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## **Ecuadorian Migration: An Ethnographic Approach to Analyzing Socio-Cultural Influences on Migration**

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## **1. Introduction**

While my younger brother and I were born in the United States, some of my fondest childhood memories took place when we lived Ecuador (mid-1990's), sitting in the backseat of my parent's golden Chevrolet truck and listening to the endless supply of stories my father had to offer. The stories he told were always about a young couple and their adventures in the most unlikely places and circumstances. Sometimes the stories took place in the Amazon jungle, where they taught school children and spent their time-off trekking through the jungle, hunting wild boar, or taking care of their pet monkey, *Serafin*. Other times, the young man was in the Panama Canal or in Mexico, escaping from the police or running from "la migra" (*immigration police*). This young couple was my parents, two Ecuadorians in their early twenties who met and fell in love in the Ecuadorian Amazon, where they lived for 2 years and then, by "las cosas del destino" (*destiny*), as my father says, ended up in the United States.

I have heard their stories dozens of times over the last 21 years, but, to my parents' surprise, the older I got the more I enjoyed them. I had so many questions to ask and wanted to know every detail; why were they in the Amazon in the first place? Why did they leave to the United States? What happened to the pet monkey? I found their unique experiences fascinating and I longed to tell their story. While I like to think of this period in my life as the beginning of my development as a researcher and academic, it wasn't until high school that I really understood that these "stories" had a much larger societal and historical content. In college, through my studies in International Relations, I discovered

anthropology and the life history method, which I found to be the most effective method to gather such rich data and to analyze it.

This project is the result of a lifetime of listening to stories and personal anecdotes about migration, as documented by an American-born Ecuadorian and a once child expatriate in Ecuador. The focus of this project is on national and international migration, as experienced by an Ecuadorian family (my family) currently living the United States. Julio, my father and the main informant in this narrative, was born in a small rural community in the Andean highlands and migrated to the United States in 1987, where he currently lives with Ana and his family. Throughout this paper, I explore the different types of migrations Julio and Ana engaged in between these two points and the social and cultural factors that played a role in these migrations. By exploring their life events, separately, and aided by additional interviews with other family members, historical data and my personal observations, I hope to understand what made migration the most sensible option for them, how they used their social networks in these migrations and how that has played out in each of their lives, as they have settled permanently in the United States.

The following two chapters will provide the reader with a historical review of Ecuadorian migration.

## **2. Ecuador**

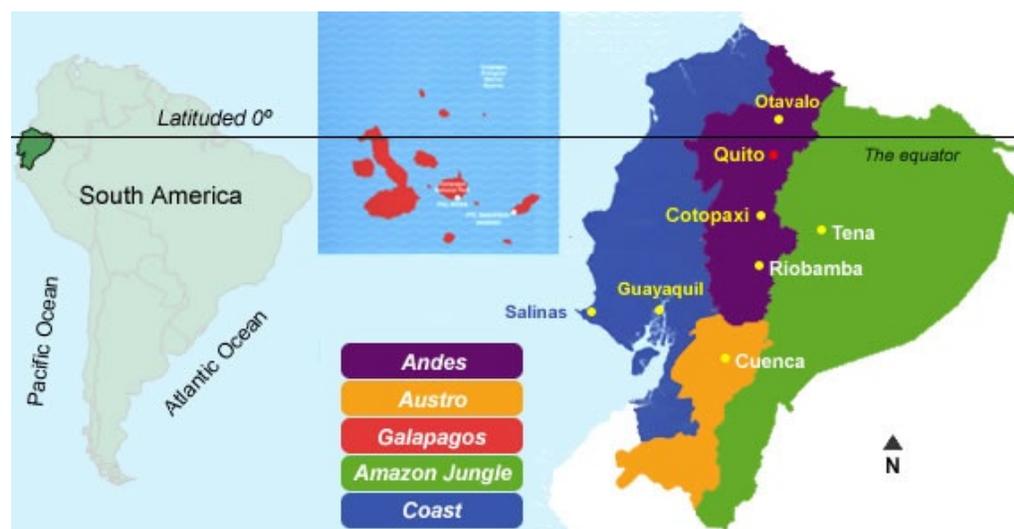
### *National Identity*

National identity refers to the depiction of a country as a whole, encompassing its culture, traditions, languages and politics, and it provides a person with an identity and sense of belonging to a state or nation, as these common factors are shared. In the Ecuadorian Republic, a nation about the size of the state of Nevada, it has been very difficult to construct a strong national identity, as regional, cultural, racial and socio-economic tensions and differences are prominent in everyday life. Ann Miles eloquently articulates Ecuador's weak national identity to be rooted in its historic inability to create a coherent and inclusive understanding of Ecuadorian identity (Miles, 2004). Miles describes Ecuador's position as an Andean country, its internal geographical and political regionalism, its racial tensions and economic dependence on the west, as culprits for Ecuador's weak identity.

Ecuador is an Andean nation, yet it rarely identifies culturally with its Andean neighbors and is often overshadowed by the more powerful nations in the region. Peru, for example, has historically been a threat to Ecuador's national security, due to a border dispute based on the imprecise borders drawn by the Spanish authorities during colonization that settled in 1998, while Colombia was popularly seen as being more "culturally" developed than Ecuador with Ecuadorians alluding to the higher quality of Colombian products, for example (Miles, 2004). However, the ongoing conflict in Colombia has led to a growing Colombian migrant and refugee population in Ecuador and to some diplomatic tensions between the two countries. Most recently, the president of Ecuador, Rafael Correa, has formed regional alliances with what is considered to be Latin

America's new left, particularly under the auspices of the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra America (ALBA), whose members include Venezuela and Cuba. Correa's push to implement modern democratic socialism has increased social and racial tensions, and will certainly impact Ecuador's indecisive national identity.

Regarding nation-state development, Ecuador's biggest challenge has been overcoming long faced geographical and political regionalisms that, literally, divide the nation. Ecuador possesses a dramatic topography consisting of two *cordilleras* (the Andean mountain range) that divide the small country into a Coastal, Andean and Amazonian region. These topographic divisions are noticeably distinct, as each region fosters; a different climate; flora and fauna; industries; cultures; and geopolitical regionalism, all which contribute to Ecuador's weak national identity. Regional antagonisms are most noticeable in the sierra and the coast. The sierra is historically known for its conservative political and economic views; while the coast has had much different labor conditions and is regarded as more politically liberal (Striffler 2002).



### **A Brief Introduction to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands, 2009**

Source: <http://galapagos2009.wordpress.com/day-by-day-activities/>

One of the most contentious issues for Ecuadorian nation–state development, contributing directly to the country’s identity politics, is the question of how to integrate the large indigenous populations into a unified national identity (see Whitten 1981; Brysk 2000; Miles 2004). While this debate began early in Ecuador’s history, the many issues surrounding indigenous populations still has many social and political ramifications. Mary Crain argues that, as seen in many other South American nations, Ecuadorian elites renounced, and still do, any cultural alliances with indigenous peoples. The majority of these elites are whites, claiming Spanish descent and, according to Crain, Ecuadorian national identity was often modeled after European patterns (Crain 1990).

Miles notes that it was only until the 1960’s and 1970’s, after capitalist expansion into the countryside had already significantly altered indigenous practices, that the government even made an attempt to integrate the country’s indigenous populations into a concept of national identity (Miles 2004). In the 1970’s, in particular, Ecuador embarked on a national program to promote a “unified concept of national identity” and began a public campaign that envisioned Ecuador’s national identity through the concept of the *mestizo* (mixed white and Indian). Promoting a mestizo identity, under an all-encompassing and homogenized category, would, by default, deflate the social and cultural differences between Ecuador’s different racial and ethnic populations (Stutzman 1981). The goal of this campaign was to eliminate old racial tensions and barriers, in order to work together to form a more equitable society, a more equitable

Ecuador. However, this mestizo category did not account for the entire population, it merely acknowledged that a large number of Ecuadorians are of Spanish and indigenous descent, and it did very little to acknowledge the rights of Indigenous Ecuadorians on their own, as well as that of Afro-Ecuadorians. As Crain notes, these attempts were no more than “official nostalgia for ‘authenticity’ and for an imaginary ‘Indian’ of the past who no longer exists” (Crain 1990: 56; see also Apolo 1995). Ultimately, *mestizaje* really meant that Indians would, or should, become more like whites, rather than whites becoming more like Indians.

Fuelled by the emergence of indigenous organizations, the politicization of indigenous identities, and the demand for indigenous rights (Yashar, 2005) in the 1990’s, Ecuador shifted its national identity, from the concept of *mestizaje* and the implied homogenization of Ecuadorian identity, and instead adopted a pluri-ethnic position in which cultural and racial diversity were to be celebrated (Brysk 2000; Miles 2004). The demands of the indigenous organizations and groups varied by case, including territorial autonomy, respect for customary law, new forms of political representation, and bicultural education (Yashar, 2005).

Following the growth of these movements, the government implemented a series of initiatives, including changing school curriculums, to educate Ecuadorians about the country’s rich ethnic diversity (Meisch 1992; Miles 2004). These indigenous movements allowed more political representation for the indigenous populations of Ecuador, for example, in 1998, Nina Pacari, a Kichwa lawyer and indigenous leader, became the first indigenous woman to be elected to the Ecuadorian parliament, as a part of the newly established indigenous movement Pachakutik and in 2008, Ecuador became a united “plurinational” state

under a constitutional reform that recognized the countries' multiple nationalities and ethnic minorities and has allowed for a more culturally heterogeneous administrative system. While this has not meant total racial, ethnic or equality in Ecuador, Ecuador's indigenous movement has earned the title of "Latin America's strongest indigenous movement" (Yashar, 2005) and has provided the country, or at least its indigenous people, with a stronger sense of indigenous identity.

### ***Poverty and Inequality***

Poverty and inequality have long been features of Ecuadorian society, as an estimated 15 percent of the population lives under the extreme poverty line, and more than 35 percent lives under the poverty line; that is, around 35 percent of the population living with less than two dollars per person per day (Canelas 2010). The World Bank views poverty as a "pronounced deprivation in well-being," generally speaking, whether households or individuals have enough resources or abilities today to meet their needs. Inequality, however, is a broader concept than poverty in that it is defined over the entire population, and does not only focus on the poor. Income inequality refers to the extent to which income is

distributed in an uneven manner among a population<sup>1</sup>. In Ecuador, from 2002 to 2009, the richest 20 percent of the population concentrated more than 50 percent of the total income, while the poorest 20 percent shared, at most, 4 percent of it, suggesting an extremely unequal distribution of resources and wealth (Canelas 2010). Rural areas, often also indigenous communities, have significantly higher poverty and inequality rates in Ecuador and throughout Latin America. Income inequality has been growing steadily and many of the region's leaders and scholars argue that it is an important obstacle to development in Latin America.

Marcelo Naranjo, an Ecuadorian social scientist, writes that there is a strong connection between Ecuador's "cultural dependency" on the west, its dependency on external markets, and internal social stratification (Naranjo, 1981; Miles 2004). Naranjo concludes that the country's participation in global economic and cultural processes has created and strengthened local patterns of social inequality. Miles points out that since the colonial period, Ecuador's economy has been dependent on supplying commodities to external markets while neglecting national needs, thus exacerbating extremes in income distribution. The unequal distribution of wealth in Ecuador, where the richest 20 percent of the population concentrates more than 50 percent of the total income, results in titanic social and economic problems, as it limits the educational and occupational opportunities of large segments of the population. As Miles describes, historically, Ecuador's economy has been largely dependent on external markets and commodity sales. Such dependency has proven problematic for Ecuador when demand for commodities peaks or evaporates (starting with cacao at the turn

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<sup>1</sup>Income Inequality. <http://inequality.org/income-inequality/>. Retrieved April 13, 2012.

of the twentieth century, bananas in the 1950's, and petroleum in the 1970's) or when circumstances prevent Ecuador from supplying that commodity (e.g. El Niño floods in the 1990's). This system makes for minimal economic diversification and has crippled the Ecuadorian economy repeatedly.

One such case was the economic crisis of the late 1990s, which led to a “mass exodus” (Jokisch and Pribilsky 2002) or mass migration of more than 600,000 Ecuadorians to the U.S. and Europe from 2000 to 2001. According to a survey by the U.S. Census bureau, there were 436,000 Ecuadorians in the United States in 2005<sup>2</sup>.

### **3. Internal Migration**

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines migration as, “the movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border, or within a State. It is a population movement, encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants, and persons moving for other purposes, including family reunification.” In this study, I focus on internal migration (national) and international migration, as understood by one Andean Ecuadorian family, currently living in the New York Metropolitan area in the United States.

Internal migration, as defined by the IOM is, “the movement of people from one area of a country to another for the purpose or with the effect of

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35761.htm#econ>

establishing a new residence. This migration may be temporary or permanent. Internal migrants move but remain within their country of origin.” The following two subchapters will focus on two types of internal migrations that occurred in Ecuador. The first subchapter will focus on rural–urban migration, which describes migration from rural to urban areas, while the second subchapter will focus on internal migrations from both rural and urban localities into the Ecuadorian Amazon.

### *From the Andean Village to the Urban Center*

For most of Ecuador’s history, the majority of the country’s population has lived in the sierra, mainly in the more habitable *hoyas*<sup>3</sup>. However, in the 1950’s, large numbers of peasants from the sierra, who had little land of their own, began migrating to the coastal region. The character, direction, and volume of rural-urban migration in the Sierra, from the 1950’s through the 1980’s, has been shaped by patterns of economic growth and decline in the agro-export, oil export, manufacturing, construction, and service sectors and by far-reaching modifications in agrarian structure (Bilsborrow 1987). During the 1970s, the population of Ecuador grew at an annual average rate of 3.3 percent, one of the fastest growth rates observed in Latin America (Bravo-Ureta, Quiroga, Brea, 1996) and the population in the sierra and the coast was roughly similar. By the

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<sup>3</sup> Hydrographic area

year 1982, the costa had become the most populated region in Ecuador (Dennis 1989). According to Dennis, the costa expanded only at roughly the national average during the 1974–1982 intercensal period. In the turn of the twentieth century, following declines in export crop production, Ecuadorians from the coastal region (Costeños) began to migrate to Guayaquil, Ecuador’s largest city, commercial capital and major port. In describing migration from the Sierra, Dennis explains that Serranos (Ecuadorians from the Sierra) were often first “pulled” by the expanding coastal economy and then “pushed” by population pressure, agrarian reform and modernization. The “push” and “pull” principle described by Dennis derives from the push and pull models of migration, in classical migration theory, where push and pull factors initiating migration are present in the source as well as in the receiving regions of migrants (Lee 1966). Indeed, Dennis asserts that the provinces of Guayas and El Oro, rich cacao-producing areas, became the most common destination for Serranos to migrate to, particularly convenient for those escaping the 1960’s drought in the province of Loja.

The cacao-boom of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also attracted immigrants from Europe and Latin America to the Coast. These migrants generally arrived with capital to exploit the lucrative commercial opportunities in this region (Dennis 1989). Of these migrants, the largest and most influential were of Lebanese origin, locally called *turcos* or *arabes*, who gained considerable influence in commerce and local politics. Many of Ecuador’s presidents and most important business leaders have been, and still are, of Lebanese descent.

The 1950’s were a period of extensive migration throughout Ecuador.

Serranos and Costeños, alike, migrated in large numbers from the countryside to the cities. This migration trend changed the face of Ecuador's largest urban centers, Guayaquil and Quito, as well as intermediate-sized cities (Dennis 1989). Each city reflected its different history and economic development. Guayaquil began as a commercial link (through its port) to Spain, which exploded with the beginning of cacao-production in the eighteenth century and continues to develop reflecting whatever export crop is currently profitable in the global market; While, Quito, since the colonial era, developed as an administrative center, representing the epitome of the *Serrano* elites Hispanic values (Dennis 1989). Growth was highest in Guayaquil in the 1950's, due to a rise in banana cultivation in the coast. Ecuador is currently the worlds' largest exporter of bananas and plantains<sup>4</sup>. For Quito, growth was highest during the decade of the 1970's due in part to Ecuador's oil boom. By 1982, Guayaquil had reached a staggering 1.2 million residents and Quito had reached 870,000 residents, together representing 60 percent of Ecuador's urban population.

Such rapid urbanization posed a great challenge to the governments of Guayaquil and Quito, particularly in the providing employment and basic services. Another common problem resulting from the large influx of migrants was the each city began to develop densely populated tenement slums, as well as the emergence of squatter settlements in unoccupied marginal lands (Dennis 1989). Many of these newer settlements lacked basic services such as well-provisioned water lines, sewage disposal and streets. Despite government actions, settlements expanded throughout the 1970's and represented almost 15 percent of

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<sup>4</sup>Profile. Background Note: Ecuador. United States Department of State. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35761.htm>

Quito's total population.

While this was all taking place in large urban centers throughout Latin America, Ecuador's medium sized cities also experienced exponential growth, sometimes much faster than Guayaquil and Quito. Indeed, Dennis points out that this was especially true in Ecuador's coastal region, in "second-tier" cities such like Santo Domingo, Quevedo, Esmeraldas and Machala. Cities in the sierra also had some growth but only Cuenca—Ecuador's third largest city—achieved growth rates comparable to Quito.

*El Amazonas: The New Frontier*

Since the second half of the twentieth century, one of the features of Ecuadorian Amazon history is the heterogeneity of its occupation by colonist, non-indigenous populations. The Ecuadorian Amazon experienced two notable migration waves. The first began in the early 1900's, when some Serranos trekked through the Oriente to pan for gold and stayed to settle on the east slopes of the Andes (Dennis 1989). These migrants "acquired" land from local indigenous peoples and set up small-scale subsistence farms and communities. While this migration was small in number, it foreshadowed the eventual colonization of the Northern Ecuadorian Amazon, to begin in the 1960's with the discovery of crude oil in the region.

The second migration to the Oriente began in the 1960's, spurred by the Loja drought, emerging oil economy and free land, where large numbers of Serranos arrived eager to obtain land. The Northern Ecuadorian Amazon, an area comprising the provinces of Sucumbíos and Orellana, began to be occupied by agricultural settler families after the discovery of oil in 1967. This was followed

by the laying of pipelines and a road network for the exploitation of crude oil, and by the establishment of the new town of Lago Agrio next to the first oil camp of the American oil conglomerate the ‘Texaco Oil Company.’ Indeed, researcher Alisson F. Barbieri adds that petroleum has provided over half of the value of Ecuador’s exports revenues and also over half of government revenues (from royalties) virtually every year since the early 1970s. In 2010, for example, crude and refined petroleum products accounted for 56 percent of total export earnings.<sup>5</sup>

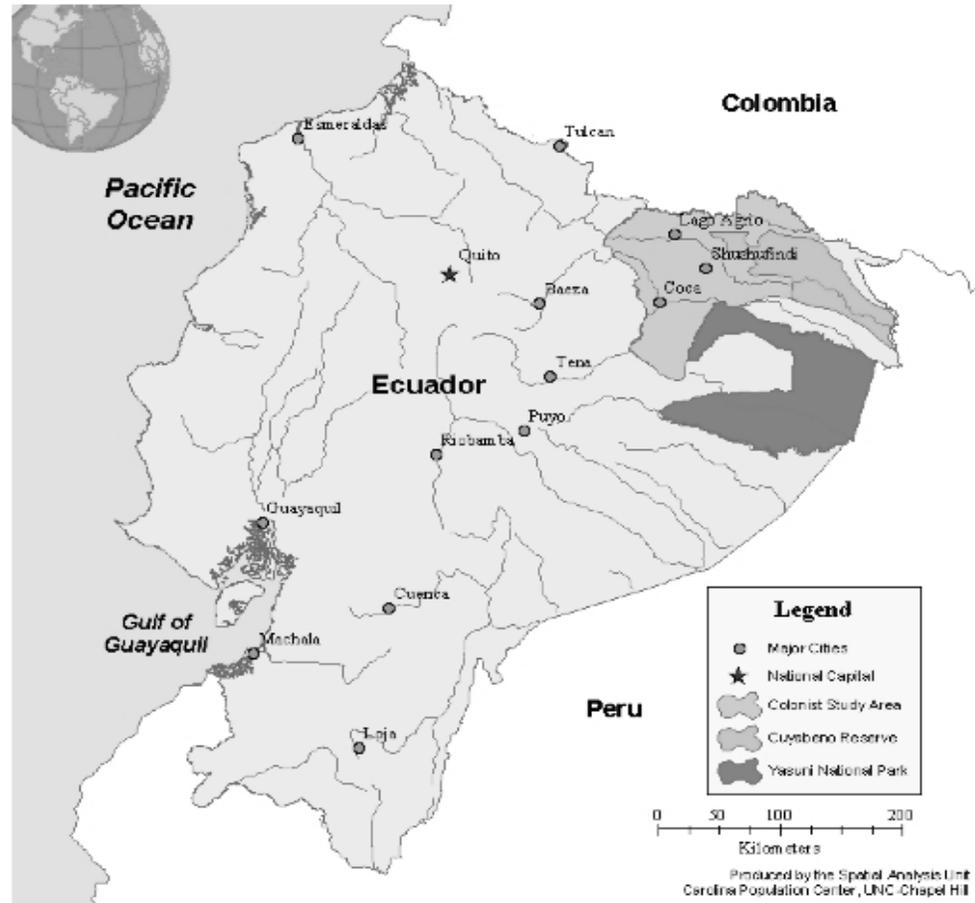
Petroleum-related development generated employment opportunities in the Oriente, a region that became the destination for numerous internal migrants, particularly from the Ecuadorian highlands. This migration has been spontaneous and was facilitated by the development of roads by the oil companies, which made entrance into the Amazon much easier for the mostly impoverished colonists that arrived. Between 1950 and 1982, the Oriente experienced a more than fivefold population increase, doubling the national growth rate average of approximately 5.6 percent (Dennis 1989), by the mid-1970’s migrants constituted nearly half the region’s residents. Barbieri’s study, in 2006, explored the linkages between rural–urban mobility, urbanization and development in the amazon region in both Ecuador and Brazil. There are four main towns (or *parroquias*) in Barbieri’s study area (in Ecuador): Lago Agrio or Nueva Loja (the largest, with 34,000 people, according to the 2001 Census), Francisco de Orellana or Coca, Joya de los Sachas and Shushufindi.

Barbieri points out that Brazil’s Amazon has undergone a large and rapid urbanization process, with two of its cities (Belém and Manaus) reaching over one

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<sup>5</sup> United States Department of State <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35761.htm>

million inhabitants, while Ecuador's largest city in the Amazon, Lago Agrio, reached only 34,000 inhabitants in 2011 (Barbieri 2006). However, living conditions for the first migrants were, often, the worst. In 2011, just half of the population in the Amazon had access to electricity; 30 percent have regular water supply; 36 percent have some sewage collection and treatment; and only 8 percent have access to phone (Barbieri 2006). As will be seen in the following chapters, these conditions were far worse for my informants, as they arrived to smaller communities in the 1960's and 1980's, which they described as "uncharted" territory. Today, nearly all of the large communities (above 1,000 inhabitants) have "electricity, piped water, church, notary's office, health facilities, elementary and high school" (Barbieri 2006). However, it's the smaller communities (those below 500 inhabitants), especially those up to 20 km apart from a local town that lack these resources, adaption and show a higher percentage of health problems.



### **Location of Barbieri (2006) study area in the Northern Ecuadorian Amazon**

Population mobility within the Amazon, from small communities to larger ones has been, by far, one of the most influential factors in the development of these areas, “Urbanization in frontier areas,” as Barbieri calls it. Migrants continue to move to the Amazon from the Sierra and Coast, and move to and from communities within the region. Most recently, there has also been an increase in Colombian migrants, including several thousands of political refugees.

## **4. International Migration**

### ***From Ecuador to the World***

Ecuador’s population of 13.3 million people accounts for the estimated 1.5

million (Jokisch 2007) of them currently working, living and applying for citizenship abroad. Prior to the 1960's, Ecuadorian transnational migration was minimal, with small communities of Ecuadorians found living in the United States, mainly the New York metropolitan area, and an even smaller number of Ecuadorians migrating to Venezuela during the 1970's. The second migration was short-lived, spurred by a booming oil based Venezuelan economy that triggered labor migration inflow from neighboring countries. However, once oil prices dropped in the 1980's said migration decreased and eventually ceased.

Until the 1990's, the majority of the transnational labor migration from Ecuador was directed mainly towards the United States, with large concentrations of Ecuadorian migrants settling in urban centers around the country, mainly NY, Chicago, LA, Minneapolis and Florida. However, in the mid-to-late 1990's, Ecuador faced its worst political and economic crisis yet, which led to the largest transcontinental Ecuadorian migration to Europe. This economic crisis occurred due to several contributing factors such as; no real recovery from the "lost decade" of the 1980's, a costly border war with Peru in 1995, El Niño floods 1997-98 and disruption of banana export economy, a record drop of oil prices, and the 1999 consolidations, closings and bailouts of financial institutions. Incomparable, in time and scale, to the large masses that have increasingly migrated to the United States since the 1960's, Ecuadorian migrations to Europe, specifically to Spain, increased from 5,000 in all of 1994 to more than 7,000 per month in 2000 (Pribilsky 2007).

### *Ecuadorians in the United States*

Ecuadorian transnational migration traces its beginnings back to the 1960's and 1970's, when small numbers of Ecuadorians began entering the U.S. on tourist and work visas. Researchers noted that in the early 1970's (Preston, 1974) men from rural Andean communities in the provinces of Azuay and Cañar were migrating to Chicago and New York. These provinces formed the "core" sending zone of Ecuadorian migration (Jokisch 1997), and since then millions have migrated to the United States, settling mainly in the New York metropolitan area. While it is not absolutely clear why Ecuadorians have so consistently settled in the area, Zambrano (1999) believes that many early migrants to New York came from Guayaquil, relying upon contacts with banana corporations to secure tourist visas. Another research, Kyle (2000), speculates that migration followed the collapse of the "Panama Hat" trade in the 1950's, and, similar to Zambrano's theory, these rural Ecuadorian migrants relied heavily upon their commercial networks in New York.

As is a common trend in Latin American migration, many of these early migrants intended to return to Ecuador after paying their debt and spending a year or two earning working and saving their earnings. Among the many reasons why migrants decide to stay in the US, "the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act in 1986, under the Clinton administration, conferred legal status to scores of undocumented migrants," (Neuman 2011) giving many of these immigrants the possibility to obtain a U.S. citizenship and remain in the country legally. The following decades were characterized by fairly slow Ecuadorian immigration to the United States. There was a small-scale migration of Ecuadorian men and women to Venezuela during the 1970's, a product of a

booming oil-based Venezuelan economy. Yet, those numbers fell in the 1980's when a drop in oil prices afflicted oil-exporting nations, such as Venezuela.

However, the numbers of Ecuadorian immigrants to the United States peaked dramatically during the 1990's, as a result of a decrease in Ecuadorian petroleum revenues in the late 1980's, the same drop in oil prices that afflicted Venezuela's economy. This period of economic downturn is known as Latin America's "lost decade," a decade in which many oil exporting nations saw an out flux of migrants to the United States. This drop in revenue, combined with a 60 percent inflation rate that devalued the nation's currency, "el Sucre," left economic turmoil in the small nation and, subsequently, an increase in poverty.

Families across the country, mainly in the Azuay-Cañar region, began to send their young men on the arduous journey to the United States, where they would work and earn US dollars to send back to their families in Ecuador. A large number of these families relied, and still do, heavily on the foreign income, known as remittances, sent by their relatives. Young men weren't exactly forced to migrate but the economic crisis had impacted their ability to meet some of the unspoken Ecuadorian cultural prerequisites for manhood, namely; owning land, getting married and establishing an independent household (Neuman 2011). Migrating to the United States meant that they would achieve the necessary income to sustain their parents and relatives, as well as a bride and children, and the ability to send money to build a house on their own plot of land, it was an opportunity rarely turned down. This income also provided them with a higher social status, as they acquired North American styles of speech, fashion and attitude" (Neuman 2011).

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Ecuadorians constitute the eighth-largest Latino group in the United States, with about 70 percent of the 600,000 Ecuadorians counted currently living in the New York City metropolitan area. Of these, a disproportionately large number are undocumented workers. A majority of them are impoverished peasants with limited resources and human capital, and are originally from Ecuador's Azuay–Cañari region in the rural Andean highlands. Their relatively low human capital has led to them working in low-paying, unskilled service and manufacturing sectors in the New York City economy and makes them vulnerable to having little job security.

While migration had allowed for these young men to fulfill cultural and socially acceptable duties, many of them were unable to enjoy their newly acquired homes and other possessions back in their native country. Unlike Mexican migrants, who have the ability to move back and forth across the border frequently, Ecuadorians often wait several years before returning to Ecuador. For starters, the journey back to Ecuador involves an 8-hour flight, about a thousand dollars in airplane tickets and buying and bringing many gifts for the entire family, as the Ecuadorian families often have a skewed idea of how much the migrant actually earns and, therefore, expect gifts such as American clothing and technology. That is what a migrant with legal residence and a passport would have to do to return to Ecuador. An illegal immigrant would likely not return for years at a time, or until they obtained their residency. The inability to move back and forth between countries is a huge factor affecting a migrant's decision to settle in the United States.

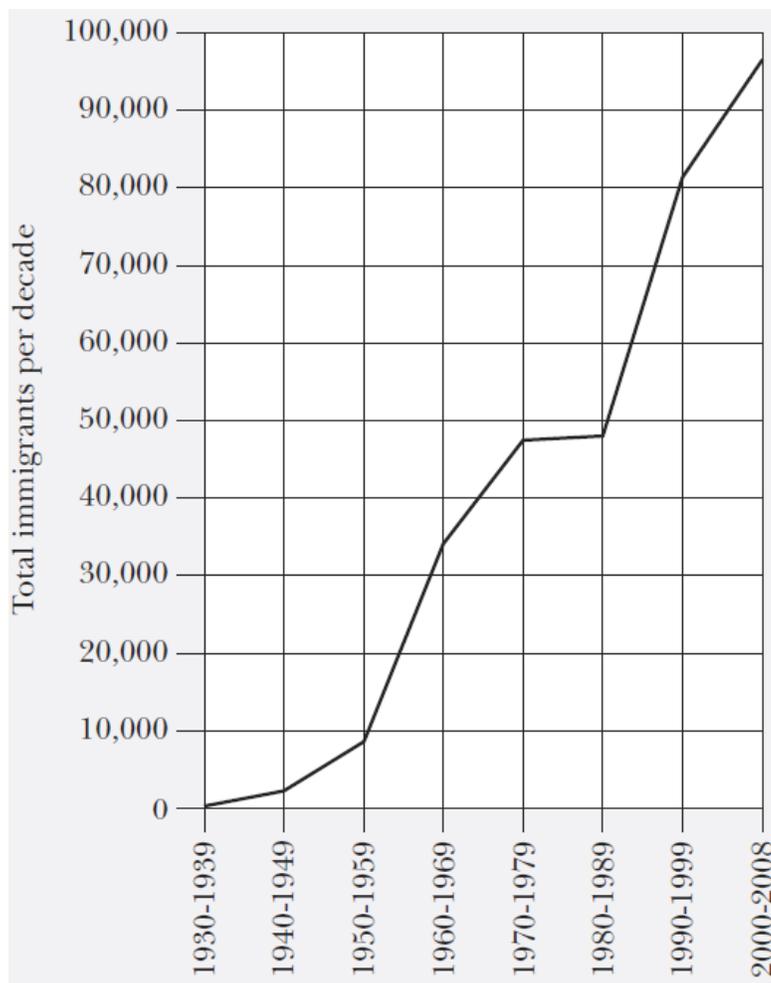
Ecuadorians in the New York Metropolitan area cluster in neighborhoods, usually home to other South American migrants. The largest community of Ecuadorians in the United States is located in Northern Queens in the Astoria, Jackson Heights, and Flushing neighborhoods<sup>6</sup>. While these are the largest communities of Ecuadorians, there are also Ecuadorian neighborhoods in Brooklyn, the Bronx, New Jersey (Newark and Jersey City), Westchester and working class towns in Connecticut. Ecuadorians communities in the United States establish unity through regional associations, which have become important institutions to bring together immigrants hailing from the same town, province or region. Loyalty to their village, town, or city can sometime even trump their loyalty to the nation (Ecuador) as a whole, probably stemming from the lack of a cohesive national identity to under which all Ecuadorians can unite. These associations are often very informal, working under larger regional federations, yet they comprise a large and vital part of the Ecuadorian immigrants' social life.

These associations not only provide Ecuadorians living in the United States with a sense of community, and a common language, accent, culture and values, but they often serve a larger and more "charitable" purpose. The regional organizations, in particular, often send large financial donations back to Ecuador, to build schools, libraries, soup kitchens, etc. In the absence of ties with these associations, religious institutions and charitable and non-profit organizations serving the Latino community may sometimes take their place.

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<sup>6</sup> Countries and Their Cultures: Ecuadoran Americans.  
<http://www.everyculture.com/multi/Du-Ha/Ecuadoran-Americans.html#b>

All in all, New York City, one of the most heterogeneous cities on earth is home to the largest group of Ecuadorians outside of New York, and the rates of incoming Ecuadorian migrants are not decreasing.



### **Immigration from Ecuador, 1930 – 2008**

*Source:* Department of Homeland Security, Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2008. Figures include only immigrants with legal permanent residence.

**Profile of Ecuadorian immigrants**

Country of origin	Ecuador
Primary language	Spanish
Primary regions of U.S. settlement	New York State
Earliest significant arrivals	1970
Peak immigration period	1990-present
Twenty-first century legal residents*	96,571 (10,730 per year)

\*Immigrants who obtained legal permanent resident status in the United States.

Source: Department of Homeland Security, Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 2008.

## 5. Life Histories

### *Julio*

Julio was born in a small parish called *Guasuntos*, belonging to the canton of Alausí, in the province of *Chimborazo*, about 140 miles south from the country's capital. He grew up with five other siblings (2 males and 2 females) and spent most of his childhood in Guasuntos. Julio's father, originally from Ecuador's coastal region, owned a small store where he sold an assortment of liquor, candies and some household products, in addition to charging the parish people for making announcements over the store's loudspeaker. Julio recalls that this wasn't a great source of income for his family of eight (including himself, his siblings and parents). His mother, a *guasunteña*, brought the main source of income through her own means, mainly selling at the market.

Julio describes a typical day in his childhood in a 2011 interview,

*“Pues uno tenía que ir a la escuela y como mi mamá era comerciante, nos enseñaba el negocio. Nosotros (sus hijos) teníamos que ayudarle todas las tardes, casi todos los días en la venta y compra de animales porque eso era el sustento para la familia.”*

*“Well, one had to attend school and since my mother was also a merchant, she taught us the business. We (her children) had to help her*

*every afternoon, almost everyday in the buying and selling of livestock because that was the family's main source of income."*

While Julio was a great help to his mother, he was also known to be a bit of a trouble-maker, earning the town nickname of "El Loco," (*crazy*). Even now, when he returns to his town people still call him this *loco* and friends recall their adventures with him, jumping off of trees into the river, digging for a hidden treasure or making toy cars and racing them down the hill. This was Julio's life until the age of 9, when his mother migrated to Caracas, Venezuela, where she spent three years working as a domestic worker and nanny. Julio tells that she sent money to her husband monthly for the children's school and other expenses, as well as money for their savings. However, when she returned, she found that her husband had not saved any money, and had, in fact, spent most of it on alcohol and other women.

Upon her return, Julio, now 12 years old, was sent to city of Alausí, where his parents had friends and connections, to continue his studies in a "better school." Julio recalls in 2011 interview,

*"Como a mis papás les gustaba... les gusta que nos eduquemos, pues ellos nos decían que tenemos que estudiar, estudiar, estudiar! Solamente estudiar, y casi no trabajar, aunque igual había que hacerlo. Tuvimos que salir a otra ciudad mas grande que se llama Alausí. Allí seguí los próximos tres años de colegio, viviendo entre Guasuntos y Alausí, pero mas en Alausí."*

*"Since my parents like for us to... they wanted us to be educated, they always told us that we must study, study, study! Only study, and not really work, even though we did have to work. So, we had to leave to another city, a larger city called Alausí. There I was for the next three years of school, living in between Guasuntos and Alausí, but mainly in Alausí."*

Julio lived and studied in Alausí from Monday through Friday, trying to find a car ride to return to Guasuntos on the weekends, or sometimes walking the

stretch between the two places. His older siblings and some friends had also gone to study in Alausí, and so the trip back was often in a group. After three years of studying in Alausi and due to the tension built over his mother's migration to Venezuela, Julio's parents separated. Julio's mother, then, decided to follow her two older daughters, who had completed high school in Alausí, out to Riobamba, an urban center in the same province, four hours away from Guasuntos. Julio, the younger brother, youngest sister and their mother moved to Riobamba, partly escaping the family drama, hoping to find better educational opportunities for them siblings. Julio and his brother attended the prestigious *Colegio Salesiano Santo Tomás Apóstol*, while his sisters attended the *Colegio de las Marianitas*, both Catholic institutions.

Julio emphasizes that all, but one of his siblings earned a high school diploma (or its equivalent in Ecuador). The only sibling that did not do this was the eldest brother. This sibling left to Guayaquil, the commercial capital of Ecuador in the coastal region, where he was supposed to finish high school. However, he dropped out of school early in the second year and migrated to Venezuela, before his mother. Julio was five or six at the time and doesn't recall much, other than his brother's return, almost 20 years later. Julio explains the context for this migration in a 2011 interview,

*“En esos tiempos, estamos hablando de 40 años atrás, toda la gente inmigraba a Venezuela, no a los Estados Unidos. Ni sabíamos de Estados Unidos todavía, como en los 70's, por ahí. Si, no conocíamos de Estados Unidos porque en Venezuela el Bolívar, en ese tiempo, estaba mas caro que el dólar, entonces toda la gente iba para allá. Y el (mi hermano) fue uno de los primeros que inmigro internacionalmente... Habían ya amigos, o vecinos, que se iban para Venezuela entonces ahí eran los enganches, con amistades. Le decían ‘ven, yo te presto el dinero y vamos! Acá se gana buen dinero.’ Entonces era la manera de engancharse y se llevaban así a la gente a trabajar.”*

*In those times, we're talking about 40 years ago; all the people (in his community) migrated to Venezuela, not yet to the United States. We didn't even know about the United States yet, until the 70's or so. Yes, we didn't know much about the United States because in Venezuela the 'Bolivar' (their currency) was at higher rates than the dollar, so everyone went there. My brother was one of the first to migrate internationally... We had some friends and neighbors who were going to Venezuela who made the arrangements. They said 'come, I will lend you the money and let's go! Over there you can make more money.' And so that was the hook and that is how they would take people to work there."*

Being one of the younger siblings, Julio was not presented with the opportunity to migrate to Venezuela. Julio finished high school in Riobamba and enrolled in the *Universidad Nacional del Chimborazo*. He barely completed two years towards his degree, after which he dropped out to marry his college girlfriend. Now a married man, and with no degree, Julio needed a job to provide for his new family. Seeing a lack of opportunities in Riobamba, he decided to go to the Amazon region, *el Oriente*, where he had heard (from friends and acquaintances) that there were many employment opportunities. He and his wife arrived to a small community called *Cooperativa Nueva Paraíso* to work as a grade school teacher. The school Julio worked in was located halfway between LagoAgrio and Shushufindi, and it serviced around 100 students from the community. The schools were government funded, but since they didn't pay very much, it was up to the school children's parents build the teachers their homes and provided them with daily meals. Describing his new life in the Amazon, Julio said in 2011,

*"Era muy duro porque no había carro y había que entrar caminando 5 o 6 kilómetros. No fue fácil porque era selva, casi camino no hay, carreta no hay. Hay que andar solo a pie. No había luz, y no había servicios básicos... La cooperativa es como un pueblo, como dirían aquí un*

*'village.' Es un pueblo donde todos los colonos, como el oriente esta invadido por colonos, se reúnen y hacen un centro poblado. Como le explico? Forman un pueblo chiquito, donde todos se juntan para hacer escuelas para los niños. Porque necesitan que los niños se preparen y vayan a la escuela... Entonces ahí, las responsabilidades principales son del maestro. Ahí no hay policía, no hay nada. La autoridad mas grade ahí es el maestro. El es al único que lo respetan, de ahí ya no hay respeto. No ve que no hay policía por lo que esta bien lejos de la ciudad, y de la capital (a 12 horas en carro)."*

*"It was very hard (to live there) because we did not have a car and had to enter the forest by foot, almost 5 or 6 kilometers. It was not easy because it was a jungle, there was no path, and there was no road. You had to get around by foot. There was no electricity and there were no basic services... the cooperative was like a town, what you would call here a village. It was a village where the colonizers, because everyone in the amazon was a colonizer, got together to build their kids a school. They needed the kids to go to school and become educated... So there, all of the main responsibilities were delegated to the teachers. There was no police, nothing. The highest authorities there were the teachers. We were the only ones they (the people) respected, no one else was respected. You see, there was no police because we were so far away from the cities and the capital (12 hours away by car)."*

Julio worked there for three years. During the second year, Julio and his wife separated. Julio claims that she missed her family, wasn't suited for the lifestyle life of the Amazon and that they were just too young to make things work. Julio's wife left the Cooperativa early one morning and, as chance would have it, by that very afternoon; Ana (his current wife) had arrived and would be starting her first day of work the following day.

Julio and Ana began dating 8 months later and worked together in the school for an academic year. After Ana completed a year at this school, Julio resigned from his position as teacher to pursue a new opportunity: a life in the United States. In 2011, Julio recalls how he decided to migrate,

*"Yo me acuerdo que yo salí en una navidad y mi padre se había encontrado con un primo que vivía en los Estados Unidos y el le hizo una propuesta. Le dijo, 'Tu no tienes a alguien que quiera irse a los Estados*

*Unidos? Yo tengo un negocio y necesito alguien que me ayude.’ Eso fue el punto principal para que yo me haya venido. Entonces mi papa me comento esa navidad, ‘te quieres ir a los Estados Unidos?’ Bueno, yo dije. Esta bien! Así no mas, no lo pensé dos veces y así comencé el viaje. Puse una renuncia en la escuela donde trabajaba y me vine para acá.”*

*“I remember that I went out (to Riobamba) one Christmas and my father had ran into a cousin who lived in the United States, he made my father an offer. He said, ‘do you have anyone who would want to come to the United States? I have a business and I need someone to help me.” That was the main reason for my having come here. And so, my father told me that Christmas, ‘do you want to go to the United States?’ ‘Alright,’ I said. I will! That was it, I didn’t think it over twice and that’s how I began the trip. I resigned from the school where I worked and I came here.”*

When Julio resigned, his plan was to go back to Riobamba and prepare for the journey, while Ana stayed in Shushufindi, working at the school. However, Ana did not want to stay alone and resigned as well. She left with him to Riobamba and stayed with Julio’s mother while he was on his journey to the US. Ana lived with his mother for 8 months, during which Julio sent money (remittances) to Ana and his mother. In Latin American migration, it is not uncommon for wives of children of migrants to stay in the homes of the migrant’s immediate family, while they make the journey or save money to send for them. Not only is it more cost-effective but also it is culturally acceptable and seen as a good thing, since the wife and children as seen as being “taken care of” in the migrant’s absence.

In addition to sending money to relatives and loved-ones, Julio also had a debt to pay. In order to make the trip to the US, he had to borrow money from another family that had relatives in the US and who had a disposable income to offer.

He recalls his experience during this process in 2011,

*“Llegar a Estados Unidos no ha sido fácil porque uno tiene que vender todo lo que tiene, coger dinero prestado a altos intereses, con dólares que uno nunca ha podido ni ver. Entonces, desde ahí comienza el sufrimiento y martirio para venir a Estados Unidos. Yo cuando vine, me demore 38 días en el camino para llegar. Arriesgando la vida, muchas cosas en verdad que.... muchos detalles que son para escribir un libro... Cruzar todo los países, caminando, en carro, caminando de noche. Luego, hasta casi fuimos secuestrados. En verdad que no es fácil. Por eso cuando yo llegue a los Estados Unidos dije, “ de aquí yo no me regreso, nunca mientras no tenga papeles, y así fue.”*

*“Coming to the United States has not been easy because one has to sell everyone they have, borrow money at very high interest rates, with money you never even get to see. So, from the start there is suffering and pain to get to the United States. When I came, it took me 38 days of traveling to arrive. I risked my life, a lot of things.... So many details to fill a book... Crossing all those countries, walking, by car, walking at night. Then, we were almost even kidnapped. Honestly, it was not easy. That's why when I arrived I said, ‘I am not leaving this place, never, until I have my documents (residence),’ and that's how it was.”*

After the grueling and dangerous journey to the United States, Julio arrived to the Park Slope neighborhood in Brooklyn, NY, on October of 1986. The cousin who originally offered to give him a job in his place of business “disappeared,” as Julio says. They tried to contact him to get the money for the trip but were never able to reach him. Instead, Julio arrived at the home of a different cousin, from his mother’s side of the family. This cousin lived with her husband and they gave Julio a space to place a makeshift bed (of blankets) on the floor behind their couch, which he had to hide every morning before going to work, so as to not “inconvenience” anyone.

Julio’s first job was as a janitor for residential buildings. A few months later, the “lost” cousin reappeared and gave him a job at his place of business, an

Auto Body shop in Brooklyn. Julio lived in these conditions for eight months, until his now wife and brother arrived, making the same trip Julio had months earlier. The three of them lived in his cousin's home and under the same conditions for a few more months. However, Julio did not want to stay there for very long, Julio explains in 2011,

*“Cuando vino mi esposa yo me acuerdo que le dije, ‘aquí no nos vamos a quedar.’ Nosotros no somos personas que hemos estado enseñados a vivir ahí metidos con toda la familia, entonces me conseguí un apartamento y nos mudamos; mi esposa, mi hermano y yo. Y ahí comenzó otro tipo de vida, desde otro punto de vista. Algo muy diferente, tener que nosotros mismos tratar de mantenernos, de conseguir un apartamento, que hay que pagar los biles (the bills), seguíamos aprendiendo. Mientras pasaba el tiempo, seguíamos aprendiendo. Nada ha sido fácil. Hubo un tiempo que hasta tuvimos que recoger botellas en la calle, las cosas que la gente tiraba porque en verdad no había dinero. Íbamos a esas áreas buenas, como Bay Ridge (un barrio rico) donde la gente botaban cosas buenas y recolectábamos para poder tener cosas en el cuarto porque no había dinero para comprarlas. No podíamos ganar mucho dinero, y las deudas encima, era muy difícil.”*

*“When my family came, I remember telling her, ‘he are not going to stay here for long.’ We are the type of people who are not used to living with the entire family, all together, so I got an apartment and we moved out; my wife, my brother and I. Then we started living a whole new life, from a new perspective. It was very different, we had to sustain ourselves, find an apartment, pay the bills, but we were learning. As time went by we learned. Nothing has been easy. There was a time when we even had to collect bottles in the street, and the things peoples threw on the street, because we didn't have much money. We used to go to the richer neighborhoods like Bay Ridge where people threw out nice things (furniture) and we would take them to have something to put in the apartment because we couldn't afford to buy them. We didn't have much money and out debt was still unpaid, is was very hard.”*

During this time, Julio began to work as a taxi driver with the same cousin who owned the body shop. Julio found driving a taxi much more enjoyable than working at the body shop, as this job paid more and allowed him to work more hours, so he decided to remain in this industry. Julio explains,

*“Al año y medio de estar en Brooklyn, un familiar me dijo, ‘acompañame a taxiar (drive taxi), vas a ver que te va a gustar, es bonito.’ Yo me enganche un día con el, de ayudante. El era medio vago y le gustaba que le acompañe. Yo vi que, en un día, el se gana 120 dólares y ahí ya me gusto la plata (risas). Yo dije ahí esta la plata, tengo que aprender, sin licencia y sin nada tengo que aprender. Con el, lado al lado, aprendí a taxiar. Entonces este señor que hacia? Por 20 dólares el me rentaba el carro y yo taxiaba, y el resto era para mi. Así comencé a taxiar, pero no fue fácil tampoco, sin saber ingles, sin saber calles, sin saber nada. Pero yo siempre he estado con mi objetivo de echar para adelante, como sea. Y aprendí así y me quede en el negocio del taxi hasta el día de hoy... Ana también consiguió un trabajo en una factoría, pero por poco tiempo porque trabajando en el taxi se hacia mucho mas dinero. Yo trabajaba 16 o 20 horas al día, y seguido. Me puse una meta; por 7 años voy a trabajar mucho, mucho, mucho, hasta poder estar fuerte económicamente, y, así lo hice. Yo venia a la casa solamente para bañarme y a comer, todo lo demás hacia en el carro, todo, tratando de avanzar, de coleccionar dinero, de pagar las deudas y tratando de ayudar a la familia también. NY).”*

*“About a year and a half after arriving to Brooklyn, my cousin asked me, ‘come with me to drive my taxi, you’ll see how much you like it, its nice.’ So I went with him the next day, as his helper. He was kind of lazy and liked having me come with him. I saw that, one day he made 120 dollars and then I really liked it (laughs). I thought to myself, here is where the money is; I have to learn, without a license of anything y have to learn! With him, side-by-side, I learned how to drive a taxi. So, what did he do? For 20 dollars, he would let me borrow his car and I could work and keep the rest of the money for myself. So that's how I started, but it wasn't easy either, without speaking English or knowing street names an addresses. But I have always had a clear goal, to keep moving forwards, no matter what it takes. So I learned and stuck in that business until this day... Ana also found a job in a factory, but it was for a short time because I made much more money by driving the taxi. I would work for 16 to 20 hours a day, and even more. My goal was to work for seven years, really really really hard, until we were economically strong, and that I did. I would only come home to shower and ear, everything else I did in the car, trying to continue, make money, pay our debts and trying to help our family as well.”*

So far in his life, Julio’s social and family “networks” have helped him in successfully reaching goals and important milestones. As a child and teenager in Ecuador, he was able to obtain a better education, through a rural–urban migration, with the aid of family connections in Alausi and later on in Riobamba.

As a young adult, he found out about a teaching position through friends, and underwent another internal migration within Ecuador into the Amazon and its newly colonized territories. A few years later, he used two main familial networks to get to, and live, in the United States. As Julio continues to work, develop and accomplish some important economic and social goals, we also see how avoiding certain networks have, in his opinion, aided him in achieving these goals. Below Julio describes some of the networks that he avoided while living in the United States,

*“La mentalidad de uno es hacer plata para salir adelante y para comenzar a encajarse en una nueva vida. Porque en verdad esta es una nueva vida y yo la vi desde dos puntos diferentes. Esta lo bueno y esta lo malo. Al conocer el dinero y tener tu carro, escoges lo bueno y lo malo. Yo escogí lo bueno, pero mucha gente (Ecuatoriana) viene y coge lo otro, lo malo. Vienen y se dedican a los vicios, a tomar, a parrandear, entonces así no funciona. Tienes que escoger, yo escogí lo bueno y me ha ido bien... Desde la niñez a uno le han enseñado a trabajar, a estudiar, a echar para adelante, a sobresalir, y a tener sus cosas. Yo, en verdad, me siento como un triunfador, lo cual mucha gente no puede decir. Yo tengo mis dos hermanos que han venido aquí (E.E.U.U.). El uno todavía vive aquí, y el otro se volvió a Ecuador, pero no les ha ido bien. Porque? Porque la persona que viene aquí tiene que tener un objetivo claro de que quiere hacer de su vida, si quiere llegar alto o quiere quedarse allí. Y yo pensé en llegar alto, y llegue, mientras mis hermanos están ahí. No han podido superarse.”*

*“Ones mentality is to make money to move forwards and begin to figure out this new life. Because it really is a new life and I saw that there were two different options. There is the good and there is the bad. When you start making money and you get your own car, you can choose between the good and the bad. I chose the good, but too many people (Ecuadorians) come and choose the opposite, the bad. They come and they pick up vices and start drinking and partying, and things don't work that way. You have to choose, I chose the good and I've had success... From our childhood we've been taught to work, to study, to move forwards, to excel and to have your own things. I, honestly, feel like a champion, which not a lot of people can say. I have two brothers who have come here (USA). One still lives here and the other went back to Ecuador, but neither of them succeeded. Why? Because people that come here have to have a clear objective and idea of what they want to do with their life, whether*

*they want to make it to the top or stay where they are. I wanted to make it to the top, and I did it, while my brothers stayed where they were. They have not been able to progress.”*

Julio criticizes other Ecuadorians, even his own family, for their lifestyle in the United States, particularly criticizing partying and drinking, adding that one must choose between that lifestyle, which he sees as “bad,” or “success” and “making it” in the United States, which he sees as good. Unlike most Ecuadorian families, Julio and his family have limited access to Ecuadorian American associations or cultural organizations. They live in a predominantly African American and Caribbean neighborhood in Brooklyn and rarely frequent the Ecuadorian neighborhoods, groceries or cultural events. Instead they have created new networks, within a community of Caribbean Latinos in a Pentecostal church.

When asked about their social life in the United States, Julio immediately mentions his strong affiliation with the Pentecostal Christian church in Brooklyn, which serves a large Dominican and Caribbean population. This explains the aversion to “drinking” and “partying,” which has been more conducive to achieving some of Julio’s economic goals, allowing him to allocate money and time elsewhere. He says that the church and related events takes up most of his time, as he has become heavily involved with the institution. Historically, Ecuadorians have been largely catholic, with about 95 percent of the population declaring the Roman Catholic faith and only 5 percent protestant of other.<sup>7</sup> The Roman Catholic Church in rural Ecuador has, over the years, allowed for indigenous elements to be incorporated into the religion. In the sierra, especially

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<sup>7</sup>Central Intelligence Agency. The World Fact book. South America: Ecuador: People and Society. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ec.html>

in villages like Guasuntos, where Julio was born, catholic practices center around *fiestas* honoring patron saints. In Guasuntos, August 25<sup>th</sup> is commemorated as the day of the patron saint “San Luís Rey de Francia.” The entire parish engages in parties and celebratory activities from August 18 through the 31<sup>st</sup>, and the activities include; four days of bull fights, community dances, fireworks, soccer games, parades, marches and solemn masses at the local church.<sup>8</sup>

Individuals in the community make religious and economic commitments to the community, in the form of sponsoring the fiestas. Julio and his family were big contributors to these parties, even after they moved to Riobamba. In fact, the only time they returned to Guasuntos was for these parties, which kept them active in the community, and they made sure to sponsor some aspect of it. Julio, himself, once made a promise to donate 10,000 dollars to the festivities in the year 2000. This was a couple of years after arriving to the United States and the gesture was made to show gratitude to God and his support and connection to his community. In the years to follow, and before 2000, Julio and his family converted to Christianity and decided that he should not sponsor the festivities, celebrating a catholic saint.

Their conversion to Protestantism, or as Julio described it “evangelicalism,” is not all that unusual. In the last decades, evangelical protestant missionaries, mainly from North America, have converted many Ecuadorians, particularly in the Cañar, Azuay and Chimborazo provinces. In

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<sup>8</sup> Municipalidad de San Pedro de Alausi. Geografía de la Parroquia de Guasuntos [http://www.municipiodealasi.gob.ec/ciudad/detalle.php?id\\_inf=2&id\\_sec=4](http://www.municipiodealasi.gob.ec/ciudad/detalle.php?id_inf=2&id_sec=4)

Chimborazo, nearly 40 percent of the population was protestant by the 1980's, and during the 1980's and 1990's, the southern sierra contributed to the largest number of Ecuadorian migrants to the United States<sup>9</sup>. With that said, the proportions of Ecuadorians who are catholic or protestant are slightly more equal among Ecuadorians living in the United States. There are no reliable statistics on this subject, but some community members estimate that one-third of Ecuadorian Americans are protestant.

The church Julio and his family attend has provided them with a community, when Julio describes the relationships he has formed there he often refers to his friends there as his "second-family." In general, part of the assimilation that Ecuadorians in the United States experience is not toward mainstream American culture but, rather, toward the Latino-American community. In Julio and his family's case, they have become particularly friendly with a Puerto-Rican family from the church. From personal observations, I have noticed that they disagree on many cultural aspects; for example, they have differing views on proper child-rearing, with Julio firmly believing, and often stating, that they are too lax with their children and should have taught them to speak better Spanish. However, Julio describes how much he likes Puerto-Rican food and how some of their dishes have become a staple in his home.

In March 2012, I was in Brooklyn for a week and had the opportunity to observe these families interact at a dinner in Julio's house. As the guests arrived, the first thing one notices is the way they greet each other. In Ecuador, it is customary to greet one another with a kiss on the cheek and with a formal

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<sup>9</sup> Countries and Their Cultures: Ecuadoran Americans.  
<http://www.everyculture.com/multi/Du-Ha/Ecuadoran-Americans.html#b>

“buenas tardes” or “buenas noches,” something Julio practiced for most of his life. However, as the Puerto–Rican family arrived, Julio greeted them in English, with a simple “hi,” while his wife said “hola nenes” (a term of endearment) to their friend and then gave them a hug. When they came over, Julio became less formal and the conversation is light, they were mostly getting to know the boyfriend of the Puerto–Rican family’s daughter, a man who had recently arrived from the Dominican Republic. Julio was friendly and asked him about his journey to the United States. Julio and his cousin, the more dominant patriarchal figures in the family, monopolized most of the conversation; sharing their migration stories and advice on how to overcome adversity in the United States. While he wasn’t technically a part of their family, he was beginning to enter it and this dinner served as a sort of initiation. By the end of the night, the three older men present had offered the young man help finding a better job, now that he was planning on beginning a family. As one of my final observations for this project, I was witnessing the use of social networks unfold before my very eyes.

Julio currently lives in his own home, a three-story building, in Brooklyn with his family. He is still working at the same car service where he began driving taxies and has moved up quite a bit, as he currently oversees most operations within the office and is the owners right hand man. An entrepreneur by nature, Julio has also engaged in his own business ventures, some successful, some not. However, Julio feels completely satisfied with his “new life” in the United States and looks forward to seeing his family settle here, during our interviews he spoke of the United States very dearly, seeming thankful for all of the opportunities he found here, even if it was often hard to get past certain obstacles. His “American

dream” revolved around economic stability and providing his family with the best, which includes providing the eldest daughter with a college education at a private university. He even ‘joked’ *“de aquí no me regreso ni muerto,” “I won’t be leaving this place even when I am dead.”* Which he meant quite literally, as he and his wife have planned to leave in their will specific instructions not to have their bodies sent back to Ecuador once they pass away, as many Ecuadorians living in the US do.

*“Yo me acuerdo que una vez, ya estando aquí, yo le dije a mi esposa, ‘mira, ahora mismo no te puedo comprar, o llevarte a un restaurante, o comprarte una ropa bonita pero alguna vez, no muy lejana, tendré dinero para que te puedas comprar lo que quieras y puedas entrar donde quieras, sin que nadie te discrimine y sin que nadie nos diga nada.’ Y así fue. Si lo he conseguido.”*

*“I remember once, here in the US, that I told my wife, “look, I can’t buy you things, or take you to a nice restaurant, or buy you nice clothes but someday, not too far from now, I will have money for you to buy whatever you want and you will be able to go wherever you want, without anyone discriminating against you or telling you anything. And that’s how it was, I made it.”*

### **Ana**

Ana was the last of seven children (three females, four males) born to a young family of farmers. She was born in Ungubi, a rural Andean parish 2 hours away from the city of Guaranda, in the province of Bolivar. Her father, a farmer and a respected man in the parish, passed away when Ana was 3 years old, from what she assumes was some form of stomach illness, since he complained of having abdominal pain. Ana recalls a faint memory of her father’s funeral, where she is in her brothers’ arms, watching him cry, as dozens of older women approached them in tears and said *“pobre guagüita, quien va a cuidar de ella,”* *“poor girl, who will take care of her.”*

The women in Ana's memory voice the concerns that the entire family must have felt at her father's deathbed. Who will take care of Ana? Who will take care of the family? While one of the older siblings was married, the rest were still living at home. Ana says that after her father's death, her mother was the ringleader; she made sure that everyone had and fulfilled their responsibilities in her home. The female siblings tended to the animals (livestock) and took care of the home, while the male siblings represented the family in matters concerning their land, profits and any public appearance. The family name would continue to be one of the most respected names in Ungubi.

While she faced some obvious struggles during her childhood, exacerbated by her father's death, Ana recalls her mother telling her to study and to only use her hands for the books, "*esas manitos son para los libros,*" "*those hands should only hold books,*" and would not let her engage in farm work like she did with the other sisters. As the youngest, she was cared for by the older siblings, in particular her brother Raul, who she says became like her own father.

At the age of 12, as most of the better-off girls in rural-communities, Ana was sent off to the city of Chimbo, a forty-five minute car-ride away from Ungubi, where she lived with her Godmother, so that Ana could attend a private high school. In Chimbo, Ana attended an all-girls catholic school and would travel home on weekends, every couple of weeks. She says that she often had to walk to Ungubi and would fear damaging her shoes on the barely paved roads, so she tried to take the bus as often as she could. Her experience with her Godmother, a distant relative, was very pleasant, as her Godmother had two

younger children that Ana helped look after, a role she had little practice in but enjoyed very much.

After living in Chimbo for six years and graduating from high school, Ana moved to Guaranda, the capital of the province of Bolivar, where she completed a three-month pre-collegiate preparatory program. After completing this program, she decided that she would not enroll at the Universidad Central de Guaranda, since the university's main academic programs focused on engineering and she was interested in social sciences.

Ana declared having no interest in returning to her native Ungubi. She says, "*Mami siempre dijo que no se casaran con nadie de por aquí (Ungubi), váyanse lejos y sean alguien,*" "*Mom always told us not to marry anyone from around here (Ungubi), go far away and become someone.*" With this in mind, and now running out of options, Ana followed her eldest brother to LagoAgrio, a jungle town in the Amazon region. He had moved there 4 years prior to work with the oil companies and had the necessary networks to find her a job there.

Ana, very eloquently, explained the historical and social conditions at the time in Ecuador, in a 2011 interview:

*"En Loja, hubo una sequía fatal donde la gente se estaba muriendo del hambre. Sequia por completo! Entonces, la gente de Loja empezó a ir al oriente donde había cantidades inmensas de terrenos, de montañas enteras vacías. La gente, del hambre, empezó a llegar al oriente donde ya estaban los posos petroleros. Como eso era selva, ellos (los petroleros) cavaron los posos y tenían el campo, el monte denso para el petróleo. Pero en vista de la necesidad la gente empezó a parcializar la selva ecuatoriana y a repartir 50 hectáreas por propietario. Imagínate 50 hectáreas! Ponte a pensar, que no harías en 50 hectáreas de terreno?"*

*"In Loja, there was a fatal drought and people were literally starving to death. A complete drought! So, the people of Loja began to go to the Amazon region, where there were enormous amounts of land, entire mountains were unpopulated. The people, out of desperation, moved to the*

*Amazon, where oil extraction had already begun. Since it was just a forest, they (the oil companies) would drill wells and had entire fields for oil operations. Seeing people's need for land, people began to appropriate plots in the amazon and to divide up to 50 hectares per person. Imagine 50 hectares! Think about all that you could do with 50 hectares of free land?*

The eldest brother was the first of Ana's family to travel to the Amazon, a brother and a sister followed shortly after, ending with Ana's arrival in the late 80's. All but Ana still live in the Amazon. Ana further explained that as more people continued to migrate and to claim their 50 hectares of land, small communities began to form. She claims that the small new "farms" were built almost next to each other and, so, for every five families there were around five children. This amounted to at least twenty-five kids for every two hundred and fifty hectares of land. In order to build a school, each community needed at least thirty children. Once there were enough children, schools were formed to provide the children of the new colonizers/migrants with an education.

At the age of 20, Ana signed a contract for her first job at one of these newly formed schools. American Catholic missionaries began the school in the "Cooperativa Las Palmas," and paid the teachers' salaries, while the children's families provided them with housing and meals. School was in session from Tuesday through Saturday, from morning until afternoon, and each "classroom" held three different grade levels, which teachers had to maneuver around in order to teach the classes. A year after opening the school, it was common practice for the school to apply to become part of the Ministerio de Educación (Ministry of Education), under the Ecuadorian government. Once the school was upgraded to a

publicly funded school, Ana was relocated to another recently opened school, north from “Las Palmas” and near the Colombian border.

Ana spent one year at each school, teaching elementary school children and learning how to navigate this complex education system. On the third year, Ana transferred to another school, this one in the “Cooperativa Nuevo Paraiso” in Shushufindi, a better-established jungle–town. Ana worked here for only one academic year, with two other teachers, teaching two grade-levels each. During her 8<sup>th</sup> month of work Ana began dating a colleague, Julio. Ana says that she arrived at this new school on the day that his then-wife had left him and it took a while for them to date because she was a bit skeptical of his status as a divorcee. Her mother had asked her to marry someone outside of Ungubi, but surely she had not meant a recently divorced man. Regardless, after a year of work at the “Nuevo Paraíso” school, Ana and Julio resigned and returned to Riobamba. Julio had received an opportunity to migrate to the United States and Ana had decided to stay with his family while he made the trip and prepared for her to join him there. Ana states that although she was unsure, and a bit uneasy, about taking such a huge risk, the lawlessness in the Amazon helped her realize that the Amazon was not a permanent place for her to live in. During an interview in early 2011, Ana recalls,

*“Como la mayoría de gente allí migraron de muchas partes, pues hasta había gente colombiana, gente que por alguna razón tenía problemas en su país, o por la pobreza o las drogas y por eso esta gente era un poco violenta. Claro, eran mas alegres y mas de fiesta pero eso es un problema en nuestros países, que la gente trabaja de lunes a viernes y el sábado se gastan su salario en las fiestas... Bueno, en una de esas fiestas se armó una pelea y un hombre de la comunidad fue asesinado. Entonces de venganza, la familia de este señor buscó al culpable y cobraron venganza , con sangre. Ya cuando vimos violencia y sangre ya no nos gustó y nos despechamos.”*

*“Since a majority of the people there (in the Amazon) migrated from many place, there were even Colombians, the people there had many reasons for being there, some had some problem in their country, sometimes it was poverty or drugs, and so the people tended to be more violent. Of course, they were partiers and had fun but that is a problem in our countries, people work Monday through Friday and then on Saturday spend all of their salary at the parties... Well, at one of these parties, a fight broke out and a man from the community was assassinated. Seeking revenge, the family of the victim looked for someone to blame and got vengeance, with blood. When we saw violence and blood we didn’t like that place anymore and we became disillusioned.”*

Ana left the Amazon and her job to move to Julio’s mother’s house, in Riobamba, in the Andean province of Chimborazo. She lived here for nine months, waiting for Julio to save up enough money for her to make the trip to the US and join him in Brooklyn, New York. In a 2011 interview, she describes some of her experiences while living at her “mother-in-law’s,”

*“Viví en la casa de mi suegra con sus dos hijos, un muchacho de 18 y una muchacha de 19, yo solo les llevaba unos cuantos años. A mi me quisieron siempre, yo les caía bien y en verdad no hubieron muchos problemas, al menos hasta que empezaron a llegar los dólares, ahí las cosas cambiaron y empezó la envidia y el interés financiero... Pero igual, la comunicación con Julio era escasa. En esos tiempos no todos tenían teléfono, era casi imposible comunicarse con Julio. Había una señora, a una cuadra de la casa, que tenía un teléfono. Entonces ahí nos íbamos a pasar sentadas esperando que llame. Julio decía el sábado a las 4 de la tarde llamo, esperaran mi llamada... Durante ese tiempo, el plan era de yo venirme con mi cuñada y encontrarnos con Julio. Planeábamos viajar juntas y cuidarnos y hasta comprábamos ropa iguales para el viaje. Pero algo sucedió, no se en verdad que fue, ellos lo planearon en familia, pero parecía que le faltó el dinero o algo, no se. Al final, la mama de Julio decidió que mejor iba su hijo, decían que así ir yo iría mejor cuidada*

*porque el era un hombre y pues ya, yo lo que quería era ir a los Estados Unidos, ya no me importaba los detalles.”*

*I lived in my mother-in-laws house with her two teenagers, a young man of 18 and a young woman of 19, I was only a few years older than them. They've always liked me, they were fond of me and there really weren't many problems, until US dollars started arriving, that is when things changed, there was envy and financial interests... Anyway, communication with Julio was scarce. In those days nobody had a telephone, it was almost impossible to get in touch with Julio. There was a neighbor a block away who had a telephone. So we would go to her house and wait there hoping that we would call. Julio would say, 'on Saturday at 4 in the afternoon I will call you, so wait for my call... During that time, the plan was for me to come to the US with my sister-in-law, and we would meet up with Julio. We planned to travel together and take care of each other, we even bought the same clothes for the trip. But something happened, I don't really know what it was, they as a family planned it, but it seems like they didn't have enough money or something, I don't know. In the end, Julio's mother decided that it the son would travel instead, they said that I would be better taken care of because he was a man, and that was it I just wanted to get to the US so I didn't care much about the details.”*

Ana had little say in the logistics of her journey to the US. She and her brother-in-law began their journey to the US by heading to the coastal city of Guayaquil, in the province of Guayas, where they embarked on a plane destined for Panama. This part of the trip was the least risky, as they had obtained a visa and were traveling legally. From Panama on the two would be crossing countries illegally. The rest of their journey was made by car and bus through Guatemala and Mexico, until they reached the Mexican-American border in Tijuana. When asked about specific details and locations Ana was oblivious. She, and the other travelers, weren't exactly informed of their whereabouts but she assumes that since she was in Tijuana, and so the first city they reached in the US must have been San Diego, California. Ana quickly recalls an incident while crossing the border, in an 2011 interview she says,

*“Ya en Tijuana, cruzando a Los Ángeles o San Diego, no se, ya Julio me manda el dinero para que los coyotes nos compren los pasajes de avión y nos manden a Nueva York. Ya, nos compraron los vuelos, y éramos 3 o 4 viajando juntos, y el tipo (el coyote) nos lleva al aeropuerto. Nosotros, contentos practicábamos nuestro inglés, bueno, lo poco que habíamos aprendido en el colegio. ‘Quiero ‘coffee’ con ‘sugar,’ ese en un ‘table’... Bueno, estando en eso, una muchacha, que parece que hablaba un poquito de español, nos dice; ‘Ustedes son inmigrantes, no tienen papeles, ustedes váyanse de aquí que ellos son de migración.’ Entonces yo, me recuerdo que les cogí a los otros y les dije que salgamos porque yo me recuerdo la dirección de la casa donde nos alojamos la noche anterior. Entonces, cogimos el taxi y yo lo dirigí, sin saber ni a donde iba, pero de alguna manera llegamos a la casa. Los dueños de casa estaban asombrados y molestos, porque les toco cambiarnos el vuelo, pero por lo menos llegamos bien a Nueva York.”*

*“Once we were in Tijuana, crossing to Los Angeles or San Diego, I don’t know, Julio sent me the money so that the coyotes (people smugglers) could buy us our plane tickets to send us to New York. So, they buy us the tickets, and it was 3 or 4 of us traveling together, and the coyote takes us to the airport. We were happy and practicing our English, well, the little English we had learned in high school. ‘Quiero ‘coffee’ con ‘sugar,’ ese en un ‘table’... Well, in doing that, a Young woman, who seemed to speak some Spanish, said to us, ‘you are illegal immigrants, you don’t have your papers, you have to go because they are from immigration.’ So, I remember getting the other ones and telling them that we have to leave and that I remembered the address of the house where we had stayed the night before. So, we took a taxi and I guided the driver, without really knowing where we were going, and somehow we made it back to that house. The owners were shocked and angry because they had to get us new flights, but at least we made it to New York safely.”*

Ana and her brother-in-law reached their final destination, Brooklyn, NY, in the beginning of 1989. They lived with Julio, in his cousins’ apartment in the Park Slope neighborhood in Brooklyn, for a short period of time. Julio had been saving up some money for the three of them to move out, and soon enough they had enough to rent their own apartment in another neighborhood. Ana recalls how she found her first job during a 2012 interview;

*“Mi primer trabajo fue en una factoría cerca de mi primer apartamento, haciendo camisetas y shorts baratos, de los que se venden en ese barrio.*

*Este trabajo lo conseguí cuando recién nos mudamos al apartamento. En el apartamento de al lado vivían unas Mexicanas y me le acerque un día a una de ellas para preguntarle si sabía de algún trabajo. Ella fue muy amable y el siguiente día me llevo a donde trabajaba ella, esta factoría. Ahí trabaje unos cuantos meses hasta que esa factoría se mudo a East New York. Entonces, me fui con ellos hasta ahí, a esa lejanía. Pero ahí llegue hasta a ser manager del grupo, porque cuando trabajas bien te van dando mas responsabilidades y te van subiendo de puesto. Pero ya después el dueño empezó a venir solo los fines de semana y poco a poco dejo de pagarnos. Entonces ya deje ese trabajo...Después de esa factoría, conseguí otro trabajo en otra factoría. Este trabajo me gustaba mas, era una factoría de italianos y hacían trajes y abrigos de buena marca. Trabajaba en unos rodillos bien grandes, pegando y forrando ropa. El problema ahí fue que yo ya estaba embarazada. Una muchacha Ecuatoriana me decía que no trabaje mas. Me decía 'la barriga no te crece porque te pasas aplastada contra las maquinas. Tome su consejo y me fui, ahí solo trabaje unos tres meses. Intente en una factoría mas pero con el embarazo solo me pasaba en el baño vomitando, la jefa decía, 'a esta bótenla porque solo me pasa enferma.' En tremendo verano y calor, no había un aire acondicionado en la factoría y con el embarazo y los olores fuertes de los químicos yo no pude mas y tuve que renunciar."*

*My first job was in a factory, near my first apartment, making cheap t-shirts and shorts, the type they sold in that same neighborhood. I got this job when we first moved into the new apartment. Our neighbors were these Mexican women and one day I approached one of them and asked her if she knew of any jobs. She was very friendly and took me to her job the next day, in the factory. I worked there for a few months until the factory relocated to East New York. So then I relocated with them, all the way there. But there I ascended and was even made manager of my group; because when you worked hard they liked to give you more responsibilities and would give you a better job. Soon after that, however, the owner only showed up on weekends and eventually stopped paying us, so I left that job. After that factory I found another job at a better factory. I liked this place much more, it was an Italian factory and they made better quality suits and coats. I worked on large flattening wheels, which glued and sealed the clothes together. The problem there was that by then I was already pregnant. Another Ecuadorian woman told me, 'your stomach isn't growing because you are against the machines all day.' I listened to her and left that job, I only worked there for three months. I tried working one more time during my pregnancy, but I was always sick and my manager would always say, 'fire her she is always sick!' It was summer and with all that heat and no air conditioning in the factory, in addition to the pregnancy and the strong odors from the chemicals they used I just couldn't take it and decided to quit."*

After quitting her job at this last factory, Ana had her first daughter. In an unfortunate turn of events, there was a fire in her apartment during the last months of her pregnancy, leaving the couple, the brother-in-law and soon to be born child homeless. They were provided with federal housing a month later and they lived there until the early 2000's. Ana also had a son four years after her firstborn. After having her children, she has worked sporadically over the years, mainly in cleaning and housekeeping jobs. Her husband's job soon became enough to sustain them and she has stopped working all together.

Ana and her new family lived in the federal housing project until 1997, when she and her two children (then 7 and 3) moved back to Riobamba in Ecuador, while Julio stayed in the United States for work. This small family had now joined the ranks of other immigrants before them, who have been separated because of migration; they were now a transnational family, a family that is dispersed across borders but united by economic and familial ties.

They lived in Riobamba, within walking distance from Julio's sister's houses and other family members, which proved to be a good thing for the children, especially. However, they remained in Ecuador for an unexpected five years, in which Ana had often assumed the role of a single mother. While Julio financially supported her and they weren't willingly separated, but as much as he tried to be involved in the children's lives, the toughest decisions were often left up to her to make. All in all, the children received a private education in Ecuador and were now fully bilingual. The three of them returned to the United States in 2002, where a tough readjustment and culture shock met them as soon as they arrived. However, they overcame some of those obstacles and are now living in

Brooklyn, New York, happily and returning to Ecuador, occasionally, during the summer months.

Ana, previously only a legal residence became a citizen of the United States in 2007, which she had done in order to make travel to and from Ecuador “simpler,” as she wanted to visit her elderly mother in Ungubi. She cheerfully recalls obtaining her citizenship, in a 2012 interview,

*“De todos los logros, este (convertirme en ciudadana americana) ha sido el mayor! Ya, de aquí nadie me saca! ‘Excuse me’ pero de aquí nadie me bota! Te entra una seguridad y ya haces de este tu país, es bonito sentirse de aquí... Yo aquí me quedo, ya cuando los padres no están ya una no quiere estar allí. Yo crecí mas sola e independiente entonces no hay un vinculo o razón para que yo quiera regresar a Ecuador, a que voy a regresar? Quizás porque fui la ultima hija en mi familia o porque ya no tengo padres, pero ya no quiero regresar. De vacaciones tal vez.”*

*Of all the accomplishments, this (becoming a US citizen) has been the most grand! Now, no one can kick me out of here! ‘Excuse me’ but no one can kick me out! You get this sense of security and you make this country your own, it’s nice to feel like you belong here... I will stay here; when your parents are gone you have no reason to want to be back there (Ecuador). I grew up alone and independently, so I don’t have a huge connection or reason to want to return to Ecuador, what will I go back for? Perhaps it is because I was the last daughter born in my family or because my parents are not alive, but I no longer want to go back. Maybe just for a vacation.”*

Ana’s feelings towards naturalization and citizenship are quite different from that of the average Ecuadorian. Only a minority of Ecuadorians living in the United States ever become citizens. Within those Ecuadorians who are eligible to apply for citizenship, no more than 20 percent choose to go through with it. According to Deborah Sontag, of the New York Times, the number for immigrants choosing to naturalize is generally 37 percent. This is partly because the naturalization process can be intimidating, involving a large amounts of paperwork, an English language test, and obscure civics questions that, often

times, the average American does not know. Furthermore, many Ecuadorians see U.S. citizenship as a betrayal of their own country. Recently, Ecuador began to permit expatriates to become citizens of other nations without losing their Ecuadoran citizenship, which may shift Ecuadorian naturalization patterns.

Ana's is obviously glad to be a citizen, however, her reasons were also rooted in a more personal matter. Ana's mother had been chronically ill for a long time, physically weak and spent most of her last years sitting on a chair by the balcony. Ana's rush to become a citizen was partly due to her wanting to spend more time with her mother and not have to worry about paperwork and technicalities during her travel back to Ecuador. Her mother passed away during Ana's visit to Ecuador in 2009. It had been a few years since Ana had returned to Ecuador and she made the trip because she had a feeling that there wasn't much time left for her mother. Ana tells that her mother was sitting in her chair on the balcony of the family house, watching Ana, her brother and some grandchildren chase a chicken to cook for dinner. Ana, no longer used to doing this sort of thing, describes having had some difficulty catching the chicken and how hard her mother laughed at the spectacle. With everyone, including her mother, laughing at her clumsy attempts, Ana got distracted and continued the show. When she looked back at her mother, she had already died, a serene death (of natural causes) in her home, after an afternoon of fun with her long-absent daughter. Ana expressed her gratefulness to have been able to see her mother one last time and to make such fond memories with her during their last few hours together. Julio told me during an interview in 2012, "*La señora (madre de Ana) esperó hasta ver a su hija.*" "*She (Ana's mother) waited to see her daughter.*"

## **Conclusion**

### **Why did Julio and Ana migrate?**

Although they were born in different provinces and different circumstances, Julio and Ana both underwent various types of migrations within their life. As children, they each engaged in rural–urban migrations for the purpose of obtaining better educational opportunities. While education as a factor in migration often classifies individuals as “economic migrants,” this excludes a large number of out–migrants who move for non–work related reasons, such as education, marriage or to accompany other family members (Bilsborrow 1987). Seeking education and better marriage prospects can ultimately be classified as economic reasons. However, the point of this is to consider that there are underlying motives for an individual's reasons to migrate, which are often a result of their social networks and oftentimes, as we see in the case of the informants as children, they did not have much of a say as to whether they would migrate or not.

While I did not discuss this much in the paper, they both also underwent an urban–to–urban migration, an internal migration from one urban area to another. For Julio this resulted in the opportunity to obtain a private education at a prestigious catholic institution and then the chance to enroll in a university. While he did not finish college, the opportunity for better educational and marital prospects were present and eventually led him to a young marriage and a new life in the Amazon.

Their third internal migration, into the new frontier that is the Amazon jungle, was, more than anything, for economic reasons. At the time, their high

school degree did provide them with a higher status; however, returning to their small towns for work was not an option. Taking advantage of the recent oil boom and economic prosperity in the Amazon, they both embarked on this migration into frontier territory. However, their reasons for leaving the Amazon were the most unpredictable, and quite a curious finding. Ana, in particular, seemed the most eager to leave, giving me various reasons, relating to specific incidents, for why she left. In her life history, I discussed the dangers and lawlessness in this region as one of the reasons. However, Ana also recounts that on a trip to Riobamba, to meet Julio's family, one of his nephews made a joke about having a "*primo jibarito*," "*indigenous cousin*," and she said that this was most likely something the child had heard from one of the other family members. As discussed in the first chapters, racial tensions are high in Ecuador and racism and racist language is common in daily speech, even of children. Ana did not like the comment about her having "indigenous children" or her future children being perceived that way, and it made her reconsider whether or not staying there permanently was still a viable option. In Ecuador, such a comparison is an insult; she said if she had stayed in the Amazon and had raised a family there, the rest of the family would have treated her children differently or discriminated against them.

For Ecuadorians, social identity and status are important and play a vital role in their decisions to migrate. Ana's reasons to migrate were more than just economic, her fear of having children who would perhaps be stigmatized influenced her decision to resign, along with Julio. In addition, and in line with migratory research, Ana's many migrations have also been, in part, led by her

desire to marry a better-suited partner than those available in her community. She recalled her mother always advising her and her siblings to “get out of Ungubi, before you end up marrying one of the peasants here.” This aligns with previous research that suggests that economic reasons, at least initially, may not be the ultimate reasons for female’s decisions to migrate.

Regarding the international migration to the United States, while Julio’s family originally proposed the idea of migrating to the United States, they were, of course, saddened by it but they all saw this as an opportunity that should not be wasted. In all of the migrations studied in this study, Julio and Ana’s migration to the United States is the one that, in my opinion, required the most use of social networks in order to help them reach their destination and thrive in it. Beginning with Julio’s initial contacts in the United States, a migration of this magnitude, in terms of length and costs of the trip and the physical, emotional and possibly criminal damages that could have taken place, required for Julio have these networks and that they be reliable. As we observed with his cousin, the man who initially offered to help Julio get to the United States and promised a job, he turned out not be reliable and had no part in getting Julio to the US. In the meantime, however, Julio had already quit his job, as well as Ana, and had moved back to Riobamba to prepare. Had he not had another contact in the United States, he might not have been able to make the trip and would have incurred many unnecessary costs and debt in Ecuador.

Later on we see how their social networks, even those as seemingly insignificant as their Spanish-speaking neighbors are crucial when living in another country, in particular for Ana. Julio may not have had the networks with

many females, which could allow him to find his wife a job, and so it was important for her to establish connections and make good use of them. Ana successfully does this and finds a job near her home. We also see how the avoidance of some of their networks, particularly the Ecuadorian community in Queens, which Julio says contains most of his childhood friends from Guasuntos, may have aided them in reaching many of their economic goals. However, this comes at a cost, as they have assimilated more towards other Latino cultures and have lost much of their connection with and desire to return to Ecuador, their original homeland.

Yet, we see Julio and Ana explore new social networks within the Latino community, particularly in the religious arena, where they find a “second-family” at a Pentecostal church in Brooklyn. This particular network serves a more personal purpose, fulfilling both their spiritual and social lives, rather than increasing their chances for upward mobility or higher status in the community. In addition, it provides them with an opportunity to be active and hold leadership positions within the institution. Ana, in particular is heavily involved with the churches finances and does their accounting, a position she is qualified for, having earned a degree in accounting from a community college in Manhattan, that she cannot exercise elsewhere because of her limited English-speaking abilities.

Growing up, I always asked them why they decided to come to the United States? And as most children of migrants can agree, all migrant parents say that it was to provide us with a better education and more opportunities than they ever had, etc. While that may be true now, and parents may have the best intentions for their children, the real reasons for their migrations lie deep within their own

social, cultural, and familial contexts, even if they themselves don't realize this. The life history method is a very effective tool in unveiling some of these hidden factors and has proven extremely beneficial in enhancing my undergraduate academic research.

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### **Written Summary of Capstone Project**

I became interested in Ecuadorian migration and the socio-cultural factors that play a role in migration due to my personal experiences with transnational migration. My father left Ecuador in 1986, flying out to Panama, and then embarking on a month-long journey through Central America and Mexico, where he finally crossed the border (illegally) into the United States. My mother joined him months later in Brooklyn, New York, where they settled, and where my younger brother and I were born.

Over the last 21 years, I have heard countless stories about this migration, as well the various migrations they underwent within Ecuador. This research project is about national and transnational migration, as experienced by one Andean Ecuadorian family (my family), currently living in the New York Metropolitan area in the United States. Through the collection of their life histories and an analysis of literature on this particular migrant group, I explore the different cultural trends that played a role in their migration from; rural Andean towns to large urban centers, from rural communities and urban centers into the Amazon jungle and their later migration to the United States of America.

Using *Social Network Theory* as an analytical framework, I am focused on these individuals' social networks, as a factor in their internal migration in Ecuador and to the United States, finding that often times, people that are not a part of their closest networks, such as acquaintances, neighbors and distant relatives can play a very influential role in creating the opportunity to migrate, through funding, loans, as well as becoming hosts to the migrants. The use of these social networks in my informants' migration history is extracted from hours of interviews and my personal observations. Their stories are injected into the text and in their own voice, allowing the reader to hear from the migrants themselves and draw further conclusions.

This paper is divided into 6 chapters; the first chapter is an introduction into the informants and my connection to them, the second chapter provides the reader with a profile of Ecuador, focusing mainly on national identity and poverty and inequality in the country, the third and fourth chapters provide a historical review of Ecuadorian internal and international migration, the fifth chapter

contains the life histories of the informants along with my commentary, and the final chapter is a conclusion of my findings.

The process of researching and writing this capstone has expanded my knowledge of migration theory and ethnographic research methods. I find the life history method, in particular, to be efficacious in allowing communication between migrants and scholars, allowing for the researcher to get to know the informant through semi-structured interviews and through observing their realities. In the context of a growing anti-immigration movement in the United States and around the world, I hope that my informants' stories will humanize the issue of migration and will inspire solidarity, sensitizing readers to the migrants' experience, and that this research will provide readers with a better understanding of migration processes.