



# Bricherismo in the Peruvian touristic places: the shape of gender in asymmetrical and intercultural encounters

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**“Bricherismo in Peruvian touristic areas: the configuration of gender in asymmetrical and intercultural encounters”** – Juliette Roguet, PhD candidate in sociology at the Institut des Hautes Etudes sur l’Amérique Latine” (IHEAL), Paris.

San Blas, a major tourist district of Cusco, is a cosmopolitan area that gives visitors the opportunity to enact their own culture through the staging of an “authentic” Andean world. Cultural hybridity gives travellers possible interpretations and readings of local society. In these areas, we observe the convergence of manifold imaginaries, a dynamic that is shaking the following classical dichotomies: local/global, modernity/tradition or specific/universal. This district is also one of the most famous “hunting areas” of *Bricher@s*. In Cusco, a casual encounter between a traveller, who is looking for exoticism, and a young “Inca successor” not always happens by chance. A *bricher@*, within the context of tourism, is a technician of seduction and a romantic expert in conquering travellers. While visiting Cusco or any touristic Peruvian city, foreigners often make amorous encounters with Andean lovers prepared to be their intimate travel guide. These “*gring@* hunters”, as they can be called, develop a folkloric “self”, constructed according to the representations of Peruvian exoticism. These encounters of seduction form a social interface in which cultural, socio-economic and sexual fantasies allow for a reading of complex power logics. In a context of tourism, western visitors’ relationships with local people synthesise social markers of difference and also discrimination process in the junction point between gender, sexuality, race and class.

*Bricherismo* is a phenomenon that appeared in Cusco during the 1970s, describing how Peruvian men and women seduce Western tourists so as to gain economic or symbolic benefits from them. The term “*brichero*” could be supposedly derived from the English word “bridge”<sup>i</sup>, as indeed these persons manage to enter Northern countries throughout migrations, or/and obtain benefits from the cultural and economic capital of their partners while living in Peru. Members of this specific group use foreigners as a mean of transportation, a social elevator or a way to improve their symbolic capital. *Bricherismo* is a social fact that covers a wide range of practices. Firstly, this phenomenon relates to an important period of migration during the Peruvian military conflict and, at that time, touristic development was viewed as a way to escape the national crisis. Today, this practice has diversified itself, and is present in the Peruvian collective imaginary, the term of *brichero* forming part of the common parlance. Besides this term, most Quechua translations are characterised by sexual connotations like “*Q’uchiwato*”, “pig’s tail” or « *Saq’ra chisguete* », “evil water gun”. Obviously, those terms

highlight the malicious intention of those individuals who take advantage of the traveller's appetite for total-escape from his/her daily reality. Furthermore, these relationships also make sense for tourists, as an experience with a local gives them access to the "Peruvian way of life" during their trip. *Bricheros* create a dynamic of exotic imaginaries at the interstice between their social and economic ambitions and the tourists' desires in a narcissistic perception of the Other.

Ironically considered as an "erotic adventure tourism official guide"<sup>ii</sup>, the *brichero* is an anti-hero, adulated and hated at the same time. A postmodern "*pendejo*"<sup>iii</sup> in the vein of Don Juan. This social role is carried out by a complex and hierarchized group of urban young individuals. In this article, focus will be put on a specific male subgroup of *bricheros* named "*waykis*". This Quechua term stands for « brother of a man », which is used in a performative way with the purpose of manifesting their proximity with the renovated Andean culture and the Inca heritage. These individuals characterize themselves by forging an Indian identity, which can be real or reinvented, to seduce foreigners. The Inca fantasy is translated into some strategic behaviours both in the body and in the speech. The Andean culture is mixed with a vast patchwork of new age elements. *Waykis* are part of the Neo-Indian nebula, concept developed by Molinié and Galinier<sup>iv</sup> as a reconfiguration process of "tradition" in the light of a current system of representations; a hybrid combination of practices, symbols and beliefs that is emerging due to the impacts of globalization on Peruvian society. Cultural components identified as "native" or "exotic" are reinvented by a global and modern society to produce new structures, new objects and new practices<sup>v</sup>. The hybridity process elaborates an urban indigeneity adapted to the necessities of tourism. The *waykis* exemplify this phenomenon, they develop a "savage poetic"<sup>vi</sup> made to satisfy travellers' imagination.

The *brichero*'s "authentic" identity, carved upon the anxiety for exotic consumption, becomes a real job for those individuals, a way to subsist in their everyday lives. Identity constitutes for the *waykis* the main resource in the sentimental and mercantile conquest of foreigners. These individuals form their cultural and social being according to the coveted world's fantasy. They produce, in a professional way, an exotic "self" that fits with the traveller's fantasies. In a mutual game of reflection, the representations of tourist behaviour influence this practice and reproduce a fancy of the Western world. *Bricherismo* transforms the radical otherness of the indigenous into a universalization of Andean particularisms, which represents the exaltation of the Inca utopia. Flores Galindo<sup>vii</sup> developed a theory on the Andean utopia: the glorification of the Inca Empire and History serve each period of time through their manifestations of thought, which are suitable at the present time and adapted to the imaginaries. The "reinvention of

tradition”<sup>viii</sup> developed in the *waykis* seduction strategies gives insight on issues of touristic development.

The analysis of these encounters of alterity, within the context of seduction and in a touristic environment, gives us the possibility to reflect upon powerful relations between gender, race and class. How femininities and masculinities can be analysed in an intercultural context and asymmetrical socio-economic situations? The focus on seduction strategies gives the possibility to investigate gender staging in this specific context of cultural-mixing. The commercial exploitation of romance interrogates the lack of transcendence in post-modern societies. The encounter of fantasies allows us to study the complex identity process marked by domination logics.

### **Voyage as a transition of identity: Thoughts on intersectionality in *Bricherismo***

In order to understand how *bricherismo* sheds light on the intersectional dynamic of social relationships, we have to focus on the specific context of tourism. Voyage transforms identities, and the relations of “transactional sexuality”<sup>ix</sup> between local people and travellers reveal a broad spectrum of domination systems. Interactions occurring in this practice form part of “romance tourism”: a stereotypical sexualisation of the exotic Other. Consistent with the mutual representations, all aspects of tourist and *brichero*’s identities are consubstantial. Economic and cultural-sexual exchanges within asymmetrical relationships translate a lived experience of domination. Power relations influence and reproduce themselves within the couple and through fantasies. Racial, cultural and social issues cannot be reflected upon separately, apart from sexuality and gender, within the particular context of identity transition that this kind of travel engages. According to Elsa Dorlin: “North/South antagonisms, national/nationalist mythologies, unresolved nodes of colonial history” need to be added to the analysis of the “typical “sex, race, class”<sup>x</sup>.

Victor Vich<sup>xi</sup> analyses the *brichero* as a metaphor for the globalisation of Peruvian society. In the author’s opinion, this social practice embodies consumption society throughout hegemonic powers in symbolic, mercantile and sentimental aspects. The assumed subversive appearance of the phenomenon is absorbed and submitted to this prevailing system. Sexual interactions and seduction typify relationships between people, especially in an intercultural context. Sexual

behaviour and the imaginary of fantasies in a touristic context become indicators of inequalities. The foreigners' outlook on local culture is part of a more global problematic related to their own way of life. The transgressive experimentation of an "authentic" culture might be a way for them to reassure their own status within Western developed societies. According to tourist statements<sup>xii</sup>, visiting Peru reveals to them how lucky they are in their own country. Their Peruvian trip is considered as a way "to find themselves".

Tourism supplies therapeutic benefits to the individuals who are looking for a break from their everyday life. It is a way to respond to frustrations like an overflow valve, offering a perspective of a new "universe of meanings"<sup>xiii</sup>. *Bricherismo* is closely linked to eco-friendly and ethno-tourism. Travelling means also penetrating the culture of the Other through a romantic crystallization of exotic societies. Individuals aspire to reconnect with archaic forms, as they are searching for intensity. This research for authenticity can be analysed as a cultural revalorization or a biased participation to "the prostitution of culture". The "authenticity" of a touristic destination indicates a friendly alterity with a smooth change of scenery, which cannot be anxiety-provoking<sup>xiv</sup>. The encounter of the Other shows a reflection which refers itself to the identity of the external observer. Tourists cannot experiment a stressful experience of difference. The touristic Peru of travellers is one of their weaknesses, *waykis* reflect the reversed image of the tourist. The experience of otherness allows them to consider the existence of "another possible world". This traveller's quest is analysed by local people; therefore, they propose an "alternative perspective" built in resonance with the Peruvian foreign imaginary. According to Rachid Amirou's studies<sup>xv</sup>, a voyage could be compared as a "rite of passage", where people look for a self-emancipation and intimate revelations. Héloïse Lhéréte<sup>xvi</sup> says about travellers that they "swap dreams in exchange for souvenirs". *Bricheros* are storytellers and dream catchers, they produce a mystical gallantry to fascinate foreigners. Stories related to Andean cosmovision, like the Pachamama<sup>xvii</sup> or complementarity between masculinity and femininity, are often used as seduction strategies. Shamanism and spirituality using sacred plants form part of the *wayki*'s attractiveness. Traditional knowledge is not the point; their ability is to create fascination, to perform folklore.

The moment of the voyage and the specific dispositions of the lovers redefine power relations within the couple. Traveling is a transiting heterotopy; an ephemeral nonstandard space-time. This is a "non-lieu"<sup>xviii</sup> where tourists and *bricheros* experiment alterity to become an "Other" in a transition "from self to self". This self-transition reframes the configuration of gender and cultural stereotypes.

## Reconfigured gender in an intercultural “non-lieu”<sup>xxix</sup>: What about power relations?

Travellers and *bricheros* can redefine their gender behaviour in a social space far from the dominant system of codes and standards. However, as Pruitt and Lafont<sup>xx</sup> stated in their study about romantic tourism in Jamaica, is it possible to talk about a women’s empowerment within the “*gringa*<sup>xxi</sup> and *wayki*” couple because of their economic capital? How can we analyse inequalities and dominant relations that occur in these economic and cultural-sexual exchanges?

*Bricherismo* suggests that racialisation and gender relations are interdependent and that they can vary according to the social context. Within the practice of *bricherismo*, power relations are extremely ambiguous. Complying with different postures and variations of economic, cultural and symbolic capitals of the individuals, relations of domination are likely to reproduce or reverse themselves. Besides economic purposes, *bricheros* seduce Western white women because of a fancy based on a racial and cultural hierarchical system. The conquest of a tourist brings variations in the symbolic game of power. The body of the “superior” Other is conquered by a strategical manipulation that indicates a submission of *wayki*’s body to the dominant aesthetical patterns in an idealisation of the Western world. In a *bricherismo* relationship, the occidental woman shifts continually between dominated and dominant position. She is at the same time object of fascination and object of mistrust. At the specific moment of travelling, the non-standard gender behaviours of women participate to build a stereotype of wanton women and easy girls. This representation develops a possibility: the accessible fantasy of white woman for a “native”.

The amorous conquest of the tourist allows a symbolic participation to the idealised “first world,” and, at the same time, contributes to a revalorization of particularisms using an alternative discourse. The romantic commodification of *Bricherismo* illustrates a hegemonic system of thoughts and also the creative capacity of individuals to overturn stigmas. The voyage implies an identity transition that is disrupting the normal course of events. The excitement of passions make that female tourists become “*gringas*” looking for transgression. This experimentation of identity produces a fantasy of the white woman that changes itself into the hyper-sexualized *gringa* stereotype. The research of individual emancipation boosts foreigners’ “sexotiscism”<sup>xxii</sup>: the experimentation of exoticism through sexual behaviour generating, as a result, the *brichero*’s strategy of folklorization and Neo-Indianism. The woman’s body is not

an end, it is a mean: once “captured”, the relationship brings benefits. Tactics do not oust feelings and the relationship does not prevent selfish calculations.

The masculinity of the *wayki* depends on the ambiguity of the foreign white woman’s representations. In terms of the racial dimension: the conquest of a white woman by a “native” man could be interpreted as a demonstration of virility. On the other hand, the stereotypical representation of the foreign women sexuality involves a social sanction of the man’s erotic capital. The “*gringa*” stereotype emerges related to the *brichero*’s discourse on transgressive behaviour in the travel’s “non-lieu”. We observe a circulation of representations which determine power relations in the couple and according to the social situation. Becoming a *wayki* constitutes a way to escape from the dominant model of masculinity in a Peruvian society where beauty and social success is embodied by the “white”. In this regard, the sexual or romantic conquest of a Peruvian white woman seems unattainable for subaltern male individuals. By penetrating the milieu of tourism, “*cholos*”<sup>xxiii</sup> can seduce white women, therefore they strategically reaffirm their hybrid “indianness” to fascinate and take advantage of the relationship. This voluntary economic dependence reframes the classical social division of sexes in the Peruvian society. A “*cholo*” seducing a tourist for money or other advantages constitutes a transgression towards the standards of gender and racialized domination. In the collective imaginary, *bricherismo* can symbolise the impediment to the development of Peruvian society. This phenomenon represents a form of passivity and dependence vis-à-vis to Western civilisation. The social sanctions of *waykis*’ reinvented indianness are tangible, indeed they live and reinforce discrimination of the popular class and the native people.

The economic, social and symbolic benefits drawn from the tourist are a demonstration of virility and expertise within the *bricheros*’ group and related to their system of values. The transformation of *waykis*’ erotic capital into a way of living brings another dimension to the redefinition process of masculinity. The gender domination is reaffirmed out of hegemonic requirements. The *wayki* does not exchange sexuality for money, his social and cultural capital is used in a strategic way to shut down the economic domination of his partner. Masculinity is reaffirmed outside of the economic dimension because of the *brichero*’s knowledge which ensures him a dominant position during the travel with the tourist. The strategic “anti-capitalistic” discourse transforms the economic power of the tourist into a dissonant situation. This uncomfortable asymmetrical situation prompts women to symbolically transfer her economic power to the man. In the voyage and specific intercultural context and in the mutual

projections of fantasies, the *wayki*- “*gringa*” couple constitutes a space of gender domination reproduction.

The fantasy of the Inca, the « savage » or the rebel meets that of the white libertine, the emancipated Western woman or the hit girl. The transitive bodies are elaborated by the reciprocal influences of collective representations. The experience of alterity allows reflection upon our own identity. *Bricherismo* is the encounter of two roads looking for an exotic change, two selves staging into the world of the Other. The traveller becomes “*gringa*” through the Peruvian man, who becomes in turn a *wayki* in the representation of her Western world. The relationship is a “passage” in which each partner uses the other one to leak from his world and emancipate themselves.

## Conclusion

The change of scenery in a romantic way allows to live the voyage’s utopia throughout the body. The Inca fantasy forms part of the imaginary of cultural tourism as “an existential, initiatory and transformative experience”<sup>xxiv</sup>. The *wayki* recaptures the foreigner’s romanticism projected on his world and employs it to seduce her. He shapes a mystified native as an embodiment of this sacred self, highly coveted by travellers. The fantasy of a passionate, rebel and savagely virile man, becomes a way for each of the partners to ensure a place in the hegemonic system. This mutual enchantment rephrases the dialectic of domination. *Waykis* produce a tactical reading of the occidental world in their relations with “non-modern” societies. But, simultaneously, powers mechanisms tend to reproduce themselves at all levels of the practice. The contemporary ethnicity may be a manifestation of integration of the subaltern individuals’ postures.

*Bricherismo* is an evasion occurrence, where the leaks from one world to another, or from self to self, intersect and meet themselves. These movements: the voyage, the social climbing, the individual emancipation, the distortion of identity or migration are at the same time real and imagined. The tourist’s trip is a movement in order to feed an individual achievement. The *wayki* is a nomad and an emerging migrant. Fleeing from his reality is related to the individuals’ conditions and goals. The tourist and her sexual conquest embody alterity within a social and cultural hierarchy, a dominant exoticism. The *brichero* thinks his ascent in the development



scale through a staging of an alternative way and thanks to the calculated seduction of the “upper body”. The occidental woman lives the impulse of experimentation within the voyage and with the *brichero*. The *gringa*’s representation transforms itself and influences the *bricherismo* practice, specifically masculinity. In a permanent and complex North/South power game, we observe how racialization process confronts cultural stereotypes and influences the social construction of sexuality. The production of the *Wayki* and *Gringa* figures emerges from a multiply-determined dynamic where all the representations of identity’s categories are consubstantial.

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<sup>i</sup> Different speculations about the origin of the « *brichero* » term exist, one of the most widespread opinion is that *brichero* comes from the Spanish word « *hembra* » which means « woman ». Another interpretation of this term is that could be a derivation of the English word « breeches ».

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.blacponcho.net/>

<sup>iii</sup> The « *pendejo* » term refers itself to the malicious and tricky anti-hero character, admired for his free lifestyle. Typical of the Latin-American world it takes his origins from the Mediterranean Europe.

<sup>iv</sup> GALINIER, Jacques, MOLINIE, Antoinette, *Les néo-Indiens. Une religion du IIIe millénaire*, Odile Jacob, Paris, 2006.

<sup>v</sup> GARCIA CANCLINI, Nestor, *Cultures hybrides. Stratégies pour entrer et sortir de la modernité*, Collection Americana, Presses de l’Université Laval, 2010.

<sup>vi</sup> MULLER, Elise, « *La poétique du « sauvage ». Une pratique du tatouage dans le monde contemporain.* » Thèse de Doctorat en sociologie dirigée par David le Breton, Université de Strasbourg, 2012.

<sup>vii</sup> FLORES, GALINDO, Alberto, *Buscando un Inca: identidad y utopía en los Andes*, Lima: Horizonte, 436 p, 1988.

<sup>viii</sup> HOBBSBAWM, Eric, RANGER, Terence, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, 1983 (traduction française : *L’invention de la tradition*, trad. par Christine Vivier, Éditions Amsterdam, 2006.

<sup>ix</sup> DESPRES, Altair, « Au-delà du sexe et de l’argent. Transactions culturelles intimes en situation touristique à Zanzibar », Centre Européen de Sociologie et de Sciences Politiques, *Working Papers* n°4, 2015.

<sup>x</sup> DORLIN, Elsa, « Vers une épistémologie des résistances », p 11, in, Elsa Dorlin (Dir.), *Sexe, race, class, pour une épistémologie de la domination*, Actuel Marx Confrontation, PUF, Paris, 2009, pp. 5- 18.

<sup>xi</sup> VICH, Víctor, «La nación en venta: bricheros, turismo y mercado en el Perú contemporáneo», Cultura y Neoliberalismo. Grimson, Alejandro. CLACSO, *Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales*, Buenos Aires. 2007. [http://bibliotecavirtual.clacso.org.ar/ar/libros/grupos/grim\\_cult/Vich.pdf](http://bibliotecavirtual.clacso.org.ar/ar/libros/grupos/grim_cult/Vich.pdf)

<sup>xii</sup> Statements recorded during three long field-works in Cusco, Arequipa, Mancora and Lima, from 2012. I developed a qualitative methodology, specifically the “ground theory” of Glaser and Strauss. I collected data from structured and semi-structured interviews. I realised 32 interviews with 3 different groups of informants: *bricheros* assumed (14), Peruvian men and women directly and indirectly linked to *bricherismo* (8) and foreigner men and women who had an experience with a *brichero* (10). I also made a large number of participant and non-participant observations in strategical touristic places and in non-touristic *Waykis*’ places. In the last field-work (November 2015-May 2016), I employed a quantitative approach. I passed out questionnaires, the first previous test was

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realized on a sample of 200 tourists. The second sample was realized on 240 tourists. These surveys were accomplished in Lima and Cusco, February-May 2016, through random sampling in touristic places.

<sup>xiii</sup> AMIROU, Rachid, *Imaginaire touristique et sociabilités du voyage*, Le sociologue, PUF, Paris, 1995.

<sup>xiv</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>xv</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>xvi</sup> LHERETE, Héloïse, « L’imaginaire du voyage », p 50, *Sciences Humaines*, n°240, 2012-8, Paris, 2012.

<sup>xvii</sup> *Pachamama* could be translated as « mother earth ». It constitutes one of the most important deities of the Andean belief system. *Pachamama*’s discourses or rituals are an important element of Neo-Indianism.

<sup>xviii</sup> AUGÉ, Marc, *Non-lieux, Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1992.

<sup>xix</sup> The “non-lieu” is “a space that cannot be defined either as an identity, a relational or a historical space”. They are “solitary individuality”, “passage, provisional and ephemeral” spaces. They are unprecedented dimensions’ places of « over-modernity » hard to apprehend. Areas of “the practice of everyday life”, tinkered spaces where we tinker. These places are characterized themselves by non-standard temporality, relationships, relation to the space and norms.

<sup>xx</sup> PRUITT, Deborah, LAFONT, Suzanne, « For love and money, romance tourism in Jamaica », *Annals of tourism research* 22, no 4:267-282, 1999.

<sup>xxi</sup> The term « *gringa/gringo* » forms part of the common Peruvian parlance. It mostly refers to every foreigner characterized by a “Caucasian physical”. This word is also used to describe Peruvian people with bright skin, eyes and hair.

<sup>xxii</sup> FURT, Jean-Marie, MICHEL, Frank (dir), *L'identité au cœur du tourisme, tourisme et identités 2* ; Éditions L'Harmattan, Paris, 2003.

<sup>xxiii</sup> The « *Cholo* » term is extremely ambiguous in the Peruvian parlance. It indicates initially an individual from the “métissage” between a “native” and a Spanish descendant. Nowadays, the meanings and connotations diversified themselves. This word is usually used in a pejorative and racist way but it depends on the situation and the power relations shared by the individuals. We can also observe a stigma reversal with the “*cholo* power” move who translates a sense of belonging through the revalorization of a shared ethnical identity. The *waykis* are really close to the “cholo power” movement.

<sup>xxiv</sup> AMIROU, Rachid, BACHIMON, Philippe (dir), *Le tourisme local, une culture de l'exotisme*, Éditions L'Harmattan, Paris, 2000. p 68