

TOURISTIC NARRATIVES AND HISTORICAL NETWORKS:  
POLITICS AND AUTHORITY IN TIWANAKU, BOLIVIA

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Tiwanaku, Bolivia is a special place. It is an archaeological site, a tourist attraction, a sacred space, a home to walking monoliths, a contemporary rural Aymara village. It was built by the Aymara, by an Andean civilization, by extraterrestrials, by Atlanteans, by *chullpas* frozen in place when the sun came up for the first time. Being there gives one a sense of connection to *Pachamama* (the Earth Goddess), a set of nice photos, changed DNA, illness. The *Puerta del Sol* (Gateway of the Sun) is a calendar, a gateway to another dimension, a postcard. Despite the multiplicity of narratives surrounding it, one thing is agreed on by most: Tiwanaku is the “capital of the Aymara world,” because any attempt to define the Aymara as a political group in the contemporary context must reference this place.

Tiwanaku is a pre-Inca urban site abandoned around 1150 A.D, and now a fenced archaeological area and UNESCO World Heritage Site. Visitors from Bolivia, South America, Europe, the United States and other parts of the globe come to this place to stand, breathless at 13,000 feet above sea level, and marvel at the splendor of its stonemasonry and architecture. The annual June Solstice ceremony brings urban Bolivian

Aymara by the thousands to greet the dawn. Local Tiwanakeños engage these visitors by selling souvenirs, meals, snacks and museum tickets. They also involve themselves in the cash economy throughout the year in other ways, such as dairy farming, cheese making, agriculture, and small-scale marketing.

Research on Tiwanaku has tended to focus on one of two areas: archaeological research of the site, or to a much lesser extent, the contemporary municipality as a rural agricultural community. Both of these types of studies have produced important findings and perspectives on the region. But Tiwanaku is fundamentally a place of convergence, where Bolivian Aymara come into conversations with archaeologists, anthropologists, national and foreign tour guides, regional schoolchildren and international tourists.

Tiwanaku was built to be a pilgrimage site, and has attracted visitors since at least 500 C.E. Tiwanakeños' perspectives on the site are not divorced from those who visit them. The narratives of visitors and locals are often distinct, but never isolated.

The overarching theme of this work is that the importance of Tiwanaku stems not from the coherence of a single narrative, but from the convergence of multiple and sometimes contradictory narratives. This is not a simple case of the intersection between “hosts” and “guests,” local and global, or Tiwanakeño and tourist. I hope to show how diverse groups of people – Tiwanakeños, Bolivians, archaeologists, foreign tourists, and development experts – weave multiple narratives about this place into something greater than their sum.

Narratives about what kind of place Tiwanaku is have consequences in unexpected arenas, from the layouts of touristic markets to the process of newspaper reporting, from in the quotidian practices of selling souvenirs to the production of

archaeological knowledge. Ongoing attempts to define what kind of place Tiwanaku is have tangible effects in organizing its local economy, determining the roles of local authorities, and staging national rituals.

Tourism to the archaeological site of Tiwanaku and the nearby village of Tiahuanacu invokes narratives of *both* scientific legitimacy and local authenticity. Tourists turn to archaeologists to understand the ancient, pre-Columbian city, to anthropologists to understand the local people from whom they purchase souvenirs, to local religious specialists to lead them in religious rituals and spiritual meditations, and to tour books and guides to show them the most important parts of the places they visit. Archaeologists turn to local residents to help conduct the physical process of excavation and the intellectual process of interpreting what they find.

Archaeological excavations are important to the local economy both directly, as a source of paid employment, and indirectly, as locals hope that new findings and restorations will attract more visitors. The interest Tiwanakeños have in attracting tourists is not solely economic. They want visitors to buy souvenirs and meals, but they also want them to recognize the importance of the archaeological site. Tourists are an economic resource, but their presence also visibly demonstrates Tiwanaku's national and global importance. Bolivians see Tiwanaku as the pre-Columbian root of their nation, but its role in global history is confirmed by those who are willing to travel long distances to see it. The time and money tourists invest in their travels lends prestige to Tiwanaku, situating it in a narrative that stretches beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. Tourists connect Tiwanaku to others places that, according to the narrative of global tourism, fit into similar categories: Machu Picchu, Chichén Itzá, Angkor Wat, and Tibet,

among others. The claims of Tiwanakeños made to state and international resources to promote, excavate, and conserve the archaeological site was justified by the constant flow of visitors that manifested its global importance.

Although Tiwanaku is unique, it is also one of many archaeological sites that attract tourists worldwide. Tourism as a social structure is one form of capitalism, and cannot be considered separately from the economic and social forms that system produces (e.g. MacCannell 1976). Although humans traveled for leisure long before capitalism became the dominant world system, contemporary tourism is inseparable from the economic structures that permit and promote it.

It is *de rigueur* to point out that neither capitalism nor globalization is new in the New World. Since 1492 the western hemisphere has been tied to the global economy through human migrations, raw materials, cash crops, and plantation economies (e.g. Mintz 1985). Bolivia has long been integrated into the periphery of this world system. The wealth produced in Bolivia did not translate into better standards of living for the majority of people who lived there, nor did the importance of these materials to global capitalism translate into political power for the Bolivian nation-state. Poverty in Bolivia is not the result of exclusion from global capitalism, but from its long relationship with this economic system. Tourism is in many ways another expression of this world system.

International groups such as the U.N.'s World Tourism Organization explicitly see tourism as one method of "poverty alleviation" a topic on which they have published several books. Despite such optimism, however, aggregate flows of tourists do not transcend economic and political boundaries. Instead, their movements across the global landscape – and the money they spend within these networks – reinscribe those

boundaries. Such trends can be seen in the quantities of money spent by wealthy nations' residents while abroad; they spend far more while visiting other wealthy nations than they do when visiting poorer places (in relation to Peru, see Flores Ochoa 1996; World Tourism Organization 1995:50-60). Wolf might call this mapping of the tourist industry part of the "structural power" of the capitalist system to "shape the social field of action in such a way as to render some kinds of behavior possible, while making others less possible" (2001:385). Tourism offers limited possibilities to transcend the structural inequalities of global capitalism. Although this sometimes happens on the most local level, this has not been the case in Tiahuanacu.

But despite its importance as an archaeological site, Tiwanaku is not a major world tourist attraction in terms of the numbers of visitors it attracts, or the amount of money it generates. Although Tiwanaku is Bolivia's most important archaeological site, most visited tourist attraction, and a national symbol, one would probably not have guessed that entering the Tiahuanacu's village plaza in 2002. Anyone visiting after five in the evening might have wondered at choosing this place for a study of tourism. No tourist-oriented restaurants opened for dinner. The two hotels in the village during my main fieldwork (2002-2004) had no more than a few quiet guests and were often empty. No offices advertised tours, guides or attractions. The artisans who sold souvenirs outside Tiahuanacu's archaeological site – the area's only attraction – went home after the last tourist left, packing up their wares while the buses pulled away. Walking outside the fenced archaeological site after dark – especially on moonless nights broken only by occasional glaring light bulbs – one could see every star and imagine the carved humanesque monoliths meeting for their own unobserved conversations, as Tiwanakeños

claimed they did. This situation was a reflection of the structural marginality of the place. Touristic infrastructure such as hotels and restaurants were located largely in nearby La Paz, and the vast majority of visitors to Tiwanaku returned there for the evening.

Many who visited Tiahuanacu assumed that given the apparent lack of touristic infrastructure, this must be a relatively new addition to touristic circuits. But Tiwanaku has been visited since it was built, and its history reflects a long-standing involvement with these flows. The ideal, hypothetical patterns imagined by some tourism researchers for tourist attractions presume that these spaces move through evolutionary stages that draw increasing numbers of visitors and link them ever more tightly to capitalist networks and money-based economies. Tiwanaku does not follow this pattern. Tiwanaku's marginal position with respect to global flows of tourists in the Andes is not the result of it being a recently discovered attraction. On the contrary, Tiwanaku is fully integrated into touristic networks as a peripheral tourist site. This has implications for how tourism is integrated into the local economy. The area had not developed the touristic infrastructure some might expect from a long-term engagement with the industry (although there were signs that this process might have been starting by 2007, when there was a construction boom underway; the long-term impacts of this influx of capital remain to be seen). Local residents saw tourism as only one part of a diverse local economy. Despite a long history of visitors, Tiwanaku's tourism economy was both secondary and complementary to the agricultural economy on the household level.

Tiwanaku was doubly marginalized from touristic flows. Bolivia as a nation was on the periphery of global tourism, receiving only a small share of foreign tourists and their receipts. Secondly, within the Bolivian tourism economy Tiwanaku was further marginalized as a one-day side-trip from the capital city of La Paz. The paving of the highway between La Paz and Tiahuanacu in the mid-1990s brought more absolute numbers of visitors, but further concentrated the money they spent in the hands of tour agencies in La Paz. When Tiahuanacu was four hours over a dirt road from the capital, most visitors stayed overnight. Now, Tiahuanacu is a pleasant two-hour daytrip from the center of La Paz on a well-maintained road. As a consequence, very few tourists now stay overnight in Tiahuanacu, and all their needs can be met through a day-long package tour. Since overnight stays greatly increase the amount of money spent in tourist locations, the transformation of Tiwanaku into a day-trip was seen by many locals as detrimental to the local touristic economy.

The inherent inequalities in this situation, especially between Bolivians and international tourists, were clear even in local definitions of such seemingly obvious terms as *turista* (tourist). In Bolivia, *turistas* was a category that did not include all visitors to Tiwanaku, but specifically referred to foreigners. By virtue of being foreigners in Bolivia, *turistas* were also, by definition and of necessity, relatively wealthy. The term was considered by Tiwanakeños as somewhat interchangeable with the term *gringo*, which referred specifically to white or pale-skinned people of any nationality. The identification of *turistas* as specifically wealthy white foreigners pointed to the unequal economic relationship between North Atlantic societies, especially the United States and Europe, and Bolivia as one of the poorest nations in the western hemisphere. It is also

important to note that unlike much of the literature on tourism, Tiwanakeños defined *turistas* not by their personal motivations, but by their place in an international class structure that allowed for their participation in a tourist-oriented network of services. In contrast to literature in the anthropology of tourism that attempts universal definitions for terms such as tourist, I argue for an investigation of local definitions that reveal the structures of interaction that pre-determine “host and guest” encounters.

Similarly, rather than assuming the arrival of tourists reflects the pre-existing importance of the site, I see tourism, economic networks, and local politics as constantly interacting and mutually influencing each other. While individual tourists may not interact directly with archaeologists, *Aymarista* politicians, or urban Aymara Solstice pilgrims, the meanings that these groups produce are never wholly independent nor isolated from each other. Those meanings are generated within a larger context of global capitalism that prestructures the forms that touristic and other meaning-making encounters take on the ground.

Touristic networks at Tiwanaku also involve several non-human actors, in the Latourian sense. Two of these are recognized by Tiwanakeños as animate participants in tourism. Far from being an inert relic of the past, the archaeological site is an *apu*, an animate actor. At night the stone monoliths are capable of walking, dancing, talking, and making humans fall ill. Similarly, money – the material object that most directly ties touristic networks together – is also locally seen as an actor. Far from a neutral symbol of value, Tiwanakeños see money as having a soul (*animo* or *ajayu*). The ability of physical bills to translate into value can be lost with its soul, leading to money slipping



through one's fingers – a very real experience for those working on the margins of the capitalist system.

The archaeological site is also an actor in the sense that it is a sacred space that structures the travel and experiences of those who come to see it. I examine the most obvious example of this, the contemporary Winter Solstice celebrations that are held annually on June 21 since the late 1970s. The Solstice is Tiahuanacu's largest public event. The religious ceremony held in the archaeological site at dawn is performed by local indigenous leaders (*mallkus*) and Aymara religious specialists (*amautas*). It is attended almost exclusively by Bolivians from the cities of La Paz and El Alto who consider themselves to be of Aymara descent. This ceremony is a public affirmation of the Bolivian nation as Aymara, which is itself a contested claim. While the Aymara are the majority in the department of La Paz (where both Tiahuanacu and the city of La Paz are located), they are a sizeable minority in Bolivia and concentrated in the highlands of a nation divided by regionalist politics.

The ritual of the Solstice also both highlights the increasing divisions between rural and urban Aymara, while ritually uniting them into a single group that can act politically at the level of national politics. This is particularly salient in Bolivia today, where most people who self-identify as Aymara now live in urban areas, yet the “ideal type” for Aymara culture remains rural. Solstice rituals invoke an Aymara “culture” grounded in agricultural lifestyles and pre-Columbian rituals. The Solstice celebration maintains distinctions – and physical boundaries – between Aymara rural leaders and the urban Aymara who come to see them. In Bolivia politics, where rural/urban divisions are real yet porous, these divisions are sometimes overcome in order to achieve political

action at the level of “the Aymara” – such as during the *Guerra de Gas* in 2003 and the 2006 election of President Evo Morales, Bolivia’s first Aymara president. The Solstice serves as a nexus that both divides and links rural and urban Aymara in ways that parallel larger political processes.

Having established the importance of the Solstice in contemporary Bolivia, I then consider to the historical networks that made this ritual meaningful. Such meanings are intimately linked to those created by both Tiwanakeños and multiple groups of visitors, including pilgrims, conquistadores, commercial travelers (via railroad and later the Pan-American highway), national officials, and domestic visitors and international tourists. From foreign travel writers’ accounts, it is clear that Tiwanakeños have been regularly involved with the tourism industry since at least the 1900s. No one living in Tiahuanacu now can personally remember a time when local residents were not involved in selling food and souvenirs to visitors, or when Tiwanakeños were not involved in archaeological excavations. Thus tourism is not something new or separate from daily life in Tiahuanacu, but rather integral to local experience.

The production of archaeological knowledge about the archaeological site as a pre-Columbian city and empire is intimately connected to both touristic and local understandings of that space. Indigenista Austrian-born archaeologist Arthur Posnansky’s first Equinox celebration in 1930 was celebrated in the archaeological site, and drew on his ideas about pre-Columbian religious practice. This was fundamentally an exclusionary celebration of elite urban gentlemen that drew on a glorious Inca/Aymara past while excluding contemporary Aymara residents of the area. Posnansky believed that all pre-Columbian American civilizations had their roots in Tiwanaku (the age of

which he seriously overestimated), and thus the Equinox celebrated the centrality of Bolivia (as heir to Tiwanaku) to the continent (as heirs to the Maya, Aztecs, and Inca). By the late 1970s, however, the Equinox had not only been largely replaced by the Solstice. Its celebration became an act of resistance against the state by politically active subaltern *Aymaristas*, and later a public celebration of the symbolic takeover of the state by largely urban Aymara. These elements remain in tension with each other during the Solstice. Participants actively engage with conflicting conceptions of nationalism, Aymaraness, and political hopes for a state truly inclusive of indigenous actors.

Thus Tiwanaku is both a Bolivian site and an Aymara site. These somewhat conflicting narratives were highlighted during the *intervención* of 2000, when local authorities took over management of the archaeological site. This was an entirely local political action that included the Tiahuanacu Municipal government, the *Central Agraria* (indigenous leaders of the rural communities of the municipality) and the *Junta de Vecinos* (the elected leadership of the village). In the larger context of Bolivia's *Ley de Participación Popular* (Law of Popular Participation), which had already decentralized many budgetary and other decisions to the local level, Tiwanakeños felt that they should be given full control over the income that the archaeological site produced, and the hiring decisions that provided many of the few wage-labor positions in the municipality.

The resulting negotiations with the national Vice-ministry of Culture gave control of the archaeological site's revenue and jobs to a committee with six institutional members, three local (listed above) and three national. Nevertheless, internal divisions, especially between the *Mallku Central* and the *Junta de Vecinos*, raised questions about who had legitimate claims to the archaeological site and its income. Hiring and budget

were left largely in the hands of the Municipal government and the *Central*. Meanwhile, the *Junta de Vecinos* was marginalized from decision-making in part because of their position as less-indigenous (albeit not not-indigenous) than more-rural (and more numerous) residents of the agricultural *comunidades* represented by the *Central*. Tiwanakeños, rural and urban, expressed their claims over the archaeological site in multiple and overlapping ways, through temporal connections to its builders (as their Aymara descendents) or through spatial connections (as living near to the site, and therefore having personal experience with it as animate). In these discussions, the archaeological site was both the locus of knowledge-production, and as an actor who could interact directly with Tiwanakeños.

I then consider the daily experience that Tiwanakeños have of making a living on the peripheries of touristic networks, in both the contexts of local politics and global economic structures. Tourist income was fickle, subject to sudden declines as blockades stopped tourist traffic, international media reported on political instability, or the state put new restrictions on travelers. On the other extreme, events such as the June Solstice flooded the small village with thousands of visitors, and any day of the year large tour groups could appear with little warning. In short, tourism could provide welcome windfalls, but could not be relied on to provide steady income. For most Tiwanakeños involved in tourism, these activities were seasonal and inconsistent sources of income largely dependent on factors outside their control.

To deal with this situation, local political systems encouraged maintaining mixed household economies where cash from tourism, other forms of marketing, agriculture, livestock, and temporary wage-labor all played a part. Artisan vendors, tour guides, and

museum guards were subject to local political systems that rotated work or access to tourists-as-resource. Such systems, although they have Andean antecedents, are not merely holdovers from the past; these systems were actually reinforced and expanded with increasing local control of the archaeological site after the *intervención* of 2000. Such systems not only distributed touristic wealth more widely, but also ensured that few were able to give up other sources of income (monetary or otherwise) altogether. No one could afford to completely abandon resources gained from agricultural crops, livestock, or other activities in order to work in tourism. Tourist-oriented work was usually temporary (such as working as a tour guide or museum guard) or had an extremely low profit margin (such as selling souvenirs).

Despite this, some artisans managed to accumulate capital, which was often invested into the education of their children. Most hoped their offspring would become educated, urban professionals – perhaps even tour guides – and, by implication, leave the rural economy altogether. But despite their successes, artisans did not acquire the capital necessary to participate in the hotel construction boom I witnessed in 2007; that capital came from Tiwanakeños who had left Tiahuanacu and earned capital outside the village, and were returning to invest in what they hoped would become a lucrative new industry. Few of these returning migrants had experience working in tourism before.

Given that tourism was locally important but not necessarily the primary economic resource for most Tiwanakeño households, I explored the goods, people, and information that converged in Tiahuanacu's souvenir market. Souvenirs appeared in discrete “quantum” locations (including La Paz, Desaguadero, and Tiahuanacu) where sales were made to intermediaries or directly to tourists. These locations were connected

through the physical movement of the largely women artisan/vendors. Artisans made souvenirs themselves from locally collected clay, learning techniques from family members and friends. They also resold souvenirs purchased from household members, kin, and *caseras* (regular suppliers) who came from La Paz, nearby Jesús de Machaca, and as far away as Cuzco, Peru. Tiahuanacu's market women sold not only to tourists but also to vendors in La Paz, especially in the city tourist district. Thus the artisans were part of complicated networks of production, markets, and knowledge.

I then consider a case-study highlighting the tensions between Tiwanakeños' involvement in tourism as one part of mixed household economies, and modernizing visions of entrepreneurial touristic markets. In 2002 a Bolivian NGO built permanent market kiosks for the artisans who made, bought, and sold souvenirs outside the archaeological site. This project disrupted the artisans' elegant system of rotating portable tables and introduced a sense of private, alienable property. Whereas previously artisans' tables regularly rotated to allow each vendor more equal access to the primary resource of the market – direct line of sight to tourists – the permanence of the kiosks placed some vendors behind others, literally hiding them from the “tourist gaze.” For tourism experts and national officials, the kiosks were seen as a rational, modernist improvement for the “disorganized” artisans. The artisans, however, recognized the kiosks as imposing a hierarchical space that would favor some artisans at the expense of others. In fact, a similar project built on the other side of the archaeological site two decades before had been quickly abandoned by the artisans for similar reasons. While vendors in the market were never completely equal, this was a level of inequality that they were largely uncomfortable with.

The artisans resisted using the kiosks for many months before local political pressure finally convinced them to use them. The discussions, arguments, and political machinations surrounding the kiosk conflicts brought into question how a tourist economy in Tiahuanacu should work, and which local authorities could demand compliance from the artisans and control the physical layout of the market. These struggles highlighted the artisans double roles as market vendors and the public face (and not coincidentally, a female Aymara face) of an empty archaeological site.

I conclude this dissertation by considering the tourism industry's project to erase conflictive histories that are perceived as being bad for business. By looking at the public policy movement towards "nation branding" (including in Bolivia), I consider how the tourism industry is part of larger political projects that actively engage in promoting specific histories and erase the local politics of indigenous peoples. Images of the timeless Aymara are threatened by struggles of the real Aymara for political recognition and economic advancement, and thus such conflicts are often written out of touristic narratives.

History-hiding is always the flipside of history-making, and it is not only national tourism promoters who engage in this. Political acts such as the inauguration of President Evo Morales, Bolivia's first Aymara president in 2006 also involve erasures of history. There, the Pre-Columbian Aymara past was invoked to legitimate the Bolivian political present. Tiwanakeños are also aware that the perception of conflict can be bad for business, especially in contexts where tourists quickly avoid places that are already seen to be potentially "dangerous." Tiwanakeños strategically invoked their own

timelessness and occasionally obscured even history-in-the-making (such as the 2000 *intervención*) from the “tourist gaze.”

In such contexts, claims to timelessness – to an unchanging Andean existence – are claims to political power in their own right. Strategically silencing one’s own history and political participation may become, ironically, one road to greater political power. This is where the dichotomy of “hosts and guests,” which I brought into question earlier, breaks down. Tiwanakeños are always from a touristic site, one with resonances on multiple levels. Their history-in-the-making and their active political engagements are clearly interwoven with all levels of meaning-making around the archaeological site.