

MARKETING MYSTICISM AND THE PURCHASE OF PILGRIMAGE

THE RISE OF SPIRITUAL TOURISM IN CUSCO AND IQUITOS, PERU

By

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*To my loving mom, Diana  
For all her inspiration and support these 26 years...*

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### ABSTRACT

This thesis presents my findings on the Peruvian spiritual tourism industry in both Cusco and Iquitos, based on six weeks of fieldwork during Summer 2005. New Age and Peruvian spiritual belief systems have converged to form current Andean mystical and Amazonian shamanic practices. Increasing numbers of foreign tourists, whether believers in the New Age or not, are coming to gain a deeper understanding of these spiritual belief systems through participation in sacred rituals and ceremonies. The effects of such tourism are similar to other cultural tourism industries, such as increased competition, matters of authenticity, and performance of culture. Other issues are more specific to the spiritual tourism industry, such as the physical and sexual exploitation of tourists. But there are also positive outcomes of this spiritual interchange, such as individual physical, mental, and emotional healing, and a collective desire to improve world concerns by inspiring ecological and social change.

## PREFACE: AN INTRODUCTION

After food and housing, recreational travel is the third largest household expense (Krotz 1996, cited in Rifkin 2000).<sup>1</sup> Consumers are looking progressively more to gain new cultural experiences, especially across international borders. As the global market has so rapidly expanded, tourism categories have been created to meet the desires of almost any traveler, such as eco-tours, ethno-tours, adventure tours, rural tours, volunteer tours, and political tours. Not surprisingly, people interested in spirituality have also created a market, for what entrepreneurs call esoteric, mystical, or spiritual journeys.

Travel for religious purposes is nothing new; Gilbert Sigaux suggests that sacred pilgrimages form the roots of the modern-day tourism industry (1966). People have made pilgrimages for centuries, the most famous of which are Mecca in Saudi Arabia, the Holy Lands of Israel, and the Japanese Buddhist shrine complex. In the past few years, an escalating interest in New Age religions has rekindled the act of making pilgrimages to traditional sacred sites as well as the lesser-known, non-traditional sites (Verter 2003).

This thesis deals with the contemporary convergence of pilgrimage with the tourism industry and its cultural effects. Spiritual tourism has surfaced in various places all over the world in places deemed sacred by New Age followers (*A Pilgrim's Guide to Planet Earth* 1974). Such sites are important because they are believed to emit a sacred energy that causes physical and emotional healing. Usually visitors to these places engage in ceremonial or meditative practices typical of the region. Some of the most

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to “developed” countries, including the US, Canada, Japan, Australia, Israel, and many European countries.

notable spiritual tourism hotspots are: yoga/meditation tours in India, Tibet, and Nepal, spiritual retreats in Sedona, Arizona, and tours of the ancient sites in Egypt. Foreigners and tour companies have recently popularized Latin America for its spiritual traditions, including Santeria in Cuba, Candomblé in Brazil, peyote tours in Mexico and traditional shamanic healing methods in Guatemala, Ecuador, and Peru.

My interest in spiritual tourism transpired through a previous concern about ecotourism and the sustainability of such practices. Ecotourism promises to support local natural environments, as well as supply human communities with economic opportunities. Its overall objective is to educate others about the importance of the earth while maintaining globally and locally important ecological sites. In practice, however, ecotourism is usually not as sustainable as it promises to be (Arlen 1995; Duffy 2002; Honey 1999; West and Carrier 2004). Foreign tour companies tend to make the most money from such operations, leaving local residents lower paying jobs in maintenance, housekeeping, and tour guiding. Furthermore, due to ecotourism's popularity, its physical impacts have severely damaged the natural environments it intends to sustain. When I began to research spiritual tourism, I wondered if similar issues were present in this industry. If ecotourism could not sustain the environment, what would the effects of spiritual tourism be on local community groups and their sacred traditions?

In June and July of 2005 I traveled to Cusco and Iquitos, Peru to investigate the spiritual tourism industry there (See map, Figure 1.1, page 15). Focusing on the transcultural impacts of spiritual tourism on local and regional communities and on foreign tourists, my fieldwork was guided by the following research questions: Why are

foreigners developing an interest in Peruvian shamanism and learning the spiritual belief systems of indigenous and *mestizo* groups? What are foreigners searching for by participating in traditionally indigenous and *mestizo* ceremonies? How do tourists place value on mystical or shamanic knowledge? What local and regional actors or groups have access to the spiritual tourism industry and who is included or excluded? What sorts of divisions are created within local communities between those who benefit and those who do not? How does the commoditization of ritual and spirituality affect local customs?

My field methods included ethnographic interviews and participant observation. In Cusco I interviewed nine spiritual tourism guides, ceremony leaders, or self-proclaimed shamans, two New Age pilgrims who had come for longer trips focusing on spiritual healing, eleven tourists who participated in various Andean mystic ceremonies, and two Cusqueños who practiced forms of Andean mysticism as part of their everyday practices but who were not involved in spiritual tourism.<sup>2</sup> As a participant observer, I visited various Incan sites, such as Machu Picchu's Temple of the Moon, Ollantaytambo, Písac, and Saqsayhuamán's Temple of the Moon, where many tourists go to feel what they construe as sacred energy coming from the earth or from the ruins themselves. I also participated in a *Pago a la Pachamama* ceremony.

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<sup>2</sup> My subjects' socio-economic backgrounds were quite wide-ranging. Of the guides, leaders, and shamans in Cusco, 6 were Peruvian and 3 were foreign. Of the Peruvians, there were obvious differences in income. For example, one owned a spiritual retreat center in the hills around Cusco while another organized his business in someone else's restaurant and advertised with a homemade sign. Further investigation would be required to know how socio-economic backgrounds might affect one's relationship to spiritual tourism.

In Iquitos, I interviewed four *curanderos* or shamans<sup>3</sup>, three apprentices, fifteen tourists who participated in ceremonies, and four Iquitos locals who had participated in ayahuasca ceremonies. As a participant observer, I engaged in one ayahuasca ceremony and watched two others. I also participated in a *baño de florecimiento*, an outer cleansing of the body involving a water bath with flowers and herbs, and an inner cleansing of the body using a tree resin called Oje from the *Ficus insipida* tree. I attended the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Shamanism Conference from July 16-22 in Iquitos, where over 150 people interested in ayahuasca conjoined to partake in three ayahuasca ceremonies and listen to a variety of talks regarding ayahuasca use.

Throughout my thesis I will refer to a variety of players within the spiritual tourism industry that I would like to define. The word shaman originally referred to healers from indigenous groups in Siberia and Mongolia, however the term now encompasses traditional folk healers from all around the globe. Western definitions of shamanism tend to connect it with entering into trance-like states induced by entheogens or hallucinogenics, meditation, chanting, and/or drumming. Once in this trance, people communicate directly with the spiritual realm (Mircea 1964; Harner 1973). Critics, such as Alice Kehoe, say that New Age culture has appropriated the term to refer to a hybrid system of folk healing with New Age beliefs (2000).

In my fieldwork, I found that spiritual tourism entrepreneurs often used the term shaman when talking to foreigners, however outside the industry people employed the

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<sup>3</sup> In Iquitos, 2 of the shamans I interviewed were Peruvian, one was Ecuadorian, and one was an American who now has Peruvian citizenship. I met a number of other *curanderos* in Iquitos and at the conference, however I was not able to interview them all. Again, further investigation would be necessary to determine a relationship between socio-economic background and shamanic practice.

term *curandero*, *brujo*, *ayahuasquero* (only in Iquitos), or *paqo* (only in Cusco). Agustin Rivas noted the introduction of the word shaman into Amazonian healing rhetoric only after foreigners came to the region (Bear 2000). Before, Rivas said, the term *brujo* was used, which translates in English to “witch.” Because this term has a negative Western connotation, it is hardly mentioned in front of foreign spiritual tourists, unless it refers to someone who utilizes shamanic powers for evil. In this thesis I apply the terminology people used in their interviews or in their advertising of spiritual tours; sometimes I write shaman and other times *curandero*.

Although there is growing literature on cultural tourism, while conducting preliminary research in 2004 and 2005 I only came across a few books academic articles specifically about spiritual tourism (See Sharpley and Sundaram 2005; Stuart 2000). In 2004, I saw a *National Geographic* documentary of two American tourists’ experiences with ayahuasca in Peru, however, I did not find much more than one article and a few brief references in the literature to the Peruvian spiritual tourism industry (*A Pilgrim’s Guide to Planet Earth* 1974; Flores Ochoa 1996; Van den Berghe and Flores Ochoa 2000).

Upon return from Peru, I learned that Dr. Michael Hill completed his dissertation in June 2005 on mystical tourism in Cusco. Skimming through Hill’s dissertation, I have found overlap with my thesis in some sections regarding Cusco, especially in how its mystical reputation has been promoted through nationalist identity construction. I use and expand upon information from Hill’s dissertation in my thesis. Though as a female

researcher and traveler, I believe my experience in Cusco was distinct from Hill's in that many *cusqueños* treated me differently, which I explain in Chapter Four.

In the subsequent chapters, I present the Peruvian spiritual tourism industry in the greater framework of international tourism studies. In the first chapter, I introduce tourism theory and attempt to define contemporary tourism and pilgrimage in broader cultural contexts. The second chapter explains what Peru offers to foreign spiritual tourists. I include brief descriptions of the spiritual ceremonies and speculate as to how Cusco and Iquitos have become popular spiritual tourism destinations. I examine the syncretization of certain Peruvian and New Age belief systems through nationalism, identity construction, and advertising strategies. I continue in the third and fourth chapters by presenting some of the negative side effects of cultural resource use in the spiritual tourism industry. Chapter three provides further insight into issues of authenticity and performing culture to meet tourists' expectations. Chapter four considers the roles of urban legends and sexual exploitation in the industry. Countering the previous two chapters, chapter five poses some positive benefits of the industry for residents of Cusco and Iquitos, for foreign tourists, and, as New Age followers suggest, for the world.



FIGURE 1.1 MAP OF PERU  
Iquitos and Cusco marked by arrows

## CHAPTER ONE: THE TOURIST'S QUEST

Tourism falls into an expansive and ambiguously defined category. In the broadest sense, tourism is the act of traveling from one place to another for a particular purpose, with the intent of returning to one's previous dwelling at some point. Following this definition, tourism can include pilgrimages, business trips, pleasurable relaxing vacations, research expeditions, or a mixture of all these. In this chapter, I focus on contemporary tourism and pilgrimage and argue that the spiritual tourism industry supplies a place of convergence for the two categories. I also discuss pertinent theoretical literature that will illuminate rest of the chapters in this thesis.

### THE PILGRIMAGE-TOURISM SPECTRUM

Contemporary tourism has traditionally fallen under the category of recreation and as such, received little serious academic attention until the 1970s, when the *Annals of Tourism Research* journal was published and Dean MacCannell wrote *The Tourist*, one of the first books to bring 20<sup>th</sup> century tourism into the academic realm. Scholars have increasingly recognized the tourism industry's current role in the globalization process, as it fosters both positive and negative cultural interactions through various contexts. Not only is tourism an amalgamation of marketable activities, but as MacCannell notes, "it is also an ideological framing of history, nature, and tradition, a framing that has the power to reshape culture and nature to its own needs" (1992: 1). As the effects of these interactions have become apparent, so has multi-disciplinary academic interest in the industry, including geography, sociology, anthropology, economics, and ecology.

MacCannell argues that the creation of what Thorstein Veblen (1964) calls the “leisure-class,” or those with a disposable income, fostered an increase in worldwide tourism (1999 [1976]). In addition, with ever-increasing modes of globalization – mainly the Internet and faster, cheaper methods of transportation – it is easier to enter parts of the world that were once completely exotic and remote. Parts of the tourism industry, such as airlines and hotels, have become highly privatized as foreign-owned businesses have emerged in developing countries (Brohman 1996; Desforges 2000; Ladkin and Bertramini 2002). The industry orients itself to different levels of the leisure-class to develop new markets, based on age groups and interests. The modern tourism industry increasingly incorporates forms of recreation aimed towards cultural education and awareness. As a result, new tourist sub-markets abound such as ecotourism, cultural or heritage tourism, volunteer tourism, adventure tourism, and spiritual tourism, claim to have some other purpose than sheer recreation.

Erik Cohen notes that there are two main theoretical opinions in academic literature regarding pilgrimage and tourism (1992: 48). The first is that the tourist experience can be like a pilgrimage (Graburn 1989; MacCannell 1999 [1976]). The second is that pilgrimage and tourism have completely different goals and are therefore essentially dissimilar (Boorstin 1964). Graburn and MacCannell see tourism as a sacred quest for cultural significance, while Boorstin sees tourism as mere pleasure trips. I believe the difference lies in the purpose of the trips and in the definitions of pilgrimage and tourism.

Many scholars have attempted to define pilgrimage, but their definitions almost always refer to Victor Turner's framework of pilgrimage (1973; 1979). Turner's terms "liminality" and "communitas" form an integral part in understanding the process of pilgrimage. Liminality is defined as the time and space in which an event such as pilgrimage occurs. During this time, a person breaks free from customary life habits and occurrences, which characterize Turner's idea of anti-structure. Due to the anti-structural nature of liminality, participants experience more intense emotions than those they experience in everyday life, which fosters a bond between the people involved. This union is what Turner calls communitas, or a sense of commonality among participants who experience the liminal stage together. Of course, communitas can develop without experiencing such a liminal stage, however Turner claims that liminality is the most advantageous situation for such a bond to be built (1973: 216).

Pilgrimage tends to replace many aspects of normal, everyday structure with different experiences and new relationships, or in Turner's terms, anti-structural liminality. Usually it involves hardship and sacrifice, which not only helps to create communitas relations among participants, but also cultivates healing through self-transformation. Because of the anti-structural nature of pilgrimage, the social and political constructions that define everyday life are dropped, and participants often become conscious of the oneness of humankind not only in relation to each other, but also to the world (Turner 1973: 217). This realization can bring about healing, which can be aided by others experiencing communitas, or can also be a solitary accomplishment.

Turner's critics say his terminology is so adaptable that it is not only applicable to pilgrimage but to any number of situations (Torrance 1994: 12), thus many scholars have attempted to further refine the definition of pilgrimage. Winkelman and Dubisch define pilgrimage through its dynamic connection to emotional and physical healing. They suggest that its definition has grown to be so broad, that it is simultaneously part of established religious practices but is also adaptable to a large variety of contemporary spiritual beliefs (2005: ix). Alan Morinis classifies pilgrimage as one's journey towards a physical place or emotional state that represents the ideals that person wishes to achieve (1992: 4). The definition has gone from the traditional definition of traveling to religious holy lands to including less customary and more secular ones, such as traveling to the annual Burning Man Festival in Nevada (Gilmore 2005) or across country on motorcycle to the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Site in Washington, DC (Dubisch 2005); these two examples completely blur the line between what constitutes tourism and what constitutes pilgrimage.

Cohen says that critics of tourism, such as Boorstin, define it as an "aberration" of pilgrimage, "devoid of deeper meaning, and as such, antithetical to the profound spiritual quest of the past epitomized in the ancient traveler or pilgrim" (1992: 48). However, in recent decades, the industry of tourism has expanded from its traditional definition as a secular quest for recreation, relaxation, or pleasure. Many travelers' intents aim towards creating cultural learning experiences and sometimes promoting sustainable and responsible interactions between local host cultures and foreign guests.

As pilgrimage has grown from its traditional roots and as tourism has expanded to include purposes aimed at personal growth and learning, it has become increasingly hard to separate the two. Rather, I believe they form a linear spectrum with tourism on one end and pilgrimage on the other. Spiritual tourism, a marketed form of contemporary pilgrimage, blurs the lines between pilgrimage and tourism, forming a hybrid of the two that lies somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. In this space, aspects of both tourism and pilgrimage merge together and life-changing pilgrimage experiences become marketed in similar ways as other types of tours.

I also believe that a spectrum of traveler types exists, ranging from tourist to pilgrim. The pilgrim end includes travelers who are already students of a particular religion or spiritual system and conduct their journeys to further their knowledge of that particular religion or spiritual practice. The tourist end consists of those who are completely satisfied seeing the tourist sights and attending performances for tourists, and who do not care to search further for an authentic experience. The modern spiritual tourism industry may cater to the entire spectrum of travelers, but it is generally aimed at attracting those who are looking for an authentic connection to local culture.

Higher amounts of disposable income, technological advances in transportation and advertising, and increased access to these advances have amplified the participation and interest in pilgrimage (Dubisch and Winkelman 2005: xvii). There are spiritual tour packages or retreats that are intensively focused on spiritual development. Participants in these tour packages follow a set itinerary planned by a company or a guide, with transportation, lodging, and food arrangements already set up. Spiritual tourism also

allows for tourists who are not involved in one of these tours but who simply want to participate in a particular ceremony or ritual. These ceremonies can be one of the many activities a visitor might do while traveling.

Most of these pilgrim-tours are advertised on the Internet. Anyone with Internet access can find a plethora of information simply by typing “spiritual tour,” “spiritual journey,” or “spiritual quest” into a search engine. Tour companies or operators have already done much of the groundwork by working up an itinerary that is convenient to the traveler’s needs. In an interview with Harold<sup>4</sup>, a US ex-pat who now resides in Iquitos and guides spiritual expeditions, he said, “There’s a way to get the most out of this in the shortest period of time, in other words to optimize your benefits because most people don’t have an enormous amount of time, most people can’t come down here for months, or even a month. Most people who come to work with us, come to us because what we do fits their window of opportunity.”

The sacrifice for a contemporary pilgrimage tour is usually monetary in form; for those with disposable income, this sacrifice is not as great as it would be for someone who barely survives on his income. This is not to say that a traveler cannot have a life-changing experience by traveling in first-class to the destination or by staying in five-star hotels while abroad. However, the journey itself can be significantly easier by having an itinerary already made and by being escorted through the entire journey by another person. Often the journey itself to a sacred site is a large part, sometimes even the main

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<sup>4</sup> Some names have been changed.

part of pilgrimage, due to the economic, physical or emotional hardship and sacrifice that is usually involved (Dubisch and Winkelman 2005).

Many groups that offer pilgrimage-tours describe tourism negatively. Spiritual seekers and companies alike try to separate themselves from other tour groups, and usually use terms such as journey, expedition, or quest instead of tour. While I was doing preliminary background research before traveling to Peru, I came across advertisements on the Internet by searching for “spiritual tour Peru” on google.com. For example:

- “Shamanic Journeys – Magic in the Andes - Unlike other tours to Peru, you will experience sacred sites and power vortexes intimately and profoundly. This is not just a tour, but a spiritual journey.” (<http://www.divinerevelation.org/Peru.html>)
- “*Enter the Mystery* can be like a pilgrimage. It is a tour that makes personal transformation possible. After all, you are about to step away from your usual context and the habits that currently limit your sense of who you are. We encourage you to set your highest intentions -- *and be open to receive even more!*” (<http://www.transformationaltours.com/journey.html>)

Furthermore, in an email communication with Harold, he wrote:

To be clear, we actually don't do ‘tours’ and our work is not, in the usual sense, tourism. People come to our work with clear intention and purpose and not simply for an unusual vacation. Our work is intensive, occasionally rigorous, seriously focused and highly personalized experiential core shamanism conducted in natural and ancient cultural venues with personal healing and spiritual growth the primary goals. Participation is carefully screened for health, medication, and personal intent. Not everyone is accepted for one or more of these reasons. (personal email, 2/17/05).

Distaste for the tourism industry is apparent in the advertising discourse of

spiritual journey operators, which in itself is a form of marketing. The product is intended for those who do not consider themselves tourists or those who seek an authentic spiritual experience. The language also implies that people on sacred journeys have more sense of purpose and also are more informed than a common traveler. MacCannell suggests that disdain towards tourists exists because they are outsiders, and as such bring about “rhetoric of moral superiority.” No one wants to be considered an outsider; hence no one wants to be considered a tourist. Even “tourists dislike tourists,” MacCannell writes (1999 [1976]: 9-10).

In the new realm of spiritual tourism or marketed pilgrimage, foreign participants are searching for authentic experiences that involve local customs, rituals, and ceremonies. Weibel suggests that, “Pilgrimage puts travel to foreign places into a new light, since traveling for religious purposes is often considered more legitimate than simple tourism, and because the act of visiting an exotic sacred site is thought to actually transform the visitor in some way” (2005: 123). By adopting the idea of pilgrimage, people can drop the name of tourist and earn the name of pilgrim, hoping to join in on sacred rituals with local people that have not been set up for tourists. The idea of a pilgrimage opens the door towards an authentic experience – or at least it seems so on the surface. Although pilgrimage implies a direct connection to the authentic lives of the local communities, this too may be an inauthentic act. In Peru for example, the *pago a la Pachamama* ceremony is traditionally only performed in August and sometimes January. (Lee personal interview, 6/28/05). With the influx of tourists wanting to participate in this ceremony, they are conducted at the will of the tourists. Michael Hill interviewed a

Cusqueña woman who as a teenager learned Andean rituals, and was critical of Cusco's growing spiritual tourism industry. She said, "A *pago a la tierra* is a *pago a la tierra*, and you only do it once a year, in August, not ten times in one day for ten groups of tourists. Doing a *pago* takes lots of energy, and so you can't be doing two or three in one day, because you have to communicate and connect yourself with nature" (2005: 28).

### **AUTHENTICITY – THE ULTIMATE GOAL**

MacCannell proposes that authenticity is the primary motivation of travel because tourists want to have a deeper degree of inclusion into the host culture (1999 [1976]: 10). Although many, even most, tourists probably want to have a deeper experience, this is not always the case. Many tourists are completely happy going to a cultural performance, or lying on the beach to relax on a tropical island. It is this type of tourist, the one who is happy accepting a superficial connection to a host culture, who has given tourism a bad name. Others may look for ways to turn their travel into an educational experience; these are the ones who look for authenticity and want to become integrated into local culture.

Definitions for authentic and inauthentic are tricky because they are based on a person or group's subjective opinion of another. Tourists usually come with expectations of the local culture they plan to witness, and have specific ideas about what constitutes an authentic portrayal of that culture. But instead of witnessing genuine traditions that carry cultural meaning, some authors suggest that in reality, activities deemed authentic are often basically touristic performances to entertain their foreign guests (Armstrong 1999; Graburn 1989; MacCannell 1976; Urry 1990).

Based on Erving Goffman's (1959) ideas about front and back regions, MacCannell describes tourist settings as a series of such regions, the front regions being a façade and the back regions being reality. MacCannell views modern-day tourists as "detached from their traditional roots" and likely want truly authentic cultural experiences. MacCannell believes that in most cases, it is hard for the tourist to know whether they are seeing an authentic ceremony (a true back region) or if it is simply staged (a fake front region). Among cultural tourism literature, there are many examples of staged authenticity (Harkin 2003; Nesper 2003; Schutte 2003) and other examples, though few, in which the cultural displays are in fact genuine (Armstrong 1999; de Burlo 1996).

In *Hosts and Guests*, John Urry writes that indigenous cultures must be presented to tourists in a shallow manner because cultures are so complex that someone who comes for even a year would not necessarily understand all aspects of cultural traditions (1989). Sacred places, ceremonies, and customs form intricate spiritual belief systems that are hard to communicate to outsiders. Tours, Urry argues, must be based upon the marketed and oversimplified preconceptions that tourists can understand in a short period of time, forcing an authenticity performed for tourists.

Root identifies the true commodity in the tourism industry as difference (1995: 69). Tourists want to gain different experiences from ones they could have at home. Things and experiences abroad that are similar to a visitor's everyday life are considered inauthentic, and those that are different are more authentic. Difference implies the unknown and tourists who are unfamiliar with their travel destination can easily fall prey

to things that seem different to what they know but are not necessarily authentic. The marketed difference therefore usually portrays the stereotypes that foreigners hold of the culture they are visiting. These stereotypes are advertised and marketed to people, which can also explain the disdain for the tourist who buys into such stereotypes.

Another goal for many international and intercultural travelers is to find the exotic “other,” definable as anything the seeker is not (MacCannell 1999 [1976]; Root 1995). Most travels lead people to different experiences, things they would not normally see or do. People seek to collect experiences, photographs, souvenirs, and other proof of their trip that has taken them out of their everyday life and into a different one. In the case of spiritual tourism, the search is directed towards connecting with the “divine other” (Dubisch and Winkelman 2005: xx) and collecting spiritual experiences and material paraphernalia.

The exoticism of the other, divine or not, has had a number of trans-cultural effects that tourism brings to the forefront. One of the largest effects is the apparent commodification of culture, a popular topic in academic treatment of tourism (Cohen 1988; Medina 2003; Root 1995). The tourism industry has turned everything from the traveling experience, culture, identity, and now spirituality into a commodity tradable for money. The purchase of a particular social experience plays a huge role in the tourist industry (Rifkin 2000; Urry 1990). Advertising has taken on the task of selling the vacation experience rather than simply selling the image of a place, or as Kevin Hannam calls it, experiential marketing (2004).

## **CONCLUSION**

I have provided a theoretical framework for the following discussion of the Peruvian spiritual tourism and its effects on both tourists and on local peoples and cultures. Based on scholars' definitions of pilgrimage and tourism, I have identified spiritual tourism as a place where pilgrimage and tourism converge in the marketplace. I have also shown how spiritual tourism, like other forms of transcultural tourism, deals with issues involved in searching for the "other" such as authenticity and the commodification of difference and of experience.

## CHAPTER TWO: PERU'S OFFERINGS TO THE SPIRITUAL TOURISM INDUSTRY

*Sitting in a large roofed platform on stilts in the Amazon jungle, eight hours away from Iquitos by boat, I found myself in a circle with nine other people: 3 Iquiteños, 1 Australian, 1 Englishman, 2 Germans, and 2 people from the Kawapana village where the ceremony was taking place. Following the instructions of Roxana, the leader of our journey from Iquitos, we were covered in long-sleeves and pants, with either hats or scarves wrapped around our heads. It was completely dark, except for a few small candles set up around a metal pot of brown liquid - the main attraction of this indigenous ceremony.*

*I just met Roxana, a middle-aged female shaman, a couple days before while conducting interviews in Iquitos. She told me about her two teachers, Don Agustin Rivas and Doña Pasha and that she was planning a trip to the jungle to visit Pasha, who she called a "banco" or a bank of traditional curandero knowledge. Roxana originally wanted to visit Rivas, the more internationally famous of her two teachers, but said he was too busy getting ready for a large tour group coming through – "all actors and actresses from Hollywood who pay thousands of dollars to be healed" she claimed. She also mentioned that a week at Rivas' retreat usually costs around \$1000-2000 USD while our three-day excursion cost \$100 each.*

*Due to her location, Pasha sees fewer tourists, and has not set up any kind of retreat center like Don Agustin's. While visitors at a foreign-owned jungle lodge near her*

*community sometimes request an ayahuasca session with her, Pasha mostly relies on Roxana to bring foreign and local patients, who are searching for ayahuasca.*

*To have some knowledge of ayahuasca, the famous – or rather infamous – plant, I felt I should participate in a ceremony. Admittedly, I was quite nervous about it. The effects of the drink were nothing to be laugh at – the native word ayahuasca translates to either “vine of the soul” or “vine of the dead.” Many of my interviewees who drank the extract said they felt their bodies die and their spirits fly into another realm, eventually returning to the body. Others said they saw brightly colored visions of jungle animals, spirits, people, or simply bright patterns or shapes. Pasha’s gentle mannerisms convinced me that I could trust her, but I still had no idea what to expect.*

*On the boat ride to the ceremonial site, I interviewed the other members of our group to find out their reasons for this journey. Paula and Isabel were two young cousins from Iquitos. For Isabel, this was her eighth ceremony, while it was Paula’s first. Paula came for moral support for her cousin, who was looking to free herself from the emotional trauma of her last ayahuasca experience. Isabel said the ayahuasquero abused her, although she did not go into more detail of exactly what happened. The experience caused her much distress, which had affected her personal life, her work, her love life, and her social interactions. By taking ayahuasca again, this time in a more caring atmosphere, she hoped to face the ayahuasquero who had abused her, and get rid of the curse he placed on her.*

*Mark from Australia and Lisa from England were a couple traveling throughout South America. They had tried other plant hallucinogens before such as salvia and*

*participated in drumming sessions, another technique used in New Age healing. They heard great things about ayahuasca and decided to try it in Iquitos. They found Roxana in Iquitos and based on a “good feeling” they had, decided to do a ceremony with her. Neither one related a specific reason for participating in the ceremony except curiosity about feeling the famous effects of ayahuasca.*

*Jan, a 20-year-old man from Germany, had been Roxana’s apprentice for about a year and his training was almost complete. Although he didn’t know the exact number of times he had taken ayahuasca, he estimated somewhere in the hundreds. He helped lead our journey by taking care of logistical issues and also played various roles during the ceremony. His friend Louis had recently arrived from Germany, curious about Jan’s experiences with Amazonian shamanism. Two days prior, Louis tried Ayahuasca for the first time and said he saw many different colors.*

*The night of the ceremony, we sat anxiously as Jan took a shot glass. He opened up a bottle of mixed aguardiente (homemade alcohol) and camphor. Jan lit a mapacho, an 8-inch tobacco cigar, sucked in some of the smoke, which he loudly blew over the shot glass, making a high-pitched whistling sound. This action coupled with a silent blessing was to invoke the jungle spirits. Roxana explained that the alcohol would help the Ayahuasca go down easier and enhance the effects. It came my turn to take the shot; as I swallowed it back, my mouth tingled, like I had taken a swig of menthol.*

*Then Pasha opened the small, metal pot in front of her. The contents were a product of about 10 hours preparation time, which we watched earlier that day. She took the same shot glass, filled it with a murky brown liquid, and performed a blessing ritual*

*with tobacco smoke similar to the one Jan did for the aguardiente. She invoked the spirits of the forest, particularly the spirit of the bat, and asked them to visit us that night and bring helpful visions, especially to us foreigners who had come so far to try ayahuasca. She handed me the first cupful. I tried not to taste the liquid, but the earthy, sour taste lingered on my tongue. After everyone else in the circle had their shot, Pasha took hers, and then blew out the candles.*

*We sat in silence for a long time. The first thing I felt was a tingling sensation throughout my body, especially noticeable in my hands and feet. I became very dizzy and felt I was spinning forward. After a few minutes Pasha began singing ícaros (chanting songs) and rhythmically shaking a bundle of dry leaves called a schacapa, to bring the healing spirits and guide our trips into the spiritual world.*

*I began to feel nauseous and I turned around over the ledge of the platform. The purge, although it does not happen to all takers of Ayahuasca, is a common side effect, and is in no way something of which to be ashamed, in fact it is just the opposite. It is often in the purge that a physical, emotional, or mental ailment leaves the body, and therefore it is quite therapeutic. Once the body rids itself of these negative entities or feelings, the visions often become stronger. While I was purging, Pasha came over with her bundle of dried leaves, shaking them over my head and back and singing ícaros to make me feel better. After purging I saw a few visions and colors, however none were as grandiose as other people's I heard about.*

This ayahuasca ceremony is just one of the many spiritual events offered to tourists in Peru and is usually found only in the Amazon region. Regional beliefs and

practices influence the spiritual tourism options available in those areas. In the following chapter I introduce two case studies of spiritual tourism in Peru, the first in Cusco located in the Andes mountain range, and the second in Iquitos located in the Amazon River basin. I will describe the variety of ceremonies that are offered in Cusco and Iquitos and how each has created its reputation as a spiritual tourist center.

### **PERUVIAN SPIRITUAL TOURISM**

Ever since Hiram Bingham's rediscovery of the Machu Picchu ruins in 1911, increasing numbers of tourists have made Peru their travel destination. With strong ties to a variety of indigenous and *mestizo* cultural traditions throughout the country such as *curanderismo*, Peru has drawn many curious foreigners who search to learn about its spiritual heritage and is among the most popular spiritual tourism destinations in the world. However, Peruvian spiritual tourism is not a new phenomenon, nor is it relegated to only foreigners. Peruvians themselves have been traveling to the coastal regions for centuries to be healed by *curanderos* or those who practice folk medicine (Joralemon and Sharon 1993). Although, the foreign spiritual tourism market is also beginning to grow in these coastal regions, this thesis only discusses foreign tourists within the regions of Cusco and Iquitos, as these cities house the largest concentrations of foreign spiritual tourists in Peru.

The spiritual or mystical belief systems in both the Peruvian Andes and Amazon regions have been constructed through the syncretization of local indigenous and *mestizo* belief systems with the ideals of the New Age movement involving a holistic lifestyle,

integrating the body, mind, and spirit. Many New Age tourists already studied Andean mystical practices or Amazonian shamanism in their home country through workshops or conferences, before leaving for Peru. Their trip then focuses on visiting what are deemed sacred sites, or performing ceremonies with shamans in their regional setting. Other travelers, without such previous study but with New Age inclinations, participate in ceremonies as an introduction to new spiritual belief systems or simply to learn something new. In the case of the latter traveler type, participation in a ceremony may end up changing their lives and encourage a deeper search into such practices. The ceremony might also just be one of many activities they do while on vacation and serves as entertainment. This is especially prominent when hallucinogenic plants are involved in the ceremonies.

Spiritual tourists between the ages of 40-60 tend to pay for a tour package or retreat, which ranges in price from \$1000 – 2000. Younger tourists generally do not participate in such a package, but usually happen upon a locally based entrepreneur who offers ceremonies to tourists. If they come with the intention of participating in ceremonies, they most often search for a practitioner who they trust or deem authentic once they arrive to their destination.

### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF CUSCO, *INDIGENISMO*, AND TOURISM**

Cusco, often referred to as *el ombligo del mundo* or the belly button of the world, is a marketplace of spiritual tourism options. It is considered one of the New Age centers of the world, based on its geographical location and its famous historical ties to the Inca

Empire. Situated at over 11,300 feet above sea level in a valley of the Andean highlands, the natural and human landscapes of the Cusco region are breathtaking. Northeast of the city of Cusco lies the Sacred Valley, cut by the Urubamba River, with steep mountainsides shaped by terraced agriculture. Located within this valley are a number of Incan ruins, including Písaq and Ollantaytambo, leading up to the grand finale of Machu Picchu.

By creating a healthy, charming, indigenous image, the town of Cusco in the Andes highlands has been able to attract increasing numbers of tourists each year. The number of people who visit Cusco is astounding. In the year 2000, the average number of daily arrivals was around 700 people, lower in the off-season, and higher in the peak season, reaching from 2000 to 5000 tourists on any given day (Van den Berghe & Flores Ochoa 2000: 18). Cusco is the gateway to the land of the Inca and in fact, all tourists must pass through the city either to catch the train that goes up to Machu Picchu, or to join a hiking group that will trek up the “Inca Trail” to the ruins.

Cusco’s tourism industry culturally and geographically centers around the Plaza de Armas, the town-square in front of the main Cathedral built by Spaniards in the mid-1500s. The cobblestone streets within a two-mile radius from the Plaza contain a variety of hotels, hostels, restaurants, shops selling local *artesanía* (mostly alpaca products, t-shirts, woven goods, and silver jewelry), and tour companies. Entrepreneurs hire mostly city natives to stand outside these businesses, handing out flyers, pamphlets, menus, and coupons, and trying to lure tourists inside. Mobs of children sell postcards, paintings, and woven finger puppets, offer shoe shines, or simply beg for money. Older street vendors

sell a variety of cheap, small products, or play music for spare change. Women dressed in brightly colored woven outfits, typical of the region, wander around the streets with baby llamas, or carry babies or baby goats in a cloth sling around their torsos. There are so many foreigners crammed into this part of Cusco, it seems as if every other face belongs to a tourist.

A large part of the constructed indigenous image of Cusco is linked to *indigenismo*, an early political movement in Latin America that involved the creation of a strong, national, indigenous identity. The roots of *indigenismo* go back to the 1800s, but in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it became a counter ideology among Latin American leftist intellectuals. *Indigenismo* as defined by Poole, “was a pan-Latin American intellectual movement whose stated goals were to defend the Indian masses and to construct regionalist and nationalist political cultures on the basis of what mestizo, and largely urban intellectuals understood to be...indigenous cultural forms” (1997: 182). According to Van den Berghe and Flores Ochoa, *indigenismo* created a peaceful, glorified, and democratic vision of Peruvian indigenous cultures, while vilifying and slandering the Spanish and European races (2000: 10).

In Peru, Latin American *indigenismo* was funneled into the idea of *incanismo*, a term coined by Flores Ochoa to refer to the specific glorification of the Inca Empire (Van den Berghe and Flores Ochoa 2000: 10). In the late 1800s, prevalent discourse in Peruvian history referred to a weak Incan Empire, in contrast to the strong, more powerful North American and European explorers. In the 1900s, supporters of *indigenismo* in Cusco began to reconstruct a more powerful and exalted Incan image

through literature and art, and later politics (Poole 1997: 182). The movement tended to ignore, however, the recorded violence the Incas employed in their conquests over other groups and in their ritual human sacrifices.

José Uriel García, an important *incanista*, wrote *El Nuevo Indio* (1937) in which he developed the idea of a new indigenous identity, one that would reject the idea of a “pure” indigenous ethnicity and would better represent Cusco’s *mestizaje*. Regarding García’s ideas, Poole suggests, “The ‘New Indian’ intellectuals who would guide this mission were to be forged by melding the telluric (or spiritual) power of the Andean landscape with the intellectual prowess of a *mestizo* avant-garde” (1997: 183). The mystical powers of the landscape, such as mountain gods and coca leaves, became increasingly important in developing a glorified *incanismo* image, through the creation of Incan myths that linked the Inca and their *mestizo* descendents to the spiritual powers of the Earth.

The marketing strategies employed by the Peruvian tourism industry make use of cultural resources in its adoption of *indigenismo* ideals. While most tourists must begin and end their stay in Lima due its international airport, government agencies such as Promperu and MITINCI play prominent roles in actively promoting a variety of tours to the Andean region of Cusco (O’Hare & Barrett 1999: 53). Cusco’s tourism industry is thus much stronger than most other Peruvian provinces. O’Hare and Barrett attribute the high numbers to cultural resources such as archaeological ruins and museums, and to government policies, such as increased infrastructure to these provinces and regional tourism promotion (1999: 53). The construction and glorification of the Incan mystique

has also played a huge part in bringing tourists; Van den Berghe and Flores Ochoa note, “*Incanismo* authenticates the tourism product, and tourist interest validates it” (2000: 23).

### **SPIRITUAL TOURISM IN CUSCO**

Most spiritual practices used for pilgrimage or tourism in the Cusco region are influenced by Andean mysticism, a mixed system of Cusco’s rural, urban, indigenous, *mestizo* beliefs and ceremonies with foreign New Age beliefs. Most ceremonies in which tourists participate incorporate parts of the Andean landscape, the Incan ruins, or local folk methods of healing. New Age themes such as psychic archaeology, past life regressions, entheogen or psychedelic drug use, and chakras have also made their way into spiritual tourism discourse.

Some of these practices come from the traditions of the Inka Q’ero, a relatively isolated group that lives high up in the Andes above Cusco. Tours now bring groups of people to visit the Q’ero communities that are relatively remote and isolated in the mountains. Some Q’eros come to Cusco to perform ceremonies or healings in the city. The Q’eros’ customs have become very important to the spiritual development of the Cusco region, as their historical ties to the region authenticate many of the spiritual ceremonies for which spiritual tourists come.

Lisa, a leader of spiritual ceremonies in Cusco, explains that the Q’ero’s are important to the region because they hold the key to sacred folk healing knowledge. She says:

The Q’eros Indians, who live at 6000 meters, are like the keepers of the living energy. They work directly with spirits and directly with the

energies of the universe. They have absolutely astounded me in situations where medicine couldn't help and the shamans, the Q'ero shamans they can cure people. I've seen it and I've experienced it, and it's very, very real. (Personal interview, 7/2/05)

One spiritual ceremony attributed to the Q'eros and other Andean indigenous groups is the *despacho* or the *pago a la tierra*. It is a ritual that combines some of the sacred features of the Andean landscape - *la Pachamama* (Earth), coca leaves, and the *apus* (mountain spirits). It involves making an offering to the earth, either to express gratitude or to ask for guidance with a particular problem. The offering is usually made up of over 20-50 natural items, such as beans, clay, llama fetuses, sugar, metal, and rice. The most important ingredient is the coca leaf. While preparing the *pago*, three coca leaves, called a *kintu*, are placed between the fingers. There are usually a total of ten *kintus* in one *pago*. Each one is dedicated to a natural spirit, most often an *apu* or another spirit that guards a particular Incan ruin. The spirit is asked to watch over the person offering the *pago* and provide help in gaining health, money, love, or some sort of protection. The offering, once assembled, is given to *Pachamama* at night outdoors, usually in a sacred spot. It is lit on fire and burned until nothing but ashes remain.

Coca leaf readings, similar to Tarot card readings, are also used in Cusco and in many of the smaller towns and villages in the Andean region. The reader uses the leaves to find out a client's past, present, and future welfare. The reader may offer to prepare a *pago a la tierra* if the client wants to ask for help from the *apus* or from the *Pachamama*, regarding something the client hears during his or her coca leaf reading. The reader may also offer a *baño de florecimiento*, a water bath with herbs, flowers, and other plants, to aid in cleansing the body or spirit.

Purification practices are sometimes used at the beginning of other ceremonies and usually involve smoke and feathers. The smoke removes physical or emotional impurities from a person's body. The feathers are used to direct the smoke and the impurities away from the body directed towards an object that can hold on to or destroy these.

Spiritual tourists also visit ancient Incan ruins or temples that are deemed sacred. Believers say these sites hold spiritual energy and have healing power and some parts of the ruins that hold more energy than others. For example, the Temples of the Moon at both Saqsayhuamán and at Machu Picchu are two popular spots for spiritual tourists. Because the ruins of Saqsayhuamán are just outside of Cusco, and since guards do not regulate the Temple of the Moon portion, many groups conduct ceremonies here at night. On a full moon, the Temple is packed with hippie-travelers, musicians, people taking San Pedro, or people meditating (Lee personal interview, 7/3/05, my translation). At Ollantaytambo and Machu Picchu, spiritual tourists touch particular rocks to feel their radiant energy. Many groups work with a specific deity or spirit that is contained within the ruins, and often entail meditation session at the sites that connect people to that spirit. For example, Ollantaytambo is sometimes referred to as the "Sanctuary of the Wind," where the spirit wind lives; it is exceptionally windy at this site.

Other practices brought in by outsiders have found a home in the spiritually welcoming atmosphere of Cusco. Jill from England, for example, owns a bed and breakfast in Cusco and offers spiritual healing tours around Peru. She says:

I'm an energy worker, and a healer. What I use are my traditions, I don't use the traditions here, or work for a shaman here. In my experience it's

very difficult to find a real shaman. [But] there is a huge business here [for that]. My work is very much working with chakras, balancing the chakras, past life regression, and psychic archaeology. Work varies as we go from timework to energy clearance that needs to be done. I work with guides, and they choose what we do. We tune in, we ask the guides, the guardians of the land what they would like us to do, and we ask them what we can do. They are not people guides; they are spirit guides. (personal interview, 6/28/05)

Although these other methods do not originate in Cusco, their incorporation into the Andean mystical belief system demonstrates a syncretization of Peruvian customs with New Age beliefs. Reiki comes from Japan, in which the hands act as channels of sacred energy, which is believed to heal physical and emotional ailments. Past-life regressions are used to discover events that happened in a person's previous life, which might be affecting his or her health. If a person can emotionally work through that event, physical and emotional balance may be restored. Jill's psychic archaeology involves going to various ruins to psychically determine what happened there, by feeling and reading the leftover human energies of the original inhabitants. (Personal interviews: Jill 6/28/05; Steve 6/21/05)

The chakra is arguably the New Age term most often used in Andean mysticism. The word means "wheel" in Sanskrit and is considered a focal point of metaphysical or life energy located within the human body. Each person has seven chakras and each chakra pertains to a bodily organ. Chakras have their own colors, based on the color pattern of a rainbow – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. A chakra is often described as a spinning wheel, made up of a series of cones. When the chakras are imbalanced, some move slower or faster than others. Balancing the chakras may entail methods such as Reiki, past-life regression, San Pedro, or *pagos a la tierra*, to help

restore all chakras to their standard speeds. (Personal interviews: Steve 6/21/05; Kris 7/9/05)

Tourists can easily find entrepreneurs who conduct ayahuasca ceremonies or buy it pre-made at the market. However, this plant is from the Amazon region and is never found growing naturally in the Cusco region. Based on its popularity among tourists in the Amazon, the plant extract is now found in Cusco. However, many people say ayahuasca found in Cusco should not be trusted, and those who perform these ceremonies should not be trusted either. I will explain this plant and its uses in the Iquitos section of this chapter.

## **SAN PEDRO**

Of all the spiritual ceremonies, the most popular among Cusco's tourists involves the ingestion of San Pedro, which contains the hallucinogen mescaline. San Pedro (*Echinopsis pachanoi*) is a cactus that New Age practitioners in Peru have designated one of the master plants and is used in ceremonies to heal physical, psychological, and emotional problems. Cesar, a self-described Peruvian practitioner of Andean mysticism, described the San Pedro plant and its effects as follows:

In reality, the plant is a living being... In mystic culture, we know and have the understanding that the sister plants are alive, they have life like our brother animals. In the entire world there is a brotherhood. Since the plant is alive, when it enters our physical bodies, the first thing it does is get to know us, it explores us, it examines us. It travels throughout the body. When it enters our body we feel it, and we can feel that the plant wants to help us. The effect of this plant is magical. I can say it's magical because really it is a gift from nature... Then you begin to observe things, observe other emotions, understand that nature is alive, to feel that you are a part of nature. You have tranquility and confidence. You can see a vision

in a mountain; you feel you can breathe in the mountains and that you can hear from up to a kilometer away. You can observe things in a level that in our natural, everyday state, we can't observe. We pass into a second level. The first level is where we live our everyday lives and the second is a second dimension, in which we humans cannot see everyday. (personal interview, 6/26/05, my translation)

Although I did not have the opportunity to partake in a San Pedro ceremony myself, I talked at length with a number of tourists who did. I stayed at a hostel aimed towards young travelers that was decorated with a bohemian, New Age feel – lots of paper lanterns, stars, moons, and a large painting of the Sitting Buddha. The owner, a South African woman named Lisa conducted San Pedro ceremonies once or twice a week. On a coffee table in the front room, were two large guest books, filled with people's expressions of gratitude for Lisa's hospitality and for her San Pedro ceremonies.

In the middle of the hostel was a small patio, framed by San Pedro cacti. In the small kitchen, Lisa's helper, Maria often made the extract for the ceremonies. Maria took foot-long pieces of mature San Pedro and sliced off the skins. The resin between the cactus' green skin and its white pulpy center, said Maria, contained the mescaline. She then boiled the skins in a large pot for up to 14 hours, until a slimy liquid was formed. Sometimes, Maria made batches of San Pedro that she would make into powder and package for sale to hostel guests.

Lisa had been working with San Pedro 14-15 years ago when she first came to Cusco with a group of women from South Africa who were studying Kabbalah. After that, she began to bring tours of people from South Africa to Peru. She moved to Cusco in 1997 and set up her hostel and San Pedro ceremony service. Regarding the cactus she says:

San Pedro is a tool to help us reach our goals. We use these medicines, these plants, in a very simple language that everybody can understand. This plant heals us on an emotional level and shows us how to keep ourselves free of negativity on a daily basis. We don't consider it to be a drug because...everybody that takes it has a spiritual experience. You never feel like you're just on a drug. What it's doing is showing us how to be balanced. It's giving us knowledge of how to live in this world on a daily basis without any problems. Of course people can reach that state without these plants but unfortunately most of us can't... I can vouch for everyone else who has drank it that they've also learned something very valuable and that it's changed their lives and that they are happier with the decisions they have taken after having San Pedro. (personal interview, 7/2/05)

At the hostel, I shared a room with Ellen, a young woman from Greece. She participated in two San Pedro ceremonies with Lisa and relayed to me her experiences. The following is based on her narrative testimony:

Ellen returned to our room in the early morning after her twelve hour San Pedro ceremony, which began the previous day. She said she had a wonderful experience and could not wait to participate again. In her group were about nine tourists – seven from Israel and one from Wales. Lisa took them outside the city of Cusco to a spot closer to nature, where she set up a blanket and placed different trinkets on it, like crystals, shells, stones, beads, and leaves. The participants sat in a circle as Lisa described the San Pedro process. She explained that although San Pedro was very gentle, it might make a person want to purge. Lisa ordered that all participants try to keep the San Pedro in their stomachs for at least 45 minutes before purging.

Lisa mixed cupfuls of the slimy San Pedro liquid with some mango juice and handed them out to all the participants. After thanking the spirit of the cactus, they drank it down, and continued to sit in the circle, waiting for it to take effect. Ellen said she was

the first in the group to purge. The circle began to split up as participants went off to be on their own. Lisa tried to work personally with each participant, asking them what kinds of problems they wanted to resolve in their lives. Ellen often complained of lower back pain and wanted to find its cause to rid herself of it. She also expressed her desire to quit smoking cigarettes. Lisa worked on Ellen's back, using Reiki techniques.<sup>5</sup> While everyone was having a good experience, Lisa noted to Ellen that she was maybe the only one taking full advantage of San Pedro's curative properties.

When Ellen returned to the room we shared after the ceremony, she was bubbling over with excitement. She felt she could ask the San Pedro anything, she said, and the answer would just pop into her head. From her experience, Ellen understood that her biggest problems often had the simplest answers, but the hardest part was being willing to accept them.

## **IQUITOS AND TOURISM**

Iquitos, the capital of the district of Loreto in the Peruvian Amazon Basin, is located near the tri-country border of Peru, Colombia and Brazil. With around 400,000 inhabitants, Iquitos is the largest city in the world to which there are no roads. The only ways to arrive are by boat and plane. Although the region has had contact with foreigners since the Spanish explorers came in the late 1500s, much of it has remained relatively underdeveloped compared to Cusco and Lima. The district of Loreto, the largest in Peru,

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<sup>5</sup> See previous section for a description of Reiki techniques.

is separated from the rest of the country by the Andes, making travel to the region difficult.

Over 35 different indigenous groups live in the Peruvian Amazon River Basin, yet they were somewhat ignored by the Peruvian *indigenismo* movement of the 1930s, which focused on the Inca. Until recently, the tourism industry had also ignored the region because it was difficult and expensive to get there. However, as an international thirst for ecotourism and shamanism has grown so has tourism in the Iquitos region, benefiting from its relative seclusion in that visitors feel like they are traveling to uncharted, pristine lands. Although left out of the nationalist *incanismo* mystique, Iquitos and its indigenous and *mestizo* inhabitants have begun to develop their cultural and ecological resources for use in the tourism industry.

Navigating the tropical lowlands to the east of this mountain range, covered by marshy ground, deep rivers, dense flora, and variety of wild animals proved difficult for the Spanish conquistadores of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. While searching for a territory to call their own, they came across many obstacles and conditions that often proved too treacherous for the travelers. In the 1750s, Franciscan, Augustine, and Jesuit missionaries introduced Christianity to numerous indigenous tribes in the region. They set up churches and tried to rid the tribes of their spiritual and superstitious beliefs. While many indigenous people converted to Christianity, they did not necessarily get rid of their traditional belief systems.

The Department of Loreto was established in 1861, around the same time the rubber industry began to take off. As masses of migrants from Europe came to the region

to make money off of the rubber boom, the numbers of indigenous tribal members decreased. Indigenous people were gathered as slaves to work for foreign rubber barons. (Dobkin de Rios, 1972: 50)

In the mid-1900s, the port-town of Iquitos became an important trading post for imported goods. The city was designated a tax-free zone to boost the region's economy by bringing in middle and upper class Peruvian tourists to buy electronics and foreign foods. Today, the downtown portion near Iquito's Plaza de Armas is surrounded by remnants of the rubber boom, such as large mansions decorated with colorful Brazilian tiles and the Iron House, designed by Gustave Eiffel, the same designer of the Eiffel Tower in Paris.

Westerners have searched for indigenous knowledge regarding medicinal plants, especially hallucinogenic ones, for many years. Ayahuasca has a particular fame surrounding it, similar to that of peyote in Mexico and the southwestern US. The first botanist to go into the Peruvian Amazon to collect plants was a Spaniard named Hipólito Ruíz in the late 1700s. A number of European-born researchers followed in various parts of the Amazon region. One of the first to make notes of the Ayahuasca plant was Richard Spruce from Britain, identifying it as the "vine of the soul" in the mid-1800s (Schultes and Raffauf 1992: 8). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a German explorer Theodor Koch-Grünberg looked at the region from an angle that included anthropology, ecology, and geology, making notes of indigenous myths and traditional belief systems, including that surrounding ayahuasca use (Schultes and Raffauf 1992: 10).

Richard Schultes, a botany professor from Harvard, developed a cultural following and interest in hallucinogenic plants in the 1950s. He went to South America to live among various indigenous groups, mostly in the Colombian Amazon. Schultes wrote books, academic papers and is considered one of the experts regarding the use of plants in indigenous spirituality. He also inspired much of the experimentation with psychedelic drugs in the United States in the 1960s with his books and about peyote use in Mexico and later, ayahuasca use. Allen Ginsburg and William Burroughs, influenced by Schultes, looked for ayahuasca and documented their experiences in *Yagé Letters*.

Shamanism has become popular because it often employs the ritualistic use of entheogens (psychedelic plants used for furthering spiritual understanding), and has converged with Western psychedelic drug culture. American psychedelic drug use has steadily increased since the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s in the United States. Experimentation and advertising by famous artists (Andy Warhol), activists (Timothy Leary), and musicians (The Doors and The Beatles) also helped make psychedelics famous. This fame is a significant factor in explaining how and why the spiritual tourism industry has found one of its homes in the Peruvian Amazon.

Another reason is that as an appetite for international ecotourism has grown, Iquitos has become much more heavily visited. Located in the world-famous Amazon jungle, Iquitos is an obvious spot for ecotourism. Numerous jungle lodges are located along the various tributaries of the Amazon, and take tourists out for tours ranging from two days to a month or more. Managers of these jungle lodges regularly offer trips to local communities or hire *curanderos* to conduct ceremonies at the lodges.

## AYAHUASCA

Drinking a hallucinogenic extract is the main event of an ayahuasca ceremony. This extract is made from the ayahuasca vine (*Banisteriopsis caapi*) and chacruna leaves (*Psychotria viridis* or *P. carthaginensis*). The chacruna leaves contain dimethyltryptamine (DMT), a highly potent hallucinogen. The ayahuasca vine contains beta-carbolines such as harmine, harmaline, and tetrahydroharmine, which act as monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs) and allow DMT to become orally active. The mixture of these two plants allows the drinker to see visions, colors, and patterns that have been said to cure physical diseases or provide journeys into a spiritual realm, in which psychological or emotional problems can be healed. Drinking the extract also causes a number of physical side effects, most commonly vomiting and diarrhea. This purging or cleansing of the body is seen as a good sign.

The 8-12 hour long process to make the extract varies between curanderos and in different regions of the Amazon. Ayahuasca use is highly prevalent in Ecuador and Brazil. Each indigenous tribe has various uses and recipes for the Ayahuasca extract. Within tribes, different shamans also prepare their extract differently. They may use different proportions of the plants or different varieties of the ayahuasca vine. These varieties, while botanically similar in nature, are divided into types by color in the Peruvian region. The most commonly used variety is yellow, which is often described as the most gentle. Other types such as black, thunder, red, white, Indian, or rattle ayahuasca plants have been described and are said to produce different effects, and may be used for

specific purposes or types of healing. Other plants are often added to the extract, including plants from the datura family or *mapacho* (tobacco).

I had the opportunity to watch Pasha, the same *curandera* from this chapter's introductory anecdote, prepare the Ayahuasca extract. Her son had collected the plants earlier that morning from the forest. A 45-minute canoe ride followed by a half-hour hike into the forest lead him to a small plot where Pasha's family cultivates ayahuasca, tobacco, and also fruit trees. Around 30-50 fresh cuttings of the woody vine and 2-3 chacruna leaves were collected in the morning that would be used that afternoon to make the extract. Pasha beat the vine between a large wooden club and a log, crushing the vine into a woody pulp. She placed the smashed vines into a 10-gallon pot, along with the chacruna leaves, and several handfuls of tobacco. Pasha then filled the pot with water from the Tahuayo River, which flowed near her house. She placed the pot over an open fire for 4-6 hours of boiling, until most of the water boiled out and only a couple of liters of the ayahuasca extract remained.

### **THE CREATION OF CUSCO AND IQUITOS AS SPIRITUAL TOURISM CENTERS**

Foreign tourists, tourism operators, and the Peruvian government have been the most active in the creation of Cusco and Iquitos as spiritual tourism centers. This construction relies upon nostalgia for the past and a desire for connection to an idealized uncomplicated lifestyle, such as the indigenous, ecologically noble savage is often constructed. Lowenthal writes, "The new visitor is most apt to read the past into the present" (1975: 5), but the government and tour companies have played upon tourists'

desires, aiding tourists in constructing their idealized notions of the past and connections to nature.

As stated earlier, the natural landscapes of the Iquitos and Cusco regions play an important part in their development as spiritual tourism centers. Many rituals, stories, and myths connect local cultures to their surrounding natural landscape. Natural landmarks become memory triggers as they recall human, or in terms of myth, superhuman or deific actions and events. Santos Granero explains, “It is through the legitimizing power that derives from the sacred nature of myths that particular elements of the landscape are historicized in a collective and, to a large extent, permanent manner, thus becoming true topograms and topographs within a sacred geography” (1998: 141). The idea of sacred ecology could also fit within the definition of sacred geography, referring to the spirits believed to live in natural objects that play mystical roles in local folklore, such as legends and sacred rituals or ceremonies. Based in these ideas of sacred geography and sacred ecology, the natural landscapes of both Cusco and Iquitos can be seen as topographical canvasses, upon which cultural meanings are inscribed through myths, legends, and re-telling of histories, which in turn inspire various embodied practices, such as rituals of drinking plant extracts or giving offerings to the earth.

In Cusco, various aspects of nature play specific cultural and spiritual roles. The earth is often referred to as *Pachamama*, in reference to the female deity who guided agriculture and the harvest. Today the term also connotes people who are in tune with the earth, and conjures such stereotypes as Andean indigenous groups who live in harmony with nature. The coca plant also has deific attributes in the Cusco region. Mama Coca

was the goddess of joy and health whose body became the first coca plant.<sup>6</sup> Coca plays an important role in everyday Cusqueño culture – it is used as a tea, prescribed for altitude sickness and digestion problems, and chewed to gain energy. The *apus*, or sacred mountain spirits, also make up the sacred landscape. All around Cusco and the Sacred Valley lie extraordinarily tall mountain peaks, many of which are said to house *apus*. The *apus* are said to protect and guide those who seek their help.

In Iquitos, the animal and plant spirits of the jungle are very important to indigenous belief systems. Jungle animals are said to be protective spirits. Each person has a protective animal spirit, such as a jaguar, butterfly, bat, snake, or dolphin (Personal interview, Roxana, 7/9/05). The plant spirits guide spiritual seekers in their quests. Dedicated seekers may begin a strict diet of different jungle plants, by making an extract of the plant and drinking it. After drinking the plant extract a number of times, the plant may reveal its healing or spiritual properties to its student. The plant will often tell its student the next plant he or she should drink. Because of these properties, many jungle plants are sacred, although a hierarchy exists based on the power of each plant. New Age healers and travelers often refer to ayahuasca as a goddess, teacher, or master plant.

The inscription of spiritual importance into landscape through sacred geography and ecology could also be tied to James Preston's idea of spiritual magnetism, which he defines as "the power of a pilgrimage shrine to attract devotees" (1992: 33). I would expand upon his definition however, from the idea of a shrine to include the magnetism of a particular place or region. Through woven myths, legends, and numerous natural and

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<sup>6</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inca\\_mythology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inca_mythology).

man-made sites throughout Cusco and Iquitos, these cities and larger regions are now constructed by the tourism industry to be spiritual centers. New Age followers call such magnetically powerful regions “power points.” *A Pilgrim’s Guide* offers a definition of these power points: “Where energy meridians cross a powerful spiral of energy is created, a physical and spiritual channel – arising out of the ascending energies of Earth and the descending energies of Heaven” (1974: 67).

In Cusco the sacred geography or spiritual magnetism may be defined by the controversial ceque system of energy or ley lines that is said to exist there. This system, many New Age followers believe, explains how and why certain places in the world become sacred – the places where energy lines converge are said to be geographical and archaeological areas of import around the world. For example, Lisa, the South African woman who leads San Pedro journeys, explains that:

Just being in [Cusco] will affect you on an energetic level, whether you want it to or not. I don’t think there can be many people in the world that have been through here and not had some kind of spiritual awareness inside of them... It is where the energy lines criss-cross. Basically, it is difficult to receive these messages because the vibration is lower [in other areas]. That is the main reason why people come here. (Personal interview, 7/2/05)

For spiritual purposes, these energy lines send vibrations to people who are receptive to them. Many of the ceremonies conducted in the Cusco region are said to connect people to such energy lines and in this way they are healed or receive answers to their problems or questions.

Energy lines are also used to explain why the Inca began their civilization in the region. Many spiritual tour entrepreneurs say that the Inca were drawn by the spiritual

magnetism of the area. A brief version of Cusco's mythical creation follows: The Incan capital was founded by Manco Capac and Mamac Ocllo, two children of Inti, the Sun God. They emerged from the waters of Lake Titicaca, on the southern border of Peru with Bolivia, although sometimes it is said they came from a cave called Pacaritambo. The two had been given a golden rod and were instructed to find a place where the rod would sink completely into the ground, where they would begin a new civilization. Drawn by the spiritual magnetism of the area, when they reached the location of present-day Cusco, the rod sank and there they began the Inca Empire. They built a temple to worship the Sun God, which are the present-day ruins of Q'oricancha in downtown Cusco. From this temple ran 41 ley lines, which became useful in the socio-spatial organization of the Inca Empire (Bauer 1998). According to Zuidema, there were 328 sacred places, both natural and man-made, that were organized by these ceques (1977, cited in Santos-Granero 1998: 143). Each ceque-divided space contained sites that were of importance to different social groups (*ayllus*); one group was assigned to each ceque, which was responsible for maintenance of the sites within that space. In this manner, the sacred topography of the Inca Empire was inscribed into the landscape and communicated socially to other groups.

Therefore while the energy lines drew the Incan empire to this specific region, the Incas themselves were most often credited with the mystical traditions of the area. As Cesar, a self-proclaimed practitioner of Cusqueño spiritual beliefs, told me in an interview:

There is a lot of mystical culture here because our ancestors developed the evolution of spiritual energy. Energy is everything,

everything living, and everything around us. For our ancestors, the Inca, they knew that the energetic force came from the cosmos and also that they had an inner spirituality... Cusco is one of the points of the world that has the most cosmic energy. It is catalogued as one of the points of the energetic triangle of the planet. Tibet and Egypt are the other two points. A large part of the cosmic energy concentrates here, and the Inca were masters of this energy. They built their home simply because the earth here has so much energy. So, many people come looking for exactly that, to learn how to develop spirituality in their life. Other countries are a little more materialistic in the sense that they distance themselves from spirituality, so foreigners come here to gain this knowledge. (Personal interview, 6/26/05, my translation)

#### **NOSTALGIA AND AUTHENTICITY**

Feelings of nostalgia and desires for authentic cultural experiences also account for the development of spiritual tourism in Cusco and Iquitos. Tourism allows people to come into contact with different places and times. Some people consider the past or the primitive to be more authentic (Handler and Saxton 1988, Van Dyke and Alcock 2003). Spiritual tourism offers a connection to ideas of both historical eras and primitive cultures. Nostalgia guides most people's reconstructions of the past. Van Dyke and Alcock argue, "The construction of social memory can involve direct connections to ancestors in a remembered past, or it can involve more general links to a vague mythological antiquity, often based on the re-interpretation of monuments or landscapes" (2003: 3).

For example, while visiting Incan ruins people often make a connection to the past by wondering what life might have been like in pre-Columbian Peru. During the 2000 Millennium celebration in Cusco, Hill witnessed thousands of *mestizo* individuals converged upon the ruins of an Incan fortress at Saqsayhuamán, to feel what they

construed as sacred energy emanating from its giant stone structures. This sacred energy may be seen as analogous to a connection, or nostalgia for the past (Hill 2005: 160). In an interview with Hill regarding the Incan Empire, a tourist guide from Cusco noted how thinking about an Incan past gave him a sense of nostalgia. “I imagine it fantastic, magnificent, magical... No one was hungry, no one was without a roof, everyone worked hard and also had parties and celebrations” (2005: 161).

People searching to find traditional healing practices often turn to indigenous ceremonies, plant healers, or shamans. The preconceived notions of history and these “primitive” healing practices may be argued to be the driving factors of tourism. Companies such as Blue Morpho Tours advertise their services as trips “back in time to a place where traditional beliefs remain intact” ([www.bluemorphotours.com](http://www.bluemorphotours.com)). Despite the interest and comprehension of other cultures that tourists may gain through such tours, Root says that the commoditization of “exotic images links it closely to colonialism and to contemporary systems of economic and cultural domination” (1995: 29).

This quest for history, for “primitiveness,” for authenticity, and for spirituality, suggests that something is missing in tourists’ lives. Maybe tourists are somehow disconnected from their own pasts and must search for it in areas where people claim to be in touch with their ancestral roots. The ceremonies involved in spiritual tours are often linked to cultural traditions that have been around for generations, or at least are marketed as such. In Cusco, the *pago a la Pachamama* ceremony is linked to the indigenous Inka Q’ero group, said to be the direct descendents of the Inca. Ayahuasca ceremonies in Iquitos are linked to a variety of indigenous groups in the region, who have

used the plant for many reasons throughout history. By performing these ceremonies, tourists may feel connected or reconnected to something that has historical origins, that is therefore deemed more authentic than activities tourists find in their homelands.

Indigenous groups evoke images of connections to the earth, and with them a time when people lived in harmony, or at least in touch with, the earth's cycles. Environmental activists and scholars in the field of deep ecology have a number of complaints about the barely existent connection humans presently have with the earth (Devall & Sessions 1985). One is that people are becoming decreasingly dependent on the earth's cycles for survival, as faster shipping methods of agricultural goods ensure delivery of foods from other parts of the world upon which people can sustain themselves. Another complaint is that industry is destroying the natural places of the earth at an ever-alarming pace, as human demand increases for such products as paper, plastics, oil, and other natural resources. Consumerism has robbed many people of their connection and their role in the destruction of the natural world. The enticing notion of somehow giving back or reconnecting with the earth through such traditional rituals as those found in Iquitos and Cusco has attracted many spiritual tourists who are searching for this ideal. However, the lasting effects of participation in such rituals and ceremonies are yet to be seen.

Spiritual pilgrimage represents a search for a connection with nature. As we will see in the following chapter, all the ceremonies in Peru in which spiritual seekers participate are in some way connected with nature or the spirits of nature. Indigenous groups tend to be viewed as living in harmony with nature, as Redford's image of the ecologically noble savage serves to demonstrate (1991). The tourist search for a

reconnection to the earth through participation in ceremonies that involve repayment or receiving from the earth. This could be seen as an extension of the environmental conservation movement as another reason for conservation are the sacred properties of nature.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I have introduced spiritual tourism in Cusco and Iquitos, Peru and described a selection of ceremonies in which tourists can participate. I show that Peruvian and New Age belief systems converge within the spiritual tourism industry, allowing for a wide variety of mystical activities within both regions. I also offer some explanations as to the historical and ecological significance of the regions and how these have aided growth in the tourism sector.

### CHAPTER THREE: THE TOURISM CYCLE

*On the evening of July 16, 2005, about 200 visitors from the U.S., Australia, Europe, and Canada convened in an open-air conference hall in Iquitos, Peru. They had come for The First Annual Shamanism Conference, a weeklong gathering filled with four days of scientifically based academic style presentations and three days of ayahuasca ceremonies with Amazonian curanderos. Most of the curanderos were from Iquitos, although one family – a husband, wife, and son – came from Ecuador.*

*After the welcome, the introductions, and a simple dinner came the main event of the first evening – signing up for ayahuasca sessions with the curanderos. Although originally only two curanderos had been advertised as part of the conference, about 15 or so were added as the numbers of attendees jumped to 200.*

*All 15 curanderos were seated at a long table located on one side of the conference hall. Some were wearing t-shirts, jeans, and baseball caps, while others were dressed with feathers, beads, and face-paint. As Alan, the founder of Soga-del-Alma and the organizer of the conference, presented the curanderos, most simply acknowledged the introduction with a small wave. Others requested a turn at the microphone to say a short speech about their shamanic work or to play an instrument they might use during a ceremony - a sort of self-promotion or advertisement.*

*Despite this brief introduction, the majority of the conference attendees knew nothing about the curanderos, except for the two whose biographies had originally been posted on the Soga-del-Alma website. After the introductions, Alan instructed the*

*audience to sign-up with the shamans they chose for each of the three ceremonies. In race-like fashion, conference attendees scrambled to get a spot with the shamans deemed most authentic in their own eyes.*

*Earlier that week, I had interviewed a few of these shamans around town. One elderly curandero, Don Salomón was participating at the conference. Another curandero in Iquitos described Salomón to me as one of the most honest and best in the city. Salomón had been a well-known curandero since he was in his thirties. Now he was 86 years old, hard to understand, couldn't hear very well, didn't know English, had a lazy eye, and was wearing a button-down shirt with slacks. He hardly fit the image of an authentic curandero. At the end of sign-ups at the conference, Salomón's sheet had around five or six names on it, while others, the ones with feathers and face paint, the ones who had gotten up to play a song for the audience, had completely filled up, ending up with 40 people per ceremony.*

This story demonstrates two of the principle issues spiritual tourism – authenticity and performance. Certain shamans were favored over others, those who gave a believable performance through their dress, their ability to play traditional instruments, or through their online advertising. Based on the shamans' performances, conference attendees assumed they would be a part of a traditional ceremony.

In the following chapter I will expand upon a recurring cycle found in the modern tourism industry. The market for new tourism options has grown increasingly dependent upon cultural resource use. The shift of these non-traditional resources into valued commodities has led to new forms of consumerism that market experiences instead of

more traditional items, furthering the expansion of tourism. As culture becomes increasingly commodified, the search for authenticity becomes stronger, leading to stereotyping by tourists and performance of culture by local residents to meet such stereotypes. Competition between tourism promoters intensifies and encourages ways to authenticate one's product. At first glance, the relationship between tourists and locals seems to be one of pure commodity exchange – tourists come for certain services and locals provide them. However upon closer inspection, the effects of tourism are much more profound because of the cross-cultural interchange it fosters.

#### **DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURE AS A RESOURCE**

Latin America has the highest rate of inequality in the world, exacerbated by nationally and globally produced market policies and reforms (Franko 1999).<sup>7</sup> In response to these high levels of inequality and poverty, many Latin Americans have turned to cultural resource use to earn more income (Rifkin 2000; Yúdice 2003). Cultural resources are based upon the formation of a group's identity, which can help them gain

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<sup>7</sup> Briefly, I want to mention the causes of inequality as it pertains to Latin America. From the late 1930s until the early 1980s, populist governments throughout Latin America began to implement inward-oriented growth strategies known as import substitution industrialization (ISI). ISI promoted the substitution of locally produced goods for imported goods to strengthen internal markets within Latin America. With the intent of industrialization, Latin American countries depended heavily on international loans, which led to high rates of inflation, and soaring levels of unemployment, which in turn caused the debt crisis of the 1980s. (Dornbusch and Edwards 1991)

In the 80s and 90s, neoliberal reforms marked by trade liberalization and privatization were made throughout Latin America in response to the debt crisis, to open international markets and create higher levels of national economic development, stability, and distribution of resources (Walton 2004: 165-183). In terms of economic development, Huber and Solt found that neoliberal policies showed mixed results, with positive growth rates in the first half of the 1990s, followed by declining ones in the second half. Rates of inflation dropped in the 90s, however there were still a number of financial crises throughout Latin America during this decade. In many cases, neoliberal reforms had actually increased levels of poverty and inequality in Latin America over the past 20 years (2004: 150-164).

access to certain goods and services. This identity is formed and promoted by representations of culture, such as art, cuisine, artifacts and ruins, cultural ceremonies and customs, and nationally sponsored events. As culture has taken on new economic and ideological worth, it is increasingly difficult to determine its value because culture is a highly subjective concept. Cultural value can emerge in monetary and political forms, such as social recognition and legitimation. While often used in reference to aesthetic or taste, a set of customs, beliefs, or material characteristics for ethnic, religious, and other social groups, or in terms of human learning and communication patterns, the uses and values of culture as a resource are ultimately determined by the situations and the people involved. Identity creation has played a central role in establishing cultural value, however people will be included or excluded in an identity depending on the desired outcomes or goals.

In no greater economy is the use of culture so important as in the tourism industry. Tourism directly employs culture as a resource and turns these resources into experiential commodities that are exported and sold to tourists. The construction of cultural identity has created a new kind of capitalism that Jeremy Rifkin calls “cultural capitalism.” He explains, “After hundreds of years of converting physical resources into propertied goods, we are now increasingly transforming cultural resources into paid-for personal experiences and entertainments” (2000: 137). Rather than accumulating items for consumption, the new trend is to buy experiences that will develop us as more complete human beings. Purchasing experience is the main impetus in the global tourism market, in which Rifkin’s cultural capitalism has found a perfect niche.

According to the World Tourism Organization, the tourism industry has become the world's third largest in terms of global GNP (Brohman 1996: 52). The World Travel and Tourism Council estimates the industry is more than 11% of the world's GDP. From 1987 to 1998, the economic activity of world travel rose from \$1.9 trillion to \$3.7 trillion, and is estimated to grow to \$7.5 trillion by 2008 (Rifkin 2000: 146). In 1980, 287 million people (6.5% of the population) traveled internationally. Estimates by the World Tourism Organization show that in the year 2020, around 1.6 billion or 20% of the population will travel abroad (Rifkin 2000: 146-147). Within the sector, developing countries account for a quarter of international tourism, a percentage that has been steadily rising since the 1960s. In 1990, tourism in Latin America accounted for 6.4% of the global tourism industry (Brohman 1996: 53). Touted for its ability to ameliorate poor economic conditions in a sustainable manner, many developing countries have turned to tourism to create jobs and increase income levels. In 2000, over 230 million people in the world were working in the tourism industry, 9.9 million of whom live in Latin America.

Despite the fact that most places in Peru are becoming increasingly dependent upon tourism, many Peruvians, tour operators, and even foreign tourists have adopted a negative attitude towards the industry. The effects of tourism in heavily visited places such as Cusco and other stops along the "Gringo Trail" have caused many to question the sustainability of tourism in Peru and the ability of the government to control tour operations. Visitors of Machu Picchu for example, Peru's most popular tourist attraction with over 2,000 visitors a day in peak season, threaten the ruins' maintenance and existence (Hennessy 2003).

The industry is not as sustainable as many economists and developers have claimed; in fact tourism has actually created a whole new set of problems. Brohman attributes these issues to “foreign domination and dependency, socioeconomic and spatial polarization, environmental destruction, cultural alienation, and the loss of social control and identity among host communities” (1996: 48). Take for example the marketing strategies employed by The Commission for the Promotion of Peru (PromPeru). They have made use of cultural resources in their adoption of marketable cultural ideals, mostly based on the *incanismo* movement and Cusco’s history as home to the Inca Empire. Their website ([www.peru.info](http://www.peru.info)) is entitled, “Peru: Land of the Inkas,” and they never miss an opportunity to describe Cusco as “magical.”

But the difference between the glorified or commodified idea of *incanismo* and the actual living conditions of indigenous groups near Cusco are distinct opposites. In the tourist center of Cusco near the Plaza de Armas numerous indigenous people compete with others to sell their wares, or dress in traditional Andean attire, dragging around llamas for tourists who may snap a photo for a small fee, or simply beg for a few *soles*, the Peruvian currency. As one leaves the central part of the city and climbs higher into the surrounding hillsides, where the poorer neighborhoods are located and where the majority of Cusqueños live, one sees the small mud-brick houses, most without heat, and some without electricity or running water. Although Peru economically ranks in the top half of Latin American countries in per capita income (\$1870 in 2002<sup>8</sup>), the average per capita income of Cusco falls much lower than this national average, placing Cusco

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.nationmaster.com/country/pe/Economy>; from CIA Factbook, figures 2002-03.

among the ranks of some of the poorest Latin American cities (Van den Berghe & Flores Ochoa 2000: 9).

Why does the cultural capital of Peru, a city swimming in tourist dollars due to its popularity with travelers visiting Latin America, have one of the region's lowest incomes? One explanation for this irony is that the bulk of the money earned from Cuzco's tourism is "leaked" to outsiders leaving very little for the local residents (Rifkin 2000: 151). Leakage is defined as money gained that quickly leaves the country. The tourist attractions and services that bring in the most money are usually connected to international companies, and sometimes to national companies located in other parts of the country, most often the capital city. These companies take the majority of the profit, and do not incorporate it back into the local economy. Kreg Lindberg, a tourism analyst, says that leakage in developing countries is much higher than in others and roughly around 55% of all profits leak out to foreign companies (Rifkin 2000: 151).

For example, the profits from PeruRail S.A., the company that operates the only tourist trains to Machu Picchu, do not stay within Cusco. PeruRail S.A. is joint-owned by Orient-Express Hotels Ltd., a London-based corporation, and Peruval Corp. S.A., a privately owned Peruvian company based in Arequipa, that is also involved in tourism, infrastructure and real estate sectors ([www.ifc.org](http://www.ifc.org)). Of some 400,000 foreign visitors to Machu Picchu in 2003, about 75% took the train (others hike the distance which usually takes between two and seven days). The train costs between \$68 - \$120 roundtrip and up to \$495 for a lavish ride on the Hiram Bingham train. These fares up to a large amount of annual profit, the majority of which does not benefit the residents of Cusco. While

Cusqueños are able to earn an income from tourism by providing hospitality services, making crafts, and performing ceremonies, they are not profiting overall from the larger tourism moneymakers.

### **BUYING EXPERIENCE AND “CULTURAL CREATIVES”**

Spiritual tourists are basically buying experiences they hope will help them reach personal goals. Spiritual tourists are part of a growing category of people, made up of post-modernists who want to expand their cultural capital (cultural knowledge) through the accumulation of trans-cultural experience (Urry 1990). Experiential consumerism results from a shift from industrial production to cultural production, followed by a shift in focus from work to leisure (Rifkin 2000: 7; MacCannell 1992). Instead of consuming items, the new leisure class is searching to enrich themselves with cultural capital, in the forms of education and entertainment.

Paul Ray defines this new leisure class as “Cultural Creatives,” a group of people who are attuned to a new set of values (1997). A survey conducted by American LIVES in San Francisco, California, found that 24% of Americans would identify themselves in this budding category. 29% fit into the category he calls “Traditionalists” and 47% are “Modernists” (29). Creatives, Ray says, tend to support global social issues, such as environmentalism, feminism, and religious freedom (29). They also tend to be middle-class, with a disposable income, and therefore an emerging market for new commodities that play into their ideals. Creatives look to buy experiences, to learn from them and to amass cultural capital. They are the perfect candidates for new forms of tourism, such as

sustainable ecotourism, ethno-tourism, and spiritual tourism. Ray notes that Creatives are developing a new meaning for “sacred that incorporates personal growth, psychology, the spiritual realm, and service to others” (32). These ideals go hand in hand with the ideals of New Age followers, who orient themselves towards holistic health systems.

Ray also notes that Creatives have given authenticity a renewed meaning (1997: 34). They want everything to have a history behind it, somehow be tied to tradition because they do not want a cheap remake or to be duped by imitation. In their search for authenticity however, consumers have formed an identity that they project upon the society or culture in which they are visiting (Graburn 1989; MacCannell 1999[1976]; Urry 1990). Vendors then adopt a particular rhetoric to which their buyers respond by purchasing more items or experiences. In this way, Creatives may provoke the opposite of authenticity.

When experiential culture is turned into an exchangeable good, outsiders (tourists, tour companies, other social groups) begin to place value on these commodities. Over time, these values will change. Local culture is then dependent upon outside valuation, which is often based upon stereotypes and false ideas of authenticity. As mentioned earlier, MacCannell writes that all tourists search for authenticity, however tourists usually come with preconceived notions of what authentic should be. These expectations lead to competition between service providers, who in turn may or may not perform to meet tourists’ desires (Duffy 2002).

### **QUEST FOR AUTHENTICITY AND TOURISM'S UTOPIAN DREAM**

MacCannell argues that the tourism industry tries to connect the modern with the primitive, as people from so-called modernized countries (the moderns) desire to interact with people in developing countries (the primitives or ex-primitives), such as people in Latin America (1992: 17). The ex-primitives to which MacCannell refers, no longer live or maybe never have lived what moderns consider primitive lifestyles, but this stereotype has led to “enacted or staged savagery” in the tourism industry. Indigenous groups charge money for admission to various aspects of their primitive and therefore more authentic lives, including rituals or ceremonies. “Formerly primitive peoples” as MacCannell describes them, have developed a somewhat compatible relationship with the tourism industry, so that both serve the other’s needs, leading to a long-term economic relationship (1992: 18).

In an ideal touristic relationship between outsiders and local residents, the visitor would pay admission to a cultural resource or event but would not hinder local activities within the community. The tourist would participate in something a local person already does – working, playing, and performing ceremonies or everyday customs such as eating. MacCannell’s post-modern tourist or Ray’s Cultural Creative would aim for such an idealized touristic relationship, as they would not want to harm the lifestyle or livelihood of members of the local culture.

In a capitalistic society where competition and drive for ever-improved products move the industry forward, this ideal tourist to local resident relationship could never transpire. “The encounter between tourist and ‘other’ is the scene of a shared Utopian

vision of profit without exploitation... The desire for [which] runs so strong, like that for ‘true love’ that even intellectuals can trick themselves into finding it where it does not exist; where, in my view, it can never exist” (MacCannell 1992: 28).

### **THE CONFERENCE**

The 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Shamanism Conference, introduced at the beginning of this chapter, was an attempt to bring users of ayahuasca together from around the world. The Soga-del-Alma Church, a legally registered organization in Peru based on ayahuasca use, sponsored the conference. It served as a microcosm of the spiritual tourism industry because it illuminated many of the issues raised by tourism in general and more specifically by spiritual tourism. These issues included performance and authenticity, competition between shamans for patients, Western appropriation of indigenous cultural ceremonies, the commoditization of culture, and moral issues regarding who was benefiting economically from the conference.

Most people who came to the conference had tried ayahuasca before, some in the Amazon region, some through conferences and workshops in their home country. Two online forums<sup>9</sup> have allowed users of ayahuasca to interact and share their experiences. Through the ayahuasca.com forum came the idea to have a conference in the Amazon where users could meet face to face, and participate in more traditional ceremonies than those found closer to their homes. Alan and his wife, both residents of Iquitos and

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://forums.ayahuasca.com/phpbb> or <http://forums.lycaeum.org> for examples of these forums.

founders of the Soga-del-Alma Church, took it upon themselves to organize such an event.

After the episode on opening night, wherein attendees swarmed the authentic-looking *curanderos*, another interesting incident occurred halfway through the conference. A *curandero* called Don Mario asked to have a few minutes at the microphone whereupon he proceeded to say that Christ was his savior. Silence filled the room, as conference-goers did not know how to respond. At his next ceremony, this *curandero* lost over half of the people who had signed up for his ceremony due to this comment, as they didn't want to be with a *curandero* who had been corrupted by Christianity and therefore unfit to run an authentic ceremony. A young American man, for example, dropped his friend off at Don Mario's hut for the ceremony but he opted for a ceremony with a different *curandero* because he did not think Don Mario could provide him with a traditional ceremony. Harold, an American ex-pat who now resides in Iquitos, a seasoned Ayahuasca drinker and leader of spiritual expeditions, attended Don Mario's ceremony. "They don't know what they missed," he said. "Christian mysticism is quintessentially shamanic. What *curanderos* here do is bring that into their practice. You never see a Bible, there's no reference to the church... What they bring in is the spirit. We work with spirit. Those who reject [the spirit of Christianity] have not come to a complete understanding." Howard noted that Don Mario was one of the best he had ever worked with. Harold further commented:

Just for the record, Don Mario's work is about as pre-Colombian and pure indigenous as you can get. I knew when he said that [at the conference] what the reaction would be, I knew as soon as it came out of his mouth. I told him last night, I said, '*Hermano*, I admire that you had the courage to

get up there and say that.’ For him it didn’t require courage....  
 [Christianity] is one of the ways one can distinguish a *brujo* [a witch] from a *curandero* [healer]. A *brujo* will never mention it. A *brujo* will not evoke the spirit of Jesus Christ, he will not speak of God, he will not refer to Santa María. Santa María is the metaphor for Mother Earth. Jesus Christ is the metaphor for all humanity. And that’s the bottom line... (personal interview, 7/20/05)

Many people searching for New Age religion or spirituality however have completely rejected Christianity. Some say it is mainly because they have felt marginalized by the religion and are searching for an alternative to the Christianity that is prominent in the U.S., Europe, Canada, and Australia. When Don Mario mentioned his faith in Christianity, many conference attendees thought he had been corrupted by Western concepts of Christianity, and therefore was no longer an authentic, Amazonian, indigenous *curandero*. Later in his interview, Harold pointed out, “In many Western eyes there is an ethnic and racial pedigree required for shamans, which is incorrect.”

People’s reactions to the conference were mixed and many flaws became apparent as the week wore on. Two young travelers from Amsterdam expressed disappointment, seeing the conference as a mere pretense for experiencing a new drug and that it was not about spirituality at all. One stated, “No real shaman would ever participate in a conference like this.” These two men participated in the first ceremony and “felt nothing, had no visions.” They opted not to participate in the following two ceremonies.

Most people, while recognizing the downfalls of the conference, saw it as an overall good experience. Scott, a young man from the U.S. who has organized many ayahuasca workshops in San Francisco, California, also opted out of the last two ceremonies but was very happy with the conference experience as a whole. He said it was

a good way to connect with other people interested in similar forms of spiritual exploration.

Efraín, the son of one of the *curanderos* noted the conference was positive because it “united like-minded, spiritually minded thinking in the world, and charged the spiritual battery. In that way, we can save the world, get rid of its problems.” However, he added, “The conference serves only to commercialize the sacred technology of the *curanderos*. There are many fake *curanderos* here at the conference.” Regarding the foreign participants, he realized many of them came with the purpose of experiencing ayahuasca while still “respecting the plant. However many people expect to come for a week and learn all about the plant.” But that’s not the way it is. “When we cure,” said Efraín, “we must go step by step, we must have patience. It is not immediate” (personal interview, 7/20/05).

#### **ETHICS AND ECONOMICS**

In private interviews and publicly at an open-mike during the conference and on ayahuasca.com after the conference, many people griped about the conference’s false advertising. Originally the conference fees of \$500 were supposed to cover three Ayahuasca ceremonies, hotel, food, and transportation to and from the airport and around town. However, when people arrived to the conference center, they found that food and lodging was only provided for half of the nights and that the Ayahuasca ceremonies would now cost \$20 per person per ceremony, paid directly to the *curanderos* themselves. Since many of the *curanderos* came from Iquitos, they had very few

expenses and the conference proved very lucrative for some. One family of *curanderos* however, came from Ecuador. Efraín said their trip was not paid for, although Shoemaker had lent them some money for lodging and food once they arrived to Iquitos. The economic situation became a huge issue at the conference and conference attendees posted their views on the online forum. Alan explained that since the conference was bringing income to the *curanderos*, he had made it clear that he would not be able to pay them more.

Others questioned who was economically benefiting from the conference. In an interview, one Peruvian *curandero* said that the conference served, “only for [the organizers’] pockets” and complained that no Peruvians could actually attend because the price was so high (Sacha 7/9/05). On the online forum before the conference, two people had expressed their views regarding some negative aspects of the conference regarding the commercialization of the conference, because it was not respecting the sacred ayahuasca medicine but rather earning money for Alan. Issues of concern included: 1) the number of people at each ceremony would be too large and would not allow the *curanderos* run effective sessions; 2) many newcomers who had no previous experience with ayahuasca would be participating in ceremonies without proper supervision due to the large number of conference attendees; 3) the conference was serving as a profitable moneymaker for Alan, who had made no public announcements what would become of his profits.

People’s responses in Alan’s defense engaged vocabulary that suggested the conference had a much deeper spiritual purpose. Shoemaker’s “attackers” were labeled as

adversaries to the cause of furthering and spreading the message of ayahuasca into the world and that they were doing a disservice by bringing negative energy into the conference. Below I provide some examples from the forum:

One “Attacker” wrote:

I am a son of a native shipibo shaman and am president of the Madre De Dios asociacion de Curanderos Naturista de Control Esoterico Raumios. I am sorry to inform you that I have not seen justice in this event... What it has become...Mr. Shoemaker, is your plan to exploit the native shamans of the amazon as I have heard you have been doing for years. This is something we natives will no longer permit you to do. You may be accustomed to this and may have found it to be very profitable, but, I have seen these last 10 nights here in Iquitos, the time for this is done.

With 200 participants at \$500 each, you will have enough to retire with \$100,000 in Peru. The costs of this conference are minimal. As you well know, the average worker here makes three dollars a day and the hotels are ten to fifteen dollars. The real purpose of this conference now is to make you money. It is an outrage to think that any of us would prostitute ourselves to do ceremony with so many people at the same time. We all know this is not possible and is a recipe for disaster... This conference is not a proper way to introduce true seekers to the sacred healing medicine of the jungle. (Posted 6/27/05)

A response to this post said:

There is an economic benefit to having this conference that goes beyond what Alan Shoemaker is making. The shamans have the opportunity to make 3600 over three nights (which is a nice chunk of change). The hotels, restaraunts [*sic*], individual vendors, taxi drivers etc. will also benefit from this influx of tourism, which is encouraged in Peru. Alan making alot [*sic*] of money is a result of his ability to bring business to the area. It seems to me that everyone benefits here... People coming down from North America, Europe and Australia also assists in a higher consciousness about the amazonian rainforest which is good for the planet. I don't see how this is exploitation and perhaps you could explain how it is, but, unless I'm missing something, is anyone being forced to perform a ceremony for anybody or coerced into participating in any way? (Posted June 27, 2005)

Another response stated:

Things may not be ideal. But important things will happen. Seeds will be planted. Learning will happen. Healing of some sort will happen. The spirits are working in their own way. (Posted 6/30/05)

Then a different “attacker” wrote:

I feel a deep concern for what is about to take place here because of my experience with the medicine as a longtime student and apprentice... I have experienced first hand the difficulties of conducting ceremonies with more than ten participants, let alone thirty... To think that this or any conference would create a global shift, if any of you harbor such hubris, is disturbing... To profit so extensively from this conference and to collect one hundred thousand dollars is to put a price tag on something that does not belong to any of us. Does not this money belong to the region and the native healers that are teaching us? What are you, Mr. Shoemaker going to give back to Iquitos, perhaps a garden or a center for healing? Or just the unresolved emotional pain of the participants who have willfully enriched your bank account. (Posted 7/12/05)

Responses to this last post, not only by Shoemaker but also by his supporters, sounded extremely defensive. Shoemaker’s supporters repeatedly expressed gratitude for his efforts in putting together the conference. In people’s responses, portions of the above statement were picked out and questioned, and was followed by an accusatory retort.

A later post by the same “attacker” above stated:

A Forum is usually defined as a public place which fosters the open discussion of issues. Here, however, my messages have been eliminated from several threads... Is any position other than light and love subject to being attacked, deleted, censored and/or ignored? There is a difference between back slapping and real discussion. As of yet, there has never been a real response from Shoemaker, only unfounded attacks on the various messengers and various subterfuge to avoid the issue. (7/12/05)

Despite all the negative comments, the majority of people I interviewed said they were happy they came, although they thought there were things to work on for the next conference (which is scheduled for July 2006, again in Iquitos).

## **THE CREATION OF COMPETITION**

One result of the creation of cultural commodities in tourism is increased

competition. As more people enter the spiritual tourism industry, providers must prove that they represent the authentic ideal for which tourists search. I found that people used different strategies to demonstrate their authenticity. For instance, Angel, a spiritual ceremony leader in Cusco handed me his business card as we passed in the street, complete with a money-back guarantee. I asked him to explain this guarantee. “People go and work with more expensive shamans, pay thousands of dollars, and then they come to me.” He told me about his own experiences with ayahuasca, San Pedro, and *pagos a la Pachamama*. He conducted all of the popular spiritual ceremonies in Cusco, even though ayahuasca ceremonies are not traditionally done in Cusco. Therefore, by simply conducting an ayahuasca ceremony in Cusco, it would not be an “authentic” experience. However, many tourists come looking for it, unaware of ayahuasca’s significance and history. Often they feel they are in the same country and therefore somewhat close to the source of the plant.

Self-promotion was common among almost all of the *curanderos* and spiritual tourism leaders that I interviewed. Most claimed to be the best shaman in the area, to make the best brew, to conduct the best ceremonies, to not have been corrupted by capitalism, or to have been called to their work by a greater force. R. Stuart mentions this trend in his brief article regarding ayahuasca tourism along the Ucayali River (2002). How, he asks, does a tourist find a good *ayahuasquero*?

Many people I talked to, remarked on how hard it was to find a real shaman in both Cusco and Iquitos. Harold, a leader of spiritual quests in Iquitos, stated:

To be honest, you get the impression that there’s a shaman on every street corner, and there is someone who would claim to be. To find a true

shaman in Cusco is like trying to find a needle in a haystack. The people you can most easily connect with are not generally genuine. In fact a genuine practitioner working in the true spirit of the medicine, whatever medicine they practice, rarely will ever refer to themselves as a shaman. If someone comes up to you and says, 'I'm a shaman,' you take it under advisement, but they are less likely to be than the person you see and hasn't said anything that you're drawn to. (personal interview, 7/20/05)

Jill, the British woman who led spiritual tours in Cusco similarly noted that, "People come because they want to find shamans. Now I find that quite sad because to me, if you need to find a shaman, the shaman will find you. Most of the people who are here as shamans, I would question." (personal interview, 6/28/05)

## GOSSIP

Spiritual tourism operators also used gossip as a way to discredit other shamans or *curanderos*. Roxana, a *curandera* from Iquitos, regaled me with stories about other *curanderos*. One Peruvian *curandera* was supposedly "a lesbian who touched women's breasts" during ayahuasca ceremonies. Another story involved a young American man who had started up a spiritual tourism retreat in the Amazon jungle. He was the apprentice to a shaman who was allegedly found with opium laced ayahuasca. Roxana mentioned another American man who ran a spiritual tourism retreat, who practiced what Roxana termed "falomagico." "He cures with his penis, and most people who are violated are foreigners. He was a former porn star," she claimed. "His scandals have come out in the newspapers, but he always pays off the police when he's arrested."

Another area of critique on the Ayahuasca forums, were related to Alan Shoemaker's (the organizer of the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Shamanism Conference) arrests. His arrests

were mentioned with the objective of pointing out Shoemaker's lack of integrity. His accusers took the opportunity to denigrate his reputation and question his ability to run a spiritually themed conference in the correct manner. For example, the first accuser wrote:

I understand that you have been incarcerated on various occasions and would not be surprised to see you there again. (Posted 6/27/05)

And the second accuser stated:

I do not know Mr. Shoemaker, but his history of questionable ethics and exploitation well precedes him. We all well remember the mummies that are incessantly disturbed from their sacred burial group. How is this any different? ... (Posted 7/12/05)

In a similar manner as before, the response to these accusations was defensive. One person responded:

Gossip and character assassination. You have no first hand knowledge of anything. This is merely a product of your projections from your twisted thinking. Stop dumping it on the community. You are cursing someone you don't know. (Posted 7/12/05)

## **CONCLUSION**

Here I have introduced some of the negative side effects of cultural resource use in the spiritual tourism industry. Cultural resource use allows more people to economically benefit from tourism. However, as more people become dependent on the industry, the more profits are divided up, and more competition is created. Authenticity plays a huge role as entrepreneurs often compete to prove they are more authentic than others. Gossip is also used to slander the competition.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: MYSTICAL DON JUANS

*Cesar had a long black ponytail, a multi-colored woven jacket, and an extremely pointy nose. I met him while walking past the famous 12-angled rock along a cobblestone alleyway near the Plaza del Armas, the tourist center of Cusco. We went through the typical introductory niceties such as, where are you from? Do you speak Spanish? And, have you visited Machu Picchu yet? I discovered that Cesar was a musician who played in various tourist restaurants in Cusco. After a few minutes, I told him about my research project on spiritual tourism in Peru. His face lit up with a huge smile as he said he was involved in Andean mysticism, but didn't really agree with how it was being sold in the tourism industry. This comment of course peaked my own interest and he agreed to an interview.*

*I met him the next morning for tea and apple pastries at a small café where his grand story began to unfold. He turned to me and said, "I see you, but not through my two eyes. I see you from right here, through my third eye," as he pointed to his forehead in the space between but slightly above his two coffee-brown eyes. "I see a blue aura around you, which means you are a very calm and peaceful person."*

*"You know," he declared proudly, "I am actually 1250 years old." That is the number of years his soul has lived through a variety of physical lives. Although he did not provide the exact age of my soul, he said it was quite young. "While you are very open-minded," he continued, "you still need some guidance to push you in the right direction."*

*Cesar seemed very eager to give me that push. He mentioned that if I wanted to try San Pedro, he would happily do a ceremony with me. While Cesar referred to the San Pedro cactus as a “sacred medicinal plant,” others call it a hallucinogen because of its high content of mescaline. He commented that the effect would be much stronger if I did it in Cusco (as compared to some other place in Peru or in the world) since the cactus grows in Cusco and has particular sacred importance to the region – although I was later told otherwise. I told Cesar I wasn’t interested, but I did agree to meet him later that afternoon to further discuss his Andean mystical philosophies.*

*That afternoon, we went to Cesar’s single room apartment. In one corner sat a large rug and an altar with lighted candles and incense. He turned on some sitar-like music and began his act. Cesar went over to the candles, and moved his hands back and forth through the flames, making them dance in the swirling air. He claimed he could control the flames since fire was his element. He gave me two books to peruse, one of which was entitled “The Perfect Marriage” which defined “ideal” gender roles for such a union. The other was an intensive yoga book with a sensual edge.*

*Cesar sat down with me on the rug and said, “Gigi, I’d like to give you a recuerdo of Peru,” the word “recuerdo” being interpreted as either a souvenir or a memory. He explained how we each had seven vital points, or chakras. By using divine energy he claimed he could “open up my chakras just a little bit,” announcing that the root chakra, the one near the sexual organs, was the most important, because “it moves the whole world.” I understood that this “recuerdo” was to help me become a more open person.*

*When I asked him what opening my chakras entailed, he answered, “Well I could explain to you for hours what happens, but until you experience it, you won’t really know.”*

*“Well go ahead, try to explain it,” I said, “I’ve got awhile.”*

*He paused. “Actually I can’t.” he claimed, “You really just have to experience it.”*

*Sensing my close-mindedness to the idea, he then explained how this was not a sexual advance, but this experience would connect us forever, which left me asking myself, “Do I really want to be connected to this guy forever?” That’s some souvenir. Ultimately, he said that the decision was up to me, it didn’t matter to him whether I accepted his offer or not.*

*As I declined his generous offer, I began to get up to leave. As he walked me to the front door, he seemed disappointed and said he felt misled.*

*The next day, I learned the true meaning of the Cusqueño word “brichero” while talking to some street kid vendors who had seen me walk off with Cesar the previous afternoon. When I told them I was simply interviewing Cesar for a school project they seemed relieved. “He’s a well-known brichero,” they said. “He tries to seduce gringas. There are many of them here in Cusco.” As a blonde, single, female traveler, I had already run into a few, but was previously unaware of their ubiquity. Most of them, it turned out, had strong ties to the mystical Andean arts and to the spiritual tourism industry.*

The increase in interest in spiritual tourism in Peru has led to a sudden growth in the number of people who claim to be shamans in Cusco and Iquitos. However, many of these shamans have either not had proper training or are not completely honest or trustworthy. Since there is no system stating how to tell the true shamans from the pseudo-shamans, the tourist must trust the shaman wholeheartedly, which has led to exploitation. Many tourists come to Peru unprepared, without a guide in mind, trusting their intuition that they will find a worthy shaman once they arrive to their destination. This gives entrepreneurs more bait with which to lure tourists, as most foreigners are unable to ascertain which shamans are trustworthy. As a female traveler, I ran into this issue of trust a lot. Usually the people trying to take advantage of me were men, and it usually had some sexual innuendo or final goal, as in the story above about Cesar.

My experience with Cesar taught me about some of the major downsides of the spiritual tourism industry – the exploitation and abuse of tourists that can occur on their spiritual quests. While Cesar and other *bricheros* are not always directly involved in the industry in that they do not work with an agency or guide tours, they benefit from tourism by receiving money, sex, or other favors from tourists by using their knowledge of mystical arts to seduce foreigners. The art of Andean mystic tourism in Cusco takes practice to fine tune selling points. Often, all it takes to convince a spiritual seeker to try a ceremony is saying the right words at the right time, with a convincing act. Maybe that is why so many gringa tourists get taken advantage of, especially those traveling alone, and especially those who participate in ceremonies that involve hallucinogens.

Urban legends serve as warning devices in Peru, many of which are specific to the

spiritual tourism industry. Not only are these stories about sexual abuse, but they also expose the health risks that can occur from taking psychedelics. The following section is based upon my own personal experiences and also the stories told to me by others. While I do not believe all the stories I heard, some were undoubtedly true, and others were at least based upon fact, even though embellished with fiction.

### ***BRICHERISMO***

The *brichero* persona has earned fame throughout Cusco. In the prologue to Mario Guevara Paredes book, *Cazador de Gringas y Otras Cuentas* (Gringa Hunter and Other Tales), Eduardo Viaña defines the *brichero* character: “A ‘*brichero*’ is a gringa hunter, an ‘Andean lover,’ an irresistible conqueror of foreign women” (1995: 7; my translation). He says the word may come from the English word ‘bridge,’ that the *brichero* is building bridges or links between the Peruvian Incan homeland to foreign lands. Viaña continues with his definition:

On the lookout, with a lost gaze, in the plazas, the cafes, in the bars, in the archaeological sites, at the legendary rocks, and even at scientific conferences, the persona in question is capable of approaching a beautiful tourist, dancing with her all night, taking her to undiscovered places, and beginning to live with her. The *brichero* is a type of “professional Indian” whose attraction can be attributed to a local color that bestows upon him exoticism and much luck. (1995: 7, my translation)

While the idea of finding a Latin Lover often permeates many foreigners’ stereotypes of Latin American travel, few characters have been so well developed as the Cusqueño *brichero*. Lucho Ñieto, author of “Buscando un Inca,” notes what sets the *brichero* apart from other types of Latin lovers:

In essence he was a person who was discriminated against in his own milieu because of his appearance but in whom foreign women found a special kind of enchantment. One could almost say that the *brichero* was a man scorned by his countrymen but adored by the *gringas*. And, because it could not be otherwise, the paradox that trapped the character ensured that he would quickly be turned into a myth, the most widely broadcast myth of the Cusco night. (Revilla 2003)

In my experience with Cesar, it was quite obvious that he was a man of ill repute in Cusco. The doorman at my hostel would not let him enter, the street kid vendors worried about me when they saw me walk off with Cesar the afternoon I met him, and while interviewing him on a bench in the plaza, I received a number of curious glances.

Ñieto, Guevara Paredes, and Viaña all connect the construction of *bricherismo* to the rise of the tourist industry. In Guevara Paredes' short story, he shows how *bricheros* have created their identity to include Andean mysticism; the *brichero* discourse claims their mystical knowledge was inherently passed down to them through their *antepasados* or distant Incan ancestors. Guevara Paredes' *brichero* character explains to a young female Spanish-speaking traveler, that their meeting wasn't a coincidence, but rather "the magnetism that the city radiates" brought them together, and that not too long ago, he met her in his dreams. He said he had begun to learn about the "Andean mystical world" and therefore had "another way of perceiving reality...and not the simple reality that most people understand, but a much deeper reality" (1994: 85). In his dissertation, Michael Hill also implies that *bricheros* have most recently taken on ideas of Andean spirituality to promote themselves as possible lovers/tour guides for *gringas*. "I was often told," he

writes, “that *bricheros* and *bricheras*<sup>10</sup> in Cusco like to take tourists up to the ruins near Sacsayhuamán known as the Temple of the Moon to seduce tourists with a combination of sexuality and mysticism” (2005: 15).

All these stories ring true to my own experiences as a solo foreign woman traveling in Cusco. Sometimes I found it so easy to find interview subjects, simply walking around the streets or sitting in restaurants that I began to believe that my encounters may “not have been by chance.” I had many people say this to me, beginning with Omar, my first interviewee in Lima, who had been learning the Andean mystical arts, then Tadeo, my first interviewee in Cusco and the founder of a spiritual tourism retreat, followed by a tour guide for the Sacred Valley, and finally Cesar. Omar, while not making any sexual advances towards me, claimed destiny brought us together so that I could help him organize an event to be held in Tucson, for which he could bring a Q’ero to show people the Inca were still alive, with the hope that people would come to Peru to conduct spiritual tours with him.

I met Tadeo in the Lima airport on my way to Cusco. After I told him about my project, he gave me his telephone number in Cusco and also a website address. I looked up the website and found out that Tadeo was the leader of Poquen Kanchay. Excited by my chance encounter with him, I scheduled an interview with him. However, throughout the course of the interview, it became apparent that he had other intentions. He said things like, “You and I have a destiny together, and this is why we met – it was not pure

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<sup>10</sup> There is less written about the *brichera* woman and I did not personally encounter any while in Cusco. A *brichera* is simply the female counterpart of the *brichero*, who hits on foreign men hoping to be their escort for the duration of their stay in Cusco.

coincidence, don't you see?" I asked him what this destiny entailed, to which he replied, "If I told you, it might not work out as it is supposed to" (personal interview, 6/19/05)

The constructed rhetoric of *bricherismo* preys upon spiritual tourists' desires for not merely an authentic experience, but a pre-destined experience. Far more than feeling lucky, a person may feel proud, even chosen, to have been found by someone skilled in the Andean mystical arts. Many spiritual tourists harbor the idea that a shaman will accept them as an apprentice for an extended period of time, in hopes that they too might become skilled in shamanism or alternative healing. As the international appetite for spiritual journeys has grown, *bricheros* have clearly become privy to this information, and have worked this desire into their daily interactions with tourists.

#### **OTHER URBAN LEGENDS AND CAUTIONARY TALES**

While I was in Iquitos, a rumor spread all through the city about a woman from Holland who went insane during an ayahuasca retreat. Supposedly she was with the most famous male shaman in the Iquitos region, and while the reason for her insanity was unclear, it was said to be the result of sexual predation and/or an admixture to the shaman's ayahuasca brew. She was allegedly found naked, wandering along a highway outside of Iquitos, and eventually checked into a mental institution. Roxana, a middle-aged *curandera* from Iquitos, told me about her while I was in Iquitos, and a few days later, I got an email from a contact of mine who was worried because he had not heard from me in a few days, but had heard the rumor about the insane Dutch woman. He wanted to make sure the same thing had not happened to me.

At the shamanism conference instances of sexual abuse occurred. Scott, a seasoned ayahuasca user and conference attendee, told me that his female friend Alexis felt very uncomfortable around a particular man during a ceremony. A middle-aged American apprentice to the Peruvian *curandero* leading the ceremony apparently lay down extremely close to Alexis during the ceremony and began to touch her and put his arm around her. Touching is usually prohibited during a ceremony because people's spirits are believed to be in a vulnerable state, and physical spaces should be set around each person – like a personal bubble. Alexis asked the man to move away and he became angry with her. Scott eventually had to come over and ask the man to leave.

In my interview with Roxana, she mentioned that in 2001 the Asociación de Médicos Vegetalistas de Iquitos (ASMEVEI) formed, a growing group of shamans who practice ethical shamanism. Apparently members of the association are trying to educate shamans in principled manners of the healing practice, so it will become less dangerous for locals and tourists to experience Amazonian shamanism. Roxana, one of the few urban female shamans in Iquitos, is often called to the hospital when female residents and tourists show up there after being sexually abused by male shamans. Cases of sexual abuse are not unique to foreign tourists, but have existed in the region for many years. “Since antiquity, women have gone to *curanderos* to cure their unfaithful husbands, but then the women end up impregnated by the *curandero*!” said Roxana, later adding, “They are shamans, not saints.”

“It is very dangerous for a solitary female to venture into mystical tourism and go with a male shaman. There are hundreds of cases of abuse and violations. You have to

know someone, someone who will take care of you,” she says. Mostly due to the fact that she was a female, I decided I trusted her enough to participate in an ayahuasca ceremony with her and a small group of foreigners and locals, which I discussed at the beginning of Chapter Two.

One of the local women, a young woman named Isabel, had joined Roxana’s ayahuasca trip at the last minute. This was her eighth time drinking ayahuasca and she had a distinct purpose for the trip. Her last ayahuasca experience was with a male *curandero*. She did not want to go into detail about her experience, only saying, “He took advantage of me.” Since then, Isabel had not felt very positive about her life, and she wanted to take ayahuasca again with someone she could trust, to rid herself of the pain she felt from her last ayahuasca experience.

The first morning of our ayahuasca journey began with a round of Ojé, a tree-resin from a Ficus tree.<sup>11</sup> The purpose of drinking this was to cleanse the body of any parasites, food, chemicals, or anything else that might be present in our stomachs or bowels. Over the next couple of hours, our group of eight sat around in pain, broken up only by brief intervals to throw up. Isabel said that the second time she vomited she saw the face of her previous *curandero*, laughing at her. Roxana told us this was a good sign and that soon he would be out of her system.

That night at the ayahuasca ceremony, Isabel went through the usual purge induced by the tea. Again she saw a vision of the *curandero* laughing at her, and this time plucking out his teeth, one by one. When she went to bed that night, she dreamed again of

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<sup>11</sup> Ojé may be the foulest tasting thing I have ever drunk in my life.

this *curandero*, but then he suddenly disappeared, and her dream filled with jungle images, specifically lots of flowers, butterflies, and light. Isabel felt liberated from her past experience.

### **DRUG ADMIXTURES, PHYSICAL COMPLICATIONS, AND OTHER EFFECTS**

Besides sexual overtures, there is another danger – not being able to trust the contents of a *curandero*'s ayahuasca brew. Roxana told me that many *curanderos* had begun to put other drugs, specifically LSD, mushrooms, ecstasy, marijuana, and opium, into their ayahuasca mixtures. While *curanderos* often have different recipes, preparation styles, and admixtures, the addition of drugs, especially hallucinogens like LSD have a very distinct purpose – to ensure that the recipient of ayahuasca feels the effects.

Ayahuasca can be very tricky because different doses, mixtures, and ceremonies affect each person differently. Some people feel absolutely nothing while others have the most spiritually mind-opening experience of their lives. At the conference for example, I observed a ceremony with such results. Most people were physically affected by the ayahuasca and were purging for hours. The next day two participants told me they had break-through sessions (a term used to signify an intense session in which the participant felt he or she grew spiritually) and most others reported exceptional hallucinatory visions. One woman however, did not feel anything at all the entire night, even after having a second dose.

Because of her experience as a *curandera*, Roxana said she could tell when LSD was mixed in with Ayahuasca because it changed the nature of the visions. “With

ayahuasca,” she said, “the visions are very natural and you may see many bright colors. If LSD is added, the visions become more metallic.” Roxana’s information immediately reminded me of a Greek woman I met in Cusco, who with two other travel companions had decided to take a eco-tour into the Amazon region near the Madre de Dios River, southeast of Cusco.

Ellen had previously heard about ayahuasca and asked her eco-tour guide if and where she could try it. That night, the guide took Ellen and her companions to a shaman, where they all claimed to have amazing experiences. Roger said, “It was a very, very spiritual experience, like nothing I’ve ever done before.” Jane said, “I was at first a little scared, but then I thought, when else am I going to have the opportunity to participate in an indigenous ceremony?” While I was walking around with Ellen one day, she suddenly stopped, yelling, “Gigi, look at these!” She paused in front of a store that sold artistically designed mirrors, most in the shape of a sun, with a mirror center surrounded by dazzling gold and silver pieces of metal. “These are exactly like what I saw during my Ayahuasca ceremony! Little gold and silver metallic bursts!”

If Roxana was correct about LSD causing metallic visions, Ellen quite possibly had been given ayahuasca laced with LSD or some other drug. Many tourists who dabble in such ceremonies while on vacation have heard of ayahuasca, but have not studied it or its uses before their travels. Therefore, due to the individualistic nature of ayahuasca experiences and not wanting to let down tourists by not meeting their expectations for the ceremony, some shamans might add other drugs to ensure a hallucinatory effect.

Another concern among *curanderos* and tourists alike are medical implications.

Because ayahuasca contains an MAOI inhibitor, other MAOIs must not be taken at the same time. Warnings for people taking medication for depression, psychiatric disorders, or AIDS have begun to be circulated among spiritual tour operators. Sometimes *curanderos* take ayahuasca one night and the other participants do not, so the *curandero* can read their bodies to determine if they should drink the ayahuasca. Others have patients fill out a form describing the medications they take or any diseases they have. However, most *curanderos* do not conduct such health consultations, which can lead to terrible situations. Stuart reports for example, that a man in Bolivia with AIDS died during an ayahuasca ceremony due to an unexpected physical reaction (2002: 37).

Another possible outcome of an untrustworthy *curandero* is physical abuse of tourists. Although I did not hear any personal accounts of this, I heard stories from others and also in online travel journals, about thefts of tourists' belongings while under the influence of ayahuasca or San Pedro. One instance even involved the murder of ceremony participants. Whether these stories are real or fake, they serve to caution tourists against the possible outcomes of their participation in ceremonies.

## CONCLUSION

Here I have discussed a few more negative effects of the spiritual tourism industry, focusing on the physical and emotional abuse tourists sometimes encounter. As a woman, I became quickly aware of the sexual interactions and exploitation within the industry. Although sometimes these stories of abuse are embellished with fiction, they often serve as cautionary devices for others who may want to participate in a ceremony.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE BENEFITS

I began my fieldwork with a distinct bias. Before leaving for Peru, I strongly felt that the spiritual tourism industry was negatively affecting the local communities of Cusco and Iquitos due to the commodification of these sacred ceremonies. After listening to many stories of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual healing and the potential of these ceremonies to effect positive growth, it became difficult to defend my skeptical stance towards such practices.

Although I have already mentioned some of the positive aspects of spiritual tourism, in the following chapter I will further examine how they affect the residents of Cusco and Iquitos and foreign tourists. I will mostly draw upon other people's accounts of how the ceremonies can physically and emotionally heal on both individual and global levels. I use many quotes because it is important to read people's own words to describe their faith in these healing practices and to see how they explain their beliefs to an outsider (me). It is hard for people to communicate spiritual beliefs, especially those such as New Age beliefs, because they are usually very personal and individualized and easily cause cynicism in a non-believer. Faith in psychedelic plants (ayahuasca and San Pedro) or other healing ceremonies is based wholly in feeling and emotion, not in words or facts. The following chapter is an attempt to put into words the positive outcomes of spiritual tourism in Peru.

The benefits of spiritual tourism are based on physical, emotional, and spiritual health, economic gain, the preservation and spread of traditional cultural/medicinal

knowledge, and the desire to change the world. Based on my fieldwork, I found the ultimate desire of most parties involved, to be one motivated by creating social change in the world. Despite all the negatives, the spiritual tourism industry presents a number of positive outcomes that may outweigh the negative ones.

### **THREE STAGES OF CEREMONIAL WORK**

New Age followers claim the spiritual ceremonies in both Cusco (those involving San Pedro and the *pagos a la Pachamama*) and Iquitos (those involving ayahuasca) promise to perform physical miracles and will lead to social change on a global scale. Kris<sup>12</sup> was a young American student of shamanic studies who had been living at a spiritual retreat called Sachamama near Iquitos for over 16 months. He had come to study ayahuasca and other medicinal plants, as well as learn how to conduct shamanic ceremonies. In his conversation with me, he mentioned three levels of personal ayahuasca use. Based on his interview I have further developed these levels to form a framework for understanding spiritual tourism benefits on a larger, global scale. I call the three stages: 1) Physical, Emotional, and Mental Healing, 2) Education and Information Gathering, and 3) Creating Social, Ecological, and Global Change.

### **LEVEL ONE: PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL, AND MENTAL HEALING**

In New Age spirituality, the body, mind, and spirit form a holistic system. Thus one belief of New Age followers is that most physical ailments stem from emotional or

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<sup>12</sup> I make several references to Kris throughout this chapter, which all stem from the same interview on 7/9/05.

spiritual problems and by solving these problems, people can cure their physical diseases. Stress, depression, exposure to unhealthy relationships, disconnection from a sense of home, and also detachment from nature or the Mother Earth are some of these emotional or spiritual problems. Spiritual tour entrepreneurs and spiritual seekers claim that ayahuasca, San Pedro, and participation in other indigenous ceremonies can cure cancer, headaches, and bodily pains. Don Agustin Rivas, one of the most famous *ayahuasqueros* in Iquitos explains the Ayahuasca curing process:

Our nervous systems are very sensitive electrical circuits. Everything we take in through our senses – vision, hearing, touch, taste, and smell – travels through our nerves and then ends up getting stored in our neurons... When we talk and talk senselessly, or listen to the radio all day long, or watch television too much, our neurons get overloaded. Bad news, bad smells, extremely loud noises all damage our neurons, and this can make us sick or crazy. When our neurons get overloaded, they collapse and stop working. That is why we need to take time to meditate and rest our senses everyday. Ayahuasca has the ability to cure and to give new life to the body... When we take Ayahuasca, it repairs our overloaded neurons. The Ayahuasca helps us release the toxins and excess energies stored in our bodies, and we see those energies as demons because that is how we have learned to imagine our negative thoughts. (Bear 2000: 213)

Many foreign tourists and local entrepreneurs of spiritual tourism think spiritual illnesses are more common in developed regions such as the US, Canada, Europe, or Australia, and are caused by stress and by living in technologically dependent countries leading to an “overload of the senses” to state it in Rivas’ terms. By coming to Peru to participate in ceremonies, to be cleansed, to be free from more Westernized lifestyles, foreigners can be healed of such emotionally caused diseases. Kris explains, “The West is materialized and we have no time to question why we do anything, no time to break out of the mold. Coming here gives us clarity. You can drink [ayahuasca] one time and it can

change your life.” Friedrich, a German spiritual seeker who I met in both Cusco and Iquitos agrees by saying, “Spiritual and psychological diseases affect westerners the most. The healing comes from contact with nature, the power from natural things, and the wisdom of nature” (personal interview, 7/19/05). David, a Cusqueño who leads tours to the Inka Q’ero says, “There are many who come because they are tired of the western world, and want to look for something more sacred. I work with tourists who are looking for Andean spirituality. I think it is for the connection with the land” (personal interview, 6/30/05, my translation).

The sacred ceremonies in Peru fit into the New Age system of holistic health, because they try to determine other causes of physical illnesses. Rivas explains:

If a person has a liver illness, I’m not only going to treat the liver, but the underlying problem as well, such as alcohol abuse or over-indulgence in hot spicy foods. Such problems begin in the stomach, then progress to the small intestine before the toxic substances end up in the liver. Thus, to operate on the liver, I need to understand the patient’s behavior prior to the illness – what they ate, how they lived, and what kind of toxins they had in their body to cause liver problems. In my surgery, I cut into the liver in my imagination, because everything is imagination and thought in such surgeries. I enter the compromised organ with my mind, and if I don’t know which organ is involved, then I do general surgery. In a general surgery, my wand will go automatically to the area where there is sickness. The wand’s power involves giving off special rays to pierce the body like a laser. Even if the brain, the heart, or the eyes are fine, I need to pierce all those organs energetically. The surgery is done over the entire body. In many cases the results are positive, depending on the level of spiritual contact between the patient, the shaman, and others assisting in this ritual. That’s when the miracle of healing happens. (Bear 2000: 62)

When taking ayahuasca or San Pedro, the physical level of effects involves the urge to vomit or defecate, as these plant medicines search to find where the problems lie physically in the body. The “soul-wrenching vomit,” as Kris calls it, helps expel the

negative energy or negative memories that are stored in ones body. “The body’s seven chakras,” Kris continues, “take in energy, each a different color, a different vibration.” When they take in negative energy, it must be expelled, which comes out in a certain form, (such as a snake, a demon, or a monster), and concludes in “cleaning the windows of our perception.” As Pete, a U.S. ex-pat/ayahuasca user in Iquitos explains, “You can see all these bad things coming up in the purge, leaving your body. Oh there’s the anger I’ve been holding against my brother, oh and there goes the hate I have for my work.”

Regarding the physical healing process, Roxana explains, “The ayahuasca looks at your body. Your organs have colors, and you can tell if something is wrong depending on its color. The ayahuasca will begin to clean the problem you have. It will clean your stomach, your blood, your soul, very deeply. As you experience past traumas, your karma begins to clean itself. Your liver opens and cleans up.”

Many people note the benefits of both ayahuasca and San Pedro use to heal drug and alcohol addictions. Kris says this is because the plants help illuminate the reasons why people drink alcohol or become addicted to cocaine and heroine to cure their dependence. Also, as a person realizes a more sacred lifestyle, it becomes harder to justify the use of drugs. A number of groups have been organized to help treat addicts. For example, Norma, a *curandera* in Iquitos has set up an Asociación Civil (similar to non-governmental organizations in the U.S.) called Shapinguito. Through this

organization, Norma has set up the Clinica Naturalista “Jose Torres Vasquez which specializes in curing addicts.<sup>13</sup>

Ayahuasca and San Pedro ceremonies attempt to clean out the body’s physical system – to restore tired neurons as Rivas calls them, to get rid of bad habits and addictions, to clear the memory of unpleasant experiences, or to purify the soul of destructive emotions. To do this effectively, participants must adhere to a number of rules. The rules are different depending on the region, the tribe, or the *curandero* with whom a person works. Roxana’s rules seemed to be the norm in Iquitos. She said, “When you drink ayahuasca, it changes your liver so that everything you consume passes directly to your blood. Therefore, don’t consume things with chemicals, pork, or alcohol. Don’t have sex because energy will leave your body through this interchange.” At the Sachamama sanctuary outside of Iquitos, they also had rigorous dietary restrictions, such as no sugar, salt, or meat. The meals served there usually consisted of plain, cooked vegetables, rice, and sometimes fish. Nevertheless, the rules are not always strictly enforced. One day I saw a Japanese man who was studying at Sachamama, eat a hamburger in Iquitos the day he was supposed to direct that night’s ceremony.

Many *curanderos* with whom I spoke declared that these spiritual ceremonies held a miraculous power to heal physical ailments. Lisa, the South African woman from Cusco mentioned in Chapter Two, said, “I have seen many people cured of many things, especially cancer.” During my interview with Roxana, she showed me her photo album with a number of people who had been cured by ayahuasca. One was of a Japanese

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<sup>13</sup> See [http://amazonayahuasca.com/tratamientos\\_en.html](http://amazonayahuasca.com/tratamientos_en.html) for more information about Norma’s organization.

woman who had cancer. Roxana said when they went to Doña Pasha's house this woman could not walk or hold herself up. In the photo taken after a number of ayahuasca treatments, the woman looked weak but was standing on her own with a fragile smile.

On my way to Peru, I met a man on the airplane who said ayahuasca saved his life. He told me that a few years ago his body began dying due to a premature eruption of sacred chakra energy in his body. His organs stopped working correctly and he suffered from liver dysfunction. At the time, he was visiting Ecuador working on his spiritual development, and someone took him to a group of shamans there who practice ayahuasca healing. After a couple of weeks of intense ayahuasca treatment and cleansing, he was restored to full health. Now he travels in Peru and works near Machu Picchu, continuing his spiritual path.

Based on the stories of healing I heard during my fieldwork, I was curious to see if an ayahuasca ceremony could cure my migraine headaches. Before my ayahuasca ceremony I specifically asked Roxana if I could heal these with ayahuasca. She said yes, and that during the ayahuasca ceremony, she would try to figure out what might be causing them. The day after the ceremony, Roxana gave me her diagnosis. She had prepared a *baño de florecimiento*, an herbal water bath. While the Amazon can be extremely hot and humid during the day, at 5 o'clock in the morning it is still rather cold. The water, drawn from the Amazon River, was also fairly cold. As she poured the water over my head, I screamed because the water was so frigid. After the shock, the head cold from which I had been suffering seemed to go away. As she continued the bath, she gave me her diagnosis from the night before. During the ceremony, she said she saw a green

light in my throat, signifying the thyroid gland. She said my thyroid was not producing enough of a certain hormone, which caused my migraines. Roxana said that I have not always had this condition, but rather it was a relatively new development of my physical system.

There are many physical effects of ceremonial work and people will experience a range of different ones throughout the course of their spiritual search. Mostly however, the physical effects emphasize healing by cleansing the body, the soul, the chakras, or whatever terminology a person chooses, through a process of purging.

## **LEVEL TWO: EDUCATION AND INFORMATION GATHERING**

The second stage involves learning new information and spreading this knowledge to others. “The plants,” Kris explains, “are not just living, but they also have intelligence. They choose to show you certain things, in the forms of holograms, movies, or memories from the past or future. These things effect physical and emotional change.”

I found that believers employ many mechanisms to prove the healing properties of ayahuasca, San Pedro, or other ceremonies. My interviewees attempted to explain how these ceremonies work on the body. Some used scientifically (or some might say pseudo-scientifically) based descriptions and others used folk descriptions. Most foreign spiritual tourists and entrepreneurs combined aspects of these two, while most locals stuck to folk descriptions.

For example, many people say they experience death during an ayahuasca ceremony; “You feel like to die and your soul goes to the spirit world,” Kris explained.

Dr. Rick Strassman, a Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine, provides a scientific description for the feeling of death involving the pineal gland. This gland is located near the center of the brain and secretes the hormone melatonin, which regulates many of the body's biorhythms.<sup>14</sup> Strassman has developed a theory that endogenous form of DMT (Di-Methyl Triptamine, the drug found in ayahuasca) is found in the human body, and that the pineal gland produces this form of DMT instead of melatonin (2001). He suggests the body produces more DMT during transitional periods, such as birth and death, as well as during times of meditation and dreaming. When a person takes ayahuasca, the added DMT may heighten or activate the endogenous form of DMT and foster a transitory or meditative state. Hence, some people feel like they die and their spirit leaves their body. People's dreams or visions are lucid and vivid, and many people say they experience a rebirth after "waking up" from ayahuasca.

A folk explanation of ayahuasca's healing properties is less concerned with the DMT "spirit molecule," as Strassman calls it. Ayahuasca cures by removing spiritual darts and curses from other people that cause physical harm and mental anguish (Dobkin de Rios 1972; Bear 2000). Although some locals now mix in New Age beliefs, such as chakra balancing and cleansing, when explaining ayahuasca's effects, I rarely came across any who used Western science in their descriptions. They know when the ceremonies and the plant medicines are working and when they are not. Rivas explains,

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<sup>14</sup> New Agers often refer to the pineal gland as the "third eye," or as our connection to the spirit world and to higher consciousness. Rene Descartes wrote a book about the soul, in which he calls the pineal gland, "the seat of the soul" (1988: 31).

“Ayahuasca heals primarily by faith, but it also allows us to see the mysterious inner workings of our bodies. In our visions, we can witness what is going on inside us, and in the process, cleanse our bodies” (Bear 2000: 212).

New Age followers seem to mix folk explanations with more scientific ones; the First Annual Shamanism Conference in Iquitos made this observation quite clear. The purpose of the talks presented at the conference was to teach the attendees about the powerful ayahuasca plant and Amazonian shamanic belief systems. However, most of the talks were heavily based on Western ideas of science, and aimed to provide explanations for spiritual change. For example, Dr. Luis Eduardo Luna, PhD, a professor at the Swedish School of Economics in Finland, presented a study called “EEG Gamma Coherence and Other Correlates of Subjective Reports during Ayahuasca Experiences.” In this study, investigators examined brainwave activity, specifically the coherence of the gamma frequencies of 36 to 64 Hz, during ayahuasca activity. Gamma coherence or synchrony occurred when elements of normal consciousness were integrated into a larger, unified understanding or experience. Luna and his partners suggested that elevated amounts of gamma brainwave activity demonstrated heightened cortical alertness, and enhanced information processing as well as neural and cognitive complexity. They based their research on a previous scientific study that indicated people who follow Tibetan meditation practices show high EEG coherence levels (Lutz, et al 2004). Thus, Luna and his collaborators proposed that ayahuasca allowed for a heightened consciousness is much like what happens during meditation sessions (Stuckey, Lawson, & Luna 2005).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> A similar study was recently published by researchers at Johns Hopkins University, which received wide

The conference's Western science-laden basis caused some of the *curanderos* at the conference to speak out. In an interview, Efraín stated, "I wish there was more participation of the shamans; we want to hear from the grandparents not from the children" (personal interview, 7/20/05, my translation). During the conference, Efraín made a public announcement saying, "It is sad the ones who are speaking are not the original users. Here should be the original, the true indigenous technology and spirituality of ayahuasca... We are not talking about the spirit, we are not respecting Mother Ayahuasca."

Regarding the difference between Western scientific and local folk healing knowledge Kris believes that, "A change in science itself is occurring, in which researchers are learning about themselves, they are evolving and learning on a bigger level [in order to expand the field of science]. Indigenous people use science and their traditional knowledge, but for different reasons." Much knowledge exists about psychedelics, shamanism, *curanderismo*, folk healing, and New Age practices. One is not necessarily better than the other. There are so many explanations because each speaks differently to different people who experience diverse, yet related forms of spirituality.

### **LEVEL THREE: CREATING SOCIAL, ECOLOGICAL, AND GLOBAL CHANGE**

The third stage involves expressing gratitude by doing something beneficial with the information one receives while participating in spiritual ceremonies. "We take

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coverage in the news media because of its claim that this drug may induce spiritual encounters. See Griffiths, R., W. Richards, U. McCann, and R. Jesse. 2006. "Psilocybin can occasion mystical-type experiences having substantial and sustained personal meaning and spiritual significance." *Psychopharmacology*, 187 (3): 268-283.

ayahuasca based on our choice. It will show us things, but what we do with that information is up to us,” Kris said. Many people at the conference cited its importance in fostering social and environmental change. Efraín said it was an opportunity to “unite like-minded, spiritually-minded thinking in the world” and a chance to “re-charge the spiritual battery. In this way we can save the world and get rid of its problems.”

It could be argued that this search for shamanism and sacredness in nature is an extension of the environmental movement. Movements such as bioregionalism and deep ecology integrate spiritual thought and ecological activism. Deep ecology philosophers for example, draw upon Native American and paganistic principles such as “the intrinsic value of all life forms” and “the need for holistic balance in nature” (Egri 1997: 421). Many interviewees, both tourists and entrepreneurs, suggested that people want to participate in indigenous ceremonies to re-connect with the earth. All the Peruvian spiritual tourism ceremonies have to do with nature and with creating relationships with natural things. In the case of ayahuasca and San Pedro, people are connecting with the spirits of these plants; with *pagos a la Pachamama*, people give an offering to the earth so that the nature spirits, specifically the *apus* in the Andes will answer people’s requests; if people go to connect with the archaeological sites, they are usually connecting with the natural spirits there.

Carolyn Egri says, “Spiritual traditions and religions can teach one alternative ways of perceiving and understanding the world. To the degree that spiritual belief systems influence individual and collective values and beliefs, they create the ideational motivation to change the ecological status quo.” (1997: 418) Although we are materially

and technologically advanced, she says we are destroying the planet and endangering all of its inhabitants, whether plant, animal, or human. Just as there are scientists who are making technological advances to solve environmental problems, just as there are environmental organizations, NGOs, and government agencies that work towards natural health, some people are also suggesting that there are spiritual ways to help heal the environmental destruction humans increasingly cause (1997: 410).

Besides environmental activism, another avenue for global change occurs through community development. Although there are to my understanding no statistical data for how the spiritual tourism sector of the industry affects the Peruvian economy, I will present here anecdotal examples of how some *curanderos* who have profited from the tourism industry are helping their communities.

The small town of Tamshiyacu sits 30 kilometers from Iquitos on the Tahuayo River, a tributary of the Amazon. About 2000 people live in this small town, including the aforementioned Don Agustin Rivas, one of the most well known shamans in the Iquitos area. I met Rivas briefly while visiting Tamshiyacu. He was shirtless and riding a motorcycle along one of the few cement-paved roads in town. According to Roxana, my tour guide and Rivas' student of many years, he was preparing for an influx of "rich actors from the U.S." who were coming for a private two-week session. Rivas regularly receives large numbers of foreigners at his retreat in Tamshiyacu, where guests pay upwards of a couple of thousand dollars for two weeks, according to Roxana. With the money he earns, Rivas has implemented a number of community development projects.

The most notable of these community projects is a school for the children of Tamshiyacu. Grades run from kindergarten through high school. When I visited this school one afternoon, they had recently hooked up their computer lab to the Internet through a satellite receiver. Children could now become computer literate and learn more about the world through online access. Rivas also provided a huge lake, a nice playground, moderate teaching facilities, which most likely accounted for the large numbers of happy looking students who repeatedly asked to have their pictures taken. Without Rivas' donations, this school would probably not exist.<sup>16</sup>

Rivas is also involved in helping adults through art education. A carver by trade, Rivas has begun to set up workshops to teach community members how to carve figurines to sell to tourists, so they can make a little extra cash. For example, on a boat trip to a Kawapana community about five hours upstream from Iquitos, I met Francisco. As we talked he mentioned he was learning to make wooden carvings and brought out a couple to show me. One was a brilliant cherry red plant figurine, which I bought for 20 soles (roughly \$3.50 USD). When I showed it to Roxana, she was pleased that I supported the small but burgeoning craft market that Rivas was beginning to promote in the region.

At the First Annual Shamanism Conference, Norma, a *curandera* from Iquitos, revealed her plans to build a center in Iquitos for street kids, or the children who live or work on the street. Based on her work with ayahuasca and with help from some of her

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<sup>16</sup> See the school's website at: <http://www.ferp.org/school.html>

foreign guests, she plans to raise money through her Asociación Civil “Shapanguito” to help develop programs that will to keep them off the street.

### **SAVING TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

Another benefit of increased foreign interest in the spiritual practices of Peruvian *curanderos* is that through this process, knowledge of traditional healing methods might continue. Rivas states, “Using ayahuasca is a shamanic tradition that comes from my ancestors, and has been passed down from generation to generation. I continue making and using it so it will not disappear from our culture” (Bear 2000: 211). Rivas plans to also build a children’s center in Tamshiyacu called “Apajonita,” where he can teach children the traditional plant healing practices of the region (Bear 2000: 215).

Efraín, a *curandero* at the conference, said that his family runs an NGO in Alto Napo Runa in Ecuador. He said:

We live there and we have forgotten the culture of our grandparents. I have a foundation called Iso Mangapa Urko... This foundation is to conserve and protect the biodiversity of existing species in Napo national park in the Amazon. We work like environmentalists, like biologists, resisting against the *petroleros* [those who extract oil from the region]. We are fighting. We are conserving our culture. For 512 years, we’ve been carrying this forward. It is our heritage and we are conserving and protecting the medicinal plant knowledge. Everything in the forest is a hospital, a university, and our church. The spirit helps us. (personal interview, 7/20/05)

In Cusco, NGOs are also getting involved to help protect the culture. While tourism will continue to grow and will inevitably change the host communities, NGOs along with concerned foreigners and locals, are working to make the system slightly more sustainable, so that tourists do not destroy cultural heritage centers. For example, David

told me about his plans to work with an NGO and the Inka Q'ero community. "We are going to work in the community for five years, in the areas of development, ecotourism, things like that. They want to make a park for the visitors with an area for them to camp. This is so when tour agencies begin to go, the people don't take advantage of the Q'eros" (personal interview, 6/28/05, my translation).

## CONCLUSION

Here I have presented the advantages of the Peruvian spiritual tourism industry as they were described to me. While there are many negative things about New Age appropriations of spirituality and effects of commoditization, there are a number of ways spiritual tours positively benefit, or potentially benefit individuals, communities, the environment, and as some suggest, the world. After meeting so many people, locals and foreigners with nothing but positive things to say about their participation in these ceremonies, it became hard to defend my bias against the spiritual tourism industry.

During a talk I gave in November 2005 about my thesis research, a professor asked me a question that has stuck in my brain ever since. He asked, "Why now? Why do you think spiritual tourism is happening now?" I finally have an answer.

In the 1970s, Victor Turner noted, "pilgrimage centers are 'booming' at this moment" (1973: 196). Since then, growth in the spiritual tourism industry has made pilgrimage shrines even more popular. Turner continues:

Clearly, such factors as the general and rapid increase of the world's population, the improvement of communications, the spread of modern means of transportation, the impact of mass media on travel, have all had the effect of sending up the numbers of visitors to shrines, many of whom

should perhaps be considered as tourists rather than pilgrims per se. Nevertheless my own observations in Mexico and the data I shall present indicate that in the age of Aquarius, pilgrimages, like many other liminal or 'underground' (as opposed to 'mainline') manifestations of the religious, not to mention the esoteric and the occult, are surfacing once again as significant, visible, social phenomena, just as they surfaced in the past in periods of destructure and rapid social change (e.g., in the waning of the Roman Empire, and in the waning of the Middle Ages).

If Turner is right, then the contemporary increase in pilgrimage via spiritual tourism may serve as an indicator of growing social unrest and general discontent with the dominant global frameworks, most of which are based on Western ideas of democracy, capitalism, and Christianity. Furthermore, with all the hardship in the world, there must be avenues of hope for our present and future welfare. As Lisa, the South African now in Cusco said, "In these times we're living in, there's so much poverty in the world, there's so much pain, these floods, these droughts, this AIDS. San Pedro [and other sacred ceremonies] are teaching us that we don't have to have any of these negative things in our lives, that we are all part of creation and we can live very happily and in peace" (personal interview, 6/30/05). Some people are searching for ways to understand global issues their role within them, and simply how to become better people.

While I am not suggesting that spiritual tourists or pilgrims will necessarily produce change themselves, I do believe that their relatively recent increase in numbers demonstrates that people are not happy with the way the world is now and that coming change is immanent. Many New Age prophecies call for change – or the coming of a new age, the Age of Aquarius. The Incan prophecy says that the following 500 years after Francisco Pizarro landed in Peru would be a time of darkness, which would be followed

by 500 years of light. Omar, an upper class Limeño who recently was ordained an Andean mystical priest, explains:

In 1532, before the arrival of the Spanish, the Incan king chose 50 of the wisest people of the Incan empire, both women and men. He chose those who knew about medicine, about coca, about astrology, about reading rocks, about weaving. To these 50 best men and women, he said, during the next 500 years, go hide yourself. 500 years later, you will come back, when the Pachcutek arrives, the man who will revolutionize the world; Pacha = earth, Cutek = revolution. (personal interview, 6/15/05).

The Mayan prophecy says change, or the end of the world as we know it, will come in 2012. Roxana says that “In 2012, the earth will align with Venus and there will be changes – climatological ones, changes in humanity and nature, people will become more loving, more open, and sickness will begin to heal” (personal interview, 7/9/05). Many of my interviewees, entrepreneurs, *curanderos*, tourists, mentioned their belief that a complete change in the world was coming and usually referenced either the Mayan or the Incan prophecies. While I do not necessarily believe in a particular prophecy, I do believe the Earth cannot much longer support the exponentially growing population of humans and our consumptive habits.

Carolyn Egri suggests that human desire for effecting social and ecological change must come from within each person. Spiritual beliefs and traditions can help bring about such changes in that they can encourage positive self-discipline and activism in people’s everyday lives (1997: 425). Despite all the negative effects of spiritual tourism and the larger travel industry, spiritual journeys into Peru and other places may play some role in changing individual actions; when all the individual actions are added up, it can amount to a significant transformation. By providing one of many avenues for hope and

change, spiritual tourism may inspire people to live healthier personal lives, to conserve and protect the environment and our natural resources, and to foster better social and cultural relations between people.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

In my thesis, I have discussed the transcultural effects of the spiritual tourism in Peru. It is a general assumption that religion and business never overlap, however spiritual tourism directly combines the two. Sacred rituals become commodified experiences, bought and sold under a presumed benefit for both entrepreneurs and tourists. Spiritual tourism faces similar issues as other forms of marketed cultural resources, such as identity creation, authentic vs. inauthentic representations of identity, and increased competition among cultural resource entrepreneurs.

In the first chapter I present a spectrum ranging from tourism to pilgrimage; spiritual tourism, I argue, occupies the space between pilgrimage and tourism and employs characteristics of both. Scholars have suggested that pilgrimage authenticates tourism (Dubisch and Winkelman 2005) and that culture authenticates the tourist interest (Van den Berghe and Flores Ochoa 2000). Putting an educational or spiritual spin on tourism moves travelers away from the category of mass tourism that Boorstin abhorred and towards one of tourism as a pilgrimage, in which the tourist has a deeper relationship with the culture or place he or she visits.

The consumption practices of the Western world have shifted from acquiring items to purchasing experiences (Ray 1997; Rifkin 2000). Many tourists therefore pursue the most authentic experience they can; MacCannell suggests this is the tourist's ultimate goal (1992; 1999 [1976]). Another objective in MacCannell's eyes refers to an idealized relationship in which locals simply act and live their life as normal while tourists come to

participate or to watch their daily rituals (1992). In practice, these everyday rituals lead to performed culture, which is then branded and sold to tourists as authentic, having distinct effects on local social relations. Even by the simple presence of an outsider, that person can change the conceived authenticity of an everyday event.

Chapter Two explains Peru's offerings to the spiritual tourism industry. I discuss how Cusco and Iquitos have been constructed as New Age pilgrim centers and describe the ceremonies in which tourists participate in both places. Cusco is the most highly trafficked tourist spot in Peru, as it houses many cultural and natural resources that entice tourists. The *indigenismo* movement of the early to mid-1900s helped to develop the contemporary cultural significance of the Incas (Poole 1997), which in turn aided nationally and privately run tourism advertising campaigns to bring more foreigners to the region.

Iquitos has only recently become a tourist hotspot, as foreign interest in ecological, and now spiritual, tourism has increased. Iquitos has many natural and cultural resources because it is located in the Amazon River basin. Since the early-mid 1900s, Western curiosities about psychedelics and shamanism have grown, leading many foreigners to come to Peru searching for authentic ceremonies where they can use such drugs.

In Chapter Three I introduce some of the negative consequences that spiritual tourism has brought about in Peru. I write about the effects of commoditization in Peru in terms of authenticity. Using examples from the First Annual Shamanism Conference in Iquitos, I show that attendees came with preconceived notions of which *curanderos* were

authentic. I find that increased competition among Peruvian *curanderos* leads to the spread of gossip, which serves to sully their opponents' reputations. Even though tourism is hyped as an economic cure-all for developing countries, I illustrate how most of the profit is leaked to outsiders. During the conference when people questioned the economics of the event, others responded by accusing the questioners of bringing negative energy and jealousy to the positive atmosphere the conference was to provide.

Chapter Four presents the potentially harmful physical and emotional effects for spiritual tourists traveling in Peru. I discuss sexual consequences ranging from flirtation on the streets to sexual abuse during ceremonies that involve psychedelics. I also explain that the drugs in San Pedro and ayahuasca can have adverse reactions with other medicines people are taking. Sometimes unbeknownst to tourists, entrepreneurs add other drugs such as LSD, opium, or mushrooms to the San Pedro and ayahuasca concoctions, to ensure a psychedelic effect.

Chapter Five counters the previous two chapters by presenting some of the benefits of the spiritual tourism industry. I present three stages of ceremonial work that could potentially produce social, global, and ecological change. The first is the physical level and involves the immediate corporal and curative effects of ceremonies. The second involves further education and information gathering from both folk and scientific explanations of how these spiritual ceremonies and plants work. The third level is concerned with what people do once they have such information in order to change the world.

I presented the effects of tourism's double-edged sword as they are portrayed through the spiritual tourism industry. Without trying to justify tourism as either positive or negative, entrepreneurs and tourists, both foreign and national, must begin to understand tourism's potential but also its drawbacks. Done sustainably, travel can be a powerful cultural education tool for all parties involved and can bring economic gain to some. Tourism has the power to change people's lives by opening them up to other parts of the world, other philosophies, and other ways of life.

#### **FINAL DISCUSSION**

Can any form of tourism be a completely authentic experience? If, as MacCannell believes, the quest for an authentic experience is the prime motivator for tourists, does anyone ever achieve it? In Peru, foreigners come to participate in ceremonies they usually believe to be authentic in two ways: 1) that they are ceremonies in which local people actually take part, such as ayahuasca in Iquitos or 2) that they tap into history to become part of ancient, and therefore authentic traditions, such as visiting Incan ruins to meditate with the ancient spirits and energies.

Undoubtedly, Peru's cultural customs and ceremonies have changed over the past 500 years. Based on Poole's (1997) account of *indigenismo*, an Inca identity was created in the late 1800s to early 1900s based on elitist interpretations of rural indigenous life. In the reconstruction of a collective past, a group must rely on physical remnants, written and oral histories, and myths. Depending on the group's temporal and sometimes spatial or social distance from its past, recollection may be partially or wholly based on an

imagined past. Maurice Halbwachs writes, “The various groups that compose society are capable at every moment of reconstructing their past. But...they most frequently distort that past in the act of reconstructing it” (1992 [1941]: 182).

Paul Connerton suggests that “elites have invented rituals that claim continuity with an appropriate historic past, organizing ceremonies, parades, and mass gatherings, and constructing new ritual spaces” (1989: 51). Many of the idealized visions of Incan descendents produced by the *indigenismo* movement were promoted by the government to form a sense of nationalism, and led to the creation of holidays and celebrations such as Inti Raymi or Festival of the Sun, first performed in 1944 as part of Cusco Day. Through the annual celebration of this imagined Incan ceremony, the ritual has taken on new meanings within the cultural context of Cusco; the Inca past has been appropriated by present day Cusqueño culture.

On June 24, 2005, near the winter solstice, I joined a swarm of between 75,000 - 100,000 people who had gathered to watch the Inti Raymi festivities. We were outside Q’oricancha, the ruins of an Inca temple of which only the bottom stonework structure, a few of the temples, and a large courtyard remain. Drummers and dancers appeared on the balcony of the Santo Domingo Church, the Spanish structure that had been built on top of the Inca temple in 1537.<sup>17</sup> People were sitting on balconies, cameramen standing on ladders, and children propped above the crowd on the shoulders of their parents, all wanting a glimpse of the costumed dancers who had begun to perform in the courtyard. Numerous street vendors sold camera batteries and Inca flags, which depicted seven

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<sup>17</sup> See [http://www.peruembassy-uk.com/NewSite\\_pages/Cuzco.htm](http://www.peruembassy-uk.com/NewSite_pages/Cuzco.htm); Original built in 1534, but was reconstructed after it collapsed in 1537.

colors of the rainbow. After about an hour of watching the dancers form different geographical patterns in the courtyard, the crowd began to get anxious. We were waiting for the Inca King to come out on the church balcony, to kick off the celebration to Inti, the Sun God.

Finally, dressed in gold felt and carrying a rod that ended in a golden ear of corn, the Inca King arrived, showered by applause and cheering. He only spoke in Quechua. At the end of his speech, he took handfuls of corn kernels, turned towards the morning sun and threw them into the air, in a ritualistic offering to the Sun God. The dance squads then moved in a parade through the streets to Cusco's Plaza de Armas. The women dancers were mostly dressed in felt costumes, representing the imagined Inca dress, and held bowls of corn, fruit, or plant offerings for the Sun God. Men were also dressed in felt smocks, but held either swords or musical instruments. Finally the King, standing proudly as six men carried him on a throne, followed the dancing fleet to Cusco's Plaza de Armas, where he made a speech and accepted offerings from different groups of dancers.

After an hour or so in the plaza, tourists and Peruvians hopped into busses, vans and taxis, while others walked the steep 20-minute hike to Saqsayhuamán, an Inca fortress in the hills overlooking Cusco. Rich tourists and upper class Peruvians filed onto the bleachers that were built around the open courtyard; seats on these bleachers cost \$75+ per person. Others, mostly lower class Cusqueños and tourists who could not pay for the bleacher seats, piled onto the ruins surrounding the courtyard, scrambling for seats with a view of the ceremony. Here, dancers continued to make more geometrical patterns

while surrounding the Inca King. The climax of the ceremony involved the sacrificial slaughter of a llama, which nowadays is only pretend.

In this commemoration of the Winter Solstice, Peruvians invented an Incan ceremony, although the Inti Raymi does have historical ties back to the Inca. Although the Inca did not write down their customs and histories, a number of Spanish wrote down their accounts and interpretations of the Inca. Father Bernabe Cobo was one such Spaniard who documented the Inti Raymi back in the early 1600s. He said it was the most important festival in honor of the sun and that involved a first sacrificial offering of 100 brown sheep to the sun. Then more sheep sacrifices were also made to the sun, to Viracocha (the most revered god), and to the thunder god. Only the men of royal Inca blood were allowed to participate (Cobo 1990: 142).

There is a clear distortion in the way this ritual is celebrated now and was celebrated over 500 years ago. However, it draws the most tourists (Peruvian and foreign) to Cusco than any other time during the year. The point is that everything having to do with tourism is in some way constructed. Whether or not it can be deemed authentic I suppose is up to each individual tourist.

I believe that many of the ceremonies that foreigners come to try do have authentic origins to Peruvian culture, such as ayahuasca, San Pedro, and pagos a la Pachamama. To the extent that they become a performance for tourists, they inversely lose some of their authenticity for local Peruvians. A tourist's idea of authenticity may clash with the actual authentic, as I show in Chapter Three at the Shamanism Conference. As a foreigner becomes more knowledgeable about local customs, the more he will

recognize a performance of culture, and the less susceptible he will be to accept the performance as a true representation.

This thesis is only the beginning of a much larger study of the spiritual tourism industry. The next step would be to do more in depth investigations of the perceptions of local people who are not involved in the industry, whose rituals and ceremonies spiritual tourism exploits. I would also do more historical research into the construction of present-day rituals and ceremonies that have become a part of spiritual tourism and how they have been changed, constructed, and interpreted by different people over time. There are many avenues to choose from when looking at tourism studies, because of its relatively new appearance in academia and because tourism itself is continuously evolving to appeal to a variety of consumer markets.

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