INDIGENOUS IDENTITY, ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE CONTINUUM OF A NEVER-ENDING PROCESS FOR COMUNEROS OF ST. ELENA, ECUADOR

Vanessa León-León, ESPOL Polytechnic University, Guayaquil, Ecuador.
Dennis Wiedman, Florida International University, Miami, USA.

INTRODUCTION

Academic discussions on collective identity in Latin American Indigenous peoples highlight the intertwined relations influencing the continuous process of identity “construction.” Emphasis on external dimensions structuring collective identity abstract the social group from their own cultural history, narratives, and meanings of their collective identity. This ancestral knowledge consistently influences everyday lived experiences despite external nation state and globalization forces.

CONCLUSIONS

Discussions on identity politics should emphasize the fluidity of cognitive dimensions, such as ancestral knowledge in everyday experiences, in addition to external factors constructing a collective identity. Instead of an ongoing “construction” of identity, original people in the Ecuadorian coast continually shift and adapt their ethnic identity in response to everyday situations and interactions with others. Ancestral knowledge reinforces Indigenous capitalism manifested in everyday productive practices that brings value to communal empowerment rather than individual material gains.

LOCATION

Original people on the Pacific coast north of Santa Elena, Ecuador were not forcibly removed from their original land. Rather, everyday experiences constantly reinforce their attachment to their communally managed territory and resources. For 30 years, tourism businesses integrate them into the global tourism industry bringing people from around the world.

ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge that constitutes a historical accumulation of beliefs and narratives that serves as a reference and experience for the relationship between nature, science, other peoples, and the world.

INDIGENOUS CAPITALISM

The use of ancestral knowledge guiding Indigenous group’s livelihoods while resisting the penetrating capitalist perspective of labor and individual accumulation, which tends to approach the land and culture as a commodity.

METHODS

This research is an ethnographic study conducted between the years 2015 – 2019 in communities of northern Santa Elena, Ecuador that have adopted a tourism-led economy for improving their livelihoods. The study included systematic content analysis of the speeches, archives of the monthly meetings reviewed from the year 2003 through 2017, interviews with local leaders and informal encounters with locals.

REFERENCES


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the comuneros who participated in this research.

CONTACT INFORMATION

León Vanessa: vcleon@espol.edu.ec