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## Ecuador's Historical Trajectory: Colonial Legacy and Contemporary Diaspora

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### Abstract

This paper provides a comprehensive overview of Ecuador's historical trajectory, examining the interplay between its colonial legacy and the dynamics of its contemporary diaspora. Tracing Ecuador's development from its pre-Columbian indigenous roots, through the Inca expansion, Spanish conquest, and eventual independence, the study highlights the interconnectedness of South American histories. It further explores the patterns and causes of Ecuadorian migration in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, particularly the shift from the United States to Spain, and analyzes the occupational and social challenges faced by Ecuadorian migrants abroad.

**Keywords:** Ecuador, History, Migration, Spain

### 1. Introduction

The migration of Ecuadorians to Spain constitutes a pivotal episode in the modern histories of both nations, rooted in a complex interplay of colonial legacies, economic imperatives, and shifting immigration regimes. The relationship between Spain and Ecuador dates back to the Spanish conquest of the 1530s, when conquistadores led by Francisco Pizarro subjugated the Inca Empire and established colonial rule over Ecuador, a dominion that persisted until independence in 1822. This shared colonial past fostered enduring linguistic and cultural affinities, which would later facilitate migration flows between the two countries.

Despite these longstanding ties, large-scale Ecuadorian migration to Spain is a late-20th-century phenomenon. Prior to the 1990s, Ecuadorians in Spain numbered only in the hundreds. The dramatic surge in migration from Ecuador to Spain was catalysed by a confluence of factors: Ecuador's severe economic crisis in the late 1990s, restrictive U.S. immigration policies, and Spain's more accessible entry requirements (notably, visa-free tourist entry for Ecuadorians until 2003). These conditions transformed Spain from a marginal destination into the primary locus of Ecuadorian emigration, with annual migration peaking at 150,000 in the early 2000s.

Scholarly analysis identifies five distinct phases in this migration process, each marked by specific demographic, economic, and policy-driven characteristics. The initial phase, pre-1994, saw minimal Ecuadorian presence in Spain. The subsequent period, from the late 1990s through the early 2000s, witnessed an unprecedented mass movement, with migrants drawn from diverse provinces and backgrounds, including urban and indigenous populations. A notable feature of this migration was its gendered composition: women comprised up to 58% of Ecuadorian migrants in 1997, reflecting both the demand for domestic labour in Spain and evolving gender roles in transnational migration. Many of these women entered Spain as tourists, facilitated by Ecuadorian travel agencies, before transitioning into the labour market.

The geographical distribution of Ecuadorian migrants within Spain, their age profiles, and occupational trajectories reveal the multifaceted nature of their integration. Migrants often experienced downward occupational mobility, working in sectors below their educational qualifications, a trend common among Latin American migrants in Europe. Despite these challenges, Ecuadorian migration to Spain has significantly influenced both societies, reshaping demographic patterns, labour markets, and transnational family dynamics.

### **Ecuador: From pre-Hispanic times to Independence**

The study of the Spanish conquest of Ecuador is inherently tied to that of Peru and other South American nations. What is today known as Ecuador was earlier the territory of Northern Audience of Quito (Crain 1990: 44). Before the Spaniards, Ecuador was home to about fifty independent tribes. The Quitus, who centred around Quito, present day capital of Ecuador, were the most prominent tribe. In about 250 A.D, a foreign tribe called Caras, defeated the Quitus and expanded till they reached Quito. They settled for about 1200 years, until they were conquered by the Incas, whose empire after the conquest of Caras, extended vastly from Angas Mayu, that is in present day Columbia to the river Maule in today's Chile (Flores, 1921, p. 7).

The first European to reach Ecuador is said to be Bartolome Ruiz de Estrada. However, Pizarro played an important role in the conquest of Peru and had led the expedition to Ecuador, after he had heard rumours about

huge wealth in the South. Initially, in 1513, Pizarro had accompanied Vasco Núñez de Balboa on an expedition to Panama. However, from 1524-1525, Pizarro on the instructions from the governor of Panama, Pedro Arias de Avila, went on his first voyage to the South (west coast of South America). Pizarro made three voyages, and it was in the third that Pizarro conquered Peru. In his first two voyages, he was in association with a soldier named Diego de Almagro and a priest called Fernando de Luque. However, Pizarro's first voyage, along with his second voyage, from 1526-1528, ended in a failure (Hanratty, 1989, p. 7). It was in the second voyage that Pizarro became acquainted with Bartolome Ruiz de Estrada, who was his marine pilot. Bartolome Ruiz, travelled further south, while Pizarro traversed the Colombian coast and Almagro. On the other hand, Bartolome Ruiz de Estrada, moved south. Ruiz, nonetheless returned and led the expedition to Ecuador, after he had travelled further south and witnessed precious stones and fabrics being traded in Peru. Pizarro, however, sent Almagro to Panama, in order to bring more forces and supplies. On the contrary, Almagro returned to announce that the new governor of Panama wanted the expedition to be ended in order to stop the loss of men and that Pizarro along with his men return to Panamas. Despite these orders, Pizarro, along with thirteen men, decided to move further. In spite of reaching Tumbes (Peru), Pizarro was unable to win the confidence of the governor of Panama. It was while reaching Peru, that Pizarro had landed on Ecuador' (Ballesteros-Gaibrois, 2017). He thus, returned to Spain to personally request King Charles I of Spain to authorise a third voyage.

It was the gold from Tumbes and stories of abundance of wealth in the interiors of South America, as well as the feats of Hernán Cortés in Mexico, that led the king to give permission for Pizarro's third voyage. Along with the permission for the voyage, the king bestowed upon Pizarro the title of governor and captain-general of Peru, a hefty salary, and huge territorial concessions. Moreover, Diego de Almagro and Hernando de Luque were also granted privileges. However, the benefits placed on Almagro were small in comparison with Pizarro. Hernando de Luque was made the Bishop of Tumbes. Pizzaro, before going back to Panama, recruited his family members for the conquest of Peru. From Panama, Pizarro left with 180 men for Peru, and Almagro, stayed back in Panama to gather additional soldiers. It was after 13 days of journeying, that Pizarro, for the second time landed on Ecuador. In Ecuador, they appropriated precious stones, gold and silver, sending them to Panama for utilisation by Almagro. However, despite the conquest of Tumbes (in Peru) being the main objective of Pizarro, he unwillingly had to stay for several months in Ecuador due to ill health (rash of ulcers) and then the battle in Puná. However, on arrival in Tumbes, the conquistadores found that the city was demolished by the Puná warriors and the population had cleared out. The first Spanish colony was in South of Peru, called *San Miguel de Tangarará*. Lieutenant Sebastián de Benalcázar was given the responsibility to develop and guard this new

settlement as a base for Spanish operations. After, leaving the command with Benalcázar, on 24 September 1532, Pizarro and his men departed for Cajamarca, in the north of Peru. It was in 1534, that Benalcázar commanded the forces northwards into Ecuador (Hanratty, 1989, pp. 7-8).

When the news of the arrival of strangers (Spaniards) reached the knowledge of the Inca ruler Huayna Capac, he left for Quito. However, he was unwell and realising that he won't live long, divided his empire among his two sons: Huáscar and Atahualpa. Huáscar, who was the heir-apparent, received the Southern part (capital at Cuzco), while, Atahualpa, became the ruler of Quito. As a result, war broke out between the two brothers and by 1531 Atahualpa became victorious, and reunited the Inca empire. Nonetheless, the Inca empire was weakened by the prolonged struggle (Flores, 1921, pp. 8-9).

It was not unknown to Atahualpa, that the Spanish colonisers had been in Peru for several months, however, despite knowing, it is odd that he did not take any action in order to slaughter them before they could colonise their land. It took Pizarro almost two months to reach Cajamarca. Atahualpa, at that time was resting near Cajamarca, after winning the battle with Huáscar and keeping him as captive in Cuzco. Pizarro, after arriving sent for Atahualpa. With the backing of several troops, Atahualpa went to the central plaza in Cajamarca. However, he was not met by Pizarro but Fray Vicente de Valverde, who was the chaplain (Hanratty 1989: 8-9). This, meeting, has several interpretations. According to one version, Pizarro was aware that his forces did not have a chance against the Inca troops. Thus, he decided to trick them. After, hiding his soldiers around the plaza, Atahualpa, on arrival there, found a priest and interpreter. The instructor, began telling the Inca king about Jesus and the Bible. Then, they handed the Bible to the king. However, Atahualpa, not knowing the significance the Bible had for the Spaniards, threw it on the ground. Thus, giving the conquistadors an excuse to kill the Inca soldiers and capture the king. This decisive slaughter on 16 November 1532 marked the conquest of Peru (Hanratty, 1989, pp. 8-9).

According to Dennis M. Hanratty, Atahualpa, was anxious and was worried that Pizarro might be planning to replace him as the king in favour of Huáscar. Thus, he summoned Huáscar to Cajamarca and ordered his execution along with hundreds of his nearest kin. This went in favour of the Spaniards, and they decided to give Atahualpa the right to instruct his troops from his cell. Rapidly, the Inca empire was being razed to the ground. On the pretext for the release of Atahualpa, Pizarro demanded his cell to be filled with around 4,850 kilograms of gold and 9,700 kilograms of silver. However, instead of freeing him, the Spaniards garrotted him on 29 August 1533. Devoid of leadership, Pizarro and Hernando de Soto, moved forward in the southern direction, capturing Cuzco in 1533. Here, again they looted and plundered for more precious, metals (1989, p. 9).

With the conquest of Peru the Inca Empire came to an end. However, an Indian leader called Rumiñahui, along with his acolytes had come to Quito in 1533 to replace Atahualpa. The nobles in Quito, pleaded Rumiñahui to spare the treasures there, so that they could be used to pay for the freedom of Atahualpa. But all went in vain. Thus, in order to buy the freedom of Atahualpa, the nobles collected their personal wealth and went to hand it to Pizarro. They surrendered this wealth in order to receive the dead body of the chieftain and took it to Quito. On the other hand, Belalcázar had already departed from San Miguel with 140 foot soldiers and a few horses to conquer Ecuador. On this mission he was guided by the Canãri tribe, which was against Rumiñahui. Several other tribes joined in and helped the Spaniards by providing them with supplies and information. It was at the bottom of Mount Chimborazo, near the city of Riobamba, that Lieutenant Sebastián de Benalcázar vanquished the Indian leader Rumiñahui. Rumiñahui fell back to Quito, set ablaze the town and hid the treasures below the ground, escaping to the mountains of Llanganate (Flores, 1921, pp. 9-10).

When in 1533, Belalcázar reached Quito he stood amidst debris. It was mid 1534, in December, that the Spanish established the city of *San Francisco de Quito*. Belalcázar soon went on more conquests in Colombia. In addition to Quito, Belalcázar in 1533, had also founded the city of Guayaquil, which had later been taken over by the local Huancavilca tribesmen. The city again came under the Spanish rule, when in 1537 Francisco de Orellana, put down the native rebellion and restored the city. This city a century later became a primary port for Spain in South America. In the December of 1540, Gonzalo Pizarro, brother of Francisco Pizarro became the captain-general of Quito (Hanratty, 1989, p. 10).

The uprisings for independence in Ecuador was a common sentiment, that had arisen in the rest of Latin America. This, feeling was the culmination of the ideals of Enlightenment, American and French revolutions, the Bourbon reforms (designed to improve colonial administration and to increase the economic output of colonies), economic factors and the conflict between criollo and peninsular Spaniards (Lauderbaugh, 2012, p. 35).

It were the efforts of intellectuals like Espejo and Montúfar, that the first uprising in Quito, took place in 1809, but failed due to lack of support (Flores 1921:16). However, as a result of this outbreak, the *Council of Regency* in Spain authorised an election of members from the colonies to the Cortes at Cádiz. Nearly all of the members that were chosen in the council had participated in the 1809 uprising. These members declared themselves independent of the Spanish government. This was followed by the murder of Count Rúaiz de Castilla, who was a supporter of the Spanish government in Ecuador and held the post of the president of the audiencia of Quito. This, led to the second uprising, between the patriots (supporting the

independence of Ecuador) and royalist (having loyalty to the Spanish crown). Even this uprising failed to secure Ecuador's independence as the Governor Toribio Montes defeated the patriots, and in 1813 the Spanish constitution was accepted. These incidents and uprisings gave impetus to revolutionary movements in the cities of Guayaquil, Ambato and Latacunga under the slogan of liberty. Support for these movements grew and with the assistance of Antonio José de Sucre and a quota of troops under the command of Andrés de Santa Cruz, on 22 May 1822, near Quito, the insurgents became victorious. Two days later the last Spanish president of the Audiencia of Quito, Melchor de Aymeric, surrendered and the independence of the country was secured. Thus, finally ending the Spanish colonial rule in Ecuador (Flores, 1921, pp. 16-19).

### **Ecuadorian Migration to Spain in the 20th Century**

Lorezo Gabrielli notes that Ecuadorian migration to Spain can be categorised into five phases. The first phase was until 1994, second phase was between 1994-1996, the third phase from 1998-2001, fourth phase according to Gómez Ciriano was from 2000 and the fifth phase spanned from 2004-2009 (2015, pp. 9-11).

Before 1994, there was a small community of Ecuadorians around 500, living in Spain. In 1989 their numbers grew to more than 1000 people (Gabrielli, 2015, p. 9). Ecuadorian migration to Spain is said to have become significant from the year 1996. Migration grew subsequently, as in the beginning of 1990s it was less than 5,000 per year. This grew after 2000, to around 150,000 migrants every year. A shift in choice of destination among the Ecuadorian job seekers is reflected by the fact that in 1995, the U.S. attracted the bulk of Ecuadorians, that is, 65 percent. This changed in 2000, when the percentage dropped to 30% for the US, but grew notably for Spain. Thus, 53% Ecuadorians chose Spain as their destination country in 2000. The reason for this shift in the choice of destination from United States to Spain can be traced to the US immigration policy becoming stricter, the economic crisis in Ecuador in the late 1990, Spain being perceived as a developed and stable country and that the cost of an arranged undocumented trip north, was more expensive, around 12,000 dollars as compared to Rather than 3,500 and 4,000 dollars for Spain (Gratton 2007: 586). Additionally, wages in Spain were higher. Gratton (2007) notes that, "Wages were two to three times the Ecuadorian rate, versus four to five times in the United States" (Gratton, 2007, pp. 587). Furthermore, even though Spain showed a high unemployment rate, jobs were available for low skilled workers and women.

Moreover, since Ecuador was a former Spanish colony, visa was not required to enter Spain. However, this was changed in 2003. The signing of an agreement on dual nationality between Spain and Ecuador in 1964, which was effective from 1965-2000 had two advantages. Firstly it allowed

Ecuadorians to take Spanish nationality within 2 years of legal residence in Spain, without losing their Ecuadorian nationality. Secondly, those immigrants who did not obtain Spanish citizenship were given utmost level rights. In application, the agreement guaranteed Ecuadorians priority in the labour market as well as the access to all social and economic rights. All these factors led to the increase in migration towards Spain and a decrease toward the United States (Gabrielli, 2015, p. 10).

What is interesting to note is that women were the foremost emigrants from Ecuador, making up to 58% in 1997. Moreover, 68% of Ecuadorian women were legally residing in Spain in that same year. The areas of emigration from Ecuador reveal that there is a gender balance among the emigrants from Quito and Guayaquil. Emigrants from these cities favoured Spain as a destination country. While, emigration from Cuenca had a higher number of male emigrants, who preferred the U.S (Gratton, 2007, pp. 587-588). However, the gender composition of Ecuadorian emigration to Spain began equilibrating from 2000, despite a slight majority of 51.2% women in 2005 (Gabrielli 2015: 11).

The majority of Ecuadorian immigrants reside in Madrid, followed by Barcelona. In these areas there is not only a prevalence of women that is 54% of the Ecuadorian population, but women here also tend to live alone. On the other hand, in the agricultural region of Murcia, women only comprise 43% of the Ecuadorian population and here men have a tendency to reside alone. Migration to Murcia is by men, who mostly come from the province of Loja, in Ecuador. Initially, people from the rural areas of Ecuador did not migrate internationally. This migration of young, less educated men (80%) from rural areas to Spain began as a consequence of the economic crisis in late 1990s (Gratton, 2007, pp. 588-589).

Ecuadorian immigrants like other immigrants are younger than the Spaniards. In the municipal registers of 2001, about 62% Ecuadorians were between the ages of 15-34, and 10% were under 18 years old. The 2002 statistics show a decrease in the age group between 25-34 years and 15-24 years. But an increase of 9% can be noted among those under 16 years; that is from 10% to 19%. Finally, Ecuadorians born in Spain also grew from 1,837 in 2002 to 15,199 in 2006 (Gabrielli, 2015, p. 11).

Ecuadorian women are concentrated in domestic work, even though they are mostly born in cities in Ecuador (around 70%) and have a much-advanced educational qualification. Fifty-three percent of Ecuadorians had completed high school, and 40% had education above that level. Thus, in Spain, for the Ecuadorians, in order to climb the economic ladder, immigrants had to go down the occupational ladder. Gratton (2007) reveals the occupational difference of Ecuadorians in Ecuador and Spain. He notes that 23% of Ecuadorians who did domestic work in Spain had administrative jobs in Ecuador, while 25% were involved in commercial

activities, 19% in domestic service and 16% had no jobs. However, this downgrading is faced not just by Ecuadorian women, but also men. Demotion is common to all Latin American immigrants but is especially pronounced among Ecuadorians. With regard to job occupation, Ecuadorian men are concentrated in the construction sector, where more than one-third work. Twenty percent are in agriculture and 13% in professional, managerial and technical positions (Gratton, 2007, pp. 589-594).

### **Conclusion:**

Ecuadorian migration to Spain reflects a complex interplay of historical ties, economic pressures, and social change. Originating from a shared colonial past, this migration surged in the late 1990s and early 2000s, driven by Ecuador's economic crisis, restrictive U.S. policies, and Spain's openness to Latin American migrants. Women predominated early flows, responding to demand for domestic labour, while migrants concentrated in urban centers like Madrid and Barcelona.

Despite many migrants' high education levels, downward occupational mobility was common, highlighting integration challenges. This study emphasizes that migration patterns result from both structural forces and individual agency, illustrating how colonial legacies shape contemporary movements and generate new inequalities within the global economy.

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