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Shamans and Shams: The Discursive Effects of Ethnotourism in Ecuador

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Resumen

Han surgido nuevas formas mercantilizadas de chamanismo en las comunidades Kichwa debido a la nueva afluencia de turistas interesados en las culturas indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana. Los ritos chamanicos son populares entre los turistas porque representan sus fantasías de la alteridad cultural, pero los intercambios económicos entre turistas y chamanes plantean problemas de legitimidad y autenticidad. El turismo privilegia los aspectos performativos de chamanismo más que las tradiciones que tradicionalmente han definido al chamán. Como consecuencia de ello, las comunidades Kichwa han visto un surgimiento de "nuevos" chamanes, que están capacitados en la actuación chamánica y tienen acceso a las plantas alucinógenas que se utilizan en el rito, pero les falta la formación apropiada, tradicionalmente asociada con hacerse chamán. En este contexto, el significado y la legitimidad de la vocación chamánica se contesta y se construye tanto intercultural como intraculturalmente.

New commodified forms of shamanism have emerged in Kichwa communities due to the influx of tourists interested in the indigenous cultures of the Ecuadorian Amazon. Shamanic rituals are popular because they map onto the tourists' fantasies of cultural alterity, but the resulting economic exchanges raise issues of legitimacy and authenticity: tourism privileges the performative aspects of shamanism, rather than traditional training. As a result, Kichwa communities have seen a rise in "new" shamans skilled at shamanic performance, who have access to the hallucinogenic plants employed in the ritual, but lack the proper training traditionally associated with becoming a shaman. In this context the meaning and legitimacy of shamanic vocation is contested and constructed both interculturally and intraculturally.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Ecuador, La Amazonía, el chamanismo, Kichwa, el turismo, la alteridad cultural

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EVERY YEAR HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF tourists come to Ecuador in search of adventure, new experiences, and cultural alterity. Ecuador's geography (which includes the Galapagos Islands, a massive shoreline, a mountain terrain, and the rainforest) is perfectly suited to niche tourism, including "adventure tourism"[1] and, more recently, ethnotourism (Ross 1994; Bruner 2005[2]; Sylvain 2005), which includes (but is not limited to) shamanic and entheogen[3] tourism, particularly in the Kichwa[4] communities in the Napo and Pastaza provinces.

These tourist forms are established components of a lucrative industry around jungle ecotourism, which globally markets what Sylvain (2005) terms essentialist ideas of culture. Because this essentialism links indigenous cultures to "wild nature" (Lutz and Collins 1993; Tsing 2003) (discursively opposed to industrial modernity), and because "new forms of environmental tourism are often related to ethnic tourism, marketing exotic cultures and areas where few have traveled" (McLaren 2003:2), indigenous communities in the rainforest lowlands of the Amazon basin have become centrepieces of jungle ecotours that emphasize adventures in the last vestiges of "pure," "untouched"[5] nature. Thus, visits to indigenous villages are incorporated into multi-day rainforest adventure trips, along with the other standardized fare: a stay in a jungle lodge, white-water rafting, a canoe trip, hiking, or piranha fishing in a lagoon. The activities structuring community visits are also largely standardized, and include some combination of the following: a traditional Indian meal, a craft lesson, a *selva* (jungle) trip featuring a lesson in healing and edible plants and bird/animal calls, and a *limpiada*—a ritualistic cleansing with diagnostic and healing elements, conducted by the community shaman. The *limpiada* may or may not include tourists' consumption of *ayahuasca* —a mixture of psychotropic vines, "prepared basically from the bark of the liana *Banisteriopsis caapi* with additives from a number of other species" (Flores and Lewis 1978:154). An opportunity to try *ayahuasca*, which causes "profound alteration in consciousness, including changes in time and space perception, rapid mood change, synesthesia, depersonalization, and increased suggestibility" (Dobkin de Rios 1970:1420), with a Kichwa shaman serving as a guide for the hallucinogenic experience, is an important component of the tour packages, albeit one that is phrased euphemistically in most brochures. As a Kichwa shaman explained in an interview,[6] the common tourist brochure promise of "a special cultural program" means that the villagers "offer ritual dancing, if the group is more than fifteen or twenty people … handicraft, of course—the women are in charge of that —and *limpiadas*. Some just want the *limpiadas*, but many are curious, they want to

drink the *ayahuasca* and talk to the forest spirits."[7] In these Kichwa villages, this curiosity is accommodated by both traditional shamans who have (sometimes reluctantly) become involved with tourism as a part of wider community trends in the region, and "new shamans," who emerged as a response to the expansion of traditional shamanism into a cultural product. This article considers the ensuing discursive complexities around the meaning and legitimacy of shamanic identity in the age of global tourism and commodified cross-cultural encounters, as understood by the shamans themselves, and as perceived by the tourists.

Entheogen Tourism and Shamanism in Ecuador

Entheogen tourism, which is closely related to shamanic tourism, is a global phenomenon; in South America, it has been a growing branch of tourism since the early 1980s (Krajick 1992; Dobkin de Rios 1994, 2006). It has become widespread in Ecuador specifically as a result of the national propensity towards niche tourism. Previous studies of shamanic tourism in South America have included representations of emic critiques of tourist groups in search of hallucinogens (Wasson 1980), analysis of the impact of entheogen tourism marketing in such media as *Shaman's Drum* magazine, and the ethnographic profile of instant healers who assume the guise of traditional shamans to market potent hallucinogenic mixtures to tourists in a non-traditional fashion (Dobkin de Rios 2006). The popularity of entheogen tourism has been attributed to tourists' desire for the personal fulfilment and mystical experiences hindered by lack of support for psychedelic exploration in the West (Lucas 2005); their demographic is classified as "upscale tourists, well-read, devouring a large popular literature on psychedelics and ethnography, who are spurred on by charismatic instigators to experience tribal drugs" (Dobkin de Rios 1994). Naturally, academic queries into entheogen tourism in indigenous cultures frequently overlap with writings about contemporary shamanism; recent research has explored links between global tourism and shamanic identity (Lindquist 2005), and the ways in which shamanic sacred places are constructed through tourist performances (Bernstein 2008). Yet despite the abundance of academic literature analyzing various aspects of shamanic and entheogen tourism in South America and beyond, the nuances of the parallel discourses of "shamanism" (co-constructed by indigenous practitioners and tourist consumers) remain under theorized. Shamanism in Ecuador provides an excellent case study in these nuances, as the popularity of entheogen tourism has both created and illuminated the tensions and fissures in local understandings of shamanic identity.

Shamanism throughout Ecuador is an important aspect of indigenous heritage. Known as *yachajs*, *taitas*, *shamanos*, and *curanderos*, traditional healers' medicinal skills and powers of divination are acquired through years of initiation and

training. In lowland Kichwa villages shamans develop relationships with powerful spirits, who facilitate the shaman's passage into the spirit world, a passage he[8] accomplishes with the help of the "soul vine." Shamanic visions can concern illnesses of specific community members, and enable a shaman to identify both the proximal cause of the illness, and the shaman (and the shaman's client) behind it.[9] Beyond diagnostics and healing, shamanic visions can help divine the future of the community; in their ethnographic work on the Puyo Runa, Whitten and Whitten discuss a shaman "seeing" monstrous frogs in a vision, which reveal themselves to be *maquinaria*—industrial machinery, including a bulldozer, a roller, and a road scraper—tools of the extraction industries that would not appear in their microregion for several years (2007:12–13). In my fieldwork, one of the shamans I spoke to, Alberto from the Napo Village of Santa Monica, told me that his father, also a shaman, had had visions of tourists coming to the village years before ecotourism took off in the community.

Certainly, "traditional" shamanism is not a fixed, "pure" category, and it is not the intention here to reify it as "authentic" compared to more recent forms of shamanism. As with other "modernizing" aspects of indigenous cultures, including the very notion of "being modern," shamanism was a site of mutable and contested cultural meanings long before being commodified as a tourist attraction. Equally ambiguous is the notion of the "modernity" which, according to some, is poised to "transform" shamanism. It is important to remember that "modernity," far from being a crucible of dramatic irreversible change, is itself a fluid corollary of constructed "traditions" (Appadurai 1996), linked to colonial epistemology (Mignolo 2002), which should be interrogated as a Western "project" (Asad 1993). The lowlands Kichwa have experienced "a dazzling array of versions of the theater of modernity" (Whitehead 2002:200), in which they, and their culture and religious forms have been not just transformed but, in some ways, *formed*: the engagement with Spanish colonialism; missionization; missionary-facilitated transformation from the *patrones* economic system to wage labour for Shell Oil (Muratorio 1991); ecological damage done by resource extraction industries; the rise of indigenous activism; and the politicization of indigeneity. It has been a sequence of "modernities" in which sustainable development and tourism are merely the latest. While shamanic tourism and the broader discourse of neoshamanism may seek to isolate "traditional" shamanism as a "pure" cultural form, shamanism has always been entwined with and shaped by other social forms and political forces. Historically, becoming a shaman has conferred status and prestige; in fact, during the colonial period, shamanism was directly linked to local political leadership, and even came to be a "technique for acquiring office" (Salomon 1983:414).[10] Far from being a site of "pure" indigenous resistance to colonial and postcolonial Western influences, shamanism in the Amazon[11] can only be understood in the context of

the complex, deeply ambiguous relationship between Spanish colonizers and their descendants, and the colonized Indians, and the ways in which those relations were mediated through beliefs about indigenous sorcery (Taussig 1987; Whitehead 2002). Furthermore, literature on "dark shamanism"[12] and assault sorcery demonstrates the complex relationship between shamanic praxis and postcolonial "development," implying that commodification processes themselves may incite fears of sorcery, and that incursions of "modernity" may provoke indigenous "hypertraditionality" (Whitehead 2002:176).

Nor is the "export" of shamanic practice beyond indigenous cultural boundaries unprecedented. Recently, Ecuador has been one of the Latin American nations where shamans have become active participants in the regional pan-indian indigenous activism and advocacy organizations (Ramos 1998); the persona of a shaman has become iconic of indigenous identity in the context of international and national self-representation (Conklin 2002). Scholars such as Conklin (2002) have noted that, specifically in South American lowlands, "shamanism is flowering and shamans' influence and prominence are growing" (1050). In Ecuador specifically this "shamanic boom" is important both to indigenous political identity and cultural survival tactics.

Still, the influx of tourists interested in *limpiadas* and *ayahuasca* experiences has had an impact on shamanism in Ecuador in new ways that are significant, though not readily visible to the tourists. Without postulating "true" authenticity, it remains necessary to acknowledge that among many Kichwa there is a strong *narrative* of authenticity around shamanism. The invocation of this narrative by the Kichwa is not a straightforward attempt to protect or "rescue" a tradition from modern influences, but rather a complex mixture of reactions and agenda. Certainly there exists (especially among older Kichwa) genuine concern regarding the perceived adulteration and debasement of shamanic practices (that, although *always* performative and changing, have accrued a narrative of authenticity belying the traditions in which older shamans trained). These concerns are augmented by tensions surrounding older shamans' status and authority, which are threatened by the profitable shamanic performances of younger new shamans with questionable "credentials," as well as general anxieties about new cultural and economic forms that tourism fosters. Finally, the narrative of "authenticity" may be deployed to mediate the expansion of the intercultural repertoire of shamans—cleansing tourists, opening political events (Becker 2008), lending knowledge to drug rehabilitation programmes (Mabit et al. 1995), banishing evil spirits from World Cup sites in Germany (Kraul 2006), or speaking at World bank Group presentations (2008)—with no clear sense about which "exports" are "legitimate" and who is allowed to perform them.[13] These kinds of concerns have led to the formation of professional associations such as ASHIM[14] (Association of Imbaburan Shamans) (Wibbelsman 2008:168)—but so far the lowlands Kichwa shamans lack such an institution.

While the nature of shamanism has always been performative and fluid (including the adaptation of the foreign term "shaman" by indigenous healers), the ease with which new shamans are stepping into the role is a new development, which runs counter to the long and arduous training attached to the cultural narrative of "authentic" shamanism. Along with other aspects of indigenous cultural identity, shamanism has become a commodified cultural object, entering the global marketplace in a "sanitized" form that hides the nuances and complexities that have emerged during the commodification process. The emphasis on therapeutic "positive" aspects of shamanism is certainly characteristic of the presentation of shamanism to tourists. Tourist-oriented shamanism is so closely associated with fantasies of holistic, ecofriendly, naturally healthy indians that tourists interviewed frequently expressed surprise (and some displeasure) at the amount of tobacco smoke involved in rituals.[15]

Tourists generally remain unfamiliar with fundamental aspects of Kichwa shamanism and are unaware of the "darker" side of shamanic practices, and of the fact that historically incursions of "modernities" and their associated misfortunes have been understood by many Kichwa through a lens of fear of assault magic. This double discursiveness was encountered in interviews about the impact of resource extraction industries on Kichwa villages: while the detrimental effects of oil exploration and deforestation were attributed to appropriate actors (the Ecuadorian state and multinational corporations), the negative impacts on the community were processed through cosmological discourses of misfortune and ill health.

Despite its "sanitization" for the tourists and their ecoprimitive fantasies, for lowlands Kichwa communities negotiating cultural survival in conjunction with a desire to be "modern" and participate in the global economy, shamanism remains a powerful, often political, symbol of the former, while simultaneously promising a lucrative gateway to the latter. As these two aspects of the changing communities are frequently in tension with each other, shamanism has become (yet again) a locus of ambivalent cultural positionings and contradictory agendas.

As the time-limited and experience-oriented tours privilege the performative and material sides of shamanism, rather than its esoteric spiritual traditions, the relationships between the lucrative enactment of shamanic rituals and one's identity as a shaman becomes complex, especially when the issue of legitimacy is at stake. What makes a contemporary shaman? The tourist boom in Ecuador has created a demand for shamanic performance, and there is no shortage of willing suppliers. But do their performances stretch the limits of the performative and fluid contours of Kichwa shamanic practice? Are they redefining the legitimacy of shamanic expertise, or are they imitators who know where to gather hallucinogenic plants, and have learned the protocol of the *limpiada*? The answer, of course, lies in the eye (and positionality) of the beholder. While traditionally background and

years-long training is crucial to designation as a shaman, for tourists unaware of this, a shaman is defined by performance enacted during an economic transaction, rather than by personal history. Further complicating matters is that the newly emergent entrepreneurial shamans, although not trained in the proper tradition, were socialized into the same worldview and cosmology as the culturally legitimated shamans coming from the same communities and families; they genuinely share beliefs about forest spirits and the metaphysical properties of *ayahuasca*. So if belief in the powers of *ayahuasca* is the litmus test of distinguishing shamans from shams, then it is too simple to assess the new shamans as charlatans. While some scholars concentrate on the clearly demarcated boundaries that traditional shamans draw to distance themselves from the commodified administrations of *ayahuasca* (Hutchins 2007), or from "impostor" shamans designated by Seguin as "charlatan psychiatrists" (Dobkin de Rios 1994), for Kichwa communities it is worthwhile to theorize the distinction in terms of a discursive continuum, rather than an unambiguous rift.

Certainly, these tensions are not unique to the Ecuadorian lowlands. The issue of new forms of shamanism emerging around the world in cultural locations with strong shamanic traditions has been raised by a number of anthropologists, and it is useful to consider the Kichwa shamans' predicament in that context. Townsend (2004) discusses terminology concerns that arise in distinguishing "traditional shamans in villages and urban areas of Siberia, Nepal and elsewhere who continue and are reclaiming shamanism," from Western "neo-shamans" who appropriate traditional tropes of shamanism, synthesizing them into an "invented tradition of practices and beliefs based on a constructed metaphorical, romanticized "ideal" shaman concept." The tension between "traditional" and "showman" shamanism in Siberia is explored by Bernstein (2006); Vinogradov (1999) addresses shamanic revival and neoshamanism in Gorny Altai; and Laderman (1997) discusses the return to traditional shamanic healing by a Malay shaman. These issues of shamanic performances in touristic contexts resonate with the larger issue of cultural "authenticity" produced through encounters with tourism. Sack (1992) describes the process of seeking authenticity through the tourist experience of those imagined to be more in tune with a mythologized existential "authentic" state. Some view the "staging" of the cultural aspects (Cohen 1988), and the packaging and commodification that accompanies it, as bleeding meaning out of cultural traditions (Greenwood 1989), while others argue that the hosts are fully cognizant of the performative aspect of their interactions, and separate it from meaningful cultural practices (Picard 1996). This article engages with the aforementioned literature in exploring a situation where certain practices established as "traditional" coexist with tourist-oriented performances of the same practices, which are, in fact, indistinguishable to tourists. The case study of Kichwa shamanism offers an insight

into the ways in which the thin line between emic and etic understandings of shamanism is negotiated in cross-cultural praxis. Both are fluid and nuanced, rather than monadic categories. The "emic" perception of legitimate forms of shamanism depends on the positionality of the indigenous subjects, and tourists' understanding of their experiences often shifts as they process and re-narrate their encounters: I interviewed tourists who were enthralled immediately after a *limpiada*, but in retrospect felt that the experience was overcommodified, or "too touristy." Conversely, some tourists reported feeling underwhelmed by such aspects as a shaman's modern dress, but later in the day the experience became more mystical and magical in their narratives. Still, "emic and etic" remain useful categories here, as the fluid negotiations of shamanic legitimacy are disjunctured and tethered to different structures of meaning and value among the Kichwa and the tourists, respectively. For the Kichwa, shamanic legitimacy is connected to issues of status and ambivalence about the idea of "modernity," while for the tourists it is deeply rooted in their fantasies of indigenous "authenticity."

This article engages with these emerging compexities by drawing on primary data collected during fieldwork in the Kichwa communities of Ecuadorean Amazon, where shamanic tourism is commonplace, and entheogen ingestion is an important component of the "authentic" shamanic experience. The article features the term "new shamans" to designate the persons offering shamanic services to tourists whose credentials are questioned by shamans trained in cultural traditions. Terms like "fake shamans" or "pseudo-shamans" would more accurately capture the emic perspective held by the self-described "traditional shamans," but are problematic as analytical terms: since they are not self-identifiers, they retain their status as insults in the shamanic nomenclature. I employ quotation marks to indicate the ambiguity surrounding such a classification, as different definitions emerge here about what a shaman is.

Methods

Research data was gathered through a variety of ethnographic methods: participant observation and several types of interviews, ranging from topical to freeform, and from prearranged to spontaneous. Interviewees were asked to narrate their lives chronologically, which yielded some information about the inception of tourism, their first encounters with tourism and how they felt it had transformed their lives. Some of the interviews were with self-identified shamans (occasionally identified as "pseudo-shamans" by other shamans) in different communities. They ranged in length from 45 minutes to four hours (the latter organically incorporated a *limpiada* ceremony, which accounts for its length), with the majority falling somewhere between 75 and 120 minutes. Several interviews started out as life history interviews, but

because the rapport was inadequate for one reason or another, they turned into guided question-and-answer interviews that ended up being about 30 minutes long.

Topical interviews were pre-arranged, for which the topic as well as compensation was discussed beforehand. These interviews were conducted with shamans, tourist guides, community members, and tourists, and concerned specific subjects, such as the history and meaning of *limpiadas*, traditional shamanic training, and *ayahuasca* tourists' previous experiences with hallucinogens.

Shamanism, Alterity and Identity

Tourists generally encounter shamans during "jungle tours," which include visits to indigenous communities arranged by one of the many local tour agencies; Quito (the capital city) and smaller towns like Tena and Puyo have become "gateways" to the rainforest because of their geographical positioning.

Tourists interested in "community visits" are assumed (on the basis of precedent) to be in the market for radical alterity, which the indigenous groups compete with each other to supply. Local brokers help construct the market of alterity, sometimes assessing the Kichwa as "No son interesantes" (not interesting) in the sense that they "are too close to the cities;" "they are civilized, they all have cell phones; The Siona, the Huaorani, they are primitive, they are interesting."[16]

The tourist industry seems to construct a hierarchy of "wildness" among indigenous groups, with the Kichwa occupying a low position. But lack of "wildness" can be compensated for with other forms of cultural "authenticity"—in some ways they are considered the most "user-friendly" in terms of physical access and logistics, as they are mainly located within two to five hours from the lowlands tourist hubs. In a place where tourist destinations strive to carve out a unique niche in the oversaturated "alterity" market, Kichwa tours promote *limpiadas*—ritualistic cleansings involving powerful hallucinogenics, which market well to a demographic in search of "the exotic;" this "compensates" for their proximity to "civilization."

One of the primary research informants was Jorge, a retired shaman residing in Santa Maria, a community in Pastaza province. Jorge is almost fifty and a former shaman, who no longer officially practices shamanism; he has a strong Catholic identity. His narrative emphasizes that he used to be a good shaman, and that he can still tell the difference between good and bad shamans. As he describes this difference, he says, "because of the tourism they are some people who are studying to be a shaman, but they don't do it properly, or they just pretend and say they are shamans, because they tourists, they have money."[17]

When he says people are not studying properly, he means they learn how to perform the *limpiada*, and the basics of divination through *ayahuasca*, but they

have not trained for shamanism in the traditional, highly embodied way, which requires a life-long commitment, starting early in childhood:

> "you should start your training since you are 10 to 12 at most, but better even when you are 6 years old, before your sexuality develops, so it's easier. While training, they have to eat everything without salt, just green smashed banana, not having sexual relations, every night they have to drink *ayahuasca* for five years; after two years of [being a] trainee they can start practicing. After five years they get very skinny because they do not eat anything just drink *ayahuasca* and work and work. Some of them do this for two years and that's it, but they do not deserve to be called shamans."

When he talks about the difference between good and bad shamans, contemporary elements are mixed with traditional ways of assessment in a heuristic that helps distinguish between the two. He confirms that traditional conflict between shamans remains—with shamans being held responsible for predicting ill-fortune, and revenge sorcery, which produces situations that call for a subjective assessment of a shaman as "good" or "bad," depending on alliances, loyalties, and whether the person concerned is protected or threatened by a given shaman. But a shaman can also be designated as one or the other on the basis of the quality of treatment he administers, and the authenticity of his credentials. "For example," he says, "you can come here sick and I am the shaman, I start the treatment giving you *ayahuasca* to drink, and at night I see what kind of sickness you have. I can relieve you or just pretend that I did, for you to recommend me to your family, and friends." Such pretence can be characterized as incompetent, with insufficient treatments generating undeserved income; Jorge, among others, feels that tourism promotes a lack of quality control in shamans—both in terms of training, and in terms of services rendered.

Jorge complains that "in the old days" the shamans apprenticed with older shamans, and learned divination and healing with *ayahuasca* and natural tobacco. These "modern shamans," he says, practice what he calls "red magic"—magic learned from books sold at witch markets. This magic, according to Jorge, is performed with the aid of a red, yellow, and white candle, an egg, perfume, and a "very strong drink" made of sugar cane and tobacco. The combination of the drink and the scents induces a drug high in a matter of minutes; however, according to Jorge, it is not hallucinogenic in the way that *ayahuasca* is.

Interestingly, although Jorge says he is no longer a shaman, he remains a community healer. He talks about how important it is to offer immediate medical assistance when warranted, especially to a child: "I was very sick as a child, and learned that from my father."[18] His rupture with his identity as a shaman seems more drastic in his narrative than in his actions, and seems to stem from his strong identification with the Catholic faith, and his disapproval of the new modalities of

shamanism for the tourist market. Clearly, he engages in the magical thinking that characterizes shamanism: his critique of "new shamans" comes from his discomfort with their exploitation of what he believes to be real, magical forces.

Yet he says: "When people ask me if I have a shaman here, in Cotococha, I answer no, I will not lie for the money; besides, if another shaman hears about it … I would be in trouble because there is a lot of competition … I used to be a good shaman, long ago."

It is important to note that this distinction is hardly rooted in practice, as visiting tourists receive *limpiadas*, administered by Jorge, and have the option to try *ayahuasca*. Jorge seems to want to distance himself from the sort of unethical shamanism that has emerged, as the demand for such experiences has increased in a context of little accountability. Tourists are transient, and (a) cannot tell the difference between real and new shamanism, and (b) do not present a threat of repercussion that comes with dealing with kin, neighbors, or another shaman. For tourists, the shaman encounter is epitomized in undergoing the decontextualized ritual of the *limpiada* and the hallucinogenic experience of imbibing the *ayahuasca* drink. No tourist expects shamans to prove their authenticity: the authenticity is indexed by the performed sequence of gestures that constitutes a *limpiada*, and the access to *ayahuasca*—neither of which a shaman makes, according to Jorge, and others, who share his views.

"Fake shamans always want to pretend to be what they are not:" Jorge explains that there is a difference between traditional medicine and shamanic healing, although it might not be obvious to tourists. He describes procedures that might appear magical to tourists used to Western, allopathic medical care, but that do not necessarily translate to shamanism:

> everybody knows how to cure a child of the scare. Sometimes, when they get scared they throw up. So we put that in the skirt we make from bark, and burn [the vomit] … if it is windy, it will smell awful … We do the same process for two days or until they feel better—but that does that not mean we are shamans …

He starts talking about Reynaldo—a fellow community member who identifies as a shaman. "That man … says he is a shaman … I know he advertises himself as well too. I could do the same … if you asked me for a shaman, I could tell you I am a shaman, because of the money. So you would record me, take my information and then bring it to your country, and create publicity for me, and if someone wants a shaman then they can come directly to me … Reynaldo … now he works with the agency. The agency send people who ask if he is a shaman, I answer I do not know, but I know he has e-mail, business cards and has his own publicity."

This desire for international publicity is increasingly common among both shamans and "new shamans," who sometimes see tourists as an opportunity to aid them in this quest, whether by providing information about such practical matters as registering a website, or garnering a high number of google hits, or possibly helping to promote their services by mentioning the shaman to their friends.

Jorge voices his doubts about Reynaldo; he says he was not properly initiated into shamanism in the traditional Kichwa manner:

> I have been told that when you drink *ayahuasca* with him, that spirits don't talk to you, and that he makes the women drink the *ayahuasca*, then make then lay down on the bed and request them to take their clothes off and then he starts touching them and "start the treatment", some people has complaints about it in the agency.

Reynaldo seems unconcerned with Jorge's doubts about the authenticity of his shamanic practice. He has a garden where medicinal plants and herbs grow, and is proud to show it off; he explains which plants cure which symptoms. He repeatedly states that he learned from his grandfather, who taught him to drink *ayahuasca*, although he is vague about the length of his training. In fact, Reynaldo believes that in many ways tourism benefits and strengthens Kichwa traditions, including shamanism:

> In the past we used to drink *chicha* five–six times a day, and now we make it for tourists more, and drink it more again. Now we know, because of some studies, that *chicha* has vitamin B. Now sometimes we come back from the fields at 3pm and drink *chicha* instead of having lunch then we go back to work, and it is healthy … this is the way we raise our children in order to keep them strong and healthy.

He mentions that communities that do not work with tourists are often disapproving or resentful of tourist-friendly villages, but he calls those communities "backwards:" "I think it's better [our way], we should keep our forest, and our customs, like our traditional dance and our *limpiadas*."

Reynaldo's perspective is interesting in light of the critical examination of the binary of "tradition" and "modernity" because it shows the way in which even from a synchronic perspective[19] both can be valued, and narrated as complementary rather than oppositional.

Tourist Constructions of *ayahuasca* and Shamanism

The opportunity to experience *limpiada* is a fringe activity, that is, nevertheless, extremely popular with a particular demographic; it goes beyond the standard

limpiada, and involves consumption of the drink made from the *ayahuasca* plant *by the tourists themselves*, under the supervision and guidance of a local shaman. There is no shortage of shamans who accept visitors, and the finer points of inter- and intra-community contention about who might be a legitimate shaman are neither obvious nor particularly interesting to the visitors. This establishes an economic environment in which the demand for "underground" *ayahuasca* experiences is filled by a willing supply of shamans—since, at least from a casual etic perspective, status as a shaman is determined by (a) presentation of self as such, (b) the ability to perform a *limpiada* (my informants said that "new shamans" mimic the *limpiada*, leading me to believe that the perceived metaphysics of the *limpiada* transcend the correct execution of the ritual) and (c) access to *ayahuasca*.[20]

While some tourists arrive with the specific goal of trying *ayahuasca*, they often start out simply impressed or fascinated by the shamans, or "new shamans," encountered during community visits; they may also be interested in broader indigenous traditions of naturopathic healing (these shifting demographics speak to the value of considering shamanic tourism and entheogen tourism as integrated phenomena). Requests for *limpiadas* and *ayahuasca* ingestion are communicated to the tour guides, who handle the financial aspects. A *limpiada* may cost between $20 and $30, and *ayahuasca* for the tourists to imbibe themselves usually costs extra. Although the latter is an off-the-books activity, prices are more or less standardized. Some variation exists, usually in accordance with the shaman's reputation, although the tourists are privy to that information only to the extent that it is communicated to them by their tour guides. It is not uncommon for the tour guides to recommend shamans who charge more, but are "better shamans."

Although there has been an increase in daytime rituals involving *ayahuasca* to accommodate tourist schedules, the Kichwa believe that *ayahuasca* should be ingested at night (a different hallucinogenic plant, *floripondia*, is ingested during the daytime, but tourists rarely know about it). Once arrangements are made, the shaman or another community member collects the plants. The shaman, either alone or with tourists, will ingest it in the form of a viscous bitter brown brew, frequently mixed with cane alcohol, usually by a bonfire. Then the *limpiada* will begin. Its performative aspects include ritualistic smoking and singing, fanning of smoke with leaves, and a distinct form of controlled breathing and spitting, which is narrated as a process of pulling poisonous energies out of the body. In addition to performing the *limpiada*, the shaman may guide the tourists' visions and encourage them to interact with forest spirits.

Understanding the mindset and cultural location of the tourists is crucial to comprehending their role in the legitimation of tourist-oriented forms of shamanic performance. Many tourists visiting the rainforest wish to take advantage of indigenous medicine and herbs, both medically and recreationally. This desire is

deeply entwined with an attitude frequently displayed by tourists interviewed during this research project—characterized as a *homeopathic* view of the rainforest and all that it contains (including plants and denizens). While the tourists ran the gamut in terms of general proclivity towards alternative medicine (although the "alternative" tourists primarily interested in indigenous culture frequently belonged to a self-selecting group interested in all things holistic, cross-cultural, and natural), there seemed to be a common attitude of "when in the Amazon, do as the Amazonians do," and a belief (arguably connected to the tourists' ongoing preoccupation with "authenticity") that the rainforest contained the cures to the health problems it could inflict. So, some tourists were willing to rub on or ingest herbal mixtures offered by guides and/or shamans in cases of scratches, insect bites, rashes, and even gastrointestinal distress, even though the same tourists were, as a rule, hyperconscious of possible illness and bacteria in urban areas like Quito, Guyaquil, and while in transit (i.e., they carried Purell bottles, brushed teeth with bottled water, were reluctant to use local medical facilities, aside from the Hospital Vozandez in Quito, which has a good reputation and English-speaking doctors). These people were obviously embedded in traditional Western allopathic medicine, judging from their pre-packed first-aid supplies (virtually everyone listed pain killers, Benadryl spray, anti-histamines, and a script for antibiotics as a part of their travel pack). But in some cases, especially among the "alternative"/"backpacker" tourists, both foregoing medicines from "home" and doing things "the native way" became a significant aspect of cultural immersion. For example, Alana, a backpacker from Northern California on the Lonely Planet circuit of Ecuador, Peru, and Colombia, explained that she stopped taking Larium, a malaria-preventative medicine, after a shaman told her, following a *limpiada*, that she was "protected" and didn't need them. (The Center for Disease Control states that malaria risk for Ecaudor is "risk in all areas at altitudes lower than 1,500 meters (4,921 feet) … no risk in Guayaquil and Quito;" the Amazon regions in which she had been travelling are indexed as low-risk for malaria by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO 2000).

For some interviewed tourists, interest in indigenous use of herbs organically evolves into a desire to try *ayahuasca*. For others, Ecuador is, essentially, a stop on an entheogen tour of South America. But the same imagined (and coveted) emic state of mind frequently colours expectations and narratives of *ayahuasca* experiences for both groups. The visions tourists hope to experience, and the spiritual benefits they subsequently reflect upon, are deeply embedded in the local topology of myth and ritual—which has to do with the perception of an *ayahuasca* trip as an educational opportunity—in the broader sense that it is seen as opportunity to gain privileged knowledge, traditionally reserved for Kichwa shamans. The tourists expect to commune with the forest spirits, and to be able to experience divinations

and insights through their encounters with the spirit world. It appears that they speak of forest spirits and the spirit world in a way that is as literal as they perceive the attitude among their hosts to be. This speech, presented in narratives of hopes for a hallucinogenic experience, or in narratives of an already-transpired hallucinogenic experience, is, in a sense, a mimetic performance, in which *ayahuasca* consumption is both desired and processed in appropriated emic terms of the indigenous cultural paradigm and symbol set. This complex discourse is contingent on the reified cultural capital of the shamans who supply the *ayahuasca* and guide the tourists' visions. It is easy to see how the esoteric shamanic training, located in the distant past, is de-emphasized in favour of the embodied performance of shamanic duties situated in the moment of the tourist experience.

The travellers interested in *ayahuasca* usually had previous experiences with hallucinogenic substances—twelve of the fifteen tourists interviewed on this subject (from North America and Europe) had previously "tripped" on mushrooms and LSD, and one had tried mushrooms, but they "didn't work." Three had had additional experiences with a hallucinogenic used in a traditional ritualistic setting with a shaman guide—two had tried peyote in Mexico; one had taken a dose of the San Pedro cactus in Peru. Generally, the hallucinogenic experience seems to have been the prime locus for an explicit projection of a desire for non-reflexive "pure" immersive experience of radical alterity. While most of the interviewed tourists considered their hallucinogenic "trips" in the Western setting deeply meaningful (even transformative) experiences, the language they used to convey this established a different framework from the ways they narrated their hopes for ingesting *ayahuasca* (often drawing on other travellers' narratives), or their already-transpired *ayahuasca* experiences. Transformative drug experiences within their own cultural context were described as "providing insight," allowing them to see "the larger picture" and "how everything is connected." But even when the experiences were linked to spiritual transformations or values (in terms of realizing "what is really important" or "dispensing with the superficial"), the narratives never lapsed into actual metaphysics. However, when conversation turned to *ayahuasca*, the lines between the interviewees' experiences (or hoped for experiences) and the framing of the *ayahuasca* rituals by the Kichwa shamans were blurred. The shamans' guidance was perceived as inalienable cultural knowledge that could only originate from an "authentic" shaman, and the "authenticity" of the shamans was in turn confirmed through the interactive experience of ingesting *ayahuasca* under their tutelage. It was as if an "authentic" shaman enabled access not only to *ayahuasca*, but also to a different cosmological reality where metaphysical stops being metaphorical (and, in a positive feedback cycle, such a visceral experience amplified tourists' perception of a shaman's authenticity and power.) The tourists frequently spoke of *ayahuasca* as providing access to the spirit world, and allowing for actual

divination—thus externalizing phenomenological perceptions that occur in an altered state into a narrative engaging in a mimesis of the cosmology of their hosts. The resulting discourse features a shifting, syncretic heuristic for understanding and processing what happened to them after taking the drug. Tourists' thoughts about the drug's purpose, as well as their feelings and visions, explicitly reference indigenous beliefs about *ayahuasca*, in terms of allowing contact with the spirit world, and serving as a conduit for healing. The literalness of these referents is modified by qualifications like "supposedly [*ayahuasca* allows one to]" or "the shaman says."[21] Frequently, such narratives end with some kind of affirmation of the metaphysical nature of the *ayahuasca* experience, whether through a coda referring to interacting with the spirit world, or a reference to a literal healing, without qualifications, or attempts to frame it as a hallucination. Sometimes, this affirmation is as simple and explicit as a summarizing statement— "I believe it worked," or "I think it was real magic." Such affirmations were key elements in *ayahuasca* narratives among the Western tourists, yet the attitude that emerged during interviews with *shamans* was double-discursive: they were absolutely convinced of the power of *ayahuasca*, but gently mocking in demeanour when describing tourists who expected to interact with forest spirits. By way of explanation, one shaman said: "we see [the forest spirits] because we grow up with them."

The discourse wherein a shaman's legitimacy is linked to performance decoupled from the performer's background and social status may be a contested one intraculturally, but it is predominant in intercultural interactions. It became clear that tourists conceptualized *ayahuasca* and shamans as coexisting in a metonymic relationship, where *ayahuasca* represented an authentic immersion in shamanic tradition, and, in turn, access to *ayahuasca* was the defining characteristic of a shaman. Of course, this is relevant to the tensions surrounding the praxis-based definition of shamanism: while at odds with the emic understanding of shamanism as inscribed in complex networks of cultural capital and social catchet, this form of shamanism is realized and empowered by tourists. And as shamans' professional repertoire increasingly includes working with tourists, the praxis-based shamanism becomes discursively competitive.

While interactions between tourists and shamans[22] are complex and rich in ambiguities on both sides, the complexities seem to be sublimated in the tourist narratives. This may be due to the commodified nature of the *ayahuasca* trips; a large part of the product satisfaction comes from being able to assemble a narrative of experienced radical alterity (which constitutes "the demand" in this exchange). Additionally, within the self-selected group of tourists who gravitate towards "*ayahuasca* tours," a claim to "authentic" experience provides cultural capital and social cachet. For the shamans, as long as they provide "the supply" to meet "the demand," it is obviously lucrative to facilitate a memorable experience that can be

narrated as unambiguously mystical. This can be achieved by downplaying the role of cultural context in the interpretation of the effects of the drug, which is traditionally consumed by a shaman, trained from a young age, in the presence of his family and community members as a part of a night-long ritual where a kind of *communitas* (Turner 1969) is achieved by participants engaging in a long-standing, community tradition. Deemphasizing this traditional context allows the impact of the drug on the tourists to be presented as grounded in an objective, consensual reality that includes spirits and spiritual healing, and that is shared between the shaman and the tourists. It is easy to understand how the supply-and-demand framework for "*ayahuasca* tours" creates a positive self-perpetuating loop between the shamans and the tourists: cultural frameworks are consumed, then reified, and reproduced by the tourists as reconstructed narratives of the "trips" validated by a shaman. These narratives are then imported into the realm of memory and travel stories, which validate the shamans among the tourists (if not among their fellow villagers).

A number of native non-indigenous Ecuadorians who participated in these ecotours expressed doubts about this process. A woman named Paula, from Quito, has a number of American friends. Whenever they visit her in Quito, she accompanies them on tours of her country, often arranged through an Ecuadorian friend who organizes "ecological and cultural" tours. At the time of this research, she had recently travelled to Santo Domingo Los Colorados, accompanying her friends on a community visit of Tsachilla indians (who, like the Kichwa, use *ayahuasca* for shamanic rituals). It should be noted that Santo Domingo Los Colorados, like the Napo jungle, is a popular destination for those in search of "radical alterity," especially of the sort that can be visually documented, as the Tsachilla indians are famous for painting their bodies with black stripes and dyeing their hair bright red —a traditional look they no longer use except in recreations for tourists.

After the visit, Paula expressed that she felt her friends wanted the *ayahuasca* experience to be able to talk about "[having] been there and done that." She did not ingest *ayahuasca*, but rather observed her friends drink the hallucinogenic brew, and become "dizzy, pale and very sick!" On the following morning, however, "the guys were so happy and high. And they were even telling their friends they drank *ayahuasca*, as if it were the greatest thing ever and as if they were famous and popular … I wanted to see something else … I don't even know if this "*taita*" or shaman was a good *taita* … did he know what he was doing? He didn't seem very concentrated … he allowed people to take pictures—it was a touristic attraction."[23]

Other Ecuadorians were also inclined to question the motivations and credibility of both tourists and shamans in such encounters. Juan, who was completing graduate work in tourist studies in Quito at the time of the interview, echoed this

ambivalence about the agendas that shaped these encounters. "[The shamans]—they know what they are doing, what is wanted from them … the tourists know what they want, but they don't know what the shamans give." Elaborating, he clarified that he did not mean to question whether the tourists actually received *ayahuasca* (although frequently *ayahuasca* is given with copious amounts of cane alcohol, as alcohol is believed to exacerbate the hallucinogenic properties), but he felt that the shamans would tell the tourists anything to fulfil their fantasies. This sentiment was echoed in other interviews, which *en masse* implied that tourists wanted to experience "authentic"[24] alterity through immersion in an "exotic" cosmology, represented by an "exotic" ritual involving an "exotic" plant inducing "exotic" affect. The tourists were willing to pay for a fantasy that combined these ingredients, and were not particularly interested in the ethnographic research that might have cast doubts on the shamans they dealt with. During informal interviews with the tourists, whenever asked about the issue of shamans being perceived as impostors by other community members, they always confidently stated that *their* shaman was "the real deal."

Conclusion

This article explored entheogen tourism in Ecuador, and its impact on the traditional practice of shamanism among the Kichwa population in the Ecuadorian lowlands. The emic perception of a loss of "quality control" in shamanism, felt by some of the more "traditionalist" Kichwa shamans, is connected with the tourist-generated demand for "exotic" adventure and cultural alterity manifested as opportunities to partake in *ayahuasca* shamanism. As this demand focuses on the practical and experiential aspects of shamanism as a service, an important aspect of shamanic legitimacy, rooted in an esoteric experience of training for many years, loses its significance. As a result, the emergence of shamanism as a lucrative profession within the tourism industry challenges the Kichwa traditional categorization of shamans and creates (for "traditionalists") a category of shamans lacking intracultural credentials, but successful in marketing themselves as shamans cross-culturally. This does not imply a static history of an immutable shamanism: recognizing that shamanism was *always* performative, and always mediated by engagement with external cultural forms, is crucial to a non-reductionist understanding of contemporary tensions around shamanic practice. In some ways, using shamanic practice to fulfil economic ambitions today is not dissimilar from using shamanic practice to fulfil political ambitions in the colonial context described by Conklin and Ramos. But while the "tradition" under discussion is not an objective historical fact, it is nevertheless a narrative that holds great significance to many Kichwa, whether they are shamans or not. This "tradition" is an important cultural category because it contextualizes the current tensions around shamanism

in a long history of articulating cultural meaning and regimes of value from a marginalized sociopolitical position, and negotiates the costs and benefits of becoming "modern Kichwa" at each new historical juncture of "modernity"—from missionization to ecotourism.

Finally, while this article is largely structured around the life history of Jorge, who in many ways would consider himself a "traditionalist," it was not my intention to seek out "traditionalists" in my fieldwork, as is hopefully evidenced by the fact that the two shamans mentioned in this article (Jorge and Reynaldo) are examples of a "traditionalist" and a "new shaman"—and both were important research informants. Furthermore, both perspectives show that even the notions of "traditionalist" and "new" shamans are epistemically murky, even while rich in ethnographic insights about things other than shamanism. Jorge does not identify as a shaman, partly because he finds contemporary shamanic practices tarnished by tourism, yet he performs shamanic duties and rituals; ironically, it is this discrepancy between formal rank and practice that chafes traditionalists about "new shamans." And while Reynaldo is a proponent of tourist-oriented shamanism, his self-reportage about his training differs from the perspectives of self-identified "traditionalists" like Jorge (Reynaldo's wife Maria, whom I also interviewed, would not comment at length on his training, but confirmed that Reynaldo's grandfather was a shaman—which was uncontested even by those taking issue with Reynaldo's legitimacy). Although this particular article is built around Jorge's life history, I never considered information from either shaman "privileged" or factually superior. And although I report Jorge's concern with Reynaldo's shamanic practices, it is not used as an illustration of "true" shamanism supplanted by "debased" shamanism. The ethnographic material that provides context to these life histories was gathered from interviews with a spectrum of shamans, from vehement "traditionalists" to unapologetically entrepreneurial brand new practitioners, who only began performing *limpiadas* once tourists started arriving.

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Notes

[1]Hiking, whitewater rafting, mountain climbing, diving and snorkeling, horseback riding.

[2]Ross (and Bruner, who cites Ross in "Culture on Tour") uses the term "ethnographic tourism," but they both refer to the same phenomenon.

[3]An entheogen is a psychoactive substance used in the context of a religious, mystical, or spiritual experience or ritual.

[4]Quichua is sometimes used in place of Kichwa. FONAKIN (Federación de Organizaciones de Nacionalidad Kichwa del Napo), a grassroots indigenous organization focused on cultural survival and sustainable development, uses Kichwa as their standardized spelling. "Quichua" is a spelling that is predominantly used in in tourism contexts.

[5]These terms are frequently used in tourist brochures and verbal agency marketing.

[6]Some names and locations of interviewees have been pseudonymized.

[7]Interview with Reynaldo Vargas, February 2005.

[8]Although there are male and female shamans, many women do not take ayahuasca because of concerns about its impact on female reproductive processes.

[9]Illness and misfortune are associated with supernatural causes; Kichwa are not ignorant of the biological aspects of illness, but believe that disease, weakness, and bad fortune have ontogenetic causes.

[10]Status and prestige in shamanism is not exclusive to indigenous–colonial relations. Shamans have long negotiated status and power in relation to each other as participants in a complex social network.

[11]Taussig's ethnography concerns Colombia, but speaks to the importance of considering Amazonian shamanism in the context of colonial relations beyond his particular fieldsite.

[12]A term used by anthropologists such as Whitehead and Wright, which has emerged in the context of critiquing a tendency in ethnographic literature, noted by the likes of Brown (1989) and Harner (1998), emphasizing "positive, therapeutic and socially integrative dimensions of shamanism" (Whitehead and Wright 2004:10).

[13]This is not to say that concern with shamanic "fakes" is a new phenomenon.

[14]Such associations are becoming more common globally. Other examples include the Mongolian Shamans' Association, the Siberian Shamans' Association, and the Shamans' Association of Buryatia.

[15]The surprise stems from the fact that tourist-oriented explanations of shamanism emphasize aspects of Kichwa cosmology that best conform to the tourists' ecoprimitive fantasies—hence the incongruity of tobacco with "holistic" perceptions of the shaman; indigenous ritual aspects are sometimes modified for non-natives, especially if they involve viscera.

[16]Interview with Oscar at Amazonica Tours, Quito, Ecuador, October 2004.

[17]These quotations are from interviews conducted with Jorge, winter 2005.

[18]During a previous visit, he performed a *limpiada* on me; when he heard I had tried *ayahuasca* with Jose Luis, a man he calls a fake shaman, he offered to repeat the *ayahuasca* experience with him, but I declined.

[19]The diachronic perspective is offered in the earlier part of this article, where the multiple "modernities" that engaged the Kichwa are listed in sequence, showing the ever-changing positionalities of "modernity" and "tradition" vis-à-vis each other.

[20]Ceremonial *ayahuasca* usage is relevant to indigenous emic assessments of shamanic *power*—as Dobkin de Rios explains, it can be measured by the ceremony conducted and the type of ayahuasca used (1970)—but shamanic identity is ontogenetically located in proper training.

[21]Tourist opinions were gathered through a series of structured and unstructured interviews in December 2004 and February–March 2005.

[22]There is plenty of advertising for tours incorporating *limpiadas*, though opportunities to ingest *ayahuasca* are never advertised; they are readily available but must be initiated by the tourists.

[23]Quotations are taken from personal communication with Paula and from her web journal, which she shared with me.

[24]This preoccupation with authenticity is not unique to Ecuador; it is extensively theorized in the context of tourism studies (Cohen 1988; Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1994; Root 1996; Reisinger and Steiner 2006).

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