

# Global Fusion/Local Clash

Analysis of two photographs published in an advertising supplement.

Lima, Perú

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I

Almost every Saturday “El Comercio” newspaper arrives with advertising supplements of department stores like Saga Falabella and Ripley. In these supplements we find photos of beautiful skinny tall models, frequently blond and with blue eyes. The phenotypes of these models are in sharp contrast to the ones that prevails in Peru. In spite of the contrast, these advertising supplements are apparently, very successful.

In April 2013, the Peruvian photographer, Mario Testino, published in “Vogue” magazine photos of famous models wearing suits inspired by the traditional clothes of indigenous Andean women. He also exhibited, in a gallery in Lima, photos of indigenous Andean women and men wearing these traditional clothes. Testino called this exhibition, “Alta Moda” (“High Fashion”). The Andean-ethnic fashion images started to appear in the mass media of Lima. The products and handicrafts advertised, began to be considered the “latest fashion”.

The department store “Saga Falabella” took advantage of this new mainstream appeal publishing in May 2013, a supplement where we could see models of foreign phenotype wearing dresses and products with ethnic style, publicizing international brands. These models appeared next to Andean indigenous women dressed with their traditional clothes.

We must begin our analysis remarking that sometimes we have the illusion the photographs guarantee objectivity, just because the reality is captured in a mechanical way. We usually believe that through the photos we are seeing “the very same reality”, without being aware that it is just a *re-presentation* or a depiction. The photographer had to choose a perspective, a frame, etc., and these elements give us, to a certain extent, an interpretation. Furthermore, most of the elements of the advertising photographs were consciously put there to symbolize something. The main goal of symbolization is to make the receptor do a connection between the commodities being advertised and a particular emotion or idea.

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Barthes (1977) maintains that the “myth” is caused by a process through which certain cultural beliefs and values, social rules and conventions characterizing a particular group of persons, appear to be universal and given in every society. Often, for example, we think that the role that Latin woman and man comply in his/her family and society, must be the role that every woman or man must comply in universal terms. These social values or cultural beliefs that are thought as universal, are in fact conventions lifted to the level of a myth. Advertising plays with these myths, and what have been intentionally made to interpellate to the receptor in a particular manner, comes to appear as something “natural” and out of the question. The receptors usually are not aware that with every image, they are consuming an “ideological” message.

Sturken and Cartwright state that (2009:23) “ideologies” are a “broad but indispensable shared sets of values and beliefs through which individuals live out their complex relations in a range of social networks”. The images can express in ideological terms, the relations of power in a given society: the dominant power of a group or the subordinate state of another group, etc. These ideologies, are usually produced and reaffirmed by social institutions and expressed in images through conventions that have been encoded. The recipients *de-code* the images trying to interpret the ideological meaning they suggest, believing that what they see is “natural” and unquestionable. In this paper we will analyze what kind of ideological social relations are reproduced with two advertising photographs.

## II

When I observe this photograph, the first thing that comes to mind is “history” and “memory”. In the photo we can notice two types of persons: models/women with a clear foreign phenotype for Peruvian standards, dressed up with western and Andean ethnic products, and indigenous/women dressed with their traditional clothes. On one hand, the indigenous women represent tradition, and consequently, past and collectiveness; on the other hand, the models represent post-modernity, and hence, future and individuality. The presence of both types of persons *in Cuzco* reminds us about a wound that has not been healed, remaining in our memory, the discriminatory, unequal and semi-slavery relationships that the indigenous people went throughout the days of the Spanish colony. Nowadays, there seems to be people in Peru with a unhealed open wound, who claim that the discrimination they experience, day to day, is a colonial legacy.



In this photograph we can see that the difference between models and indigenous women are not only of phenotype, but also of attitude. This difference is marked by the models slim build, the color of their eyes and the way of looking. The models blue eyes, which is the color of the sky, are shadowed in such a way that they turn into one of the most important focal point of differentiation in the picture.

The way of looking of the model placed on the left of the picture, is of determination, whereas the way of looking of the model placed on the right, is provocative. The indigenous woman wearing her traditional cloth placed at the back of the picture, looks sideways and with certain distance and strangeness at the model that is placed on the left. She seems to be asking to herself, what are they doing? Who are they? Where are they from? The image of the other

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indigenous woman does not appear totally, it has been cut out; however, we can notice that she is looking to the receptor. Apparently, she is placed there to show us some parts of her clothes, so that they could be linked to other elements of the models clothes, stressing in this way, the “ethnic” idea. The picture highlights the foreign and differentiated characteristic of the models, although relating them to the indigenous women through some ethnic colors and products.

The models and the indigenous women represent two imaginary and differentiated times and spaces, corresponding to two dissimilar ways to understand tradition and identity. The indigenous women are indicating through their clothes, tradition and certain passiveness in their cultural acquisition. The models, on the contrary, are indicating through their clothes, cultural fusion, blend or cultural hybridization. In their dresses, we can observe a set of products from different parts of the world, connected between them by the way of a collage or *bricolage*. This brings up the idea of agency and free choice, in other words, of a constructed identity. Versus the indigenous identity, predestinated, without any possibility of change just because they were born in a given time and place.

The shoes are also a focal point of differentiation. Nevertheless, some indigenous colors and products are *appropriated* and *re-interpreted*, and put in the models clothes. The way the models use the ethnic products, gives to these elements, a global context. Even more, the braided hair, the Andean skirt or “pollera”, the hat and bag, are worn by the models in a re-interpreted manner. In this appropriation, these elements are separated from their usual historic context, and are given a new meaning. All this makes us reach to the conclusion: “the ethnic is exotic and can be freely chosen by means of the consumption.” “It is something that can be bought”.

The models represent consumption; nevertheless the indigenous women represent origin and production. The Andean women are carrying the sheeps, and this gives us the idea that with them started the production of the sweaters the models are wearing. Once again, two different identities are stressed, but this time through what they consume and produce.

## III



This image repeats what have been analyzed in the previous image, nevertheless it has distinctive elements. The model placed on the left of the picture, is looking in a snobbish way, and the child of the indigenous woman, is looking towards the receptor. It can be stated that through the way of looking, the model is trying interpellate or appellate to the receptor. In other words, she is trying to make the receptor identify her or himself with the group from where the model is. We get the feeling that the model, on one hand, is challenging the receptor to be member of her social class or group (the characteristic of this group is that of consumption, fusion, globalization and post-modernity); on the other hand, the model is challenging the recipient to not to be part of the class the indigenous woman represent (she is backwards to what the models are signifying). However, the way the child looks, represents the future encounter of the indigenous women with post-modernity and consumption.

We must be conscious that we construct meaning through the process of representation. The images that have been analyzed are not just informative, they have an emotional power. When we look at an image, we are not just *de-coding* information; we constantly are trying to discover the link between us and what we are seeing. We always are seeking to be placed in a social or cultural group, that is why sometimes the images touch our feelings. Through this photograph the publisher wants to make the receptor identify with a particular foreign phenotype and group, whereas the indigenous remains in a state of discrimination and subordination. They want to produce the desire to be like the models, and with them to be like what the post-modern and globalization signify, in order to sell the commodities that are being advertised.

## Bibliography

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