From Gold Mining to the Golden Prison of Ecotourism Lodges in Madre de Dios, Amazonia Perú

Thesis

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By

Gordon L. Ulmer, B.A.

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Thesis Committee:

Dr. Jeffrey Cohen, Advisor

Dr. Mark Moritz

Dr. Ray Cashman
Abstract

I explore the production of social, cultural, and natural space in the Madre de Dios (Amazonia Perú) biosphere. Following a political ecology approach, I focus on the experiences of locals who worked primarily in gold mining, timber, and other extractive economies prior to becoming tourism guides and examine how the transition to an institutionally regulated livelihood around ecotourism has reshaped the ways they perceive and constitute themselves in relation to concepts of family, nature, insiders and outsiders, ownership, and modernity. I argue that tour guides navigate through a constellation of dialectical relationships that bisect local, national, and global connections and mediate articulations between local labor (the ecotourism guides), national tourism markets (including the Peruvian state), and the global economic system (including NGOs, lodge operators/owners).
Dedication

For my wife, Dara Adams, whose love, encouragement, and contagious passion for Amazonia and anthropology introduced me to a peculiar world that continues to beckon to my intellectual curiosity. No words can adequately express my gratitude.
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Vita

August 2009………………………………………………… B.A., Anthropology with Honors
The University of Texas at Austin

2009 to Present……………………………………… M.A., Anthropology
The Ohio State University

2010………………………………………………………. Invited Paper

   The Andean Literati: The Politics of Ethno-history and Social Memory.
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2011……………………………………………………….FLAS fellowship in Quechua

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# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ iii
Dedication ..................................................................................................................................... iv
Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................................... v
Vita .................................................................................................................................................. vi
List of Figures ................................................................................................................................. viii
List of Maps .................................................................................................................................... ix
Chapter 1: Introducing the Theoretical Story ................................................................................ 1
Chapter 2: Methodology and Analytical Procedures .................................................................... 17
Chapter 3: Madre de Dios and a People Without History ............................................................... 27
Chapter 4: Familial Backgrounds and Livelihoods in Transition .................................................... 44
Chapter 5: Transcendence from Obreros to Guides to Owners ...................................................... 52
Chapter 6: The Political Economy of Gender and Sexuality at the Lodge .................................... 72
Chapter 7: Education and State Control of the Local .................................................................... 79
Chapter 8: Constellations of Power ............................................................................................... 92
References ...................................................................................................................................... 96
List of Figures

Figure 1. Outside Baggage Claim at Padre Aldamiz International Airport.................................04
Figure 2. Cathedral de Cusco........................................................................................................14
Figure 3. Machu Picchu ruins.....................................................................................................15
Figure 4. Padre Aldamiz International Airport........................................................................20
Figure 5. Illustration of twelfth Inka, Tupac Cuci Hualpa Huascar Inka.......................................29
Figure 6. Native Community in Madre de Dios recruited for rubber extraction.......................32
Figure 7. Cauchos and Caucheros of the “Manuripe”.................................................................33
Figure 8. Puerto Maldonado (ca 1940).......................................................................................42
Figure 9. Plaza de Armas in 2010 and ca 1950s.........................................................................42
Figure 10. Mining operation on the banks of the Madre de Dios.............................................49
Figure 11. Mining operation on an artificial island on the Madre de Dios...............................50
Figure 12. Andean festival in Puerto Maldonado.......................................................................69
Figure 13. Parade.........................................................................................................................80
Figure 14. Local advertisement for SENATI technical programs.............................................84
Figure 15. La Universidad Nacional Amazonica (UNAMAD)....................................................84
Figure 16. Clock tower at the Plaza de Armas, built by Japanese migrants...............................90
List of Maps

Map 1. Department of Madre de Dios.................................................................21
Map 2. Protected areas near Puerto Maldonado.............................................39
Chapter 1: Introducing the Theoretical Story

“Every self-estrangement of man from himself and nature is manifested in the relationship he sets up between other men and himself and nature”

–Karl Marx, The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts

**Point of Entry**

A nebula of smoke from swidden agricultural production of cassava and other crops obstructs the morning sunlight in Puerto Maldonado, the capital Amazonian city of Madre de Dios, Perú. It is another hazy day conducting interviews on the outskirts of town and outside the Padre Aldamiz International Airport. Tour buses systematically line up in the airport parking lot. One vehicle is airbrushed with images of a scenic jungle landscape inhabited by caiman, jaguars, scarlet macaws, and other exotic fauna. Another bus is adorned with a faux thatched roof, mahogany-framed windows lacking protective glass, and other cultural relics belonging to bygone times— a mythic past for tourists and a nostalgic past for locals. A drive on newly paved streets through the built landscape in Puerto Maldonado suggests that times have changed; corrugated aluminum sheets have replaced thatched roofs of *pona* palm and *chabaja* leaves and windows are now glassed and covered by security bars. Most tourists are afforded only a fleeting glimpse of Puerto Maldonado from the bus window because the city is merely a portal from airspace to rainforest. I’ve heard the same routine described in several interviews: upon arriving to
the airport, guests meet their tour guides who shuttle them to their respective tourism agency office in town to fill out release forms. Immediately following, they head to the river port where they take an outboard motorboat along the Tambopata or Madre de Dios river to a remote lodge in the rain forest for a five to seven day vacation and return directly to the airport to exit the region. I am here at the airport with a group of guides who dropped off their guests for an early flight to Cusco and we await the next group of tourists to arrive.

*Moto taxis* (a common form of public transportation in Puerto Maldonado consisting of a two-wheeled converted motorcycle that seats three or four passengers in an attached carriage) swarm through the airport parking lot. This is a ubiquitous scene around the globe: porters, bus drivers, and tour guides cluster around the exit of the open-air baggage claim area. Tour guides form cliques and chat with one another. Their attire is a giveaway that they are nature guides; most are wearing hiking boots, nylon-based water resistant pants, and T-shirts printed with silkscreened logos of their lodge. Some guides wear necklaces or bracelets made of seeds from the forest, but local men do not typically wear jewelry. One guide wears a new set of fancy binoculars that becomes the topic of interest among his friends. Each guide takes a turn looking through the binoculars into the fields across from the airport parking lot. Probing questions circulate among the group. “Where did you get these? How much do they cost?” It’s not everyday that a local guide (who makes an average of $25 USD a day) owns a pair of professional binoculars worth $3,000 dollars. But the owner is not an ordinary local guide; he grew up in Puerto Maldonado and now lives abroad with his “gringa” wife. His friends joke “Hey,
you are living in the U.S. — the gringa carries you like a parcel!” Each year he returns to Perú during the high season and takes tourists around the country on birding tours.

Birding guides are freelancers; they make around $100 per a day and usually receive generous tips for their time and effort. In fact, they typically receive more in tips than guides employed by lodges because birding tours are expensive and at the apex of vacation luxury (in terms of cost, access to natural areas, and specialized knowledge of tour guides). Freelance guides take their guests on weeklong excursions into the rainforest or highlands to view rare bird species and other specific attractions; lodge guides typically take guests on four hour hiking trips near the lodges. Freelance guides choose when they want to work and when they return home to their families, but they have less job security than a lodge guide during the rainy season when tourism slows because they are paid per the job rather than on a monthly salary.

I jot down similarities and differences between lodge guides and freelancers in my weatherproof notebook but my thoughts are interrupted as the droning engine of an Airbus A320 echoes through the small airport and the intercom system announces an arriving flight. The jet lands after a short 45-minute flight over the Andes from Cusco. Cusco is the core tourist destination in Perú and the entry point to the ancient Incan ruins of Machu Picchu for hundreds of thousands of foreigners each year. LAN Airlines is a Chilean-based airline that has monopolized air travel in Perú over the past decade and now transports most of the foreign tourists visiting Lima or Cusco to the Amazon region. LAN was an acronym for Linea Area Nacional prior to merging with other airlines, but
now LAN owns most of the jets in Peruvian airspace and in 2004 the company rebranded itself as ‘Latin American Network Airlines.’

Figure 1. Outside Baggage Claim at Padre Aldamiz International Airport

Passengers exit the jet and begin walking onto the tarmac toward the baggage claim area. After they reunite with their luggage, tourists exit the building and look into the crowd of guides, porters, and taxi drivers who are waiting and holding signs with the names of guests written in marker. Immediately, the loud chorus of “taxi… taxi!” commences as the first tourists exit the baggage claim area. Amidst the clamor of voices,
I think about the binoculars that transfixed the group of local tour guides. Those expensive binoculars are worn to the airport to convey prestige in a sphere where local guides frequently socialize; they are symbolic capital and articulate success and status. The binoculars are emblematic of a new career opportunity for locals from Madre de Dios.

Most local guides are proud to be neto neto Huarayo (native from the jungle) and earn their livelihoods by sharing stories and local knowledge of the forest with tourists. “I am translator of the jungle” one guide tells me as we wait for his group of tourists. “My teacher told me that I am the future of the rainforest.” Local guides matriculate into the three-year program in tour guiding at one of the two local technical institutes and receive a certificate that permits them entry into the national parks and reserves in Madre de Dios. For some guides, their education provides them with a legitimate and respectable career; they are the first in their families of timber workers and gold miners to receive any form of higher education. Many guides reconstitute themselves along a trajectory of progress, from working as an obrero (laborer) in a dredge mine to working as a guide for a lodge, and they hope to eventually own a private lodge or tour agency in the future, but most locals will never move beyond their roles as guides.

Negotiations between large tourism companies from Cusco and Lima, international conservation NGOs, educational institutes, and the Peruvian State regulate access to livelihoods and define the terms by which the rainforest in Madre de Dios is capitalized. Local guides live and work at the nexus of these power relations and cope with them by drawing upon a multitude of customs and strategies. This manuscript
focuses specifically on the social relations of ecotourism workers in Madre de Dios, Amazonia Perú to elucidate linkages between local labor (including tour guides) the global economic ‘system’ (including tourists, lodges, international tourism agencies, environmental and conservation programs, and NGOs), and the role of the Peruvian State (including departmental and national governmental agencies) in mediating these articulations. I seek to understand how social actors constitute themselves in response to hierarchically organized regimes of power embedded in the ecotourism industry, or what I call the ‘political ecology of ecotourism’ in Madre de Dios.

**Theoretical Roadmap**

The political ecology of ecotourism in Madre de Dios is defined by the dialectical relationship between captains and laborers and the means by which the biosphere is converted into capital “through the employment of jural rules of ownership to strip the laborer of his means of production and to deny him access to the product of his labor” (Wolf, 1972:202). Political ecology is a framework to understand the linkages between the structures that constrain and regulate access to resources and the emergent social relations that are negotiated in this process. This manuscript is the first step toward formulating a theory about the hierarchical regimes of power that mediate human-environmental articulations in Madre de Dios.

Eric Wolf first defined political ecology as the study of “mechanisms which mediate between the pressures emanating from the larger society and the exigencies of the local ecosystem” (1972:202). Drawing upon Wolf’s definition, I argue that the biosphere in Madre de Dios is a *centrifugally organized environment* in which
entrepreneurs and other stakeholders of global markets redirect the *centripetal tendencies* of the household through the exploitation of local labor and employment of institutional tools to convert natural resources into global capital.

This study defines the social universe of tour guides within a political ecology framework that takes into account “the nexus of symbolic and material factors” and the “space of culture/power/history/nature” (Biersack and Greenberg, 2006:4-5). I combine Wolf’s political economic perspective with the more recent post-structural concept of ‘nature’ as a socially constructed object that is utilized to define social relations between peoples and environments, and in this case study, the tour guides, the Peruvian State, and ‘the jungle’ (Biersack and Greenberg, 2006:3-40; Peet and Watts, 1996:28-29; Mann, 2008:336). The social production of the biosphere is the means by which local tour guides define themselves and their cultural worlds in relation to social and physical environments in Madre de Dios. Understanding the linkages between local labor (tour guiding and other economically extractive industries), State programs, global markets, and their historical *disjunctures* in the region bring into relief how “peoples, places, and environments are related and mutually constituted” (Bebbington and Batterbury, 2001: 377). In the following chapters, I discuss how tourism guides in Madre de Dios define themselves in relation to concepts of family and other *social fields*, insiders and outsiders, ownership and power, and the paradox of nature and modernity (or what is often called ‘sustainable development’).

I concentrate on local ecotourism guides because their worlds are shaped by regimes of power that mediate human-environmental relations in Madre de Dios and they
navigate through a constellation of dialectical relationships in search of autonomy: the tourist lodge in the forest and the household in town, pseudo-singlehood and married life, employment and entrepreneurship, and friendship and competition. Local guides transition between resource extractive industries (e.g., gold mining, timber, agriculture) and those that promote resource conservation (environmental NGOs, ecotourism), high season and low season, dollars and soles (salary currency and local currency), and support for regional development (promises of improved quality of life) and a nostalgia for the historical small town of the past (when crime was rare and everyone in Puerto Maldonado knew one another). Local ecotourism guides produce themselves socially and symbolically in relation to insiders and outsiders, selvaticos and serranos (jungle and highland people, respectively), masculine and feminine gender roles, native and foreign language, and tradition and modernity.

My analysis of these dialectical relationships indicates that the means by which local guides negotiate and contest regimes of power embedded in the ecotourism industry are both material and symbolic. In the chapters that follow, I explore the subtleties of these negotiations and contests to ultimately understand how local ecotourism guides define the contours of their social universe in relation to the hierarchical framework of power that regulates access to resources in Madre de Dios.

In chapter 2, I discuss my methodological approach to ethnographic research of this unique population that lives between the household in Puerto Maldonado and lodge in the forest. I take a case study approach to come to a better understanding of the emergent social universe of locals who transition from well-established extractive
industries to a form of extractive labor in Madre de Dios. This manuscript is based on ethnographic research with local ecotourism workers in Madre de Dios. I used Grounded Theory to analyze data from 60 semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and other experimental methods.

This manuscript focuses on dialectical relations between the local and global. However, discussing this phenomenon as a local-global dichotomy risks oversimplifying the nuanced ways in which the Peruvian State regulates ecotourism in Madre de Dios as part of a larger national project focused on the tourism market in Cusco. In chapter 3, I argue that understanding how the history of Peruvian colonization is critical to understanding how multiple localities in Perú currently interact within the global economic arena.

Conceptual models of globalization such as development theory, dependency theory, and modernization theory are important theoretical building blocks in constructing a framework to define the political ecology of ecotourism in Madre de Dios. Immanuel Wallerstein’s World System Theory (1974) is perhaps the most salient of these models; Wallerstein posits that the rise of the European World-economy in the late fifteenth century can be understood by organizing labor force into three zones: the Western European core (based on free labor), the semi-periphery in Southern Europe (based on share cropping), and the periphery (based on unfree or forced labor), which is comprised of Eastern Europe and the Americas. However, it is critical to review the limited applications of these conceptual models if we are to understand the nuanced variation between interconnected localities in Perú and how such places became
‘peripheries’ in the global economy. I am cautious about circumventing specific economic subsystems in Perú to emphasize the significance of the overarching World System because the relationship between Cusco and Madre de Dios is a critical component of the hierarchical regimes of power embedded within the current ecotourism industry in Madre de Dios.

The conceptual treatment of Perú as a singular periphery would receive the same criticism that Mintz offers regarding the application of Wallerstein’s thesis to the Caribbean. The inescapable issue, Mintz explains, is that the core “assimilates to the ‘periphery’” at least three different major regions: Eastern Europe, the Continental highlands of the South and Middle America, and the Caribbean and Circum-Caribbean lowlands” (Mintz, 1977:254). Mintz maintains that establishing these areas as labor zones is problematic not only because each region is vastly different from one another, but also because there is a wide variation within each sub-region. An analysis of the ‘periphery’ labor zone as a homogenous area is “thorny” because different regions in the Americas were not integrated into the European core in the same ways (Mintz, 1977). The expansion of New Spain in Perú was fought in Cusco and the surrounding highlands; colonial powers never quite reached Madre de Dios. Colonial enterprises incorporated the Andean periphery into the global market soon after Pizarro set foot on Perú’s coastline, but the lowland Amazonian region of Madre de Dios did not become a periphery until the latter years of the rubber boom and then only became an economic periphery toward the end of the nineteenth century. I discuss important historical moments in Madre de Dios and how they relate to the formation of dialectical relationships and regimes of power.
that control ecotourism today. Understanding the historic regimes of extractive labor power in Madre de Dios provides a critical background to examine how ecotourism is the most recent economically extractive industry in a long series of exploitative enterprises.

In chapter 4, I focus on the means by which ecotourism guides mobilize forms of capital (economic, social, symbolic, and human) as they move across the landscape in search of stability, regularity, and autonomy. I utilize Bourdieu’s *economies of practice* (theory of multiple forms of capital) to understand the motivations, strategies, and cultural dispositions that ecotourism guides mobilize to insure stability and security in their social worlds. Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of material and immaterial capital is a useful framework to organize the particularities of social practices and explain relations between agency and social structures that characterize human actions in Madre de Dios. Following a political ecology approach, I focus primarily on the experiences of locals who previously worked in gold mining, timber, and other extractive economies prior to becoming tourism guides and examine how the transition to an institutionally regulated livelihood based on ecotourism has reshaped the material and symbolic ways they perceive and constitute themselves.

I expand the analysis of capital in chapter 5 to address what I call the *mirage of ownership*. In this section, I discuss how tour guides build social, cultural, and human capital as a means to gain more control but how their efforts paradoxically result in increased vulnerability. This section analyzes relations between the hierarchical regimes of power that structure ecotourism in Madre de Dios and the personal lives of ecotourism guides, forms of capital they draw upon as a livelihood strategy, the politics of ownership
of place and business, and the social production of identity that distinguishes lowland and highland people.

Following the discussion of lowland and highland identity, I use chapter 6 to explore the performance of identity to understand the politics of gender and sex at ecotourism lodges in Madre de Dios. I draw upon Erving Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical approach to understand the performative dimension of working as an ecotourism guide, but rather than focusing on the guide as a culture broker whose job is to translate cultural capital into a commodity for tourism consumption, I concentrate on the social milieu that defines appropriate behaviors and determines opportunities based upon reputation and status. This choice is critical because it allows me to investigate performance primarily as a strategy to cope with gendered politics in the lodge. Female tour guides must carefully ‘perform’ their identities and regulate behaviors at the lodges and in Puerto Maldonado to mitigate rumors that could potentially damage their livelihoods. I choose to focus on performance within the social milieu of the lodge to elucidate the gendered outcomes of ecotourism guiding. Moreover, my approach illuminates the political dimension of performance; too often is performance relegated to a “Kantian aesthetic sphere that is both purely subjective and carefully insulated from cognition, social relations, and politics” (Bauman and Briggs, 1990:65). Reputation, social status, ecological knowledge, experience on the job, and performance of cultural competence each relate in complex ways to the forms of capital that a local ecotourism guide mobilizes into a livelihood that sustains his or her being.

In chapter 7, I discuss the formalization of ecotourism guiding in Madre de Dios
and how it relates to the cultural hegemony of the highlands. Cusco developed into a large colonial cosmopolitan city for myriad reasons relating to and defining its assimilation into the global economic system. But how did this region become the cultural symbol of Madre de Dios? This fetishized national symbol is rooted in the social constructions written by early explorers, anthropologists, literary critics, and other writers of Peruvian history and culture and has more recently been co-opted by Perú’s tourism industry and assimilated into their marketing strategy. The curriculum of ecotourism programs in Madre de Dios is designed to train locals in Cuscqueño cultural traditions rather than to provide education of local flora and fauna because the mythic Andean identity is the organizing trope of Perú’s cultural capital commodified for the global tourism circuit. When I asked local guides in Madre de Dios why they thought Cusco was the epicenter of tourism in Perú, most agreed that Cusco had more ‘cultural attractions.’ In his oft-cited work The Tourist, MacCannell (1999:77) draws connections between the social construction of ‘high society’ or ‘high culture’ that shapes global tourism today and its preindustrial roots:

“In the preindustrial era, Society was defined as an exclusive subgroup of the collectivity, much as we try to define “high society” today… At the very heart of the human community were the opera halls, cathedrals, cafes and salons which accommodated this Society and its very high culture. The relics of this system survive today as tourist attractions embedded in a greatly expanded system of attractions including factory tours, inner city tours, museums of all types, historical and industrial monuments, parks and pageants.”

Cusco’s cathedrals, Incan stonework, local cuisine, craft markets, historical museums, and other symbols of Cusco’s “high culture” attract hundreds of thousands of tourists to the region each year. Cusco is the epicenter of tourism in Perú and shapes the way in which the State interjects itself in mediating articulations between local tourism workers
in Madre de Dios and the global economic system. As we will see, tourism in Madre de Dios is designed to adhere to the cultural hegemony of a mythic Andean identity that symbolizes Perú’s ‘place’ in the global tourism market.

Figure 2. Cathedral de Cusco, taken from the Plaza de Armas in Cusco. The cathedral was built over the Inca Wiracochas Palace and finished in 1669. Today, the Cathedral houses a collection of over 400 paintings from the 16th and 17th Century.
In the concluding chapter, I discuss how the constellation of dialectical relationships that define the social universe of ecotourism guides is comprised of manifold linkages between history, identity, place, and physical environment. I focus on hierarchical power relations to understand the social universe of ecotourism guides that emerges from these junctures. Finally, I consider this case study a contribution toward understanding the complex relations between agency and structure, material and symbol, local and global, each of which has too often been reified as self-evident truths and treated conceptually as mutually exclusive frameworks to interpret social phenomena.
The conceptual goal of this case study is to traverse these antiquated dichotomies that predispose our understanding of social life.
Chapter 2: Methodology and Analytical Procedures

*Ethnography in Spaces Between Home and the Golden Prison*

Motorcycle tires dig into the muddy earth and fling debris onto my backpack and the underside of my arms as my assistant and I ride down one of the few remaining dirt roads in town. We scheduled a morning appointment to interview Rufus, a *motorista* who works for a popular ecotourism lodge on the Tambopata River, but he is nowhere to be found once we reach the lodge’s office in Puerto Maldonado. We call Rufus and learn that he is on the other side of town waiting for the mechanic to repair the brakes on his motorcycle. After the repair is complete, he is scheduled to take a tourist group several hours downriver to one of the lodges. We would have to postpone the interview for a few weeks if we miss this fleeting opportunity, so we ask if we can interview him while he waits on his bike repair and he agrees. We trek toward the strip of mechanic shops on the other side of town (this time on the newly paved roads) and arrive at the business sector, passing dozens of garages and straining our eyes as we look for Rufus amidst hoards of people waiting for their repairs. We find him in a few minutes and purchase *refrescos* (cold drinks, usually juice from star fruit, papaya, or *maracuya*) at a nearby kiosk before the interview. I tell him that I am grateful to catch him before he returns to the lodge for a few weeks and he responds, “When business picks up, I work about 15 to 20 days away from home. This makes me very sad—to leave my family.” Rufus paralingually
expresses the repetition of days away from his family by striking the backend of one hand against the palm of the other with every utterance: “Pasa un dia... dia... dia” (another day passes, and another…and another).

The social world of ecotourism workers is bifurcated into the family household in Puerto Maldonado and the lodge in the rainforest, or as one guide describes the latter, “a golden prison, where you have everything you need but cannot leave.” The division of their social worlds along the lines of ‘household’ and ‘lodge’ presents theoretical and methodological challenges to ethnographic research. On the theoretical front, one difficulty is to model how ecotourism workers navigate between two distinct social fields that are fundamentally separate yet integrated in their social and economic outcomes. For example, some ecotourism guides pivot between marriage and fatherhood in Puerto Maldonado and a life of a *casador* (literally translates to hunter; signifies ‘a playboy’) at the lodge. Eventually, these two social worlds converge or the guide chooses to abandon his deteriorated relationships at home to continue his pursuits at the lodge.

A methodological issue, or rather, a practical challenge is the task of locating and recruiting informants who spend the majority of their time working at the ‘golden prisons’ in the forest. I approached this challenge in three ways. The first method was colored by my cultural bias coming from the United States and it was quickly abandoned upon serial failure during the first week of fieldwork. I attempted to schedule appointments with informants, but due to the ephemeral nature of leisure time, the unpredictability of work schedules, and the notorious phenomenon known as “Peruvian time” (in which ethnographers should set there watches back at least an hour or two to
synchronize with their informants’ relationships with time), I resorted to tracking people
down and interviewing them ad libitum. The second approach was unrefined, inefficient,
but successful when face-to-face connections were possible, such as when I was able to
down Rufus at the mechanic shop. My field assistant and I tracked down informants and
met with them in odd places to conduct semi-structured interviews, such as futbol
tournaments (local soccer matches), discotecas (music clubs), political rallies (regional
elections were scheduled to take place one month after I completed fieldwork), daycare
centers, pizza parlors, and most importantly, the local airport, my third and most
successful recruiting approach. Meeting at the airport to conduct interviews quickly
became a quotidian ethnographic practice. I was successful locating informants in the
most transitory of places, between home and the golden jail at Padre Aldamiz
International Airport. Tour guides spend on average 25 days a month hosting tours in
remote areas of the rainforest and five days resting in their homes and tending to other
responsibilities. During the busy season, many guides are at the airport to pick up and
drop off tourists. I routinely visited the airport every morning for semi-structured
interviews and participant observation once I discovered this world between worlds.
Padre Aldamiz became the perfect place to conduct ethnographic research because I could consistently recruit informants who were biding their time and waiting for flights of tourists to arrive from Cusco. It was also an excellent time and place for ethnographic research because tour guides were not as concerned with the aesthetics of their ‘performance,’ compared to when they are at the lodges and their interlocutors are tourists. Tour guides spoke more colorfully and ideologically when I conducted interviews in touristic and recreational places, such as one of the accommodations along Rio Madre de Dios.
Map 1. Department of Madre de Dios
Research Design

I take a case study approach in my project for several reasons. I entered the field to understand relations rather than to resolve a specific hypothesis. Each case deepens our understanding of the linkages between social actors, State policies, and global economic processes. A hypothetico-deductive framework is inappropriate for the task at hand. Moreover, my ethnography incorporates perspectives from a diverse population. There is no clear logical argument to support a method of dividing the sample into categories to test correlations between independent and dependent variables, nor would the arbitrary distinction of a ‘control’ account for the numerous confounding variables that shaped my informants’ responses to semi-structured interview questions. Thus, I treat each response to questions about the social worlds of tour guides as an additional perspective to better understand articulations between social actors and the configuration of power in ecotourism. Using an “inductive-as-possible...nets cast widely” case study approach (to borrow words from Ray Cashman, one of my mentors), I was able to capture a range of possible social outcomes and experiences and discover potential variables to examine in future research.

Data Collection

I conducted semi-structured interviews with approximately 30 local guides between the 4th of August and the 9th of September in 2010 in the department of Madre de Dios, Amazonia Perú. I also conducted semi-structured and unstructured interviews with approximately 30 former students who studied to be guides, but were ‘in training’ as cooks, office administrators, airport transfers, working in other tourist-related positions, or employed by conservation NGOs. These latter individuals were my theoretical
sounding boards, cultural informants, and collaborators who helped me discover and focus on critical aspects of ecotourism guiding that I might have overlooked had I only conducted semi-structured interviews with guides. Most interviews consisted of questions around three general categories:

(I) Background: age, marital status, geographic origin, familial sources of income over time, education and work history, motivation to work in ecotourism.

(II) Dyadic relationships: social world in the lodge compared to life in Puerto Maldonado (and challenges living between two places), opinions regarding opportunities, capabilities, and working conditions of female guides compared to males, tensions between guides from other regions in Perú and local guides, differences between local guides and other types of local workers, differences in lifestyle and salary between low and high tourist season, differences in salary currency and local currency.

(III) Development and environment: perceptions of developmental changes in recent decades (including the local ecotourism industry), opinions regarding ecotourism as a viable career option for locals and strong economic force in the region, opinions regarding recent waves of Andean migrants and gold mining, predictions about the newly paved Transoceanic Highway connecting Brazilian and Peruvian traffic circuits and other related queries.

I collected information, perspectives, and opinions on these three categories to understand the cultural worlds of my informants and how they make sense of dialectical relationships between themselves and other dimensions of social life (category II) in a rapidly changing region of Perú (category III).
Interviews typically lasted between 45 minutes to 1.5 hours and were conducted in a mixture of Spanish and English. All interviews at the airport were conducted in the morning because most flights arrived and departed before noon. I also conducted purposive observations of guides interacting with other guides as they waited for their guests to better understand their social worlds. I spent the remainder of the day locating additional guides in town, visiting eco-lodge offices in town, coordinating and conducting additional interviews, and attending football games, barbeques, luncheons, and other events. I recorded interviews with a PCM D-50 Sony digital recorder when given permission. Additionally, I wrote shorthand notes and verbatim statements during all interviews and wrote expanded accounts during the evenings. I jotted notes and analytical memos about patterns I discovered from one day to the next and reformulated semi-structured interview topics to address these emergent themes. While in the field, I organized all field notes and recordings of interviews, analytical memos, photos, and other ethnographic material on an Excel spreadsheet. These files were digitized and hyperlinked, which allowed me to scroll through the database and click on an icon to open any number of file types (word processor documents, audio and video recordings, photographs, other data sheets, etc.).

I employed a ‘freelance’ guide to assist me during two weeks while I conducted research in Puerto Maldonado. My assistant was born and raised in Puerto Maldonado and worked in timber, gold, and other extractive industries prior to becoming a tour guide. “Felipe” (all names in this ethnography are pseudonyms to protect identities) was instrumental to my research because he put me in contact with guides, professors, NGO
workers, and other insightful informants. Moreover, Felipe and I conversed daily about patterns that emerged in my findings and his perspective helped me formulate new research questions.

**The Iterative Process of Data Analysis**

Grounded Theory informed my data analysis. I compiled all digitized field notes and transcribed interview data into a single file and performed inductive and *in vivo* coding of phrases, sentences, and short sentence sequences to index data and render broad themes into searchable codes (e.g., Bernard, 2006:492-494; Charmaz, 2001:342). After I identified broad repetitions of comparable responses by my informants, I conducted focused coding to find patterns and variations in my informants’ responses (O’Reilly, 2009). For example, many guides expressed the goal that they would like to own their own tourism agency or lodge when I asked them about future aspirations. When the topic ‘entrepreneurship’ emerged in an interview, I coded the relevant section of interview data ‘OWN’ and exported all conversations indexed by this code into a single word processing file.

After I combined each response relating to entrepreneurship into a single document, I performed focused inductive coding and detected patterns of motivation, such as the difficulty of starting a family (#FAM) in Puerto Maldonado because tour guides spend most of their time away from town and working at the lodge. I initially detected this pattern upon coding broader themes when I noticed discussions about deteriorating relationships with romantic partners preceded, overlapped, or followed discussions about working for a lodge. Another pattern that emerged from discussions
indexed by ‘#OWN’ was the fear that the forest in Madre de Dios was undergoing privatization by large foreign companies (#FOR) from Cusco, Lima, and abroad. I wrote analytic memos explicitly linking themes and patterns between codes and pile sorted verbatim interview excerpts that reflected relations between broad and specific patterns in the data (Bernard, 2006:494).

It would be misleading to suggest that I analyzed my data following a seemingly linear process. Data analysis was iterative; I often discovered emergent themes (such as the broad theme of ‘control’) as I drafted sections of the manuscript. I moved between reading theoretical literature, writing analytical memos, and returning to both raw and coded data recursively until I committed myself to inscribing my findings in this text. The goal of the analysis is to understand ecotourism guides as social actors who draw upon a repertoire of strategies to constitute themselves in relation to their social and physical environments and to infer articulations between their experiences and the hierarchical regimes of power embedded in the ecotourism industry.
Chapter 3: Madre de Dios and a People Without History

*Finally, theoretically informed history and historically informed theory must be joined together to account for populations specifiable in time and space, both as outcomes of significant processes and their carriers.*

- Eric Wolf, Europe and the People Without History

**The Neglect of History and Culture**

Standing on the shoulders of Wolf and other cultural materialists, it is critical to understand the historical processes that enabled and constrained the means by which the people of Madre de Dios sustained themselves. History is a living process that is critical if we are to understand the present. Thus, “culture must be viewed historically if it is to be understood at all” (Mintz, 1982:508). I invested time in the field to learn about the regions’ history, but there were no museums, books, or other mediums of ‘social memory’ that I could source for information (Halbwachs, 1941). I was excited to learn that Puerto Maldonado will celebrate the its first centennial next year; however, commemorative rituals often mythologize the past and ignore its atrocities.

The historical record of human activities in Madre de Dios is limited. Although I do not fully understand why this is the case, I offer a few possible explanations that help account for why historical information about the region is scarce. The first reason is practical; Madre de Dios is one of Perú’s last frontiers and has one of the lowest human population densities in Amazonia (UNEP, 2008). The scattered distribution of human
settlements across dense tropical forests makes them difficult to detect. Archaeological and historical ecological fieldwork in the region has only recently increased as prehistoric settlements become more visible as a result of deforestation and the utilization of areal photography and satellite imaging (Denevan, 2001; also see Erickson and Balée, 2006).

The absence of a historical record of human activities in Madre de Dios is also a reflection of scholarly biases and prejudices toward highland culture and “high society.” Prior to colonization of the region, native groups such as the Ese Eja, Machiguenga, Piros, and other ‘people without history’ occupied the várzea and terre firme (flood plain and terraces, respectively) areas of Madre de Dios, but ethno-historians, archaeologists, and other scholars of history were preoccupied with Andean culture and history of the Incas.

Historical literature also illustrates the differences in volume and style between highland lowland histories of Perú. Colonial powers enlisted Spanish friars to learn the principle Andean languages (Quechua and Aymara) and translate them into alphabetic script. Friars were instructed to teach Castilian Spanish to Andeans and convert them to Catholicism as part of a larger project of Hispanicization. This strategy of ‘ecclesiastical imperialism’ led to a literary renaissance that peaked in 1615, in which the Andean past was written by indigenous and mestizo authors who were able to utilize the alphabet to record Andean history in the principle languages and in Castilian (Gareis, 2004). Works produced during this literary efflorescence were rich in ethnographic detail of Andean life before and after the arrival of the Spaniards (Salomon et al., 2000).
No such writings were produced in Amazonia Perú. Until the late twentieth century, general perceptions of Amazonia were influenced by literary genres such as natural history, popular geography, ethnography, adventure, and travel journals authored by Alexander von Humboldt, John Baptist von Spinx, Alfred Russell Wallace, and other nineteenth century writer-adventurers of Amazonia landscapes (Posey and Balick, 2006). Consequently, depictions of Amazonia as ‘Green Hell,’ ‘Garden of Eden,’ ‘Virgin Forest,’ and ‘Alien World’ became durable mental symbols of this tropic region in the
minds of scholars, their interlocutors, and lay people. The social identity of Amazonians and their landscape was mutually constituted: ‘headhunters,’ ‘cannibals,’ ‘noble savages,’ and ‘simple foragers’ dominated popular perceptions of present and past Amazonian peoples (Nugent, 2007). The ‘scripting’ of peoples and places in Amazonia as mutually wild and untamed objects of study remained unchallenged into the mid twentieth century.

The Incan resistance to colonization (and all its romanticized portrayals) is part of the story of how Cusco emerged as a globally important place. Resistance is a powerful cultural symbol and its association with the Incas contributes to a proud story of the foundation of Cusco as a global city. Such is not the case with Madre de Dios or its capital city Puerto Maldonado. It would be a creative stretch to construct a foundation myth about rubber barons who enslaved native populations and colonized the region during the final years of the rubber boom in Amazonia without a story of resistance that draws upon a cultural history like the Incas. Locating historical documents of these accounts would have been too laborious for the task at hand, but such efforts are certainly a potential avenue for future research. Therefore, this brief historical introduction is based on scattered mentions of Madre de Dios in academic publications and complemented by oral narratives from older informants that I collected while in the field.

**From Spanish Colonialism to the Rubber Boom**

Political expansion south and east toward Madre de Dios was one of the Spanish crown’s early colonial strategies in Perú. In 1535, Fray Mateo de Jumilla arrived on one of Pizarro’s ships and established missionary villages in Northern Perú. With Alvarado (a conquistador), Mateo de Jumilla founded the Marañón site in northern Perú.
seventeenth century, friars based in Marañón used ancient Indian routes to establish mission and mule trails southward to colonize the region between Rio Marañón in the north and Rio Madre de Dios River in the south. In the eighteenth century, indigenous resistance effectively halted Franciscans from reaching Madre de Dios (Eidt, 1962:258-259).

Puerto Maldonado is named after a ‘native’ from Cusco, Coronel Faustino Maldonado, who explored the waterways of the Madre de Dios in 1859 and “perished in the rapids of the Calderon del Infierno” (Toppin, 1916:85). In 1896, Bolivia attempted to establish customs houses at the confluence of the Manú and Madre de Dios and initiated a series of border disputes between Perú, Brazil, and Bolivia. The control of access to *Hevea* and *Castilloa* trees during the rubber boom (ca 1860-1920) motivated diplomatic entanglement over State ownership of the frontier. Rubber from Amazonia accounted for at least 60 percent of the global rubber supply and South American countries vied over resource rich areas along nebulous borders (Little, 2001). The rubber boom in Amazonia created a large demand for human labor; *caucheros* (rubber bosses) recruited—often by debt-peonage and coercion, indigenous *obreros* (laborers), who were comprised of “large numbers of individuals from different ethnic backgrounds” and transported across vast distances to extract rubber (Alexiades, 2009:22). The Peruvian government granted *cauchero* C.F. Fitzcarrald a transport monopoly on the Madre de Dios River in 1897 and the extractive industry arrived at Madre de Dios in 1902 (Reyna, 1942), only 10 years before the collapse of international rubber prices and as Asia began mono-cropping rubber trees and swamping world markets (Alexiades, 2009; Coomes and Barham, 1994).
After many deliberations in the Argentinean Court, Perú and Bolivia signed an agreement that defined national boundaries by a geodetic line from the confluence of the Heath and Madre de Dios rivers. The Peruvian government led an expedition in 1912 that forged the path for colonists to move into Madre de Dios during the twentieth century. In that year, Perú established Puerto Maldonado as the capital of the region (Reyna, 1942). Former caucheros and their obreros became the first townsmen of Puerto Maldonado. Dominican missionaries and patrones (bosses) mediated the end of the rubber boom in Madre de Dios by establishing “small agro-extractive estates along the Madre de Dios” (Alexiades, 2009:228).

Figure 6. Native Community recruited for rubber extraction (Courtesy of DIRCETUR)
Alexiades maintains that the rubber boom “established the social and political foundations for a regional extractive economy whose influence continues to this day” (2009:228). During the early to mid twentieth century, commercial extraction shifted to other forms of natural resources, such as furs and skins, Brazil nuts, produce, and during the final decades of the twentieth century to timber (e.g., mahogany and cedar), alluvial gold, and petroleum. The development of Madre de Dios as an extractive enclave has reached a unique historical moment with the arrival of ecotourism in the 1990s. The biosphere in Madre de Dios (e.g., biodiversity, exotic and endangered flora and fauna, ecosystem resources, etc.) has become a socially produced natural resource for global
economic extraction. Ecotourism constitutes a new kind of extractive system; while it builds upon the foundational structure in which foreign enterprises exploit local peoples and resources, the success of ecotourism depends on natural resource conservation rather than physical extraction. Moral and scientific arguments about the importance of rainforest conservation has been woven into ecotourism marketing, which obscures the hierarchical regimes of power that exploit local populations.

Meeting with one of the Legends

I turn now to more recent history in the region and begin with a short narrative about an informant who shared stories with me about the early years of ecotourism in Madre de Dios. It was happenstance (as it often was during fieldwork) that I met an important person during an unanticipated recruitment detour from my typical day of interviewing guides at the airport. I had just finished an interview with a souvenir shop clerk at an open-air bar near the airport and my assistant offered to give her a ride home on his motorbike before we returned to our hostel for the day. Within minutes after they left, a gust of wind blew into the dining area and a much-needed torrential rain graced Puerto Maldonado during its driest month of the year. I waited at least an hour before my assistant returned to pick me up but I found myself in good company with ‘Guillermo,’ one of the first ecotourism guides in Madre de Dios who moved to the region from Lima in 1979. Guillermo was tall and lanky, slightly drunk, and chain-smoked so diligently that he lit one cigarette with the hot embers hanging off the butt of the previous one. He was full of nostalgic stories about the past, but also with skepticism about the present state of ecotourism and whether the industry should be considered “ecologically responsible.”
We shared a few beers and conversed about Peruvian history, culture, and lastly, ecotourism. Guillermo guided in Madre de Dios before the region became a “biodiversity hotspot” on the global ecotourism circuit. He was one of the ‘legendary guides’ who spearheaded ecotourism in Madre de Dios in the 1990s after Perú’s tumultuous years of hyperinflation, Fujimori’s military rule, civil war, and turn to neoliberalismo (neoliberal reforms).

Ecotourism in Madre de Dios was “practically non-existent” until the mid 1990s, during which time there were only a few lodges and a handful of ecotourism guides. “Once there were two groups of about 30 tourists. They had to all go to the market and buy produce and food supplies and carry them to the lodges. There weren’t enough beds or food for them at the lodges… it was very different back then.” While Guillermo and I only spoke briefly during that rainy day, his insights provided me with a unique perspective of ecotourism. Guillermo was present before and during the formalization of ecotourism in Madre de Dios. His hopes of ecotourism proving to be an environmentally responsible industry faded as he witnessed lodge employees bury trash in clay licks and the number of tourists entering the rainforest each year increase by the thousands, which requires more fossil fuel, imported foods, and other demands that have ecologically damaging effects on the environment. “There is nothing ecologically friendly about ecotourism,” Guillermo maintained. He also became jaded with the ‘Standard Model’ of conservation, in which “touristic concerns” could serve as a “catalyst of communal ownership” because entrepreneurs from other regions and countries moved into Madre de Dios and privatized the rainforest (Yu et al., 1997:135).
**Land Reforms**

Madre de Dios is teeming with wildlife. Peruvian Law (No. 26,311) establishes the Department of Madre de Dios as the “Capital of Biodiversity.” This region in Southeastern Perú is home to over 1,000 species of birds, approximately 200 mammal species, and over one million species of reptiles, fish, insects, and invertebrates (UNEP, 2008). The recent boom of ecotourism in Madre de Dios is the outcome of multi-scalar capitalization of rainforest conservation. Madre de Dios is emerging as a biodiversity hotspot on the global ecotourism circuit. Over 60,000 foreigners visited the region in 2007 (Economist, 2008), compared to an estimated 6,500 visits in 1987 (Groom et al. 1991).

A series of land reforms set the stage for the booming ecotourism industry that exists in Madre de Dios today. The Peruvian government established Manú National Park in 1973 (Barker, 1980). Located in the Departments of Madre de Dios and Cusco, Manú is Perú’s largest national park and it has one of the highest levels of biodiversity on Earth. The area is also home to the *Machiguenga* (members of the Awawakan language group, and well documented, as among other things ‘savage’). During my final days of fieldwork in Puerto Maldonado, I spoke with Yesinia, a woman who cooked for tour groups that visited Manú during the early 1990s before ecotourism became a prominent industry:

Yesinia:
“At that time, most of the tourists camped because there were no lodges. One time when I was serving food out of a canoe to tourists a group of Machiguenga rowed by and took all of our food and supplies. At this time, there was very little contact with them… the tourists got out their cameras and took pictures!”
In recent years, some of the Machiguenga in Manú have become involved in ecotourism; one group even sent a young member of the community to study for the new ecotourism degree at the university in Puerto Maldonado. Because of its remote and highly inaccessible location where the Andes meet Amazonia, Manú has remained a rare stop on the heavily trafficked tourism circuit in Perú.

In Madre de Dios, most tourism activity occurs in the Tambopata province, near the capital city of Puerto Maldonado. Currently, there are 37 “ecotourism” lodges and dozens of other types of accommodations on the city’s periphery, located inside or near Tambopata National Reserve (DIR CETUR, 2010). Neither Tambopata National Reserve (TNR) nor Bahuaja-Sonene National Park existed prior to 2010. Land reforms in this area have had dramatic impacts on ecotourism, and specifically, local ecotourism guides. In 1977, the Peruvian government signed an agreement with the Peruvian Safaris Company for the business to protect forested areas adjacent to the Tambopata and Heath waterways, including Sandoval Lake, which is a popular attraction in the region today. Formalization of the ecotourism industry in Madre de Dios gained momentum during the waning years of the 1990s. In 1990, the government formally established the area as the Tambopata-Candamo Nature Reserve and ecotourism and biological research in the region began to flourish (Yu et al., 1997). Until the early 2000s, guides from other regions in Perú (like Guillermo) or from abroad accompanied tourists who entered these areas of Madre de Dios. At that time, most guides were foreigners and held Ph.D.s or other advanced degrees in ecology or organismal biology. I spoke with a guide who arrived in Madre de Dios in the mid 1990s from Europe, during which time foreign
guides began training locals to be tour guides:

Mary:
“When I came during the mid 1990s, tourists had to hitchhike from the airport through town to the river port. The idea was we were supposed to be teaching English to the lodge staff as well as guiding. We were on an exchange program. Soon after it ended, I began freelance guiding in the region. There weren’t any English-speaking biologists... and there were maybe 10 lodges at that time. Freelancing was great work with good pay and generous tips.”

More locals were trained to guide tours when tourism agencies from Cusco, Lima, and abroad constructed lodges and began selling tour packages to Madre de Dios as a short excursion from Cusco. Local staff knew the forest better than anyone else but most lacked the ability to speak English. There were at least 50 local guides by 2000 (a very conservative estimate based on the number of guides enrolled in the first ecotourism program in the region), when parts of Tambopata-Candamo Nature Reserve were incorporated into newly established protected areas. The National Service of Protected Natural Areas by the State (Servicio Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas por el Estado, SERNANP) established and Bahuaja-Sonene National Park (1,091,416 ha) in 1998 and Tambopata National Reserve (274,690 ha) in 2000.
Map 2. Protected areas near Puerto Maldonado
The establishment of these protected areas was a watershed moment in the formalization of ecotourism in Madre de Dios. In the years that followed, local guides were increasingly denied access into these areas until they possessed a university title or research permit issued by the National Institute of Natural Resources (Instituto Nacional de Recursos Naturales, INRENA). The only guides permitted to enter the national park or reserve were former students who received the necessary titles upon completion of university programs in biology, environmental impact studies, or other related degrees only available in Cusco and Lima.

**Development in Puerto Maldonado**

By 1980, there were approximately 2,500 people living in Puerto Maldonado.

“This place was a small farming town where everyone new each other” an older local mentioned to me when I asked how the city has changed in recent years. I spoke to someone in his mid 30s and asked him how the city changed since he was an adolescent:

Manuel:

“Let me tell you from my point of view. I grew up like everyone else here. I didn’t know what a tractor was until I was eight years old. I didn’t know what was happening in the world; I was completely disconnected. There were only three places in town to use a phone. My sister decided to leave to go to Lima; it was fashionable at that time to leave to the city.”

Manuel then described going to one of phones in town and waiting in a long line of people with his mother to make a phone call. He described his memory of watching women operate a giant switchboard. “It looked very modern… or futuristic…but it was technology from the 1940s!” he said in laughter. “And this was in 1989!” Manuel described Puerto Maldonado before the gold rush and start of multiple development projects:
Manuel:
“No traffic lights… only one or two cars, two paved roads to the main plaza… electricity was very erratic, water was very erratic… everything changed. The reason has to be President Fujimori- he privatized everything. There was a creek where I used to go fishing; it became a sewage plant, but technology became available to us. We didn’t have technology before. Then the gold came. Guacamayo… kilometer 82— they found tons of gold and more people came from the Andes. Then the road came… it created speculations… or … expectations.”

According to Perú’s National Institute of Statistics and Information (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, INEI), the population in Madre de Dios between 1940 and 1970 remained steady at 25,000. The population grew to 70,000 in 1990 and increased to 113,000 by 2007 (INEI, 2009). In recent decades, tens of thousands of migrants from the Andes relocated to Madre de Dios to find work in mining as the international price of gold more than tripled. According to conversations I had with older miners, a gram of gold was worth 26 soles in the 1980s compared to 106 soles in 2010. The gold boom in Madre de Dios attracted firms from across the globe to finance alluvial mining operations. Prior to the boom, the local population practiced small-scale artisanal gold mining, but now most of the miners in the region are from the Andes and work as obreros onboard dredge mining boats. The timber industry also changed during this time. According to a retired air force pilot I spoke to in Lima, the Peruvian military flew large cargo planes in the 1980s to Madre de Dios to transport lumber to the capital; today, harvesting mahogany in Madre de Dios is illegal. Prior to the ban, extraction of mahogany was in decline as the international price of mahogany dropped and desirable tree species perished along the banks of the Madre de Dios. I spoke to a former logger who quit when valuable wood along the rivers became too difficult to find: “Some people work in timber, few get rich. In 1998, I could find the best timber near the river. Now I have to walk into the forest for several hours to find mahogany or cedar.”
Local ecotourism guides grew up in a place where the primary form of livelihood was the extraction of natural resources. Their families worked in timber, gold mining,
agriculture, Brazil nut harvesting, fur trading, and other extractive enterprises during the latter years of the twentieth century. Today, Puerto Maldonado is steadily growing in population and diversifying economically. In 2007, the top sectors of work in Madre de Dios included agriculture (17%), commerce (14.1%), ‘other services’ (12.6%), ‘fish mining’ (10.8%), and construction (9.1%); however, the majority of gold mining concessions in Madre de Dios have not been approved by Perú’s energy and mines ministry, and thus are not factored into the State’s reports of formal employment (INEI, 2009).

The current trend toward ecotourism is another kind of extractive economy. What makes this particular sector of business in Madre de Dios unique is that while natural resources are not physically extracted from the region, the majority of financial capital converted from the conservation of natural resources is accumulated by tour agency and lodge owners who reside in Cusco, Lima, and abroad. In other words, ecotourism moves capital out of the community. The political ecology of ecotourism in Madre de Dios is part of a historical pattern of foreigner-owned enterprises that exploited local and migrant labor in the process of converting natural resources into global capital.
Chapter 4: Familial Backgrounds and Livelihoods in Transition

The story of how Felipe became involved in ecotourism:

“I was born and raised in Madre de Dios. My father used to be staff on my uncle’s timber operation. He was also a boat driver. He worked in Manu…before it was a national park. During holidays… when I was a kid I went to Manu every year for three months from December to March…running and playing! My Father used to be a hunter; he was one of the predators in the jungle! He sold skins of anaconda, jaguar, caiman… he brought the skins to town to trade for food, bullets, fishing lines and other supplies. I went hunting with him several times. I hunted jaguars…peccaries… but my brother shot everything that moved! I don’t remember how many siblings I have… I think ten. My father used to work in timber with the Piro native people… he used to recruit members of the community for work. I grew up a lot by myself, working for my uncle. I studied to be a boat driver. I didn’t finish secondary school—I did gold mining. I started to make my own money at 14 years old. I used a wooden barrel, and at this time we called it ‘mineria artisanal’. Then my father had a small gold mining boat. I helped him for 3 years, at this time my uncle had a collectivo on the Inambari River.”

“One time, my uncle was sick. He was burned by gasoline and could not put his leg in the water, so I agreed to help for 2 to 3 weeks. Then my uncle went to Puerto Maldonado and asked me if I could take passengers on the river… I took the job. It was at night! I took 3 hours more than normal. Then little by little, I got experience. I became a sharp driver at night, without spotlights. I kept working with my uncle for many years. I shuttled passengers (mostly gold miners) for many years. I worked 7 days a week, all day. I shuttled from 4 a.m. to 2 a.m. the next day… some days without sleep—almost 24 hours a day! I didn’t have time to take a shower or change clothes, maybe every three or four days. I did this for about five years in the 1980s. I stopped for two years and came to the city…just walking around, drinking all the time! I was a teenager at that time. I worked as an assistant to a mechanic for cars. You could count 10 or 15 cars in town, and there were only 1 or 2 mechanic businesses at the time. I also worked on a research project as a motorista and assistant to biologists. I did that seasonally.”

“Then I moved to Laberinto and continued working with my uncle, but the business was getting bad… the government began working on the road. The miners began taking the road instead of the river…so less business for collectivos. I worked 3 to 4 days a week and spent a lot of time at my uncle’s place. One day I stopped at a gas station. My friend saw me…stopped the motorcycle, and asked me “do you want to work in my company?” He was a manager for a tourism company and they needed a motorista. I was the first boat driver to work for the company… and I worked there for six years. I had several kinds of jobs: I taught climbing by rope, worked on platforms, assistant tour guide, I trained new staff, and showed them the jungle.”
**Former Lives**

Most local ecotourism guides in Madre de Dios come from families that work in artisanal gold mining (laborers, supervisors, equipment suppliers, *motoristas*, cooks, etc.), timber in cedar and mahogany, agricultural production or distribution (cassava, papaya, plantains, citrus, rice, maize, etc.), Brazil nut harvesting, building and road construction, or a combination of these livelihoods. Diversification is a critical livelihood strategy in Madre de Dios and other rural areas across the globe (Ellis and Freeman, 2005). Many guides grew up working with their parents or followed similar livelihood trajectories before they studied to be ecotourism guides. Almost every local guide I interviewed spent their childhood years in the forests of Madre de Dios “fishing, hunting, and falling from trees” regardless of whether they grew up around mining, logging, farming, or construction. Guides told childhood stories of times they saw jaguars, anacondas, caiman, and other exciting jungle fauna. One guide described an experience when he was seven years old and lost in the forest for three days. Another guide laughed as he told me that as a child he ate the monkeys he now identifies to tourists. Many guides continue to spend their vacations helping with the family business.

George:
“I remember when Tambopata National Reserve didn’t exist. I was helping my uncle and cousins at a Brazil nut place. We went four hours down the Madre de Dios until we reached Lago Valencia… then we walked four or five hours into the forest. The trail we used was muddy…and I carried 80kg bags back to the boat.”

Another guide spent his vacations in a small mining camp hunting with his siblings. “It is how I learned to identify mammals!” he said laughing. These are common stories of the past and they usually appeared during the parts of interviews when I asked informants how they became interested in ecotourism.
Some guides had a difficult life that included manual labor in the forest before they became tour guides. I spoke with a guide who spent his childhood in mining camps. He attended primary school in Puerto Maldonado and spent weekends traveling up and down the Madre de Dios to visit his parents who owned a large mining operation several hours up river from the city:

Arturo:
“They were the first to mine gold here,” he said proudly. “They had fifty obreros working for them during the 1970s and 1980s. I traveled freely on the river because everyone knew I was the boss’s son. At that time, the price of a kilo of gold had the value of a single gram of gold today. When I finished high school, I worked in gold mining and I was a local logger.”

Arturo worked in timber for a few years until his mother pressured him to study computer science in Lima. He never finished the program, but instead returned to Puerto Maldonado and worked in gold mining along the Madre de Dios and bartended at one of the ecotourism lodges before ultimately enrolling at the local technical school to study ecotourism. Another guide I interviewed came from a similar background:

Francisco:
“I grew up in mining…my whole family were miners. During that time, you only made 20 to 25 soles per a gram of gold. I used to do panning when I was ten years old, man. Now there is more technology. Panning, then barrels, then small pumps… all these things are expensive now.”

Francisco’s parents divorced and stopped mining when he was 15 years old. Soon after, he began working in timber and described the six month work routine:

“You travel long distances, maybe 10 to 20 days upriver and spend six to seven months, working, working, working. You hunt for food… and boats bring supplies to camp. There were twenty to thirty obreros using chainsaws and circular saws—we created a sawmill… a little one. When you are done, you make a raft and float it down the river for 7 to 10 days depending on how far you go. Then you spend all your money drinking all week. That is what you do.”

46
Francisco was a timber worker for several years, but his motivations changed after realizing that he would be lonely and never escape poverty if he continued logging. I asked him why he eventually stopped working in timber and he responded:

“I met people 60 to 70 years old doing this activity… without family… without money, just getting drunk. I used to talk to them, I asked them ‘why are you doing this and they said ‘I didn’t expect to do this. It wasn’t what I wanted to do.’ I used to stay in Puerto Maldonado maybe a week… two weeks a year. Those old people try to give you advice, ‘you are young; why don’t you finish your studies?’ I learned that very few people working in timber think about the next day.”

Transcendence through Livelihood

The themes ‘thinking about the future’ and the aspiration to ‘be more than a miner or logger’ appeared in several interviews, including those in which informants did not participate in mining or logging but grew up in similar work environments. One guide grew up in a mining camp because his mother cooked for the owner of the mining concession: “I remember everything, that’s why I decided to study… I didn’t want to live like that. I had four brothers… each from a different father.”

Another guide mentioned that his parents did not want him to practice gold mining like the rest of his family: “They wanted us to have a different life that has purpose… taking us to the city from the jungle. They didn’t get the chance to be professionals, they were afraid it would also happen to us.” Many guides described their aspirations to be more than their parents or extended family members. One guide described how obreros who mine gold are motivated by short term gains but do not think about long-term consequences. Celeste said:

“Como la musca a la miel” or ‘like a fly to the honey.’ “It’s sad because many of the obreros are young. When they get money from gold… they get good money. They leave school or the university… they don’t think about the future—just right now.”
However, not all guides regard gold mining as a short-term endeavor. One guide I interviewed continues to run gold mining and timber operations in addition to working in ecotourism. We shared a few beers while watching a futbol tournament and Carlos described how he became involved with gold mining and what he plans to do in the future. Carlos began gold mining with his family when he was young and then joined a small company for six years. He ended his contract with the mining company after he obtained a loan from the bank to fund his own mining enterprise. With the loan, he was able to purchase mining equipment such as wood, machinery, motorbikes, and funds to pay initial salaries of his obreros. After Carlos was awarded the loan, the value of the dollar decreased and impacted his ability to repay his loan ahead of schedule.

Nevertheless, his business is successful; he can earn up to 4000 soles (approximately $1,400 USD) on an exceptional day. Carlos hired four obreros who mine between 60 to 70 grams of gold per a day while he earns an additional salary as a freelance ecotourism tour guide. His obreros work around the clock; two obreros work an 11-hour shift during the day and the other two-person crew work an 11-hour shift overnight. The obreros keep 25 percent of the gold and Carlos uses the remaining money to pay down his loan, reinvest in more equipment, and save for a future enterprise. Carlos also owns a timber concession, where loggers pay him to take trees. For the cheaper types of wood, he makes between 8000 to 9000 soles in two weeks (usually about 4 to 5 trees). Carlos said that he plans to sell his gold mining business in a few years for 200,000 soles to invest in the construction of an ecotourism lodge. Carlos admitted, “mining is a dangerous job— at least one or two people die in dredged in Madre de Dios every day.”
But mining keeps this city alive… miners buy rice, beans, beer…and go to every single bar!” “And tourism?” I asked. He responded: “Tourists go from the airport to the office to the lodge, then from the lodge to the office to the airport… but gold stays with the local people.”

Figure 10. Mining operation on the banks of the Madre de Dios
Control and Externalities

One distinction between gold and tourists is that gold is a locally controllable form of capital because it resides in the riverbanks of the Madre de Dios and has yet to be regulated by the Peruvian State. Ecotourism, which is framed as a sustainable alternative to mining and logging, is vulnerable to global processes such as economic and environmental shocks because tourists are foreign and their trips to Madre de Dios are contingent upon a multitude of variables, most of which are outside the scope of local control. Between 2009 and 2010, vulnerability to global processes became more evident as local workers experienced a series of financial slowdowns caused by external factors: the flooding in Cusco and temporary shutdown of Machu Picchu, flight cancelations after...
ash plumes from Iceland’s Eyjafjallajökull volcano covered skies in Europe, the World Cup in South Africa, and most importantly, the global economic recession. The effects of the global economic recession on ecotourism in Madre de Dios have been the most durable of these shocks; the salaries of guides decreased because (1) they are paid in U.S. dollars and the value of the dollar declined; (2) the GDP in Perú grew nearly 10 percent in 2009, which further weakened the dollar to sol exchange rate; (3) salaries are supplemented with tips from tourists but there were fewer visitors to Madre de Dios. As one guide put it, “When people could not pay for food… pay their bills… there’s no money left to travel. What we live off of is other people’s vacations.”
Chapter 5: Transcendence from *Obreros* to Guides to Owners

“The politics of ownership and control must be central to political ecology in order to give the bare bones of poverty some sort of flesh if it is to be employed analytically. Political ecology comes closest to theory when it invokes surplus extraction.”

- Peets and Watts, *Liberation Ecologies*

Transcendence refers to moving beyond a prior state or form of self. The goal of transcendence from *obrero* to ecotourism guide to proprietor is motivated by material and symbolic factors. Lodge ownership is one strategy by which local guides hope to obtain more control over their livelihoods, personal relations, forests and rivers, and the social landscape of Madre de Dios. Other strategies to attain autonomy include labor unions, freelance networks, and goals to own other businesses in Puerto Maldonado, such as bars, restaurants, tourism agencies, arcades, and other enterprises. Understanding how these motivations are related and linked to larger processes is critical to defining the political ecology of ecotourism in Madre de Dios.

*Forms of Capital and the Perpetual Cycle*

Entrepreneurship is a shared vision among ecotourism guides; an overwhelming majority of the guides I interviewed aspire to own an ecotourism business in Puerto Maldonado and employ others to guide tours in the forest. Their ambition to become owners of a lodge or tour agency comes as no surprise; one guide described it as the “American Dream… people in Puerto Maldonado think we make a lot of money, but we
don’t really. It’s the same as gold mining. You just work for your family or a company and you only get a small salary.” For some local guides, employment at a lodge is not significantly better than working in timber or being an obrero who mines gold in dredges along the Madre de Dios. While ecotourism salaries are not considerably better than mining (in some cases they are actually lower), the symbolic capital of working in a position that requires an education is perceived by locals to be of greater status than gold mining or other forms of ‘unskilled’ labor. One guide explained, “In Puerto Maldonado, the local persons see me working with somebody, talking with foreign people… with a different color, different eyes… making dollars.” The economic, cultural, symbolic, and social capital of a wage earner pales compared to that of a business owner. Bourdieu (1986:242) wrote:

“It is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognized by economic theory.”

Economic theory does not account for the means by which social actors create and sustain their social worlds because its conceptual framework is insulated from theories of culture (i.e., how rationality is culturally bound), power (i.e., political economy, or the role of unequal power relations that exist between individuals and incorporated entities), and other dimensions of social life. An analysis of the ‘economy of practice’ of ecotourism guides is critical to understand the motivations and limitations of social action. Ecotourism guides (1) manage their reputations and protect their social status (symbolic capital), (2) strengthen relations with lodge owners and operators, other ecotourism workers, NGO workers, and others through the construction and maintenance of social networks (social capital), and (3) accumulate knowledge of Cusqueño traditions,
ecological knowledge of Madre de Dios, cultural knowledge of tourists, and language skills (each of which I define as critical elements of cultural capital). In this section, I discuss the relations between ownership, control, and the forms of capital as they relate to ecotourism in Madre de Dios. Ownership denotes the ability to mobilize subsets of capital that are inaccessible to the laborer.

Bourdieu (1986:247) describes how the appropriation of capital conceals power and control:

“It follows that the owner of the means of production must find a way of appropriating either the embodied capital which is the precondition of specific appropriation or the services of the holders of this capital. To possess the machines, he only needs economic capital; to appropriate them and use them in accordance with their specific purpose (defined by the cultural capital, of scientific or technical type, incorporated in them), he must have access to embodied cultural capital, either in person or by proxy. This is no doubt the basis of the ambiguous status of cadres (executives and engineers).”

Ecotourism guides sell their labor to owners of lodges and agencies. In this dialectical relationship, power and control over everyday life activities is limited because guides must adhere to the specificities of their employers’ requirements, which include time-consuming ancillary practices that must be performed outside of the workplace and during time off. Guides are in a constant state of ‘self development.’ They are expected to attend workshops, become more familiar with flora and fauna, learn new languages, and perform other tasks that sharpen their competitive edge in their practice. These skills accumulate as cultural capital (learned languages, cultural knowledge, ecological knowledge of Madre de Dios), symbolic capital (social status among guides, prestigious distinctions in skills, abilities, experience, etc), and social capital (their relations with other important people in tourism). These forms of capital are mobilized into economic capital in the workplace.
Social capital is particularly important for ecotourism guides because their social networks can lead to more capital and thus, new job opportunities. The extent to which they make connections with other guides, business managers, and owners defines their livelihood potential in ecotourism. Bourdieu (1986:249) explains:

“The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected.”

Ecotourism guides develop an extensive network of relations to survive in this job market. Their social networks provide them with opportunities to convert their state-issued licenses, certificates, and permits, communication skills with foreigners, knowledge, work experience, and other forms of capital into economic capital and prestige. Several guides described the importance of these social networks to remaining relevant workers in the job market. Amador, who has been guiding for nearly a decade, described an essential benefit of knowing lodge operators and gaining their trust over the years:

“If a lodge trusts you, they give you... 'VIPs' [tourists who are going to spend more money based on known knowledge about their specific tour interests]. Reputation means everything in this business! If you can earn the trust of the lodge, you will be assigned all the high-paying tourists. This makes it very difficult for newcomers to enter the market in any competitive way.”

Amador added that he has to be careful with how his reputation (symbolic capital) is used by newcomers applying for jobs (and looking for social capital). Inexperienced tour guides sometimes ask Amador if he would provide a reference when they apply for jobs but he turns them down to protect his own reputation. Another guide, Hugo, compared the similarities of building social capital to accumulating other forms of capital necessary for the job:
Hugo:
“...The point of the guide is you have to develop good contacts... that’s where you start building your ropes... so they keep pulling you. Otherwise, you stay in one place... for nature guides... you must keep moving, making new connections— it’s like... learning natural habitats in the world... you must keep moving... you must increase your level.”

In recent years, ecotourism guiding has become one of the most competitive careers in Madre de Dios. Amador, Hugo, and other guides stress the importance of investing energy and time toward improving their statuses by accumulating new skills and knowledge, expanding their social networks, and performing other tasks that increase their wealth and prestige. While their efforts are perceived as a means to eventual entrepreneurship (such as owning their own lodge), their energy is invested in tasks that suspend them in a state of constant self-improvement that adheres to the ever-changing rubric of the employers that exploit them.

The aspiration of tour guides to transcend the role of the obrero or wage earner plays into this perpetual cycle. They chase the mirage of ownership by concentrating on fulfilling their roles as ecotourism guides (e.g., learning new species, new languages, etc.), not by expanding their knowledge into other areas necessary for owning an ecotourism business in Madre de Dios, such as studying business management, international marketing, or finance. Furthermore, this perpetual cycle alienates tour guides from their families because they invest most of their time into their careers. Ironically, it is often the alienation that ensues from the deteriorating social relations with family and friends in Puerto Maldonado that becomes a powerful motivation for guides to become business owners in the first place.
**Living between household and lodge**

Most guides sign 10 month contracts to work for a lodge. During the busy season (May to September), guides typically return to their homes in Puerto Maldonado only for a few days each month and travel during the rainy season (January, February, and March) to study at other tourist attractions in Perú, work for conservation NGOs, enroll in training programs, attend workshops hosted by experienced guides, or participate in other activities that will help them build knowledge and be more competitive in their careers. “I was told by other people to keep training, to take every opportunity to study and travel.” For these reasons, guides spend most of their lives working and studying outside of Puerto Maldonado. Most guides I interviewed were single, separated, or divorced, as one guide says:

Pedro:
“Working in tourism you have to spend more time in the jungle than with your family. Relationships [with spouses or significant others] last one or two years. Sometimes when we ask for special days off, they don’t give it, and they say ‘this is the career you choose.’”

The number of guests at the lodge and their scheduled departures usually determines when guides can spend days off in town and at their homes. Guides who have families in Puerto Maldonado often miss anniversaries, birthdays, holidays, emergencies, and other important events. “There are problems with your partner when you go back to town. And fathers are trying to get off from work on their daughter’s birthday and their son’s birthday… emergencies… then they have no time off during the holidays.” Every guide I interviewed had friends who were divorced and divorces were often described as a result of their occupation in ecotourism.
I spoke with a few women who were recently divorced from guides and was told things like, “He was with two lives; one with another woman and one with me.” Infidelity was one cause of divorce, but each divorced guide and ex-wife I interviewed talked about the role of absence, neglect, and loneliness that played in the failure of their relationships. “Sometimes I feel all the feelings… sometimes I want someone next to me… I want to show them different feelings inside” one woman told me. Another divorcee described the deterioration of her relationship with her ex-husband who worked as a guide:

Maria:
“He didn’t have time with me, my family, or our son… all the time working… all the time friends. It’s tiring. I preferred divorce. It’s the distance… they forget many things… it’s like a flower not watered.”

This recent divorcée has a two-year-old son and receives 400 soles (approximately $140 USD) in child support each month:

Maria:
“It’s muy poco…it’s not enough because the boy needs clothes, shoes…many things and 400 soles is not enough. One pair of shoes for him is 50 soles. One pair of pants is 42 soles… I don’t want support… just for my son.”

I asked another woman who was divorced from a guide about what her marriage was like: “They travel all the time, leaving the wife alone in the house.” She has four or five female friends who are divorced from guides. “When people are divorced they have a problem sending money after about two years. Some men guide tours to send money home, but not all. Women go to the police to get mantención (child support).”

I also spoke with guides who were in relationships and they shared the secrets of their success. One guide is in a relationship with a woman who works at the airport and he is able to see her every week when he greets tourists at the airport or escorts them back.
for their return flight. Another guide is in a relationship with a cook at the lodge and can spend time with him everyday. One guide’s wife works for the same tourism agency at the lodge office in Puerto Maldonado. In addition to “knowing the business,” their relationship works because he guides tours for the only lodge in the region with cell phone reception:

Renato:
“We work for the same company; she knows where I am, who I’m with. But I think that if she had a different job… maybe our relationship would fail. Another thing many guides don’t understand is communication. I’m still working there because of cell phone reception. But, working for a different company? There is no cell phone reception. If something happens, a problem with the wife or kids, you don’t talk for 4 weeks. I think that’s why relationships fail.”

Marital problems, loneliness, singlehood, and absence from the lives of their children are major reasons why guides want to become owners of lodges and other tourism businesses that are operated out of Puerto Maldonado. The following responses intersected themes I coded as “Business Ownership” (OWN) and “Family Relations” (FAM) in data from semi-interviews and unstructured interviews with guides:

Miguel:
“If you like the job, you will spend all of your time out traveling with people…it’s negative if you have a family. You think… ‘I should quit this… and work once a month if I want a family and start developing my own business…’ but it’s tricky. And problems with the wife? It’s tricky… you are considered a guest in your own house.”

Wilfredo:
“I was planning to leave the lodge this year but I couldn’t… I want to start a business so I can be here in Puerto Maldonado… it’s not the same as when I was 22 years old. Then— you just want to be with the gringos drinking on the patio. Now— you think in a different way…. to get roots… kids maybe… several of my friends got married, same jobs, guiding, and after two to three years of being together, now they are separated.”

Jesus:
“Everyday away from the wife… the love starts to decrease. Most of my friends have come out confused with their relationships. Most of us think… ‘… probably one more year, then quit…’ – that’s one of my goals, to open up my own travel agency. When I was freelance, I learned how to organize trips. One more year… We get tired of being away from our friends and family.”
Victor:
“I want to start a small pub or restaurant for tourists who are older than 35. If you go to a lodge, you see most tourists are 22 or 23 years old. That way I can live here in Puerto Maldonado with my family.”

Cesar:
“If I start a business... I have an office in Puerto Maldonado... and employ people making the logistic... once in awhile I go to the field with them…”

The strong ties of kinship get in the way of economic ties between guides and lodges, yet the economic ties and hopes for independent ownership are exactly what many ecotourism guides want for their future. The goal of owning a business is not inspired simply by the desire to make money or chase the tail of prestige in ecotourism. Those factors are important, but older guides like Victor (who is single and in his 30s) have started to reflect on their lives and hope to settle down with someone in Puerto Maldonado. Guides who are divorced also express concerns about growing old in solitude: “After 35 years, you start to get worried. Everywhere around the world, once you reach a certain age, you question whether you will ever find someone who is right for you.” Owning a lodge or tour agency is a way that guides can still use their accumulated skills and experiences in ecotourism while living in Puerto Maldonado and starting a family of their own. As of now, I am unaware of any local guides who left their jobs to start an agency or other tourism business in Madre de Dios.

**Political Ecology and Ownership of the Forest**

The dialectical and unequal relations between owners and laborers and the means by which natural resources are regulated and restricted in the process of becoming global capital characterize the political ecology of ecotourism in Madre de Dios. The issue of ownership is not limited to tour agencies or lodges, but also the physical environment
itself; all major lodges in Madre de Dios are owned by foreigners and have privileged access to the lush biomes of the region because of new State regulations regarding access to the reserves and national parks. These businesses employ locals to work at the lodges and facilitate, wittingly or unwittingly, the privatization of the rainforest and alienation of locals from their own jungle. The political ecology of ecotourism in Madre de Dios is also symbolic; the privatization of the rainforest by companies from Cusco represents people from the highlands colonizing people from the lowlands. The Peruvian government sanctions this business model and creates institutional mechanisms that insure its success. Understanding the social worlds of guides (at home in Puerto Maldonado and at the lodge in the forest) elucidates the political ecology of ecotourism in Madre de Dios because it is where the global meets the local and is mediated by the State.

In addition to spending time away from family, guides also expressed the desire to become tourism lodge and agency owners because most businesses related to tourism in Madre de Dios are owned and operated by “foreigners,” which include entrepreneurs from other regions of Perú (mainly Cusco and Lima) in addition to business owners from abroad. “Most lodges are owned by foreigners or associates… or people abroad…” one guide told me. “The lodge where I work is owned by a Peruvian from Cusco and someone from abroad…they set up the lodge, they forget about the rest—they don’t think about Puerto Maldonado. But I want to start a business here.” Some local guides claim that their own rainforest is slowly becoming privatized and controlled by serranos (people from the Andes). Many guides made resentful statements like “No one from Puerto Maldonado owns a lodge.” One guide fears that foreigners will take over the
forest: “It’s very sad because they are going to own all of the jungle- but not people from here, people from other places. We won’t have the opportunities to have our own lodges.”

Resentment for Cusqueño guides is a persistent pattern in the interview data, particularly in the case of local guides whose grandparents grew up in Madre de Dios. I asked informants (including other ecotourism workers I interviewed, such as guides from Cusco and Lima, motoristas, cooks, supply merchants, and office administrators) about tensions between local and Cusqueño guides and I discovered that regional nepotism between Cusqueño guides and managers and the larger phenomenon of regionalismo (regionalism) between highland and lowland Peruvians accounts for much of the tensions between locals and Cusqueño in everyday life at the lodge. I explore these two salient patterns in the following sections.

**Regional Nepotism**

Some local guides expressed desire to be business owners in ecotourism because they grew up in the region and know more about the forest than Cusqueños who work as guides, managers, and ecotourism teachers at the technical institutes where locals study to obtain certificates to guide. One guide said that he would make a better tour agency owner because he is local: “I would like to create my own business. I know all the best places, I know all the lodges, I’ve worked for several years… I grew up here…at the end-you have to own your own business!” Local guides have knowledge of the forest, but working for others alienates that knowledge because it is used to train guides from Cusco.
In the mid to late 1990s, tourism agencies from Cusco began to build lodges in Madre de Dios and managers hired locals to work menial jobs (lodge construction, maintenance, etc.) and train Cusqueño guides. Many locals resented their Cusqueño coworkers because they believed that the companies from Cusco took advantage of locals and favored their own kind. Moreover, many local workers resent Cusqueño guides who fail to acknowledge the instrumental role locals played in acquainting Cusqueño to the forest in Madre de Dios. Manuel, who is now a guide but worked as a motorista for a tourism company in the 1990s helped train Cusqueño guides in the forest but was later viewed as a lowly uneducated laborer: “The Cusco guides…the first time they arrive to the jungle, they felt a little nervous. I remember… as a boat driver.” Guides from Cusco relied on local ecotourism workers like Manuel to show them flora and fauna in the forest, but after six months of training, good relations between locals and Cusqueño ceased to exist:

Manuel:
“They didn’t remember what I taught them... they thought I was just a boat driver and said things like, ‘just do your job.’ I had another friend who I showed many things about the jungle. After one year, he thought he was the best guide! I reminded him that I taught him many things, but he denies it.”

Manuel’s story is common today because lodges still employ Cusqueños to guide in the forest and recruit local guides to help train them. Another guide reported: “People came from the sierra and don’t know much about the selva, but after one year, they think they know everything about the jungle… they think they are better than selvaticos.” Most local guides complained that guides from Cusco act superior because Cusqueños receive more respectable titles from five year universities in Cusco rather than the tourism certificates from the three year technical institutes in Madre de Dios, learned English at
language institutes, and come from a region that is internationally known for its Andean history and culture. For these reasons, local workers perceive their Cusqueño counterparts as “thinking they are better than locals,” even though local guides grew up in the forest and know it better than anyone else working in ecotourism in Madre de Dios. “There’s a difference being from here. You know your place better than anyone. You learn more in situ than one hundred years in the university,” one guide said when I asked him the difference between local guides and those from Cusco. Another guide responded: “All the people from the highlands want to pass over other people and cultures. If they come here they will say ‘the Incas were in Amazonia too.’ They think their culture is better.” One local guide questioned whether Cusqueño guides had any business in Madre de Dios because Cusqueños have no authentic stories of living in the forest to tell to their tourist groups:

Hector:
“We are able to tell about life in the jungle, tell stories, we hear their explanation of the jungle… they were making up stories! And telling stories about Cusco while they were guiding in the jungle! We were seeing something, and they were seeing something different, because we were living in the jungle our whole lives, and they were from different places and trained for only three months. Then… they thought they became super guides!”

Local guides also claim to experience inequality in the workplace because owners and upper management favor the staff from Cusco over local employees. “If there is a problem with a Cusqueño, they are protected by their boss in Cusco.” Other guides mentioned favoritism between Cusqueño managers and guides in regards to promotions:

Alejandro:
“Most guides I met from Cusco…they really created a lot of problems. They were the favorites of the company instead of the local people in the lodges. So they put serranos in positions that should have been for selvaticos… there was a kind of war in the office.”
Samuel:
“There was favoritism from people who come from Cusco. They ascended to the top of the company, took jobs from others from PM who were more qualified. Now there are two groups at the lodge; from Puerto Maldonado and Cusco.”

Local guides invest a significant amount of time, energy, and money to obtain their licenses to guide in Madre de Dios (now required by the State to enter the reserves and parks) and they view Cusqueño guides as holding a privileged status among job recruiters. One local guide resents workers from Cusco because “they come here and it is very easy for them to get a job.”

Regional nepotism between Cusqueño guides and managers also works the other way around; guides from Cusco typically refrain from challenging their supervisors and take more heat from management without raising a grumble. “Highland suckers,” one local guide calls them. “They try to be good with the boss. People from here? That’s not good for us; if there’s something we shouldn’t do we don’t want to do it. People from here don’t brownnose as much for this reason.” Cusqueños also request less time off from work because they typically do not have friends or family in Puerto Maldonado to visit; their social ties are mostly in the Andes:

Sofia:
“People who come from Cusco don’t have a house here. For us, we have a son or a daughter and we want to come to town. That’s why companies prefer people from Cusco. They don’t have homes here…they don’t ask for as much time off.”

Lodges favor guides from Cusco because they are easier to control and they are willing to work more than guides from Puerto Maldonado. Cusqueños typically go to Madre de Dios to work for a few years to gain experience working in tourism before heading back to Cusco to find a better paying job. Cusco is the most competitive place in Perú to work in tourism because it is the prime destination for tourists. Thus,
inexperienced tour guides might work in Madre de Dios for a few years to improve their chances of landing a good job back at home.

Discord between guides from Puerto Maldonado and Cusco is a manifestation of two regional businesses articulating in an unequal relationship because one is well established (and promoted by the State) and the other has only recently become a formalized industry. The Peruvian State focuses on institutional measures that will insure the success of tourism in Cusco because it comprises one of the nation’s largest industries. Only a small fraction of tourists going to Perú will visit Madre de Dios. In their discussion about regional inequalities in Peruvian tourism markets, O’Hare and Barrett (1999:47) argue that “government laissez faire policies” account for the lack of “diffusion or dispersal of tourism sectors to new areas,” but my research indicates that the Peruvian State plays a key role in growing tourism in Madre de Dios and interjects itself to conserve regional inequalities between tourism markets in the region and Cusco. State affairs in Madre de Dios are anything but “laissez faire.”

**Regionalismo**

*Regionalismo* is rooted in the State. It is based on “a national ideology dividing the population into ethnic and regional groups” and is institutionalized by Perú’s political system, which “favors a minority of rich Peruvians at the cost of the majority of poor Peruvians” (Paerregaard 2008:4-5; also see Mendoza, 2000:9-18; de la Cadena 2000:20-34). Tension between guides from Madre de Dios and Cusco is a manifestation of regional inequality. I discovered through interviews with ecotourism workers and conversations with non-ecotourism workers that *selvaticos* and *serranos* have a long
history of cultural conflict that is further intensified by the recent gold rush in Madre de Dios, during which time early 40,000 Andeans migrated to Madre de Dios in response to the tripling of international gold prices. While selvatico and serranos are now marrying and having offspring together, regionalismo still exists in Madre de Dios and is replicated in the social organization of staff at some of the ecotourism lodges in Madre de Dios.

There are often two groups of workers at the lodge: one from Cusco and one from Puerto Maldonado:

Victor:
“We sometimes, you know, we didn’t socialize very much. The guides from the jungle were on one side, they thought they were superior… separate group trying to avoid them all the time! They go and teach about the Incas. Of course the Incas were the main culture in Perú, but when you are from the jungle, you have stories about anacondas, pumas, jaguars, but they’re always about the Incas. You are from one state… someone else comes from another state trying to explain why it’s better than your state, you don’t like people to compare your state, make you feel like your state is nothing—we are proud of where we are from.”

Another guide cut to the chase: “We are regionalists! People here hate guides from Cusco but they never complain about guides from Lima.” I learned about regionalismo early on in my fieldwork and decided to ask local guides to explain the cultural differences between people from Madre de Dios and Cusco. One guide had a particular way of describing Serrano culture as more fiscally responsible:

Diego:
“The serranos are very progressive. The people here [Puerto Maldonado] like to be healthy, eating good… they don’t like to save money. The serranos—you will see the taxi drivers, they don’t care about health—just money. That’s why serranos own all the buildings in Puerto Maldonado.”

Diego contextualized cultural differences in terms of tourism:

“The guides from Cusco…they don’t care about the family… they only care about making money. Different ideas from Cusco and Puerto Maldonado— In Puerto, they care more to be with their families. The guides from the Andes sacrifice their families to get more money. That is my opinion—but it’s true.”
I also learned from Diego that there is an assumed expectation from tourists that their experience in the rainforest will be more ‘authentic’ if their guides are local:

“You see the local guides waiting at the airport… guides will say ‘Hi, I’m from Puerto Maldonado, I am not from Cusco!’ because supposedly the gringos care that the guides are from the jungle! Many guides prefer to say that they are from the jungle, even when they are from the sierra. My friend…he is also a guide— he prefers to say ‘I am from the jungle,’ but his face is from Cusco.”

Local guides also explained the differences between *seranos* and *selvaticos* in relation to environmental destruction. Several guides mentioned that the newly paved road between Cusco and Puerto Maldonado contributes to migration of *serrano* miners from the Andes to Madre de Dios in pursuit of gold. Most guides said that *serranos* do not care about the forest because they are outsiders— they grew up in the sierra, not the selva:

*Jorge:*

“We have the highway now… many people from Cuzco and Puno…only 25 percent of the people are from Puerto Maldonado- the rest are immigrants. That’s why they don’t care about the jungle.”

*Rene:*

“The people don’t care about destroying this place because they are not from here. If you go to the place where they buy and trade gold… all of them are from the highlands.”

*Hernan:*

“It’s not because we don’t like to work, it’s because we like the place we live. We don’t want to see it destroyed every single year just because some people come here to make a lot of money. We want to have a better life… but by balance. Make money, not destroy much like the people from the Highlands.”
Figure 12. Andean festival in Puerto Maldonado. In the past 15 years, Madre de Dios has seen an increase in Andean festivals and holidays as more migrants move into the region.

To gain a different perspective, I also interviewed guides from Cusco and Lima who were working in Madre de Dios at the time of my fieldwork. Cusqueño guides are not in control; they too are exploited by tourism businesses and must spend most of their time away from family. Cusqueño guides also had an interesting way of defining the ‘other’ Peruvian: “Most of the people here are very lazy and ignorant against…each other. They just want to stay in the hammock and sleep all day. People who just want to live with what they have: poultry…bananas…they are people from the jungle.” During the course of my fieldwork, I learned that there were more females from Cusco working
in Madre de Dios as ecotourism guides than local females. I asked one Cusqueño guide why he thought there were few local female guides:

Edwin:
“I think there are less girls from here, less local girls who try to be the best. They buy everything like makeup… new shoes. The girls from here are just thinking of the present—not of the future. Most girls from the jungle are a little lazy.”

Edwin then contrasted this stereotype one about Cusqueñas: “But girls from other places…they want to grow as a person, to be the best girl. For example, my girlfriend is from Arequipa, she’s working to get a home to start her own company, to start her own business.” The stereotype of “lazy girls” from Puerto Maldonado was certainly a statement that reflects regionalismo more than it does reality; I saw female police officers, construction workers, gold miners, farmers, and street sweepers in addition to female street vendors, retail merchants, restaurant servers, bank tellers and women working in other typical forms of gendered labor.

**Power and Control**

Motivations to own a business relates to concepts of power and control over personal life and place. Guides hope to own a private business because they desire to live in a singular social world instead of one divided between the household in Puerto Maldonado and the lodge in the forest. Younger guides typically enjoy singlehood, but as they grow older they start reflecting on their lives and yearn for a family. Guides also want to be owners to reclaim their local environment from ‘outsiders.’ These patterns emerged in surprising places during interview sessions. They appeared in responses to inquiries about (1) deteriorating social relations with family and friends in Puerto Maldonado as a consequence of working 25 days a month at the lodge; (2) social tensions
between guides from Puerto Maldonado and lodge managers and staff from Cusco; and (3) questions regarding salaries, the effects of the global economic recession on tourism in Madre de Dios and the closing of Machu Picchu in 2010 resulting from the floods in Cusco.

Ownership symbolizes autonomy in different ways for different local ecotourism workers. For some, it promises a right for locals to mobilize forms of capital into profitable assets rather than to allow their knowledge and skills accumulate for others to perpetually exploit. With ownership comes freedom to salvage a marriage or start a family in Puerto Maldonado. It sanctions a claim to the rainforests where guides spent their childhoods and assures sovereignty from the monopolies of lodges controlled by Cusqueño managers and their nepotistic relations with Cusqueño employees. For some guides, ownership aims to unshackle Madre de Dios from the national monopoly of Cusco’s tourism circuit so the regional industry can flourish in its own right. Finally, the goals of local ownership of ecotourism and the rainforest in Madre de Dios can be viewed as a potential strategy of local resistance to external mechanisms of control by markets and the State. The transcendence from obrero to guide to proprietor symbolizes a challenge to the durable history of economic extraction that has characterized human activities and relations of power in the region since the arrival of rubber barons in the late nineteenth century.
Chapter 6: The Political Economy of Gender and Sexuality at the Lodge

Female Guides

Females comprise over half of the combined student body (estimated at ~1,000 students) in ecotourism programs at the technical institutes and university in Madre de Dios, but few women are employed in staff positions at the lodges and even fewer are guides. I made efforts to locate and interview female guides and other female ecotourism employees to learn about their experience working at the lodge and why they think lodges refrain from hiring women. Female informants gave one general answer: lodge managers view female employees as a liability to business because they perceive women as sexually promiscuous and involved in affairs with staff, and most importantly, tourists. For this reason, female guides must follow a strict regimen to protect their reputations from damaging rumors and ‘commentaries’ that could cost them their jobs or careers.

Rosa has guided in Madre de Dios for a few years and told me her strategy:

“With the tourists- you need to be careful… not have too much confidence with them. You cannot treat them like a friend. Sometimes the guys do it and there are some girls too… but if a girl does it— it looks bad. Some male guides act very friendly with their guests… some guys flirt with female guests—and it’s acceptable— but this is not true for female guides.”

Rosa maintained that women should be more cautious about how they present themselves to guests of the opposite sex in order to avoid misinterpretations of their behaviors that could lead to rumors, damage their reputations, and even ruin their careers. She illustrates this point with an example.
“At the bar at the lodge it’s okay to see a male guide drinking with guests…but only if the guests invite him… but if I want to have a drink because tourists invited me to the bar- I have a soda because in Puerto Maldonado… things get around. ¡Pueblo chico, infierno grande! [Small town, big hell!] Here the gossip spreads a lot. When they spread, it doesn’t start with a drop- it’s a rain!”

I spoke with Luz, a female guide who works at a different lodge and she also described the importance of maintaining a strict composure around men at the lodge:

“That is a really hard part of the profession. Even if you have a partner, and you are not a part of it—you are in it. I was serious when I started. I didn’t want to smile at them, even if I was talking to a guy because it’s too much. They think that I like the guy.” Luz then described the social consequences for females who work in ecotourism.

Luz:
“This kind of profession makes you alone. You don’t see your partner for one week, two weeks, three weeks… four weeks. Then you start talking to a male guide… or our tourists drink with us sometimes—but there are problems with women. The men do it, but we shouldn’t. And you wonder who are your real friends, eh? You don’t have honest people in tourism. They say ‘you are the best, you are my friend’ time and time but away, they say the opposite about you.”

Because lodge managers typically limit the number of female employees they hire one or two females, most women who work at the lodges are surrounded by a male workforce: “There is a married woman working at the lodge and the husband is working in town. There are problems with the husband because women are working with guides…and they are the única mujer [only woman at the lodge].” One female guide described her workplace as a sexually charged environment in which male guides act like birds of prey: “And some of the boys here- you’ve heard all the things about the jungle fever” she said with wide eyes and a giant grin on her face. “If they can see a small bird… like a hummingbird? They can know what underwear you are wearing.” “Ah, because they have a trained eye?” I asked rhetorically, and she responded as her grin fell and her face turned more serious, “Like a Harpy Eagle” she said unexpectedly and we both began
laughing. Female guides also cope with sexual advances from tourists. One female guide, Sofia, described sexual tension also in a lighthearted tone:

Sofia:
“One friend of mine was working in Manú, touring with a man…in the jungle…alone! He tried to kiss her! Yeah, that’s one in a hundred…but when I go on excursions? I bring my machete! We can joke, we can laugh at the lodge, but this is what I do when I am in the jungle!”

Sofia said that one of her guests from Canada also tried to have sex with her while they were in the forest, but she did not go into details about the dispute. Anna also works in ecotourism and mentioned that male guides are not immune to sexual advances from tourists: “There’s also a problem with women that come here—she is too friendly, she wants an experience with sex—they get what they want.” Anna followed this statement with a story about her friend (a male tour guide) who broke up with his girlfriend after a tourist accused him of rape: “He met a girl from another country. They were drinking. He went to her room. They were together for a few days! At the end…she complained to management… lied…said he drugged her.” Her friend lost his job at the lodge and the accusation of rape tarnished his reputation once rumors spread to all the lodges and agencies in Madre de Dios. He no longer works as a guide. Anna summarized her thoughts on reputation, rules, dignity, and the absence of female guides in ecotourism:

Anna:
“If you are working as a guide, you always need to consider your reputation. The rules of the company: you can’t drink too much; No sex with guests—but there are some lodges… well, every lodge has their own history. Some people even have sex with the manager! That was the reason why I left one lodge…there are few men and women that respect the life. Even the manager breaks down sometimes. Some companies…you can’t find any kind of commentary because there are no women. They don’t hire them.”
Sex as Resistance

I spoke with a few male guides about the rumor mill between lodges and learned that guides should be careful about how they conduct themselves when they are in town in addition to the workplace. ‘Hector’ described that reputation in the job is also shaped by how guides conduct themselves in Puerto Maldonado:

Hector:
“There are some women who are very successful. Mostly the girls who study for tour guides are working for different places…and there is too much gossip. The problem here in Puerto Maldonado is if someone watches me hanging out with one of my friends… who is a woman, they think ‘oh, he’s going out with that lady.’”

Hector explained that reputation defines job opportunities in tourism for both men and women, but that men are also concerned about their reputation among friends. On the symbolic level, lodge rules are another form of control over ecotourism workers. Defying those rules and bragging to interlocutors about it, wittingly or unwittingly, is an expression of autonomy over the body. Male guides often brag to one another about becoming sexually involved with female tourists: “Here, if a girl invites a tour guide to have a drink, in their minds, it means sex. There are many guides here who have sex with gringas. It makes them feel proud to have sex with foreigners.” Bragging about affairs with tourists is a performance of machismo, but it is also a performance to show others that management does not control the body. Hector is correct; guides indeed brag about their sexual relations with tourists:

Diego:
“They call me ‘Casador’ (hunter) or jungle gigolo. Maybe you’re not handsome, but you have a way to attract the girls. In your mind, you know they will be there for only three days, so you don’t have a girlfriend… you have many girlfriends.”

75
Diego also mentioned that male guides comment on one another’s ‘kills’ at the lodge and form positive reputations among their cadres by sleeping with tourists and foreign volunteers; however, they avoid engagement in such relations with guests in their own tour groups to mitigate unwanted rumors that could be deleterious to their employment. As a strategy to avoid suspicion by management, some guides form partnerships and try to set each other up with female guests from the other’s tour group: “Guides work as partners, they take girls from the other guides group…” Diego draws me a diagram of two circles (with the number 1 in one circle and the number 2 in the other) and draws and ‘x’ to connect them while explaining: “Guide 1 takes girl from group 2. Guide 2 takes girl from group 1. Jungle gigolo! That situation happens a lot. All the guides break the rules. You can’t drink with them, but you drink and they might wink at you.” Several guides agreed that staff members frequently break the rules: “When you display the rules, people just shit on it,” one guide says in laughter. “Maybe it’s Mal de Monte” (a term that translates literally to mountain fever— in reference to having lower standards for potential sexual partners as an outcome of living in social isolation).

Some guides said that it was difficult to resist when “gringas throw themselves” at them because “for some reason, gringas love Peruvians.” Rene, a married guide who has been working in tourism for 10 years, disputed such claims and implied that many guides try to exploit their guests. “Indirectly, you are seducing your clients to give things to you. They pretend that they are victims of the job.” Rene told me a story about another guide who came to him one day bragging about a nice expensive LED flashlight that a tourist gave him. The same guide came back weeks later and showed him new binoculars
that a different guest gave him “as a tip.” Rene said he has never received expensive gifts or sexual advances from tourists and that guides might say something like, “Oh those are really nice binoculars, they don’t sell those in our country.” Rene asserts that some guides “seduce their clients to get what they want.”

The strategies guides employ to protect and bolster their status extends beyond the means by which they avoid or engage in sexual relations with other staff and tourists, but for the sake of time and space, I conclude this discussion with a few general points: there is an underlying social asymmetry between male and female lodge staff; female guides generally make greater efforts to avoid potential rumors by socially engaging less frequently or with greater carefulness with male staff and tourists. Women are reified as sexually deviant and thus a liability to business. For this reason, lodges typically do not hire women, but when they do, the lodge becomes a social environment in which women must perform their identities and carefully manage the impressions they make to the lodge community and to a lesser extent, gossipers in Puerto Maldonado. Erving Goffman coined this dramaturgical phenomenon ‘impression management’ and pioneered a theory on the ways in which people perform and become audiences of other’s performances in everyday life. Goffman famously stated, “All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify” (Goffman, 1959:78). Female guides describe this challenge in their everyday lives at the lodge. The dramaturgical dimension of guiding extends beyond the guide performing and the tourists participating as audience members; impression management is shaped by the politics of gender and sexuality among lodge staff and managers.
I argue that both men and women workers in ecotourism adapt to living away from town and under the constraints of lodge rules in a variety of ways. Central to this discussion is the issue of control. Some guides describe their strategies of impression management and its constricting effects on opportunities while others calculate how they can create and exploit opportunities (and thus, challenge mechanisms of control, such as lodge rules, informal rules between guides and guests, etc.) Yet a piece of this ethnographic puzzle is still fundamentally absent. In the final section of this monograph, I take a step back from these micro-level experiences and examine the institutional processes that contributed to the formalization of ecotourism in Madre de Dios. A critical examination of these structural processes broadens our understanding of everyday life at the lodge and draws new linkages between life on the ground in Madre de Dios and global economic processes. I have spoken to great lengths about the lives of ecotourism workers, but this ‘population’ has only existed formally for slightly more than a decade. How did it emerge?
Chapter 7: Education and State Control of the Local

“We didn’t have a good system. I was from one of the first groups at SENATI. We didn’t have a good teacher, so we made a lot of meetings. It’s a very bad thing about SENATI... You didn’t get a title, just a certificate. So at the university in Cusco, you would get a title. Now we are starting to get titles for young and old generations. If you want to guide in other states, you need six months to one year of courses. You need to travel a lot to learn all the trails, all the ruins... the history.

-Sofía, local female ecotourism guide

In 2000, SERNANP established the Tambopata National Reserve and Bahuaja-Sonene National Park. In the years that followed, INRENA began enforcing new regulations that limited access to protected areas in Madre de Dios. Locals who had guided tours informally could no longer enter these areas without State-recognized permits. The establishment of these protected areas was a critical moment in the formation of a new regime of control in Madre de Dios. This configuration of power includes (1) State regulation and enforcement of protected areas, (2) private concession holders (eco-lodges) regulating livelihoods in ecotourism and acting as a ‘buffer’ between the national reserve and highway and regulating, (3) NGOs who provide training of locals in principles of sustainable development, ecological research, and rainforest conservation, and finally, (4) a new market of specialized tourism education programs that provide local graduates with permits that allow them to enter protected areas. The focus of this chapter is on tourism education as a mechanism of State control over the local population.
Figure 13. Parade. The 10th anniversary of the establishment of Tambopata National Reserve, a watershed moment in conservation and ecotourism in Madre de Dios

The Industrialization of a Career

The formalization of ecotourism in Madre de Dios was a project to ‘modernize’ tourism in the region by the creation of new economic opportunities for national tourism business (primarily based in Cusco and Lima) and with the goal of attracting foreign direct investments. The State initiated a joint program with the private technical institute Servicio Nacional de Adiestramiento en Trabajo Industrial (SENATI) and Banco de Desarrollo (Development Bank of Perú) to provide a certificate program in Madre de Dios
that would allow local guides entry into the protected areas upon completion of the program. A select group of locals who had been guiding in Madre de Dios prior to the establishment of the protected areas were recruited into the ‘first promotion’ to train for the new “Certificate of Professional Qualification Operational Level Technician specializing in Tourist Guide.” I spoke with a few guides from the first promotion about the formalization of their careers:

Edgard:
“It’s like this… your father is a mechanic, so you learn to be a mechanic. People want to hire you, but you don’t have the title and they ask for it.”

Eduardo:
“They didn’t teach us nothing [sic] because it was nothing different for us…we were already working as guides.”

Carlos:
“I worked as a tour guide…but the government made rules for tour guiding and I needed the license to be able to go to the national reserve! There were a lot of tour guides who weren’t licensed, and at that time, the government started the program with SENATI. I went for two years every weekend while I worked. I took exams by letter and e-mail. It was difficult.”

Aldo:
“When I started guiding… actually, my profession was teacher- we started with many more friends than when we ended. I had to spend extra hours to get the certificate.”

The pilot program was only marginally successful at recruiting locals who had already begun guiding in Madre de Dios. Although I am uncertain about the total number of locals who had been informally guiding in Madre de Dios, I know at least 50 guides were recruited into the joint program between SENATI, the State, and Banco de Desarollo. However, most guides from the first promotion did not complete the program. Moreover, some local guides never trained to obtain a license and thus, were eventually forced to pursue other forms of livelihood.
Boris:  
“There was a problem when I was becoming a guide—we went through a program from the government with Banco Desarrollo—which had money for educating people in the field. Forty of us started but only seven finished.”

Fernando:  
“After four years of guiding... I had problems at the checkpoint because I didn’t have a DNI. The lady told me I had to go back and study to get a certificate. I continued to take more tourists, but every 3 months I had problems at the check point and eventually quit. Now I’m trying to finish my degree so I can guide.”

Daniel:  
“Now I have to study because of the laws with the government- if you don’t have the title, you cannot work. To be available for guiding you need to follow some rules and get some certifications… and the problem with me was I didn’t go to the institute.”

Soon after spearheading the special program to recruit locals who were already guiding in the region, SENATI started a formal 3 year certification program in tour guiding available to anyone in Madre de Dios who could pass entry exams and afford the tuition. However, SENATI was not the first institute in Puerto Maldonado to offer a certification program in tourism guiding. In 1999, the public college Jorge Basadre Ghroman Institute de Tecnológico began its first promotion for ecotourism guiding. I spoke with a few guides who began the program during its infancy at Tecnológico:

Juan Carlos:  
“Most of the guides from the first promotion already were working in Tourism…at this time, we didn’t have all the good conditions we have now. Guides come out of universities and institutes now…we didn’t have the opportunities. The lodges weren’t really trusting. We were the first ones opening up the door. Now for them it is very easy. Before, you had to apply to many lodges again and again and again.”

Leopoldo:  
“We were the first promotion. There are now seven from my class working… there were 35 out of a total of 60 students…some are working for banks, travel agencies, airlines… when you study tourism you don’t have many job opportunities in Puerto Maldonado so you have to be a guide, but not many people make it.”
Most guides I spoke with who were enrolled in the first promotion at either Tecnológico or the special program at SENATI described how few students passed the program and even fewer found jobs as guides. Some guides were resentful about the programs they attended while others were proud to be the first in their family to receive a higher education. Many students who passed their final exams became airport transfers, receptionists, administrators, or what several guides described as ‘lower jobs.’ During these formative years, lodges hired personnel from Lima and Cusco to guide and recruited locals to acquaint them with the forest. This hiring trend continued into the mid 2000s, but today there are more local guides working in the region than ones from Cusco or Lima.

While I do not fully understand which factors led to the lodges hiring more locals to work as tour guides, I suspect that it relates to the following: (1) the industrialization of ecotourism education in Puerto Maldonado has made it easier for locals to legally access protected areas because SENATI and Tecnológico have issued hundreds of licenses over the past 10 years, (2) more locals who worked “lower jobs” at the lodges began learning English from studying independently and talking to tourists, which enabled them to eventually guide tours because they could communicate with tourists; and (3) “Authenticity,” as one guide described it, is critical to tourism. Tourists believe they will have a more authentic jungle experience if a ‘local’ tourism guide instead of a Peruvian from another region leads tours in the rainforest. I suspect there are other factors involved in the transition from a foreign workforce to a local one, including a trend in which larger and more influential lodges began hiring more locals before smaller lodges.
Figure 14. Local advertisement for SENATI technical programs

Figure 15. La Universidad Nacional Amazonica (UNAMAD)
The local university in Puerto Maldonado, La Universidad Nacional Amazonica (UNAMAD), recently started a five-year program in ecotourism. This program is different from tour guiding programs at the technical institutes because they offer ‘titles’ or university degrees that permit graduated students to guide outside of Madre de Dios. I spoke with a professor at UNAMAD and I asked him about the formalization of guiding in Madre de Dios:

Stefan:
“Three or four years ago there were only foreign guides. By foreign, I mean guides from Lima, Cusco, Arequipa in addition to other countries. This university started about 10 years ago… and the first careers in eco-tourism from this school began about 2 years ago. At the technical institutes, people graduate, become cooks, bartenders, housekeepers… after 2-3 years of work in lower positions they can become guides. The guides from Cusco and Lima learned English at the same time as they went to school… here in Madre de Dios they wait to finish school and then study English because the English courses here are very basic.”

Stefan’s response confirmed what other guides described about the process of training to be a guide. After guides receive certification, they find employment at a lodge and work one of the ‘lower jobs’ for a few years before guiding tours. However, Stephan made an interesting comparison that was not discussed in other interviews; local guides learn English after they finish their studies but students from other regions of Perú receive language training as part of their tourism curriculum. During the course of the interview, Stephan had something more illuminating to say about the education market in Madre de Dios:

Stefan:
“We teach students to become guides and to manage enterprises. At the university, there are about 800 students enrolled in the ecotourism program. There are many more students than jobs in ecotourism. What happens when they graduate? …There aren’t that many jobs like that for 800 students.”
Tourism education in Madre de Dios is a business unto itself and a key mechanism of control. The majority of students who matriculated into these programs and received licenses to enter the protected areas do not work in the careers for which they studied. The State plays a central role in the tourism education market by restricting access to protected areas and requiring special licenses to guide tours. Understanding the role of the State in the formalization (and capitalization) of tourism-related markets in Madre de Dios is key to understanding the regime of power embedded in this industry.

**Capital, Formalization, and Status**

The education of students who successfully become tour guides has opened new pathways to social, cultural, symbolic, and economic capital. The establishment of tourism education in Madre de Dios symbolizes a legitimate livelihood in a region largely characterized by informal (also called illegitimate or illegal) gold mining. Locals can now transcend a lineage of hard manual labor and earn their livelihoods legitimately by exploiting their local knowledge and newly founded ‘international cultural competence.’ Tour guides have a unique surplus of cultural capital because they are more connected to the global through daily interactions with foreign tourists and are thus more familiar with popular cultures, cutting-edge technology, current events across the globe, and other areas of knowledge to which most locals in Madre de Dios are not privy. As mentioned earlier, guides generally have a distinct social status in Puerto Maldonado because they interact with *gringos* and earn U.S. dollars. They also have a unique material culture; I saw guides with electronics that are difficult to obtain in Puerto Maldonado, such as iPods, smart phones, and laptops. Fashion also articulates a guide’s status; guides can be
seen riding new motorcycles, wearing things that most locals do not, such as fancy
binoculars, jewelry made from rainforest products, expensive clothing, and shirts from
the Unites States.

There is yet another symbolic dimension to the formalization of ecotourism
guiding in Madre de Dios. The two technical institutes have taken on a symbolic meaning
in relation to each another; guides told me that Tecnológico has a bad reputation for
falsifying test scores and considered SENATI to be a more prestigious institute. One
guide even bragged about SENATI’s International Organization for Standardization
certificate (ISO 9001). It will be interesting to see whether institutional status between
these institutes change after the first graduating class from UNAMAD’s five-year title
program enters the ecotourism market in the region. Moreover, with approximately 800
students enrolled as of 2010, what will become of the workforce in the years to come?

‘The Big Wall of Language’

“The most important thing in this business is language. It is one of the main concerns…a lot of
students come out of universities and colleges and don’t really learn the language. They have the
title or certificate for tourism but they cannot speak English…it is the big wall of language.”

English comprehension is one of the foremost challenges that students of
ecotourism face in pursuing a career in guiding. Virtually all tourism agencies and lodges
in Perú require tour guides to speak English, but students in Madre de Dios do not receive
adequate language training in their career programs. Once I learned that local tourism
programs only offer three to six hours a week of elementary English, I asked each
informant how they learned to speak English. It became clear to me that learning English
is somewhat of an anomaly for locals in Madre de Dios. The following interview excerpts
represent the most common ways in which local guides learned English:

Luis:
“Nirvana… you know, rock! I love music. I also learned while bartending at the lodge before I became a guide, but it was music that made me passionate.

Lucho:
“We asked for more hours in English at school because we only had 3 hours each week, so I learned English by volunteering for 6 months at a conservation NGO.”

Martin:
“I was helping build lodges… I used to see people from other places who could speak English. I learned by reading and talking. Unfortunately, in 2000-2001 we didn’t have a place to learn English”

Paulo:
“I decided to leave during the second year of the program. I got a job as a bartender at one of the lodges. After two months working at the lodge I still couldn’t understand anything…they were speaking a different language. I learned most of my English at the bar.”

Ramon:
“Tambopata English Center. Some foreigners rented a house to give private lessons. In the morning, I attended classes at SENATI and went to English classes at the center during the evenings… from 6-8 PM. I also became involved in a 5 month relationship with one of my English teachers from Canada, but she moved back to her country.”

Most guides learned English working a ‘lower job.’ The professor from UNAMAD said, “They will start from the bottom… housekeeping, reception, help carrying luggage… they do lower jobs.” Some guides learned English while volunteering or working for one of the many conservation NGOs in Puerto Maldonado. Only a few guides learned English at a language institute because language schools only arrived to Puerto Maldonado in the past few years. I was vexed to learn that the ability to speak and comprehend English was the main factor that weeded out most students in ecotourism. Despite the importance of English comprehension, local certification programs invested the least amount of time to this subject. What exactly are the students learning at these institutes?


**Curriculum and Cultural Hegemony**

Students at the technical schools do not become masters of their local history, indigenous cultures, flora and fauna, nor do they learn to communicate these potentially touristic features in English. The product they purchase when they pay for tuition is training to be a culture broker of Perú. Because the country’s number one tourist attraction is the Cusco—Machu Picchu complex, ecotourism students in Madre de Dios learn more about history and culture of Cusco than they do about their own historical, cultural, and ecological landscapes. I asked local guides what types of things they learned in their ecotourism programs and the overwhelming majority of responses indicated that ecotourism education programs focus primarily on Andean history and cultural traditions. One local guide said that her instructor did not require students to dance to “the music of the jungle…they wanted us to dance to Andean music because they are from Cusco and Ayacucho.” Students do not learn dances from different native groups in Madre de Dios, such as ‘Homage to the Anteater,’ ‘Homage to the Jaguar,’ or ‘Dance for the Brazil Nuts.’ Instead, they learned about dances and other traditions from the Andes.

Miguel:

“The teachers don’t want to forget their own culture. They are just interested in salaries. Another thing is professionals who study here in Puerto Maldonado could teach in the college—the colleges should require locals to teach courses.”

Local guides are indirectly taught that local culture in Madre de Dios is not worthy of commodification for tourism; the programs promote the ‘cultural hegemony’ of Cusco. One guide expressed dismay about a required course entitled ‘International Secrets,’ in which the instructor argued that Puerto Maldonado should serve more international food to cater to tourism and “not our customs from here,” such as fried yucca or *tacacho con*...
cechina (fried plantain balls served with pork). Another guide added, “When we were learning history at the institute, it was still about Cusco, Lima, Arequipa—history but they didn’t focus much on what we needed-stuff about the jungle.” One guide said that there are plenty of interesting historical features of Madre de Dios to teach in the programs but none of the instructors know about them because they are from Cusco or Lima. He provided me with an example:

Victor:
“There is a story about caucheros close to Brazilian borders about Brazilians and Chileans fighting for caucho. The first migrants were Brazilian people. In Inambari—50 kilometers from here is Iberia town, there is a ditch there… from a trench warfare when Peruvian caucheros fought with Bolivians. There is something interesting here. Japanese built the Plaza de Armas. The Japanese introduced corn and rice to Madre de Dios. They did experiments here. Teachers don’t know about this history. Local people know because their elders know and told them. Wood extraction took people from the jungle to work. Owners killed people who didn’t work. It was like slavery.”

Figure 16. Clock tower at the Plaza de Armas, built by Japanese migrants
These programs exert control over cultural discourse in tourism. Antonio Gramsci proposed that a ruling class could dominate a culturally diverse society through mass adherence to an establishment of universal ideologies perceived to benefit everyone that only in fact advance the position of the ruling class (Lears, 1985). Gramsci said that the “state does not mean only the apparatus of government but also the “private” apparatus of hegemony or civil society” (Gramsci, 2007:137). Taking this definition into account, the Peruvian government and private tourism markets in Perú can be viewed as a singular force that sells a mythic identity of Perú on the international tourism market. Cultural hegemony is institutionalized through myriad apparatuses of control, such as tourism education, marketing, and the regulation of access to land. The configuration of power that controls ecotourism in Madre de Dios is a micro-macro example of the processes by which the State fetishizes Cusco to represent Perú in the global tourism market. Local tourism guides in Madre de Dios are on the periphery of this system of capital. Through institutional mechanisms of control, the State mediates articulations between the local and global in education, livelihood, and access to natural resources. These widely dispersed loci of State control allow the Peruvian government to conceal its power over locals. Hiding in the shadow of regionalismo (which most lay people perceive as a ‘cultural phenomenon’ rather than a political policy) is one way the State washes its hands of technocratic control over unequal development in Perú.
Chapter 8: Constellations of Power

“I am neto neto huarayo de Puerto Maldonado… I was born in Tambopata- nine kilometers from Puerto Maldondo- there is the place where I was born! My family was born there! My Parents were also born there! Yo soy de la selva.. Neto!”(I am from the jungle! Native!

-Victor, local ecotourism guide

The ethnography of ecotourism guides in Madre de Dios is a story about a local population adapting to a new process by which natural resources in their physical environment are bundled, regulated, and converted into global capital. Ecotourism in Madre de Dios is the newest economically extractive industry in a long chain of centrifugally organized enterprises. This industry creates a hierarchically oppressive dialectic in which guides are caught even as they search for autonomy. Locals choose this livelihood for a variety of reasons. For some guides, “thinking of the future” and “being more” than miners or loggers by working in ecotourism ruptures the durable patterns of labor and extraction that characterize a long history of human activity in the region. This is partly true; ecotourism guides work in an industry whose success depends on the conservation of natural resources rather than the physical extraction of them but they still work for economically extractive enterprises.

There is another paradox of ecotourism; this industry is sold to local workers and global consumers as a responsible alternative to other modes of work and leisure, respectively. For locals, it is marketed as an alternative to other extractive industries in the region despite its economically extractive business structure. Ecotourism is sold on
the global market as an ecologically and socially responsible form of tourism, but the social outcomes of ecotourism in Madre de Dios are so rosy, as we have seen. The ecological impact of thousands of tourists entering the region each year has yet to be determined, but Kirkby et al. (2010) provide a good starting point.

Madre de Dios is no longer a frontier, though articles from the BBC and other popular media continue to portray the region as a “wild west” in reports of the informal mining sector. However, Madre de Dios is not a lawless land. The State is present in multiple forms and levels of control from the regulation and enforcement of protected lands to the actions of human bodies. In this manuscript, I focused on how these levels of control manifest locally as social actors respond to power through adherence, negotiation, and resistance. I began with a discussion about the history of the region to demonstrate how the rubber boom established the foundation for the extractive economy we see today in Madre de Dios. Following this discussion, I described experiences of locals who transitioned from gold mining and logging to ecotourism guiding and their desire to be business owners. The mirage of ownership is a shared vision among ecotourism workers and plays into the aspiration to gain control over their material and symbolic worlds. Ownership was allotted a lengthy discussion because it intersects with multiple dimensions of what it means to be a guide. Their motivations to be proprietors are not purely economic; they constellate around specific loci of social phenomena shaped in part by the ways in which institutional control is exerted directly and indirectly over their personal and working lives. The deterioration of personal relationships in Puerto Maldonado and workplace tensions caused by nepotism were two examples in which
guides have little control. I also described a symbolic dimension to ownership that connects identity and place and codifies insiders and outsiders in relation to the physical and social landscapes of Madre de Dios. In this discussion, the phenomenon of *regionalismo* between *serranos and selvaticos* played an important role in understanding how the social production of peoples, places, and identities are mutually negotiated.

I also focused on the experiences of female ecotourism workers to elucidate the gendered performance of identity in the lodge and the means by which power is exerted over the body, not through direct legal codes but by industrial ordinances and informal rules of behavior at the lodge. Linked to this discussion was the role that sexuality plays in confronting institutional control. Finally, I discussed how the state exerts power through land reforms, regulations, and education programs, each of which played important roles in the formalization of ecotourism careers in Madre de Dios. Throughout these discussions, I draw connections between the local and global and how these relations are mediated by the State’s interest in Cusco’s tourism market.

I recorded these phenomena from the perspective of local ecotourism workers and used semi-structured and unstructured interviews, purposive and participant observation, and other ethnographic tools to understand patterns and variation in their social worlds. Their perspectives are critical to modeling the political ecology of ecotourism in Madre de Dios because they negotiate, resist, and adhere to the principal mechanisms of institutional control over the physical and social environments.

The ethnography of ecotourism guides in Madre de Dios also provides an important case study to anthropological theory. I theorized ecotourism guides as social
actors who move across the political ecological landscape in search of stability, regularity, security, and most importantly, autonomy. By focusing on the articulation between social actors and the institutional structures that constrain and regulate their opportunities, I am able to elucidate nuanced relationships between agency and structure, materialism and symbolism, and micro and macro processes, each of which often appear in theoretical literature as objectified and mutually exclusive concepts. This study contributes to the growing body of literature that challenges our theoretical tendencies toward reifying Cartesian dualism. The social universe of ecotourism guides in Madre de Dios provides a critical case to challenge antiquated theoretical predispositions. By focusing on the nexus of agency and structure, material and symbol, and micro and macro, we can better understand the configuration of social life across time and space.
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