and the Caribbean, these items cannot fully encompass the specific ways cuy(r) people are discriminated against in their respective countries. In regards to Ecuador, the cuy(r) community is in an interesting position. Common law recognition was granted in Ecuador in 2014, “guaranteeing the constitutional right to a civil union tantamount to heterosexual marriage,” (Viteri et al., 2021, p. 188). Following the Inter-American Court of Human Rights’ ruling in 2018 that Latin American countries should recognize same-sex marriage, Ecuador’s Constitutional Court voted for marriage equality- joining a very limited group of nations at the time. However, while some movements have managed to gain traction and make some advancements, the difficulties faced by activists when attempting to receive acknowledgement from the Ecuadorian government are not to be understated. Issues that disproportionately affect the cuy(r)/trans community such as name/gender marker recognition on identification and a lack of protection for sex workers have led to the emergence of many of these movements. In light of these difficulties (as well as the evolution of contemporary activist practices), some activists have also decided to move beyond solely fighting for protective legislation, and are instead employing counterpublic strategies to stand against the dominant culture and create spaces for queer people.

Interestingly, the developments in cuy(r) theory focus on the ways cuy(r) people in Ecuador live alongside the rest of society. There is an ongoing conversation surrounding what is acceptable within the view of the state, especially as activists continue to advocate for protections for cuy(r) people. *Políticas secas* (dry policies) and *deseos mojados* (wet desires) are terms coined by academics to distinguish between activist work and campaigns that are better received by those outside of the community, versus those of which have no desire to appeal to the state and general public. This distinction describes how “states that link LGBT rights to modernity wrestle with new policies and laws, bringing homo/trans into their liberal fold, while the most precarious lives and the most sabroso provocative political imaginings remain outside this neoliberal brand of modernity,” (Viteri, 2017, p. 410). Whether an act qualifies as *políticas secas* or *deseos mojados* would arguably depend on perception- the state and people within it may view any act to gain protections for cuy(r) people as radical, even if the initiative favors more moderate sentiments.

In an effort to allow Ecuadorians to change one’s information related to gender on government documents, the My Gender on My ID campaign was created. My Gender on My ID divorces gender and sex from each other, noting “gender as a public identity and sex as a private biological trait, suggesting that a person’s gender, not their sex, should be registered on public documents and identification cards in accordance with their gender identity,” (Garriga-López, 2016, p. 109). This differentiation is often used as a strategy of compromise. So long as sex is viewed as fixed and undeniable, gender identity acts as a savior. Both sides of the debate can agree that gender is decided by the individual, and sex may be kept private for the state to view at its own discretion. After much difficulty, only a select few aspects of My Gender on My ID were present in a reform bill passed in 2015, titled the Organic Law of National Identity, and

Civil Data Management. Rather than keeping sex private and displaying an individual's preferred identity on all state-issued identification cards, an individual was responsible for acquiring an alternate ID that omitted the sex marker and instead gave the choice between masculine or feminine. Notably, one would only be able to undergo this process once- leaving no room for the indecisiveness often attributed to trans people for choosing to transition. This caused disagreements, as "conflict emerged between activists who wanted to reject the new proposal and those who argued that it would be more strategic to accept it while continuing to work toward the use of gender as the standard administrative category for all," (Garriga-López, 2016, p. 115). This speaks to the tensions present in many activist spaces when deciding how to approach a relationship to the state. Despite attempting to lighten the pressure by keeping sex and gender separate, the outcome of the My Gender My ID campaign is another example of how attempting to use the state's language may not always serve the movement.

In contrast, a collective based in Quito called SinVergüenza (without shame), was established in 2017, as a place for music, art and performance for cuy(r) people with no interest in censoring their expression. The collective's mission is straightforward- "opting not to use the term 'queer, and instead to find empowerment through the term of 'mariconería' that speaks to their specific reality...taking back and transforming the word 'marica' which was used previously as an insult," (Skolnick, 2019). These modifications of language speak to the *deseos mojadados* academics have discussed when speaking about how to center Ecuadorian experiences. Reggaetón, a genre born out of Panamá and pioneered by Afro-Latines, is played frequently by DJs in SinVergüenza. J0ya and 5urdeaMarica, two DJs in the collective, describe it as "a way to *desculonizarlos*... standing down classist marginalization of the genre and 'nationalist boundaries through a common and popular non-elitist language understood across intersectional

identities in Latin America,” (Skolnick, 2019). While the contributions being made by scholars at academic conferences undoubtedly contribute to the knowledge present in institutions, collectives such as SinVergüenza don’t wish to tie themselves to the Ecuadorian state. In fact, the existence of the collective is meant to be a counter to what is acceptable amongst the general public- embracing sexuality and resisting against the sanitization of cuy(r)ness. Desculonzarlos, a tongue-in-cheek modification of decolonization, is a prime example of this. SinVergüenza has made an effort to foster the growth of the cuy(r) community by creating space for it.

Somewhere between the My Gender My ID Campaign and the SinVergüenza collective is the work of Purita Pelayo, a trans activist and leader of the Coccinelle collective. Heavily involved in the fight against Article 516, a criminal code that declared homosexuality illegal in Ecuador, Pelayo has been instrumental to the cuy(r) movement in Ecuador. Pelayo’s work with Coccinelle was instrumental in getting the law repealed, the group “made up largely of sex workers from Quito’s La Mariscal neighborhood, known as the red-light district- carried out a door-to-door crusade to raise public awareness and build support,” (Viteri et al., 2021, p. 188). Despite many viewing the legalization of same-sex marriage as a victory, a lawsuit was filed by Pelayo and Nueva Coccinelle against the Ecuadorian government on the grounds of “historical crimes against humanity and persecution targeting the trans community. The goal of the case is for trans people to be recognized as victims of state violence and for survivors to receive comprehensive reparations,” (Viteri et al., 2021, p. 188). Pelayo’s lawsuit poses an interesting question: is Ecuador liable for its inability (or lack of desire) to protect its cuy(r) citizens? Purita Pelayo and Cocinelle’s legacy as a group is evident, as they’re partly responsible for building the foundation that led to rights held by Ecuadorians today, such as the legalization of same-sex marriage and greater access to social transitioning. Therefore, those involved in transfeminist

movements are individuals owed compensation- as “victims of state violence... most survivors of this era have died, and the majority of those still alive live in precarious conditions,” (Viteri et al., 2021, 189). The trans community in Ecuador is vastly unprotected. Reparations being brought into the conversation confronts the state’s neglect towards the important work done by activist groups and the threats to safety that plague trans Ecuadorians. Due to the fact that Pelayo’s work documents the abuses towards trans women by police officers, it is evident that systemic violence occurred, and the lawsuit filed by Pelayo and Nueva Coccinelle is an attempt to hold the state accountable.

Ultimately, the various campaigns and collectives that have been cultivated in Ecuador throughout the last few decades show a dedication to preserving the lives and rights of cuy(r) people, even if it means being at direct odds with the state. Along with the Ecuadorian government, having to fight against more traditional or religious ideologies is a common issue for Ecuadorians attempting to live their lives as openly cuy(r). While there are many in opposition to the cuy(r) community gaining protective rights, the approach these parties take is often based on the little viable knowledge they have. In being outside of the movement, they risk missing the nuances of the conversation surrounding cuy(r) rights. Some have argued that the lack of precedence for securing cuy(r) rights can be helpful for cuy(r) activists:

While conservative political positions on marriage and abortion are firmly fixed, there are openings through which activists can push for increased rights when no rigid party line has been handed down to religious and conservative leaders regarding other specific social issues. Efforts to reduce employment discrimination for trans people, or to increase access to gender-affirming health care and higher education, are topics that the Catholic church and other conservative leaders have not taken a strong position against, and these

can be successfully advocated for on the basis of a call to equality. (Garriga-López, 2016, p. 111)

It is indisputable that trans feminists face immense difficulties when advocating on behalf of the cuy(r) community. Yet, it is intriguing to consider how the state's lack of experience with advocating for trans people can be beneficial. This provides activists with a home-field advantage- introducing terminology to the general public gives the cuy(r) community the ability to steer the conversation and avoid the state's attempts to stifle the movement. Having the ability to introduce information at their own discretion grants activists and policy makers leverage when presenting their demands to the state. It is compelling to consider the implications of this possibility in lieu of the highly supported separation of sex and gender amongst activists, as many depend on this distinction to persuade the state and public opinion. Whether it is a calculated lawsuit against the state or an artistic venue filled with self-expression, these various movements across the country show the countless ways cuy(r) Ecuadorians are working to fight for their right to exist.

Chapter Three: Ecuador's Cuy(r) Archive

Ecuador's pre-Hispanic history is difficult to assess- there are a multitude of narratives held by different groups in order to project a particular image of the country. This is especially true when pursuing cuy(r) historical research, as researchers must make sense of the little historical recordings available. Oftentimes, the items reviewed during this research are just as judgemental as they are descriptive, leaving little room for objective interpretations. Subsequently, scholars, activists, and the state all have varying interpretations of Ecuador's existence prior to colonization. With the understanding that each party is viewing the same materials, we can determine that these groups are perceiving these artifacts with their own biases. For the nation-state of Ecuador, the validity of cuy(r)ness has been largely contested throughout time, with the exception of milestones such as the decriminalization of homosexuality. Cisheteronormative interpretations of historical artifacts have largely contributed to the erasure of dissident identities being recorded in Ecuadorian history. However, Ecuadorian anthropologists and archaeologists have begun to reframe these findings within the past few decades. This work is central to the creation of the cuy(r) archive, necessary to ensure the history of cuy(r) life in Ecuador is recorded, both prior to colonization and in more recent years. This can be seen in scholarly articles, interviews, and artistic expressions that seek to document and recognize the existence of different cuy(r) stories and events.

In the community of Engabao (a town located on the Ecuadorian coast), many have reclaimed and identified as *enchaquirados*. Enchaquirados were a part of the Manteño-Huancavilca culture, a "complex highly stratified society that settled along much of what today is the Ecuadorian coast, by the time of the arrival of the Incas and Spaniards," (Benavides & Ugalde, 2018, p. 162). Interestingly, the Manteños were not conquered by the

Incas, leaving their cultural practices relatively undisturbed until the Spanish began to infiltrate their society. Within the observations recorded by Europeans, there are bits and pieces of history that have been left unaddressed by those unwilling to accept varying gender and sexual expressions as part of Ecuador's history. Benavides (2021) has done extensive archaeological research on pre-Hispanic Ecuadorian communities, and has reframed much of the existing history to include the cuy(r)ness that is ignored by the state:

Among other documented practices, there is evidence of the role of individuals commonly known as the enchaquirados. After landing in Ecuador in the 1500s, European chroniclers recounted how, from a very young age, these young men on the coast held high-status positions serving the curacas (local political officials) and religious leaders of their communities...In their writings, the Europeans explicitly described not only the enchaquirados' elevated status, but also how their ritualistic activities included same-sex sexual acts, particularly with political and religious leaders in the community. Clearly documenting their Eurocentric homophobia, the chroniclers deemed these practices perverse, nefarious, and bad. In reality, the enchaquirados enjoyed high status within their society. (p. 189)

Very little is known about the enchaquirados besides what was recorded by the Spanish and the artifacts that have been preserved from the time their civilization was active. Amidst recordings from outsiders of human sacrifices and devil worship, they also mentioned "a group of young men recognized for their religious (or ritualized) homosexuality activity and their ritual wearing of chaquiras (shell beads) and gold ornaments," (Benavides, 2004, p. 74). While those outside of the community presented the fact that enchaquirados were engaging in same-sex acts as sodomy, this behavior was common and normal to the Manteños. They were not only integrated into the

societal structure of the Manteños, but were also often seen with items that symbolized status and importance. But despite being a part of Ecuador's Indigenous history, enchaquirados remain largely unrecognized by Ecuador. In exploring these accounts, scholars are posing the question- "how has this 'evidence'- what were normative practices in pre-Hispanic times- been excluded, or more accurately, represented not only to not question contemporary heteronormative historical interpretations, but to actively fuel and sustain this hegemonic ideology," (Benavides, 2002, p. 71). Thus, the research being done to create visibility for enchaquirados confronts the ways heteronormative readings of historical artifacts and recordings have affected the ways these pre-colonized societies are viewed today. Ultimately, the article notes the fact that the reclamation of *enchaquirados* amongst transgender people in Ecuador today is not only validating to the country's presence of cuir individuals, but also to the indigenous cultures present prior to its colonization.

While those currently living in Engabao have found affirmation in looking to enchaquirados, it isn't fully accurate to state that the identities of those today derived directly from them. Rather, "the enchaquirados legacy provided a much needed legitimization of their own sexual reality and daily existence, perhaps less within their own community but more so against the heteronormative modernizing enterprise of the public media and the state," (Ugalde & Benavides, 2018, p. 174). The purpose of reclaiming this Indigenous history is not to conflate their role to current *cuy(r)* expressions, but is instead a signaling that *cuy(r)*ness has always been present. Even then, defining the actions of the enchaquirados as *cuy(r)* (and in tandem, *sinful*) is a recent notion- their behavior was part of the Manteños' social structure, and was not viewed as *cuy(r)* until outsiders deemed it different. This is seen today in Engabao and other *cuy(r)* communities on the coast, where *cuy(r)* people "are not seen as foreign but rather within the

sexual variation expected of human behavior,” (Ugalde & Benavides, 2016, p. 178). It should be noted that this neutral (or not inherently negative) outlook can be interpreted as decolonized thought. By normalizing varying sexual expressions, Ecuadorians on the coast have decentered oppressive opinions of homosexuality and transness, and have instead accepted cuy(r)ness as part of the standard. The acceptance of cuy(r)ness as a natural human trait in these communities is intriguing, as there’s a stark difference between this mentality and that of more conservative, religious communities in Ecuador. The interaction between tradition and religious influence contributes to the cuy(r)phobia that runs rampant in other areas of Ecuador. When these factors are lessened or removed altogether, communities in areas such as Engabao become sustainable for cuy(r) life. For many of these more rural cities on the coast, the presence of these communities “excavate suppressed sexual histories that are far from the modern, urban, and Western sexual identity that most queer narratives put forward,” (Ugalde & Benavides, 2018, p. 177). When the dominant cuy(r)phobic narrative is challenged with neutrality, there is space for valuable histories to be exposed. This is not only true for the Ecuadorian state as a whole, but for those producing knowledge in the Global North, who may view Ecuador (and Latin America and the Caribbean) as unitary in regards to their understanding of varying gender expressions and sexualities.

The deep dive that has been made into the history of the Manteños and the role of the enchaquirados points to a larger desire amongst Ecuadorians to fully confront their country’s history. While this information is certainly not readily available, the reframing of what already exists allows for a more vibrant, nuanced view of Ecuador’s history and culture. These reframed perspectives show that cuy(r)ness is not new- it did not originate in the Global North, nor did it just reach Ecuador within the last few decades. In fact, archaeologists and theorists alike have

spoken to the fact that “the ethnohistorical evidence and the iconographic and ethnographic work that we are carrying out allow us to elucidate that transgender identities, at least on the Ecuadorian coast, are neither urban nor modern and even less white (or even white/mestizo),” (Ugalde & Benavides, 2016, p. 175). Their work not only solidifies the existence of cuy(r) people in Ecuadorian history, but also shows that there is still so much left to investigate. Given that these ethnographers have been able to find new understandings of these archaeological artifacts, who is to say that the history that has been established as heteronormative and patriarchal has not also been misunderstood? The importance of this work is not to be understated, as “translations of queerness, present and future, not only make local and regional sense but also question structures, practices, people, and institutions that preserve the geopolitics of knowledge in the North (and with the complicity of agents in the South),” (Travéz & Myers, 2022, p. 3). The reexamination of Indigenous cultures and covert expressions of gender and sexuality allows for the greater production of knowledge in Ecuador and the wider scope of Latin America and the Caribbean.

What is important to note about the ways that enchaquirados are being brought into discussions of cuy(r)ness is the fact that history itself is being negotiated. These conversations are a direct confrontation of what is accepted within the Ecuadorian state, due to the inaccurate and/or incomplete presentation of pre-Hispanic Ecuadorians. While some may attempt to deny this history, having artifacts that contradict cuy(r)phobic sentiments are not only beneficial to the academic community, but are also helpful to cuy(r) Ecuadorians seeking to feel affirmed in their identity. Beyond ethnography, countless mediums contribute to the archive- interviews, blogs, podcasts, and social media posts are all contemporary forms of recording cuy(r) life. The cuy(r) archive is as big or as small as it needs to be- the existence of the enchaquirados has large

implications for cuy(r) Ecuadorian history, but a video documenting a cuy(r) collective's activist work may prove to be just as useful. In seeing the ways history itself is being negotiated, we see the cuy(r) archive being created.

Conclusion

There is still much to unveil in regards to Ecuador's extensive cuy(r) history. The scholars and activists behind the growth of cuy(r) thought have determined that cuy(r)ness/cuirness itself is not meant to be a permanent pillar of queer thought in global conversations, but is instead meant to take up a particular point in time. It confronts the fact that queerness does not fit all experiences of gender and sexuality. A lack of visibility for Ecuador and other countries in the Global South can no longer be considered acceptable amidst the ever-changing landscape of queer/cuy(r)/cuir academia. The movements that have originated in Ecuador speak to this same idea- what was once allowed can no longer continue, should it mean that cuy(r) people continue to face discrimination from the state and cuy(r)phobes. While there can certainly be discourse on whether organized strategies to gain more legal rights are truly beneficial, it is clear that these rights are not only overdue, but necessary for the survival of cuy(r) Ecuadorians. In reflecting on these moments, we witness history. Making these stories visible and accessible benefits multiple areas: cuy(r) people wanting to join a cause, academics looking to understand Ecuador's experiences of cuy(r)ness, and activists wanting their work to be widespread and remembered. The benefits of an archive, particularly one for underrepresented identities and narratives, reach both those in and outside of the community. For Ecuadorians, the road to cuy(r) liberation is long, as it is in the rest of the world. However, it is important to understand the conditions that have made this so, rather than attributing it to stereotypical notions of Latin America and the Caribbean that render Ecuadorian perspectives unheard. Ecuador's cuy(r) legacy is rich and ancient, and thrived despite it not being described in its entirety. Moving forward, its legacy will continue, so long as we make the conscious choice to witness it.

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