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Between Utopia and Total Institution: Structural and Secondary Adjustments in the Andean Identity Market

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Objectives

This paper is on the Sanctuary of Machu Picchu located in the southern Peruvian Andes. The goal of this paper is not to criticize nature conservation efforts there but to call attention to the contradictions people face when those efforts are integrated with privatization policies, sometimes referred to in Peru as “neoliberalism.” *What happens when conservation and the need to attract global investments come together?* I explore Erving Goffman’s work on “total institutions” (Goffman 1961), particularly the idea of “secondary adjustments” and the institutional loops they create, as helpful in understanding the lived contradictions of people who reside in this protected area.

The tangible lives of an intangible place

When I arrived in Machu Picchu, the pueblo was in the midst of its big festival—the anniversary of the founding of the political district. The anniversary festival is a special event for the people of Machu Picchu. It is perhaps a time when the community reasserts its jurisdictional autonomy over the sanctuary designation. Festival activities are often encounters with the intersecting spaces of district and sanctuary.

As part of the festivities, a dance competition was planned. Raul had spent the last few weeks preparing his dance group for the evening contest. In designing the dance he called “Rito al Dios Sol” (“A Rite to the Sun God”), Raul wanted to create a dance to represent the pueblo of Machu Picchu. Although Raul knew little about dance or choreography, he took it upon himself as the president of one of the barrio associations to organize some of the local children. Raul explained, “The pueblo does not have an identity and creating its own dance would offer something unique to Machu Picchu.” “We are the only pueblo in Peru that has no identity,” he declared.

That evening, spectators crowded the plaza waiting for the competition to begin. All participants were from the pueblo with the exception of those dancing for the Instituto Nacional de Cultura (INC, the state archaeological conservation agency). Many objected to their participation, claiming that these dancers were outsiders. When it was time for Raul’s group to dance, he entered the stage to explain to the audience that this was their new dance created to represent ancient times in Machu Picchu. He stressed to the pueblo that they should accept this dance as theirs because “our pueblo does not have its own dance.”

However, the judges decided that the INC had won. Raul and his group began shouting “fraud”; he was furious and insulted the panel of judges made up of officials from the municipality. “Incompetents,” he cried. He expressed the feeling that the municipality had betrayed the pueblo and explained, “They don’t represent us, but rather the powerful.” The felt need by many, such as Raul, to create a Machu Picchu identity, raised the question of

what is considered an appropriate identity for the pueblo and why having one had become urgent.

The people of Machu Picchu live in a landscape made to represent a utopia, classified as an intangible zone by the tourism industry, state institutions, and international bodies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which, through its World Heritage Convention secretariat, defines Machu Picchu as a World Heritage site—heritage for all humanity (*patrimonio de humanidad*). Under UNESCO Legislative Resolution 23349, Peru is required “to identify, protect, conserve, restore and transmit to future generations” its World Heritage sites. Since the creation of the sanctuary in 1981, residents of the district overlapping the sanctuary were granted user rights to land, but prohibited from holding property titles. What happens to those rights when the concept of intangibility is steered to serve larger capital investors in the tourism economy? In one sense, the mammoth growth of the tourist industry in Peru turned Machu Picchu into a commodity that commercializes an image of the past. That image dictates the kinds of identities acceptable within the sanctuary boundaries. In another sense, governing agencies methodically manipulate the law to promote some interests above others and to dispose a population for the purpose of moving poorer people out of the way.

Secondary adjustments

It might stretch the imagination to think of the residents of Machu Picchu as “inmates” living in a “total institution” (Goffman 1961), because the conservation institutions of the state are not designed for the management of people in the same sense as those of a prison or hospital, but rather are those of a heritage zone. Moreover, people are not confined behind physical walls and cut off from the wider society, as are people in a total institution. Also residents are not so brutally “stripped” and “leveled,” in Goffman’s sense, of status and identity, as they would be in a prison. And of course the residents of the district don’t quite live in “batches,” where all activities are carried out in the constant presence of others (Goffman 1961:4–28).

Nevertheless, sanctuary life shares similarities with life in a “total institution.” For instance, while people are not confined, exit and entry into the sanctuary is highly controlled, and it is difficult for a resident to receive a family member or friend without the guest paying tourist entrance fees. Furthermore, the privatization of the railroad has meant that residents are subject to fare hikes that in effect limit their movement. While residents of Machu Picchu do not live in “batches,” their movements are constantly watched by park rangers, and from the perspective of the sanctuary director, the status of community is denied to the rural residents. At least in his eyes, residents are a chaotic mass of people, referred to by terms like *grupos humanos* (human groups) rather than as legitimate communities.

However, the semblance of a total institution arises when, beginning in the mid-1990s, governing institutions integrated neoliberal policies into their management of the sanctuary. First, by tying nature to the debt crisis with debt-for-nature exchanges. Second, by offering multimillion-dollar contracts to nongovernmental organizations to conserve specific ideas of nature that stigmatize the activities of the population. Finally, by privatizing services formerly run by the state, such as transportation and major hotels, to the giant tourism company

Orient Express. In effect, the state retains control of a nationally symbolic territory while maximizing capital accumulation needs. It does so by balancing the idea of a public good, a commons normally not associated with the politics of privatization, with an emphasis on private property, creating a contradiction that needs to be resolved, and the resolution is a coercive politics of blame. Corporate and governmental interests come together to impose an intensified institutional order of people management.

Suddenly, residents find themselves “stripped” in the sense of having their possessions taken or restricted for the financial benefit of others, and “leveled” in the sense of having a new commercialized identity imposed on them as a qualification to live in the sanctuary. Equally important, people must still respond to the strict rules and regulations of the sanctuary. What we see is something akin to what Goffman referred to as “secondary adjustment,” where people adapt to the institutional order, often through secretive and deceptive practices. These are “practices that do not directly challenge staff but allow inmates to obtain forbidden satisfactions or to obtain permitted ones by forbidden means” (Goffman 1961:54).

An examination of secondary adjustments in the city of Cuzco is useful in seeing that the intensification of conservation enforcement problems in Machu Picchu is the result of privatization policies. Up until 1999, the Plaza de Armas (central plaza) in the city of Cuzco was teeming with small-level merchants selling artisan goods arranged on the pavement, along the portals, and under the balconies that encompass the plaza. Men and women without the resources to rent pavement space ambled around the plaza as they carried their goods, such as clothing, jewelry, or food, to sell. There were shoeshine boys and children who sold postcards or posed in traditional Andean garb with a llama or a lamb, and for a small fee offered tourists a photo opportunity. And of course the plaza area was also filled with tourist establishments, such as tour agencies, artisan shops, restaurants, and bars. At the turn of the millennium all of that changed. The wealthier establishments were left untouched, but the merchants selling their wares on the portal pavements were sent off to a newly built artisan market located about a mile away from the plaza, where most foreigners never go. The rationale was that they were unsightly and that they posed a hazard to tourists by attracting criminal elements. In contradictory fashion, another artisan market was constructed for them near the central market, an area where many tourists are specifically told not to go because it is considered dangerous and unsightly. These markets are also not well advertised and tourists tend to make their purchases in the establishments in or around the plaza. The displaced small merchants thus suffered great economic loss. Hence, just as the Orient Express captures the high-end tourist market in Machu Picchu, plaza space is regulated to capture the dollars of wealthier western tourists by removing competition and the temptation of customers purchasing cheaper goods or memorabilia.

A more dramatic alteration of plaza space in Cuzco can be seen in the new laws that prohibit street sellers of any sort from entering the plaza. Whereas once poorer families could reasonably benefit from the tourist economy by selling goods without having any overhead costs, now they cannot. The plazas are in effect “cleaned up” of poorer people who do not look well educated or cosmopolitan, and are thus viewed as “racially” different.

In contrast to the city of Cuzco, in Machu Picchu the boundaries of the sanctuary not

only define the market space, but also a public good, and the commodity sold; a tourist must pay to enter the sanctuary to have a “heritage experience.” In Machu Picchu, the changes in sanctuary laws affect the interactions between tourists and residents with profound economic consequence. Here, great effort is made to separate tourists from locals. For example, tourists were once allowed to hike the Inca Trail alone, crafting their own kind of “authentic” experience through interactions with residents. Residents could make some extra money by renting a bed to a hiker. Tourists at that time were far more likely to attempt to engage in dialogue as well as receive local interpretations of Inca monuments. Also, before privatization tourists could take the local train either to the kilometer from where they would start their hike on the Inca Trail, or go directly to the pueblo to visit the citadel. While it was crowded and not the most comfortable ride, many tourists chose the local train not just because of cost, but also to be engaged with the realities of a contemporary Andean population. With a shortage of seats, a tourist might be asked to share a seat with a child to lighten a mother’s load. From a resident’s perspective these interactions were also opportune moments to establish economically significant godparent relationships with foreigners.

Now the tourists are no longer allowed to use the local train. Tourists are also no longer allowed to hike the Inca Trail alone, but must go through tour agencies that provide a tour guide; Andean life as well as the past is now interpreted through a professional tour guide who echoes official versions of the past. The tour company provides all the food and there is little interaction between locals and tourists. Tour groups have designated campsites that, while often located near homes, offer few opportunities for interaction with residents. The little interaction that does take place between locals and tourists is largely confined to the purchase of a bottle of water or a candy bar as they pack their gear to leave. Residents must pick other moments and places to sell to tourists directly, often tagging behind them as they walk.

Conclusion: the neoliberal double bind

Finally, it should be understood that Goffman’s notion of secondary adjustment is not defined as an attempt at subverting social hierarchies. In the setting of a “total institution” secondary adjustments are a mode of adaptation to power, not a confrontation. But more importantly, as the institutional setting becomes more encompassing, adjustments can backfire and be made to serve the interests of those who are in control. Goffman’s notion of “looping” describes a double bind scenario where secondary adjustments inmates need to make to survive the rigors of the institutional order can then be used by the staff to further justify the rationale for incarceration.

I apply that reasoning to situations revolving around economic structural adjustment and state conservation efforts. I offer the concept of secondary adjustment here as a way of understanding how people are disciplined to respond to economic conditions designed to favor more powerful interests. I suggest it shows how market space is “cleaned up” to make way for larger investors.

This application of secondary adjustment connects with the way the geographer David Harvey (2003) defines “neoliberalism” as the “the cutting edge of capital accumulation by dispossession.” He ties the imperial impulses of global capital to dispossession of land and

property as ways of clearing away smaller property holders to make way for larger investments and cheaper labor, identifying state force as the primary means (Harvey 2003:149). Investment opportunities may “lie idle” as property titles, land rights and many other juridical entanglements block them.

In conclusion, the introduction of a neoliberal economy in Machu Picchu has changed the relationship between conservation enforcement and forms of economic adaptation. Now a concerted effort is placed on criminalizing the more fuzzy infractions found in secondary adjustments, converting them into more severe crimes that must be prevented. Locals are now excluded from a market arena. In these cases, secondary adjustments become much more of a gamble at the same time as they become more crucial for survival. Now people risk expulsion from the sanctuary and their district as well as property confiscation.

In addition, as a national symbol, Machu Picchu represents Peru to the rest of the world, and it receives a lot of media attention. In order to retain its value as a commodity, Machu Picchu must retain this image. Both rural and urban residents are forced to find ways to contend with this image. Race and Indian identity are not merely implicated in the above-mentioned dance festival but are also more directly embedded in the history of the area, the development of a tourism economy and the subsequent incursions of state institutions of conservation. For the conservation authorities of the state, and the expectations of the tourism industry, an idealized nature must be populated by nothing short of an idealized Indian. The current population is out of place because it does not fit well with the romanticized notion of an Incan past symbolized by the citadel.

If we view the sanctuary as a place where public goods and user rights collide with privatization efforts, we can see secondary adjustments eliciting harsher government discipline. Initially the expropriation of property was justified by the state in the name of the public good. Now, the uneven standards in nature preservation enforcement mean that, the more stringent the enforcements, the harder it is for residents to survive without making secondary adjustments. The more pervasive secondary adjustments become, the more those governing institutions turn to documenting ecological violations or damages to a public good. This situation leads to increasing justification by governing agencies for the further dispossession of sanctuary residents, and the subsequent turning over of that space to larger capital holders. Machu Picchu is an intangible good. Equally intangible are its institutional walls.

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