

# ***Coca, an alternative to cocaine?***

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## ***Abstract***

This article examines alternatives to the war on drugs in terms of the continued survival of the legal market in coca leaves. By comparing the two areas of traditional coca use and cultivation—northwest Amazonas state, Brazil, and the department of Cusco, Peru—the differences are highlighted between Peruvian and Brazilian attitudes towards coca and ethnic identity. Formulations based on a rigid dichotomy between (good) coca and (bad) cocaine are shown to confuse morality with purely practical considerations. Rather than a simple distinction between substances, the experience of indigenous drug users in South America suggests an understanding of the importance of cultural values in controlling *any* kind of drug consumption, and a recognition of the long-term effectiveness of 'user-friendly' strategies of prevention.

## ***Introduction***

The last two decades have witnessed the rapid transformation of cultural attitudes towards coca and cocaine. The traditional use of coca leaf, once a subject whose interest seemed restricted to a small circle of biologists and anthropologists, has acquired the status of a major question of ethnic and national identity. Cocaine production, originally a very marginal phenomenon—a 'passing phase', as one Colombian sociologist confidently told me in 1973—has grown to the point of becoming a major business, perhaps the single most important economic activity in the Andean region.

It has to be admitted that most political and intellectual debate has been slow to accompany this change. Drug prohibition, and the climate of hysteria associated with it, have made it difficult and unpopular to question current policies. As a means of controlling the use of coca and its derivatives, a purely

repressive approach has prevailed. The 1961 version of the United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs called for the habit of coca leaf chewing to be 'phased out' in twenty-five years, and this position continues to be maintained by many Latin American governments today (notably Argentina, Brazil and Ecuador). Despite cosmetic changes in the 1988 Single Convention—which recognizes, albeit with ambiguous wording, the legitimacy of 'traditional uses'—the concept of a 'war on drugs' continues to underpin most official thinking on this question.

This is sad, ironic, and even tragic; particularly in view of the obvious failure of prohibition in preventing the spread of problematic forms of drug use. For this reason, an alternative view—which stresses the importance of non-authoritarian cultural controls—has gradually been gaining ground, prompted by the close observation of various forms of drug use in their native setting. This has been particularly true in considering the indigenous use of coca leaf, a practice which has been defended (to a greater or lesser extent) by most of those members of the scientific community who have had occasion to study the habit. Since the publication, in 1978 of the issue of *América Indígena* (vol. 38:4) dedicated to the question of coca, a new consensus has emerged among Andeanists, one which clearly separates coca from cocaine, and 'traditional' types of drug use from more 'modern' and/or 'alienated' forms.

It seems to me that a major contradiction underlies this formulation, despite the undeniable material logic—the distinct pharmacologies of coca and cocaine—upon which it rests. It is one thing to distinguish between drugs, on a purely practical cost/benefit basis, but quite another to engage in judgements of moral value. By definition, 'informal' or 'cultural' controls on the use of drugs must exist—to a greater or lesser extent—in *all* forms of drug consumption. What distinguishes traditional uses over modern ones is not their inherent virtue, but the fact that they have had more time to develop and coalesce. I therefore undertook this study guided by the following question: How far does the experience of the inhabitants of the producing areas actually support the idea of a neat moral dichotomy between (good) coca and (bad) cocaine?

### ***Ethnicity, coca and cocaine***

To a considerable extent, the currently fashionable separation of coca and cocaine is based, albeit tacitly, on a shared perspective regarding the nature of ethnic conflict. In this view—developed particularly by the Brazilian ethnologists Darcy Ribeiro (1970) and Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira (1976)—the specificities of any one case of 'inter-ethnic friction' are determined by two principle variables: the nature of the 'economic fronts' which impinge

upon Indian areas, and the structure, culture, and history of contact, of the indigenous societies themselves.

A brief typology of both sets of variables shows that the coca and cocaine issue involves either a high degree of complexity (when viewed as a single phenomenon), or else an equally marked degree of geographical specificity (when examined on a case-by-case basis). Thus, the external forces engaged in a given area of coca production range from very ancient, pre-Inca patterns of trading reciprocity between the highland and sub-tropical zones, through to legal commercial monopolies (Peru's *Empresa Nacional de la Coca* - ENACO), the illicit cocaine business (itself subdivided into a multiplicity of different types), and the various, more or less aggressive programmes of crop substitution and forcible eradication. From the point of view of native societies, the scope of differentiation is equally striking: the category 'indigenous coca producers' could just as easily be applied to the semi-nomadic Makú on the Colombo-Brazilian border, as to the large population of resettled miners and other workers of urban origin to be found in the Chapare region of Bolivia.

This diversity suggests that the realities of inter-ethnic conflict must be approached with due consideration to the details of each particular zone of coca production. In this, perhaps, the 'cocaine cycle' is no different from previous economic booms in the region. What gives current events a degree of novelty and uniqueness is the fact that a traditional economic activity has been sanctioned by law, becoming 'illegal' in certain areas, remaining 'legal' in others, and—in the vast majority of cases—being subject to a constantly changing definition which forms part of the wider negotiation of political power.

It is here, in my view, that the current model of inter-ethnic conflict shows itself to be inadequate, and with it the simple distinction between (good) coca and (bad) cocaine. For it is not simply a question of opposing balanced, indigenous forms of coca consumption and commercialization, on the one hand, to 'modern'/'capitalist' types of cocaine use and production on the other. Observations in the producing areas show that the last two decades have witnessed a considerable degree of interpenetration of discourse and practice. There are Indians, for instance, who have taken on board the 'Western', war-on-drugs position on the strict equivalence of coca and cocaine, and today decry the customs of their ancestors with as much virulence as any drug-war zealot. On the other hand, there are 'capitalist' interest groups—drug traffickers as well as government spokesmen, serious doctors as well as transparent demagogues—that have raised the banner of traditional coca use in many



different contexts, and for widely differing purposes.

There exists, in short, a *circularity* in the distribution of representations about coca and cocaine which renders a structural sociological analysis ('inter-ethnic friction') largely misleading. One suspects that the desire to distinguish coca and cocaine responds to an unwillingness to consider the very ambivalence of this drug in any of its forms. It is safer, easier, less complicated to draw the line between substances than it is to judge, in terms of potential for problematic use, widely varying forms of drug use and commercialization.

Though I have myself lent support to this dichotomous view in previous publications (Henman 1981 and 1985), I believe that to continue defending coca while decrying the use of cocaine is a position which has outspent its historical usefulness. Three reasons prompt me to this conclusion: Firstly, that such a distinction provides tacit support for crop eradication programmes, and their highly selective, socially divisive, and frankly unfair distinction between crops deemed legitimate ('for traditional use') or illicit ('surplus to traditional needs'). Secondly, by sustaining the logic of criminalization of at least part of the coca crop, this distinction actually has the perverse effect of increasing profitability and thus strengthening the cocaine-producing sector, leading to price imbalances which render the supply of coca leaves for chewing ever more difficult and problematic. Thirdly, and perhaps most crucially, the rigid separation between (good) coca and (bad) cocaine is an idea to which only the most token lip-service is paid in the producing regions—a fact that has important implications in terms of the emergence of novel forms of drug use.

For it is a fact that the criminalization of a significant proportion of the coca crop has had notable effects in altering the patterns of drug consumption in large areas of South America itself. The use of cocaine base—a compact and chemically stable substance which is easily produced and transported—has become generalized in the Andean countries, spreading recently into the border states of Brazil as well. In stressing the threat which cocaine presents to the developed world, international bodies have consistently failed to assess the social cost of their 'supply-side' interdiction policies on the countries that produce the raw material.

Before analysing what alternatives are open to these countries, in terms of more coherent and effective drug prevention policies, it would be useful to consider in detail two areas where the issues have acquired particularly stark contours. In avoiding a discussion of the major producing regions of illicit cocaine—the Alto Huallaga in Peru, and the Chapare in Bolivia—I have chosen deliberately to focus on areas of 'traditional' coca use and production.

I trust that the distortions observed in these regions will both alert readers to the spiralling social cost of the 'war on drugs', and point the way to a more humane approach in the future.

### ***North-west Amazonas, Brazil***

Few Brazilians realize that their country has as much right as any Andean nation to the status of a 'traditional producer/consumer of coca leaves'. Whenever DEA-directed eradication programmes in the Amazon basin are reported in the press, the idea is always conveyed that coca plantations have somehow 'spread' across the frontier, instigated by 'Colombian traffickers'. Never is it pointed out that coca was reported from the Brazilian Amazon in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—that is, well before the onset of any possible cocaine production—by such acute and reputable observers as Ribeiro de Sampaio (1825:34), the German naturalists von Spix and von Martius (1831:1169), and the English botanist Richard Spruce (1908:446).

It is also significant that such early accounts describe precisely those areas where the DEA and the Brazilian Federal Police have made their most sensational 'discoveries': the Alto Rio Negro (particularly the rivers Tiquié and Uaupés), home of the Tukano and Makú Indians, and the district around Tefé, a town on the main course of the upper Amazon (here called the Solimes). The population in this latter area includes many traditional coca users—both among the local Miranha Indians, and in various other detribalized groups who collected here at the turn the century, fleeing the rubber-boom atrocities of the Colombian Putumayo.

Altogether, one could confidently speak of five to ten thousand coca users/producers in the Brazilian Amazon. It is important to point out that, in these two areas at least, a consumer is also of necessity a producer, since there is no real trade in coca leaves on the Andean model. Indeed, the very preparation of coca leaves in the local form of *ipadú* requires a highly localized supply. *Ipadú* is made by toasting the leaves, pounding them to dust in a hardwood mortar, adding an alkaline reagent in the form of ashes of the leaves of *Cecropia* spp. (Port. *embaúba*, Span. *yarumo*), and then sieving the final product into a fine greyish-green powder. *Ipadú* quickly spoils in the humid conditions of the Amazon basin, and thus discriminating users tend to produce only small amounts at any one time, repeating the process daily—or, at most, weekly—intervals.

This, in turn, has important implications with regard to the ways in which coca is cultivated in the region, since supplies of fresh leaves must lie readily to hand. Each bush can be harvested four times a year, so long as there are no

significant droughts, and local cultivars demonstrate considerable resistance to disease. However, the competition of weeds and the invasion of scrub makes it impractical to maintain the same coca plantation for more than four or five years, at the end of which time it is abandoned to the encroaching forest. This presents no great problem; new plantations are rapidly established by means of stem cuttings, since the Amazonian variety of the bush (*Erythroxylum coca* var. *ipadu*) is incapable of setting fertile seed (Plowman 1981). At a purely visual level, then, and to the untrained observer, it will always appear that 'there is a whole lot of new coca planting going on around here...' (words of a narcotics 'expert' in Tefé in 1981).

This conspiratorial interpretation is further strengthened by the local custom of planting coca bushes in rows amongst the manioc crop, a practical and labour-saving arrangement which strikes most law-enforcement agents as a means of 'hiding' the coca. Since such agents are under pressure from their superiors to 'show results', it is therefore rather obvious that they will proceed to destroy precisely those coca plantations which are nearest to human habitation, and which constitute the native supply for traditional *ipadú* processing. From the point of view of the ever-present media coverage, as well, one pile of burning coca bushes looks pretty much the same as any other—and, in any case, the common desire of all concerned is to 'get back to civilization' as soon as possible.

This is not to deny that a certain amount of coca planting has occurred in the Brazilian Amazon for the purpose of producing cocaine. Such was the case particularly at the time of the cocaine price boom of 1981-1, when a rapid expansion of production—allowed by the very quick growth of *ipadú* cuttings—permitted manufacturers to bring new sources of supply on stream faster than in the traditional Andean areas of production, where coca bushes typically become productive only in their third or fourth year. This advantage, however, was rapidly lost; falling prices for cocaine base made the high cost of transport in the Amazon a distinct disincentive to any further expansion, and the low yield of cocaine (between a quarter and a third of that common in the Andes) meant that local varieties simply could not compete with the coca of such areas as the Chapare and the Alto Huallaga. A similar decline was observed even in the neighbouring territory of the Vaupés, in the Colombian Amazon, where contacts with cocaine-refining centres were much closer and better established (Stephen Hugh-Jones, personal communication).

What, then, has been the legacy of a decade of coca eradication in the Brazilian Amazon? In the absence of any concrete evidence for the existence



of a major 'economic front' dedicated to the production of cocaine, I do not think one can usefully analyze the conflicts in the area in terms of the classical model of 'inter-ethnic friction', which would suppose a straightforward confrontation with 'capitalism' as represented by the Colombian cocaine trafficker. There is a sense, indeed, in which the destruction of the coca crop is predominantly a symbolic exercise ('ethnocide') designed to pave the way for other forms of economic integration. From the establishment of large agri-business projects in Tefé, to the partition of Indian lands and expropriation of rich mineral deposits in the Alto Rio Negro, a concerted attempt is currently being made by the Brazilian state to 'develop' its last frontier.

This process naturally distracts the attention of critics from the specificities of the coca issue. In such a context, the assault on indigenous traditions—particularly those, such as the use of drugs, which are not considered 'good copy' by pro-Indian campaigners—can flourish unhampered and unchecked. We read in the Rio newspaper *O Globo* (11.9.88), à propos of coca chewing: 'The result of this new (*sic*) practice is visible in the physical appearance of the Indians: their teeth rapidly rot and fall out, their average life expectancy is only 50 years, and all suffer from a process of precocious ageing...'

Opinions such as these come to be accepted by many social scientists and younger, more 'integrated' Indian leaders, despite all the evidence to the contrary provided by science and by elder Indians themselves.

These latter continue to view coca not only as an excellent physical stimulant, but also as a major element of traditional healing practices, and—through the support and stimulus given to myth recitation—the prime means of activating the collective memory (Buchillet 1987). Thus, to attack coca chewing in the Amazon amounts to more than a minor act of behavioural re-training, on a par with making Indians cover their private parts. It involves a fundamental assault on the cohesion of a culture which has existed for millenia.

In the face of the propagation of these negative stereotypes of traditional coca use, there is evidence of some, albeit hesitant as yet, retrenchment and resistance. Precisely in the vicinity of Tefé, the area where coca plantations have been hardest hit, and where the native inhabitants are considered most 'acculturated', there are growing signs that the use of *ipadú* may re-emerge as a major symbol of ethnic identity. Such positive reinforcement of an age-old custom could feasibly have a long-term impact in preventing the spread of cocaine-base smoking, already popularized in the area through the Colombian port of Leticia. At the same time, it is not clear how far coca eradication

campaigns have already forced a relocation of plantations well away from areas of human habitation. In view of the details of *ipadú* processing described above, such a move would tend to promote the smoking of cocaine base, which is much easier to store and transport.

In short, what we are witnessing in the Brazilian Amazon is the classic scenario of the 'war on drugs': the destruction of tried and tested cultural mechanisms for controlling the use of drugs, combined with a certainly shortsighted (and possibly intentional) economic incentive to the commercialization of a drug substance in its most harmful form. At the same time, the possibility also exists that the traditional cultural controls represented by coca chewing may acquire a new and unsuspected validity in the process of reaffirming political and cultural identity. We seem, here, to be verging on the very proposition—(good)coca/(bad)cocaine—which I was at pains to demolish at the outset of this article.

Unfortunately, I do not have the data on cocaine-base smoking in the Brazilian Amazon which would allow an assessment of the degree to which it is truly 'problematic'. On a purely anecdotal level, however, it is worth recalling the words of a Tukano Indian who once described to me his experience of these two different forms of the drug:

I went to Colombia to work for a cocaine-base producer who was living near Mitú. He used to give us some [base] so that we would work harder, and to begin with I used it every day. Then my lungs started to hurt and I lost my stamina. So I asked him if I could make *ipadú* instead, and he said O.K., so long as we kept working... Once or twice a week he would let us go to Mitú, to see women and go out drinking. Then I really used to like smoking base. It stopped me from getting drunk [laughs]...

In a nutshell, such a practical and hard-headed appraisal of the relative advantages and disadvantages of different coca products would seem to indicate a considerable degree of self-awareness, and a welcome refusal to be drawn onto the uncertain ground of moral discrimination.

### ***Valle de la Convención, Cusco, Peru***

The subtropical zone of the department of Cusco, centred on the town of Quillabamba, has long been the principal source of coca leaves for chewing among the highland Quechua and Aymara of southern Peru. It was an area of major importance to the Incas, and by the 1920s its economic development—based principally on the cultivation of coca, though coffee, tea and cocoa have all made their contribution as well—was sufficient to warrant the only railway line ever built down the eastern slopes of the Central Andes. Today, this has



renewed significance in the transportation of tourists to and from the ruins of Machu Picchu, though few visitors are aware of the close proximity of an important area of coca production.

The 'neo-feudal' nature of this production (Hobsbawm 1983), organized in large *haciendas* owned by absentee landlords, gave rise to considerable peasant unrest and a short-lived guerilla outburst led by the Trotskyist organizer Hugo Blanco. By the mid-1960s, a process of land reform was under way, which has in turn led to the emergence of a strong peasant federation in the area—the *Federación de Productores Campesinos de La Convención y Lares* (FEPCACYL). Understandably, FEPCACYL is a strong and highly articulate defender of the legal market in coca leaves; probably for this reason, La Convención is the only major coca producing region in South America never to have suffered the effects of forcible eradication. With *Sendero Luminoso* guerillas poised on the very hilltops surrounding Quillabamba, any attempt at armed intimidation of coca growers could only lead to widespread bloodshed.

There is evidence, too, that the more intelligent strategists in the Peruvian state apparatus have realised the political importance of maintaining a legal outlet for local coca production. Despite constant pressure from the United States and the United Nations, Peru has consistently refused to embark on an all-out campaign against the cultivation and use of coca in the department of Cusco. On the contrary, with the precedent of the neighbouring region of the Alto Huallaga foremost in their minds—where repression of the coca crop has degenerated rapidly into civil war—the state company dedicated to coca commercialization (*Empresa Nacional de la Coca*—ENACO) has recently been expanding its infrastructure around Quillabamba, building new warehouses and multiplying the up-country posts where it buys leaves from peasant producers.

One of the few state enterprises to turn a healthy profit, ENACO derives some 87% of its total (approximately 4,500 metric tonnes) coca supplied from the region of La Convención and Lares. Leaves are graded into two main qualities, *normal* and *exportación*, the former being used to supply the traditional highland markets, and the latter being converted into cocaine base at 80% purity. This is legally shipped abroad to supply the pharmaceutical market: official figures show exports totalling 1,350 kg. in 1988, roughly half of it to buyers in the USA. Paradoxically, in the period of the 'war on drugs', legal cocaine exports have been booming—up from 170 kg. in 1980—a rise that probably compensates for the rapid decline in legal exports of coca leaf,

which have dwindled from 522 tonnes in 1980 to 46 tonnes in 1987.

Not surprisingly, too, the existence of this efficient and operationally transparent state coca company—on visiting their offices in Lima, Cusco and Quillabamba, I sensed no reticence in showing me their records and installations—is a thorn in the side of the zealots of the DEA and the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC). 'All my superiors want to know is how many hectares we have managed to eradicate this year...' complained Victor Claudet Torres, chief agronomist in the UNFDAC-funded *Corporación de Desarrollo del Valle* (CODEVA), a crop substitution project with offices in Quillabamba. CODEVA sees itself as an innocent body, trying to do the right thing, and caught in the cross-fire between coca growers and the anti-drugs warriors of the international bureaucracies.

How far does this image match reality? The peasant leaders at FEPCACYL accuse CODEVA of soaking up most of its budget (c. US\$ 1m., in the period 1985-88, and planned to rise to US\$ 5m. in 1989-91) in internal administration, rather than in any effective support to coca growers' attempts to develop new sources of income. Peasants are unlikely, therefore, to lend much assistance to CODEVA's next plan of action, which envisages a fund to support coffee and cocoa purchases in the region. Indeed, the irony of an 'imperialist' organization engaging in price-support ventures, while a 'socialist' peasant union defends the economics of a free market, is not lost on the peasant leaders themselves. They view CODEVA's attempts to strengthen the coffee and cocoa sectors as a deliberate ploy to divide the peasant movement—setting the older, more diversified producers (those that have significant harvests of coffee and cocoa to sell) against the younger, more remote communities, whose principal crop continues to be coca.

Such a division—between 'responsible' peasants who collaborate with crop-substitution projects, and 'lumpenized' peasants who do not—is viewed, probably accurately, as a preparatory justification for the eventual use of force to eliminate coca plantations. CODEVA has thus begun to criticize the very existence of a legal coca industry, expressing dissatisfaction with the fact that the guaranteed prices paid by ENACO serve, in effect, as an encouragement to new coca planting. ENACO counters with the argument that legal prices must keep pace with the competition offered by the illicit market, and cites the fact that its total purchases of coca leaves are actually falling in the area of La Convención and Lares, from c.4,000 tonnes in 1987 to c.3,800 tonnes in 1988.

The strategy of strengthening infrastructure and paying the going market

rate for coca is, therefore, justified by ENACO spokesmen as a means of mounting a viable alternative to the illicit cocaine industry. The attractions of this industry—as indicated by the decline in ENACO's legal purchases of coca leaves—must undoubtedly be growing in some of the outlying districts of La Convención and Lares. Other than the inevitable difficulties produced by any attempt to make legal business compete with the more dynamic illicit sector, many other petty distortions of the market are produced by this attempt at legitimate control.

ENACO buyers, for instance, constantly lament the fact that peasants deliver leaves in a state of excessive humidity, a practice which increases weight and thus the paid value paid to the producer, but which also leads ultimately to a high rate of spoilage in ENACO warehouses. On the other hand, peasants clearly resent ENACO's monopoly on the very profitable traditional coca leaf trade to the highlands—a monopoly maintained by a regime of humiliating body searches on the buses and trains between Quillabamba and Cusco. In the overall context of the 'war on drugs', however, such differences are a relatively minor detail. Though constantly pressuring ENACO to raise the prices paid for leaves at source, peasants must of necessity support the continued existence of a legal, state-regulated coca industry, if only as a defence against the encroaching logic of criminalization.

This has implications not only with regard to the maintenance of an economic alternative to the illicit cocaine market. It also—through the positive reinforcement given to coca as a stimulant, ritual lubricant, and symbol of ethnic identity (see Wagner 1978)—serves to restrict the spread of problematic forms of drug use, here represented by uncontrolled cocaine-base smoking. Not that base—known in Cusco slang as 'pie' (in English), from the Spanish *pastel*—should itself be seen as the problem, since many local inhabitants admit to smoking it occasionally, during prolonged festivities and drinking-bouts.

Indeed, the consensus of most drug users in the Cusco and Quillabamba districts—like that of the Tukano Indian quoted earlier—seems to be that 'pie' is fine for an occasional binge, but that a daily habit becomes counterproductive. Coca is here the everyday stimulant of choice, even among many foreign visitors and middle-class students at the university in Cusco. No doubt the ready availability of coca leaves, together with the cultural incentive to use them—an advantage of being in the ancient Inca capital—has done much to prevent the emergence of the sort of widespread cocaine-base problem which exists in other Andean cities.



## **Cusco and Amazonas: comparative aspects of the war on drugs**

What are the broader lessons to be learned from the experience in La Convención and Cusco? In the first place, any comparison with the previous Brazilian example shows that a radical difference exists between areas which could equally be described as 'traditional' producers of coca leaf. Though the illicit cocaine industry is undoubtedly present in both areas, the recognition of its existence has led to fundamentally dissimilar official responses: scapegoating, ethnocide, and crop-burning in Brazil, and the tacit, albeit ambiguous, strengthening of a legitimate coca industry in at least one region of Peru. (Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of other areas of the country, where coca and cocaine prohibition has been truly tragic in its consequences. To give but one example, Decreto 22095 of 1978—which prohibits the possession and sale of coca at altitudes below 1500 metres—has made coca leaves virtually unobtainable in Lima, precisely the major centre of cocaine-base consumption).

No doubt the observed differences between Amazonas and Cusco are related to the fact that local patterns of self-sufficiency do not, in the case of Amazonian *ipadú* at least, favour the emergence of more broadly-based trading structures. In La Convención, on the other hand, the continued vitality of a large coca-leaf market in the highlands makes the consolidation of ENACO only the latest in a series of reasonably stable economic arrangements. These stretch back in the historical record through the mercantilist practices of Republican and Colonial Peru, to the putative state monopoly of the Inca period, and ultimately to Andean patterns of inter-altitudinal reciprocity which would—without the presence of an ENACO monopoly—no doubt reassert themselves in novel forms again today.

However, I do not think that one can credit the existence of such differences in the size and structure of the coca market with sole responsibility for the considerable discrepancies between Cusco and Amazonas. Were Tefé and Alto Rio Negro to lie within the territorial confines of a major Andean republic, it is unlikely that they would have suffered such a violent process of crop eradication, not least because their production of coca leaves would have been correctly perceived as somewhat tangential to the main thrust of the illicit cocaine industry. Rather than a simple matter of economic scale, then, what distinguishes Brazil and Peru on the coca issue is a series of historical and cultural attitudes, deeply ingrained in the ideology of each nation.

From the Brazilian perspective, the traditional use of coca is a very marginal and insignificant phenomenon, warranting only a haughty dismissal as 'primitive' and 'unhealthy'. In police statements regarding the 'spread' of coca across the border from Colombia, one senses a deep-seated ethnocentrism, indeed a latent racism, which views the use of coca as profoundly 'un-Brazilian'. Even the Brazilian Association of Anthropologists, despite a strong stance on many Indian issues, has failed to follow up a motion presented at their meeting of 1984, defending the use of *ipadú* in the Alto Rio Negro. This is shameful, perhaps, but perfectly understandable in the Brazilian context.

In Peru, on the other hand, anti-coca campaigners have always been subject to strong opposition from intellectuals concerned with indigenous realities. This was true in the sixteenth century, with Juan Matienzo's (1567) spirited defence of coca against the Spanish inquisitors, and it has been true in our own time, since Carlos Monge (1953) countered the slurs on coca produced by Carlos Gutiérrez-Noriega (1949). No doubt this has a great deal to do with the persistence of the symbols of Andean ethnicity within the broader context of Peruvian nationalism—a factor which prevents the complete repudiation of such indigenous traits as coca chewing.

There is also, however, a broader theoretical difference in the way in which the very concept of ethnic identity is conceived in these two South American nations. In Peru, the inevitable point of reference is provided by the civilizations which flourished in the Andes in the pre-Hispanic period: in consequence, the basis of ethnic identity existed long before contact with Europeans. In Brazil, theorists such as Darcy Ribeiro and Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira define ethnic identity essentially as a product of the conflict between indigenous societies and the advancing fronts of integration into national society. In terms of the coca question this difference has important implications: for Peruvians, coca refers back to the mythical origins of the nation, for Brazilians, it merely represents an 'otherness' which is offensive in the eyes of the cultural majority.

## **Conclusions**

At the risk of appearing to claim clairvoyance, I would like to spell out what this difference in cultural attitudes would seem to entail, in terms of the likely development of the coca and cocaine question in these two countries. In Brazil, whose willing alignment with the DEA approach to the 'problem' is made manifest by showpiece coca eradication operations in the Amazon, one is almost certain to witness an escalating use of cocaine in all its forms,

including base. Given the absence of any marked degree of collective self-awareness among new (younger, poorer) cocaine users in this country, and the insistent broadcasting of negative stereotypes of the cocaine habit by media and official sources, much of this use is likely to be socially and individually problematic—along the lines of the ‘crack epidemic’ in the USA. Other, more balanced perspectives—provided by the example of *ipadú* use in the Amazon, or by reasonably well-established patterns of recreational cocaine sniffing among the bohemian élite—are unlikely to acquire either the legitimacy or the prominence necessary to offer an immediate alternative to the ‘bad’ model of cocaine use.

In Peru, the growth of base consumption—undoubtedly problematic in its initial stages—already shows some signs of stabilizing. Though a thorough sociological and demographic analysis is still lacking, casual observations of the use of base seem to indicate two main reasons why this should be the case. In the first place, the Peruvian population shares a longer exposure to cocaine in all its forms, and informal cultural controls have thus had more time and opportunity to emerge and consolidate themselves. These include various sub-cultural prescriptions on the right time, place and frequency of use, as well as such purely practical details as the mixing of bicarbonate of soda with base, in order to neutralize the sulphuric acid residues normally present in this product.

Such a process of maturing may also occur, with time, among the Brazilian population as well, but a further feature distinguishes Peru which I believe to be of crucial importance. This is the undoubted validity of the positive model of drug use represented by traditional coca chewing. On occasion this has been misinterpreted—most notably, of late, by the guerillas of *Sendero Luminoso*—as a simple question of valuing the use of coca, while at the same time sanctioning that of any of its chemical derivatives. *Coca sí, cocaína no* is a formulation of great political appeal, for it separates the issues in a straightforward way which allows of no misunderstanding. In the long term, however, I believe that the example afforded by the use of coca far transcends the discussion of the relative suitability of this or that substance for human consumption. The indigenous model of culturally-controlled drug use—as evidenced not just with coca and *ipadú*, but also with many other substances—offers a perspective on how society can discipline the use of drugs without recourse to fear and loathing, violence and intimidation. It shows us that effective controls are not produced by negative sanction, but rather by the *positive reinforcement* of use, in its most adequate, historically tested forms.



Put another way, the prevention of drug problems in any society—whether traditional or modern—must of necessity go the route of proposing the 'right' way to use a drug, rather than attempting the futile task of scaring people away from using drugs at all. Within such a perspective, there is undoubted space for formulations which stress the relative advantages and disadvantages of different preparations of a given drug, or of different routes of ingestion. These are not moral arguments, however, nor even properly medical arguments. They are the arguments of maximal pleasurable effect, or of minimal physical harm and psychic distress. They are, in short, the arguments of the user. Rather than attempting to act on the realities of drug-taking from without, by means of coercion, intelligent social policy should seek to work from within, from the very mental perspective of users themselves.

This is no easy task, for it amounts in effect to generating or transmitting cultural representations in various viable and authentic forms. It cannot be done at the whim of a bureaucrat, nor by simply designing 'educational' programmes. It involves valuing everything that orthodox views have sought to deny—the consumer's point of view, the belittled and despised 'drug cultures' themselves. It also requires constant vigilance in the defence of those forms of drug use which have managed, against all the odds, to survive the prohibitionist onslaught. In this article I have stressed the legal coca industry in Peru, and the traditional use of *ipadú* in the Amazon, but such examples could be multiplied throughout the globe. We should, I believe, seek to understand the workings of such cultures, and build upon this experience in such a way as to propose a positive, respectful and, above all, 'user-friendly' relationship with drugs.

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