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Queer histories and identities on the Ecuadorian Coast

The Personal, the Political, and the Transnational

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Abstract: This article looks to critique the heteronormative discourses with which both authors grew up in Ecuador in the 1970s and 80s. We do this through a thorough archaeological and historical analysis of Ecuador's past, but always looking to destabilize the heterenormative discourse which has served as a hegemonic stronghold that has not only strangled the day-to-day livelihood of several generations of Ecuadorians but in a similar way served as an ideological vice on national historical production and culture. It is our hope that through the ethnohistorical, ethnographic and archaeological material discussed in the article we are able to express a more realistic picture of the sexual and gender diversity present in this part of the Americas during prehispanic (and even contemporary) times.

Keywords: sexuality; archaeology; Latin America; hegemony.

> Do you know that there is something called gender ideology? (...) It basically states that there is no such thing as a natural man or woman, or that biological sex does not determine man or woman, but rather the "social conditions" (*said in a burlesque tone*); that one is entitled, free to choose even if one is man or woman. Please‼!, that does not stand the slightest analysis. That is an outrageous belief that goes against everything; natural law, against everything. But that is what is maintained. [...] We are thanks to God different; men and women, complementary, and it is not to impose stereotypes, but how good it is for a woman to keep her feminine traits; how good for a man to keep his masculine traits. And well, the whole world is free, for a man to be effeminate, a woman to be manly, but I prefer woman who look like woman (*laughs*) and I think women prefer us men who look like men (*audience applause*). You will see that because of what I am saying I will be called retarded, a caveman; that I am not at the forefront of civilized thought. Well, they can go to others with these so-called stories.
>
> Ecuadorian ex-President, Rafael Correa in a national citizen link

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1. Introduction

Ecuador has made some progress in recent decades with regard to sexual identity, but there is still a long way to go. Watershed moments, such as the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1997 and the current constitution guaranteeing the rights of any person regardless of their sexual preference, represent major steps forward. However, there is still a backlash not only from conservative groups, but also from the state itself, both equally invested in ignoring the diversity and complexity of Ecuadorian sexual identities (Argüello 2014: 121). This is most evident when essential social policy decisions are traversed by personal prejudices of those who hold political power (see ex-President Correa's quote above).

In this fashion, this article was a long time in the making; one could say our entire lives. Through different paths and experiences, as well as emerging from very personal contexts, the two authors of this article came to the same conclusion: that the heteronormative discourses with which they grew up in Ecuador in the 1970s and 80s did not cohere to social reality. But perhaps even more poignantly, it was clear that this heterenormative discourse had served as a hegemonic stronghold that not only strangled (many times almost literally) the day-to-day livelihood of several generations of Ecuadorians but in a similar way served as an ideological vice on national historical production and culture. It is perhaps because of this, that as James Baldwin (1966: 171) elaborates, "only creature(s) despised by history find history a questionable manner," and as a result are able to transform it.

We now understand that our individual journeys were far from merely personal but rather quite political as we began to understand the political infused by a feminist and queer reading of one's daily social struggle. This reading of gender and sexual politics also went in hand with a strong transnational experience as well. As García Canclini (2002) states, Latin America provides the global with three large commodities: oil, telenovelas and people. In this regard, Ecuador provides the world considerable amounts of the first and the latter. It is estimated that at least 20% of Ecuadorians currently live (or have lived) outside of the national fold. The authors of this text are no exception (see below).

In a manner of speaking, it was these elements of repression, travel and curiosity, as well as mere survival, that led both of us to investigate the

sexual past of our country. These conditions, as well as other significant coincidences, brought our research agenda together. They also made us look back to the more or less remote past, and the gendered social structures that have constituted the territory known today as Ecuador. Several years later, and finally with a research project in progress,[1] we present here the first reflections and results of our analyses of ethnographic, ethnohistorical and archaeological sources of the Ecuadorian coast. Our work points to a more complex sexual historical picture than the one we were allowed to know growing up as Ecuadorians, and not surprisingly one imbued with strong colonial legacies of race, class and space (see Benavides 2013).

Covering an extended period of time, by means of disordered space-time jumps, as our own migrants lives have traversed, below we outline our individual reflections, our intersecting paths, and the joint focus in search of a more humane and realistic sexual Ecuadorian historiography.

2. First itinerary: Guayaquil-New York, or 'the Grindio (Gringo/Indio)' anthropologist

"The peninsula of Santa Elena is the biggest source of fags (*es la mata de los maricones*)!" From a very young age I got used to hearing this phrase, first said by older men and then among my own friends. Somehow it involved a kind of forbidden geographical and sexual knowledge, both of which were a kind of off-limit territory, in one way or another, until my adolescence. In addition, each time the phrase was repeated it was said with some jocosity and not little pleasure, seeming to highlight another type of transgression. A kind of liberation that, being unconscious, was possibly even more 'real' and powerful (*sensu* Lacan 2007). Little did I know that homosexuality (the *mariconada*) would be my thing, and that it would become one of my academic specialties. Even less did I know that my coming out as a gay man would cost me my relationship with my family and even with my own country, the Ecuador to which I could not return for fifteen years.

In this regard, I left Ecuador when I was twenty-two years old to pursue my Bachelor of Arts in anthropology in New York City. Little did I know that not only was I pursuing my studies but also desperately taking advantage of the opportunity to be who I really wanted to be. Like many

[1] Project M13430 funded by PUCE, titled "Etnoarqueología de las identidades sexuales en el Ecuador prehispánico".

other 'sexiles' (Anzaldúa 1987) of the Americas, I chose to continue my professional life outside my home country as well. During all those years, I kept trying to understand why my sexual preference would have such a negative impact on my relationship with my country and my family.

As a result of this intersection, I decided to analyze (possibly excavate would be the most appropriate word) the historical legacy of the *enchaquirados* on the Ecuadorian coast (Benavides 2002; Sp. transl. 2006). It is important to state that the word 'intersectionality' is currently used in the academy for what queers have known from our very sexualized beginnings, and that is that our sexual agency and identification is not separate from that of our racial, ethnic, national, generational and class characteristics. This is why the work of female scholars of color such as Anzaldúa (1987), Morraga (1983), Lorde (1982) and Mohanty (2003) privileged the intersectionality (even before it was recognized by all in the academy) of all these social traits, and above all the lived-in experience of being a discriminated subject for more than one reason.

The article I wrote was very much embedded within this intersectional approach and attempted to investigate and define the historical figure of a transgender group known as the *enchaquirados*, of which we have consistent ethnohistorical data, albeit this knowledge had (and still has) never been incorporated into Ecuador's national identity. On the contrary, until now it only has been sought in order to minimize, and even deny, the existence of this group of transgender people in the country. I was also interested, in this manner, in understanding how and/or why this transgender knowledge was so dangerous, and how the sexual was connected in an intimate manner to the racial, class and social reality of the national Ecuadorian imaginary.

It is very much this fluid relationship of sexuality, race, class, culture and nation that I explored in my article that has now become a mainstay of intersectional studies. These works, particularly the contributions of renowned legal scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw (2018) and Patricia Hill Collins (2008), as well as that of bell hooks (2014), continue to help us understand the complex manner in which these differing traits, particularly those related to gender and sexuality, are afforded agency and even made visible to ourselves. One's queerness is never read purely on sexual grounds but rather in the larger cultural reading that incorporate other gender, ethnic, class and national elements that enable it to be assessed

in particular ways, and not in others.

This finding was central to my article written almost two decades ago, and continues to fuel the main thrust of this one as well.

3. Second itinerary: Quito-Berlin, or 'the Sudaca' archaeologist

Very young, in the 1990s, I set out from Quito to Berlin determined to study archaeology, and perhaps naively considered myself to be a quite open, tolerant person, free of prejudices, unlike most of my country-people, whose conservatism I fled from quite disgustingly. At that point, I was not aware of the cultural constructs of gender and sexuality, nor could I imagine how these could play a role in archaeological analysis, which was what I was enthusiastically studying. I thought at the time that the 'problem' of sexual categories lay in the intolerance of some cavemen who refused to admit the normality of homosexuality, and that it was resolved only by cultivating and encouraging 'tolerance' in society. Recognizing as normal the categories of 'man', 'woman' and 'homosexual' (understanding the latter as one who was born within one of the categories but identified with the other) allowed me to feel like a more developed person since supposedly I had a better understanding of sexuality in all its diversity and breadth; and because of this assumption I did not need to devote any more thought to it.

Yet I was forced to question this conviction when shaken up in a class at the Free University of Berlin I found someone whom I could not pigeonhole into any sexual category I accepted as possible. It was somebody who was neither man nor woman, who could possibly be classified as a transvestite, yet did not meet the feminine characteristics that I expected in my understanding of this category. I would have not had any awkward reactions to see 'him' fully transformed into a woman, yet I was deeply disconcerted to see that 'he' blatantly combined male and female elements. I could not understand, for example, if 'he' "wanted to be a woman" (which was my wrong and myopic reading of 'his' desire) why 'he' did not shave 'his' beard. This bewilderment became a growing curiosity, and the talk held by this person on his thesis research led me to seek avidly books on third gender and sexual identity, and in that way, opened a window to a new world for me. But even then, to that moment it stayed just as a window, since I understood this interest as a personal curiosity, a subject of general culture, foreign to my area of study.

Later on, as I worked strictly within archaeology on my doctoral thesis on the iconography of the Tolita-Tumaco culture located on the northern Ecuadorian and southern Colombian coast (Ugalde 2006; 2009; 2011), I encountered a similar classification problem. In order to understand the structure and symbology beyond the images I was analyzing, the archaeological pieces that needed to be ordered in some coherent scientific taxonomy for us to infer their meaning, did not always conform with the categories that I had previously established. Although most anthropomorphic figurines, to my relief at that time, could be categorized as female and male, a few definitely combined the attributes that were considered typical for each sex. This being a small issue – as I thought of it then, but it has only continued to grow in relevance – within a complex and extensive doctoral thesis on archaeological iconography, I could only state the issue (Ugalde 2009: 58) and leave it inconclusive. However, it continued to hover in my head for the next decade, until I met Hugo, the 'grindio' anthropologist. Thanks to this encounter, the window became a door inviting me to visit that new, fascinating world of sexual diversity.

4. The encounter and its consequences: reflections on the Sixteenth-century *enchaquirados'* ancestors and successors

The early colonial chronicles make clear allusions not only to homosexual practices in the Americas but also to a remarkable diversity of sexual identities, both in domestic and ritual contexts (Horswell 2010). The Manteño-Huancavilcas, 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, are represented as infamous in many ethnohistoric accounts. They are accused of carrying out diabolical practices such as the adoration of stones, sacred wooden effigies and other deities, the reduction of heads, bizarre burial customs, and last but not least, for their public acceptance and practice of sodomy. The latter practice was described as being partly carried out through a sort of enslaved homosexual harem of young servants destined to religious and sexual tasks.

The recovery of a series of ethnohistorical data related to ritualized homosexual practices, as well as evidence of a more general and normative practice of homosexuality on the Ecuadorian coast, on the part of Benavides

(2002; 2006) was not positively met. This article was mostly ignored, published in an academic journal of some recognition in the United States (in the Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology) but never really had a social repercussion. At least nothing like what was desired. Although this was one of the initial intentions, that of wanting to progressively impact gender relations within the country.

It was not until almost ten years later, the same article would be used by a group of transgender activists to carry out a workshop on identity and sexuality on the Ecuadorian coast, specifically in the community of Engabao (in the Santa Elena province). The journalistic reports on the workshop, both in the newspapers and on television, detailed how this group of homosexuals/transgendered subjects of Engabao had appropriated the term of the *enchaquirados*. In this way, the article to a certain degree contributed to the revitalization of the homosexual identity of the community, which very much seems to be part of a transgender regional identity that extends through several of the provinces of the Ecuadorian coast, in particular Guayas, Santa Elena and Manabí. This identity surely refers to the phrase *la mata de los maricones* (biggest source of fags), which possibly stems from this regional historical homosexual identification.

Engabao's contemporary transgender community (figs. 1-4) used this title to call attention to the need for the historical recovery of a tradition which they regarded as forgotten and neglected. In this way, the term *enchaquirados* became important again and began to decorate t-shirts and fishing boats, with a pride possibly not seen in over five centuries on the Ecuadorian coast, that is to say not since before the colonial period. Recognizing themselves as *enchaquirados* allowed this small group in Engabao to claim a lost historicity and above all to reclaim a pre-Hispanic identity that has been projected by them to the present.

To address many of these gendered concerns we developed our project: "Ethnoarchaeology of Sexual Identities in pre-Hispanic Ecuador." The relevant evidence, we believe, must be found in the media of each period's culture, that is, material culture in general, and iconography in particular, which are the most potent ways of transmitting messages in pre-literate societies (*sensu* Tilley 1991). The starting point, then, is the question about how this sexual diversity manifests itself in the material and iconographic record and what guidelines could shed light on these patterns over a period of several centuries. Because as the *enchaquirado* community of Engabao

Fig. 1 – Engabao, Vicky. Foto: Iván Mora Manzano.

Fig. 2 – Engabao, John. Foto: Iván Mora Manzano.

Fig. 3 – Engabao, Lindsay. Foto: Iván Mora Manzano.

Fig. 4 – Engabao, Tamara. Foto: Iván Mora Manzano.

has proven, the sexual past is never just about the past, showing clear connotations for the present and our contemporary existence. For these reasons, we have also incorporated an ethnographic element in the project that consists of interviewing several of Engabao's transgender members. It is not surprising that these subjects have much to say not only about their sexuality and gender identity, but also about the present and past transgender Ecuadorian identity.

With regard to the very remote past, there is no doubt that the interpretation of the archaeological record has been biased by the violence of the colonial discourse, and it is evident that contemporary archeological analysis suffers from a rampant heterosexism and homophobia (see Ugalde 2017). This same heterosexist discourse ignores the anthropological research of the last 30 years that clearly demonstrates the existence of a minimum of five sexes biologically speaking (Fausto-Sterling 1992; 2000). It also fails to acknowledge that it was not until the nineteenth century itself that a purely binary sexuality of woman and man was assumed, which is also when hermaphrodites began to be surgically intervened to deny the natural sexual diversity present in humans (Foucault 1990; Laqueur 1994).

5. Two thousand years ago – a new look at the iconography of the regional development figurines

5.1. Scene one: heterosexist coupling

Within the iconographic corpus of several cultures of the Regional Development period (about 500 BC–AD 500) on the Ecuadorian coast, especially among the styles known as Tolita and Bahia, anthropomorphic representations are frequent (figs. 5-8). Although most represent individuals elaborated in the form of clay figurines, there are occasionally pairs or groups of people whose representation follow quite strict iconographic conventions (figs. 9-10). Such representations traditionally have been interpreted as family scenes, always speaking of 'marriages', 'couples' or 'erotic scenes' when the couple represented corresponds to a male and a female person. However, when a scene is described with a similar canon of representation but the two characters

clearly correspond to individuals of female sex (fig. 11), it is not viewed as a marriage or couple, but rather as Siamese twins (see details of this analysis, as well as other examples, in Ugalde 2017). Such heteronormative readings starting from *a priori* assumptions continually have dominated

Fig. 5 – Tolita-Figurine, normally interpreted as female, with the most representative attribute being the skirt. Museo de Arqueología y de Arte Contemporáneo (MAAC), Guayaquil. Object-code: GA-311-1745-81. Foto: María Fernanda Ugalde.

Fig. 6 – Tolita-Figurine, normally interpreted as male, with the most representative attribute being the loincloth. Museo Nacional, Quito. Object-code: LT-16-16-69. Foto: María Fernanda Ugalde.

Fig. 7 – Bahia-Figurine, normally interpreted as female, with the most representative attribute being the skirt. Museo de Arqueología y de Arte Contemporáneo (MAAC), Guayaquil. Object-code: BP-4895. Foto: María Fernanda Ugalde.

Fig. 8 – Bahia-Figurine, normally interpreted as male, with the most representative attribute being the loincloth. Museo de Arqueología y de Arte Contemporáneo (MAAC), Guayaquil. Object-code: BP-4441. Foto: María Fernanda Ugalde.

Fig. 9 – Tolita-composition, normally interpreted as heterosexual couple. Museo Nacional, Quito. Object-code: LT-5-6-80. Foto: María Fernanda Ugalde.

Fig. 10 – Bahia-composition, normally interpreted as heterosexual couple. Museo de Arqueología y de Arte Contemporáneo (MAAC), Guayaquil. Object-code: BP-06609. Foto: María Fernanda Ugalde.

Fig. 11 – Tolita-composition, representing two women, normally not mentioned or interpreted as "Siamese sisters". Museo de Arqueología y de Arte Contemporáneo (MAAC), Guayaquil. Object-code: GA-43-2015-81. Foto: María Fernanda Ugalde.

the iconographic interpretation of the pre-Hispanic cultures of Ecuador, lacking any analytic and alternative reflection on identity and sexual preference.

The heteronormative readings of the past are not restricted to iconographic interpretations, but also are observed in the interpretation of other types of archaeological evidence. For example, we present two very suggestive archaeological findings of the Preceramic period, from Ecuador and Peru respectively. These discoveries are very similar, but have been interpreted in a very different manner. In both cases, they are a double funeral context, consisting on two individuals placed together in the same tomb, in a position that belies a strong bond and intimacy, manifested through an embrace.

However, their sexual identification offered through an osteological analysis has unconsciously provided a basis for divergent interpretations. The Ecuadorian find, located at the Las Vegas site (Santa Elena province, Ecuador) (Stothert 1985), corresponds to a female and a male. Out of roughly 170 burials, this funeral context is the most famous one, having been baptized as 'The Lovers of Sumpa', to the point of having inspired poems from two very well-known Ecuadorian writers (Carvajal 1983; Adoum 1993).

On the other hand, at the Peruvian site of La Paloma (Quilter 1994), two individuals were buried together in a practically interlaced form (see tomb

illustration in Quilter 1994: 133). Both were identified as male and the context was interpreted much more ambiguously within the ritual scope. The outrageous interpretation expressed that the presence of a crystal in the tomb could indicate some ritual or shamanistic role of the older individual (whose age was estimated at 47 years):

> Burial 142a was judged to be a 21-year-old male; Burial 142b was another male, about 47 years of age. These two individuals appear to have been special members of the Paloma community. Although some double infant burials were found at Paloma, this grave is the only evidence of a double adult burial. Furthermore, the nature and number of burial offerings and the time and trouble expended in placing the bodies in an embrace suggests that these individuals were of special concern to the Paloma community. Crystals are associated with shamanism throughout the Americas, and staves are both symbols of authority and religious symbols in the Andes. Although the evidence is slim, these items in the double burial may indicate a religious or authoritative role for one or both of the individuals (Quilter 1994: 62).

This contrasts markedly with another double funeral context of the same cemetery, in which the two individuals were identified as male and female and are interpreted by default as marriage (Quilter 1994: 58), without it ever being necessary to justify such an interpretation. A similar double-standard is present in other archaeological interpretations. A recent analysis of a warrior grave from the Viking Age town of Birka in Sweden, confirmed by genomic data that the buried individual was a woman (Hedenstierna-Jonson *et al.* 2017). The interpretation of a female Viking warrior was criticized and instead many other alternative explanations were immediately offered. Of course, similar findings of male burials are accepted without question as being warriors.

This lack of perception or interest in the diversity of sexual identities and preferences, and ultimately on gender roles, seems quite provocative. This is especially true when taking into account 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 chroniclers.

5.2. Scene two: iconographic ambiguity in Bahia and Tolita

A comprehensive review of archaeological pieces of the Bahia culture within the framework of our ongoing project has allowed us to identify some couples who, while maintaining the representative pattern of heterosexual couples that usually are interpreted as marriages, are clearly composed of two women (fig. 12). This type of representation, in turn, leads us to the supposed siamese of Tolita, who probably are not such. Also for Tolita, Ugalde had previously drawn attention to figures that break with the iconographic convention and combine biological attributes of a sex with clothing corresponding to the opposite sex (Ugalde 2009: 59).

It is striking that among the numerous representations of the Tolita culture of young characters with little attire, who are often classified as female or male according to their clothing, there are numerous individuals dressed in a loincloth (and therefore would have to be men according to the traditional binary classification), but whose silhouettes are suspiciously feminine, since they have a very pronounced curve between their waist and hip (fig. 13). Some authors have suggested that this is due to the use of the same mold for the manufacture of all these pieces and that the

Fig. 12 – Bahia-composition, representing two women with a baby, not mentioned in any study or museum-catalogue. Museo de Arqueología y de Arte Contemporáneo (MAAC), Guayaquil. Object-code: GA-46-482-77. Foto: María Fernanda Ugalde.

Fig. 13 – Tolita-Figurine, normally interpreted as male due to the loincloth. Museo Nacional, Quito. Object-code: LT-45-112-70. Foto: María Fernanda Ugalde.

sex would have been defined through the dress (Brezzi 2003: 501). Such an interpretation does not seem very plausible, as there are also figures with markedly masculine silhouettes, which also were made with molds. The same author, interestingly, in describing a piece of this type that he characterizes as a "young man", mentions that "the character has masculine and feminine characters at the same time" (Brezzi 2003: 469), but does not reflect on the implications that such iconographic particularity can have in terms of sexual identity and gender role.

This archaeological evidence has led us to develop a systematic iconographic analysis of anthropomorphic pieces of the Bahia culture, with a corpus composed of several hundred figures from museums throughout Ecuador. Through an analytical approximation that makes use of the methodological semiotic principles (already used by Ugalde in her iconographic analysis of Tolita, see especially Ugalde 2009), we are trying to assess the relationships between the physical sexual attributes (of a more biological character) and other attributes of a cultural character, such as dress and ornaments. In this way, we hope to be able to offer an alternative view of gender and gender roles that were present in this past society, and in this way offer a new look, more independent of the heteronormative bias that up to now has limited the interpretative capacity of those

who have previously worked with this material. Our initial findings (see below) show the imperative to revisit the cultural material in such a way that scholars can begin to repay the outstanding debt to gender and sexual diversity, ignored until now as the normative Ecuadorian culture continues to be dominated by the heteronormative discourse that still prevails since colonial days.

6. Back to the future: an ethnography of the contemporary *enchaquirados*

Initial interviews carried out at Engabao, within the framework of the ethnographic component of our project, reveal a transgender history on the Ecuadorian coast, very different from what is normally understood not only at the national level, but also within the global context. To begin with, it is understood that *la mata de los maricones* is not a haphazard reality, but rather the result of a millennial history (both prehispanic and colonial) with diverse and alternative forms of living one's sexuality and gender identities.

As one can imagine the historical knowledge that contemporary *enchaquirados* have of themselves is a complex one. To this effect their re-reading of an *enchaquirado* past is a quite recent one, and it is not a name they would have afforded themselves had it not been for the recent historical research on this identity or the political contributions of contemporary transgender activists. However, neither of these realities created the contemporary transgender individuals that exist in Engabao and rather, their easy identification with the historical *enchaquirados* speaks volumes to their postcolonial legacy. One could argue that for the contemporary transgender community in Engabao 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.

Like contemporary berdaches in the North-American Southwest, contemporary *enchaquirados* have a recognized rightful place in their community. This identity allows them to feel pride in an ancient association and recognize themselves in the ethnohistorical descriptions written for the area several centuries ago. But the sexual diversity present in the Americas before the European conquest was far from uniform or monolithic. Despite the fact that both have an ancestral religious association there are

significant differences between berdaches and *enchaquirados* both in the ethnothistorical record and in contemporary terms. Perhaps one of the biggest is the pedagogical role that berdaches possessed that *enchaquirados* never had. This along with the birthing ritual that similarly are not part of the *enchaquirados* historical or contemporary cultural lexicon.

However, both of these ancient American sexual traditions have grown side by side with the urban explosion of the continent. The transgender individuals interviewed in Engabao complained about the mistreatment and discrimination they received in Guayaquil (the Ecuadorian port city has over two and half million inhabitants), as compared to their normal existence in their small fishing community, demonstrating a transgender community socially integrated into the local life of the town. But this supposed national anomaly, that is, to expect that a transgender identity would cause more malaise and discrimination in a rural setting than in a big city like Guayaquil also responds to a global prejudice; one even inherent in queer theory. Most global understanding of queer theory often assumes that homosexuality is above all an urban phenomenon, within large cities and iconic places like San Francisco, New York or Berlin in the north. It supposedly being these global centers which manage to maintain and develop queer or gender identities alternative to those normally developed within a binary heterosexist hegemony.

In this way, both the United States and Europe understand sexual diversity as a modern, urban and Western achievement that as good missionaries they must defend and protect in the Global South. Unfortunately, it is also the same manner in which many African and Latin American governments understand transgender identity, as a plague and perverse colonial intrusion stemming from the White north. It is also equally important that it is through these ideological mechanisms that queer identities are also racialized, as if would seem that only the developed northern White world would have the right to sexual diversity, as they also had before access to Christian truth and then to secular enlightenment.

However, it should be remembered that this 'civilizing' West (and North) was the first to condemn America's sexual diversity, killing indigenous people not only because they were indigenous (i.e., Native Americans), but also because they practiced sodomy (Horswell 2010). Of course, it is hard to believe that it is now that same civilizing West that seeks to defend sexual diversity and transgender identity as they define it. We consider that

both 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*).

But the hope is that something always escapes, especially from the West's exacting culture (*sensu* Hall 1997). Among them are traditions such as *La Nueva* in the community of Engabao, which is what the person who decides to take a transgender identity is called. And taking into account the phases of the moon, so important for a fishing community, a communal rite is celebrated to recognize and baptize the new member of the transgender community with a female name of her choice. We are possibly seeing in this tradition new arrangements and old adaptations to produce a historical palimpsest as authentic as it is hybrid, that is to say like any other cultural sexual identity.

7. "Deep Rivers" and the history of the vanishing present

The concerns expressed are very much in keeping with the decolonial approach that has been a mainstay in the Americas for over half a century (see Zea 1991; Mignolo 2012; and Quijano 2014). As Benavides' (2010) work shows, the decolonial attempt in archaeology to re-assess a hegemonic and official history is a crucial endeavor that is at the core of making research essential beyond the academic enterprise. For example, Silvia Rivera Cusincanqui (2000) shows how it is no longer possible to understand categories such as Indigenous and Western independent of each other. The West and the Rest have been brought up in mutual recognition (see Said 1978) and the decolonial approach helps us recognize the messy palimpsest of our mutual historical origins.

As Foucault (1994) elaborates in his analysis of the development of theoretical production in the West, one of the most interesting phenomena is the pervasive ethnological role that history will come to occupy. Far from it being obvious or natural, historical description and chronological order have taken on a teleological authority in the narrative development of the West.

This insight is particularly important as one tries to understand the 'histories' (in the plural) of communities that were present before the West became the West. Perhaps more importantly, it is central to point out that it was precisely the conquest of non-Western communities (in what would consequently become the Americas, Africa, and Asia) that allowed

the West, beginning in 1492, to claim themselves as modern. Interestingly enough, it was these same Indigenous communities that allowed the West to be constituted as such that then were historically denied their participation in the Western framework of civilized behavior.

As Ecuadorian subjects we were schooled in a Western tradition of cultural norms (*buenas costumbres*) and modern (i.e., the Global North's) academic standards. However, along with those cultural and academic requirements we have also entertained a millenary tradition (mainly expressed through the art and music): what Jose María Arguedas (1958) referred to in the title of his paradigmatic novel as *Los ríos profundos* (deep rivers) that refuses to be erased or completely encapsulated into the West's rational historical categorization.

In many ways, our lives, and the ethnographic, iconographic and ethnohistorical strands of our project, stem from listening to the 'deep rivers' of a "past (that) is not dead. It is not even past" (Faulkner 1951: 67). Our attempt is not to define any 'panacea', sexual or otherwise in the past, as some have naively expressed (see the very limited analysis about homophobia in the prehispanic Americas expressed in González Arenas and Gamboa 2015). Rather, the different evidence we discuss shows that many regions in the Americas presented elements of a different normal than the one expressed by the colonial West. Our work shows glimpses of particular sets of cultural norms in which homosexuality was not the automatic perversion it would be constituted as. Sexual difference is expressed in the archaeological figurines we have noted (see above) and has even survived the colonial narrative. Perhaps even more to this point the large presence of a rural form of homosexuality on the Ecuadorian coast today (in 2018) shows a sexual practice different than those predicted even by the most progressive queer theory scholars today.

Our ethnographic work in Engabao and throughout the Ecuadorian coast continues to excavate suppressed sexual histories that are far from the modern, urban and Western sexual identity that most queer narratives put forward. Homosexual practice is as normal to these coastal Ecuadorian communities as the open-ocean fishing that they carry out for their daily livelihood. The fact that homosexuality is more accepted in these rural fishing villages up and down the Ecuadorian coast than in the large modern metropolis of Guayaquil or Quito express 'an-other' history and 'an-other' sexuality than the one contained in the West's officializing chronological teleology.

In fact, we might be much closer to Arguedas' 'Deep Rivers' than to the Western narrative of homosexuality as a contemporary development and modernizing civilizing goal. The biggest clue in this sense is that homosexuals in Engabao, and the majority of coastal communities, are not seen as foreign to their culture, and more importantly are not even merely tolerated. After all, one would tolerate something that is different, and in this regard homosexuals are not seen as foreign but rather within the sexual variation expected of human behavior. Of course there are some negative reactions, the same way that certain heterosexual expressions (e.g., class or age differences come to mind) are subject to them as well. What you do not see is the indiscriminate homophobia that Ecuador's modern society and national culture continues to express, and within which we grew up.

8. In (conclusion)

By refusing to stay within this prejudiced enculturation, officially expressed by the Ecuadorian heteronormative state (see above), we align ourselves with a 'long line of vendidas' (Morraga 1983) conformed by visionaries such as Jose María Arguedas and Gloria Anzaldúa, who also refused to conform, in Karl Marx's words, to a history not of our making:

> And it is with great pain and terror that one begins to realize this. In great pain and terror, one begins to assess the history which has placed one where one is, and formed one's point of view. In great pain and terror, because, thereafter, one enters into battle with that historical creation, oneself, and attempts to re-create oneself according to a principle more humane and more liberating, one begins the attempt to achieve a level of personal maturity and freedom which robs history of its tyrannical power, and also changes history (Baldwin 1966: 171).

Ultimately, our hope is that our research begins to make some organic sense of the personal, political and transnational experiences we have both traversed. It is our assumption that these experiences and lessons far from denying reality, as was the mainstay of our upbringing, will broaden the picture of the complex world and cosmology lived in the Americas before (as well as after) the conquest. We are quite aware that we will never know exactly what it was like in the past but we definitely hope to provide more clues to how it was not. Perhaps through that re-reading of the narrative palimpsest expressed in the material culture left to us, we

allow 'an-other' histories and 'an-other' realities to permeate our otherwise hegemonic Western imagination:

> The successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing these rules, to replace those that had used them, to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them: introducing themselves into this complex mechanism, they will make it function in such a way that the dominators find themselves dominated by their own rules (Foucault 1998: 378).

And that is the ultimate catch, how does one construct a congruent, alternative and inclusive history that doesn't end up enclosing us all in a singular monolithic past.

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