



Migration far and wide

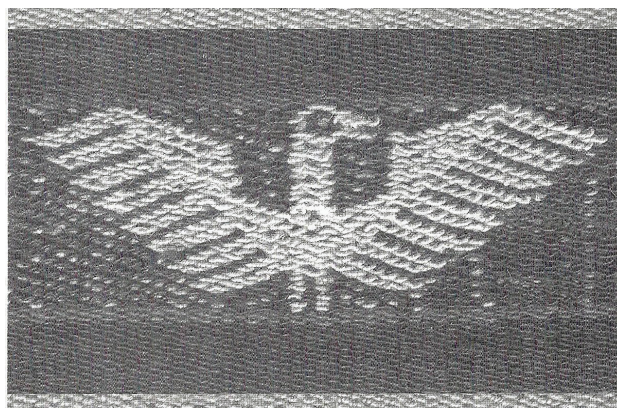
# From the Andes to São Paulo

**Albino Ruiz Lazo**

My birth stopped telegraph service on the line that used to link the towns along the shore of Lake Titicaca in Peru's highlands. On a dull wet Sunday in December 1955, neighbors took an old blind midwife from her shack high above the town of Acora to the post office where my mother worked as a telegrapher. When her labor pains started, my mother informed the other telegraph operators on the line from the city of Puno to the Bolivian border. They kept the line open, in case my birth proved difficult and she had to be rushed in a passing truck to Puno, 30 kilometers to the north.

Every day Peruvian telegraphers spread news of villages and the world, transmitting headlines of Lima newspapers which didn't reach Andean towns, news of politics, soccer and military coups. Japanese transistor radios, available elsewhere, had not yet reached our mountain villages. The telegraph office where I was born took part in all the changes which Peru went through until improved communications discarded the thousands of poles and wires of the national telegraph system.

The wand of change worked its magic quickly connecting isolated communities with the rest of the world, freeing the peasants from servitude and ignorance. The changes brought new roads, schools, different fuels, electricity, transport by bus, truck and plane, telephones with direct dialing, radios and recently public Internet booths, a new medium of mass communications. In remote towns, people now pay 57 U.S. cents per hour to phone relatives in the United States or Europe using an Internet Protocol, sharing details of the corruption scandal leading to the fall of President Alberto Fujimori and the creation



of new political alliances. My son Miguel, wandering among the villages of Puno, formed an Internet friendship with Raquel Salvador, a Spaniard living in London, whom he met in the Chat Café Ole. She has just arrived in Peru to spend a few days with Miguel in the Andes to become better acquainted.

## NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Even before the Internet facilitated communications so dramatically, the spread of secondary schools after the agrarian reforms of the 1970s pulled young people from villages into towns and cities. The new opportunities brought by these changes dispersed the mass of poor Quechuaspeaking peasants who went to my mother's post office to receive the medicines and cures that she distributed. When I returned to Acora many years later only old people were left. I was treated like a stranger. They told me I spoke and dressed like a gringo, that in my long absence I did nothing for my people.

Another absentee is Oswaldo Curo, who was born in 1971 in Capachica, on the other side of Lake

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*Albino Ruiz Lazo is a Peruvian researcher for the Fernand Braudel Institute of World Economics.*

*Some illustrations for this essay are taken from old Andean weavings.*



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# Old Times in Bom Retiro

Bernardo Ricupero

***“The greatest district of São Paulo That I most admire for its beauty Is  
Bom Retiro” (Juó Bananére)***

Juó Bananére never existed. But a young Brazilian writer using this name produced one of the best portraits of São Paulo of the early 20th Century: *La Divina Incenca* [*The Divine Confusion*]. Thanks to immigration, the city then was as much Italian as Brazilian. Nothing more natural, then, that a compatriot of Dante would descend to the inferno of this young metropolis and narrate, in an odd mixture of Italian and Portuguese, the adventures swarms in the streets of Paulicéia.

In these adventures, the *bairro* (neighborhood) of Bom Retiro had a central role, which should not surprise since it grew up near the railroad stations. After the opening of the São Paulo Railway in 1867, Bom Retiro became an effervescent spectacle of commerce, circulating imported goods arriving on the famous English railway. Soon factories appeared to add value to these goods, giving Bom Retiro its working-class character.

Alexandre Ribeiro Marcondes Machado, the real author of *La Divina Incenca*, had a privileged vantage point for describing what happened in Bom Retiro and in the rest of the city. He was a student of the Polytechnic School in Bom Retiro and could witness much of what he later wrote.

Sad irony may lurk in the fact that Juó Bananére, though never existing in mesh and blood, became so famous

that he erased the memory of his creator. Today nobody remembers Alexandre Machado, while Juó Bananére has become a familiar figure of São Paulo folklore. The cartoons of Voltolino, appearing in the weekly *O Pirralho*, immortalized Bananére as a pot-bellied Italian with a big moustache, cigar and walking cane.

Bananére became so real in the popular mind that he acquired a family and friends in his comic book appearances. His personality never was dearly defined in terms of age and occupation, varying in different cartoons from poet to barber to journalist to candidate for President of the Republic. Banana also ventured into florid and futuristic verse. He became known for his most original opinions, on the discovery of America, the Independence of Brazil, the government of President Hermes da Fonseca (1910-14), the First World War, divorce and socialism, etc., participating in some of these events.

Social mobility enables us to understand Bananére. Thus a recently arrived Italian could make trenchant observation on the behavior of prominent figures of the day, such as rich coffee planters and military chieftains. With this apparently chaotic posturing, Alexandre Machado could portray some of the principal features of Bom Retiro as well as of Brazil of those days, provoking public

opinion into attitudes of irony and objectivity about Brazil's history and current events.

The Bom Retiro of Juó Bananére little resembled the original neighborhood. Although only a mile from the central Sé Plaza, the bairro was the pleasant scene of small farm plots and gardens until the railroad came. The name Bom Retiro came from its use as a weekend refuge by wealthier São Paulo families.

The second wave of immigrants changed Bom Retiro once again. If the Italians who settled near the train stations after 1880 were mainly workers, the Jews who arrived after 1900 were merchants. Rua José Paulino, the only street connecting the Estação da Luz railway terminal with Bom Retiro, was still the manufacturing and commercial hub of the bairro. The words of Hilário Dertônio of 30 years ago describe the scene then as now.

Many old houses were torn down and replaced by large shopping galleries, each containing hundreds of stores, mainly selling clothing that often was made in their back rooms. Little space remained for other commerce. There were two or three drugstores, bakeries, bank branches, luncheonettes, government offices and furniture stores, only enough to sustain life on the street. The rest are stores, stores, where São Paulo's six million people [now 17 million] can buy supplies.

The Jews replaced Syrians and Lebanese immigrants who roamed over Brazil as itinerant peddlers,

selling a wide variety of goods to poor people. The peddlers called "Turks" came from the old Ottoman Empire, settling after a while in centers of commerce and light manufacturing. They offered a greater choice of goods to farm workers than the *barracões*, the country scores owned by the landlords. Many of today's retail store chains, still selling on credit, began with this kind of peddling.

There was one big difference between the Jews and the "Turks." The natives of Syria and Lebanon were roughly 10 times more numerous than the Jews, enabling them to fan out all over Brazil. The less numerous Jews, today some 150,000 in all of Brazil, had to settle in a few big cities to maintain their identity. In São Paulo, where nearly half of Brazil's Jews live, they settled at first mainly in Bom Retiro, specializing in manufacturing and sale of clothing.

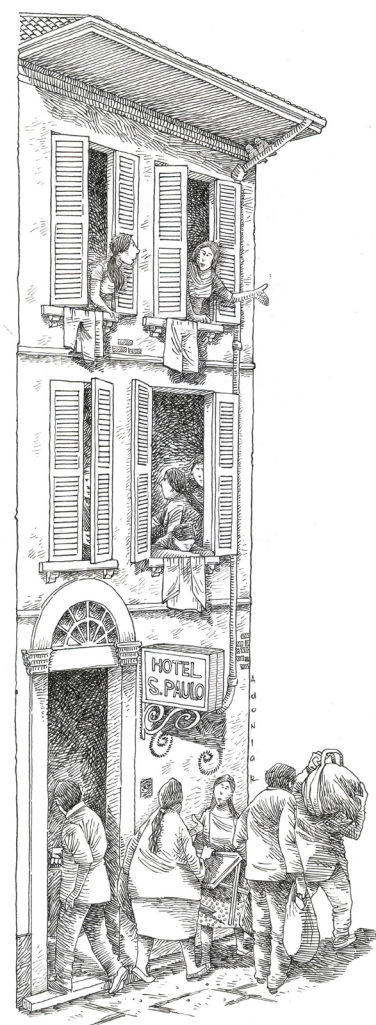
Albino Ruiz Lazo magnificently cells the story of what came next in this issue of Braudel Papers.

In the succession of Italians, Jews, Koreans, Bolivians and Peruvians in Bom Retiro, little seems to have changed. Enormous cultural differences provide Bom Retiro with a kind of urban archeology in which the traces and contributions of each wave of immigrants are found in successive layers. These waves of immigrants pursue similar economic activities, using similar production and commercial techniques. They specialize in selling cheap clothing, produced in precarious laborintensive workshops that are

under-capitalized, catering to the low-income population.

Thus with ingenuity and courage the immigrants often can overcome their limitations. They move from declining neighborhoods to more fashionable ones, leaving behind the newcomers and the residual poor. Some Bolivians and Peruvians in São Paulo nourish the optimism of Juó Bananére:

***"Oh, let my last breath Be taken in Bom Retiro, Where my tomb shall stay."***



**Bernardo Ricupero** is a young political scientist and member of the Fernand Braudel Institute, with family roots in the immigrant neighborhood of Brás.



*Continued from page 1*

Titicaca. I met him in São Paulo on a cold dawn in August 2000, looking for space to sell hand-made earrings among spectral hawkers of jewelry, leather goods, clothing and school supplies cramming a crowded street market near the old financial center of São Paulo. Chinese, Koreans, Chileans, Rumanians, Angolans, Ecuadorians and Peruvians, along with migrants from Brazil's Northeast, sell a whole wide range products wholesale to storeowners from interior towns until the arrival at 8 a.m. of tenants of the street stalls which are rented from handicapped concessionaires. At that hour a blitz of municipal inspectors, alerted by the handicapped in defense of their acquired rights, may descend upon the scurrying street hawkers

Oswaldo lives and produces costume jewelry with a mulata from Minas Gerais in the Hotel Itaúna, home to many Peruvian migrants in São Paulo. He has lived in Brazil for three of his 29 years, after dropping out of the Adventist University in Lima for lack of money. "I was ten years old when I left my town for the first time on a school trip to see the

sea in Arequipa," he said. "I didn't understand Spanish and didn't know what to say when someone spoke to me. In my town we just spoke Quechua. During school vacations I went back to Arequipa and sold ice cream in the streets. I learned about the city. My boss fed me and let me sleep in a corner of his factory. Something always drove me to leave home. So I went to Lima to study and now I'm here".

The door of the Hotel Itaúna opens on to the Avenue Rio Branco. The hotel gives off an acrid smell of mildew coming from the top of the stairs leading to the upper floors. Doors, railings and decorations in a faded green splash four of the five floors with color. Dim side corridors connect the 17 rooms on each floor. Doors remain half open most of the time, releasing smells of soap, food, sweat and Andean wool. Children play near the doors, while cries of babies mix with Cuzco cassette music. On the floors of the rooms, piles of alpaca fabric are separated into piles of woolen gloves, hats, chullos (Andean caps covering the ears), and handbags. Hanging From

wall hooks are hundreds of colored bracelets and necklaces from Peru, Ecuador, Paraguay, Brazil and Bolivia. Rooms at the back, hidden and divided by curtains, are used as bedrooms/workshops. Beds and mattresses crammed together at night give way by day to the making of earrings by trusted people paid five centavos per piece. Oswaldo employs young Brazilian girls in his room to make accessories like those used by the exuberant dancing Feticheira ("Sorceress") on TV. "The girls like to wear what Feticheira is wearing. Every Richer traders have built shelves in their rooms, used alternatively as bunk-beds and for storing goods. During the day the rooms become secret bazaars supplying thousands of Peruvians and other petty merchants arriving from the streets or the interior of Brazil. A central corridor connects the second row of rooms with the toilets, from which, in mid-morning, pour out half-dressed hotel residents dripping with water, on the way to their rooms. These are wholesalers returning from the turbulent dawn market. The hotel houses 350 Cusqueños in its 80 rooms.



## MIGRATIONS AND HUMAN ADAPTATION

These Cusqueños form part of the crescendo of world migration, one of the oldest forms of human adaptation. Between 70,000 and 100,000 years ago, when the first humans appeared in Africa, migration resulted in the spread of people over all the continent, almost always as a response to ecological crises, political conflicts and new opportunities. "The history of America is, in its widest sense, the history of migrations", observes the demographic historian Noble David Cook. Waves after waves of migrations have formed the World City of São Paulo: Portuguese, Negroes, Italians, Germans, Jews, Russians, Japanese, Koreans and now poor workers and traders from neighboring Latin American countries.

The human torrent today crosses borders and continents. Peruvians, Brazilians and Iranians swarm into Japan, whose populations has been decreasing for decades due to a fall in birth rates. South Africa each year expels 100,000 of its two million immigrants who have no documents, but many return illegally. Chinese enter Europe through the Balkans, Muslims go to Italy through Bosnia in weekly flights from Istanbul and Tehran. In the first semester of 2000, the government of Croatia captured 10,000 illegal immigrants, compared with 8,000 in all of 1999, who came from China, Rumania, Turkey, Bangladesh and elsewhere. Albanian gangsters and prostitutes enter Italy to circulate throughout Europe. In June the asphyxiated bodies of 58 Chinese, trying to enter Britain illegally, were found in the back of a truck in Dover. According to *The New York Times*, "These stories seem to confirm the growing alarm among diplomats and immigration officials in the West. They believe that an extensive and sophisticated network of traffickers of human beings from Asia, has transferred its targets from the United States to Europe".

In New York, 40% of today's population was born outside the US, in 167 different countries, speaking 116 languages. "Without immigration, New York would be very different with whole districts abandoned and a shrinking population", states the sociologist Philip Kasinitz. The most recent waves of immigrants come from Russia, Mexico, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Dominican Republic and Colombia. Similar migrations arrive in Paris and London. In the United States, 12% of the work force consists of immigrants, a total of 15.7 million people, of whom 5 million are illegal. The United States annually issues 250,000 visas to foreign software technicians. In Silicon Valley in California, Indians in 1998 ran 774 companies and another 2,001 were run by Chinese, together employing 58,282 people producing 17% of the high technology sales of the Valley. The state government of Iowa, in the farming heartland, is now recruiting immigrants, alarmed by demographic losses, the aging of its native population and emigration of its young people after they leave school. Italy, with one of the lowest birthrates in human history, has more people older than 60 than younger than 20. It is difficult to think of a solution other than immigration for the demographic problem of Western

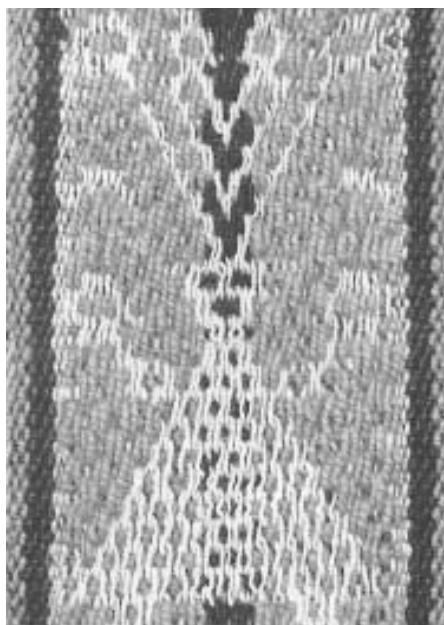
Europe with its negative reproduction rate. What is politically difficult is to attempt to establish legal distinctions between the free movement of goods and the free movement of people.

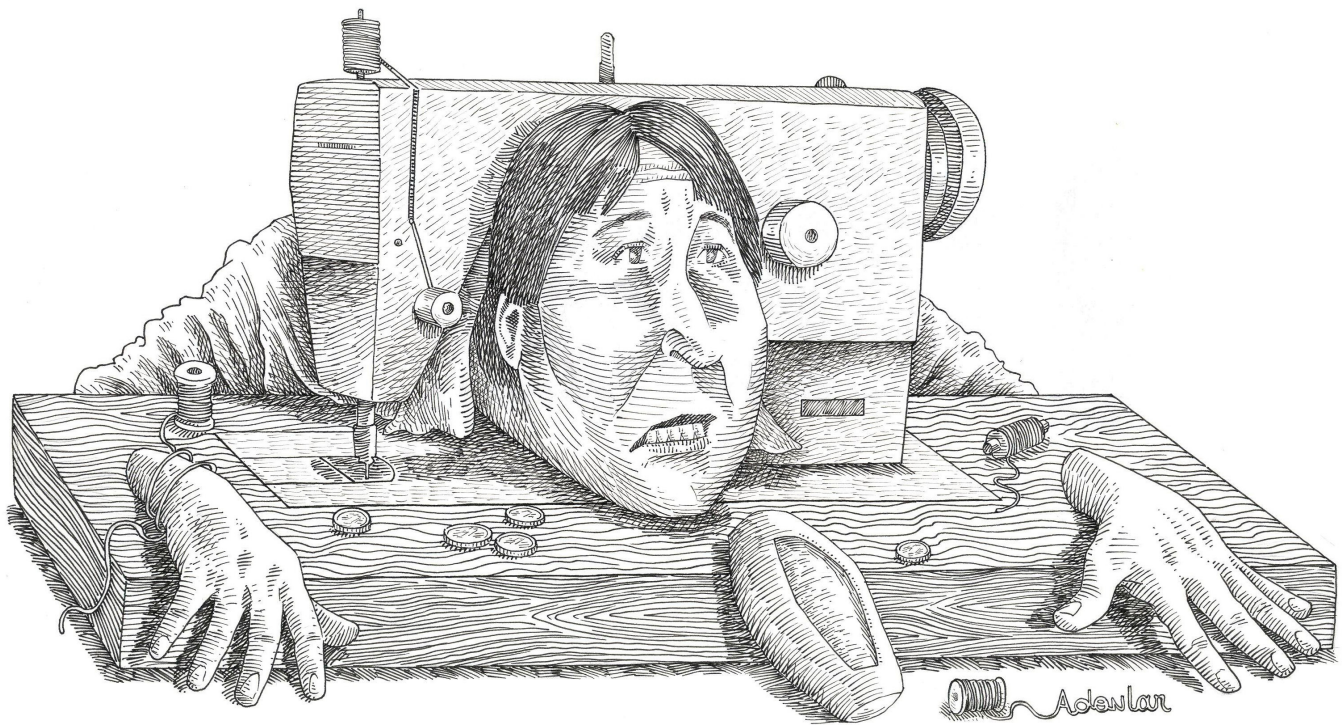
## THE CUZCO CRADLE

Since the end of the Shining Path terrorist insurrection in the early 1990s, Cuzco has become one of South America's main tourist attractions. Amid colonial churches and the massive stone monuments of the ancient Inca empire, Quechua-speaking Indians draped in colorful ponchos pose for tourist photos beside llamas festooned with pink ribbons tied to their ears, asking for tips in smatterings of English and French. Discos and bars flash neon lights and Visa signs. Hawkers surround tourists to sell alpaca sweaters and native jewelry, a business that engaged Raúl Aquino as a boy when he arrived in Cuzco from a mountain village to finish his secondary education. It was so easy to sell these artifacts to Brazilian tourists that Raúl, like other poor Cusqueños, decided to try his luck in São Paulo.

In the Hotel Itaúna, Raúl and Fausto, and Indian from Ecuador, talk and do business. Short and round-faced, with a long ponytail typical of his native region, Fausto says that every eight days he flies to Otavalo, his town in northern Ecuador, to bring bracelets and personal adornments with Brazilian motifs made to order there. Artisans in the region produce crafts that are well-known internationally. Like Fausto, the people of Otavalo today travel the world to sell their crafts in every conceivable market. In São Paulo, the Otavaleños stay at the Peruvian's hotel so they can make contacts through the Peruvians and get to know the local market.

Raúl was one of the first Peruvians to stay at the hotel. "When I first arrived in 1995, we just came for a few days. We had to sell our goods quickly and return because it was





very expensive for us to stay, with the exchange rate high. Those in the hotel now arrived a short time ago. Raúl now lives in a room in a nearby apartment, with a floating group of friends and relations. Almost all of them completed their secondary education, in contrast to most Brazilian. Bolivian and Ecuadorian men of their age and social class. He is 27, broad-shouldered with tiny dark eyes. He is renewing his residence permit to rent a stall in a Chinese Shopping Center in downtown. He comes to the hotel to buy goods. His brother Nacho has just returned to Peru with money to look after their mother and their two sisters who study at the University of Cuzco and is looking for earrings, now in short supply. "Here things are very different," he says. "Everything gets sold. The consumers are hungry, especially women. They like what we bring. But novelties wear off and we must always change our merchandise".

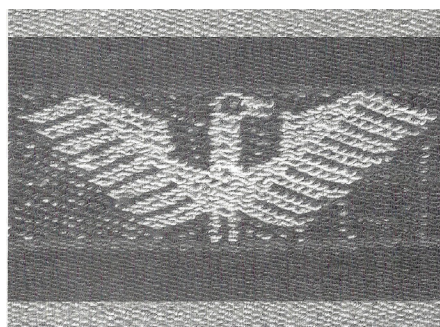
Except on Sundays, the hotel wakes up before 5 a.m. Light from under the doors shines into the corridors. Low voices, a few quiet cassette recorders and then a sudden herd of people leaving with enormous parcels into the darkness of the streets and the

early morning market. They leave in groups to protect themselves against thieves. They have taken precautions since the hotel was robbed in July, when the traders' goods and money were stolen. They keep lots of cash because they cannot legally open a bank account.

In recent years over 50,000 Peruvians, mostly from Cuzco, migrated to Brazil. Many sell in markets, beaches and interior towns, making São Paulo their center of operations. They say that they have never visited a shanty-town. An average of ten people share the rooms, each of them responsible for their share of living costs, part of a network of families and friends. Peruvians and Brazilians buy and sell merchandise from each other to take to their places of origin. The Peruvians sell in three

ways: The travelers supply wholesalers of the hotel at a basic price. They also sell directly in street stalls at a slightly higher price. The retailers are supplied at any time in the hotel for cash or on credit if they have a guarantor or good commercial standing.

Peruvians come from all over. Darío, from Huancayo in the Andes, became king of the fridge magnets, small ceramic fruits that housewives love. He first came to Brazil as an international trafficker of university theses, selling theses from Brazilian universities to students in Peru and Bolivia. He discovered a good market for Peruvian handmade magnets to decorate refrigerators, cheaper and of better quality than those made in Brazil or Asia. So he decided to bring fridge magnets from Peru in overland trips. When Brazil's currency was devalued in early 1999, he started manufacturing them in Brazil to take advantage of cost economies. In the poorest areas of Lima he found skillful hands to make fridge magnets. Darío also discovered that it is a Peruvian component that gives the magnets their quality and viscosity. So he brought both materials and labor and began production in a workshop at





the back of a house in the São Paulo district of Casa Verde. Sales boomed. He set up more clandestine workshops and built a commercial platform that now dominates the market. Now Darío says that he will export. He returned to Peru to set up a factory in a poor Lima district, with dozens of craftworkers doing piecework.

The Peruvians protect their apartments with security systems common in São Paulo, with closed circuit TV cameras focusing on corridors and elevators connected to a cable system. The system enables them to see what is going on outside their dwellings, filled with a jumble of boxes, merchandise, suitcases and piled up mattresses. In order to move from the Hotel Itaúna to a small apartment, the tenant has to meet certain requirements. He must put down a deposit equal to several months' rent. His identity documents must be in order and he must have a guarantor and proof of regular income.

The presence of the Cusqueños in Brazil derives in part from its growth as a worldwide tourist attraction in the last 30 years after the construction of an international airport and, more recently, the paving of the road to La Paz. Immediately after the control of Peru's cholera epidemic and the end of the guerrilla war in the early 1990s, the flow of tourists increased between 1995 and 1999 by 500% to reach a million. Cuzco's native crafts revived along with migrations along the old corridor to Bolivia, used for levies of forced labor and trade with the silver mines during the colonial era.

In the Andean world, migrations follow ancient patterns. In Inca times migrations took place as a result of the organized transfer of workers to building sites. Soldiers went on conquering expeditions or to control or punish peoples already conquered. In colonial times Andean peasants fled their communities to escape forced labor in the mines. In 1680, almost half of Cuzco's urban population was made up of migrants working as muleteers, craftsmen, traders and household servants. With modernization and urbanization, migrations have multiplied.

With the increase in international tourism came the international traders of craftwork keen to produce earrings and necklaces with incusted Brazilian stones en masse. "Jeff the Gringo set up a factory which employed 100 craftworkers" remembers Raúl Aquino. "He made us work day and night, making us produce more and more. He paid us \$10 a week to produce a hundred pairs of earrings. I set up my own workshop when direct buyers appeared. One day they told us that there was a glut on the market and that they couldn't pay us for the merchandise that we

had given them. I had 4,000 pairs of earrings and a lot of debts. I came to Brazil to sell them directly to the public. The stone sellers told me that there was a good market here".

When Peru's recession of the 1990s got worse, thousands of Cusqueños went to Brazil to look for a market. When making his way around Lake Titicaca Raúl obtained the rough alpaca fabrics that the gringos like to buy. They discovered that the mulatas in São Paulo love to show off their clothes in the short São Paulo winter. Indian chullos, now no longer used in Peru, come out of the metro stations in São Paulo, on the heads of their proud buyers.

To increase his sales volume, Raúl rented a 2x2 meter stall inside the Sé central metro station, where two million of the 17 million people who live in São Paulo pass by every day. Greater São Paulo generates 20% of the gross national product of Brazil, almost twice the size of the economies of Peru and Bolivia combined.

#### KOREANS ARRIVE

Before the Peruvians and the Bolivians, the Koreans arrived. Tjitjalenka was the name of the boat that in 1963 brought the first 100 Korean families from the land of the ancient kingdom of Kyrio under an agreement between the governments of Brazil and Korea. Thus a long tradition discouraging emigration was broken. Unemployment among those who escaped From North Korea and the enormous economic crisis alter the division of Korea 50 years ago led the government of South Korea to finance emigration to Brazil with the aims of controlling population growth, relieving unemployment, obtaining hard currency that the emigrants would send home, and gaining allies in the non-Communist world.

But the immigrants had a different idea. They did not want to keep their links with Korea. Their departure was final. They arrived in Brazil with the idea of becoming farmers. They were army officers, educated middle-class and some from the upper class. They failed. They tried to get work in São Paulo but few succeeded. So they went on to the streets to sell Asian scarves and shirts door-to-door.

"Success was immediate," remembers Mu Kon Kim, an elderly evangelical pastor. "Most Koreans were Christians from a variety of churches. In the beginning it was very easy to know what the rest were doing as they almost all lived in the Korean area of the Liberdade district. When they found out that door-to-door sales could make money, others did the same. This enabled them to get to know the city and its needs, and encouraged the three pioneering Kims,



Soon San Kim, In Bae Kim and Sun Hoom Kim to begin manufacturing textiles.

Only the oldest remember the gambit that led Soo San Kim to buy a small sewing machine in installments to sew tablecloths and scarves at home, until late at night, and sell them the next morning at ten to twelve times the cost of the fabric. The other Kims successfully followed his example.

The success of the three pioneers inspired other Koreans. This febrile activity soon dominated their homes. Brazil's fast economic growth at the time absorbed production that increased daily, pouring out of rudimentary workshops hidden near the center of the city. Household

sewing machines bought in installments were the only equipment they had. They cut fabric with scissors, kneeling on the floor. When the demand grew to frightening heights, the Koreans no longer had time to eat. They sewed day and night until they fainted.

New groups of Koreans came into Brazil every day across the Bolivian border. Those who had started to make garments did not hesitate to exploit the illegal immigrants' fear of being deported to subject them to a kind of slavery in the hidden workshops of the Vila Coreana. They sweated away in secret, with closed windows, hiding the children so that public view of them would not betray their presence. They feared that each passing police car was coming for them. By the time their residence in Brazil was legalized by an immigration amnesty in 1982, hundreds of small wholesale businesses flourished in Bras and Bom Retiro.

The Koreans now say that they control 60% of the garment industry, of which 99% is now produced by Bolivian sewing machine operators in no less than 30,000 workshops in the center and many districts of São Paulo's sprawling periphery. There are some 150,000 craftsmen. Most inhabitants of São Paulo acquire clothes, generally of poor quality, produced by the mingling of two racially and culturally distant groups: the Koreans and the growing mass of Bolivians.

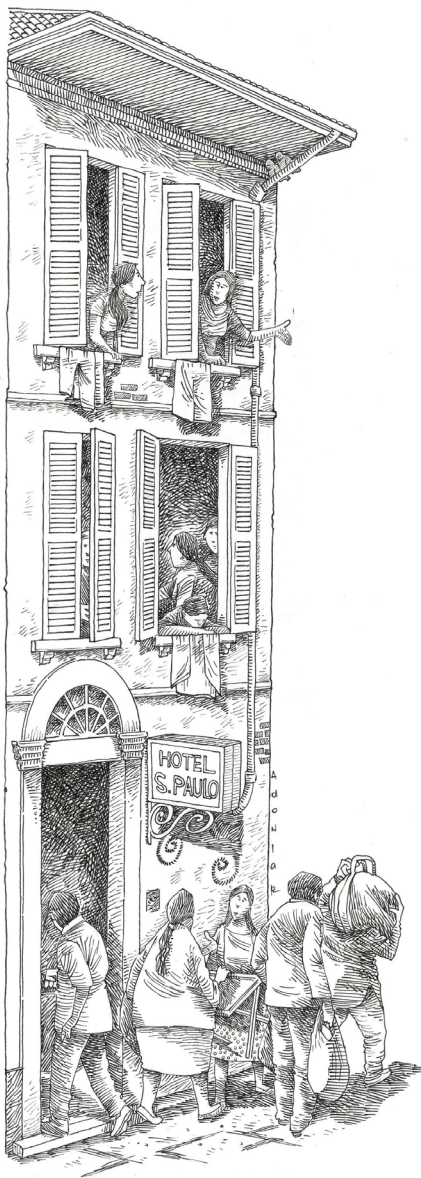
#### LOW PRODUCTION COSTS

Before the 1982 amnesty, wholesalers supplied by clandestine workshops did well. An agent working at a commission of 5% would place the production of the workshops on the market and collect orders. The workshops tried to make a profit of 100% on the value of the product and the wholesalers 20% on the retail value. The prosperity generated in the informal workshops

led the manufacturers who had become wealthy since 1975 to move their homes away from the immigrant districts of Brás, Bom Retiro, Pará and Liberdade to the smarter area of Aclimação. Prosperous entrepreneurs kept advancing to better neighborhoods, time toward Higienópolis and Moema. But the old immigrant districts of Bras and Bom Retiro remained the operational centers of their businesses.

Competition between small firms produced a culture of saving and simplicity among the Koreans in Brazil. The importance of saving can be seen in all their businesses. Decoration and furniture are very simple, without even signs and shop window decoration. Bargains are noted down on rough pieces of paper hanging from a box. Low production costs are obtained through minimum investment in infrastructure, maximum control over wages and technological backwardness. To insure success and reduce risks of loss, they have two strategies. The first is stock control, producing in small quantities, normally lots of between 400 and 1,500 items, with the most daring reaching 7,000. The second is credit, paying the supplying workshops only after sale and return of unsold goods. When a model is placed on the market, it is immediately tested. If it begins to sell, new stock is requested. If it doesn't sell in between 30 and 60 days, it goes back to the workshop.

Many Bolivians, motivated by the dynamic market in Brazil and the critical situation in Bolivia, illegally entered Brazil as the Koreans were starting to dominate the São Paulo garment industry. The thousands of illegal Korean sweatshop workers who became legal residents after the 1982 amnesty were replaced by Bolivians fleeing hunger, so that Korean firms still could grow in the competitive and voracious São Paulo market. Bolivians have their own roots in the garment trade. In the middle of the 1980s, textile businesses were set





up in the outskirts of La Paz and El Alto in Bolivia. Open-air markets flourished on the borders with Peru and Chile, where local imitations of American clothes suited for the cold were sold. The commercial network employed a floating population of sellers whose movements retrace the steps of wandering Andean merchants in colonial times. Clothes entered Peru illegally over the border at Desaguadero, near Lake Titikaka. Inhabitants of the Peruvian border towns of Ollaraya, Unicachi and Tinicachi made fortunes smuggling Bolivian jeans and coats, until Peruvians learned to make them in their own workshops in Lima.

The rough clothes were very popular in the Andes for their low prices. Throughout the 1980s, workshops were constantly going bankrupt and new ones set up with more sophisticated machines able to produce more detailed and complicated embroidery. The workshops that could not compete failed. First the craftsmen and then the owners of the workshops migrated to enter the garment industry of São Paulo, often bringing their old machines with them.

Used to wandering from one place to another, to living in mines and seeing daylight only for a few hours a week, the Bolivians quickly got used to living in the Koreans' workshops. Entire families of illegal immigrants accepted living and working in conditions of near slavery. Doing piecework for 16 hours a day, they reproduced the routine of their employers when the Koreans were illegal. Some 150,000 Bolivians now work in Korean sweatshops for small and elusive wages paid by vouchers that may prove worthless.

The first Bolivian migrants cherished hopes of returning to Bolivia to set up a workshop or becoming capitalists like the Koreans in Brazil. A new immigration amnesty in 1998 gave them hope. Before they could be accused under law of running a slave

industry, the Koreans handed over the control of the sweatshops to the new Bolivians for a good reason. By transferring the risk to the Bolivians and absorbing their labor, they would be freeing themselves from the fear of a possible fine when discovered by the authorities. The Korean sweatshops continued to operate in wretched conditions, but now behind the legal shield of Bolivian ownership.

Now with identity documents and considerable experience, the Bolivians quickly entered the sweatshop business after their position was legalized in Brazil. They could now legally rent property, have a bank account and take advantage of the ease with which one can buy second-hand equipment at bargain prices on credit in São Paulo's many repair shops.

The cheapest Chinese sewing machine can be bought for US\$190. A Japanese Juki for US\$270 and an American one for US\$325. The small overlock sewing machines are more expensive; the cheapest costs US\$650. With no more than US \$900 a simple sewing workshop can be set up. More complex machines for specific works cost a lot but not so much more. The businesses which sell these machines generally belong to Brazilians who have been regularly selling to Koreans and then to Bolivians. Many of the machines now are assembled in Manaus and arrive at prices lower than a few years ago. But these machines are technologically out-of-date.

Inexperience naturally has its costs. Some migrants fulfill their dreams and some fail. The more successful are able to get along in the new world, overcoming ups and downs. They manage to buy a house and drive their own cars. They bring up their children decently. They blend reasonably well into Brazilian society. They manage dozens of businesses. For their children Bolivia is a remote place. The second group is made up of those who survived but failed in their attempts to run their own business.

Some enter other lines of business.

Rosa Elvira is now getting on in years. She speaks Portuguese better than Spanish because Aymara sounds are closer to Portuguese. She sells electronic accessories and pirate copies of CD software in the downtown electronics flea market of Santa Ifigenia Street. "I came here 20 years ago with all of my family. I had a garment workshop near the district of Sopocachi in La Paz. I was born in La Paz. I couldn't sell anything in Bolivia. I had to sell clothing at the Peruvian border, but they were already making the same clothes on the other side of the border. I lived with all of my family in the workshop. We had to come. The Koreans don't pay anything. We just got vouchers. Just vouchers! No money! We've done everything. I've sold food. They gave you credit and the workers you sold to on credit disappeared or changed jobs. We've also sold hot dogs in the street. We've done everything. Now my daughter had a workshop. I couldn't. I had to go all over looking for fabric, cooking for everyone. I had to pay five things: rent, electricity, water, food and wages. The money's not enough. Too much work and not enough money. The Koreans pay just a few cents for a sewn garment. Just a few cents. Now I'm better selling software on the streets."

Those who go to Santa Ifigenia Street are looking for specific things. Specific copies of software, hardware, plugs, adapters. When she doesn't have them, she notes the order in a little book. She knows that people will return because the street sellers are the best way to get any product cheaply, from woolen products from the Andes to the latest technology.

Other Bolivians work as designers and cutters. "I prefer to work for Brazilians," explains Samuel Condo, a designer at Street Fashion on Arcoverde Street. "They pay better and you can enjoy work. I hate the Koreans. They take advantage. When you design something original, they don't give you any credit. They always

want more. Let's not even speak about the Bolivians, they are like dogs eating each other up. The worst are those who work as foremen for the Koreans. As they speak your language they squeeze everything out of you, both the older ones and the new arrivals. It's hard to know why the new Koreans are in the garment industry."

Some younger Bolivians are the shame and worry of their parents in São Paulo. Many who arrived as children identified with the habits of the lower classes in São Paulo. Aware that they are legal citizens, they have no interest in continuing with their parents' business. They have no other horizon than that of living from day-to-day. Brazilian society is an enormous surface where they are lost.

### SUNDAY NIGHTS IN THE PLAZA PARÍ

From 5 p.m. every Sunday the small triangular square of Santo Antonio in the district of Parí is filled with Andean tunes blaring from within the railings that enclose the bleak concrete space that remains empty until the end of the day. On one side of the square, there is a jumble of soldered iron pipes which have sunk into the dirty sand, the playground where children of all ages play.

Out of the night come thousands of anxious Bolivians for their weekly taste of freedom. The crowds circulate among the obstacles and stalls and help themselves to traditional Andean food outside the perimeter fence where older Bolivians arrive in ancient cars with their families to open street stalls.

The Andean street market flourishes under its flickering spotlights hooked up to local power lines. Cassettes of Bolivian music are strewn over metal folding tables as portable stereo players blast the latest hits from La Paz. Inside the plaza evangelical missionaries preach in Spanish over loudspeakers to appreciative rows of young people, their sermons alternating with lively sets by a Bolivian rock band. Outside

the fence, other Bolivians crowd around an elderly woman selling from sacks of grain and tubers from the Andes: tubers such as quinoas, ollucos, and ocas, dried wheat, corn to make chicha, serrano cheese, jerked beef, all brought from Bolivia. On another corner, photos of Bolivian sporting and social events are displayed in thick albums to be sold at three reals for each photo.

Young Bolivians circle the Plaza Parí, pausing before food stalls, hawkers and signs posted by Korean labor recruiters. They search for a familiar face, a gesture, a neighbor from Bolivia. From parked vehicles anxious eyes of recruiters follow the streams of young men like Walker and Rubén, who, in shirtsleeves, shiver in the winter night while gawking at the crowd. They suddenly cross the sidewalk to meet an acquaintance and shake hands. Nothing to say. Just a big smile and then they look at the ground. The clothes of the new arrivals say everything, having just arrived from their sweatshop.

"We arrived together", says Walker.

"We were working with the Bolivian who brought us. He's had us working for six months and only by arguing have we got him to pay us 10 reals each," adds Rubén. "We got in a taxi. We didn't know where we were, and we told the driver: the square in Parí. We paid him all the money. Do you understand our situation?"

Rubén and Walker, classmates in a school in El Alto, failed the entry exam to the University of La Paz at the beginning of the year. They decided to reply to a radio advertisement offering work in São Paulo with all travel expenses, board and lodging included and good wages on top. "There were six of us," recalls Rubén. "We waited on the border until it was night to board a bus full of Bolivians. Arriving in São Paulo, we were sent to different workshops." Walker was angry: "Our boss kept saying that we owe him money. We've sewed pants, shirts, everything. He asked us to make more and more. He said that it was never enough, that we should produce more so we would begin to earn money. In the workshop there





were six other Bolivians. They never told us anything or wanted to help us. They could go out on Sundays." "They escaped," comments an other worker.

In a dimly lit corner of the Plaza Parí cardboard signs hang from the fence with job offers scribbled on them. A Bolivian recruiter leads job-seekers to a Korean who tears pages from a notebook on which he writes the address and phone number of his workshop. "The Korean doesn't speak Spanish," explained an older Bolivian who works for the Korean. "You've got to go to the workshop to see about the conditions". Well-dressed Korean women and a Brazilian man also hand out papers. The two friends receive the papers and their faces light up. They still are shivering from the cold. They are no older than 20, no more than five feet tall. They have not been able to communicate with their parents. In his pocket Walker has some letters to send. The recruiter takes them to the other end of the plaza where a knot of young men is quietly talking and joking. Others gather to silently stare at a Bolivian girl passing by, sniffing her from a distance. The Bolivian recruiter parcels out his young charges. "Go with that one" points out the acquaintance. "The younger Koreans are better, the old ones are cheats." The Korean goes to a nearby parked car, followed by a group of young men whom the two friends join.

For hours, until late at night, the music sustains the atmosphere of a strange village Feast in the old immigrant district of the metropolis. At about 8 p.m. the activity in the square reaches its peak. Rubén recognizes a girl who was his neighbor in La Paz. She passes, looks at him as if she as if he were a stranger and goes on her way. The crowd begins to thin out at 11 p.m. The patrol car, from which policemen were watching the crowd, turns on its circular lights and goes away. And fond words chime away: "Buenas noches, amigo. Chau.

See you next Sunday." The strangers file through the lifeless streets. The hours of freedom are coming to an end for those who are permitted to air their bodies on Sunday evenings to get away from the entrails of the Korean sweatshops of the districts of Bom Retiro, Bus and Parí.

Very little has changed in the districts which have been successively inhabited by Italians, Jews and Koreans in the last 80 years. Old houses are stained by mildew and black dead moss. It never seemed necessary to build anything new. Discretion and a veil of simplicity prevail in the streets full of shops that receive merchants arriving on the hundreds of buses parked in front of the innumerable cheap hotels accommodating buyers and sellers coming from the interior of Brazil or from other countries, similar to the Hotel Itaúna of the Peruvians. The buses wait for their passengers through the afternoon before disappearing into the veins of Brazil with their enormous loads of merchandise acquired in the early morning in the 25 de Março wholesale market and the secret hiding places of nearby manufacturing districts.

#### WORK LIKE COOLIES

The new Bolivian owners of the sweatshops learned, refined and eliminated costs of their old bosses, the Koreans. "Work like coolies" is their motto. They attract and bring young Bolivians to Brazil through their own recruiting agents.

Coming to Brazil to work as a sewer is common in Bolivia. Advertisements on radio stations paint marvelous pictures to potential migrants, all young. Three meals a day and lodgings provided by the boss, in addition to wages which will be ten times that of the minimum Bolivian wage, working in the garment industry in São Paulo. No experience or knowledge of sewing machine operation is required.

The most common route is to travel to the eastern Bolivian city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra and from there catch

what is known as the Death Train for the long, hot and tiring crossing of the Chaco to Puerto Suarez, on the Brazil-Bolivia border. Those with passports ask in Corumbá, on the Brazilian side, for a one-month entry permit. Those without passports wait until night-fall to mingle with the herd of traders and smugglers who come in buses full of merchandise, traveling with them to São Paulo to avoid problems at police control points. Some arrive at the huge Tietê bus station in São Paulo. Others go to interior towns harboring Bolivian workshops. Each boss will bring his own apprentices, some of whom ordered from recruiters. The trick is to instill them with great fear of their illegal status. Even when they have a stamped passport, they never manage to return to the border to renew their visas for another month.

Just as the Koreans did with Korean migrants, and then with Bolivians, the new Bolivian owners of the informal workshops are viewed by the Brazilian labor legislation as illegal and exploiting slavery.

The new migrants are less afraid than their predecessors. They know what may await them. But they keep on coming. The Bolivians who now own the sweatshops learned from the Koreans to work with all their windows closed, turning up the volume of their radios to drown out the noise of their machines. They forbid their sewing machine operators to go out to the street even to buy candy. They offer higher wages for shifts from Monday to Saturday that begin at 8 a.m. and end after midnight, when the body can do no more.

The large number of Bolivian workshops has collapsed the wage structure. The workshops sew to order. They look for ads from Korean firms to accept small job lots. Koreans pay the Bolivian workshops only one real (50 US cents) for sewing a pair of pants. The Bolivian pays his sewer 25 cents. A T shirt earns 30 cents. "It's clean profit," says Sabino Huaman, a



workshop boss. "They arrive ignorant, they sew badly and they have no idea of how much it costs to manage a workshop. They're incapable of organizing a union. Who are they going to complain to?"

The most common occupational disease is a gradual loss of vision. The fabrics that most injure sight are black and white. Workers also suffer from shortage of breath and respiratory illness caused by the dust from the clothes. They often are afflicted by severe pains in their legs as well as circulation problems and rheumatism caused by the lack of movement, awful working conditions and extensive alcoholism. When a Bolivian becomes ill, he has to pay for his own cure or go to a public hospital.

At the slightest hint of a police blitz, the workshop is moved to another locale. Both to separate the new workers from the older ones and to avoid a possible surprise from the tax inspectors, the workshops have been transferred to distant districts such as Guarulhos and Guaianases on the eastern edge at Greater São Paulo. Staying in the same place as little as possible is always the best practice. Mastery of sewing techniques is an

obsession for the workers as it allows them to change jobs quickly and earn more money than they ever saw when working in the mines. This enables them to get drunk on beer instead of chicha, paying less than in Bolivia.

Opportunism and the search for quick profits have created in the Koreans habits which makes it difficult for them to conquer more sophisticated markets. An ambitious project designed to join small firms into a consortium in order to launch their products on to the international market won government support from the Brazilian Export Promotion Agency, with a three-year state subsidy from September 1999, based on the success of a company which sold US\$300 million worth of products to Chile. Thus the Brazilian brand "Tropical Spice" was launched.

The first international presentation of the Koreans in Las Vegas in February 2000 was a step into the unknown, doing away with all their pretensions of becoming powers in the garment industry. International markets require production quantities beyond the capacities of small Korean firms. For the first time in years the Koreans felt ridiculous.

They brought to Las Vegas a catalogue containing 150 samples. They were astonished when they received their first orders of from 50 to 70 thousand units to be delivered in less than 30 days. This was impossible, given the production structure of small lots produced in badly equipped workshops, most of which were in the hands of Bolivians cranking museum pieces. They came back with their tails between their legs.

In their market research they had never noticed the volumes demanded in mass production for large retail chains. Korean and Bolivian sweatshops in São Paulo lack the machines to produce quality garments that even the more advanced workshops in Bolivia can make.

Sunk in their considerable stocks of unsold clothes, using the same Las Vegas catalogue which circulates on the Internet, the Koreans attacked the smaller markets of Mercosur such as Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Chile, without caring much for the quality of their finished products. Meanwhile, the Koreans obtained credit from the Brazilian government to modernize their industrial



equipment. The Bolivians are a long way from being able to overcome the barriers preventing them from participating in such projects. Inability to cooperate and join forces prevents them from trying more ambitious projects. The sons of Bolivia who, in their homeland are so good at organizing street demonstrations of unions of blind telephone token sellers, cannot unite in Brazil.

Quickly, but not very perceptibly, a hotel in the center of São Paulo is being taken over by Bolivian traders from El Alto as the smuggling of Bolivian products on the Peruvian border falls. The opening of world markets casts more doubt upon the old idea that the industrialists of the south of Peru

made their political dogma: fear of expansion of Brazilian exports that would destroy Peruvian industry and that made the projects for a road to link the two countries sleep under the charm of eloquent phrases of political speeches and diplomacy. But with its industry collapsed and its markets saturated with imported products, trying to keep the trade barrier of the Andes intact no longer has meaning for Peruvian industry.

A new open world recognizes fewer political and natural barriers. Brazilian products arrive in Peru. Peruvian and Bolivian immigrants arrive in Brazil. The governments end up by accepting *de facto* situations. New forms of communication and

business appear. Internet and cheap air fares provide information and easy transport. There also are other types of international trade. There is now an enormous international market of used garments, from rich to poor countries. Secondhand Japanese cars are brought to Peru. Some 300 Pakistani traders have set up in Tacna, on the border of Peru with Chile, selling a million Japanese cars in the last five years. National barriers are now more porous. Wealth ends up by being distributed in its own ways. This is the most important meaning of globalization.

**Translation by John Milton**