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# HINTS ON COLOMBIAN CULTURAL PRACTICES

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- ◆ Close taxi doors GENTLY. If you do it gently FIRST and it's a sticky door and it doesn't close properly, THEN you can do it harder. Taxi drivers get angry if you slam their doors.
- ◆ Close house doors gently (esp. other peoples').
- ◆ Slamming something down on the table (other than dominoes) like your water glass or other objects CAN signify that you're very angry.
- ◆ Don't throw something in order to pass it to someone, unless s/he is used to cpter's weird behaviour.
- ◆ **SAVING FACE is very important.** People always allow us to save face. We have to gauge when it's the right time to save theirs. The time we caught the Navy shmoozing with the paramilitaries and we confronted the Navy Major about it - We pushed and pushed but he never admitted it out-right, and he called his underling on the floor and shamed him in front of us, and his underling denied everything, and he knew that we knew that he knew, but he never said anything out-right. Everyone knew everything. People will make it easy for you to save their face if you choose to do it. We probably should have taken a few more opportunities than we did to save legal authority's faces.
- ◆ If you preserve cordiality (even though you know the person is your biggest political enemy and s/he's helping you get kicked out of the country) you still have "grounds" (to maneuver, negotiate, ask "favours"). If you don't preserve cordiality, you have no "grounds."
- ◆ When you visit others, you will probably be offered at least something to drink. If you do not know the person well, and want a friendly relation with them, it is best to accept what they offer. Once you know the people well, you can refuse, but you might explain your reasons ("I'm so full, my stomach's a little sick yadda yadda"). If you know them well and you don't want what they're going to offer, catch them in the act of preparing it and say you don't want any and give your reasons.
- ◆ Hospitality: When the DAS or the Police or the Army come to visit, we keep them at the front door of the house and generally do not invite them in due to security concerns. When friends and acquaintances visit our house, it is important to offer them something to drink. If you don't want visitors to stay too long, don't offer them food. Also, if you want people to leave you can say you're busy, especially to good friends. They'll get the hint. But DON'T do that to them every time.
- ◆ Food vs. Drink. Sharing drinks is an act of politeness that encompasses what you do with your "political and / or social friends" AND your "political enemies". In general the team does not accept food/share a meal with paramilitaries, guerrillas, the military or the Navy. People in the campo have told us that accepting food is a symbol of friendship or can be interpreted as condoning actions.
- ◆ Small talk. Before you start talking about intense or difficult issues, do SMALL TALK: Joke around. ask How's the fishing these days? how's your corn? What's up?
- ◆ Sharing Important Information. Especially in the campo, people share important information by calling a person aside, often to a place where others can see them but not hear them, and giving them the information. When this happens to us, usually the CPT male gets pulled aside, or the CPTer perceived as the strongest leader. Often (not always), the other CPTer comes along to show that we do this stuff together and we share information anyways. We call Colombians aside whenever we need to.
- ◆ Being confident. Apologize occasionally if its necessary but do NOT be apologetic in your general attitude or people will trust you less or think you're weak. Don't highlight your mistakes. If a Colombian NGO is having a rough time, I bet a hundred bucks the way they respond is to put on some big event and sell it as if it's the best thing in town. SELL yourself.

- ◆ Clothing. When bathing in campo, women wear a tee-shirt or tank top and shorts, and men wear shorts. When hanging out in campo, pants or shorts with CPT tee shirt and CPT hat. In Barranca, when hanging around the house– whatever you want. For formal meetings in Barranca, however, nice pants and nice shirt or, a CPT tee-shirt and CPT hat. Colombians tend to dress much nicer than the typical CPTer. In Bogota or Barranca, high level meetings: formal clothes. In Barranca, dancing: little as possible
- ◆ LGBT. There are a few out LGBT people in Barranca. They are under threat, mostly from paramilitaries, because they are LGBT. We have heard that they are sometimes able to pay off paramilitaries to leave them alone, but sometimes they are military targets and sometimes they are tortured and killed. There are gay bars in Barranca.
- ◆ Conflict/ Emotion. Close friends or extreme enemies sometimes show strong emotion, but usually people do not show strong emotion. Keeping outward emotions low key makes things less stressful for everyone.  
It is possible to talk directly with the person you are having a conflict with. For example, one time the team's driver thought a specific CPTer was upset with him because she wanted to leave him behind and drive the boat herself. The driver called her aside and to ask her what was going on. They talked it out.  
It is also okay to handle conflict through a third person. Wait 'til you know people really well and sort of understand their relationships before you go that route, especially if it could be perceived as a criticism.
- ◆ Dating. People (even women, though to a lesser extent) often have multiple sexual partners, sometimes even within the same time frame. This is socially acceptable according to some and tolerated by others.  
Dating starts when people are teenagers.  
Be careful if you date Colombians because you don't know to what extent someone might be connected with an armed group. Definitely consult with team members before dating anyone and review the Amorous Relationship Guidelines in the CPT policy book.
- ◆ In the Cimitarra Valley, some of the men have aggressively flirted with female CPTers, even married ones! One female CPTer said that if she goes back, she will talk to one particular very powerful woman in that area who's involved with the "association" (example of using a third party to deal with "conflict").
- ◆ In general, there are a lot of sexual jokes and some anti-homosexual jokes. I've called some of my Colombian friends on anti-homosexual jokes. They've taken it well. Mostly, sexual jokes are told between men.
- ◆ Dancing does not have to be a big deal. You can go to a club and dance in a very sensuous way with a stranger or a friend without being offensive and without raising expectations of a romantic relationship. Of course, it COULD raise expectations if that was your dance partner's idea to begin with. If you're with a group of Colombian friends dancing, you can dance with a friend whose partner is right there and that's no problem. It's a good, friendly thing to accept lots of offers to dance from lots of different people.