Annals of Tourism Research, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 90–109, 2011
0160-7383/$ - see front matter
Printed in Great Britain

doi:10.1016/j.annals.2010.05.005

SURFING FOR A SHAMAN
Analyzing an Ayahuasca Website

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Abstract: While niche tourism has been explored in multiple and varied contexts, few studies have examined spiritual tourism in the context of the Amazon. Through a detailed textual analysis, this study discursively explores the complex social and cultural phenomenon of spiritual tourism, as examined through an ayahuasca tourism website. Ayahuasca tourism involves traveling to the Amazon to participate in a shaman-led ceremony and drink the hallucinogenic tea ayahuasca. This paper analyzes a study of one of the most frequently visited websites, Blue Morpho Tours. Findings suggest that the appropriation and commodification represented on this site have significant implications for the local peoples of the Peruvian Amazon, and, as spiritual tourism increases, to other cultures and peoples as well. **Keywords:** ayahuasca, spiritual tourism commodification, internet analysis, Amazon.

INTRODUCTION

> Ayahuasca seems to appeal to people unconcerned with traditional modals of life, people searching for the extraordinary, the remarkable and unusual facets of life. That there even exists a tourist industry to serve this population strikes me as amazing. That this industry is heavily advertised and available to anyone with financial means to undertake a trip, that it is not a hush-hush experience available only to a select few in the psychedelic drug underground, is perhaps even more astonishing (Grunwell, 1998, p. 62).

As Grunwell suggests, indigenous and mestizo communities in the Amazon Basin have been experiencing a unique type of tourism recently: ayahuasca tourism. Sometimes referred to as drug tourism (Dobkin de Rios, 1994, 2005) or spiritual tourism (Winkelman, 2005), this new form typically involves non-indigenous, Western tourists who purchase all-inclusive trips to the Peruvian jungles to participate in

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shaman-led ceremonies that include the drinking of the hallucinogenic tea ayahuasca. Considered to be the most widely consumed hallucinogen in Amazonia, ayhuasaca produces intensely vivid, colorful and sometimes frightening hallucinations or visions (Luna & Amaringo, 1999; McKenna, 1999; Winkelman, 2005, p. 210). Ingested by indigenous peoples for centuries, ayahuasca has been used by shamans in providing healing services to their local communities (Dobkin de Rios, 1994; Luna, 2003). While several studies have examined ayahuasca tourism and argue that it is increasing in popularity (Dobkin de Rios, 1994, 2005; Grunwell, 1998; Luna, 2003; Winkelman, 2005), few have investigated this trend and its implications for local culture/peoples in depth and no studies have examined the Internet's role in the evolution of this industry.

According to ayahuasca scholar Luis Eduardo Luna (2003), ''the use of ayahuasca by indigenous and non-indigenous practitioners in shamanic, religious and non-religious rituals has created a complex phenomenon'' (p. 47). However, the research on ayahuasca tourism has yet to explore this phenomenon in a comprehensive way. While there have been several studies examining its predecessors—religious tourism (Cohen, 1998; Rinschede, 1992) and/or pilgrimage tourism (Digance, 2003; Nolan & Nolan, 1992; Shuo, Ryan & Liu, 2009; Vukonić, 1992)—few studies have focused specifically on spiritual tourism as conceived herein (Garfinkel, 2006; Li, Niininen, & Jacobs, 2006; Norman, 2006; Winkelman, 2005). Given that there appears to be an increasing interest in spirituality and a decreasing adherence to organized religion in modern society, it is helpful to distinguish those factors that contribute to the Western tourist's interest in 'alternative spiritualities' as separate from the fairly well-established knowledge on religious/pilgrimage tourism (Raj & Morpeth, 2007; Smith & Robinson, 2006).

For example, religious tourism is thought to be both worldwide phenomenon and the oldest form of tourism (Rinschede, 1992, p. 53): as such, it has garnered a vast and wide ranging amount of research. Tourists in this category are characterized as being motivated for religious reasons and often travel in groups composed of similar believers of the same age (Rinschede, 1992). Pilgrimage tourism is sometimes placed within this broader category, as many pilgrims report having religious motivations for their travel (Nolan & Nolan, 1992; Shuo et al., 2009; Vukonić, 1992). Additionally, pilgrimage tourism is defined by its connection to a particular ''consecrated sacred space'' (Digance, 2003, p. 144). In spite of the extensive literature on these two, longstanding types of tourism, neither reflects fully the spiritual tourist as conceived in this study. Though some may describe spiritual tourists as those who take a ''modern secular pilgrimage'' (Digance, 2003, p. 148), ayahuasca tourists differ from such ''pilgrims'' insofar as their primary motivation is for an individualistic, spiritual and/or transformational experience, one that is neither connected to a specific religion nor directed toward a particular site or space (Digance, 2003; Nolan & Nolan, 1992; Shuo et al., 2009). It is this motivational, individual, experiential aspect, combined with a self-described lack of

affiliation with any organized religion, which differentiates the spiritual tourist from either the religious tourist or the modern pilgrim.

In this study, ''spiritual tourism'' is, therefore, investigated as a neocolonial phenomenon situated in the broader context of economic and cultural globalization. Mowforth and Munt (1998) define neocolonialism as the ''principal way of describing the retention of former colonies in perpetual subordination to the First World, in spite of formal political independence'' (p. 53). Fueled by cultural voyeurism and the presence of third-party commercial brokers, ayahuasca tourism resonates within a paradigm that pivots on the socio-economic differences between those who visit the Amazon and those who reside there. As such, spiritual tourism cannot be comprehensively understood without analyzing it as a commodified activity of foreign tourists. While these concerns are echoed in fragments within the post-colonial, sociological and anthropological literature (Cohen, 1988; Hall & Tucker, 2004; Mowforth & Munt, 1998; Trask, 1999; Urry, 1990; Van Den Berghe, 1994), there appears to be little research that specifically examines how the neocolonial and socio-economic discourses of spiritual tourism are perpetuated through the advertising on tourism websites.

This study is designed to advance a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of spiritual tourism by interrogating the structures of knowledge and power, and image and representation utilizing a post-colonial framework (Caton & Santos, 2009; Hall & Tucker, 2004). It seeks to broaden our understanding of ayahuasca tourism by examining the primary medium through which it is marketed and sold, the Internet website. Specifically, it analyzes the commodification of the ayahuasca ceremony and investigates whether or not the means by which this tourism is advertised reflects the exoticization of the local communities from whom the ceremony originates. By doing so, its seeks to deconstructively map the discursive practices of website advertizing (Foucault, 1980), analyzing the ways in which these practices are reflective of the discourses of appropriation and commodification, processes which appear to be widespread in the current age of globalization (Santos, 2006). This paper argues that while the Internet has been touted as an equalizing tool in the war against social and economic inequalities, ayahuasca tour advertising suggests otherwise; many examples of ''cyber imperialism'' are discussed throughout this work (Pannekoek, 2001).

Among the many ayahuasca tours advertised on the Internet, this paper focuses on the most frequently visited ayahuasca tour website (as evidenced by placement on Dogpile.com between 2007–09) in order to most fully examine the marketization of ayahuasca online. Through the use of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995, 2003; Foucault, 1980) and semiotic visual analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996), this study explores the commodification of culture by examining ''Blue Morpho Tours.'' Several features of the text are analyzed, including the primary messages used to advertise the tour, as well as the identification and representation of key actors. This examination of actors highlights both those who are included and excluded from the text. The analysis is informed by post-colonial theory and discussed in the

context of new capitalism, wherein the ''re-scaling of relations between global regional, national and local is fundamentally a matter of the transformation of capitalism'' (Fairclough, 2003, p.220).

SPIRITUAL TOURISM AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF CULTURE

Among the multitude of studies conducted on the broader field of alternative tourism, several of these have examined the various roles of the stakeholders involved (e.g. the tourist, the local, and/or the broker (Holden, 2005; McLaren, 2003; Smith, 1978; Van den Berghe, 1994). As stated, only a few have examined ayahuasca tourism in any form. Of these limited studies, each investigates only one primary stakeholder in the process: either the tourists (Dobkin de Rios, 1994; Grunwell, 1998; Winkelman, 2005) or the shamans (Dobkin de Rois, 2005). No study examines specifically the role of the broker or intermediary in the industry—a role that carries much socio-economic power but is widely understudied and minimally understood (Cheong & Miller, 2000). Including the broker in the study provides a crucial lens through which we can investigate how the local community is represented to the tourist on the website, as the broker is primarily responsible for ''selling'' the community through its image and rituals (Britton, 1979; Caton & Santos, 2009; Cheong & Miller, 2000; Van den Berghe, 1994). Finally, no ayahuasca tourism studies have investigated the presence and power of the Internet in fueling this industry, nor have any assessed the possible imperialism present on tour websites.

Cultural Imperialism

Post-colonial studies and, particularly, studies on cultural imperialism and tourism provide much guidance for this focus on spiritual tourism (Echtner & Prasad, 2003; Hall & Tucker, 2004; Nash, 1989; Pratt, 1992; Said, 1993; Smith, 1999). Post-colonial theory examines socio-cultural interaction between the ''West and the Rest'' (Caton & Santos, 2009, p. 193). This study draws from post-colonial scholarship in two primary ways. First, spiritual tourism is defined as occurring between predominantly Western, capitalist societies and indigenous (and mestizo) communities, akin to the colonial relationship (colonizer/colonized). Second, it provides an examination of the discourse and representations of local people as presented on the ayahuasca tour websites to interrogate the possible power structures and binaries constructed/maintained (e.g, civilized/uncivilized, developed/undeveloped, normal/exotic) (Britton, 1979; Caton & Santos, 2009; Said, 1979; Santos, 2006).

Drawing from Said (1993) definition of imperialism, cultural imperialism can be described as a practice, a theory and and/or an attitude of domination or superiority of the West over Other, typically non-Western cultures. One way to understand spiritual tourism is to analyze the ways in which it serves as a vehicle for Western tourists to

appropriate indigenous culture via the tourists' participation in the ayahuasca ceremony. This appropriation occurs in the context of what Mary Louise Pratt (1992) calls the ''contact zone''. Pratt describes the contact zone as ''social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today'' (p. 4). Pratt's work informs this study by providing a conceptual framework from which to analyze the discourse on the ayahuasca websites. In addition to situating spiritual tourism as occurring in a ''contact zone'', the language on the websites is examined to understand to what extent it reflects what Pratt calls moments of ''anti-conquest''. Pratt defines anti-conquest as ''strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert their European hegemony'' (p. 7).

Tourism scholar Carla Santos (2006) echoes this concept in her textual analysis of *The Best American Travel Writing 2001*. Santos argues that when we do not provide readers with socio-cultural and historical contexts, dominate Western notions are reproduced. The current study examines the potential for such hegemonic reproduction and explores the discursive strategies used to maintain the predominant economic and social order (Santos, 2006).

Appropriation and Commodification of Culture

This paper also investigates the industry of ayahuasca tourism through the examination of the most frequented site as a possible means of commodifying culture, specifically, the buying and selling of the ayahuasca tea. Huanani-Kay Trask's treatment of tourism and the colonization of Hawaii assists in this study's conceptualization of spiritual tourism as a culturally commodifying activity. Trask (1999) summarizes well the ''sale'' of Hawaiian culture: ''The point is, of course, is that everything in Hawai'i can be yours, that is, you, the tourist, the non-Native, the visitor. The place, the people, the culture, even our identity as 'Native' peoples is for sale'' (p. 399). Many have examined and critiqued the commodification of culture from a variety of perspectives (Appadurai, 1986; Cohen, 1988; Dorsey, Steeves, & Porras, 2004; Gunster, 2004; Harvey, 2006; McLaren, 2003; Trask, 1999; Urry, 1990). Trends in this scholarship suggest that due to the advances in technology, an increasingly high number of formerly remote or hard to reach communities are now targeted as sources of markets and income. Tourism has become a commodity to be advertised, marketed and sold much like every other commodity, largely due to the rise in Western productivity and the resultant increase in leisure time for the middle class (Urry, 1990).

Not surprisingly, this process occurs most often in the form of commodification of indigenous cultures, replicating the neocolonial paradigm. While there have been reported benefits of such intercultural contacts, such as exposing tourists to alternative lifestyles (Rojek,

1998, p. 38), or a renewed interest in local traditions (Cohen, 1988) the consequences of this commodification are rife in the literature. These include, but are not limited to: the weakening significance of rituals (Blackford, 2004; Cohen, 1988; Trask, 1999) and/or the exoticizing of local people (Dorsey et al., 2004; Mander & Tauli-Corpuz, 2006; Mowforth & Munt, 1998; Trask, 1999). To date, the impact of such commodification on the local communities affected by ayahuasca tourism has not been investigated. Given the potential ramifications, this phenomenon warrants closer inspection and merits further research.

Websites as a Source of Privilege and Power

Both access to, and control over, the content on the Internet provide critical sources of privilege and power within the alternative tourism industry. The scale and scope of the Internet has continued to increase within the field of tourism, specifically by the most affluent of potential tourists. For example, the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) estimated that among the 145.7 million American travelers in 2004, 67% used the Internet for trip planning (TIA, 2004 in Kaplandidou & Vogt, 2006, p. 204). As of 2004, Nielsen/Netratings report that 75% of American households had Internet access (www.netratings.com).

Website development and Internet access have become cheaper and easier to use, broadening the scope of the production and consumption of this media. Still, even with such expansion, 80% of the Internet traffic continues to go to just 15,000 popular sites. Most Internet users are from the western world/global north and most alternative tourist destinations are in the developing world or the global south (formerly considered the Third World) (Rojek, 1998 in Dorsey et al., 2004, p. 760). Additionally, the United States, Europe, and Japan account for 79% of the world's Internet population, adding up to 41% of foreign tourism expenditure (World Tourism Organization, 1999 in Dorsey et al., 2004). Nielsen also reported in 2007 that while the typical user visits 25 websites a week, he/she spends as little as 48 seconds on each site (http://www.netratings.com). Thus, this short amount of time suggests that these alternative destinations are advertised seductively for the virtual tourist's gaze, designed specifically to attract the hurried user (Urry, 1990). They have become spaces that sustain consumerism via the standardization of images and packaging of landscapes, leading also to a privileging of 'sights' over 'sites' (Dorsey et al., 2004, p. 754).

Perhaps the most important reason for examining the Internet as a means of advertising is that one can examine directly the role of the intermediary (Cheong & Miller, 2000). The role (s) advertised on-line may be of the tour operator/organizer, director or guide, it may be the person/agency to whom the deposit is sent and itinerary confirmed, but it is not specifically the ''tourist'', nor is it the local ''host'', the one offering the experience and (likely) facilitating the ayahuasca ceremony. By examining this individual via the website, one can move beyond the ''hosts and guests'' dichotomy (Aramberri, 2001; Smith, 1978); an important step, as cultural anthropologists have long insisted

that tourism is an activity substantially shaped by the middleman (Cheong & Miller, 2000; Van Den Berghe, 1994). Through both the expansion of international travel, as well as the increased use of the Internet to search and secure one's travel plans, the tourism website has emerged as a useful lens with which to examine the shifting nature of global flows of information, experience and exposure.

Dorsey et al. (2004) observes that while there has been little or no analysis thus far of Internet representations of tourism, there have been many studies of the content of traditional advertisements (p. 761). They include the tourism brochure studies conducted by Britton (1979), postcard analysis research by Albers and James (1988) and the study of ''touristic images of natives'' by Cohen (1993, p. 36). Additionally, while many examine tourism promotion on the Internet, they do so from a marketing or management perspective. In contrast, the model of analysis utilized here reflects Dorsey et al.'s (2004), as this is one of the few studies that comprehensively examines issues of cultural commodification, indigenous representation, promotional discourse and advertising specifically on tourism websites (utilizing both textual and visual analyses). Given this study's emphasis on the assessment of cyber imperialism in the most frequented ayahuasca tour website, Dorsey et al.'s (2004) model reflects best the goals of this work.

Study Methods

Prior research regarding the commodification of culture as reflected on ayahuasca tour websites revealed an increase in the appearance of ''ayahuasca tours'' advertised online between 2007 and 2009 (Holman, 2010). Within this two year period, the number of Internet websites offering ayahuasca tours to Peru increased from 13 to 17. Initially, six sites which advertised tours specifically to the Iquitos region of the Amazon were chosen for analysis from their appearance on meta-search engine Dogpile.com. Dogile.com simultaneously queries the major search engines (e.g., Google, Yahoo, MSN) and lists the resulting websites in order of popularity (those which receive the most traffic) (Spink, Jansen, Kathuria, & Koshman, 2006). Of these six, four were founded or brokered by individual, non-Peruvians, from either the United States (three) or Italy (one), while two were listed as either Peruvian travel [or tour] agencies (with no individual listed). Though a comprehensive discussion of this former study is beyond the scope of this paper, some general trends in the discourse will be presented briefly for context.

Discourse and visual analyses of these six sites indicated that the tours most readily available to the potential tourist are brokered by Western-born individuals. The cost for these tours ranged from US$398 (four days) to $1940 (12 days). The longest running tour in the study began in 1993 (Perutravels.net, one of the locally owned agencies), while the newest tour was founded in 2006 (Sacred Peru Adventures owned by American Steffan Heydon). A textual analysis of all sites revealed the word ''spiritual'' as the most frequently

occurring term. Additionally, this term was used significantly more often on the Western, individually brokered sites than on the Peruvian sites. These sites also employed a variety of exotic terms at a much higher frequency. Exotic terms included ''mystical'', ''magical'', and ''extraordinary''. One commonality between all sites was the presence of phrases and terms that reflect a corporate, service-oriented discourse. For example, El Tigre (also known as Ayahuasca SpiritQuest, www.biopark.org) promises ''genuine, expertly facilitated, real-life Amazonian shamanic experiences''. PeruTravels.net also embraces this language, ''Our travel team knows what 'going the extra mile' means—obtaining the lowest fares and demonstrating commitment and professionalism to your complete satisfaction''. Phrases such as these have been examined by this author as part of a larger study wherein individual analyses are conducted for each website.

As stated, the ''Blue Morpho Tours'' (www.bluemorpho.com) website was chosen as the site for this in-depth analysis due to its appearance on Dogpile.com as the most frequently visited website from the search term ''ayahuasca tour.'' According to Fairclough (2003), the website can be considered a promotional genre, a characterization of the new Capitalism, wherein there has been a proliferation of genres which have the implicit or explicit purpose of selling commodities, brands or individuals (p. 35). Here, a single site analysis seeks to obtain a rich, comprehensive understanding of a particular phenomenon (Magnet, 2007; Sujatha, 2007). While it is clear that the website functions to provide communication, findings from this detailed analysis suggest that its purpose is much more strategic: to attract potential tourists who are willing to pay $1940.00 to participate in an ''all-inclusive'' nine-day ''workshop/retreat'' (includes five ayahuasca sessions). Thus, Internet analysis has emerged as a critical medium in understanding social processes and serves as an appropriate method herein (Jones, 1998).

Guided by Fairclough (2003), this study examines both the internal and external relations of the text (pp. 36–37). The data from 13 pages of the Blue Morpho website was downloaded and printed out for examination. This data was coded similar to the process conducted by Echtner and Prasad (2003) whereby nouns, verbs and descriptors were the primary units of analysis. Nouns were primarily assessed to understand the activities offered on the tour and actors included or excluded (be it through suppression or back-grounding) (Fairclough, 2003, p. 145). Verbs were tracked to elucidate the actions of actors listed and activities offered. Descriptors aided in interpreting the importance or prominence given the nouns. Once coded, key themes emerged from the data (Santos, 2006).

The text's external relations were analyzed by exploring how the discourses and findings identified intersected with the larger social practices of cultural appropriation and commodification as a function of the social structures of economic globalization and tourism (Fairclough, 2003). This linking of text to larger and more pervasive social and economic processes assists in contextualizing the findings and perhaps explaining why some voices or actors were included, while others were excluded (Caton & Santos, 2009). Thus, through a

multi-level, detailed analysis of Blue Morpho's representation of itself, this study sheds light on one aspect of the complex social and cultural phenomenon of spiritual tourism, as examined through an ayahuasca tourism website.

Findings

Three primary themes or discourses emerged from this analysis. These included the ''Corporate Discourse,'' the ''New Age'' and the ''Exotic Discourse.'' Additional findings included the near exclusion of indigenous or mestizo actors on the sites (with the exception of the shamans), and the presentation of the broker as ''host,'' subsequently moving from the role of middleman to that of primary host, thus maintaining the host/guest dichotomy discussed previously, while at the same time effectively removing the local host.

The Corporate Discourse

The very first line of the Blue Morpho site asserts that Blue Morpho ''specializes'' in ''all inclusive Shamanic Workshops...'' Phrases such as ''specialize,'' ''all inclusive,'' ''workshops,'' and ''excellent service'' are utilized multiple times throughout the site and can each be attributed to a broader corporate, capitalistic discourse—a far cry from the spiritual, shamanic and transformative descriptors used on other pages of the site. Moving from the first line to the last line of the paragraph of the Home Page, one finds this discourse reflected most succinctly and prominently, as it is the final piece of text which the tourist sees, before, presumably, moving on to the next page (Shamanic Workshops): ''Blue Morpho is dedicated to our clients' enjoyment of the experience. Our goal is for our guests to return to Iquitos beaming from their adventure into the jungle and impressed by our professionalism and commitment to service.'' In the ''About Blue Morpho'' section, one is informed that the company has ''already lead over 800 satisfied tourists to the camp,'' thus providing a strong ''track record'' of ''satisfied tourists,'' language more appropriate to business brochure providing a service than a tour group providing a spiritual experience.

In the text, the tourist is referred to by various names. Ranked in order of those terms used most often, the tourist was referred to as: ''guest(s),'' ''tourist,'' ''traveler,'' ''client,'' ''participant,'' and ''person(s).'' Notably, the word ''guest'' was used five times more often than the next term, ''tourist,'' suggesting that the relationship between the purchaser of the tour and the provider of the tour is one of ''host'' and ''guest.'' While this finding may seem to contrast with a Corporate Discourse, it is actually similar to popular corporate language. For example, if one takes into account the linguistic turns in other customer-service oriented businesses, one will notice that even such retailers as McDonald's and Disneyland refer to their customers as ''guests.'' Fairclough (2003) refers to this process as recontextualization, whereby the elements of one social practice (e.g., business transactions) are

appropriated by and/or inserted to another (e.g., spiritual retreats), thus transforming the shamanic experience in a particular, corporate-oriented manner (pp. 22–23).

Another example of such genre mixing can be found on the ''About Blue Morpho'' section whereby the ''traveler'' is offered the ''opportunity to experience the realities of the mystical world surrounded by untamed wilderness in a safe and well-organized workshop.''

Discussing both the ''mystical world'' and a ''well-organized workshop'' in the same sentence reflects the appropriation of the spiritual nature of the ceremonies offered. This recontextualization of the Corporate Discourse within the New Age or Spiritual Discourse is one way in which the ayahuasca ceremony, in particular, and indigenous spirituality more broadly have become appropriated and commodified.

One final example of this commodification can be found on the ''Shamanic Workshops'' section. After the lists of ''Shamanism Workshops'' and ''Rainforest Excursions'', one is invited to join a ''Group Workshop / Retreat:''

> These group workshops are designed to illuminate the reality of Amazonian Shamanism in a sacred and ceremonial setting. As we journey into the depths of the Amazon rain forest, we hold the intent of spiritual transformation and learning through our work during these magical days.

Next to this text is a $1'' \times 2''$ color photo of a group of approximately 30, primarily white individuals, standing together with Hamilton Souther (owner/founder) and the tour shaman. Ian Munt (1994) would describe this mixing of the personal and the professional as ''the commencement of professionalization processes in consumption,'' as a function of ''postmodern travel'' (p. 112). Munt (1994) describes these activities as the ''blurring'' of ''occupational professionalism'' and ''consumption and leisure''. Fairclough (2003) describes this blurring of ''social boundaries'' or this blending of social practices as various forms of ''hybridity.'' For example, the mixing of a corporate business genre (workshop/retreat) with that of a spiritual or self-empowering genre (participating in a ''sacred and ceremonial setting'') produces a hybrid genre. By combining the internal analysis of genres and discourses with the external analysis of its relation to social practices, one can identify more clearly the articulation of the commodification processes within the spiritual tourism industry (Fairclough, 2003; Smith, 1999).

The New Age Discourse

Similar to the Corporate Discourse, but perhaps less surprising, is the inclusion of several elements of the website text that cluster together to form the New Age Discourse. While the term ''New Age'' is both amorphous and contentious in the religious and sociological literatures, it is used here to draw out its main features as noted by Wood (2007), a ''discursive emphasis upon the self and that self authority is paramount'' (p. 27); that New Agers are concerned with ''spirituality'' instead of religion, that they are individual ''seekers'' of spirituality;

and that the individuals most likely to participate in the New Age experiences tend to be ''white, educated [and] middle class.''

Multiple nouns, verbs and descriptors were dedicated to the shamanic and spiritual dimensions of the tour. Additionally, 42 photos on the site illustrate the shamans, the ayahuasca, and/or the Ceremonial House. Of the textual elements, ''spiritual'' or ''Spirit'' was employed the most often throughout the site. Other frequently employed terms included ''sacred,'' ''visionary,'' ''transformational,'' and ''personal growth''; the phrase ''sacred, visionary plant'' (ayahusaca) was employed six times. The tourist is invited to come to the ''center for shamanism...deep in the Peruvian Amazon rain forest where traditional shamanic methods and study could be offered in the environment where these techniques developed.''

The Shamanism Workshop Activity and Ceremony List includes: ''Nightly Shamanic Journeys''; ''Discussion and Identification of Medicinal Plants''; ''Shamanism Journey Practice''; ''Guided Meditations''; ''Chakra Theory and Balancing''; ''Camalonga Dream Journey''; and ''Inkan Fire Ceremony.'' This list stands out as a unique blend of ''New Age'' activities, as the inclusion of Chakra Balancing (from India) and the Inkan Fire Ceremony (from Southern Peru) represent a comingling of New Age techniques, whereby tourists can pick and choose among a wide variety of spiritually enlightening practices, some of which are clearly not endemic to the locale in which they are offered. Additionally, the tourist can ''Learn out-of-body journeys to connect with power animals, spirit guides, and guardian angels. Harness their powerful healing capabilities to transform ordinary reality into magical living.'' One can trace both native and Christian origins, providing a mix that might appeal to a wide variety of tourists. This paragraph's placement on the Home Page illustrates the prominence of the New Age discourse as the main focus of the tour:

> We work with traditional shamans (curanderos, medicine men and women) who practice the ancient and mystical shamanic arts of the jungle. The shamans conduct ceremonies and rituals, many of which utilize the use of sacred visionary medicinal plants, designed to open consciousness and bridge the physical and spiritual world. These ceremonies are personally transformational, positively changing the life of the participant.

Many scholars are concerned about the increasing appropriation of native culture and spirituality by non-natives, whether or not such individuals subscribe to the tenets of New Age spiritualities (Deloria, in Deloria et al., 1999; Dobkin de Rios, 1994; Smith, 1999, 2005). Linda T. Smith (1999) summarizes well this concern and lists ''commodifying indigenous spirituality'' as one of the ten forms in which imperialism still exists:

> . . .the spirituality industry will continue to expand as people, particularly those in the First World nations, become more uncertain about their identities, rights, privileges and very existence. New Age groups currently appropriate indigenous spiritual beliefs at will . . . Despite protestations that spirituality is an experience through which

> non-indigenous people aim to help people, it is clearly a profitable experience (1999, p. 102).

While the New Age discourse is focused on the transformation of the individual, this ''reconnecting of [one's] lost or separated soul parts'' belies the $1940 price tag, thus obscuring the industry behind the ''spirit'' (Smith, 1999).

The Exotic Discourse

Though less prominent than the previous two, the Exotic Discourse is represented on the Blue Morpho website — most notably through the combination of verbal and visual elements of the text. Verbal elements include many descriptors of the ''place'' in which Blue Morpho is situated. These include, but were not limited to, the ''exotic and colorful wildlife,'' ''jungle shamanism,'' ''mystical world,'' ''untamed wilderness,'' and ''isolated place.'' While the shamans are sometimes referred to as ''traditional'' or ''native,'' there is no mention, nor exoticization, of local peoples, something often found in representations of the Amazon or indigenous culture/spirituality (Echtner & Prasad, 2003; Munt, 1994; Said, 1993; Smith, 1999, 2005). This exclusion of local actors will be discussed below. First, it is important to note that the visual cues perform a preparatory function. Of the 139 photos included specifically on the Blue Morpho Photos page, eight were devoted exclusively to ''Sunsets'' and another 27 to ''Animal Pictures'' (thus, there were no people in these photos). An additional five photos included in the ''Iquitos, Belen and Quistacocha Zoo Pictures'' contained images of animals. Four pictures of forest, plants or animals were found on the ''Blue Morpho Camp Pictures'' page and two more on the ''Shamanic Workshops'' page. Combined, these visual elements totaled 46 photos — a full third of photos on the site — devoted exclusively to animals and environs.

In contrast, only 14 photos on the entire website appear to depict individuals who may be Peruvian (not including the shamans, featured dominantly on the Photos page). Of these, only eight photos include enough of the image to make out a person's face or expression. Again, the strategies of inclusion/exclusion appear to favor the depiction of place and animals over that of local people (Dorsey et al., 2004). Also, it is important to note that while the author(s) of the site provided no space to the naming, identifying or discussing the local Amazonian people (Foucault, 2002), they devoted a significant portion of the site to the identification of local plants and animals, listing 223 different species over 16 printed pages (including the ''Local Name,'' ''English Name,'' and ''Scientific Name'').

The Exclusion of Local Actors

There is a conspicuous exclusion of local people as evidenced through both the verbal and visual elements on the site. Social actors were tracked to note the inclusion/exclusion of particular groups or

individuals (Fairclough, 2003). ''Locals,'' be they indigenous or mestizo inhabitants of that area of the Peruvian Amazon, were mostly suppressed, with the exception of the shamans (as noted earlier) and the people who work as the ''camp staff.'' Neither the locals nor the ''local community'' were identified in any way (e.g., no information was provided on the group's race, ethnicity, or region of residence).

Aside from the minimal information regarding the camp staff, there are only three other places where any type of local community is mentioned, albeit briefly. The first reference is on the Home Page, ''Ceremonies with traditional shamans *(curanderos)* who currently practice native shamanism in local communities!'' Interestingly, this is the only place in the entire text where an exclamation point is used, leading one to perhaps assume that this is a deliberate move to authenticate the shamans who work at the camp thereby affirming their legitimacy (Fairclough, 2003). The second reference to the ''locals'' occurs on the ''Shamanic Workshops'' pages within the ''Shamanism Workshop Activity and Ceremony List.'' The locals are mentioned only in the following sentence, ''The Amazon is home to thousands of medicinal plants used by the locals to cure many illnesses ranging from headaches to cancer.'' Again, there is no mention of who these locals are or how they cure these many illnesses, thus pushing the locals to the periphery (Santos, 2006).

The third reference to the ''locals'' is on ''Lodge & Meals'' page, within the paragraph on ''Location'':

> The Blue Morpho Shamanic Center and Jungle lodge sits on privately owned 180 acres of Primary Forest 53 Km from Iquitos off the Iquitos Nauta road. We employ locals in all levels of employment, aiding their struggling economy. We contribute to town projects, and donate clothing and household items to the families.

In this example, the locals are excluded via means of ''backgrounding''; they are mentioned, but not identified, named nor described (Fairclough, 2003, p. 105). As might be inferred from this short mention, the context within which the Center relates to the ''locals'' as a classified group alternates between the ''specific'' group of those who work at the Center and the ''generic'' one of the locals and ''their'' struggling economy (Fairclough, 2003, p. 146). The particular process verbs such as ''aiding,'' ''contribute'' and ''donate'' cluster together and imply a paternalistic, colonial discourse between the Center and the locals, not unlike the colonial binaries discussed by Etchner and Prasad (2003) in their study,

> These are the contrasts between the states of advancing, progressive, modern, developed and disciplined versus decadent, stagnant, ancient/primitive, undeveloped, and unrestrained. These persistent underlying binaries illustrate quite clearly the extent of colonial discourse permeating the representation of the Third World in tourism marketing (p. 13).

This paternalistic, neo-colonial ''us'' and ''them'' representation reflects well Pratt's concept of the anti-conquest, whereby the European subject (in this case, Souther) attempts to secure what Pratt terms his

''innocence''—by employing, aiding, donating and contributing to the struggling locals- at the same time he asserts his Western, capitalist hegemony (his spirituality-based business on his private land in the Amazon rain forest) (1992, p. 7). Thus, the unnamed locals who receive donations to their unnamed town are represented as ''passivated'' social actors, who serve as the ''affected'' or the ''beneficiary,'' the ones who are affected by the processes of the Blue Morpho Center (Fairclough, 2003, p. 146).

The final and most significant instance of ''local'' people mentioned or referenced in the text can be found on the ''About Blue Morpho'' pages. Attending to the arrangement of the team members, one might infer that they are organized intentionally in a hierarchical fashion, from most important to least important (Fairclough, 2003). These members begin with owner/founder/shaman (Souther), then profile the resident shaman (Don Alberto), and next a shaman who passed away in 2007 (Don Julio). Immediately following the owner and shamans are the three non-indigenous individual team members, each of whom provides a specialized service to the tourist. Following these specialists are the Blue Morpho staff, presented last.

In addition to being listed last among those individuals who comprise Blue Morpho, several elements elucidate the differences in the ways in which the locals are represented in this section. First, each of the primary members of the Blue Morpho ''team'' are identified individually, by their first and last name, and are depicted by a high quality $1'' \times 1''$ color photo. With the exception of the two shamans, all four of the team members appear to be no older than forty years old and are photographed with only their head and shoulders showing, facing directly at the camera. Except for Souther, each exhibits a wide, open smile for the viewer (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). This is in sharp contrast to the complete exclusion of the ''local'' staff members' photographic representation. Additionally, all six ''team members'' are profiled individually (in contrast to the group description of the ''staff'' as detailed below). These brief biographies describe the length of time the team members have worked with Blue Morpho Tours, listing their credentials and detailing their specific role(s) within the camp.

Take for instance the case of Mimi. Mimi's complete biography is provided to illustrate the discursive strategies of legitimation (Fairclough, 2003), as well as to provide a comparison to the paragraph which represents the ''Blue Morpho Staff.'' Under her picture, Mimi is listed as ''Apprentice, Trip Organizer, Camp Manager:''

> Mimi Buttacavoli**:** Mimi started apprenticeship in April of 2005. Mimi is fluent in English, Spanish, Italian and Sicilian. She is a licensed nurse trained in Oxford. She studied herbal medicine in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Her main duties include trip organizer, camp manager and nurse. Her depth of knowledge shines through in her personal interaction with guests in and out of ceremony.

The listing of Mimi's license from Oxford, her ability to speak four languages and her former study in/travel to Bolivia all suggest that she is highly trained and likely quite skilled in the services she provides

for the tour. Munt (1994) argues that providing such a detailed list of qualifications reflects the ''professionalization'' characteristic of post-modern tourism, whereby it is no longer enough to simply introduce the tour leader (or staff), but to highlight both her academic qualifications as well as her traveling experience. This professionalization of the Blue Morpho team also extends to the shamans featured. For example, Don Alberto is described as having ''over 35 years as a spiritual healer and over 3,000 ayahuasca ceremonies in his collective experience.'' In spite of providing such detailed information about Don Alberto's qualifications, it is only mentioned in passing that ''when not working exclusively with Blue Morpho Tours'' he serves as a ''curandero [in] his local town.'' Additionally, Alberto is ''considered one of the very best and most powerful healers of the Ucayali River'' yet the text does not list by or among whom he has earned this honor.

The inclusion of such business terms as ''exclusively'' and ''very best and most powerful'' reflects the Corporate Discourse found throughout the text. This discourse stands out in this brief biography and does not appear to be obscured by the utter lack of information provided on which town Don Alberto works in and among whom he has earned such accolades. Again, this exclusion may serve as a way to present the tour's shaman as existing exclusively for Blue Morpho tours, somewhat a historically, quite separate from his own community (Echtner & Prasad, 2003; Santos, 2006).

The individual presentation of each team member, highlighted by both a quality photograph and a detailed biography serves as a sharp contrast to the single paragraph in this section, describing the entire ''Blue Morpho Staff:''

> The Blue Morpho Staff: The Blue Morpho staff is in charge of the kitchen and food, cleaning, laundry, grounds maintenance, and assistance during ceremonies. They work hard during trips to provide excellent service, tasty food and a clean environment. They are also of great assistance during ceremonies by giving support and helping people to the bathroom in times of need.

Such description introduces the viewer to the ''staff,'' who are most likely the ''locals'' employed by the Center. This representation differs from that of the rest of the ''team'' in several ways. First, as stated, the ''staff'' are presented in text only; there is no photo of the staff, nor any explanation as to why a photo is not included (e.g., perhaps the staff would like to secure their anonymity?). Second, the staff is referred to as a group, ''they work hard,'' as opposed to being introduced and named on an individual basis. Fairclough (2003) asserts that such impersonal representation of social actors can dehumanize them, taking away their focus as people, instead representing them instrumentally, as part of the organizational structure (p. 150). Third, compared to the other team members, the list of staff duties are highly labor intensive and, because they are not discussed in the context of specific credentials, appear as low-skilled chores.

Finally, the staff are the only employees described as helping people ''to the bathroom'' in times of need. This bathroom assistance is likely

shorthand for helping people to wash and/or change themselves during or after a ceremony, as ayahuasca is a purgative, causing most people to vomit or experience diarrhea after drinking it (McKenna, 1999). No other team members are listed as providing this type of care-taking to the tourist, thus reinforcing the binary between those who are skilled (who lead the tourist) and those who are unskilled (who clean the tourist) (Caton & Santos, 2009; Echtner & Prasad, 2003), limiting the role and potential of the ethnic other (Buzinde, Santos, & Smith, 2006).

The Broker Turned Host: Rendering The Local Extinct

While much of the literature frames the tourist exchange as taking place between the indigenous or local ''host'' and the tourist as ''guest,'' the morphing of broker into host on the website thwarts this dichotomy by presenting the tour owner, Souther, as the main ''host.'' This surprising presentation of the broker as host moves him from the role of middleman to that of primary host. Thus, while this shift maintains the host/guest dichotomy discussed throughout the tourism literature, it effectively removes the locals from their context rendering them extinct (Aramberri, 2001; Santos, 2006; Smith, 1978; Stronza, 2001). As stated previously, ''guest'' is the term used most often in reference to the tourist, thus representing this part of the dichotomy. Additionally, because the local community is absent from the site, it appears as though Souther and his team are the exclusive Amazonian hosts. Souther's cooptation of the host's role may be considered a type of recontextualization, whereby Souther has appropriated the social practice of host from the local people onto himself (Fairclough, 2003). He now serves as the primary host, instead of functioning as the tourist broker or middleman (the one who typically arranges the contact between host/guest) (Cheong & Miller, 2000).

The fulfillment of this position as primary host, coupled with the Corporate Discourse of impressing his guests by ''professionalism and commitment to service,'' Souther reflects the role of the ''expert,'' one of the emerging characters in the discourse of the new capitalism (Fairclough, 2003). This emergence as the tour leader, main shaman and camp host serves to further legitimate Souther's presence as a Western, landowning businessman-turned shaman in the primary rainforest of the Peruvian Amazon, effectively selling the spirituality of the Amazon, without paying any noticeable tribute (on the website) to those from whom the rituals and ceremony originated.

CONCLUSION

If spiritual tourism is part of the larger discourse of commodification of culture, then the cultural texts of that discourse should be rigorously interrogated. Thus, issues regarding how the discourse of spiritual tourism appears to be constructed under conditions of unequal power (with the broker controlling the representation of both the local

people and the ayahuasca experience), as well as how that power is exercised, were explored. Also, the language on the website marketing such commodities was investigated to determine the extent to which it served to exoticize and construct alterity in the process of Othering the local communities mentioned (Hall & Tucker, 2004; Said, 1979, 1993; Santos, 2006). Lastly, the text was examined to determine which discourses were most salient and which actors most pronounced (Fairclough, 2006; Santos, 2006). As Said (1993) has noted, while ''direct'' colonialism has ''largely ended,'' imperialism has not. It ''lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices'' (p. 9).

From a post-colonial perspective, this paper examines how the Internet may inadvertently function as a tool of imperialism instead of as an instrument of equality and social change (Pannekoek, 2001). Though this investigation of Internet representation provides a unique contribution to the ayahuasca tourism literature, it also reflects one of this work's limitations: the analysis is focused exclusively on web content. The study addresses only the text's production and representation, it does not adequately explore how the text may be received. Thus, one direction for future research would be to survey those who view and/or book their tour through the site, in order to best understand how potential tourists interpret the material contained therein and to test the veracity of this study's findings. A second area of future research is the examination of ayahuasca tourist ''testimonials'' on the websites, conducted specifically to assess the tourist perspective of this phenomenon.

Key findings of this comprehensive study of the Blue Morpho website suggest that business and spiritual discourses were combined to most strategically advertise the ayahuasca tour and, in turn, local actors were largely removed from the site, rendering them extinct in this process of appropriation. Through the use of Corporate Discourse, the privileging of place over people and the paternalistic references to the ''locals'' whom the tour broker employs, it appears that the discourse on this ayahuasca tour website reflects the broader tendencies of neocolonialism and cultural commodification within the spiritual tourism industry. The near absence of any reference to the historical, social or traditional context of the ayahuasca plant and ceremony serves to commodify the experience of ayahuasca by severing it from its indigenous roots, making it seem ahistorical and more easily appropriated as a product for purchase in an all-inclusive retreat package, available to anyone with enough time and money to take the tour.

In sum, this study suggests that contemporary spiritual tourism, in contrast to its predecessors religious and pilgrimage tourism, can be theorized best as a form of postmodern tourism (Munt, 1994), wherein the discourses of consumerism and individualism are coupled with a quest for the authentic, ethnic Other, situated in the current stage of economic and cultural globalization. Through an examination of the power of online representation, this study questions the democratic potential of the Internet and suggests that instead of improving the lives

of the marginalized, it may instead be replicating the imperialistic processes of appropriation and commodification. A

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Submitted 25 September 2009. Resubmitted 17 January 2010. Final version 21 May 2010. Accepted 30 May 2010. Refereed anonymously. ***Coordinating Editor: Lee Jolliffe***