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DRESSING THE PART: INDIGENOUS COSTUME AS POLITICAL AND CULTURAL DISCOURSE IN PERU

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INTRODUCTION

In Latin America, indigenous clothing has often been equated with indigenous cultural identity (Schevill 1986). When we speak of indigenous fashion as being a marker of cultural identity, we must also examine the more fluid roles of the indigenous individual and community within the state. How is individual, community and state identity represented? What form does the discourse between the individual, the community and the state take? Many anthropologists have written of the flexible and strategic use of ethnicity, and costume as a primary tool in the manipulation of ethnic identity (Seibold 1990, Rappaport 1992, Femenias 1987, Royce 1982 to name a few). Indigenous, handwoven dress legitimates community as well as ethnic group membership while western dress indicates membership in the larger global market economy and state culture. I would like to proceed from this foundation in a different direction, that of indigenous costume as metacommunication and indigenous discourse (see Urban 1993 and Feierman 1990).

Indigenous peoples, such as those I worked with in Choquecancha, Peru, hold a fundamental concept of peoplehood, such that their self-reference, "runakuna" simply translates as "people". Almost all indigenous groups throughout the world refer to themselves as "people" in their own languages. It is not an ethnic concept; this self-reference is not as an ethnic people in some oppositional relationship to an Ethnic Other, although this is what their identity is slowly turning into. As their interaction with the state and global political and market systems increases, and as their self-definition is increasingly co-opted by state agendas, other terms of self-reference, more ethnic and more oppositional in nature are used. Choquecanchenans have no doubts about their identity and where they fit into the social and political order. It is only us who get confused and need to place people into "native", "indigenous", "ethnic" or "mestizo" categories. But when we use these colonial terms we overlook the unique strategies of cultural affirmation, recuperation, revitalization, and maintenance of individual, community or group identity. At the same time, community members in Choquecancha themselves identify levels of involvement by different terms: reserving "runakuna" for fully participating members of the community; "campesinos" for those community members who interact with the state political system and market economy; and "cholos", "mestizos" and "mistis" for non-Indians and non-community members. There are then different types of relationships.

Fashion adds a visual dimension to the discourse, costume offering an instant understanding of the wearer's identity and relationship and form of interaction with the community and the state. Handwoven textiles produce a self-reference of Choquecancha (a wider reference than runa); the woman's lliklla, or shawl, and the man's poncho identify the wearer as being from Choquecancha and not Ccachin, a neighboring and rival community. As the weavings are sold to middlemen who market them for the tourist trade, the community then becomes "indigenous", as the frame of reference changes to the state and even international perspective. Community members are aware of the multiple layers of identity available to them, and just as they speak in different voices, so too do the textiles they weave and the fashions they choose to wear. The Quechua speakers of Choquecancha, Peru (a subsistence agricultural community which lies to the north of Cuzco) use their handwoven costume and textile designs to construct an identity which places them in specific types of relationships within both their community and the Peruvian state. Handwoven dress functions as discourse with the state, at times in opposition and at times adopted and coopted by the state as an instrument and a symbol of national identity.

CHOQUECANCHA, A CASE STUDY

As an example of the limits to our ability to categorize by costume, let me give an example from my field notes:

Lara, Paulina's cousin, has been visiting her relatives in Choquecancha... Her parents moved to Lima when she was eight years old. Now at 17, she's completed high school and considers herself a modern Limenan. She was dressed today in a comfortable but fashionable jumper with blouse, socks and loafers... Paulina...asked me to photograph the two of them. They posed, Paulina in her most traditional Runa finery, and Lara in Lima's best. Then Paulina convinced Lara to pose in Runa dress. They giggled and whispered together and retreated inside, still giggling to prepare. I could hear the rustling, the crash of something on the floor, and an argument about a montera (Runa hat) while I sat outside in the sun talking with their grandmother. Finally they came outside, still laughing and arguing about the hat that Lara refused to wear. Paulina posed for her photograph in typical Runa stance against the wall of the house, feet together, arms straight down at her sides, round-shouldered, and staring without expression into the camera. Lara, on the other hand, still refusing to wear the montera (Paulina rushed in at the last minute and jammed it on Lara's head, angering Lara because it mussed her hair), chose to stand at the edge of the compound

using the town and the Lares Valley as her backdrop, posed like a fashion plate teen-age model, hands on her hips, legs apart with one foot turned outward, shoulders back, and her head tilted almost coyly to the side, smiling at the camera. By her stance and her air of self-confidence, Lara could never be confused for a runa, irregardless of costume or language. Costume then, while perhaps the most noticeable symbol of indigenous identity, is only a cue, and possibly a not very accurate one, since it may be adopted or discarded, or otherwise manipulated by the wearer.

-- Choquecancha journal, July 27, 1988

Keeping in mind that runa discourse requires self-identification and a range of socialized behaviors that is more than costume, within the runa wardrobe each person owns a textile that by design stripe or combination of colors, marks the identity of the textile and person as belonging to one runa community or another. These runa marker textiles, the woman's lliklla, or shawl, and the man's poncho, have a cultural identity, signifying to outsiders the community of Choquecancha. As metacommunication, the textile both identifies the person by reflecting personal taste and fashion, and at the same time dissolves a person's identity by imposing on the individual the larger community identity. Within the community, to those who "speak" the language, the colors and designs of these textiles identify gender, age, and to some extent modernity, marital status and the woman's ayllu of birth. Commercial western dress on the other hand - dacron or polyester knit slacks or skirts and sweaters indicates membership in no particular community or nation. It indicates membership in an international market economy. Runapacha, or "human's clothing" has meaning for Choquecanchenans because it is rooted in their cosmology.

Choquecanchenan women's hats are a good example, crystallizing in one item of costume, indigenous cosmology. The montera is a saucer-shaped hat made of straw and covered with black cloth above and red below. White rickrack is sewn onto the outer rim and across the top of the hat, separating it into four quarters, in the form of Tawantinsuyu, the Inca Empire of the Four Quarters. Near the rim, each of the white lines splits into two, the one line bifurcating into two equal halves, reflecting the dual cosmology as seen in Incan sites - in the bifurcated streams of water at Tambo Machay, the Coricancha, Macchu Pichu, and Ollantaytambo. The hat is a visual Tawantinsuyu, with runa cosmology being founded in political conceptualization.

Hats also demonstrate the Choquecanchenan belief system in another way. Hats distinguish the runa from the mestizo, the member of the state's society. All runa men, women and children wear hats. They wear them all day long, both in the house and outside. They wear them as protection from

the sun, but they also wear them while they work or eat or visit inside, in the nearly dark house. At one school program in Choquecancha, the school director asked the parents to take off their hats for the National Anthem, and it was fully five minutes before the embarrassed and giggling mothers and fathers complied. Runakuna wear the hat to guard themselves from the entry of illness-carrying malevolent spirits that travel on the winds and enter their bodies through the tops of their heads, which they regard as being open. Like clothing and handwoven cloth, hats provide a protective boundary between runakuna and the supernatural agents of illness. Mestizos, on the other hand, explain illness through germ theory and do not wear hats.

In their zeal to acculturate schoolchildren, the mestizo schoolteachers in Choquecancha will not allow handwoven costume, such as ponchos or girl's shawls, in the school nor will they allow the children to wear hats. Mothers complained to me that their children's colds were the result of the teachers forbidding the children to wear their hats to school. Whether it was the exposed heads open to malevolent spirits, or the children running to school in the chilly early morning hours with freshly washed and wet hair, is not the issue. The issue is two sets of belief systems that are talking past one another. Hats demarcate ethnic, state and belief boundaries.

Choquecanchenan textiles then, have become symbols of discursive identity and designs within those textiles serve as the specific link to that identity (Seibold 1992). By designs and by costume, handwoven textiles identify Choquecanchenans as runakuna, an ethnic group. It further subdefines them as Choquecanchenans, as distinct from the runa of Ccachin. It further defines women according to ayllu and family, my friend Maria and her female relatives using different colors in one supplementary warp stripe than Simeona and her female relatives. And it defines individual women in terms of their weaving: a skilled weaver is industrious and innovative and everyone recognizes her work.

Contemporary runa costume combines elements of pre-Columbian, Colonial Spanish and modern western dress. By the late 16th century, Spanish Colonial law forbade the wearing of pre-Conquest costume in order to sever runa ties to Inca government, religion and history, and to prevent rebellion. What is today considered by many runa and Peruvians to be "traditional" costume, is 16th century Spanish peasant dress (Femenias 1984). And many of the materials used to make that "traditional" costume are commercially manufactured, such as synthetic yarns and aniline dyes, not to mention the sweaters and trousers that most runa women and men have adopted as part of their ethnic dress. But many runakuna prefer to wear western dress for everyday use. There is a great deal of movement and maneuverability for runakuna. Costume is a powerful tool

and runakuna have learned through laws, economic opportunities, and social experiences the roles to play to accomplish their ends. My landlord Valentin, for example, as president of Choquecancha wore his red patterned poncho to Rimanacuy, the July 1986 Cuzco meeting of all the presidents of peasant communities. Whenever he made court appearances in 1987 concerning his part in embezzling community funds however, he wore shoes and left his hat and poncho at home. Valentin, like all runakuna, walks the cultural tightrope very well.

Women have greater maneuverability. Choquecanchenan women, who wore the black runa dress every day at home, changed to western mestiza dress in order to travel on the trucks to Cuzco, and I sometimes failed to recognize them. Some Choquecanchenan women wear western dress and a few weeks later change back to runapacha. And although permanent western dress is usually worn only by bilingual women, some women who can speak no more than market Spanish occasionally adopt western dress for everyday use. The rules for costume use are clearly flexible.

From the discussion so far we might infer that race or home community has no bearing on ethnicity, that these are cultural or social categories of dress, rather than racial or geographic categories. But this is not true. One afternoon when Sra. Saturnina and her daughters were pressuring me yet again to wear runa dress, I asked them whether I would then be a runa, if I were to master Quechua, dress in runapacha, and buy a house in Choquecancha to live. When they finally stopped laughing, they told me that I would always be a misti, a white, regardless of what I wore and spoke and where I lived. Sra. Saturnina gently explained to me that I could never be a runa because my ancestors were gringos, born and buried far from Choquecancha. This is perhaps the crux of runa identity, the ties runakuna hold with their land, the source and repository for their ancestors, and the overriding criteria for group inclusion. Costume and handwoven textiles can only project an identity, an identity whose source lies buried within their political structure, their cosmology, and ultimately, one's own personal sense of identity. Lara, the dutiful daughter of Choquecanchenan parents and grandparents that she may be, will never again be a Choquecanchenan because she no longer perceives herself as anything other than an urban Limenan. It is a complex issue that cannot be reduced to one level of analysis.

Because identity is ultimately internal and costume merely the means of discourse, indigenous dress is, like western dress, also susceptible to the pressures of fashion. The women of Choquecancha and their neighbor Ccachin compete in weaving, this competition accounting for a great deal of the creativity and innovation in lliklla designs. The competition inflates the weaving economy, demanding new and

better designs and llikllas each year. When we look at contemporary Andean textiles we sometimes bemoan the new reliance on synthetic fibers and aniline dyes, the gaudy neon colors like lime green, and the apparent loss of quality. From my research in Choquecancha, including time and motion studies of the production process, I learned that weavers are actually able to devote more time to weaving llikllas and ponchos because they have replaced handwoven utility clothes with some commercial clothing and cloths and because they use commercial dyes and yarns. The production of handspun yarn for a lliklla or poncho dominates total production time, reaching up to 75% of total manufacture time for a poncho and up to 50% of total manufacture time for a lliklla. Synthetic yarns allow more time for weaving more complex design areas. Weavers have also switched from the four stake loom to the backstrap loom, the backstrap loom being faster and more flexible, and so increasing the speed of weaving and cutting production time. In the last 25 to 30 years they have also switched from supplementary warp weave to complementary warp weave, the latter giving them greater flexibility in the new figurative designs.

In weaving more intricately patterned designs, weavers have created a number of new and different designs. Weavers first work new designs out in their sashes. The sash is the weaver's sketchbook; once the kinks are worked out successful new designs are then worked into llikllas and ponchos for public view. For example, in my study of the town's trend setters, I watched the creation and re-creation of motifs between two sisters who lived on opposite sides of the mountain. Lucila, older and quieter, first wove a design of a dead horse out in the pastures being picked apart by condors, while Maria, my landlady and vivacious friend, improved it, tearing the horse apart, allowing the condors and foxes to make a meal of the dismembered head and legs. Maria and Lucila have begun weaving designs with action in them. Horses run and rear up in defiance. Deer race from predator felines. Hares leap and run free in the campo. They have also begun to look around them and take their designs from nature. Maria now sketches flowers in her sashes. Sometimes she succeeds, weaving delicate flowers bending in the wind, and sometimes she does not, and she has to tell us what the design is.

Perhaps the most striking example of fashion reflecting social changes linking Choquecancha to the Peruvian state, lies in the green/blue poncho and lliklla design stripe. Men and women of marriage age wear llikllas and ponchos with woven motifs in red, white and **green**, and green edge stripes. Women, after menopause, and men, after the age of sixty, wear red, white and **blue** motifs and blue edge stripes. When I asked about the colors, weavers told me the green was the color of buds, that is, agriculture and growing life, while the blue was the color of chuno, the small mummified freeze-dried potatoes that are blue-black in

color. The green is the growing plant which symbolizes reproductive fertility, both the wearer's and agricultural fertility, while the blue refers to infertility. Color symbolism is based on fertility: young not-yet-fertile girls wearing brown shawls which I was told represented unplowed fields, fertile adults wearing the green, and post-fertile men and women wearing the blue.

I first learned the categories when Valentin offered to sell me the never-used poncho belonging to his cousin. An older professional weaver was hired to weave the poncho for an unmarried 27-year-old son of a neighbor. Too old to enjoy weaving, she provided the yarn and paid the professional weaver for her labor. But the weaver, thinking the poncho was for the husband and not the son, wove the blue stripe. The young man could not wear the brand new poncho without being ridiculed by his friends as an impotent old man.

In 1987, young married women began wearing the blue. I was devastated. I had just discovered the remains of an age grade system still at work in 1986, and a year later it had collapsed. I asked several women why they wore the blue. "Por gusto", one said ("I like it"). "Blue is prettier", another said. Finally, Maria explained it to me, and it was then easy to verify. Young women who wear Intra-Uterine Devices to prevent pregnancy weave and wear the blue she said, instead of the green. They are no longer fertile and despite their youth should wear the blue. What looks on the surface like a traditional system breaking down is really a closer adherence to the underlying structure of the system. The system identifies fertility rather than age after all. The women already have two or three children, and aware of the hardships of raising children in poverty, they are trying to limit the size of their families. IUD's are the preferred method of contraception and women are wearing their fertility, or the lack thereof, like badges on their sleeves.

What I want to watch however, is whether the unmarried 17-19 year old weavers without children, who look to the young married women for design innovation and fashion trends begin weaving the blue. This will indicate whether this is fashion or reinterpreted tradition.

That costume and textiles woven in Choquecancha change is nothing new; present forms and options of dress are merely the latest in a long line of fashion trends and responses to geo-political concerns. Ultimately the issue of costume indicates that ethnic clothing, like western clothing, is inherently a social process.

My final example, the man's poncho, illustrates many of the points I have raised about costume, ethnicity and identity in Choquecancha. In Choquecancha, there are at

current time, two categories of men's ponchos: the red patterned or "pallay" poncho and the plain brown poncho.

Runa men wear the red pallay poncho for formal community events such as community assemblies and festivals. The red poncho identifies a man and his community, his age and status. It identifies the discourse between the man and his community.

The brown poncho is the generic garment of the contemporary Andean campesino. It no longer identifies the ethnic community, but instead identifies the wearer as a peasant farmer and a member of the state's market economy. Men wear it while working in the fields and when they go to market, to the city, or otherwise deal with the Spanish speaking culture. The brown poncho marks the upwardly mobile peasant farmer and reflects his class, economic status and world view. The brown poncho demonstrates the discourse between the man and the state. Increased contact with the Peruvian government and culture, schooling and ability in Spanish, and the poor treatment meted out to runakuna by mestizos encourage runa men to adopt the campesino's brown poncho.

The brown poncho increasingly represents discourse between the genders as well. Many Choquecanchenan women weave a narrow band of complementary warp weave animal designs in red and white, or pink and purple over the protests of their husbands, who truly prefer plain brown ponchos. The women's insistence on weaving these thin design bands on their husband's brown ponchos may reflect the woman's role as caretaker of cultural values and her reluctance to let her husband abandon his ethnic heritage or community identity, but it also reflects the woman's very real power over her husband. The band of community designs is a form of control, the woman's personal signature, labeling her husband in a way that the plain brown poncho cannot. Choquecanchenan men are in effect wearing and displaying statements made by women.

And then again, some men travelling to Cuzco forgo the poncho entirely, adopting full western discursive style.

Mestizos or whites occasionally don a poncho to show either solidarity with the Indians, or their common glorious Inca heritage. University professors and students and Cuzco municipal administrators for example, wear these ponchos for municipal parades, where they demonstrate to the community their common Incan descent or that they can relate to the common people of Cuzco. Under the ponchos they wear full western dress (pants and shoes for both women and men, and no hats). But they do not wear either the red patterned ponchos or the plain brown ponchos. Instead they wear very large and very long machine made ponchos, or special order synthetic ponchos woven by prisoners in the Cuzco jail, or

rarely, a specially woven and fantastically patterned runa poncho. By the different ponchos that they wear and by their western dress underneath, these "Ethnic Indians" show only their upper class status. They have appropriated an indigenous symbol, interpreted it as an ethnic symbol and altered it, transforming it into a symbol of the imagined state and national identity. An element of a "people's" costume has been appropriated from personal identity to national as well as ethnic identity.

Peru appropriates other aspects of runa costume and identity as well: the post office issues commemorative stamps of artistically rather than authentically drawn indigenous costume; the government sponsors an annual competition of indigenous weaving; and the travelling buyers from the international tourist market. To a person of Choquecancha the lliklla is a marker of personal cosmology and identity; to the people of Choquecancha, it is a means of discourse between the community and other Runa communities; to the state it is both a symbol of its agenda of assimilation and an idealization of the Inca past; and to the international tourist it is a souvenir of a vacation. The designs, full of power and symbolism in Choquecancha, communicate different messages to each viewer. When the state appropriates runa costume as a national symbol however, it usually selects a costume from the past, the rationale being that the weaving was better and the dyes natural back then. In actuality, the state uses time as a boundary to separate themselves from contemporary Runa, to separate the noble savage from the disappointing Indian, to distance themselves from their own policies of acculturation. Just as the mestizo teachers do when they will not let Choquecanchenan children wear hats or ponchos to school.

SUMMARY

The form and designs of Choquecanchenan textiles, while subject to intense innovation and fashion pressures, are firmly embedded within a culturally established aesthetic and cosmological system. Textiles as community fashion and art reflect complex political, economic and social conditions. It is more than a matter of contact, crossover and continuity; it is also a matter of communication and cultural context.

Textiles communicate messages of runa world view, identity and culture. The textile becomes metacommunication or meta-weaving, as in the sash sketchbooks where weavers are weaving about weaving. The textiles speak different messages to runa weavers, to Choquecanchenan men and children, to non-Choquecanchenan runa, to peruvians, and to the international tourist market. Runa weavers across the Andes have created their own form of discourse and counter-discourse in textiles and costume.

NOTES

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