

# Urban Ethnogenesis Begins at Home: The Making of Self and Place amidst Amazonia's Environmental Economy

DANIELA M. PELUSO AND MIGUEL N. ALEXIADES

This article examines the makings of post-traditional environments through processes of urban ethnogenesis among the Ese Eja, an indigenous Amazonian group living in the border areas of Peru and Bolivia. We argue that the use of "tradition" as social currency by the environmental service sector, particularly by a thriving international ecotourism industry, has exacerbated processes of urbanization, dislocation, and social and ecological alienation of indigenous peoples. We examine how an Ese Eja "past" is selectively reinvented through discourse and appropriated by "participatory" projects and development. This unearthing and reburial of history is then used to "authenticate" the present and its environmental agenda in a postglobal world of environmental moral righteousness.

*Daniela M. Peluso is a research associate in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Kent. She has been working with the Ese Eja since the mid-1980s on questions relating to gender, kinship, personhood and identity.*

*Miguel N. Alexiades is a Nuffield Fellow at the University of Kent currently working on the Ese Eja landscape, particularly indigenous notions of history, territoriality, and the environment.*

The Ese Eja are a lowland Amazonian group comprising about 1,500 people, living in several communities along the rivers Beni, Madre de Dios, Heath and Tambopata, in the border regions of Pando, Bolivia, and Madre de Dios, Peru (FIGS. 1, 2). The Ese Eja language belongs to the Tacana language family, itself part of the Macro-Panoan group of languages of Western Amazonia. Most Ese Eja plant swidden fields, hunt, fish, and extract forest resources, both for consumption and commercial trade. Madre de Dios, the third largest and least populated department in Peru, is itself home to eighteen different ethnic groups and seven linguistic families. The department has also a significant importance for global conservation. As a biodiversity "hotspot," with more than three million hectares set aside for conservation, it is heavily targeted by external conservation and community-development funds and projects.<sup>1</sup>

The popular conception of Amazonia as a place inhabited by forest peoples is outdated: most people today live in urban and periurban environments. Throughout the twentieth century, Amazonians have moved between urban and rural areas in response to

**FIGURE 1. (RIGHT)** *Madre de Dios river (Peru).* Photo by M. Alexiades.

**FIGURE 2. (BELOW)** *Heath river.* Photo by M. Alexiades.



fluctuations in the international demand for forest products. However, in recent years the long, inexorable trend toward urbanization in Amazonia has involved an increasing number of indigenous peoples. The Ese Eja of Peru are a case in point. Traditionally a highly mobile society, the Ese Eja have become increasingly sedentary largely as a result of the broader social and political changes that have resulted from the penetration of a market economy into the region.<sup>2</sup> The process of urbanization began during the first half of the twentieth century following the establishment of a Dominican mission and numerous small outposts and rural settlements where forest resources were extracted and agricultural commodities grown under conditions of debt peonage. It was extended and facilitated in the second half of the twentieth century through the official creation of “native

communities” with titled lands and through provision of such state services as schools and health posts. Throughout the twentieth century, most Ese Eja embraced — albeit to varying extents — notions of progress and modernity. This in turn entailed the need and desire to develop more intense links with the market, the national society, and, concomitantly, the regional capital of Puerto Maldonado (FIG. 3). Urban models of settlement and dwelling have been adopted and incorporated in Ese Eja communities, while migration and relocation to the town itself has also increased. Key factors contributing to these forms of urbanization have been improved communications and increased dependency on goods and services that are provided in the city, including secondary education. Today, most urbanized Ese Eja maintain ties with their community of origin, as part of a diversified subsistence strategy that links them to the forest through agriculture, extractivism, and more recently, service-related activities, notably conservation and ecotourism projects.

This contemporary phase of indigenous urbanization coincides with the emergence of an environmental service economy in which conservation and development agendas converge, and which privileges certain forms or representations of indigenous knowledge, organization and control. It further coincides with developments in Ese Eja ethnogenesis — the construction of a collective social ethnic identity — in part realized and mediated through their participation in emergent pan-Amazonian local, national and international indigenous organizations, particularly since the 1980s.<sup>3</sup> While much anthropological work about indigenous Amazonia has focused on identity in the context of social and environmental change, scant attention has been paid to



FIGURE 3. Puerto Maldonado (Peru). Photo by M. Alexiades.

urbanization. Urbanized indigenous peoples have similarly been neglected by indigenous organizations and by other organizations working with rural indigenous communities.

In this article we explore the notion that the environmental economy, through such interventions as ecotourism, conservation, and “sustainable-development” projects, advances the integration of indigenous peoples into the market economy and exacerbates the related process of urbanization. Many of these interventions either directly discourage or indirectly undermine many longstanding resource-utilization activities — including hunting, fishing, certain forms of gathering, and swidden-fallow agriculture — and hence continue to disengage people from their land. In addition, wage labor, physical displacement, secularization, new patterns of consumption, and the commercialization of culture all further detach the Ese Eja from the matrix of extended kin and ecological relations that until recently sustained them. This process of social and ecological alienation following incorporation into the market is clearly not novel; indeed, it is one of the historical trademarks of capitalism. Rather, what is truly novel, and what this article focuses on, is how processes of market integration and social and ecological alienation now unfold, ironically, under the aegis of “conservation.” Moreover, urbanization, physical and social uprooting, and commoditization simultaneously draw upon and create an idealized, essentialized, reified and nostalgic image of its mirror — “wilderness,” “tradition,” locality, and social and ecological “embeddedness.”

In using the term post-traditional to describe Ese Eja native communities, we are not suggesting that “traditions” have disappeared, but rather that their forms, roles and meanings are fundamentally different from those in the past. The term post-traditionality is reminiscent of Hobsbawm and Ranger’s hallmark notion of the “invention of tradition”: repeated behavior meant to convey a continuity with a suitable, sometimes fictitious, distant past.<sup>4</sup> Whereas neotraditional communities engage in the manufacture of culture as tradition, however, post-traditional communities selectively

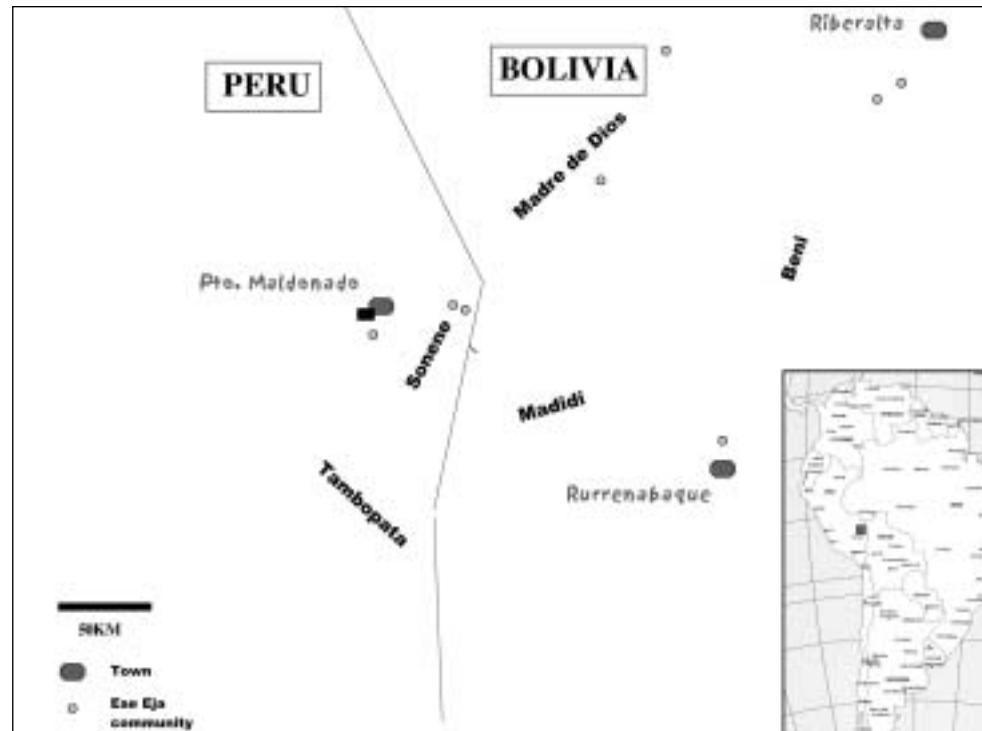
and mimetically reproduce parts of the past in order to make the present appear like the past.<sup>5</sup> As Appadurai has noted, these discourses about the past are governed by “norms.”<sup>6</sup> Here, we argue that the “discourse” about an Ese Eja past, in communities involved in an ecotourism economy, is to a great extent dictated by the international tourist market (or the marketing of that market). This market contributes to “the social production of memory,” even though, as Hauschild warned, not all participants have an equal standing.<sup>7</sup> As such, economic interests, through a calculated market-based system of rewards, play a dominant role in the social production of post-traditional visions of the past.

In this article we look at the contemporary and preliminary phase of urbanization that unfolds within Ese Eja communities. Specifically, we examine how notions of self and place — including territory, community, gender relations, ritual, health and language — inform and are informed by the environmental agenda, and the tensions and contradictions that emerge as a consequence. This in turn problematizes simple links between identity and place, often resting on ideas of spatially bounded cultures, “localities,” or territories.

#### ESE EJA REFERENCE TO PLACE

Notions of self in relation to place are central to how identity is constructed in indigenous Amazonia. The available historical records support the Ese Eja notions of their traditional territory as encompassing three adjacent tributaries of the Madre de Dios and Beni rivers: the Tambopata (Baawaja), Heath (Sonene), and the headwaters of the Madidi (Manini). The headwaters of these rivers all converge in a fairly small and very rugged area in the eastern Andes, in the border of Peru and Bolivia, and flow away from each other to join the Madre de Dios (Na’ai) and Beni (Kue’ai) rivers (FIG. 4). During the twentieth century the Ese Eja have gradually migrated in and settled in the lower reaches of the Tambopata and Heath rivers, as well as on the Beni and Madre de Dios (FIGS. 5, 6). As the Ese Eja moved away from the headwaters, they have also moved away from each other, becoming dispersed over a wide area, with some communities as far apart as 400 km. The descendants of each of these three groups (Baawaja, Madidi and Sonene) speak slightly different dialects, and are themselves a mixture of people from different tributaries, many of which once fought or traded with each other. In this way, the people who today identify themselves as Baawajakwiñaji, for example, link their ancestry to such tributaries of the Tambopata as Kuishokuei (La Torre) and Nao’o (Malinowski).<sup>8</sup> Aside from these three main groupings, people tend to refer to each other more specifically according to which community they live in or were born in. For example, Ese Eja from Portachuelo are Madidi’kuiñaji, but they mostly refer to themselves and are referred to by Ese Eja of other communi-

**FIGURE 4.** *Ese Eja communities in Madre de Dios (Peru) and Beni-Pando (Bolivia). Drawing by authors.*



ties as Kuei'ai'kuiñaji (people from the big river, meaning the Beni River). Also, these geographical distinctions may not always reflect actual geographical location. For instance, a group of Sonene'kuiñaji who migrated to Portachuelo more than thirty years ago still refer to themselves and are referred to by others as Sonene'kuiñaji.

Ese Eja identity has thus always been fluid and dynamic in its relationship to place. The notion of Ese Eja as a collective entity is also historically conditioned, as is the emerging notion of a pan-Amazonian indigenous movement and identi-

ty mentioned earlier. Native communities too, like the notion of "tribe," are politico-historical artifacts; specifically, they are the products of contact with the state and broad political, legal and economic systems.<sup>9</sup> As such, and in terms of their location, physical makeup, and internal organization, Ese Eja communities reflect a history of increasingly intense — yet consistently ambivalent — relations with the state and market, including related processes of migration, dislocation, fragmentation, sedentization, dependency on outside goods and services, and increased internal differentiation.



**FIGURE 5. (LEFT)** *Heath river. Photo by M. Alexiades.*



**FIGURE 6. (RIGHT)** *Ese Eja community, Heath river (Peru). Photo by M. Alexiades.*

While historically disposed toward a mobile lifestyle, elements of Ese Eja social structure, such as kinship, are also very much rooted in place, notably through residence. When Ese Eja marry, the couple tend to dwell with the woman's family (uxorilocality). Households, therefore, usually consist of a married couple, all of their unmarried sons and daughters, their married daughters and son-in-laws, as well as maternal grandparents, grandchildren and adopted children. By rooting the household and its systems of production in the continuity of female residential clusters, uxorilocality tends to undermine the social and political significance of patrilineality. Consequently, and as in much of lowland South America, residence rather than descent is the key criterion for Ese Eja social organization.<sup>10</sup>

ECOTOURISM AND PLACE

Ecotourism has been heralded by its defenders as an effective way of providing economic incentives for the conservation of forests.<sup>11</sup> A subset of such ventures directly involves local dwellers, either by including them in some of the activities promoted by an ecotourism lodge, hiring them as employees, or, in some cases, establishing formal partnerships and working agreements (FIG. 7). Two of the Ese Eja communities in Peru have developed formal partnerships with national tourist operators, in both cases with direct support of international environmental organizations and donors.<sup>12</sup> Despite differences in the details of how the partnerships have been set up, both Ese Eja lodges are built within the titled lands of the communities; both seek to directly involve the Ese Eja in staffing, and to a lesser extent, running the lodges; and both are either partly or fully owned by the community in question.<sup>13</sup> In one of the lodges, community members have been actively trained as guides, and have been sent to Lima, the capital of Peru to study English or specialist managerial skills (FIG. 8).



FIGURE 8. Ese Eja guides and tourists, Tambopata river (Peru). Photo by M. Alexiades.

As in other areas, ecotourism among the Ese Eja is closely linked to and dependent on the creation and management of natural protected areas, in this case the Tambopata National Reserve and the Bahuaja-Sonene National Park, itself part of an international program seeking to establish a corridor of protected areas on the eastern flanks of the Andes.<sup>14</sup> As with other “indigenous” ecotourism ventures in western Amazonia, lodges seek to promote distinct ecological and social attractions in order to lure visitors and compete with neighboring operations (FIG. 9). A global biodiversity “hotspot,” the area is widely known for its “pristine” and accessible environments (forests, lakes, and bird and mammal clay licks — areas where large number of animals congregate to feed), and for its extraordinary diversity of flora and fauna.<sup>15</sup> The lodges also allow visitors to experience such “social experiences” as visits to the community or to certain community projects, walks with



FIGURE 7. Tourism agency, Rurrenabaque (Bolivia). Photo by D. Peluso.



FIGURE 9. Website with information on the Ese Eja lodge ([http://www.greentracks.com/Tambopata\\_programs.htm](http://www.greentracks.com/Tambopata_programs.htm)).

indigenous guides, and the purchasing of local handicrafts. The idea of community-operated lodges helping realize broader social goals — notably conservation and “sustainable” development — also forms a distinct element of the institutional branding of these lodges: for instance, one of the lodges received Conservation International’s Ecotourism Excellence Award, among several others.

While the national park and the state provide a guarantee of the ecological “authenticity” of the area, the partnership with an indigenous community provides a complementary degree of “ethnic” and “moral” authenticity: the lodges are advertised, for example, as follows: “. . . only four hours by river from Puerto Maldonado airport, Heath River Wildlife Center is the gateway to the largest uninhabited and un hunted rainforest in the Amazon. . . . [H]undreds of birds and mammal species and a lodge 100 percent owned by the Ese’ija Indians of Sonene make the Heath the best combination of nature and culture in the entire Amazon.”<sup>16</sup>

For indigenous peoples to work, and eventually to own and run ecotourism lodges, they must reorganize their means of livelihood, often putting subsistence agriculture, hunting, foraging, and extractive forest activities in the background. Wage labor, usually in the form of work as boat drivers, guides, waiters or cleaners, takes them out of their household and moves them into the space of the lodge, where they are separated from their families and the social obligations that normally bind them to their household and the rest of their community.

For a variety of reasons, including uxoriality, women are more tied to place than men. As a result, women find themselves doing a double load, taking on the additional jobs that their husbands and sons left behind to go work for the lodge. In turn, they have less control over the wage that is meant to compensate for such sacrifices. An Ese Eja woman spoke about her relationship with her husband who was administering an Ese Eja lodge at the time:

*My husband is not here. He cannot help me with our six children. Yes, he makes money, but he is not here to chop wood, carry plantains, and keep the fields or hunt or fish. The little ones do fish, and my sisters help me with meat sometimes, but I have nothing to give them. My husband has bought us a gas stove, but look over there! It has been empty for many months. It is expensive to refill. He is working — but he is not here!*

Another clear impact of the boom in the environmental service economy has been language loss among the Sonene Ese Eja. While most Ese Eja are bilingual, Spanish is clearly spoken much more frequently now than ten years ago, and many children are only marginally bilingual. Factors contributing to this recent process of linguistic erosion include a dramatic increase in the number of Peruvian nationals visiting or living in the community as a direct result of interventions

linked to the national park or the tourist lodge. Indeed, three households, out of a total of seventeen, now consist of mixed marriages between Ese Eja and lodge workers. As a young man remarked, laughing, “We are embarrassed to talk when they [non-Ese Eja] are with us. And now in our house we do not talk because of him [his non-Ese Eja brother-in-law].”

## CONSERVATION: REDEFINING TRADITIONS

Much of conservation, and certainly ecotourism, is inimical to hunting; many conservation biologists view the practice as fundamentally incompatible with their preservation efforts. This is particularly the case for the larger “charismatic megafauna” (tapirs, peccaries and monkeys), which are used to rally public and official support for conservation, and which are also sought out by tourists and hunters.<sup>17</sup> The issue of hunting by indigenous peoples in national parks is often contentious, not least among those Ese Eja living around the protected areas now covering much of their traditionally occupied lands. While national legislation recognizes the right of indigenous peoples to hunt in protected areas, this provision is restricted to meat used for domestic consumption, and to the use of “traditional” means, which in many instances is taken to mean bow and arrows. The suggestion that only what are in effect precolonial means of subsistence and hunting are compatible with “tradition” suggests a view of culture as bounded and static, which is hard to reconcile with the dynamism and open-endedness of social processes.

For the Ese Eja who still depend on a “traditional” lifestyle based on hunting and gathering, and who use the occasional sale of forest products and game to purchase basic goods, the distinction made by the state between “subsistence” and “commercial” is absurd. As one exasperated hunter complained “Do I sell game to become rich? No! We are still poor . . . [and] we hunt to buy soap, to buy books for our children. . . . They [“white” people] . . . are the ones who showed us how to use these things!” Likewise, commodities such as shotguns, soap, cooking oil, sugar and schoolbooks are viewed by the Ese Eja as integral and historically constituted parts of their daily lives. The fact that shotguns have been used by the Ese Eja for generations, that hunting continues to have unparalleled social, symbolic and economic importance, and that Ese Eja have hunted in these areas before there were any white people all serve to underscore the view among many Ese Eja that hunting with shotguns and selling game constitute and inalienable right.

Significantly, a growing number of Ese Eja — particularly those working as wage laborers in the environmental service economy or with greater contact with the rhetoric of conservation, including some leaders — have assimilated the view of hunting as a negative, or indeed shameful activity. One of us once asked a young Ese Eja tourist guide, about to take on his regular leave, if he was planning to go hunting.

He smiled shyly, and looking away, said, “We do not do those things here anymore.”

Another time, a biologist who had been hired by an NGO to make a series of educational cards of animals based on Ese Eja accounts, recalled a decision by the NGO to remove any reference in the cards to hunting:

*I was so disappointed when I saw the place-cards. I had collected such fabulously detailed and entertaining stories about various animals from Ese Eja children and adults. When the NGO administrator read them she immediately said that they could not be used because they referred to hunting. People had passionately described the different ways animals “taste” or where they nest and hide.*

This instance illustrates how traditional knowledge is strategically edited before it is channeled back to the community as part of conservation and “cultural revitalization” projects, whose goal is to reinvent “tradition” in ways that downplay aspects considered aesthetically, morally or politically undesirable, or incompatible with modern “sustainable” land-use planning. In this way, “culture” is appropriated and repackaged to legitimize the convergent interests of the state and ecotourist firms: the creation of the illusion of “pristine” forests inhabited by “traditional” or “authentic” indigenous peoples (FIG. 10). According to this discourse, the Ese Eja — akin to an “ecological noble savage” used to live in harmony with the environment, but have subsequently — and through the perverse influences of modernity — succumbed to the evils of environmental degradation, which presumably include the use of shotguns to provide one’s dinner.<sup>18</sup> It is no coincidence that technology is thought of and discussed in terms of “traditional” versus “nontraditional,” rather than “precolonial” versus “colonial.” These referents frame people’s choices in terms of a nostalgic past rather than one of

subjugation, exploitation and resistance. This rewriting of history is a self-serving way of authenticating the present with an environmental agenda.

The “demonization” of hunting, with a zeal that on occasion acquires a distinct missionary fervor, also subverts the social legitimacy and prestige of the activity, suggesting that it constitutes an outdated modality of environmental intimacy — and one which is may be transcended by the transformation from “hunter” to “tourist guide.” The prestige of the hunter, in this new environmental post-traditional economy, is built not on the ability to utilize his skills and knowledge to provide his household with game, but, rather to reinvent and re-create those skills and knowledge, combining them with English and marketing, in order to “interpret” the forest and provide an “authentic” experience to visitors. This in turn also allows him to bring cash, not game, back to his wife and children.

This powerful interplay of the demonization of the hunt and the commodification of the hunted is illustrated in the reprimands of the representative of the ecotourist company during a meeting with community members. In this instance, a capybara had been shot, in violation of the terms of agreement, in the vicinity of the tourist lodge:

*Who killed that capybara? . . . Don't you know that that it is stealing? That capybara was worth money and it belonged to everyone. . . . By killing the capybara, one person has stolen from everybody else! If you kill the animals, what will the tourists come to see?*

Hunting is not only undermined by providing a competing idea of value, but also by collapsing the different values traditionally associated with game and hunting — including aesthetic, moral and spiritual ones — into a simple material choice. Extolling the accomplishments of a project linked to the tourist lodge, a Kellogg fellow noted how “the endangered Harpy Eagle rose in status from just another chicken to their community mascot.”<sup>19</sup> Suggesting that before the arrival of the lodge the Ese Eja viewed the harpy eagle as “just another chicken” is ironic not only because Ese Eja do not eat harpy eagles, but because this animal plays a salient role in Ese Eja oral traditions and is a powerful symbolic referent to the suprahuman *edósikiana*, and to the ontological predation that underscores the intimate interrelationship between human and nonhuman beings.<sup>20</sup> Yet Ese Eja beliefs about nonhuman beings also emphasize the regenerative, creative and healing aspects of activities such as hunting which are otherwise interpreted as strictly hunter-prey, predation-consumption-reciprocity models.<sup>21</sup>

Stronza, an anthropologist who has worked closely with one of the Ese Eja lodges, and asserted how, paradoxically, “despite the importance of Harpy Eagles and Giant Otters among biologists, conservationists, and tourists, neither species held special economic significance to people . . . at



FIGURE 10. Community environmental education poster, Heath river. Photo by M. Alexiades.

least not before tourism.”<sup>22</sup> In actual fact, harpy eagle feathers were the most highly prized of all bird feathers, and were used in the manufacture of arrows — themselves indispensable technology. The large size of the feathers makes them ideal for manufacturing the arrow’s tail, which in turn ensures the stability and accuracy of the arrow’s flight path. This, coupled with the powerful symbolic attributes derived from the fact that harpy eagles are the largest and most powerful flying predator — suggests that the bird did indeed have an important economic value for the Ese Eja before the advent of tourism. Stronza’s account not only conceals the “economic” value of harpy eagles as a source of materials for hunting technology, but its allusion to the indeterminate *symbolic* significance of harpy eagles to Ese Eja hunters also disassembles the “symbolic” from the “economic,” thus subverting — and reinventing — Ese Eja “traditional” perceptions of value.<sup>23</sup> By defining “economic” only as that which takes place in the context of market transactions, this kind of rhetoric creates the object of its own discourse: the commodification of ecological and social relations and the primacy of the market as measure of value.

#### URBANIZATION: LODGED IN ONE’S MIND

Urbanization begins with new ideas and images, whose power lies in their ability to evoke new kinds of desire — not just material desires but the desire for different lifestyles and different identities. Aside from effecting changes in modes of production and forms of social organization, urbanization brings its own particular sense of aesthetics, value and morals. We have already discussed how international ecotourism is helping to shape these transformations, and particularly how Ese Eja notions of subsistence, hunting, the past, and “culture” are subverted and conditioned by the complicity of state and market and transformed into commodities that are consumed according to late capitalism’s theory of value.

Ese Eja often articulate the loss of their traditions through nostalgic discussions of the past. More than a “return to the past,” such nostalgia is a suggestive projection of how people wish to imagine the past, ultimately miming a fantasy (or to paraphrase Taussig: miming a fantasy about someone’s fantasy of them).<sup>24</sup> Within newly emerging economic contexts, by convincingly embracing “Ese Eja-ness,” individuals or communities can bolster their political leverage vis-à-vis regional, national and international populations and enterprises. As one young Ese Eja man from Inferno who is involved in ecotourism told me in January 2003:

*It is not my fault that I do not speak Ese Eja. It is the older people’s fault because they did not teach us. I am ashamed that I cannot speak Ese Eja because now when the financieras [funding agencies] ask me to say something in my language. I have nothing to say!*

Narratives echoing loss reflect how ideas of “cultural purity” and “authenticity” are both employed and disemployed. Nonetheless, one paradox is that the desire to reconstruct or essentialize the past manifests itself within the context of cultural hybridity. In a discussion on identity it is not questions about an original “authenticity” that are provocative, but rather a questioning of how and why and to what political ends one’s positioning of being “Ese Eja” is deployed. Hybridity makes the limitations of binarisms clear and illustrates how ideas such as “authenticity” or “mixture,” for example, are commodified in the expression of identities.<sup>25</sup> Indigenous identity is a powerful political resource that, in addition to having its own internal significance, is repeatedly performed for and accessed by outsiders — hence, its continual emergence in more globalized contexts. Although its discourses and appearance have changed, the underlying structures of the hierarchies of power have not. The same young man pointed toward the complexity of such mirroring when he next said:

*I ask my father to teach me Ese Eja but he says nothing. If someone from far away, like a “gringo,” asks him something, then he shows them things. Suddenly my father speaks Ese Eja. With me, he can’t be bothered.*

Both of this young man’s statements expose Shobat’s main theoretical concerns over the ambivalence and the inconvenience of a politics of hybridity in places like Amazonia, where people’s articulation of a wish to return to the past often express their quest for political survival.<sup>26</sup> If discussions of hybridity sidestep aspects of the political consciousness of identity they end up in danger of sanctifying whatever neocolonial hegemony is in place. As such, works on hybridity can also encompass theories of mimicry and how Fourth World peoples use ideas about “tradition” to stage their own urgent needs for political representation, land rights, and access to resources without invalidating them. Whereas hybridity and other postcolonial theories can allow for a critical perspective on the mimesis or nostalgia of “the past,” they can simultaneously recognize peoples agency in using these ideas as embedded within local and global power relations.

#### CONCLUSIONS

We have characterized Ese Eja villages as post-traditional communities, a trend which is exacerbated through ecotourism and its impulsion of urbanization. First, individuals are increasingly alienated from a sense of place through their changed relationships to land, nature, and each other. Second, the commodification of culture and the rewriting of “tradition” creates new contradictions and anxieties with regard to people’s relationship with the past and with human

others. Last, through a discourse of nostalgia, many Ese Eja now search for a link between history and place.

We have also discussed how such key notions of self and place, including community, territory, gender relations, ritual and language, shape and are shaped by the novel ecological and social relations that urbanization entails. The *production of difference* within common, shared and connected spaces, and how these differences are produced and maintained, takes place in a field of power relations that is always already spatially interconnected.

It has been said that what matters most about tradition is that it is credible.<sup>27</sup> In this article we have briefly highlighted how the environmental service economy shapes the credibility of tradition toward an outside audience while

concurrently selectively rewriting, reediting and reshaping it toward the inside. The former is fulfilled through marketing, the latter through reconstructing the values placed on both the choices and the reasons for revitalizing “the past.” As such, memory and tradition are bound together in the way that people organize the past.<sup>28</sup> It is precisely the way in which nature-based industries are established upon principles of modernity, yet clothed in the discourses and pretexts of “tradition” that mark Amazonian economies as post-traditional. The need for protecting the cultural and biological diversity of tropical rainforests and their peoples remains compelling. This is precisely why it is important for all participants in environmental economies to examine how conservation discourse creates its own object, and at what cost.

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1. CORDEMAD, *Madre de Dios: El Perú Desconocido* (Puerto Maldonado, Perú:

Corporación Departamental de Desarrollo de Madre de Dios, 1986).

2. For a historical profile of the Ese Eja, see M.N. Alexiades and D.M. Peluso, “La Sociedad Ese Eja: Una Aproximación Histórica a sus Orígenes, Distribución, Asentamiento y Subsistencia,” in A. Garcia, ed., *Los Pueblos Indígenas de Madre de Dios: Historia, Etnografía y Coyuntura*, (Sweden: IWGIA; Peru: FENAMAD, 2003).

3. The institutional and political processes set in place by indigenous organizations has also facilitated — unintentionally — the process of urbanization. While important, this aspect of urbanization does not fall within the scope of this article.

4. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

5. See D. Peluso, “Conservation, Indigenismo and Mimesis,” *Hemisphere*, Vol.5 No.2 (Winter/Spring 1993), for an examination of how conservation agendas may provide an alternative discourse for native people in otherwise subordinate national positions by providing them with an idealized image of an “indigenous” past upon which to fashion their self-representation.

6. A. Appadurai, “The Past as a Scarce Resource,” *Man* (N.S.) 16 (1981), pp.201–19.

7. E. Hauschild, “Making History in Southern Italy,” in K. Hastrup, ed., *Other Histories* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.29–44.

8. The same holds true for the Madidi and Sonene Ese Eja. All of these groups also retreated at different points in time, rejoining other tributaries. For a more comprehensive account of Ese Eja history, see Alexiades and Peluso, “La Sociedad Ese Eja.”

9. M.H. Fried, *The Notion of the Tribe* (Menlo Park, CA: Cummings Publishers, 1975).

10. D.M. Peluso, “Ese Eja Epona: Woman's Social Power in Multiple and Hybrid Worlds,” Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2003.

11. For a similar position among some environmentalists and scholars, see, for example, M.A. Groom, R.D. Podolsky, and C.A. Munn, “Tourism as a Sustained Use of Wildlife: A Case Study of Madre de Dios, Southeastern Peru,” in J.G. Robinson and K.H. Redford, eds., *Neotropical Wildlife Use and Conservation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp.393–412; and A. Stronza, “‘Because it is Ours’: Community-Based Ecotourism in the Peruvian Amazon,” Ph.D. diss. University of Florida, Gainesville, 2000. For other more general reviews, see E. Boo, *Ecotourism: The Potentials and Pitfalls* (Washington, D.C.: World Wildlife Fund, 1990); E. Cater and G. Lowman, *Ecotourism: a Sustainable Option?* (Chichester, U.K.: John Wiley and Sons, 1994); M. Honey, *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: Who Owns*

- Paradise?* (Washington, D.C.: Island, 1999); A. Stronza, "Anthropology of Tourism: Forging New Ground for Ecotourism and Other Alternatives," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2001), pp.261–83; and T. Whelan, *Nature Tourism: Managing for the Environment* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1991).
12. Strategic partnerships between national and international private capital, government agencies, environmental NGOs, and donor organizations have been critical in promoting ecotourism ventures in tropical forests, particularly around units of conservation. See, for example, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), "*The Components of Successful Ecotourism*" (n.d.), pp.33–62.
13. E. Nycander and K. Holle, "Rainforest Expeditions: Combining Tourism, Education, and Research in Southeastern Amazonian Peru," in J.A. Miller and E. Malek-Zadeh, eds., *The Ecotourism Equation: Measuring the Impacts* (New Haven, CN: Yale University, Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies Bulletin Series, Vol.99, 1996), pp.169–81.
14. See Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, "Vilcabamba-Amboró Forest Ecosystem of the Tropical Andes Biodiversity Hotspot: Peru and Bolivia," Final version, December 14, 2000, downloadable from [www.cepf.net/xp/cepf/static/pdfs/Final.TropicalAndes.Vilcabamba-Amboro.EP.pdf](http://www.cepf.net/xp/cepf/static/pdfs/Final.TropicalAndes.Vilcabamba-Amboro.EP.pdf).
15. R. Mittermeier, N. Myers, and C.G. Mittermeier, *Hotspots: Earth's Biologically Richest and Most Threatened Ecoregions* (Mexico City and Washington, D.C.: CEMEX, 1999).
16. Greentracks, Inc., website, [http://www.greentracks.com/Tambopata\\_programs.htm](http://www.greentracks.com/Tambopata_programs.htm). Accessed February 14, 2005.
17. K. Brandon, K.H. Redford, and S.E. Anderson, eds., *Parks in Peril: People, Politics and Protected Areas* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1998); J.G. Robinson and E.L. Bennett, eds., *Hunting for Sustainability in Tropical Forests* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press); and J. Terborgh, *Requiem for Nature* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1999).
18. K.H. Redford, "The Ecologically Noble Savage," *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, Vol.15 No.1 (1991), pp.46–48.
19. Ibid.
20. Harpy eagles are not mere animals; rather they are Ese Eja (people) from *yawajo nee nee* (a long time ago), when beings had the ability to transform between forms. Significantly, harpy eagles were the sons of the most powerful forest being, Edosikiana. Ese Eja explain that Edosikiana uses the harpy eagles talons to kill humans; see G. Burr, "Eshawa! Vision, Voice and Mythic Narrative," Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 1997; and Peluso, "Ese Eja Epona."
21. See M. Alexiades, "Ethnobotany of the Ese Eja: Plants, Change and Health in an Amazonian Society," Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1999; and "El Eyámikewwa y el Ayahuasquero: Las Dinámicas Socio-Ecológicas del Chamanismo Ese Eja," *Amazonía Peruana*, Vol.14 No.27 (2000), pp.193–212; Brightman, *Grateful Prey Rock Cree Human Animal Relationships* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Peluso, "Ese Eja Epona"; and L. Rival, *Trekking through History: The Huaorani of Amazonian Ecuador* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). For predation models, see E. Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism," *Journal of Royal Anthropology* (N.S.) 4, (1998), pp.469–88; J. Overing, "Death and the Loss of Civilized Predation among the Piaroa of the Orinoco Basin," *L'Homme*, Vol.33 No.2–4 (1993), pp.191–211; and B. Conklin, *Consuming Grief: Compassionate Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).
22. Stronza, "Because it is Ours," p.142.
23. We are not implying that Stronza set out consciously or strategically to undermine Ese Eja views of harpy eagles: Ese Eja, particularly those more exposed to modern and conservationist discourses, do not customarily and openly discuss issues relating to their oral traditions and "beliefs of the ancestors" (*creencias de los antiguos*) with outsiders, given that these have tended to be scorned in the past. Stronza's consultants are thus likely accomplices in this particular instance of the masking of the past.
24. M. Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
25. See R. DeGrandis and Z. Bernd, *Unforeseeable Americas: Questioning Cultural Hybridity in the Americas* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2000); and H. Bhabba, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985), pp.144–65.
26. E. Shobat, "Notes on the Post-Colonial," *Social Text* 31/32 (1992), pp.99–113. On ambivalence, see Bhabba, "Signs Taken for Wonders"; "The Commitment to Theory," *New Formations*, Vol.5 (1988), pp.5–23; and *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994). On the commodification of identity, see M.F. Brown, "Facing the State, Facing the World: Amazonia's Native Leaders and the New Politics of Identity," *L'Homme* 126–128, avr.-déc, XXXIII (2–4) (1993), pp.307–326; and Peluso, "Conservation, Indigenismo and Mimesis."
27. See G. Muri, "The World's Smallest Village: Folk Culture and Tourism Development in an Alpine Context," *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, Vol.13 No.1 (2001).
28. A. Giddens, "Living in a Post-Traditional Society," in U. Beck, A. Giddens, and S. Lash, eds., *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp.57–109.