



## “A dream for me”: Idioms of progress among Peruvian migrants in Madrid

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### Abstract

In this article, I examine idioms of progress among Peruvian migrants in Madrid, Spain. Since the first waves of migration from Peru in the 1980s, Spain has represented for many Peruvians the possibility of realizing aspirations to socioeconomic betterment. Open-ended interviews and participant observation with Peruvians living in Madrid highlighted the importance of *superación* (overcoming, surmounting) in contextualizing migrants' desires for socioeconomic improvement. As an ideology of individual and collective progress intimately tied to Peruvian histories of violence, *superación* promises to benefit migrants' communities and overcome entrenched racial hierarchies that associate indigeneity with poverty. In Madrid, I observed that desires for *superación* among Peruvian migrants often buttressed a moral conduct toward their family, region, and nation. I discuss the ways by which gender and nationality become important lines of difference as migrants negotiate their own conceptions of progress in the face of Spain's decadent modernity and hostile racism. Lastly, I investigate the relationship between *superación* and another powerful narrative of progress in Spain: consumerism. Analyzing an excursion through a Madrid IKEA with Peruvian migrants, I suggest that consumerism's discourses of universalized access are in fact implicated in the same kind of class and racial exclusions that subtend *superación*. I conclude by pointing toward the myriad narratives and subjects of progress at play in transnational settings, and suggest that rather than subscribe to models of migrant assimilation, attention must be paid to the local contexts and articulations of progress by which migrants strive for better lives.

### I: INTRODUCTION FROM IKEA TO PERU AND BACK AGAIN

Even for Madrid in the summertime, it was an unusually hot day—I had just finished eating a hearty meal of *arroz con pollo* (rice with chicken) and *papa a la huancáína* (Huancayo-style potatoes), two staples of Peruvian cuisine—and it was getting close to that time of day when even the heat in the shadows is unbearable.

Carmen and her mother, Julia, suggested going to the mall to entertain ourselves in fully air-conditioned space, and we agreed instantly.<sup>1</sup> Carmen had invited my roommate, Anita, and me over to her house that day for lunch, as she had promised many times ever since I arrived in Spain. Even though we had hardly spoken before, I felt like I knew Carmen well, perhaps because Anita talked about her frequently after coming back from work.



As Anita's coworker in the souvenir shop where she worked part-time, Carmen was a predominant character in the workplace gossip I became privy to while living with Anita. Whether Anita was narrating a near-robbery or an altercation with a coworker, Carmen was almost always on her side—as Anita explained to me, she was the only other Peruvian working in the same souvenir shop with her; and thus trusted her more than anyone else.

We eventually found relief from the heat in the climate-controlled shops and passages of La Gavia, a huge *centro comercial* (mall) in southeast Madrid. Although Carmen and Julia were not thinking of buying anything, we accompanied Anita as she searched for shoes, shirts, and jewelry. After a couple of hours of aimless wandering, Carmen and Julia suggested going to IKEA, which happened to be connected to the mall. As part of the IKEA experience, we all followed the prescribed path through their product repertoire. All of the women were taken by the sleek styles of home furnishing offered by the store as we passed first through their domestic templates and miniature reconstructions of real rooms: to the sofas, chairs, cooking supplies, and finally to the shelves of decorations and household gadgets. In the end, none of us bought anything besides ice cream, but Anita repeatedly expressed her desire to furnish her future home according to the IKEA style.

Our passage through IKEA, as I would come to see over the next few days, was a particularly apt location for the closing hours of a day devoted to commercial leisure. Although going to La Gavia was initially proposed in order

to “*pasearse*” (take a walk),<sup>2</sup> the kinds of attitudes and affective responses elicited by the company's products were not simply leisurely or recreational: walking through IKEA was intimately related to the economic aspirations and social imaginaries of these Peruvian migrant women. IKEA, in promising to deliver a certain kind of daily living, also dramatized the various tensions that Peruvians must negotiate in Madrid as immigrants in a new country.

After all, IKEA's guided tour of domesticity seems only possible at first through a linear progression from A to B. However, on closer inspection, you begin to notice several “alternate” paths that weave past and through each other. And just as the store is beginning to fill your head with ideas, templates, and products, you end up in the same place as you started. Progress, it seems, is an illusion, and the ice cream and Swedish meatballs offered near the store's exit are perhaps there to mitigate a rather rude awakening to reality: cash and credit.

In this article, I propose to explore the idioms and cultural logics of progress of Peruvian migrants that emerged over the course of my fieldwork in Madrid. I first address the complex interrelations between migration and social mobility, situating migrants' understandings of progress within Peruvian histories of race, class, and poverty. In the next section, I discuss the importance of gender and nationality in migrants' conceptualizations of Spanish modernity. Finally, I discuss consumerism and Spanish narratives of modernity, which invoke migrants' local articulations of progress while simultaneously casting them as part of the universalized consumer

<sup>1</sup>In this article, I have changed the names of people I mention in order to protect their confidentiality.

<sup>2</sup>This article is based on field notes I wrote while in Madrid. I recorded none of the conversations, interviews, and events I describe here, so when I place words in quotation marks, I had written them down in my notes exactly as I remembered them. On the other hand, other quotes I do not enclose in quotation marks I only recorded in my notes as best as I could. In either case, my notes are approximations of the things that were actually spoken.

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publics of global exchange. As they strive for a better life in Spain, Peruvian migrants must negotiate not only these multiple discourses of progress, but also their relationship to their hometown communities, broader national and global contexts, and lines of difference, such as race, class, nationality, and gender.

#### MIGRATION AND IDIOMS OF PROGRESS

As I became aware during my first days in Madrid, the primary driving force to migrate cited by the majority of the Peruvians I spoke with was the need to improve their socioeconomic conditions. Some migrants left Peru during the political and economic crises of the 1980s and 90s, others because of the poor pay or lack of prospects in Peru, while some had connections to family members abroad who facilitated the process. These desires for social betterment must be situated within the transnational patterns of inequality that made immigration to Spain a viable option for Peruvians. As Karsten Paerregaard explains, the wave of Peruvian migration was precipitated by the need for cheap domestic workers and caretakers in Spain in the 1980s (Paerregaard 2008, 65). This coincided with the tightened immigration policies of the US and the economic and political crises in Peru beginning with Alan García's government in the mid-1980s (Paerregaard 2008, 46). As Jason Pribilsky indicates in his use of the word "transmigration," the circulations characteristic of immigration are powerful strategies to "negotiate the insecurities of the global economy" by "keeping multiple options open" (Pribilsky 2007, 10).

Many migrants I spoke with frequently compared their experiences of lack in Peru to their sense of socioeconomic security in Spain. For many Peruvians, narratives of migration were intimately tied to notions of individual progress. However, I wish to avoid viewing progress solely as a material process of accumulation enacted by rational agents of consumption. Rather, as many of the Peruvian migrants intimated, migration is fraught with challenges, ambiguities, and contradictions that cast into doubt ideas of linear socioeconomic mobility and migrant assimilation into First World nations. More importantly, any representation of migrant subjectivities must take into account the symbolic dimensions of progress that at once frame and are constituted by material concerns. In my research, this meant attending to what migrants said about progress, what narratives were invoked in its articulation, and what perspectives for understanding one's place in society were conjured when talking about social and economic betterment.

Progress not only refers to material and symbolic registers, but it also implicates a multitude of "subjects" of social and economic advancement—from the individual to the regional, national, and global. These complexities were compounded by the multiplicity of progress narratives I encountered in Spain. For Peruvian migrants, local discourses of social betterment from Peru overlap with broader discourses of Spanish modernity and consumerism in Madrid. Consequently, in this article, idioms of progress—which include the discourses, narratives, and tropes of social and economic improvement—will be referred to by a variety of terms,

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including *superación* (overcoming, surmounting), and will also implicate other important concepts, such as modernity. Progress can have many different meanings depending on the perspective from which one approaches the term. For instance, in this article, I critique linear models of social betterment from my point of view as a researcher; but at the same time, many of the Peruvian migrants I befriended subscribed to similar notions of linear progress. However, I chose to view these instances of tension as opportunities to interrogate the protean nature of “progress” and illuminate the contingencies upon which progress depends for its articulation in a particular context.

## METHODS

This article is based on observations collected through participant observation and open-ended interviews with Peruvian migrants in Madrid from July to August 2009. My advisor during the research, Jessaca Leinawever, provided me with an initial network of participants, which later grew through the use of a snowball sampling methodology. Adhering to guidelines for research in human subjects, I conducted participant observation with eighteen Peruvian migrants, eventually interviewing six of them. Over the course of the summer, I did everything from attend Peruvian Independence Day festivities to cook Peruvian food with my roommate, Anita. Interviews consisted of open-ended questions about life in Spain, experiences of migration, and identity. I also interviewed a range of individuals—both Spaniards

and foreigners—with a stake in immigration, including health providers, NGO aid workers, and state officials.

Nevertheless, I will be discussing the cultural politics of progress with the acknowledgement that I am presenting a partial perspective on Peruvian migration. Most of the migrants I will be invoking in this article were young women who left Peru to search for better prospects or to improve their family’s socioeconomic position. Also, in designating a “Peruvian migrant,” I do not wish to homogenize a very diverse set of people; as I will discuss below, Peru is divided along racial, class, and regional lines. Some of the migrants I spoke with were from the coast, others from the *sierra* (highlands). Following Pribilsky, though, I will preferentially use the term “migrants” over immigrants in order to signal the ongoing, transient, and contingent processes of migration (Pribilsky 2007, 7). As I soon found out after arriving in Madrid, many of the Peruvians I met either wanted to return to Peru or had plans to do so. This was especially apparent during my stay as Spain was experiencing an economic crisis and rising unemployment rates.

In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Arjun Appadurai suggests that we are all potentially implicated in the global projects of modernity. Just as I myself am invested in modernity’s narratives of progress, as a research assistant in Spain, I was also deeply implicated in the lives of the Peruvian migrants I befriended. In many cases, I was cast into certain roles intimately related to their experiences of migration. For instance, one woman from Trujillo named Lupe repeatedly

told me that I reminded her of Carlos, a son she left back in Peru. Not only a simple research assistant, I became part of the journey she undertook to support her children. In addition, this research resonated powerfully with my own family's histories of migration, which have spanned Peru, Japan, and the US. Raised in America by Peruvian parents, transnational mobility has profoundly influenced the identities I have been exposed to and which I have claimed as my own. Investigating Peruvian migration was thus an endeavor imbued with my experiences of migration, identity, and belonging.

### INTEGRATION AND LOCALITY

From my perspective, migration emerged over the course of the summer as a process steeped in ambiguity. However, there were dominant narratives that seemed to have particular power in Spanish discourses of immigration. A predominant narrative that I frequently came across was the notion of *integración* (integration). Spaniards tended to share the opinion that immigration would not be successful unless migrants integrated themselves socially, economically, and politically into the Spanish nation. For instance, one Spanish physician I spoke to suggested that a failure of integration could give rise to bodily ailments, which he categorized as a *patología de integración* (pathology of integration). Arguments for migrant civil participation ranged from this medical perspective to economic rationalizations and humanitarian justifications. In some cases, integration provided an opportunity to perform intercultural cooperation and unity. One evening, I attended an event

in Madrid called *Perú Fusión*, a state-sponsored celebration of Spanish-Peruvian relations in commemoration of Peru's Independence Day. In a particularly interesting moment in the ceremony, a Peruvian chef and a Spanish chef prepared a dish in front of the audience that combined the recipes of the Peruvian *ceviche* (citrus-marinated fish) with the Spanish *pulpo a la gallega* (Galician-style octopus), both traditional dishes and sources of national pride. *Perú Fusión* effectively rendered the ideals of social integration a gastronomic reality.

In investigating migration and progress, I turn to Appadurai's notion of locality. Locality as a domain of social life is a "phenomenological quality" constituted by "the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and relativity of contexts" (Appadurai 1996, 178). For Appadurai, producing locality refers to the continuous project of socialization, made possible through material processes such as house building and cooking, but also inseparable from the "particular valuation" accorded to these aspects of social life (Appadurai 1996, 180). Producing locality is thus a contingent enterprise in which we are all actively engaged, and of which the stakes are the very foundations of "agency, sociality, and reproducibility" (Appadurai 1996, 178). Although *Perú Fusión* cleverly makes social integration a physical possibility through the hybridization of cuisines, discourses of integration fail to take into account and in fact gloss over the diverse localities that migrants must redefine and challenge in their attempt to construct a viable version of the social. Locality becomes an especially useful rubric because narratives of progress also have the ability to modulate

the relationships between migrant subjects and the multiple contexts Peruvians must negotiate in Spain.

My excursion through IKEA's winding paths with Carmen, Julia, and Anita allowed me to experience something of the contradictions, challenges, and harmonies of producing locality as a migrant in Spain. But my transnational IKEA experience also threw into relief the multitudinous narratives of progress Peruvian migrants must contend with—both the local articulations of *superación* in Peruvian contexts and broader discourses of Spanish modernity. By turns linear and circular, real and illusory, progress is rife with ambiguities as migrants wish for a better life and individual, familial, and national betterment. As Pribilsky argues, getting ahead is not simply a monetary calculation: progress, rather, is the articulation “of a new standard of living” that negotiates claims to difference (national, regional, racial) and aspirations of modernity (Pribilsky 2007, 115). And as I elaborate below, these myriad discourses of progress have significant effects on migrant subjectivities—not simply inducing a complete assimilation of Spanish culture, but also strengthening a sense of Peruvian identity intimately intertwined with narratives of morality and family.

## II: 100 YEARS APART: *SUPERACIÓN*, RACE, AND MORAL PROGRESS

During the course of my fieldwork, I began to notice that Anita, my roommate, was recounting not a singular narrative of migration, but multiple narratives that sometimes seemed to contradict one another. For instance, when I first arrived in Madrid, Anita explained

that one of the major reasons she chose to come to Spain was the possibility of working and studying at the same time, an opportunity she did not have in Peru. Other migrants shared this sentiment, and indeed working and studying was possible. When I arrived, Anita was doing just this, going to school in the mornings and working in the afternoons; Anita also occasionally expressed her desire to become some kind of health provider, such as a nurse. However, as time went on, Anita ran up against a variety of difficulties, including failing one of her tests in school, and by the time I left, things no longer seemed to be so simple. Anita took on the full-time shift at the souvenir shop and explained that she did not see the sense in taking high school classes and getting her diploma in Spain when she could easily be taking more practical courses that would teach her job-related skills.

Anita's decision to take the full-time shift was interesting because it seemed to contradict her initial ideas of Spanish opportunities for progress, which included gainful employment, education, and professionalization. In her article on Ecuadorian migrants in Spain, Gioconda Mosquera resists linear conceptions of socioeconomic progress and points to the highly contingent nature of experiences of social mobility. One of her informants, Matilde, boasted that through employment as a domestic worker, she was able to relocate her five children to Spain from Ecuador. Matilde's goal of reuniting her family abroad allowed her “to work in jobs which she was overqualified for and where the working conditions have not always been easy. After ten years of having immigrated, Matilde

Indeed, in many of my conversations with Peruvian migrants, the importance of education was repeatedly stressed, whether it was in the context of migrants' own education or the education of their kin.

had not improved her social status, but she had achieved economic independence” (Mosquera 2008, 81).<sup>3</sup> Unlike Matilde, though, her younger daughter experienced migration rather negatively: instead of dedicating her time to her education as she did in Ecuador, she was forced to work as a caretaker in Spain, which she found to be “extremely unpleasant” (Mosquera 2008, 81).<sup>4</sup> In this account, Mosquera questions the modes by which we judge social progress in contexts of transnational mobility. Matilde’s experiences of autonomy in Spain (despite having worked as an accounting assistant in Ecuador) suggest that the social trajectories of migrant subjects cannot simply be reduced to the terms of remuneration or employment. In addition, the disjuncture between the experiences of Matilde and her daughter highlight the context-dependent values that migrants assign to migration and its associated socioeconomic changes. Taking a job in domestic work in Spain was beneficial for Matilde because the integrity of her family was at stake; whereas, for her daughter, migration meant renouncing opportunities for education.

In order to better understand migrants’ representations of socioeconomic change, experiences of migration and progress must be situated within the diverse idioms for describing social betterment, hierarchy, and difference in Peru. In her book, *The Circulation of Children: Kinship, Adoption, and Morality in Andean Peru*, Jessaca Leinaweaver analyzes progress through the ideology of “*superación*” (overcoming, surmounting) which not only means getting ahead socially and economically, but also overcoming one’s constraints. *Superación* is a cultural

logic that only makes sense in light of Peru’s extreme inequalities and racial divisions. As Leinaweaver explains, poverty and Indian-ness have been tightly linked in Peru’s history, and so references to poverty or indigenous people often imply one another (Leinaweaver 2008, 10-11). *Superación* becomes such a powerful ideology because it promises to both overcome poverty and break free of markers of indigeneity that are disparaged in Peru’s dominant cultural climate. This could mean anything from dressing in a more Western style, to abandoning Quechua in favor of Spanish, and living in the city instead of the rural countryside (Leinaweaver 2008, 110).

While in the field in the highland city of Ayacucho, Leinaweaver noticed that talk of *superación* often referred to education as a way out of poverty. Indeed, in many of my conversations with Peruvian migrants, the importance of education was repeatedly stressed, whether it was in the context of migrants’ own education or the education of their kin. For Anita, it was a grave disappointment not to be able to continue her studies: she often lamented that she would have been able to study had she had family to support her financially. As Leinaweaver argues, “In a context in which ‘peasants’ is officially code for ‘Indians,’ education is a technique for divesting oneself of certain ethnic markers” (Leinaweaver 2008, 118). Education as a technology of socialization has the potent ability to align the indigenous subject with broader discourses of cultural literacy, professionalization, and modernity—but at the expense of subordinating and marginalizing indigeneity.

<sup>3,4</sup> My translation



Mari's sense of responsibility to her employment and household effectively situates her as a viable subject of transnational *superación* in Spain.

Anita's desires for education not only invoke the racial hierarchies of Ayacucho, the city in which she grew up, but also a moral dimension of progress that will be indispensable to understanding Peruvian migration to Spain. Although Anita and many other migrants were unable to study and work at the same time in Spain, they were profoundly invested in the qualities of industriousness and honesty characteristic of the disciplining space of the school. In an interview, for instance, Mari, a migrant from Piura, and Teresa, a migrant from Ayacucho, both described how some of their coworkers would become mistresses of their Spanish bosses. Once, after noticing her boss's pleasure with Mari's work, a coworker asked her what she had done to him ("¿qué le has hecho al viejo?"), insinuating that Mari had become the boss's lover. However, Mari simply responded that she was just doing her job. For Mari, the integrity of her work spoke for itself: she was experiencing success through honest industriousness, not by selling her body.

In her discussion of child circulation in Ayacucho, Leinaweaver argues that *superación* as an "individual effort—overcoming one's own conditions—is a moral act: it occurs within a social web of relations who will, ideally, benefit as well" (Leinaweaver 2008, 128). Even though getting ahead was often described as a personal endeavor, as in Mari's account, migrants framed their *superación* in the broader terms of family, region, and the Peruvian nation. As Mari once explained to me, she and her older brother were the only ones in her family to leave their small village outside of Piura. She explained that she had to "*superarse*" (get ahead, overcome) in order

to support her siblings and parents back home. Indeed, most migrants I spoke with regularly sent remittances back to their relatives in Peru, sometimes contributing a major source of revenue for these family members. A scrupulous work ethic thus allowed Mari to re-articulate a variety of interpretations of *superación* that not only emphasized her disciplined behavior in the workplace, but also underscored the moral valences of aiding her family. Mari's sense of responsibility to her employment and household effectively situates her as a viable subject of transnational *superación* in Spain.

Mari recalled once that Spain was always "*un sueño para mí*" (a dream for me). The realization of this dream has had a significant impact on her family, but for Mari, her migration to Spain has also had a positive influence on broader communities her household is a part of. During an interview, Mari affirmed that she always wanted to help her "*pueblo*" (village, hometown). Similar sentiments of regional loyalty were expressed by other migrants I spoke with. As Pribilsky observed in his fieldwork in Ecuador and New York, cash flow from migrants can have profound consequences on the social hierarchies and material economies of hometowns. Pribilsky's informants in Jatundeleg agreed that remittances had led to regional development, such as annual road repairs (Pribilsky 2007, 74). However, Mari's use of the word *pueblo* could also mean larger contexts in which her town is situated—including the Northern region of Peru or the country itself. In fact, the progress of individual Peruvians often paralleled their discussions of national advancement as well. For instance, when I interviewed Javier, a migrant



from the Northern city of Trujillo, he expressed his wish that Peru modernize: he explained that Peru and Spain are about 100 years apart in social and economic development.

Despite these wishes, the *superación* of individual Peruvians did not always match up with Peru's progress. As Javier recounted, he left Trujillo precisely because his country was in bad shape, politically and economically. It was because he migrated that he rose from a condition of poverty to a social class he described as "normal." And just as the national, regional, and individual trajectories of progress are not synchronized with each other, they are also subject to the vagaries of the global economy. Javier confessed to me during an interview that he fears falling from his socioeconomic position to even lower rungs on the social ladder: you turn into an animal, he added. Such comments invoked the uncertainties of a global order that could at any moment disadvantage Peru's population on individual, regional, and national scales.

Javier's fear of turning into an "animal" also points to the persistence of racial and class hierarchies among Peruvian migrants in Spain. When Javier explained that Peru and Spain are 100 years apart in development, the idiom of the nation conjured the entangled logics of poverty and indigeneity. The success or failure of the individual or the nation could impact not only your assets, but also what kind of human you are—whiter by virtue of social betterment or more like the racially-marked, backwards "animal" of the lower classes.

### III: COMPLETE "PERDICIÓN": GENDERED MORALITIES OF PROGRESS AND NATIONAL DIFFERENCE

Articulating certain lines of difference, in particular nationality and gender, became for many migrants important ways by which to produce locality as they struggled to overcome in Spain. As Pribilsky and Leinweaver argue in their ethnographies, narratives of progress are gendered, establishing different expectations for men and women. In Pribilsky's study of male migrants to America from the Azuayo-Cañari region in Ecuador, he observes that many of his informants held the belief that experiences of migration were crucial steps in becoming a man (Pribilsky 2007, 11). Migration enabled men to accumulate some wealth, which they could use to acquire land, establish independent households, and start a family. Migration to Spain, however, must be seen in a different light because of the prominence of women in initiating transnational social networks: after all, immigration to Spain was precipitated by a growing demand for domestic workers and caretakers, labor historically conceived as women's work.

The gendered expectations of progress became apparent to me through a rather awkward scenario that implicated my own gender identity. Soon after I arrived in Madrid, Anita and I both began to notice frequent insinuations made by her coworkers and friends about our living situation: many of them suggested that Anita take advantage of my proximity by dating me! Anita and I were at first scandalized, but over the next few weeks, we would become accustomed to these innuendos.

When I asked her about it, she explained that in Spain, people are more risqué (“*la gente son más atrevidas*”), engaging in casual sexual relationships with ease. Anita compared this to her experiences in Ayacucho, where people were more socially conservative. She explained that the concept of a *compañero de piso* (roommate) with someone of the other sex did not exist—it was simply assumed that you were “*conviviendo*” (living together) with a romantic partner. As I would come to realize, other migrant women also framed their experiences of migration in terms of gender norms that were divided along lines of national difference.

Anita explained that in her view, her ideal relationship would proceed “*paso por paso*” (step by step), rather than moving straight into a boyfriend’s residence as many Spaniards do. As Leinaweaver describes in relation to the kind of education young girls receive in Ayacucho, “the placement of a moral compass in young adult bodies is a gendered act, designed partly to prolong a girl’s unmarried and childless state...so that she has a better chance of achieving professionalization and *superación*” (Leinaweaver 2008, 125). In the case of Leinaweaver’s informants and Anita’s notions of appropriate sexual behavior, getting ahead in society requires women to adhere to ideals of feminine purity organized around marriage or enduring affective relationships. As Anita explained, women are more at risk of being rendered “*sucias*” (dirty) by men, referring to the material consequences of pregnancy and the symbolic registers of gendered morality.

For Anita and other Peruvian women in Madrid, articulating the differences between these cultural norms was essential to producing a sense of transnational locality. In describing the “loose” sexuality of Spanish women, Peruvian migrant women were inoculating themselves against the insidious effects of Spanish modernity by adhering to ideals of social continuity and tradition. Even though these Peruvians had migrated to Spain in order to seek social betterment, I encountered this notion that modern society was a decadent one in other contexts as well. One night as we were walking in our neighborhood, Usera, Anita and I got caught in a lightning storm. She confessed that thunder frightens her and recalled being scared to death of stories of the end of the world she used to hear as a child in Ayacucho. She still believes in apocalypse, she added, citing gangs and growing violence worldwide. In this moment, Anita expressed the sense that things are getting worse in the world and suggested that modernity, rather than reforming society, was the symptom or even cause of encroaching evils.

Sentiments of global decline were also articulated in terms of a collapse of moral codes. For instance, in Javier’s model of global development, societies proceed through successive phases linearly, starting with the primitive and eventually passing through the “*liberal*” (liberal) to arrive at “*libertinaje*” (libertinage). When I asked him what this latter one meant, he answered, complete “*perdición*” (perdition). According to Javier and Anita, modernity does not simply result in social betterment, but also has the potential to release an excess of vice and sin.

A general consensus among the migrants I spoke with was the notion that Peruvian *trato* (social conduct) was better than the *trato* in Spain.

Javier also reminded me that this succession was a global one: even Peru would eventually reach the end stage of perdition.

Pribilsky discussed this notion of “progress at a price” in his analysis of home construction in Jatundeleg, Ecuador. Beginning in the 1990s, houses began being constructed according to North American designs, which, among other changes, did away with the open courtyards and patios of older designs. Despite these architectural trappings of modernity, Pribilsky’s informants seemed to agree that something of domesticity was lost in these constructions. Some described this type of house as “*chiri wasi*,” or “cold house,” which lacked signs of warm family life (Pribilsky 2007, 110). Something of these pejorative changes accompanying modernity was evoked in my conversations with Peruvians in Madrid. Warm, affective relationships seemed to come under threat in the context of a modernity characterized by sex without emotion, public violence, and moral corruption.

National difference was a site not only for the critique of modernity but also for a critique of Spanish society more generally. Shortly after arriving in Spain, I began to notice repeated references to another kind of morality concerning the state of everyday social relations in Spain. A general consensus among the migrants I spoke with was the notion that Peruvian *trato* (social conduct) was better than the *trato* in Spain. *Trato* often referred to the tact and amiability of an individual or collective, and was frequently invoked by migrants when comparing their social faculties to those of Spaniards. On one of

my first days in Madrid, Anita interestingly attributed her trust in me to my Peruvian-ness: she explained that she almost always gets along with and confides in other Peruvians. Other migrants shared her view that the *trato* of Spaniards was by turns unfriendly, “*seco*” (dry), or “*tosco*” (brusque). From my conversations with these Peruvians, the characterization of Spanish *trato* seemed to suggest a paucity of hospitality in Spain more generally. Indeed, it was commonplace for me to hear of the uninviting attitude of the Spaniards, sometimes discussed in accounts of racism. In an interview, Teresa asserted that despite the “*encuestas*” (polls) that declare Spain non-racist, Spaniards are in fact racist. Mari added that this was true “*tanto en la calle como el en trabajo*” (as much on the streets as in the workplace). This idiom of *trato* thus emerged as a powerful way to critique Spain’s attitudes toward immigrants and to buttress a particular kind of Peruvian distinctiveness premised on a polite, friendly, and welcoming social conduct.

Peruvian migrants’ accounts of gender and national difference illuminate a certain rejection of modernity: despite the tremendous advantages progress can afford, modernity can also endanger the foundation of the family and quotidian social conduct more generally. The seemingly contradictory opposition of *superación* as moral advancement and global change as decadence points to the conflicts posed by a modernity that perpetuates social ills. Criticisms of Spanish gender relations and *trato* were also a powerful means by which Peruvian migrants denounced Spanish society as both needing immigration and rejecting immigrants from broader social, cultural,



During my stay in Madrid, I noticed that a major pastime of Anita and other Peruvian migrants was shopping, or simply window-shopping.

and political arenas. By posing the Peruvian as moral and industrious, and by critiquing Spanish modernity, migrants are both poised to overcome racial and class hierarchies in Peru and also in Spain. *Superación* thus becomes articulated by Peruvian migrants in ways that both maintain a critical stance toward Spanish society and allow for social betterment in Spain. An emerging theme here will be the tension between the impulse to establish a Peruvian distinctiveness (with its moral genealogies, racial histories, and gendered dimensions) and the need to adopt the cultural codes, logics, and discourses of Spanish modernity.

#### IV: “¡LAS ETIQUETAS!”: CONSUMERISM, RACE, AND PARODIES OF PROGRESS

Although repudiated by Peruvians in the domain of social conduct, Spanish modernity was met by migrants with a very different reception in Madrid’s contexts of commodification. Indeed, as I suggested in the introduction, my meanderings through IKEA with Anita, Julia, and Carmen gave physical form to opportunities for consumption in Spain that seem to promise not only new products, but better lives. In *La Chulla Vida: Gender, Migration, and the Family in Andean Ecuador and New York City*, Pribilsky quotes Daniel Miller in describing consumption as “the main arena in which and through which people have to struggle toward control over the definition of themselves and their values” (Miller 1995, 277, cited in Pribilsky 2007, 206). Consumption thus has the curious ability to open up those avenues of Spanish modernity that allow the active construction of new

identities and the undoing of limiting social categories.

During my stay in Madrid, I noticed that a major pastime of Anita and other Peruvian migrants was shopping, or simply window-shopping. For instance, I accompanied Anita countless times along the streets of Madrid’s busy center as she shopped for shoes, blouses, jeans, or shirts. Although migrants rarely spoke about consumption and identity directly, I began to notice that Anita and the other migrants only bought clothes and accessories that were sold in trendy Spanish stores, which lacked any “markers” of ethnicity. Returning to Leinaweaver’s discussion of race and poverty, clothes are one of many ways by which people in Ayacucho “read” class and locate individuals in racial and ethnic categories. After all, *superación* in Peruvian contexts seems to be only possible by becoming “whiter” and shedding an “Indian way of life” (Leinaweaver 2008, 110). Viewed from the perspective of *superación*, Anita’s impulse to shop was thus not simply a side expenditure—her purchase of “Spanish”-type clothes was a crucial part of overcoming her constraints and getting ahead. As Appadurai argues, “consumption creates time and does not simply respond to it” (Appadurai 1996, 70). Seen in this light, consumption has the power to constitute the time frames by which migrants register their own trajectories of transnational *superación*.

In the context of shopping, race also rarely cropped up as a relevant topic of conversation in my interactions with migrants. Indeed, it seems as though the function of a brand is to market products to a universalized consumer

pool. Seen in this perspective, commodification effectively homogenizes potential customers into rational agents of consumption, eliding racial, class, and gender differences. For instance, in my passage through IKEA, it seemed as though anyone and everyone could have access to the products on display. IKEA invites consumers to enter into its domestic templates—tableaus of living rooms, bedrooms, and dining rooms—and temporarily inhabit those spaces. Anita, Carmen, Julia, or I could potentially become the next “real” residents of these domestic scenes. In addition, IKEA is structured so that the store itself acts as a “blueprint” of a home, inviting the agency of the consumer to construct and give life to his or her future abode.

Observing the dynamics of consumption, Appadurai suggests that the imagination is increasingly the dominant domain through which globalized circulations occur: “The work of consumption is as fully social as it is symbolic, no less work for involving the discipline of the imagination” (Appadurai 1996, 83). IKEA is thus particularly suited to selling its home furnishings in the 21st century, when even a walk through a store can enact the imaginary narratives and exchanges of consumption.

The hold of commodities on the imagination became evident in these migrants’ expressions of pleasure during our stroll through the mall. One of Anita’s favorite pastimes—and vices, she assured me—was shopping for new clothes. Our trip through IKEA was also filled with gasps and other expressions of delight: its products were truly pleasurable for the women as they stumbled upon

some convenient household tool or attractive piece of furniture. As Pribilsky argues, a key strategy that migrant households used in Ecuador to combat the negative effects of migration was engaging in events and actions that claim modernity through a “celebration of family life” (Pribilsky 2007, 113). Similarly, these pleasures of consumption were oriented toward the construction of a home, invoking the centrality of the family in the narratives of Peruvian *superación*. The pleasure of spending an afternoon at IKEA thus in a sense synthesized desires for modernity with obligations to the family, negotiating consumption along moral lines.

Despite the seriousness with which Anita, Carmen, and Julia spoke to me of their desires for an IKEA home, the character of our stroll soon became rather playful. During our walk, they would stop at a particular template and take pictures of themselves in domestic poses, enacting the kind of living the scenes seemed to be inviting. I myself became a participant, and in one picture, I am in the middle of a imitation kitchen, pretending to be peering into an empty pot as though I were cooking; behind me, a price tag reads, 4,867€. The women would crack up after taking these pictures and seeing the results on the screens of their digital cameras: they repeatedly screamed, “¡las etiquetas!” (the tags!), referring to the price tags on all the items in these domestic scenes that gave away the photographs’ illusory nature. Carmen, Julia, and Anita caused quite a ruckus in the store that day, but our lively tinkering of IKEA’s templates spoke volumes about the ambiguities and ironies of progress.

In our ridiculous photo shoot through IKEA, Julia, Carmen, Anita, and I became cast as actors in a kind of parody of *superación*. There was nothing “real” about these household scenes: in fact, our poses of everyday living were completely fake. In one picture, I am sitting with Anita on a couch in a living room simulacrum: we are smiling at the camera as though someone were taking our picture in our own house. In our performances of domesticity, the dimension of *superación* that takes place on Appadurai’s plane of the “imagination” here meets the illusory unreality of our parody, two registers of the imagined that do not wholly cancel each other out, but neither map onto each other as equal terms. In these hilarious pictures, there is the sense that *superación* inhabits those spheres of the imagination that threaten to cross over into the unreal, the farce.

*Superación* borders on the absurd here in part because our excursion through IKEA pointed to the ironies of consumption and moral progress. On the one hand, IKEA depends on a narrative of universal access and a homogenized subject of consumption. For instance, in the photograph in which I am peering into the pot, it is as though I am already the owner of my new kitchen setting: all I need to do is to purchase it. However, as the price tags behind me reveal, constructing a home is expensive, and only possible through the monetary exchanges of capitalism. *Superación* is not solely achieved through hard work and industriousness, but also bought with no-nonsense currency. This parody of *superación* also exposes the intimate relation between consumerism and its promises of universalization. The symbols and tropes

that accompany the global flow of commodities seem to convey the potential of erasing the differences of those who choose to engage the materials of exchange. In the encounter with an IKEA commodity, for instance, subjects of consumption become stripped of their past identities as they confront the possibility of remaking their homes and themselves. Consumerism thus resembles discourses of integration in that it has the ability to elide the diverse localities and contingencies through which migrants must construct viable and meaningful lives.

However, the sheer amusement elicited among Julia, Carmen, and Anita by our reconstructions of IKEA living was made possible in part because of our incomplete and unsuccessful appropriation of the templates covered in price tags. In their parody, there is the sense that the kitchens, bedrooms, and bathrooms on sale belong not to us, but to another. Indeed, on IKEA’s Madrid website, a slideshow of families in their IKEA-furnished homes is displayed on the main page, and interestingly, feature predominantly white, middle to upper class individuals. Even though it seems as though IKEA advertises to a homogenized consumer public, its templates, products, and accessories market a sleek, modern style that is intersected with the racial and class histories of European modernity. The Peruvian women’s parody of progress in this sense signaled the ways by which commodities not only convey the narratives and symbols of consumerism, but also the subtle racial, ethnic, and class differences with which they are inscribed.

After all, both *superación* and consumerism implicate trajectories of social betterment within contexts of racial, ethnic, and class subjugation and domination.

The clean, simple motifs of IKEA's products are undoubtedly part of the company's success. As many authors have argued, poverty, indigeneity, and dirt are often linked together in powerful ways in the Andes (Gandolpho 2009, Leinaweaver 2008, Weismantel 2001). When I interviewed Javier, he asserted that in Peru, *no hemos andado sucios* (we haven't been dirty). In his conception, even the poorest of the Peruvian population are poor with dignity—that is, *limpios* (clean), as he described them. Javier's comments gesture toward the terrible entanglement of race and poverty that associates the indigenous poor with filth. Mary Weismantel discusses these associations in the context of indigenous market women in Ecuador: as public figures in non-Indian spaces, market women were frequently cast as "dirty Indians" (Weismantel 2001, 24).

My walk through IKEA with Carmen, Julia, and Anita made manifest the complex relationship between the capitalist logic of consumption and the morality of *superación* dictated by Andean idioms of progress. The guffaws from Anita, Julia, and Carmen you could hear in the passageways of IKEA in response to our photographs hinted toward a singular tension between these narratives of progress. On one hand, there is the sense that migrants are not able to escape the kinds of racial and class exclusions inscribed in commodities and intertwined in notions of *superación*. After all, both *superación* and consumerism implicate trajectories of social betterment within contexts of racial, ethnic, and class subjugation and domination. On the other hand, however, both idioms of progress invite the subject of social betterment to

redefine his or her identities and embark on better lives, whether achieved through consumption or the assimilation of "Western" modes of conduct. The insight and hilarity of these Peruvian women's parody is engendered in the paradoxical space between the social hierarchies that subtend *superación* and consumerism, and the possibilities of new, better ways of living promised by these same narratives of progress.

Our "paseo" (stroll) through IKEA shed light on the multiplicity of narratives—some contradictory, others compatible—that Peruvian migrants must negotiate and inhabit in Spain. For the migrants I befriended, "progress" was a contentious site where Peruvian histories of *superación* met narratives of modernity's decadence, Spanish discourses of consumerism, and accounts of global social and economic change. In addition, the kind of "individual" and the kind of "society" at play on the global stages of progress are manifold. The collectives invoked by migrants in our conversations could refer to a single family, a small town in Northern Peru, or even the totality of the modern world. The individuals conjured by notions of progress could similarly range from the independent subject of consumption to the working mother trying to support her children back home. It seems that progress, whether understood from the perspective of *superación* or globalized consumerism, teeters delicately between local needs and global hierarchies, individual actors and regional communities, universal imperatives and exclusions marked by race, class, and nationality.

Perhaps resolving the “immigrant problem” involves reconfiguring the localities and communities we include in our conceptions of the social world.

#### V: RETHINKING INTEGRATION

The ambiguities of *superación* in a transnational context point to the simplified models of social interaction that underpin discourses of integration. Rather, we in the First World must ask ourselves: what is at stake in the assimilation of immigrants, and what are the limits of integration? How are we to accommodate the myriad localities migrants are forging a life within, and how are we to provide more inclusive conditions for their flourishing and recognition? These questions are more pressing now than ever given the increasingly tightened immigration policies of the United States and Spain.

Perhaps resolving the “immigrant problem” involves reconfiguring the localities and communities we include in our conceptions of the social world. For Appadurai, locality is primarily “relational and contextual,” rather than spatial (Appadurai 1996, 178). Viewing immigration in this “relational and contextual” perspective, I believe, is key to elaborating alternative and more just modes of living—locality is not rooted simply in space, but can be modulated in our interactions with others around us. Perhaps it is in this spirit of concern for the localities around us that we may strive for collective social betterment—and even find new and unexpected neighbors.

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