From Hungary to Ecuador in the 20th Century

European Immigration to South America and its Modern Implications

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Introduction
In 1918 World War One ended and Europe was in shambles. The Austro-Hungarian Empire, an ally to Germany, was dismantled through the Treaty of Trianon. Millions of ethnic Hungarians were displaced across various borders, without moving, those individuals were under the rule of different, governing nations. As a result, many people left Hungary altogether, most for North America, but some to South America. It is on this premise that this poster was created.

Margrit Hinek
Following the war, Margrit Hinek of Hungary, immigrated to South America. There is no information on her actual journey across the Atlantic, however we do know through a series of letters that she arrived in South America and ultimately settled in Ecuador.

My Work
While I was researching in Hungary on a UWEC International Fellows Program, my brother’s girlfriend, Tamara Espinosa of Houston, originally from Quito, Ecuador, emailed me a series of letters from her great grandmother. She was hoping that I could find a translator who could read Hungarian. Tamara’s family in Ecuador only speaks Spanish today, but with the help of András Bauer of Karoli Gaspar Reform University in Budapest, we were able to translate the letters to English and then to Spanish.

Photo at top-right of poster: The little girl on the bottom-right of the photo is Tamara Espinosa’s grandmother who is still living in Quito, Ecuador today. Her mother is Margit, the author of these letters.

Overview and Letters
Three separate letters, consisting of 27 total pages, spanning over 30 years exist between Margrit in Ecuador and her family back in Hungary. These letters are sad in nature depicting the immense struggles immigrants had living in an entirely new environment. Of the three letters that exist, two were sent to Hungary and the last was sent from Margit’s mother to Ecuador. The first two are dated 1924 and the latter is dated 1957. In 1924, on average it took 1 month for a letter to go one way. The first two letters sent to Hungary convey factual information about Margrit’s life. In the second letter, Margit writes about how she met her German husband.

The letter below, dated 1924, states as follows,

My Sweet Mother! I received your September 30 letter together with the ones from Mr. Wünsch and Aunt Liza. Imagine how happy I was! My husband visiting his sister, I was all alone with my little girl, feeling sad and lonely. But when the letters arrived, it made me so happy that I completely forgot about my loneliness. My husband returned yesterday, but he had to leave again and he won’t return until Monday. He was asked by his brother in law to help install a machine. Lazlo rode over to them on horseback, but now he took the train as that only takes half an hour, while riding takes four. We are having rainy weather. My husband got drenched to the bone on his way home.

Significance
Two major points stem from these letters. First, often European migration in the early 20th century is studied from the United States perspective. Millions of Europeans flooded through the eastern seaboard and as a result, the ethnic makeup of America is significantly a product of these movements of people. However, this story shows that Europeans were immigrating all over the world. European ethnicity exists within South America, and that is often forgotten.
Second, unprecedented in human history, the movement of people across borders today has hit all time highs. Through easier means of transportation, millions of people are leaving and going to new places. My brother’s girlfriend, Tamara Espinosa, moved from Quito, Ecuador to Houston when she was 16. Her great grandmother’s decision to immigrate to Ecuador has had lasting effects. Tamara was raised in a Latino culture that is prevalent in the United States today. The 21st century has become extremely globalized and this story proves just that.

Three continents, over the span of 90 years have connected two completely different families. Not only have families been connected, but various cultures, languages, and ethnicities have all come in to play. The world really is becoming smaller.

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