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# PERFORMING CULTURE IN THE TOURIST CITY: THE CONSTRUCTION OF ESSENTIALIZED IDENTITY IN CUZCO, PERÚ

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This work analyzes the construction of regional identity in Cuzco, Perú and how this essentialized identity is commodified to define the ideal tourist encounter. The *indigenismo* and *neoindianismo* intellectual movements in the twentieth century shaped regional Cuzco identity as one in which the grandeur of the Inca Empire is valorized and celebrated and the present indigenous and mestizo experience is marginalized as socially inferior. Through the tourism industry, these attitudes of the Cuzco elite have propagated in the performance of culture. The sanitization and negotiation of public spaces serves to preserve an essentialized image of the physical space and the social composition of Cuzco in order to meet the tourists' expectations. Local policies serve to eradicate tourist spaces of individuals who are perceived as dirty and unrefined. The mediated physical space and social composition of Cuzco suspends the tourist city in time and prevents *cuzqueños* from accessing the tourist space. Ritualized performances such as *Inti Raymi*, the annual Festival of the Sun, also demonstrate the priorities of the cultural elite to preserve an essentialized *cuzqueño* identity rooted in the glory of Inca traditions. The historical and cultural context of the creation of these rituals impacts how *cuzqueños* interact with and interpret the staged performance. Both the twentieth-century construction of identity by the Cuzco elite and the tourism industry seek to create a specific, mediated image of Cuzco that is divorced from social and cultural realities of the region. The tourism industry relies upon the commoditization of this essentialized identity, and the performance of staged authenticity legitimizes the elite construction of culture and identity.