Disputed Worlds: Performances of Heritage in Cusco's Tourism Economy

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Abstract

Between 1200 and 1535 AD, the Incas were the rulers of a region that stretched beyond Peru's contemporary borders, extending from the equator to the Pacific coast of what is now Chile. The heart of the Incan Empire was Cusco, the "navel of the universe," near the popular international tourist destinations of Sacsayhuaman and Machu Picchu. Cusco's heritage is largely consumed with its link to the Incas, and a variety of cultural performances of this heritage leaves many *cuzqueños* disenfranchised from or left out of their historical legacy due to an economic hierarchy that is directly tied to a racialized hegemonic discourse. Tourism appears to often take precedence over the needs of all *cuzqueños*; this historically repetitive trope has manifested in contemporary Cusco, where identity and heritage are commoditized for tourism's sake as the city adapts to its role as a cultural hub and major international tourist destination.

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It is important to accept that history is a living organism; history is rewritten and revised as more information and more perspectives are applied to it, and it is thus equally crucial to acknowledge that perhaps the problems of heritage in Cusco, Peru – its "value," its performance, and its legacy – can be seen as merely the natural process of a growing city adapting to its own changing landscape. Tourism, and thus an influx of international interest in the Andean city, has forced a certain amount of critical scholarship on the frustrations and hypocrisies of Peruvian politics surrounding the issue of portraying Cusco's heritage to the world, often without regard to its own citizens. Attempting to assign a "truth" or "real authority" to Cusco's cultural heritage is somewhat of a lost cause, as there are far too many interested parties projecting their views and dollars into a complex issue of ownership; essentially, there are too many "cooks in the kitchen" when it comes to Cusco's public formation of its historical inheritance. Cusco's heritage is often polluted by a corrupt system that values (perhaps not without reason) the wealth garnered from tourist spots, such as Machu Picchu, over the needs of its citizens and the sanctity of their land. This imbalance of priorities has resulted in lopsided social structures in Cusco, where indigenousness is a commoditized product and historical reality is often doctored for the benefit of the tourist industry.

Cusco's past is more than just the "navel of the universe," an impressive Andean and Incan capital captured by Spanish conquistadors; the city's history is full of struggles for power by various groups. The transformation of Cusco from Inca stronghold to Spanish metropolis was not an easy or bloodless task, as wars between various indigenous tribes in the Andean highlands preceded the arrival of the Spanish by several hundred years. Pedro Pizzaro was among one of the first conquistadors sent to Cusco by Francisco Pizzarro, and he did not arrive until February of 1533. Pedro Pizzaro's task was to "[loot] some of the city's treasures and [to gather] strategic information"; Pizzaro completed his task, in his wake

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leaving many of the residents of Cusco "victim to disease or warfare, their landed estates [taken] over by invaders, and their stores of food and other supplies [looted]" (342). Francisco Pizzaro declared himself governor of Peru, and the Spanish conquerors set forth an array of changes and decrees, one of which to "re-draw" the city of Cusco in order to cement the idea that Pizzaro's city:

> was not really the successor to the unique capital and ceremonial center of the Incas. Instead, whenever possible, Cusco's new Spanish occupants deconstructed the economical, social and religious networks… The Spanish transformed these networks into unilateral relationships whereby Indians paid and they themselves received tribute. (MacCormack 344)

The Spanish takeover of Cusco carried the hallmark of reorganization of the city to meet Spanish visions and needs, but the Spanish conquerors were also seeking to suppress the native's original spirit. A theme that still exists in Cusco can be gleaned from this account of the conquistadors' treatment of the Indians; the indigenous residents of Cusco (and arguably the rest of Peru) would remain subservient to their colonizers and their quest for power and domination. Anthropologist Helanie Silverman points out, however, that "what colonizers kill off as archaeology often lives among the colonized as self-knowledge and historical consciousness, two principal ingredients of anti-colonial resistance movements" (Pratt qtd. Silverman 884). This historical consciousness still lives on in contemporary Cusco and prompts a certain historical context for the city's current struggles over heritage and its formation.

Citizens in communities around Cusco were often left out of the city's developments and consequently were likely to deal with the aftermath of decisions on land reform and natural resources as opposed to having a say in what happens to the Sacred Valley in the first place. Conflicts between ethnic groups did not seem to indicate progress in Cusco, where "[an] inherently unequal struggle between classes and ethnic groups is firmly embedded in the postcolonial social and economic realities of poverty and affluence [and continues] to divide the nation" (Silverman 883). The harsh inequalities in social order that had been established by the Spanish colonizers and conquistadors still rewarded *cuzqueños* who were wealthy and who were often, unfortunately, of European descent. But the social inequalities also rewarded *performances* of Cusco's heritage by those whose physical features seemed to match an idealized version of Cusco's Incan ancestors, and many of the poorer citizens of the ancient city began to assimilate into a new tourism-driven economy that treated their history – or at least an over-simplified version of that history – as a marketable commodity.

Claiming one's identity and heritage in Cusco is not an easy task. Even though "*indigenismo* was strengthened by reforms at San Antonio Abad" in the early 20th century, *cuzqueños* – mestizos and Indians alike – struggled to define themselves *and* their heritage (Super). Claiming to be of indigenous descent was helpful in terms of luring tourists into thinking their interactions with the locals were "authentic" and "exotic" experiences with locals, but defining oneself as indigenous also meant that one was a part of a neglected group of Peruvian citizenry. Also, to assimilate into the tourism-based economy of Cusco, indigenous citizens were often coerced into at least *looking* less indigenous, and speaking Spanish and dressing in a more contemporary, western style was also part of espousing one's newer, less *indigenous-looking* identity. Claiming indigenous roots had a discouraging social effect on citizens, as "indigenous communities can come to be seen as subversives because they are poor, they live in rural areas, and they mount public demonstrations against a

neglectful, exploitative, or terrorist state" (Jackson & Warren 565). Being from the highlands was good for tourism, perhaps, but in terms of internal Peruvian social and economic politics, the association was not the most desirable for a citizen of Cusco. Losing some of one's indigenous community practices and traditions, at least in a public sphere, seemed to allow for more upward mobility for *cuzqueños*, though it is debatable how spiritually healthy or morally sound these constraints of Cusco's society are for those involved.

Anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena found, through her research, that working class *cuzqueños'* identification as a "mestizo" or as an "Indian" was less about "changing cultures" and more about "changing social conditions" (30). The fact that an individual could be "a mestizo and indigenous at the same time" relied heavily on "shedding the markers that indicate the social condition of Indianness" as opposed to an individual's entire dismissal of their heritage and culture (de la Cadena 30). This game of smoke and mirrors concerning individual identity was often motivated by profit, but also could be seen as a move toward equality. Sometimes retaining one's "Indianness" brought about stereotypes that were socially and economically harmful for individuals. For example, highland Peruvian women are often "constructed as 'more Indian' because they are less likely to speak Spanish or travel to urban centers and more likely to wear traditional dress and assigned duties that are seen as more traditional" (Jackson & Warren 560). While these "more Indian" practices may benefit a woman hoping to access certain pockets of society, it also ultimately results in Indian women earning "a second-class status of women and 'the female' in Andean societies" (560). By practicing a form of cultural performance – losing the appearance of "Indianness" – women and other "lesser" citizens have the ability to move forward in an admittedly racist society.

These *cuzqueños* do not necessarily lose their heritage in these cultural performances, but the loss of the *appearance* of their cultural heritage and traditions signals their willingness to participate in the norms that Cusco – or at least Cusco's elite – demands of its citizens. Obeying this societal structure is not an entirely terrible act, according to anthropologist Helanie Silverman. Silverman argues that though the descendents of "…those who created the admired ancient civilizations have been socially denigrated and…politically disenfranchised Indians of the past 470 years of colonial and postcolonial oppression," these socially and politically oppressed citizens' participation in cultural performance signals a new sensitivity to the social issues in the Peruvian highlands (Silverman 883):

> The apt phrase [for this phenomenon is] 'nation as narration,' the creation of tourist attractions out of archaeological ruins and their nearby 'native peoples' and museums as sites of representation. In turn, these approaches prompt sensitivity to issues of identity and how tourism reterritorializes and reconfigures identities; how image, people and places become commodities; how places are drawn into spatial economies; and how local politics find a venue for expression in the promotion and management of tourism. (Silverman 882)

By using both people and monuments as "sites of representation" of Cusco's heritage, the city exploits its resources selectively, damaging the people involved in the "narrative" of their heritage by diluting it for the purpose of tourism. Anthropologist Catherine J. Allen's study of the *Runakuna* Indians, *The Hold Life Has*, remarks several times on the importance of "sacred spaces" and "sacred places" that hold special value to Indian groups; contemporary Cusco's construction of "commoditized places" does not necessarily devalue the sites, but the commoditization of the *people* whose ancestors once occupied these places trivializes

these people's participation in their own heritage.

Part of the problem with the perpetual mismanagement of *appearances* of heritage in Cusco is that bending one's (assumed, sometimes created) Indian heritage to suit one's own goals is not a new concept for Peruvians, and the nation's acceptance of this malleability of inheritance and historical customs and traditions contributes to the complexities within the arguments over authenticity and ownership of Indian and/or Incan heritage. When Peru imposes a certain cultural hegemony on Cusco for, essentially, the country's tourist economy, there will naturally arise moments when transparent inaccuracies present a clearer picture as to how much of Cusco's heritage is manufactured. A humorous "challenge to the municipality's hegemony came in 2000, when officials realized that the invented 'Inca flag' used throughout the city since 1973…is the same as the international gay community's rainbow emblem" (Silverman 888). This gaffe, while challenging to the aspect of "truth" in this particular cultural performance, does not necessarily result in a re-examination of cultural performance – instances like the "Inca flag" folly generally only serve as roadblocks in the nation's quest to construct their empire of tourism; it is thus unimportant that there is no concrete evidence of the Incas possessing a flag, but it is important that the flag not be associated with homosexuality. Similarly, archaeologist Helanie Silverman notes that "maps are not neutral drawings" in reference to the free maps available at Cusco's *Boleto Tourístico*; often these maps "[attempt] to selectively and ideologically structure reality for its tourists by highlighting some features and ignoring others" (892). The insistence on a limited Cusco – one where symbols and historical landmarks are designed with tourism in mind as opposed to factual representation of the city's heritage – perpetuate a discourse that justifies the subversion of fact in favor of monetary or personal gain. Even former Peruvian President Alejandro Toledo "mobilized discourses of *incanismo* in his campaign, emphasizing his Indian ancestry and Andean cultural roots in a peculiarly 'New Age' fashion," which, along with his promised for social and economic reform for his fellow Indians, ultimately garnered him a favorable opinion from the greater Cusco area (Vich 2007 qtd. Hill 437). However, when Toledo "[continued] the neoliberal privatization policies begun by his predecessor, [his] popularity plummeted, and he was commonly framed by Cusqueños… as a 'traitor' or a 'sellout'" (Hill 437). Toldeo's cultural performance was ultimately judged by *cusqueños* as a fraudulent display of *indigenismo*, and the unfortunate fact is that this is not the first time *cusqueños* have had to tolerate blatant manipulation of their heritage for the personal gain of those already in a position of power in Peru.

Lima's efforts to hold a *Quilla Raymi* (moon festival) event in Cusco were met with disdain from many *cusqueños*, who were suddenly ordered to clean up its city's streets under a millennial operative designated for the festival. Not only was this *Operative Milenio* put in place solely for the tourism economic benefits related to the moon festival (which was entirely constructed through state directive and had little to do with actual Indian cultural tradition), but the areas targeted by the operative were obviously designed to keep *cusqueños* out of their own city, perpetuating class and race problems that have plagued the city since the Spanish conquest. The targeted areas of the *Operative Milenio*, "were the San Francisco Plaza and the markets of Wanchaq and Rosaspata, all areas visited infrequently, if at all, by tourists. These areas of the city, rather, are home to Cusco's poorer working classes, those who are more likely to be reconsidered *campesino* or *cholo/indio* by white or mestizo elites" (Hill 454). Similarly, the citizens of Cusco were put off by the evidence of state disregard for historical and local input on their *Quilla Raymi* festival, and these "…state versions of *incanismo*, expressed through its designs for the *Quilla Raymi* event, were roundly criticized by

local Cusqueños as just another example of Limeño centralism" (451). Heritage in Cusco, in regard to Toledo's campaign, the production of a false "Inca Flag," and the *Quilla Raymi* festival, are seen here as bastardized uses of a real people's real heritage. And, while there are no clear rules as to who and what may access this heritage and what parts of it may be accessed, it is obvious that misuse of this heritage comes with some social consequence. While criticisms of the *Quilla Raymi* actually bolstered *cusqueño* identity "by virtue of the opposition to Limeño centralism that the organization of the event engendered," it is worth noting that these reaffirmations of identity often occur *after* one's lineage and history has been maligned in a public space (452). It is frustrating that evidence of *cusqueño* protest seems suppressed by the state, even if it is realized in academic discourse, though it is encouraging that the youth of Cusco appear to be entering the dialogue regarding the city's heritage in a more abstract way.

The Sacred Valley – which includes Cusco, the Inca Trail, and Machu Picchu – is arguably the most popular tourist destination in Peru; in 2006, "over a million tourists per year" were reported to have visited the area (Bauer 613). This influx of diverse visitors to the region has resulted in "a large and diverse tourism industry providing not only for Cuzqueños but job seekers from other parts of Peru"; part of this "diverse tourism industry," unfortunately, includes prostitution (613). But Cusco's sex market comes with a twist of exoticism; the city has its own "brand" of local folks who "specialize in sexual and romantic encounters as a means of income," the *bricheros* (men) and *bricheras* (women) (613). These *cuzqueños'* trade resulted from an influx of tourists seeking a foreign sexual or romantic conquest, and the game of working the tourism sex circuit reveals gender, social, and racial issues that seem inescapable to Cusco. The *bricheras* are not required, in the same physical manner, as the *bricheros*, to take on "particular ethnic appearance. Men become 'professional Incas' and are seemingly irresistible to foreign women with their long black hair, darker skin, often indigenous features, sometimes wearing ponchos or woven belts or headbands" (613). If these *bricheros* also speak Quechua, play what appears to be an "indigenous instrument, and, most importantly, [claim] to be a direct descendent of an Inca," their exotic (and perhaps erotic) value increases (613). This "value" projected on the *brichero/a* is the pleasure principle that justifies these *cuzqueños* participation in another deceptive angle of Cusco's heritage and submission to the tourist market, according to Dr. Irmgard Bauer:

> One must go back in history and realize poor indigenous mountain people (*cholos*) have always been marginalized by mainstream Peruvian society and this discrimination is still very much alive. Oppressed by their own people, they are now suddenly valued by Westerners whose appreciation of *cholos* (genuine or fake) is worth so much more. (Bauer 617)

Anthropologist Michael D. Hill believes that Cusco's tourist-centric market has unfairly commoditized both Cusco's historical spaces but also its people. The existence of the *bricheros* is a direct result from the perpetuated system of racial and class identity, allowing tourism to become an arena "in which identities and bodies become marked and differentiated, and the *performance* of cultural identity is a product or service in the tourist market" (Root 1996: Castañeda 1996 qtd. Hill 442). It is upsetting that this performance of distorted heritage is what garners value in an international tourist market, but perhaps what is more upsetting is the cost of this cultural performance on its players. The inevitable problem of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) has not been avoided among the *bricheros* and *bricheras* of Cusco, and Bauer notes much of this problem on the limited "national

HIV/STI-prevention strategies" and the Catholic Church, but she blames the majority of this problem on poor sex education classes, which, if they did exist, were "offered in a detached, mechanical way focusing on anatomy, accompanied by displays of major embarrassment by teachers and pupils" (Bauer 620). Clearly, the issue of cultural performance is one that Cusco is familiar with, but perhaps a further acknowledgement of the hazards of some practices of "appearing Inca" could intercept future problems for the city's youth, who, even if willfully practicing a tourist-centered version of their heritage, are altering it in a way that is individually irreparable.

Heritage in Cusco is an ever-changing organism, and many contemporary representations of it reveal a paradoxical set of social norms perpetuated not only by the city but also by the Peruvian government; to wit: being an Indian isn't so great, but being an Incan is. Cusco's claims of Incan heritage have been overwhelmingly beneficial, at least fiscally, to the city's development and, to be fair, many preservationist efforts; the city's "…strong regionalist, Incanist identity demonstrate[s] the continued relevance of local nationalisms and place-centered movements which construct themselves in opposition to and the state and which may even succeed at undermining state authority," therefore allowing Cusco to once again be a cultural hub (Hill 441-2). But despite Cusco's status as a popular international destination, the legacy of its sacred spaces does not include all of its citizens, who criticize the state's tourist-centric attitude toward the city, where "the daily experience of poverty and need which have only increased, despite the promises of neoliberalism and despite the growth of the tourist industry" (438). What Cusco must accept is that its Inca heritage is no more important than its indigenous heritage; the Indians in the Peruvian highlands may very well be direct descendants of the Incas, but those ancestors remain mysterious ghosts of over 400 years ago. To continue to center primary significance on "Incaness" as the *only* piece of Cusco's heritage worth promoting to the international community will only entail further imprecision and accepted ambiguities of historical and cultural performance. Squabbles over heritage in Cusco are "inevitable because the past in Cusco is a fragile, nonrenewable resource," but there are untapped areas of Cusco's legacy that may broaden avenues of tourism in a manner more suited for honoring the city's, as well as the Sacred Valley's, many treasures, while *also* protecting the Peruvian highland's sacred past (Silverman 888).

The truth about Cusco's heritage is that there is no clearly defined truth, but historical accounts reveal that the city has suffered as much as it has thrived. The city's claims of "Incanness" in Cusco and the surrounding Sacred Valley has been diluted by colonization and changed through the natural passage of time, but that does not mean there is nothing left of the Incan world to celebrate and preserve; the sacred spaces of Cusco and the undeniable allure of Incan ruins like Sacsayhuaman and Machu Picchu are never likely to fade. Anthropologist Helaine Silverman warns, however, that "in Cusco, an essentialized and homogenized past is co-opted into the service of creating an authentic tourist experience," which begs the following questions: how can the past in Cusco become less over-simplified and more inclusive in terms of the knowledge and people thus far left out of its construction? (Silverman 887). What can be removed from Cusco's current representation of its past and what should and could be added or changed? These adaptations will likely be results of the efforts of those who have already been working tirelessly to unearth inequities and injustices buried under Cusco's attractive image, but these changes and adaptations must also come from within all participants in Cusco's society.

Social categorization of *cuzqueños* still carries levels of condescension that must cease in order for Cusco's heritage to be better cared for; the incessant labeling of citizens as "cholo" or "mestizo" or "misti" or "Indian," in academic discourse, art, and literature, does little for Cusco's tourist economy or for its citizens; the perpetuation of labeling only bolsters racial tensions and underscores fiscal inequalities. *Cuzqueños* have made it clear that they would prefer to be held accountable for their history, as well as better integrated in the progress of Peru, and it is confusing as to why these vocal citizens have not been more involved, excepting that they were likely not welcomed in big community decisions that effected the influx of tourism and commerce. Cusco's heritage must include not only its people – its women, its *bricheros/as*, its Indians, cholos, and mestizos – but it also must include the people who visit. If Cusco insists on a more holistic, veritable account of its heritage, perhaps visitors would follow suit, and a new chapter in Cusco's fantastic history could be written for all *cuzqueños* to enjoy.

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