

ETHNIC IDENTITY AND CULTURAL MANIPULATION: INCA ATTIRE IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD

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Abstract

Precolonial Andean dress such as the uncu, the liclla or the asco served to express ethnic identity and the status or condition of the individual. Colonial powers tried, instead, to homogenize those differences through the imposition of a generic indigenous identity. This article considers the uses of dress as a semiotic expression of identity, and its manipulation in changing fields of reference. It intends to highlight the strategies used to express, control, conceal or transform the projection of a specific collective identity in contradictory social contexts.

Key words: identity – ethnicity – Andes – dress – Colonial Peru.

Received: May 2004. Accepted: December 2004

❖ INTRODUCTION

In complex social contexts attire works as a sign of social and ethnic identity. However, too often this index of identity is manipulated in order to modify the meaning that it carries. Such manipulation can be compared to cultural violence when it is related to a repressive situation and to a situation in which culture is being imposed. On the contrary, in some cases, cultural violence is often expressed as a cultural appropriation imposed to the occupied population.

The primitive and basic purpose of attire is to protect the body, however, it is also used to project information to the outside world and to point out social and physical particularities such as biological features. Attire protects the body, and in a symbolic way, it hides the individual's sexual organs. But sexual identity finds itself in the same act, reinterpreted and projected by the same attire that is used to hide it. Sex is hidden, but sexuality is projected once again (or at least the gender) through the attire that matches with that sexuality. The mentioned use of attire leads to manipulation and transgression, due to the mingled use of gender identities or to the use of a "neutral" external identity, which is sexualized again through the act, for instance, when one uses undifferentiated attire.

In fact, attire has a lot in common with "social skin", a term proposed by Turner (1980) in his study of the Gê community from Matto Grosso, a population that uses its naked body as a poster, a parchment, a canvas, where painting, tattoos and feathers are used to show not only ethnic and tribal belonging, as well as status, rank, age, but also intentions and emotions. According to their condition, each man, woman and even each child has the possibility to wear a particular set of designs and motifs. The rules that standardize the mentioned use are quite socialized, in that way, since his childhood years, each member of the village is able to interpret the mentioned code without misunderstandings. Mistakes are not ad-

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mitted and if a Gê dares to fake his status or rank, the other members of the village simply remove the fake tattoo with a knife (Polo Müller 1992: 133). There are few examples of such a cruel punishment due to the illegal or careless use of inappropriate attire². However, I want to state that the symbolic manipulation of identity through the use of attire is, at the same time, more subtle and more varied than what a Gê can achieve with a tattoo on the naked body.

Two Confronted Conquests

In two occasions, in the Fifteenth and in the Sixteenth century, the great majority of the Andean region was subjected to extreme situations in which its culture and structure were threatened. The region was threatened the first time by the Inca conquest and then by the Spanish conquest. After the Inca conquest and the consolidation of its empire, the expression of the cultural identity which belonged to several ethnic subjected groups was more than allowed, it was also mandatory. For political, ritual, and ideological reasons, it was necessary that the Empire unify a set of different elements without amalgamate them. For example, after becoming subjected to the Inka, each small group could get from the Inka, as an honorific favor, the right to wear a specific attire – uncu³, chullu⁴, among others -, and other ornaments which would identify it as a group, from that specific moment (Guamán Poma 1936 [1615]; Garcilaso 1966 [1609]; Cobo 1964 [1653]). Even the mitimaes⁵ were expected to wear the attire from their land even though they were not allowed to visit it anymore (Murra 1973, 1980; Prescott 1962 [1874]).

2 With the remarkable exception of the Inca royal symbols, as it will be seen below.

3 Male Inca robe.

4 Wool cap.

5 Transferred groups, as part of a control strategy and assimilation for the dwellers of the Inca Empire.

6 J. Rowe (1980) discuss to what extent that unity could have reached beyond the intentions of the Inca governors.

7 See Wachtel (1971) for a discussion about the bad structuration in the context of the cultural imposition from the Spaniards. My consideration of the political implication of the colonial discourse and the notion of “the other” in cultural meetings was influenced by Sahlins (1981), Fabián (1983) and Bucher (1981). These topics were developed more widely in Decoster (1994).

When the Spanish conquerors came, they assumed that the lands under the Incas’ control were an empire whose political integrity needed to have an ethnic and cultural uniformity. In fact, the Inca colonization of the region had imposed an economic, political and in some way, ideological unity of the region⁶. But surpassing the Inca colonization, the Spanish conquest and colonization were the ones that created and implemented a homogeneous identity over that multiple population, through politics that reflected the conquerors’ perception of the native person as the generic “other”⁷. The resultant cultural hegemony pattern that will deeply mark the colonial society, interacts with a dialectical relation. Based on the dialectical relation, oppression and resistance forces generate a mutual molding process which defines the form and the nature of its interaction.

The differences between the two conquests represent two opposed ways to exercise power. On the one hand, indirect control of local groups through military power was important for the Incas, as well as control through alliances, the use of symbolic gifts and religious control. Incas also exercised indirect control using a redistribution system which centralized and unified a very diverse population.

On the other hand, for the Spaniards, conquest implied assurance of financial success for the conquerors and for the first settlers, while both groups respected the conditions imposed by the Catholic Church through The Tordesillas Treaty. Through The Tordesillas Treaty, Catholic Church demanded that the native population was Christianized. However, the conversion of the native population to the Catholic faith, demanded by the Spanish Pope Alejandro Borja, in order to allow the conquerors to have access to the New World, brought ethical and moral consequences. What I am trying to say is that during the Middle Ages and the Re-Conquest the slavery of the Moors and other groups which were not Iberian, was justified due to the fact that they were barbaric and non-believers. Being “Other” was a necessary condition for subjection.

During the first period of the Spanish conquest several royal decrees prohibited that indigenes dressed as Spaniards. Contrasting that idea, in the Seventeenth century, in his *Indian Politics*, Solórzano insisted on the

importance of “educating indigenes in their traditions” (Marzal 1992:136). The dilemma for the Spanish conquerors was based on the idea that indigenes must have been like them (civilized and Christians) but not “too similar” to them because the systematic exploitation of the indigenes by the Spanish conquerors would have been difficult to achieve.

The Spaniards were on the position to implement a cultural identity which was artificially uniform, instead of keeping ethnical differences between groups. The purpose of colonial secular and religious institutions was to guarantee the reduction of the indigene population to identical groups that imitate European models by adoring the only Christian God and by paying tribute to the Spanish crown. Indigenes also needed to speak the same generic language (Quechua used by Spaniards as *lingua franca*) and to wear the attire which identified them as “indigenes” and made them different from Spaniards. But not everything worked out as the Spanish wanted. Many indigenes from the Indian reductions came back to their original villages (*pacarinas*) which became annexes to the new towns. The Christian God had to share the town’s faith with His Andean colleagues; some of them were disguised as Catholic saints. And as we already know, local and regional differences in color and design could be seen in the poncho’s folds. Nowadays, like five hundred years ago, one can identify a region, even a indigenous group by the attire someone wears.

Cultural Identity in Multi-ethnic Situations

The secondary use of attire as a sign of cultural or social identity is not limited to multi-ethnic situations. I propose, however, that the mentioned attire use acquires all its importance and its semiotic richness from the moment in which multi-cultural or multi-ethnic societies appear. In situations that implied contact or cultural interaction, there is a necessity to establish proper identity and the immediate recognition of the “other”. For instance, a sports uniform or a military uniform allows one to distinguish the members of a specific group⁸. This collective identification process is constructed from inside and outside the group, and the identity is acquired and

attributed, absolute and relative (Barth 1969). The Andean poncho, with all its characteristics, its colors and designs, can only be identified with a specific location in virtual opposition or comparison with all the other ponchos from the other communities. Paraphrasing Derrida, identity only exists as a difference. Without this contrast, or out of context, poncho will be reduced to a blanket, or to a coat, maybe beautiful, but deprived of its semiotic frame which informs its precise place of origin.

There is an aphorism related to the studies of Andean identity that says a farmer only needs to leave his poncho and the use of Quechua in order to pose as mestizo. But reality is more subtle. Through attire change there is not cultural identity exchange. It seems like identity is discarded. In the process of cultural transformation, the significant aspect is not the acquired identity, the significant aspect is the identity that is left behind. The individual who left his town and changes his traditional attire in order to wear the attire of mestizos, is called *q’ala*, or nude in Quechua. This metaphor is so powerful that the indigenes who travelled from the town of Queros to Cusco wore above their community attire, another poncho which was lead-colored, similar to the poncho assigned by the Spaniards which I previously described. This “upper poncho” allow indigenes to be transformed from *q’eros* easily to be recognized, to a kind of generic farmer from the heights. Nevertheless, they do not leave their *q’eros* poncho at home. They still wear it under their plain poncho. Poncho is in fact the social skin, referring to Turner, and cannot be skinned.

From Ethnic to Social Identity

The conquerors who arrived to Cusco were single or lonely men, the second son of a family, or low class men in their own land. It was essential for them to create wedding alliances with the local nobility and marry Inca princesses in order to improve their economic and social condition, and the condition of their mestizo children. As a consequence, in order to keep their pretension to be part of the American nobility, it was necessary to maintain the noble status of the indigenes who were their wives’ brothers. For instance, baptism in the Christian faith gave Incas and their descendants, honorable men status and the right to use the “Don” title. Moreover, those elite men who belonged to the “Indian Republic”, were gran-

8 See for example, Barth (1969) and Fabian (1983).

ted with a number of privileges which were visual signs of their noble condition, for instance, to wear the Inca uncu, to ride a horse.

Thanks to the contemporary representations, we know that Incas took those privileges very seriously⁹. However, other data that comes from the beginning of the Seventeenth century indicate a change in the use of indigenous attire. On canvas kept in La Compañía Church, in Cusco, that represents the wedding of the ñusta¹⁰ Beatriz with Martín García de Loyola, we can see that princess Cusi Huarca's mother wears the Inca traditional attire for royal blood women (ñañaca, lliclla, and acso)¹¹. Her daughter, the ñusta, wears a Spanish variant of her mother's attire, where the ñañaca has disappeared and the lliclla can be seen under the Spanish shawl. However, the same symbolism which appears on the canvas, the alliance between two cultures, proposes that the external act of Hispanicizing the ñusta can only be the presage of the coming miscegenation¹².

We have been able to create a document database from regional Cusco archives which collects more than six thousand notarial documents dated between 1675 and 1725, which refer to noble indigenes and to Incas. The great majority of the documents are testaments, dowries, sales and concerts. References to attire, in particular, to women attire, are varied. There are common cases of humble women who offer their babysitting services and who demand as part of their salary (or sometimes as their entire salary) a traditional attire set that represents their daily and work attire, as it is shown in the following document from 1691:

"Ysabel Sisa single indigene, from Parroquia Hospital de Naturales, agreed with Doña María Quispe Sisa, in order to work at her house for a year, earning ten pesos, an acso, a baize kilt and something to eat every day"(Dean 2002b).

9 See, for example, Dean (2002a) for the description of the parades in honor to Corpus Christi from Cusco.

10 Princess of royal blood, daughter of the Inka.

11 Approximately mantilla for the head, shawl for the shoulder, and skirt respectively.

12 The princess, daughter of the Inca who is in exile, Sayre Tupa, marries the Spanish captain García de Loyola, conqueror of her uncle, Tupac Amaru I, who was the last Inka of Vilcabamba.

A similar document, dated 1708:

"Thomasa de Huruñuco, indigene from Anta, Abancay, agreed with Doña Juana Albares de Peralta, to raise a girl during a year, earning eighteen pesos, an ordinary piece of cloth (acso, lliclla, a baize kilt, each month a pair of leather rustic sandals – ojotas – and the daily ration that costed half real" (Dean 2002b).

The following document from 1688, is more shocking because neither salary nor food is mentioned:

"Ana de la Cruz, indigene from El Cusco City, the woman of Lorenzo Paucar –absent- agreed with house master, Don Gerónimo de Gupide y Soto, to work for two years as housekeeper, earning two pieces of cloth, acso and lillclla, four shirts, two skirts and a kilt" (Dean 2002b).

Contrasting those desperate testimonies, there are women whose abundance of goods denotes some economic comfort. For instance, the case of Doña María de la Cruz, from Parroquia de Belén, daughter of Don Mateo Chunchu and Doña Pasua" (Dean 2002b).

As it was common to women from her condition, Doña Pasua was married first with a Spaniard and then with a noble indigene, Sebastián Huayna Chino. In her will, Doña María asked for the creation of a foundation that would give money to a priest so he could celebrate masses in a specific chapel. She declares to have:

"A table made of aliso tree and a big box of aliso wood and inside it, six pieces of abasco cloth, something good composed of acso and lliclla, two kilts made of blue cloth from Quito and four anacostes, plus another one which makes five, two green and yellow llicllas made from baize from Castilla, plus two separate llicllas. Plus a little box, two pair of big vessels (tembladeras), four small silver plates, a silver cachora, two new silver topos plus other llicllas and brough acsos"(Dean 2002b).

Finally, there is another category of wealthy women who left in their will, besides real state goods, some European cloth, and also pieces of indigenous attire, often made with imported material. Here, one can clearly see that it is not a matter of work cloth:

"Magdalena Utco, from the town Taray in Calca province, daughter of Simon Guaman and Isabel Milla. Magdalena asks

for her body to be shrouded with San Francisco's habit and buried in the church of San Blas Parish. She declared that she was married to Joan Lucas, already dead. She declares to have a house in San Blas Parish, in Pumapaccha place. She declares as her belongings: an *acso* made from wood from the black land, another *acso* made from dun wood, plus another vicuna color *acso*. Besides the mentioned cloth, a kilt made from cloth brought from Quito, a wool blanket, plus another blanket made from Castilla wool. Executor: Juan Bautista Dávila and Simón Abapanti¹³.

Or another case from 1700:

"Doña Juana Yauarina, born in this city, legitimate daughter from Don Juan Yauarina and Juana Choque. She requests to be buried in San Francisco Church. She has a house in this city. She has eight big canvas, each one with two rods. She has a big box made from aliso wood. She has four new kilts, three made from baize and one from Castilla. She has four *llicllas* made from wood with its gold and silver lace. She has four *llicllas* woven with wool from the land of silver and gold thread. Plus four woven *acsos*, two with silver thread work and the other common, plus a skirt with silver laces. She has *lliclla* made from Castilla baize with white laces. She has three shirts from Brittany with embroidery chests and two *naguas* and three handkerchief with big laces¹⁴.

This last document presents the use or at least, the ownership of a traditional Pre-Hispanic cloth which was parallel with European cloth, without having any stigma which can be related to the use of indigenous attire. A new appreciation of traditional cloth with gold and silver laces arises, in other words, with European elements which increase their economic and symbolic value. To find among Doña Juana's belongings modified attire does not mean a disparagement towards traditional cloth, it deals with the eagerness to embellish the attire with additions that make it more appealing.

There is less information about men's attire in these six hundred documents related to noble indigenes which belonged to the time of bishop Mollinedo. However, some

documents indicated the profound symbolic and economic value of traditional attire:

"Don Matías Topa Orcoguaranca, Royal Lieutenant, governor of ayllu Hatun Incacona, reduced at San Blas Parish and one of the twenty four electors of the Royal Crown of the major indigenes from the eight parishes, son of Don Diego Pata Yupanqui and Doña Inés Paucal Ocllo Achachi. He declares that he was married for the first time with Doña Sebastiana Cusi Rimay He also declares that he was married for the second time with Doña Ana Rosa Guarilloclla. He declares that he has houses in San Blas Parish, he has lands in Yucay and Guacapongo. He requests that two pairs of Inga attires should be given to his brother, Don Antonio and to Don Joseph Atocguas. The white attire with its adherent things should be given to his brother and the golden attire should be given to the mentioned Joseph¹⁵.

What seems to be really interesting in relation to the above quote, is that individual garments such as uncu or borla have not been mentioned, only Inga attire is mentioned; that situation creates a contrast with women's testaments where individual garments are always mentioned. Don Matías is Royal Lieutenant of the Incas, which means that he has an important ceremonial position, and during Holidays he wears one of his two "Inga attires" which give account of his position and function. Because of the presence of those two Inga attires in his will, one can understand their symbolic and economic value. One also supposes that the individuals who were mentioned in the will had the right to wear the attires.

Contrasting what it is stated in women's testaments, the Inca attire is the only one mentioned by Don Matías. One can only speculate about what he wore when he was not dressed as Inca, but it is clear that his daily cloth did not have for him a symbolic or economic value in order to be included in his testament.

Symbols of Inca Nobility in the Late Colonial Period

Some authors have argued that the members of a religious brotherhood (*cofradía*) who were, like Don Matías, members of the town council for indigenes and who represented the Cusco Inca national elite, wore all the sym-

13 ARC, Bustamante, Cristóbal de, 1685, f.519, 15 November 1685, Testament, Magdalena Utcu.

14 ARC, Maldonado, Francisco, 1700, f. 577, July 6 1700, Testament, Doña Juana Yauarina.

15 ARC, Unzueta, Francisco de, 1716, f. 417, August 27 1716, Testament, Don Matías Topa Orcoguaranca, Royal Lieutenant.

bols which belonged to the indigenous nobility with such eagerness that the governing Creoles used to protest and to demand that mascapaycha can only be worn on the Holidays (Amado 2002). Vayssière (1983:51) also declares that through the Eighteenth century a lack of control was going to take place and one of the factors was the fact that indigenous chiefs “dressed as Inca kings with the declared purpose of resurrect the most pure Inca tradition”.

It calls one's attention the uncontrolled use of Inca attires, in particular, the use of mascapaycha, since the use of this royal insignia was reserved to the Inka who was reigning at that time and to the people related to him through royal blood (Larrea 1960:115; Uhle 1969 [1907]), offenders, their ayllu and relatives were submitted to cruel punishments (Murúa 1946 [1590]:136). One can suppose that more than the royal mascapaycha, the real problem was noble llautu (also called paicha by Garcilaso). One has to admit, as Vayssière seems to indicate, that the old distinctions and prohibitions were starting to disappear through the colonial times, maybe because of the Spaniards' intention to create an undifferentiated noble class, which had contributed to erase the differences among panacas and, in some cases, among noble Incas and other groups.

However, it is important to notice that there is no file evidence that confirms the existence of an uncontrollable abundance of attires and Incan symbols in colonial Cusco, at least until the first decades of the Eighteenth century. In fact, the legacy that Don Antonio and Don Joseph received from Don Matías, “two Inka attires”, is the only reference that one has found in Inca testaments of that period, in relation to the existence and use of those ritual garments.

To Be or not to Be Inca in the Eighteenth Century

The concept of purity in the late colonial context is very complicated (see Decoster 2002). During the middle of the Eighteenth century, many families that were descendants of the different Inca lineages (panacas) had married among themselves, forming a great collectivity of “noble indigenes”, by gathering the Ramos Tito Atauchi, Carlos Inca y Sarahuara, besides counting on many Spanish and Creole ancestors. In a parallel way, many creole

families had something from Inca blood and sometimes it was difficult to distinguish among creole, mestizos and Incas. In fact, family Esquível, from Cusco, who were also marquises of Umbroso Valley, had acquired, at that time, the apu title, wore Inca attire and spoke Quechua (Pagden 1992:46; Lavalley 1998).

The matter related to multiple ethnic and cultural identity can be confirmed in the well-known case of José Gabriel Condorcanqui Tupac Amaru, a mestizo descendant from the Inka Tupac Amaru the First, and who knew how to move with fluency among the creole, mestizo and Inca identities (Cahill 2003). It is a fact that nowadays the figure of Tupac Amaru II can be a part of the Peruvian pantheon sharing honors with the creole heroes from the independence or from the national fight – like Simón Bolívar and Miguel Grau - . He can also be identified with the mythical hero Inkarrí on the fine Quechua fabrics – where he is represented as a human figure, torn apart by four horses – The easy way in which Tupac Amaru II could move among identities confirmed the complexity of the cultural relations at risk.

The multiple identity of Condorcanqui explains to a great extent the initial success of the rebellion. He knew how to attract the emerging social class composed by bourgeois mestizos who considered him the champion of the fight against the creole aristocracy and against the Spanish crown, while for the indigenes, he embodied the mythical personification of the generic Inka King. Throughout his campaign, Tupac Amaru used to give orders in Quechua and in Spanish, according to the composition of his audience (Valcárcel 1970): in some of his allocutions, he refers to himself as the Inca king and promised the extermination of the Spaniards; in other allocutions he spoke in a more moderate way, about fiscal reform (Vayssière 1983).

In his description of the mentioned leader from the last rebellion of the colony, Campbell (1979: 7-8) does not attribute the popularity of Tupac Amaru to his use of the Inca symbols. On the contrary, Campbell tells us that the rebel “dressed himself as a Spanish knight who wore a black velvet coat, golden vest, plush hat, silk socks and shoes with golden buckles”¹⁶. Despite the mentioned situation, after the torment of the leader one did not prohibit the use of velvet coats, one prohibit Inca national

symbols, such as to wear Inca attire, to exhibit paintings from the Inca kings, speak the Quechua language and even to play the pututus or shell trumpets from the local authorities.

Such a reaction from the Inca colonial power indicates a decision to handle insurrection as an indigenous rebellion and a desire of removing what the authorities perceive as a threat to their own established order. After the common indigenes were prohibited not to wear the uncu in the Seventeenth century, the noble Incas had the same prohibition in the Eighteenth century. The use of attire or its prohibition should be seen as a projection of the identity (social, physical, ethnic, and local) or its suppression. At the end of the Eighteenth century, the Incas had ceased to be useful to the creole society, after having completed, through the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries, their role – previously mentioned – guarantors of the American nobility.

16 No cabe duda de que la apariencia del inca rebelde era cuidadosamente calculada para tranquilizar a sus seguidores criollos y mestizos, mientras proyectaba una imagen de autoridad hacia sus seguidores indígenas. Sin embargo, su capacidad de manipular los símbolos incas se manifiesta en un incidente narrado por sus enemigos Betancur —y, por ende, tal vez apócrifo— cuando hubiera paseado por la calles del Cusco a su joven hijo, engalanado de la mascapaycha inca (Cahill 2003).

With the prohibition of wearing Inca attire, one intended to exterminate at once the Indigenous Republic, and the people who wanted to exterminate that Republic was the same group of noble men who disliked Tupac Amaru. The proscription of the distinctive symbols brought the disappearance of the Incas as a group and added them to the group of indigenes, who in a short generation, were destined to integrate the new Peruvian nation.

Acknowledgments I thank Ann Peters, Victoria Solanilla, Elayne Zorn and Bárbara Cases, coordinators of the Symposium ARQ-21 “Knitting dreams in the south cone. Andean textiles: Past, present and future” from the 51st International Congress of Americanists which took place in Santiago de Chile, from July 14th to July 19th 2003, where I presented this essay. Thanks to Carolina Agüero P., for the opportunity to publish this material in extensor in *Estudios Atacameños*. All my gratitude to Donato Amado, José Luis Mendoza and Margareth Najarro, who participated in the archive research and the elaboration of the database. The research was possible thanks to a scholarship from The Pew Charitable Trusts number 96002899-000 (1997-2000). Thanks a lot to Claudia Rodríguez for her help with the draft of the text.

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