

Through a New Mirror: Reflections on Tourism and Identity in the Amazon

Amanda Stronza

Interactions between locals and tourists entail more than simple transactions of money for goods or services. They also involve the exchange of expectations, stereotypes, and expressions of ethnicity and culture. In this study, an ecotourism lodge in Peru was the setting for an ethnographic analysis of tourists' expectant gazes and locals' reactions to them. Interview data and observations reveal that over several years, locals began to alter their perceptions of what it meant to be, sound, and look "native." The lodge in the study is co-owned and managed by a mixed ethnic community of 150 families. Since opening in 1998, the lodge has received 5,000-6,000 tourists a year. Partly in response to the expectations of tourists, people have begun to show new (or renewed) pride in indigenous culture. Four indicators were: (1) increased efforts to learn indigenous language, stories, and songs from elders; (2) heightened interest in presenting indigenous culture to tourists, coupled with debates over intellectual property rights; (3) the adoption of native identity by some non-native members of the community; and (4) discussions about dividing the community along ethnic lines.

Key words: ethnicity, ecotourism, cultural revalorization, mestizo, indigenous

People become aware of their culture when they stand at its boundaries.

A. Cohen (1985)

The Ese eja, we know the science of the natural world and how to live. We have the legacy of our ancestors, the ones who know. The mestizos are in zero. If they know anything it is because of us. We, the natives, know everything, all of the animals, and because of the moon and the sun, we are never lost.

Ese eja man, 45, Infierno

Introduction

Tourism is often a catalyst of change in the ways people perceive themselves and others. When tourists and locals meet, their encounters are like windows that double as mirrors: each side uses the other to peer into a new world while at the same time casting back impressions, and reflecting on themselves through the eyes of the other. Expectations of how each side "should" look are often based

on ethnic stereotypes, nostalgic ideals, and the promising pictures of brochures. In the wake of such gazing, hosts and guests on both sides are likely to walk away affected, their views of themselves and of the other somehow altered.

The purpose of this article is to describe the ways in which tourism has affected perceptions of identity and culture in the mixed ethnic Native Community of Infierno in the southeastern Peruvian Amazon. The members of Infierno partnered with a private tourism company in 1996 to build, co-manage, and share profits in an ecotourism lodge called Posada Amazonas. Using ethnographic data gathered between 1996 and 2006, I interpret transformations of identity in the community, and how perceptions of self and other are changing in the context of tourism. I pay particular attention to what Pierre Van den Berghe (1994) has called re-creations of ethnicity as locals reflect on what (they think) tourists want to see. In so doing, I emphasize the relational and dynamic qualities of ethnic identity.

Tourism, Culture, and Ethnicity

Many anthropologists have interpreted tourism's effects on ethnicity and cultural identity (Chambers 2000, Gmelch 2004, Nash 1996). Nuñez (1963) described tourism as a "laboratory situation" for testing how cultural perceptions and relations shift when hosts and guests interact. A number of seminal works have shown how ethnicity is represented, perceived, and reinvented through the tourist gaze (Bruner 1987; Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1994; MacCannell 1984; Urry 1990). Some have argued that tourism can

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represent a first wave of globalization that overpowers or altogether obliterates local traditions and values (Mowforth and Munt 1998). Others have shown that tourism can lead to a renaissance of native culture by instilling new pride in local communities (Grunewald 2002; Ingles 2001; Van den Berghe and Keyes 1984, 1994) or by encouraging creative forms of self-representation (Bendix 1989; Cohen 1979, 1988; Evans-Pritchard 1989; Leong 1989).

The mechanisms by which tourism alters culture and identity are debated. Erisman (1983) has suggested it is the large influx of foreign goods, people, and ideas to host destinations that drive change. In this view, markets and the “commodification of culture” are primarily to blame for identity loss (Greenwood 1977, but see revisions in 1982, 1989). Though local residents may gain economic benefits from tourism, they do so by catering to the needs of outsiders; as they serve others, they may lose a sense of themselves. An alternative view posits that feelings of identity shift in response to the conveyance of tourists’ expectations—or the “gaze.” This understanding begins with the premise that tourists are preoccupied by a search for the authentic, or “the pristine, the primitive, the natural, that which is as yet untouched by modernity” (Cohen 1988:374; see MacCannell 1976). As tourists gauge their satisfaction of a trip based on how well their perceptions of authenticity match their experiences in a destination, the logical response for locals is to mirror back brochure behaviors (Adams 1984; Rossell 1988; Silver 1993). These responses may shift significantly over time as locals gain increasing experience with tourists (Pi-Sunyer 1977). Maoz (2006:229) has introduced the term “the local gaze” to describe a more complex, two-sided mirror between the gazes of tourists and locals. In the two-way exchange, tourists themselves tend to “live up to the expectations and images the locals have of them.”

Van den Berghe and Keyes (1984) argued that tourism is always a form of ethnic relations. Especially in tourism that brings people of different ethnic groups together, locals may modify, revive, or invent “new” customs and traditions to appeal to tourists’ desires for authentic cultural displays. Over time, the displays have a tendency to develop their own “reconstructed” authenticity (MacCannell 1984). For example, Esman (1984) found that tourist versions of Cajun culture are now interpreted by many Cajuns as authentic and traditional even though much of it has been created specifically for tourists. Xie (2003) has similarly described how traditional dance forms of bamboo beating in China co-evolved with tourism development.

Even if locals are not playing up the exotic or brochure-ready displays of their ethnicity, tourism can exert a strong influence on local conceptions of self (Picard and Wood 1997). Schiller (2001) observed that Dayak identity in East Kalimantan has evolved in a dynamic relationship with tourism. Using the metaphor of “the play of mirrors,” Caiuby Novaes (1997) wrote that self-image among the Bororo Indians of Brazil was shaped by their interactions with non-Bororo. A member of the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nations tribe in Canada

commented, tourism “makes me think about my culture every single day” (Mazurkewich 2007).

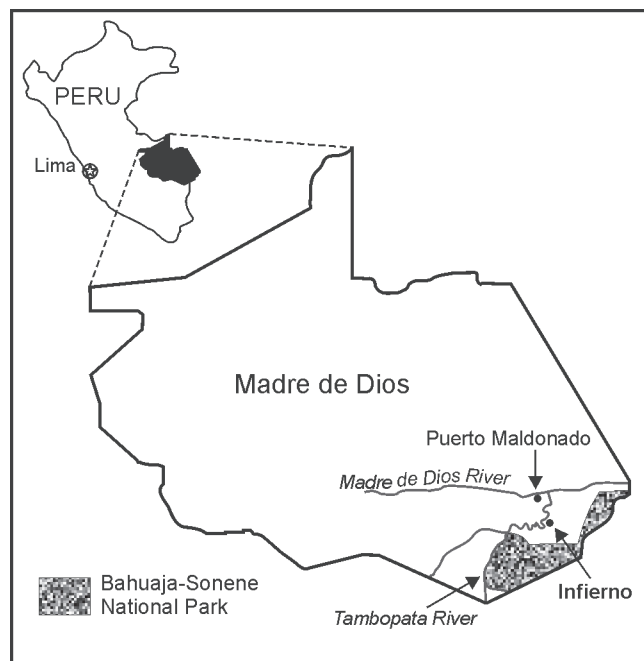
But what is ethnicity in these analyses, and how does it become authentic or fake in the eyes of tourists? Graburn (1976) suggested that tourists tend to recognize ethnicity as “a small bundle of overt features”—clothing, architecture, dances, arts. These are what get exaggerated by tourism, and sometimes feed back into a host community, changing locals’ sense of who they are, or who they think they should be (or at the very least, who they think outsiders think they should be). Evans-Pritchard (1989:97) described a Native American woman who felt she had to “look ‘Indian’ in order to be accepted as authentic by the tourists.” Cohen (1979) wrote of locals who “played the natives” for tourists. In these ways, tourism becomes a kind of a stage for local plays of culture and ethnicity.

The notion of “playing up” ethnicity is possible only if ethnicity is defined as something changeable and subject to manipulation. Yet, ethnicity is often treated as primarily a biological product of inheritance, passed down through blood and genes. Jackson (1995) noted that people are often described as *possessing* ethnicity, just as an animal has fur or claws. Field (1994:238) argued that ethnic traits are often seen as “the essences of being Indian that function as Cartesian coordinates against which the degree of ‘Indianness’ of a group can be determined.” Here ethnicity is something people acquire early in life as part of their normal development and socialization, not something they reconstruct or invent later in life.

Yet most anthropologists and other social scientists have long ago disposed of these static and primordial conceptions of ethnicity. We know ethnicity to be a social construction. Weber (1968:389) called ethnic groups those that “entertain a subjective belief in their common descent.... It does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists.” Ethnicity in this light is less something someone *has*, like blue eyes or brown skin, and more something someone *does* with varying levels of consciousness. Stephens (1996), for example, argued that ethnicity is a creative and improvisational process of consciously creating and recreating what it means to be Sioux, Welsh, or Aymara. Throughout Amazonia, Lepri (2006:70) argues, identity is primarily processual rather than inherited. Anyone, she explains, can through his or her actions “become a proper Piro, Cashinahua, or and so forth.” Paulson (1997) portrayed a Bolivian woman who changed her ethnicity in the course of just one day, depending on the task at hand. Valdivia (2005) too provides examples of how Amazonian peoples in Ecuador articulate their ethnicity (or “indigeneity”) in relation to tourism and other forms of market integration.

These notions of mutable ethnicity follow on Barth’s (1969, 1994) seminal work, which posited that ethnicity is continuously created in instrumentalist ways to construct and maintain boundaries. Such boundaries can be subjective, ideological, symbolic, and not necessarily identified by outsiders. Their purpose is essentially to keep insiders in and outsiders

Figure 1. Department of Madre de Dios, Peru; Native Community of Infierno; and Bahuaja Sonene National Park



out as members of the ethnic group compete or mobilize to achieve some advantage (see also Despres 1975).

Discussions of ethnic boundaries and boundary maintenance are inextricably linked with Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" among ethnic groups or nations. Communities are socially constructed by the people who identify themselves as part of a group and who coalesce around certain perceptions, images, and discourses (Anderson 1983). Though such communities may be imagined, they are not false, as perceptions define the very boundaries of collective identity (Nagle 1994). In the context of tourism, this perspective highlights the power of members of a host community to construct identities for themselves (and their visitors). In this way, the tourist gaze can ultimately be a tool of power, wielded by locals, to imagine their own "community" through their interactions with others.

Case Study: Ecotourism in a Mixed Ethnic "Native Community"

The *Comunidad Nativa de Infierno* (Native Community of Infierno), a mixed ethnic village of 150 families in the lowland rainforests of the Peruvian Amazon, is an especially apt place to track and interpret changes in ethnic relations associated with tourism. Over the past decade, the members of Infierno have partnered with a private tourism company, Rainforest Expeditions, to build, co-manage, and share revenues in a highly profitable ecotourism lodge called Posada

Amazonas (Stronza 1999). The communal-private partnership is a legally binding 20-year contract, which began in 1996 and will end in 2016. The members of Infierno share all rights and responsibilities with Rainforest Expeditions, and the community owns the lodge and its infrastructure outright.

Posada Amazonas has won several international awards, including the United Nation's Equator Initiative Award, for its efforts to bring the ideals of ecotourism to practice <<http://www.equatorinitiavie.net>>. Ecotourism is broadly defined as nature-based tourism with three features: (1) it minimizes the negative environmental, economic, and social impacts often associated with mass tourism, (2) it delivers a net positive contribution to environmental conservation, and (3) it improves the livelihoods of local people (Charnley 2005; Stronza 2001).

The lodge consists of an architecturally designed complex of thatched buildings that can accommodate 60 guests at a time. The number of tourists to Posada Amazonas has steadily increased from 2,000 in 1998 to 4,000 in 2002 to more than 7,000 in 2007. In 2005 alone, the lodge generated profits of \$110,000 for the community. Between 70 to 80 percent of the profits are divided among families for personal use, and the remainder are used for communal projects, including a secondary school, water tank, and new river port (Gordillo, Hunt, and Stronza, in press). Profits are also channeled to increase social support in the form of an emergency health fund, care for the elderly, and loans for higher education in Lima.

Infierno and Posada Amazonas are located in the province of Tambopata, several hours by motorized canoe from the capital of Madre de Dios, Puerto Maldonado (population ~40,000, Figure 1). The community covers 9,558 hectares on both sides of the Tambopata River. It lies within the buffer zone of the Tambopata National Reserve and near the Bahuaja-Sonene National Park. The members of Infierno have a mixed economy based on fishing, hunting, and gathering with some horticulture. They travel to the market in Puerto Maldonado to sell produce and buy manufactured goods.

Despite its title and legal designation by government decree as a communally-owned "native" territory, Infierno is culturally diverse. The members comprise three main ethnic groups: *Ese eja*, *ribereños*, and Andean *colonos* (colonists). The cultural and ancestral heritage of the *Ese eja* is tied with the lowland rainforests of what is today southeastern Peru and northwestern Bolivia. The *Ese eja* distinguish among themselves by referring to their place of origin, generally the river where they were born or have lived most of their lives (Ocampo-Raeder 2006). The *Ese eja* of Infierno are Bahuaja *Ese eja*, or the "Ese eja from the Tambopata River." Two other groups of *Ese eja* are associated with the Heath River in Madre de Dios, and the Madidi River in Bolivia (Alexiades 1999; Lepri 2006; Peluso 2003).

The *ribereños* are people of mixed heritage who represent some of the earliest immigrants to the Peruvian Amazon (Chibnik 1994). Their name implies proximity to rivers. The *ribereños* arrived for a variety of different reasons—as part of the rubber boom, and later in search of opportunities in

extractive industries like timber, gold, or Brazil nut harvest. The Andean colonos in Infierno settled in the area during the 1980s and 1990s. They maintain cultural and economic ties with the Andes. Many continue to speak Quechua, visit family in Cusco, Puno, and Arequipa, and send remittances.

Though the groups are different, ribereños and colonos in Infierno tend to refer to themselves collectively as “mestizos.” “Mestizo” is a Spanish word that implies mixed ancestry (Rudel, Bates, and Machinguiashi 2002). Herrera (2007:6) argues that “mestizo” is a complex social phenomenon that needs to be understood in terms linked to colonialism as mestizos are those who have “been assimilated to the larger national-society.” In Madre de Dios, mestizos include a wide range of people of Brazilian, Bolivian, Chinese, Japanese, and Yugoslavian descent as well as coastal and Andean Peruvians (Ocampo-Raeder 2006).

Understanding how the mestizos and Ese eja came to share communal land requires some background. Until the 1970s, no indigenous communities were legally recognized in Peru. Individual parcels within native territories were granted by the national government to “anyone who cared to colonize the area” (Gray 1997:77). This changed in 1974 when the Law of Native Communities stated that Amazonian indigenous peoples were to have their lands demarcated and recognized as inalienable territory. When this law led to a title of “native community” in Infierno in 1976, the Ese eja joined with ribereños and families of mixed indigenous and Andean descent who were already living in the area since the rubber boom. Information about why non-Ese eja members were included varies. According to some elders, the Ese eja were coerced by government representatives. Apparently, support for public works was conditioned on a certain number of inhabitants. The Ese eja had only 14 families, and they needed 20 to solicit a school.

Minutes from meetings in which local leaders began negotiating terms for the new “native community” reveal early concerns about ethnic differences between the families, and how these would play out in a shared community. In 1975, a government representative acknowledged “two classes” of people, and asked, “Why cannot these two forces unite? The natives also can be absorbed with the mestizos” (CNI, Libro de Actas, February 1975). In that meeting, an Ese eja elder announced that he did not want to join the “mestizos” because they “deceive us and look at us badly.” A younger Ese eja leader spoke up, “Why don’t we join with the mestizos so that we can have more power? Today we are all brothers, and we are all equal. The bad treatment and the naming of ‘the Indian’ to humiliate us has finished.” One of the mestizos responded, “Yes, there is discrimination, but there is no reason to call anyone ‘Indian’ if we are all one race.”

Notes from a meeting three months later reported that “all is well” in reference to the new settlement, save for “a lack of confidence in working together with the mestizos because some of them have committed abuses” (CNI, Libro de Actas, May 1975). By the following year, the government had built a new school, and the Ese eja and mestizo families agreed to

form one community. Yet a persistent and underlying tension remained, as the following comment from the minutes revealed: “Between the mestizos and the natives, there are disagreements, and because of these, the community will not be able to develop in the best way. It was agreed: the natives will work on one side [of the river] and the mestizos will work on the other side, where the school is” (CNI, Libro de Actas, June 1976).

Over the following years, the founding members of Infierno gradually accepted several new families of Andean colonists. These migrants became official members of the community and were granted rights to extract and produce from communal lands. Ocampo-Raeder (2006) estimated the population of Infierno in 2000 as approximately 380, with 36 households identified as Ese eja, 44 as ribereños, and 25 as Andean colonists. It is difficult to give an exact population figure at any time as the communal census includes only people who are official members of the community. Gordillo et al. (n.d.) estimated the population of Infierno as approximately 600. In addition to the original primary school and medical post of 1976, the community now includes a kindergarten and secondary school, a meeting house and handicrafts studio, connectivity via an unpaved 19 km road to Puerto Maldonado, a water tank tower, three bodegas, and the ecotourism lodge, Posada Amazonas.

A Longitudinal Study of Ethnicity and Ecotourism

I began the research in the same month Infierno and Rainforest Expeditions signed the contract to launch their joint venture. Between 1996 and 2006, I have lived in the community and collected qualitative and quantitative ethnographic data in five major time periods, totaling 28 months. In the first period, when the community and company were planning Posada Amazonas, I conducted participant observation and a series of stakeholder interviews to understand early expectations and concerns about tourism development. In the second period, as the lodge was being built, I collected baseline data on people’s household economies and their values about ethnicity, culture, and tradition. When the first groups of tourists began to arrive, I returned to ask the same questions I had asked in previous years, in addition to some new questions. When the lodge was fully functional and people began to focus on other concerns in the community, I returned to work in an applied capacity, leading focus groups and workshops to envision needs and priorities for the future. Subsequently, I joined with community leaders in Infierno over the course of a year (2002-2003) to share and compare lessons learned in Posada Amazonas with other community-based lodges in Ecuador and Bolivia. Most recently, I returned to carry out follow up interviews during the 10-year anniversary of the signing of the contract, when the partnership was at its halfway point.

Much of the focus of this research has been on livelihood changes associated with tourism and effects on conservation, community development, and perceived quality of life (e.g.,

Stronza 2007). However, I have also sought to understand changes in reported feelings of identity, and in definitions, descriptions, and displays of Ese eja and mestizo culture.

The data presented here come from four main sources: (1) participant observation and detailed fieldnotes of meetings, discussions, focus groups, and key events during the periods of 1996-1999, 2002-2003, and 2006; (2) in-depth interviews with participants in the lodge and a purposive sample of 115 men and women in 68 community households in 1998, and 2003; (3) written surveys with 120 tourists in 1997; and (4) content analysis of marketing materials for Posada Amazonas. To build generalizations from the more qualitative ethnographic data, I coded fieldnotes and interviews for topics and emergent patterns. When I found cases that diverged from the patterns, I re-examined and evaluated the data in the light of those cases. I conducted all of the interviews in Spanish without interpretation. Spanish is the dominant language in Infierno though some speak Ese eja at home, especially elders. All of the Ese eja in Infierno are fluent in Spanish, as are both men and women.

Ethnicity Before Tourism

Questions concerning identity and ethnic relations and how they might be altered in the context of tourism moved to the forefront of the research even before the lodge came under construction. The notion of ethnic identity is difficult to avoid in Infierno. Concerns over who belongs in what group, what people think of each other, and how they get along are at the core of both casual conversations and formal meetings. Of 65 men and women who responded to the question, "What is the worst problem in Infierno today?" 16% identified "conflicts between ethnic groups," and another 26% pointed to the "lack of organization and willingness to work together." In fact, concerns over ethnic conflict and lack of organization topped other serious problems, such as "lack of economic opportunities," "lack of potable water," and "lack of quality education." Even among people I talked to outside of the community, the fact that Infierno is a *mixed* community often came up as the first distinguishing characteristic.

Aside from the fact that everyone talks about ethnicity in Infierno, at least two things warranted better understanding of people's notions of identity, and how they were changing in the context of tourism. For one, most people who knew Infierno described it as rife with conflict over ethnic differences between the Ese eja and mestizos. A predictable comment was, "Infierno [meaning "Hell"] lives up to its name." Others described the community as a "hornet's nest."

Based on all that I had heard and read, I expected to find, or more precisely *see*, conflict and ethnic difference in Infierno. I imagined distinguishable camps—the Ese eja looking and acting different on one side, and the mestizos on the other. Yet, when I arrived in 1996, I found it difficult to discern much of any conflict or, for that matter, see major differences between the groups. With time, I learned that people

did (and do) maintain a strong subjective sense of identity and affiliation. Though people were not openly fighting or shouting, the differences were felt and also deeply embedded in people's memories, which had accumulated over more than two decades of sharing the same territory.

Infierno was often described as having *lost* its indigenous identity. Invariably, the community was characterized as the most "Westernized," "modern," "acculturated," or simply "changed" of the native communities in the region. Indeed, Infierno is just 30 minutes by road from the urban center of Puerto Maldonado, and half the community is comprised of mestizos. Even within Infierno, the Ese eja frequently identify themselves as different from Ese eja of other communities in the region. With a combination of shame and wonder, they often remark that other Ese eja still keep their traditional ways. They live differently ("only pure Ese eja among them"); they do things differently ("they still hunt only with bows and arrows"); and they talk differently ("even the *children* speak the language fluently"). One mestizo from Infierno observed:

Now they [the Ese eja] have their radios, they listen to the news, they have their watches, and nice shoes. The real ones, the old ones who died, were Ese eja. They did not know about money, they spoke their language, they did not know anything. The Ese eja in other communities—they are the real ones.

It was common to hear that the natives in Infierno had lost their authenticity, or that they were somehow not "real." Yet, when the community signed the contract with Rainforest Expeditions, many onlookers outside of the community were quick to protest, arguing that the influx of tourists to Infierno would destroy Infierno's ethnic identity. Here was an irony: on the one hand, the natives of Infierno were perceived as having little identity left to lose, but on the other hand, something about their identity was still worth saving from the Westernizing influences of tourism.

Like Oil and Water

Ocampo-Raeder (2006:69) has described a cultural resilience among the Ese eja. Even though they differ from other Ese eja in the region, she argues, they maintain "important memories, practices, and information about the Ese eja way of life." This insight was certainly reflected in responses to my question, "What does it mean to be Ese eja [or mestizo]?" No one needed to think very hard or very long to be able to explain the differences between their two overarching ethnic categories. Many respondents differentiated the groups by referring to work. A 36-year old mestizo who had migrated to Infierno from the Andes said:

The Ese eja are the same as the mestizos, but their work is different. The Ese eja like meat and hunting. The mestizos like agriculture more. The Ese eja do not work much in the *chacra* (farm), only in *pedazos* (pieces), and not all year. The Ese eja are comfortable with just what they have.

Table 1. Mean Annual Income: Ese eja and Mestizo (non-Ese eja)

Ethnic Group	Number of Households	Mean Annual Income	Standard Deviation
Non-Ese eja	49	US\$3,348	US\$2,258
Ese eja	51	US\$2,280	US\$1,856

t-stat = 2.530 p-value = 0.013

We are thinking about old age, about being prepared for the future. The Ese eja do not think about old age. For example, they do not have fruit trees or cattle.

Similarly, an Ese eja man said:

The mentality of the native is to work for the day. We think only about hunting to eat today, and not to invest money for the future. The mestizos are thinking about having more. They have their radios and they have money, so they are not missing anything at home. They put more into the *chacra* (small farm).

Implicit in these distinctions is the idea that farming is true work and foraging is not, and that farming implies a person is concerned for the future, whereas foraging is a day-to-day existence. As a 38-year-old Ese eja woman explained, “The Ese eja live from fishing, they walk in the forest. The mestizos do too, but not much—they worry more about working.”

A second group of respondents brought up differences in perceived intelligence. Generally, people said the mestizos were smarter, in part, because they had a better command of the language. As a 37-year old Ese eja man explained, “The mestizos participate more; the Ese eja are more humble. The mestizos have more knowledge.” A mestizo of the same age who had been born in Infierno explained, “The natives are ashamed to speak their own language.” A third group pointed to physical differences between the Ese eja and the mestizos. A 30-year-old mestizo man described the Ese eja as noticeably different “in the face, in the hair, in the language. They do not talk like we do, and they have another class of words.” Similarly, a 63-year-old mestizo said of the Ese eja, “Their noses are turned, and their faces are different.”

The level of consensus was strong, even across categories of gender, age, and ethnicity. The same stories emerged, regardless of who was doing the telling; that is, the mestizos and the Ese eja, the men and the women, the young adults and the elders had very similar ideas about what it means to be Ese eja or what it means to be mestizo. Stereotypes had become well entrenched in Infierno, and perceived ethnic differences were already assumed, felt, and discussed on a normal basis before tourism became a factor in Infierno.

In general, people said the Ese eja do not plan for the future, and instead, they worry only about meeting today’s

Table 2. Mean Number of Hectares Cleared: Ese eja and Mestizo (non-Ese eja)

Ethnic Group	Number of Households	Mean number of hectares cleared (1998)	Standard Deviation
Non-Ese eja	51	2.045	1.682
Ese eja	51	1.280	0.868

t-stat = 2.885; p-value = 0.005

needs; they do not farm, but they do hunt; and, they are knowledgeable about the forest. The consensus about the mestizos was that they are savvier, especially in terms of language, and, because they speak well, they dominate in meetings. Also, the mestizos were described as ambitious, thinking only about themselves, and not about the community as a whole. These perceptions correspond with those described in Isabella Lepri’s (2006:73) work among the Ese eja of Bolivia. She found that the Ese eja construct a self-identity in relation to mestizos (*dejja*) and see themselves as “ignorant, backward, cowards, dirty, and poor,” and the mestizos as “educated, clean, and they own ‘things.’”

As with most stereotypes, I found evidence to counter the perceptions. Though people said the Ese eja had problems with language, several Ese eja men of different ages speak Spanish fluently and often vociferously in community meetings. Though people said the Ese eja did not engage in agriculture and/or the market economy, many Ese eja farmers sell farm produce on a regular basis to the river taxis and markets in Puerto Maldonado. Though the Ese eja were described as the ones who hunt (and not the mestizos), several mestizo men hunt regularly, and several Ese eja men pointed out they rarely hunt at all.

On the other hand, some of the stereotypes did have empirical basis. A comparison of mean annual incomes and mean number of hectares cleared for agriculture showed that the Ese eja in general earned less income per year and cultivated fewer hectares of annual crops on average than did the mestizos (Tables 1 and 2). Differences were significant at a p-value < 0.05. Included were only households in which men and women were both either Ese eja or mestizo (see Ocampo-Raeder (2006) for thorough analysis of these differences).

The facts and fictions regarding “how the Ese eja are” or “how the mestizos are” have been passed on through at least two generations in Infierno. The alacrity with which people responded to interview questions and the consensus among the answers attests to the prevalence of stereotypes. Like all stereotypes, the ideas seem to have some foundation, and 20 years ago, the differences must have been much more marked. Yet, whether or not the stereotypes remain empirically true today in Infierno has done little to diminish their hold on people’s imaginations and prejudices. One man mused, “Like oil and water, the mestizos and Ese eja will never mix.”

Table 3. Tourists' Responses (N=120) to Importance of Ese eja vs. Mestizo Participation

Ways of Participating in Tourism Project	Mean score on 5-point Likert-like scale
Housekeeper	1.84
Cook	1.86
Builder of lodge	2.1
Supplier of food	2.12
Marketing	2.64
Boat driver	3.02
Manager	3.16
Guide	3.22
Cultural performer	3.9
Artisan	4.02

1=not important that the person be Ese eja;
5= very important that the person be Ese eja

Tourists' Perceptions

Though ethnic differences were a source of great concern to people in Infierno, the question remained whether they would matter to tourists too. Would tourists have certain expectations about the people they were meeting on their visits? Did they have perceptions about who was "real" and who was "not real" in ways that matched people's ideas in Infierno? Conran (2006) has argued that Western tourists perceive the other as persons to be "intimately experienced" rather than as an object of their gaze. Would tourists be disappointed to learn that their experiences in Posada Amazonas were not always with Ese eja natives? I suspected that the answer to this question and tourists' expectations would ultimately affect how people in Infierno characterized themselves.

I distributed surveys to tourists in Tambopata before Posada Amazonas was built, described plans for the community lodge, and asked the respondents to rank how important it would be to know that a native Ese eja versus a local mestizo was assuming different roles in the lodge. The 5-point Likert scale examined the degree to which it "mattered a lot" or "did not matter at all" whether a person performing a specific job at the ecolodge was Ese eja (Table 3). Chhabra, Healy, and Sills (2003) used a similar scale to gauge authenticity as perceived by tourists attending a Scottish heritage festival.

For positions such as housekeeper and cook, most tourists said they did not care whether or not the person carrying out the work was an Ese eja. For positions such as guide or artisan, most tourists said they did care. These latter positions are more strongly dependent on knowledge of local culture. The notion of authenticity in these positions is more important to tourists than it was in other positions. An implication of these scores is the idea that authenticity and culture are associated with the Ese eja and perhaps not with the mestizos.

Review of the tour company's marketing material showed that they were, in some ways, upholding these ideas.

In the brochures and websites, Posada Amazonas was said to be located in the "Ese eja Indian Community" or the "Ese eja Native Community." While it is clear that the "Native Community of *Infierno*" is an unappealing name for a lodge (few tourists would jump at the opportunity to spend their vacation in "Hell"), the marketing material is notable not only for omitting a word, but also for inserting "Ese eja."

To a large extent, the joint owners of Posada Amazonas have downplayed cultural aspects relative to the wildlife and natural history. Early in the partnership's history, the owners of Rainforest Expeditions explained:

We do not intend for the project to use the community or the people themselves as the focus of attraction for tourists. Rather, we want to work with the community to develop the natural resources they have as a tourist attraction. We hope to capitalize on their natural resources more than on their cultural resources.

This statement is supported by some of the marketing materials. One magazine advertisement for Posada Amazonas contained color photographs of macaws, capuchin monkeys, giant otters, and a Harpy eagle with a caption that read: "*Come meet some of our most frequent visitors.*" The small gallery could have included an image of an Ese eja man holding a bow and arrow—a flourish that would be typical of other Amazon lodges—but it did not. Below the pictures, the caption continued: "*In Posada Amazonas, you will find the perfect balance between wildlife and the richest tropical forests in America in a comfortable, secure, and authentic lodge....*" Though the word "authentic" appeared, there was no insinuation that "authentic" implied "Ese eja."

It is true that Posada Amazonas is home to many species of wildlife that are attractive to tourists. Yet what distinguishes the lodge from others is the fact that it is locally owned. This participatory feature alone would be enough to attract some tourists, but "local" can be made even more appealing to tourists by characterizing the local as not just local, but *indigenous*. Perhaps for these reasons, articles about Posada Amazonas in the popular press emphasize the fact that the lodge is co-managed by native, Ese eja (not mestizo) members of Infierno. A 2003 issue of *Outside* magazine identified Posada Amazonas as one of the "top ten ecolodges" of the world. Their description follows:

At the edge of an old-growth forest the size of Connecticut, Posada Amazonas is run and staffed mainly by members of the native Ese'eja community. Ese'eja means "true people," and these indigenos [*sic*] are expert river navigators who support themselves by hunting, preparing forest medicines, and gathering wild Brazil nuts to sell to tourists. Because of the lodge's community ownership, guests have ample opportunity to "go local." This might mean taking ethnobotanical walks—during which Ese'eja guides explain which seeds and barks are traditionally used for hammocks, fans, arrows, and medicines—or visiting the neighboring 1.8-million-acre Tambopata National Wildlife Reserve to search for giant river otters and parrots. (Singer 2003)

Though more than half of Posada Amazonas' staff people are not Ese eja, they are omitted from the information presented to tourists. In summary, as evident from the discourse of community members, tourists, Rainforest Expeditions, and the popular press, "culture" and "ethnicity" seem to be the domain of the Ese eja. By contrast, the mestizos tend to be perceived as devoid of culture, at least of the kind that might be marketable for tourism.

Ethnicity After Tourism: New Reflections

The visitors from California squinted in the late morning sun as they watched the performance from their seats on the school's wooden porch. Quechuan music streamed from the small boom box while the young performers from Infierno danced, their palm skirts rustling in unison. Like so many small warriors, the boys lifted half-sized bows and arrows above their heads as the girls carrying squash gourds skipped in time. Each child wore the bright orange tail feather of a scarlet macaw. The performance was presented as a gesture of gratitude to the students from the United States who had brought a telescope and other new supplies from their own school to Infierno. Standing on the last step of the porch, Don Rolando, an elder Ese eja man, watched the dance for a few moments, then turned to walk away, his head shaking: "That is not anything Ese eja."

Later that evening, the students gathered in the lodge to talk about their visit to the community. A young woman spoke first, "I was a little uncomfortable looking down at the kids. I guess it made me feel too important."

"Yeah," another added, "it seemed like they were a little uncomfortable too. I wondered if they were just acting for us, I mean, in a way that they thought we wanted them to be."

"I think it was nice they danced for us," offered one of the parents sitting in the back. "They obviously put a lot of preparation into it."

"True," conceded another student, "but what I liked best was playing soccer with everybody afterward. That felt more real."

Because Posada Amazonas is a locally managed tourism project, people in Infierno are not only the subjects of brochures, they are also active participants in determining what is being said and depicted about them. This is in contrast to many tourism cases where locals have little or no control. For example, Yea (2002:189) found that host communities in Sarawak were highly dissatisfied with their level of control in tourism, particularly their lack of ability to confer or deny for themselves "destination status." The lack of participation is especially problematic in that it creates and sustains inequitable, exploitative relationships (Yea 2002).

The fact that the local members of Infierno are managing their own images became especially apparent to me one afternoon when I was showing a stack of photographs to Diego, a young Ese eja man who had been involved in Posada Amazonas from the beginning. One of the photographs portrayed Gustavo, an Ese eja man in his 40s, dressed in a

traditional tunic called a *cushma*, clutching a bow and arrow, and looking directly at the camera. Diego studied the picture for a few moments and then, holding it to the light, declared, "This is great for the brochure!"

I was immediately taken aback, for I had not considered using the photograph for a brochure. Though I could see that it was a provocative image, it was one that Gustavo had requested I shoot for his own use, not for public display. Later, I thought about Diego's comment, and how much it revealed, in so few words, his consciousness of public image, his awareness of tourists' desire for the authentic, and his knowledge of the fact that Infierno had become a place to be seen, and in that way, consumed. I realized also that not everyone in Infierno perceived things in the same way Diego had, and perhaps that was precisely the point: Diego had been involved in tourism from the beginning, and his involvement had already somehow influenced his sense of self and his desire to project the "right image" to tourists, one that would be perceived as ethnically authentic and adorned with the appropriate accoutrements of Ese eja culture.

Diego may represent an extreme case of heightened awareness about tourists' expectations of authenticity, but he is not alone in Infierno. As Posada Amazonas has gained success, and as the community has received more attention from tourists, photographers, researchers, and other outsiders, people in Infierno have begun to talk more about reviving their culture, especially their Ese eja culture. In the 10 years since the introduction of tourism, people seem to have gained a new appreciation for Ese eja identity, and in various ways, they seem to be playing up their ethnicity. The words of Rosa, a mestizo mother of five children with mixed ethnic heritages, summed it up simply: "We cannot disappoint tourists who have come to see Indians." Another woman of Ese eja origin added, "We're living like any community, and not like the native community that we are. Now we want everyone to know our origins."

Many tourism scholars have described this phenomenon. MacCannell (1992) wrote of "ex-primitives," or those who adapt to modern life by acting primitively for others, through staging their culture. Adams (1997a:317) described how the Tana Toraja of Indonesia were "re-examining their rituals and consciously reshaping their traditions and past." Grunewald (2002:1018) argued that the Pataxo of Brazil are not Indians "just for tourists." In the realm of tourism, "they mold and remold themselves, in accordance with expectations that they themselves pose."

Yet new pride in Ese eja identity represents a turn of events in Infierno. For years, the Ese eja were told their beliefs and practices were antiquated and backward. Many were made to feel embarrassed, foolish, or ashamed to speak their own language, live by their most traditional practices, or simply look and behave in ways that were distinctly Ese eja (Alexiades and Lacaze 1996; Chavarria and Garcia 1993). With tourism, however, the Ese eja are considering the possibility that a return to the past may be the best path to a prosperous future.

Now that tourism has become more important to the livelihoods of many families in Infierno, the Ese eja seem to be gaining a newfound sense of pride and entitlement. Coupled with this is mounting concern among the mestizos that the Ese eja might be especially favored by tourists. The result has been a re-drawing of ethnic lines between those who are “truly native” and those who are not. Though the Ese eja and the mestizos have been living together for more than two decades, and although they agreed to build and manage Posada Amazonas together, now they are having new debates about who has a right to what resources, and more pointedly, who is most deserving of benefits from tourism.

An increased sensitivity to ethnic heritage and a vocalized need to define who’s who may be linked, in Barth’s instrumentalist fashion, to the economic benefits from ecotourism. There are several indicators of this trend. The first relates to “cultural rescue.” One man described cultural rescue as important to live up to how Infierno had marketed itself as the Ese eja community. “We want to acknowledge the cultural differences between us,” he said. “In fact, that could be another kind of attraction.” He then suggested that they would need to dress appropriately, adding, “Though we won’t be wearing our traditional costumes *everyday*.” Interest in cultural rescue appeared in discussions about the need to learn from Ese eja elders. Two years after the lodge opened, more people were speaking with urgency about collecting tape recordings and photographs. An elder who knew many of the traditional songs and stories of the Bahuaja Ese eja had died in 1997, and there was a sense that time was running out. One man said, “Those who were born here are not Ese eja. They act like mestizos. They don’t speak the language, only Spanish. There are only a few of us who still speak. Little by little, we are finishing.”

Concerns about loss of Ese eja memory and language would be repeated to me again and again, especially after 1998. This was a difference from my first year in Infierno, 1996, when most people told me they could speak only a few words of Ese eja, that they were not as fluent as their grandparents or neighbors. Just two years later, many people assured me they were strongly fluent. I could attribute this to several things: (1) they were always fluent, but ashamed to say; (2) they were never fluent, but wanted to be or had become so in later years; (3) they were never fluent, but wanted others to think they were. Any of these answers provides evidence that a revaluing of cultural identity had occurred in just a matter of years.

A second indicator of increased interest in Ese eja culture is discussion of intellectual property. Though the Ese eja leaders said they did want tourists to visit the community, they were also apprehensive. In particular, they reported feeling wary of commercializing or exploiting their cultural traditions for consumption by tourists. One Ese eja leader offered this insight: “The tourism project should not collect knowledge of the Ese eja. It would not be good for us because the lodge is part of Western society. They would take our knowledge and then gain the most from it. We must be prepared to do

cultural rescue for ourselves, collecting stories and songs for our own children.”

The treatment of Ese eja culture as intellectual property had existed in Infierno even before tourism began, and these concerns about commodifying culture and who has a right to share cultural knowledge of the Ese eja with agents of the outside world were debated before any marketing brochures were created or tourists came with expectant gazes. The grassroots indigenous federation in Puerto Maldonado was instrumental in introducing the concept of intellectual property to Infierno and to other native communities in the region. When Rainforest Expeditions and Infierno signed the partnership, the leaders of the federation were some of the most emphatic in their concerns to protect Ese eja culture from the commodification and potential expropriation that could occur in the context of tourism. The advice of indigenous rights organizations and activists in Peru has continued to influence how people in Infierno talk about culture as property and its potential “use” (and misuse) in tourism.

A third trend, and this is perhaps the most significant indicator of renewed pride in Ese eja culture, is the fact that even mestizos in Infierno have begun to identify themselves as natives. Such a premium has been attached to Ese eja identity that even people who had not a drop of Ese eja blood, or who had never defined themselves as Ese eja, had begun to characterize themselves as native. This switch of identity was especially surprising when a man who began calling himself a native in 1998 was the same man who had highly derogatory words to say about the Ese eja in 1997. In fact, everyone in his family had negative descriptions of the Ese eja in comparison with the mestizos. One comment from his father, for example, was, “When the Ese eja sell something, their money disappears quickly because they drink a lot. Sometimes then they have to steal.”

The man’s change of heart about the Ese eja and, ultimately, his change in self-identity occurred when he began working at Posada Amazonas in a position that gave him a tremendous amount of daily exposure to tourists. After discovering that tourists wanted to learn about his traditions as a native of the region, he found it advantageous to accommodate their perceptions of who he was. Indignant when I questioned his decision and motives, he said, “Well, I was born here, and so I’ve always considered myself a native.” Of course, his point was valid: it did not matter that he was not Ese eja—he was nonetheless *native*. He knew enough about local flora and fauna, social history and mythology of the area to fill several hours of conversation with tourists. He was not void of culture, and it did not make sense for him to dilute somehow the perceived authenticity of his being by revealing to tourists that he was not precisely “native” in the way that they thought he was.

Not only people working at the lodge, but also some community members who rarely interacted with tourists were beginning to consider a change in their identity. At a meeting to plan for the future of development in Infierno, a leader of the “cultural rescue” initiative addressed the

importance of including mestizos. He had sensed that there was growing resentment about the exclusiveness of the Ese eja-only endeavor. Addressing the mestizos, he said, "We want to involve everyone. Little by little, the Ese eja culture can be adopted by everybody." At that, a mestizo in the group responded, "Yes, we can dance like Ese eja, use the clothes, learn to speak the language." And another mestizo added, "Yes, I feel completely Ese eja. We've been living as one family for 25 years now."

Medina (2003:265) reported similar identity shifts in a Belizean village where locals grew cognizant of the fact that tourists were according higher value to "things Maya" than to "things Mestizo." In response, mestizo villagers began to associate with Maya identity, regardless of whether they actually spoke Mayan or had much lived experience with Maya culture. Van den Berge (1995) found that tourism prompted local mestizos in Chiapas, Mexico to modify their attitudes and behaviors towards Indians, especially as they sensed that maybe there was something "interesting" that the well-heeled tourists from developed countries were noticing about the Indians that they had been missing. Nagel (1994) too has argued that people respond to shifting ethnic incentive structures by asserting minority status or even changing their ethnicity.

Finally, an indicator of ethnic consciousness and boundary maintenance in Infierno is mounting tension and talk of dividing the community. Though the playing up of ethnic tradition by the Ese eja is a positive trend in that it has led to a resurgence (or, for some, a first-ever feeling) of ethnic pride, in other ways, it has exacerbated old tensions in the community. The tourism lodge does not mark the first time ethnic conflict has arisen in Infierno. Nearly two decades ago, the mestizos and the Ese eja discussed splitting over debates about who had rights to a loan from the Agrarian Bank. Notes from the community's logbook of 1979 also indicate that one of the community members asked the general assembly if the mestizos could separate from the Ese eja.

Though the conflicts are deeply rooted, tourism seems to be causing an accentuation of difference in the community. Neither the mestizos nor the Ese eja want to stop working together in Posada Amazonas, yet when the lodge first opened, both sides thought the other was receiving preferential treatment. One Ese eja man said that the mestizos should have no right to work in the lodge—the lodge should belong only to the Ese eja. When I asked about the mestizos who signed the contract and helped build the lodge ("Should they benefit as well?"), he said, "We can pay them for their time, but after that, they should be excluded from the project." The mestizos, in turn, argue that they invested the labor, and now the Ese eja are being favored. As one woman clarified, "The mestizos helped more in building the lodge, but now the Ese eja are being hired."

Despite the perceptions, designation of staff positions at the lodge is not determined along ethnic lines. All members of the community, regardless of ethnic origin, dominate language skills, and all have vast knowledge of natural history (for guiding). Furthermore, the visible or physical differences between

the Ese eja, ribereños, and colonists are relatively minor, or at least not obvious to tourists. Partly because the ethnic tensions are high enough to warrant vigilance, the hiring patterns at the lodge are quite equal between the groups.

In 2000, the Ese eja proposed a solution to the mounting ethnic rivalries. They suggested separating from the mestizos, and moving upriver. As a group, they said they had decided that their children may attend school with mestizos as always, but in the evenings, they would return to the Ese eja-only sector of community. The question of who would be included in the Ese eja portion of the divided community, and how they would decide, or even *who* would decide is unclear. Some leaders said they would follow rules of patrilineal descent. This accommodates many of the leaders who have parented children with non-Ese eja women. Yet, even among the leaders, the rules are confusing: some people who are not Ese eja by descent would be entitled to join the Ese eja enclave if they "share similar beliefs."

Other ethnographers have reported similar interethnic conflicts sparked by tourism. Schiller (2002:414) described competition among natives and migrants as a "disturbing side effect of culture tourism in Kalimantan." Adams (1997:174) wrote of "intensified interethnic competition, rivalry, and suspicion" among some South Sulawesi groups as an unanticipated consequence of tourism promotion. Some ethnic groups were spotlighted for tourist promotion, but not others—just as the Ese eja have been noted, but not the mestizos.

The four indicators of renewed (or new) pride in Ese eja culture I have mentioned are: (1) heightened concern for cultural rescue and learning language, stories, and songs from elders; (2) interest in presenting various aspects of Ese eja culture to tourists, coupled with debates over intellectual property rights; (3) adoption of Ese eja identity by non-Ese eja members of the community; (4) discussions of dividing the community.

Conclusion

In the previous vignette, an elder Ese eja man commented with some frustration that the dance presented to tourists was "not anything Ese eja." The back story of that invented dance took place one afternoon in Infierno, shortly after the day's classes had finished.

The teacher met with the Ese eja and mestizo members of the Family Parents Association. A big item on the agenda was to plan a performance for a special group of visitors (students from an international exchange program). The parents started the meeting by talking about what costumes the children should wear. The general idea was to present a dance as a show of gratitude to the visitors who had made donations to the school. Several parents suggested designs and materials, and their ideas seemed to emanate from some reservoir of perceptions about what the guests might want to see. What kinds of palms or seeds or feathers should be used? How should the boys' costumes differ from the girls'? Fifteen minutes into the discussion, the teacher pulled from

her bag a cassette tape decorated with the photograph of an Indian man. "He may be from Pucallpa [an Amazon town in Peru]" she contemplated aloud. And then holding up the picture, she reminded everyone, "They must also have their bows and arrows." At that point, Pablo, an Ese eja man who had begun to sell bows and arrows to the tourists, murmured from the back, "But they have to be from this area, what the Ese eja really use."

Anthropologists have argued that the gaze of tourists is influential in shifting the ways locals look, behave, and feel. The case of Infierno suggests that hosts can, and often do also play a proactive role in determining what happens in host-guest interactions. Especially when making decisions about how to portray themselves, community members have expressed particular ideas about what the tourists want. Diego's comment that the photograph of the Ese eja man wearing a cushma is "perfect for the brochure" reveals that people are thinking explicitly about images and expressions of ethnicity. Also, the mestizo guide's decision to call himself a native illustrates conscious attempts to match tourists' expectations.

Over the course of just a few weeks in Infierno, and in different kinds of interactions with outsiders, I watched people demonstrate tremendous creativity in matching behaviors to visitors' expectations. With a group of foundation donors, community members proudly played up their role of lodge owners, content with the direction tourism was taking in their community (though, privately, they had a number of concerns about who was participating and who was gaining). With visiting school children, they performed a dance, dressed in what they hoped would be perceived as typical Amazonian Indians—this role to match the lesson plans of teachers. For a Native American woman who was visiting from the United States to share stories about cultural rescue among her people, the members of Infierno played up their own role as crusaders in rescuing a languishing language and set of traditions. For guests who were visiting from another part of the Amazon, people apparently felt no need to change much of anything—the expectations from other Amazonians were minimal and so too were the efforts to play up.

The fact that people in Infierno are shifting the outward manifestations of their identity does not necessarily imply that they have lost a sense of who they are ("really are"), or their ability to distinguish what is genuine from spurious. Especially in places where tourism is invited rather than imposed, as in Infierno, locals can remain conscious of what is real and staged even as they manipulate their culture to attract more tourists. Pablo's recommendation to use bows and arrows that are "really used" by the Ese eja reflects a concern for authenticity even as he helps fabricate a cultural display for tourists.

Because ethnicity is mutable, people may carry "a portfolio of identities" that are more or less salient vis-à-vis various audiences (Nagel 1994:154). Lepri (2006:68) explains that Ese eja notions of identity are "multiple, sometimes contradictory, and they vary in the encounters with different others."

Further, the trend to play up or embellish cultural identity in Infierno has not been the result of tourism alone. As Graburn (1976) suggested, "All viable cultures are in the process of 'making themselves up' all the time. In a general sense, all culture is 'staged authenticity'" (see also Crick 1989). With this in mind, Taylor (2001) reminds us to consider the "sincerity" with which locals stage and perform their own culture.

Perhaps the members of Infierno have been "making themselves up" for many years, or at least as long as the mestizos and the Ese eja have shared the same land and tried to reconcile the differences among them. They are now and perhaps always have been a community in transition. Anyone who spends enough time in Infierno certainly gets the sense that it is possible to see culture changing and being recreated on a daily basis. People seem always to be shifting their identity. I was reminded of this one day when tourists weren't even around.

It was a Sunday, and the members of a mestizo community upriver were in Infierno about to engage in a champion soccer match with Infierno's team, *Los Angeles de Infierno*. One of the fans from the other team asked Felipe, a star player from Infierno, "What are you doing wasting your time with these natives of Infierno?" Felipe responded without even a pause, "I was born, raised, and educated in Infierno. I've always considered myself to be a native as well." Later in the game, fans for the other team yelled out some derogatory comment about how poorly "the natives" play. In unison, a group of three women from Infierno's side, two of them Felipe's sisters, called back indignantly, "We are *not* natives!"

It simply is not clear who is who in Infierno, and people seem to be deciding this from moment to moment, situation to situation, depending on the audience and what's at stake. What is clear is that tourism has prompted people to talk openly about the differences between them, the changes they are experiencing, and the fairness of ethnically-defined rights and privileges. As an indirect and perhaps unintended result of tourism, a few fundamental questions concerning identity, culture, and community have seeped into everyday debates and conversations in Infierno. These include the question of what culture is and who has it, how and why ethnic differences define people, whether ethnic diversity is a strength or a weakness, what traditions are meaningful and why, and how things have changed over the past 25 years.

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