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## The Shifting Phases of a Commodity: Textiles and Ethnic Tourism on a Lake Titicaca Island

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# The Shifting Phases of a Commodity: Textiles and Ethnic Tourism on a Lake Titicaca Island

## Abstract

The case study of the island of Taquile in the Peruvian part of Lake Titicaca will be used to explore how textiles function as intermediaries for social interactions and change and how they respond to demands from ethnic tourism. By using theories of material culture, specifically the analytical approach of "the biography", I aim to shed light on the process by which some textiles in Taquile have passed from being the person's "second skin" to a commodity responding to ethnic tourism. However, such a process, rather than being contradictory, expresses the capacity of Taquilean culture to adapt the local values to a monetary economy. Taquilean culture is also an agent in these encounters with tourism, impeding the complete commoditization of the textiles.

## Keywords

Material culture, Textiles, Ethnic tourism, Commodity, Taquile, Lake Titicaca, Andes, Peru

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## The Shifting Phases of a Commodity: Textiles and Ethnic Tourism on a Lake Titicaca Island

Daniel Escobar López

### Introduction

I am observing a *chuspa*<sup>1</sup> and a *chullo*,<sup>2</sup> which I have received as a present from my *compadre* during my fieldwork in Peru and a belt<sup>3</sup>, which I bought in the same place. On the Internet and in books, there are many tourists commenting on the extraordinary textiles made on the island of Taquile, which are bought at prices relatively higher than other handicrafts in Peru. It is no coincidence that in 2005 UNESCO recognized Lake Titicaca as a world heritage site. How did these textiles gain their world-wide fame and how did they go from having a symbolic/cultural value to adhering an economic value, through monetary interchange? In the present essay, I will examine how textiles<sup>4</sup> are connected with the different spheres of the Taquilean society and how textiles came to be commercialized for tourism and, more specifically, how a particular textile called a *calendar belt* has emerged as a commodity.

First, I will present some background about general aspects of the Taquile island and how Taquileans struggling to recover their land happen to be connected with tourism. I will also briefly describe the production of textiles in the Andes in general and on the island in particular. I will finish the background section by defining ethnic tourism, and the island's relationship with it. My analysis and supporting

ethnographic data is divided into five parts. The first part is called Changeable Textiles: The Biography of a Commodity, wherein I define the concept of commodity and present the analytical and conceptual tool of the biography of the textiles. In the second part, called First Use: Textiles as a Second Skin, I show how textiles and clothing are inseparable from the person. In the third part, called Second Use: Losing the Skin?, I discuss the process by which the clothes used by Taquileans are commoditized. The fourth part is called Non-Usage: Calendar Belt. In this section, I analyze a specific commodity that, unlike other textiles, is practically never worn by Taquileans and is fabricated just for sale to tourists. In the last part, called Beyond the Island: Ethnic Tourism and Money, I return to discuss ethnic tourism and its links to material culture commerce. I finish this part by discussing in brief the implication of money on the island. Finally, I wrap up with Conclusions.

The ethnographic information used in this article was collected during fieldwork between January and June 2008 and in March 2009.

### Background

The island of Taquile is located at 3830 - 4010 meters above sea level in southern Peru on the shores of the Titicaca Lake, the highest navigable lake in the world (Echeandia 1982). Taquile is the second biggest island on the Peruvian side and despite being located in a predominantly Aymara-speaking region, its habitants use Quechua as their mother tongue (Zorn 2004). The Quechua origins of this island go back to Inca times, although information about Taquile during this period is very limited. There is much more information after the arrival of the Spanish conquerors to the region of Collao in 1533 when the island became property of the King of Spain

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<sup>1</sup> A small bag woven by hand and used on the island to carry coca leaves.

<sup>2</sup> A knitted hat with ear-flaps.

<sup>3</sup> The real name in Quechua is *chumpi*, or *fajas* in Spanish, a belt woven by hand.

<sup>4</sup> From here on, I use the word textiles to refer principally to *chuspas*, *chullos* and belts.

(Matos Mar 1957). During most of the colonial Spanish period and up to around the middle of the twentieth century, Taquileans were not the owners of the land where they resided. They lived on the island as squatters. As a consequence, to be able to live on the island, Taquileans were forced into labor for the different owners of the island (Spanish people and their decedents) who generally did not live on the island (Matos Mar 1957). However, a turning point, still discussed by modern Taquileans, occurred in the twenties. At that time, when the island still housed a state prison, Sanchez Cerro, one of the prisoners and the future president of Peru (1930-31), promised his Taquilean friend Prudencio Huatta to grant Taquileans property title for their lands (Matos Mar 1957; Nonis 1993). After struggling through a long judicial process, in 1942, Taquileans began to acquire property title to their lands, and by the late sixties the whole island was in the hands of Taquileans (Matos Mar 1957). This historic account of the recovery of their lands is offered by different authors and the Taquileans as a demonstration of the high level of organization in Taquilean society (Nonis 1993). Such organization not only distinguishes them from other communities on the lake, but also explains the success of the Taquileans in their encounters with tourism since the seventies.

As Zorn (2004) shows, Taquile is famous for having successfully adopted tourism with a collective management perspective. Thus, at least during the first years of tourism, Taquileans were successful in equally distributing the benefits of tourism (such as motor boat transportation, family housing and profits from the selling

of handicrafts) among each other.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Taquile is promoted as an example of community-controlled tourism and participative development.

Taquile has also gained a reputation for producing some of the most elaborate textiles in the world, turning the island into a principal Peruvian tourist attraction with the help of the introduction of motor boats. More concretely, from the first mention of this area in a 1976 guidebook, a process began of shifting from a subsistence agricultural economy to a market economy based on tourism (Zorn 2004). From that moment onwards, the principal economic activity on the island has been tourism. The island receives approximately fifty thousand visitors per year (Bardales 2004), an impressive number considering that the number of the inhabitants on the island is just two thousand people.

The production of textiles in the Andes has a history of more than 4500 years (Prochaska 1988). During the Inca Empire, for instance, textiles had an important political role. According to Rostworowski (2001), before conquering a place, the Inca offered gifts including textiles, to the potential new subjects of the empire. If the gift was accepted, it meant the acceptance of the rules of the Inca, and if not, it was a declaration of war. In addition, subjects to

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<sup>5</sup> As Zorn (2004) describes, in the beginning Taquileans had a monopoly over transportation to the island. However, after passage of an anti-trust law in the early nineties during the dictatorship of Fujimori, travel agencies and urban businessmen began to compete in transporting tourists to the island. As a consequence, both tourists and profits have escaped Taquilean hands, since new travel agencies prefer to have tourists stay on the nearby island Amantani where costs for food and accommodation are cheaper. Nowadays, most of the tourists stay only three or four hours on Taquile to visit, buy textiles and have lunch.

the empire paid taxes in the form of, among other things, textiles, which the Inca stored in strategic places throughout their territory. Since these stored textiles had to be renewed every year, the production of textiles was immense throughout most of the Incan empire (Rostworowski 2001), including the region of Collao where Lake Titicaca is located. Even though the production of textiles varied during colonial rule, its importance was still significant. That is why in the Andean societies “perhaps the most important of all industries is weaving” (Mishkin 1946, in Prochaska 1988:29).

Although there is not much information about textiles on the island during the colonial period, in middle of the last century, Matos Mar (1959) observed that “all their clothing is created by them [Taquileans] using the technique of spinning” (214, my translation). Importantly, after the 1781-82 rebellion of the native leader and Inca descendant Tupac Amaru II against the Spanish colony (Bar 1989), the wearing of Incan clothing was prohibited. Thus, the colony tried to force natives to wear Spanish peasant clothes (Prochaska 1988). Despite the fact that Taquilean clothes are based on Spanish peasant clothes, non-Hispanic elements are still present, such as the designs and form of production. In addition, Spanish clothes were assimilated into Taquilean culture. As Zorn (2004) says: “variations of clothing from Spain – pants, vests, jackets, shirts, and skirts – became part of ‘native’ ethnic dress” (53).

However, as we will see, tourism in the twentieth century has presented a new context for textiles on this Andean island. This new economic activity has affected the meanings and use of textiles, as will be explained later on. Moreover, tourism has helped to (re)create new textiles, such as the calendar belt, production of which is exclusively for the tourist market. Although

some islanders began to interchange their textiles for goods and money on the Aymaran island of Uros by the early 60’s (motivated by state politics), the turning point came in 1975 when an American volunteer of the Red Cross (INC 2006) encouraged the islanders to sell their textiles in Cusco, the top tourist site of Peru. Consequently, according to Zorn (2004), three Taquileans (described in this article as pioneers) initiated the gathering of textiles from the inhabitants to sell in Cusco. Later, when they won a handicraft competition, they expanded their selling activities to other Peruvian cities. Such exposition and sale of textiles combined with the introduction of motor boats, reducing travel times between Taquile and the mainland port of Puno from approximately fifteen to five<sup>6</sup> hours (Matos Mar 1957), motivated tourists to visit the island. As Echeandia (1982) asserts, tourists came to the island to buy everything the Taquileans wore: “...vests, *chullos*, shirts, pants, handbags, etc., which contributed to an increase in their production” (12, my translation). By the eighties and nineties, the textiles acquired international recognition when some Taquileans (including the three pioneers) travelled to Europe and the United States to participate in different handicraft expositions (Zorn 2004).

As a consequence, the textiles in this new context entered a process of commoditization, becoming a principal source of income. Before going deeper into the commoditization of textiles in the context of tourism, for clarity’s sake I will briefly define ethnic tourism.

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<sup>6</sup> Now with faster motors, travel from Puno to Taquile through Lake Titicaca takes just three or four hours. There are even faster motor boats managed by travel agencies that can make the trip in just a couple of hours.



Figure 1: Encounters between tourists and Taquileans.

### *The Context: Ethnic Tourism*

As we have seen, current Taquilean society cannot be understood without taking into account the tourism phenomena in general and ethnic tourism in particular, both of which represent the context in which Taquileans interact with each other and with foreigners (Fig. 1). In a meeting of tourism researchers at the University of Washington in 1991, ethnic tourism was defined as “mass recreational nomadism undertaken in foreign parts in quest of the exotic,” in which the principal attraction is the cultural exoticism of the local population and its artifacts (Van den Berghe and Keys 1984:344). By artifacts, the authors mean architecture, music, clothing, dance, theater, visual arts and so on. The search for the exotic is also implicit in Cohen’s (2004) definition of the tourist as: “a voluntary, temporary traveler, travelling in the expectation of pleasure from **the novelty and change experienced** on a relatively

long and nonrecurring round trip” (23, my emphasis).

The search for the exotic is related to authenticity; in ethnic tourism the natives have the role of maintaining and representing the image of the exotic so as to transmit to the tourists an authentic experience. As this advertisement of a travel agency illustrates:

Renowned for their **beautiful textiles**, these people have retained traditions that are centuries old. A Taquile Island tour is like **stepping back in time**, to the peaceful, simple living of the **original** Peruvian people. (Overland Adventure Travel 2008, my emphasis).

This promotion of the island corresponds with the concept of historical-cultural authenticity elaborated by Bigenho (2002). This kind of authenticity looks for a mythical past, which is imagined to be still present in the place visited.

In the case of Taquile, as we have seen, this historical-cultural authenticity is based on the idea that Taquile has preserved Incan elements, like the language, organization and moral code. For instance, when asking a Taquilean about the rules on the island, he replies with the famous Incan moral code: *ama Suwa* (do not steal), *ama llulla* (do not lie) and *ama qella* (do not be lazy).

The search for authenticity has not only affected ideological norms, but also concrete actions. Thus, the communal assembly (the principal institution of decision-making on the island) discusses, among other things, restrictions on the selling of handicrafts. For instance, the authorities of the assembly some years ago prohibited the selling of *shakiras* (a very popular bracelet in other touristic places) and other atypical handicrafts since these

foreign handicrafts “corrupted” the authenticity of the Taquilean handicrafts for which Taquile was famous worldwide (Taquilean male authority, mid-forties. 2009). Taquileans are also proud of using pre-Hispanic techniques that go back to Collas, Pukaras and above all, the Inca period.

Having discussed the background on how Taquilean textiles entered into market transactions and underwent the process of commoditization, I will now define a commodity and explain the significance of the biography of a commodity.

#### *Changeable Textiles: The Biography of a Commodity*

For Kopytoff (1986), a commodity is “a thing that has use value” (68) and, thus, is amenable to exchange for a counterpart of equivalent value, which is also a commodity at the moment of transaction. In other words, a thing is (or becomes) a commodity when it has the ability to be concretely valued and exchanged for another thing that has an equivalent value. Furthermore, the transaction of commodities can be direct or indirect, in exchange for currency, for example. So, generally speaking, everything that is exchanged for money is a commodity. Moreover, the difference between a gift and a commodity is the quality of the latter of being terminal. A gift opens up an almost endless circuit of exchange because of the obligation to receive and the obligation to return the gift with another gift (Mauss 1967 [1923]). A gift, in addition, opens or reinforces a relationship between the donor and receiver that endures beyond the moment of transaction. For instance, in the aforementioned example from Incan times, the gift – accepted or not – given away by the Inca opened up between the sovereign and the subject their future relationship: obedience or war. In Taquile, the establishment of a relationship of

*compadrazgo* (ritual co-parenthood), which ideally lasts a lifetime, is established through giving away textiles and other goods.

A commodity, on the contrary, closes off the exchange (Kopytoff 1986). Once a textile is bought, the buyer and the seller end the transaction without having to repeat the exchange again, nor necessarily create a social relation, as in the case of a gift. The tourists who buy the textile, or the Taquilean who sells it, return home without having to see and think about the seller or buyer ever again.

Of course, commodities can be gifts as well, but what determines whether something is a commodity or a gift is the finality of the exchange. As a rule, a commodity aims to appropriate the value of its counterpart in the transaction – such as money. A gift, on the other hand, aims to enter into a circuit of social relations that go beyond the mere appropriation of the counterpart, like establishing *compadrazgo*. In addition, according to Kopytoff (1986), since exchange is a universal human phenomenon, commoditization is also a “universal cultural phenomena” (68). The difference among societies lies in their social systems, factors of commoditization, stabilization or not of the commodity, and principally the “cultural and ideological premises that suffuse its workings [of the commodity]” (Kopytoff 1986:68).

To understand commoditization, the same author proposes an analytical approach called *biography*, which implies treating things, in this case textiles, as persons formed in a specific culture with a specific life history, i.e. a biography of things. More concretely, a biography approach asks questions “similar to those one asks people” (Kopytoff 1986:66): What is the social position and status of the thing in a specific culture and time? How were they made and who made them? “What has been its career

so far, and What do people consider to be an ideal career for such things?” (66) What periods or ages does a thing have, and what changes produce those ages? What are their cultural markers? When are they considered useless?

In the present essay, for space’s sake, I will mostly focus on the phases or ages of the textiles in Taquile. This entails that just as a biography of a person passes through different phases (e.g. birth, childhood, adolescence, and death) and identities (e.g. professional, political, psychological, familiar, and economical) in the course of his/her life, a thing also possesses, although not in the same manner, different ages and identities in the course of its life. Thus, the cultural biography of an object assumes that a thing or commodity, like a textile, can acquire different attached meanings and uses

in different contexts and moments. With this theoretical framework, I will explain the different phases textiles on the island pass through, from being a “second skin” to becoming a commodity.

#### *First Use: Textiles as a Second Skin*

The aforementioned importance of Taquilean textiles in the creation of tourism on the island is not by chance. Textiles in Taquile, as in the Andes as a whole, are connected with the person’s inner self, even before she/he is born. When a mother is about to give birth, she is wrapped by a large, wide belt, and then the child is completely enveloped using different textiles (Prochaska 1988; INC 2006). Later on, the children play with toy-sized tools imitating the working tools of their parents and adults for working in the field and –



Figure 2: Taquilean wedding with the bridal couple at the center and the godparents at their side.



especially for the girls – weaving. However, it is in the rites of passage that the importance of the textiles is most clear, the prime example being the wedding. In each of the four weddings I attended in 2008, I observed the same clothing patterns. The bride must wear at least twenty-five *polleras* (skirts) of different colors (symbolizing a young flower), different sizes of textiles (like blankets) and a wide belt. Men's bodies are covered by long textiles (like ponchos). The clothes covering their bodies are used in such quantity and are so tightly tied that the bridal couples cannot do anything by themselves: their godparents and parents help them to eat, drink and move (Fig.2). In addition, they must “keep serious, still and just as rigid as the textiles that are covering their bodies” (male Taquilean, early twenties).

Furthermore, for different ceremonies and *fiestas*, women ought to weave different textiles. For instance, in carnivals their husbands wear more than twenty-five *chuspas* in order to show, among other things, their qualities as good weavers, symbolizing abundance. Textiles are also present at death when the deceased is buried with a black ribbon, and her/his clothes must be washed and/or burned. If somebody touches their clothes, it is the same as touching the deceased (Prochaska 1988). As we can see, textiles are inseparable from the body and mark every phase of a person's life: from one's birth to one's dead and passing through baptism and marriage.

Indeed, these descriptions show that textiles encompass all spheres of Taquilean society and illustrate the fact that the world of things or objects are essential in the formation and understanding of personal identities and societies (Tylley 2006). In other words, “material culture is inseparable from culture and human society” (Tylley 2006:61). As Miller (2005) asserts, there is

no separation between humanity and materiality. We become conscious of ourselves when we face material things that have been in the world since before we were born. As he says:

We cannot know who we are, or become what we are, except by looking in a material mirror, which is the historical world created by those who lived before us. This world confronts us as a material culture and continues to evolve through us (Miller 2005:8).

Anthropologists have observed the centrality of materiality in many societies. However, rather than returning to a material determinism, Miller underlines that subjects and objects create each other and “have mutual origin and mutual dependency” (Miller 2005:38). In this sense, objectification should not be understood as the dualistic separation between subject and object or people and objects. Objectification is a process of self-creation, of a mixture and alliance between subject and object. More concretely, for Miller (2005), objectification “creates our sense of ourselves as subjects and the institutions that constitute society but which are always appropriations of the materiality by which they are constituted” (37).

A clear example of this mutual relation between person and objects is clothing. As the same author (2005) asserts, clothing and person are inseparable since they are “part of the same process of objectification: the subject is the product of the same act of objectification that creates the clothing” (32). Hence, the clothes are neither the cover of the person and society, nor “necessarily a vicarious representative of society” (Miller 2005:32). In this sense, for the people in Taquile, clothes are not separate from the people who wear them.

The ability and qualities of a man, and especially of a woman, are judged based on the textiles they make and wear. Indeed, a woman who is a good weaver is highly valuable and considered a good wife. Moreover, these textiles also mark the gender, civil status and personal characteristic of their owners: while a white and red *chullo* is used by single men, a red, fully-colored one is worn by married men. A multi-color *chullo* is used only by (ex) authorities. These examples suggest that clothes determine the person and his or her position in society since clothes mark gender, age, status and personal skills, like being a good weaver. That is why clothes were called a “second skin” by O’ Hanlon (1992).

Just as there is not a complete body without a skin, there is not a complete person without clothing in Taquile. As an illustration, an adult male should wear the traditional Taquilean clothing used principally in ceremonies, rituals and encounters with tourists. These clothes consist basically of black trousers, a white woven skirt, a *chuspa* (handbag) to carry coca, a red *chullo* and a *faja fina* (fine belt). The so-called fine belt is probably the most important garment since it is a marker of both social status and functions as a diary of personal events: it registers the tastes and characteristics of its owner. The *faja*, apart from being very helpful to carry heavy things, also carries important designs and symbols related to agriculture in general (animals like a cow, or seasons of the year, etc.) and the person in particular (personal tastes like a special bird, or an event). Since women are the only ones who can weave *fajas*, a single man is considered incomplete: he lacks a woman and, thus, one of the most important markers of being Taquilean, the *faja*. Even though a widower still maintains the *fajas* his wife made, he cannot obtain new ones to inscribe the future events of his

life, and has fewer opportunities to sell *fajas*, hence, less economic income. Despite the fact that the *faja*, or rather the shortage of it, does not determine the widower or the single man, these persons and the *faja* are part of the same process of how Taquileans conceptualize a complete person in general, and a widower or single person in particular. Thus, we can say that Taquileans and their textiles as a whole are inseparable in considering the formation of the person, the Taquilean identity and the image of the authentic Taquilean promoted by ethnic tourism.

In addition, Miller (2005) notes that it is through consumption and exchange that people potentially make themselves. More precisely, things become part of ourselves through their “life cycles, in moments of exchange, appropriation and consumption” (Tilley 2006:60). As we have seen, it is not only of importance how the textiles in Taquile are produced, but also how they are consumed and interchanged in every sphere of society. For instance, textiles, as before mentioned, are given away as presents to a potential godfather/godmother or are interchanged for money in the handicraft shop. That is to say, a person becomes a godfather or godmother only through the mediation of things. Moreover, textiles are the mediums through which values, ideas and social distinctions of, for instance, religion, kinship or tourism “are constantly reproduced, and legitimized, or transformed”; that is to say that “personal, social and cultural identity is embodied in our persons and objectified in our things” (Tilley 2006:61).

There are plenty of examples of how textiles are presented in the different life cycles, helping to form new statuses and identities. Indeed, “the biographies of particular persons and particular things may be intertwined” (Tilley 2006:63), entailing, as mentioned before, that objectification is

tied up with people and things alike. This is illustrated by the fact that on the island people can recognize the weaver of a piece of textile just by seeing and touching it (especially the belts). This also implies a risk. As Gell (1998) points out, the images and indexes are not only an extension of a person, but above all part of him or her. That is why sorcery is produced when an index of a person is put in the milieu without control. Thus, when these textiles are interchanged in rituals or sold, the locals say “it’s by ‘X person’” (female Taquilean, late thirties). Textiles become the skin of people: in recognizing and touching the textile, the person who made it is also recognized and touched (judged). This also means that the person is distributed in the milieu, which also implies a cultural assessment of the quality of the weaver, implying also the risk of her own unique technique being copied.

As we have seen in this part, clothes become the second skin or a part of the person, although not permanently. The same *chullo* used in adolescence, the *chuspa* weaved in order to dance in a ceremony or that beloved fine belt used for many years can leave their content (their owner) and end up in the handicraft shop, being sold to tourists. In this light, how can we interpret the route of Taquilean textiles on their way to the handicraft shop?

### *Second Use: Losing the Skin?*

Within our theoretical framework and maintaining coherence with the biographical approach, I will go back to the textiles’ birth, or more precisely the moment of their production. According to the same islanders, before tourism, the textiles were mostly produced for their own use and for specific ceremonies, seldom interchanged for other products, and never for money. In addition, they did not spend so much of their time weaving since their principal activity was agriculture. However, since the

introduction of tourism, weaving textiles has become the main source of revenue on the island, thus, most of the islanders spend a great amount of time making textiles, especially women.

As indicated in the background section, the selling of textiles is a quite recent activity that has been encouraged even more by the increasing number of tourists to the island. That increase in demand for textiles has led to many Taquileans not only producing more textiles for the tourist market, but also selling the textiles they used to wear. Miller (1994), following Marx, pinpoints that in order to understand the process of commoditization, we should concentrate first on the physical production of commodities. In such a process, the characteristic of the commodity, or more concretely the capitalist system, implies that an object loses its use-value for a change-value. Furthermore, the people who produce the objects, in the process of commoditizing, lose the means of production. However, as Jones and Stallybrass (2001) remind us, “for Marx a commodity comes to life through the death of the object” (8). That means that the process of commoditization implied the detachment of an object or a thing from its social environment, with the cultural meaning being exchanged for money, for instance. Does it mean that a piece of clothing previously used by Taquileans, like a *faja*, loses all of its social implications, personal and cultural meaning, when sold to tourists? Does it mean that the market dispossesses Taquileans from their skin (clothing) for money?

At this point, the arguments put forward by Stallybrass (1998) in the article entitled *Marx’s Coat* can shed light on the process of commoditization. This author states that instead of only paying attention to production in factories, Marx should have written about the pawnshop because it,

rather than the factory, was the motor of capitalism. In the pawnshop, the value and meaning of personal possessions like clocks, rings, necklaces, clothes, etc. were detached from their possessors, thus, amenable to be exchanged. In that process, the owners' personal memories and their connection to their beloved objects were gone, since "the pawnbroker did not pay for personal or family memories" (Stallybrass 1998:196). A pawnbroker did not have any identification, or memory of the beloved possessions of the people who pawned. However, once they got the cash to pay back the pawnbrokers, their beloved possessions returned home, and with them, their memories – like a wedding ring, for instance.

We can make a similar analysis in this case study. Even though there are some personal textiles in Taquile that are less likely to be sold, like a fine belt, many textiles after having been worn for a while end up in the hands of tourists. However, all the symbolism and meaning of the textiles – as their second skins – are when sold to tourists transferred to and replaced by the new textiles produced by Taquileans. Textiles can be replaced by other ones: skin comes back! The return of the meanings and symbolism of the textiles can be a consequence of the process of the cultural adaptation of Taquileans to the context of tourism, as we will see.

Leaving production and *Marx's Coat*, I want to return to the biography of the textiles in Taquile and how they arrive at the handicraft shop to take part in a definite interchanging of hands, although with the promise of returning, to some extent, in the next textile woven by their former owners. Bohannan (1959) describes three separated spheres of exchange in the Tiv of Nigeria: subsistence, prestige and rights. Each of these spheres had their own logic and morality, although hierarchically ordered, where the first one (with its market

morality) was at the bottom. Furthermore, in non-monetary societies such as that of the Tiv, the introduction of money produces not only the dissemination of commoditization but also causes the borders of the aforementioned spheres of exchange to become blurred or merged (Bohannan 1959).

In the case of the island of Taquile, we can also find different spheres of exchange, including at least the three mentioned by Bohannan: money, prestige and rights. Indeed, not only are textiles present in the three spheres (textiles for selling, for showing status and by acquiring rights over women, for instance) but also, as we have seen, the same piece of textile can pass through the three spheres in different moments. In other words, rather than a merging of spheres there is a parallelism of spheres. By parallelism<sup>7</sup> I mean that each sphere maintains its own logic, being sometimes crossed by the same textile in different circumstances. That separation is a consequence of forces that constrain the process of extended commoditization. In this sense, Kopytoff (1986) asserts that the "counter drive" to this explosion of commoditizing is culture and the individual "with their drive to discriminate, classify, compare and sacralize" (87). That is to say that culture always (especially in short-scale societies) avoids the commoditization of certain objects and takes certain commodities out of the commodity domain. That is the case for instance of some textiles,

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<sup>7</sup> The concept of parallelism has been defined and developed by Flores Ochoa (1990, 1991), as well as used by Tamayo (1970). According to Flores Ochoa, modern Andean religion(s) cannot adequately be described by the concept of syncretism, as they operate parallel. This implies that Andean pre-Hispanic religions have maintained their ritual basis, sometimes borrowing and incorporating Catholic symbols in their existing rituals.

like *mantas* (blankets) used in weddings that resist being commoditized. Likewise, some islanders maintain their best *fajas finas* or *chullos* for their own use, in order to show prestige and status: “I will keep this *chullo* for myself, it is only for me” (male Taquilean, late thirties, 2008). That is to say that the culture (in its wider sense) in Taquile, still organizes, although to a lesser extent, the degree of the singularity of the textiles. However, what happens if the culture in itself acquires an exchange value, entering a process of commoditization such as in the case of ethnic tourism?

#### *Non-usage: Calendar Belt*

The boom of weaving and the demand of tourism have affected the production and design of textiles: “In the past it was not like this (like a current textile shown). There were few designs. It wasn’t like that in those days. Now it is better. [The islanders] are learning little by little” (male Taquilean pioneer, late fifties, 2008). For instance, now they are using less abstract figures and their designs are more concrete, with birds or other animals. The designs also possess more colors and some weavers are returning to the use of natural dyes. It is worth noting that such changes have been taking place very fast, responding to the demands of the market and also the creativity of the people. Thus, the innovations and changes in Taquilean textiles respond to both external and internal circumstances. On the one hand, the new context of selling textiles outside the communal association and the arrival of tourists to the island (especially in the form of ethnic tourism) have transformed textiles into one of the principal means of acquiring money, affecting their production (more designs, and colors), number (increase) and purpose (for selling). On the other hand, the Taquilean traditional culture and its weaving skills have produced not only new meanings

and uses for textiles, but have also invented new ones (Zorn 2004). In this sense, one strategy to acknowledge the turning point in Taquile is through the emergence and expansion of the handicraft shop on the island and the (re)creation of the calendar belt (*faja calendario*).

Despite the fact that Zorn (2004) has already asserted that the calendar belt was created during the eighties for the tourist market, as a commodity, I want to discuss here its birth and capacity of action. Different tourist agencies and some Internet sites hold that the maximum expression of the Taquilean textile is the so-called calendar belt: “It consisted of twelve different designs, one assigned to each of the twelve months of the year” (Prochaska 1988:55). That is to say, that in a belt there are at least twelve different drawings symbolizing agricultural activities or the principal event for each month of the year. As Echeandia (1982) describes:

The month of September is represented by the drawing of the *suyos* [the six geographical divisions, or neighborhoods of the island]. Three of them [*suyos*] are marked with circles, meaning that they are cultivated with potatoes, oca [*Oxalis tuberosa*] and barley” (80, my translation).

As we have seen, by the early eighties some commoners were already designing specific and recurrent signs in the textiles “that represent an agricultural calendar, and in this sense I will analyze a calendar created by a commoner from Taquile, based on these drawings” (Echeandia 1982:18, my translation, my emphasis).

It is important to notice that the meanings of these designs were used and

known only by a few people, as Echeandia (1982) concludes:

At the present time [1980-1982], as some Taquileans report, not everybody can interpret these signs, ‘they [the rest of Taquileans] do not have the education nor the knowledge.’ But everybody likes to adorn their textiles with these symbols” (84, my translation).

That these fixed designs represent the months of the year was known by few people in the early eighties, but is now known by most Taquileans. This can indicate two things: first, that the diffusion of the meanings of the signs has expanded to all Taquileans, as a consequence of tourism; second, that this fixation of signs and the representation of the twelve months was introduced by some people (perhaps those who could interpret these signs to Echeandia) at some point in the late seventies, generating a new kind of belt of the twelve months, based on traditional signs.

The second option seems to be the most likely according to what Prochaska

(1988) observed in 1981 and to Zorn (2004). Indeed, according to Prochaska (1988) there is a confusion of names since the so-called *calendar belt* (Fig.3) that is sold to tourists these days (which was once called an almanac belt, according to her) is just a new version of the old and “original” calendar belt which was used by Taquileans:

These terms would be reversed, since the calendar belt records events from the past, and the almanac belt has **general patterns** for each month of the year, no matter what year it represents. The almanac is a recent introduction and in 1981 I only saw a few designs actually woven, whereas in 1985 it was sold in the artisan shop at a higher price as a ‘calendar belt,’ **replacing** the previous type of calendar they had used” (55, my emphasis).

This paragraph gives us the exact moment in which a (re)created belt, (based on the “original” calendar belt) was introduced to the handicraft shop. Here, we can acknowledge the birth of a commodity. Moreover, in the past and with the calendar



Figure 3: The calendar belt surrounded by other belts in the handicraft shop of Taquile. Photo courtesy of Cecilia Byström.

belt, the signs were not fixed, since they depended on personal events. The current calendar belt, on the other hand, “has twelve **nonrepeating** images” (Zorn 2004:97, my emphasis). The new calendar belt represents the homogenization of designs, helping in that way its own commoditization.

The new commodity, once created, rapidly blurred its origins with those of the most traditional textiles, even as it becomes one of the symbols of Taquilean culture. According to Latour (2005), objects tend to be perceived as invisible, i.e. they appear to us as if they had no capacity for action. For people, things are just things. However, the capacity of an object to act is latent. Objects are just waiting for somebody or the proper moment to make themselves manifest. For example, a historian takes an old document from a library to make it tell us something. However, when the document is returned to the library, it does not mean [that it] stops acting, but that its “[...] mode of action is no longer visibly connected to the usual social ties [...]” (Latour 2005:80). Hence, the apparent inaction of an object is just momentary: the document not only produces other documents through the historian’s account, but can also be taken out again and again from the library by another historian, and, thus, talk again. It is in these moments, Latour (2005) suggests, when the objects manifest themselves and talk through people who serve as the mediators of the actions of the objects; in those moments we can acknowledge the capacity of action of the objects. But once humans become mediators of the objects the latter tend to enter a process of invisibilization and, so, disappear again.

Adopting Latour’s (2005) argument for our case of study, I would like to suggest that the new commodity of the calendar belt has manifested its capacity of action as well. From the moment when somebody on the island designed the calendar belt, (regardless

of whether this was encouraged by tourism demands, previous experiences while visiting museums and expositions worldwide, one’s own invention, or a combination of all these), the belt has made itself manifest by undertaking a process of invisibilizing its own origins, as it merged with the origins of the other traditional belts of the island, hence, turned into a supposedly authentic Taquilean garment. Once this new garment was created, the islanders and tourist guides became the mediators of it, who *made* it tell the tourists a particular story. With its invisibilization, the tourists have come to assume that this garment always existed on the island, just as did the other belts. At the time when the calendar belt was turned into Taquile’s most important handicraft, the information about its origins disappeared since “the greater the importance [of objects], the faster they disappear” (Latour 2005:80).

Thus, the name confusion and blurring of the calendar belt’s origins cannot merely be said to be the result of a market strategy carried out by people; it can also be attributed to the commodity’s own capacity of action, and constitutes as well a vital part of the process of commoditization. However, the commoditization and the changes in Taquile respond to external factors as well, such as tourism and the market economy.

### *Beyond the Island: Ethnic Tourism and Money*

In order to understand the Taquilean textiles and the calendar belt, we cannot stay isolated on the island. In reality, the island represents an “in between” case, in the words of Kopytoff (1986) since in spite of being a small-case society it has characteristics of a complex society as well: a monetarized, open market economy linked to global markets, etc. Moreover, as I have shown, for decades, the island has been

connected with the outside world through tourism. As Miller (2005) points out, “economy” has become the new arena for discussing materiality. Furthermore, for Miller, to understand the current world, it is essential to focus on consumption since it is an important medium in making oneself. In this sense, given that tourism is also a form of mass consumption, it enables discussions on materiality and the making of oneself as well.

The first arena to discuss materiality in touristic encounters takes us on a backwards trip of tourism: from the island to the tourist’s home. As MacCanell (1999) asserts, tourism represents a ritual of passage, where the people travel to the other’s world, in which she/he is transformed into a tourist. Later, back at home, she/he reinforces her/his selves through pictures, memories and, principally, objects (e.g. souvenirs). Even though textiles are not the anthropomorphized idols used in rituals in Africa (Gell 1998) and belong to the more mundane world, they are, for the tourist back home, the exotic other that are seen and serve as a mirror to produce awareness of the person’s subjectivity and to reinforce their cultural identity. As we can see, the textiles bought in Taquile can take on other meanings miles away from the island in the tourist’s house. The biography of the Taquilean textiles does not end in the artisanal shop.

A second touristic arena linked with materiality is the process of ethnic tourism and its immaterial form. According to Miller (2005), many religions in the world express the view that in order to be able to communicate with gods, or god, it is necessary to go beyond our bodies, the things we see, touch or smile at. In other words, to grasp the immaterial world (the sacred, ideas, truth, a deity, etc.) we have to transcend the material world of things. However, the paradox according to this

author is that with stronger claims of transcending the material, the more important the material manifestations become. For instance, in some oriental religions, material elements such as objects, architecture (monuments), idols, ornaments, etc. are necessary to express and represent the immaterial since “immateriality can only be expressed through materiality” (Miller 2005:28). Indeed, as a rule “the more humanity reaches toward the conceptualization of the immaterial, the more important the specific form of its materialization” (Miller 2005:28). That is why in modern art, the more we believe that art has to do with transcendence, with the capacity of a piece of art to go beyond our understanding as ordinary people, “the more its material form is worth in dollars.” (Miller 2005:28). Hence, the quality of a piece of art is valued as a material thing: a quantity of dollars. In the same way, in religion, the more incomprehensible a deity is, the more valuable becomes the medium of objectification, for instance, sacrifice or prayers.

Similarly, we can understand the authenticity of ethnic tourism as a form of immateriality. As previously mentioned, ethnic tourism promotes the idea of Taquile as a place where we can still find the original values and lifestyle of pre-Hispanic or non-occidental civilizations. When such ideas, myths and conceptualizations about the Incas or an authentic native become strong as a result of tourism, the material performances (like rituals) and certain objects such as textiles, become the most important ways of materializing the idea of authenticity in Taquile. Moreover, “what makes materiality so important is very often the systematic cultivation of immateriality), [and] the most effective means to create value is that of immateriality” (Miller 2005:28). In this context, the calendar belt represents, perhaps, the most concrete



example of the materialization of the ideas surrounding authenticity. The calendar belt emerged to fulfill the necessity to express the ideas of the authentic Taquilean in the context of the market. It is not by chance that this extraordinary piece of native art is the island's most highly economically valued handicraft. In addition, the Taquilean textiles are generally among the most expensive that one can buy in Peru. For instance, a *chuspa* costs around US\$10-15, a *chullo* US\$20-25, and belts from US\$60-140. The calendar belt is the most expensive, with a price tag of over US\$100, although what determines the price of the handicraft is its quality.

The last point I want to discuss is money. Before tourism, the island was a non-monetary society. Thus, the impact of money on the inhabitants' lives has encompassed all the spheres of the society, but not in the sense that money has destroyed the culture.

Taquileans have assimilated money into their cultural practices. Indeed, as Hart (2001) points out, money is a "means of human interaction in society [and] an instrument of collective memory" (21). This is illustrated in Taquilean weddings, when the godparents, relatives and guests attach banknotes to the bridal couple's clothes. In the ritual of passage called *rut'uchi* (the child's first haircut), the godparents, relatives and friends give money for every lock of the child's hair they cut off. Money is a medium also for buying food, music and especially alcoholic drinks, indispensable to any ceremony, which is a way of constructing a sense of belonging to the society and a way of collective memory. Textiles for most of the islanders (except those who own accommodations, restaurants or transport for tourists) are the principal means of acquiring money. However, as Maurer (2006) suggests, following Bloch and Parry (1989), money is not an evil

motor of dehumanization and homogenization: there are different local ways of representing money. Money is adopted within the society. That explains why the aforementioned spheres of exchange are still separated: the Taquilean culture has adopted money into their moral system. That is why there are no moral contradictions when the same textile used in a ceremony, or worn to mark political authority, is sold in the handicraft shop. The textile not only changes "content" (owner), but also sphere and morality when being consumed. Unlike the aforementioned textiles, the calendar belt is rarely worn by the islanders as it was created exclusively for the sphere of money. Although money and the market of tourism have encouraged the production of textiles, even pressuring the islanders to dance, wear "aboriginal" clothes and always weave more and better, they have encountered strategies to manage change and adapt themselves to the demand of tourism.

### *Conclusions*

As we have seen, the search for authenticity in Taquile is expressed not only through dances and its impressive landscape, but principally through textiles, the marker of Taquilean uniqueness. In this sense, Taquilean textiles, especially the calendar belt and the fine belt, are much more than a souvenir bought on the street in the Peruvian tourist magnet of Cusco. Indeed, they are considered pieces of native art. Their quality, as much in the technique of weaving and design as in the representation of a sample of Incan culture, makes them unique. Although most of the *chuspas*, *chullos*, and belts have similar colors and designs, on some of them (especially the belts) the weaver has left a personal stamp: a color, a modification in the design, etc. Indeed, since the textiles have a number, one can find out who wove them (although only the names of the husband appear and not the actual

female weaver of the belt and other handicraft). Ironically enough, their apparent singularity and uniqueness is also the reason that they are marketable for tourists. However, unlike the case described by Bohannan (1959) in a native community where commoditization of some objects was perceived as morally incorrect, the commoditization of these textiles in Taquile is both socially and morally accepted.

Although the commoditization of the textiles in Taquile has been encouraged by internal and, principally, external factors, the changing biography of the textiles shows us how Taquileans (re)create and adapt their textiles to the demands of the market. Hence, the local is not an empty recipient for the global market. When textiles are commoditized, new commodities and new ways of commoditization are undertaken, without bypassing local cultural values. Even if a garment considered to be a second skin is sold to a tourist, its meanings are maintained in its replacement. Finally, textiles in Taquile also open up questions about objects' capacity of action: People and textiles are not in a strict relation of subject-object, but one of interdependence and mutual constitution. Textiles can speak as well, sometimes so strongly that they recreate local identities, otherness, other textiles, writings, and histories, including this text, which has been written with Taquilean textiles beside this laptop.

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