

# **Identity and Nationalism in Peru,**

## **Quechua Indians, the mirror of the conflict,**

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### **Summary**

#### ***Introduction.***

One day in January 1981, I was at Plaza de Armas, the square outside the palace of government in Lima. I observed a nationalistic manifestation which had its background in a border conflict between Peru and Ecuador.

As an outsider I could easily see the sharp social differences among the people in the square, and this area became in my eyes one of the many images of Peruvian society. I remember that within the "human contrast" I tried to identify the reality of the Quechua Indians in this nation called Peru.

This nationalistic manifestation was just one of many others with the same content which I later experienced in Peru. They were manifestations which never gained any massive popular support. I started to think about a form of nationalism which is institutionalised and manipulated from the top of society, and about what sort of strategies it could use. If there were alternative forms of nationalism, alternative popular movements, what sort of expression they would take and in what sort of social spheres of society these "alternative" would work. From this point of view, I am going to describe and analyse the Andean Quechua culture of Peru.

#### ***Historical background.***

A parallel cultural development started in Peru as a result of the confrontation between the Spanish conquerors and the Andean Indian population. The Inca language and a similar Inca cosmology were important elements, at the time that the Quechua Indians pronounced themselves against the Spaniards.

Quechuas cultural strategy of survival against the Spanish population in Peru was based on adaptation, resistance, exchange and it also led to internal development. In this process Spanish-European elements were incorporated in the culture of the Quechua Indians.

The parallel development of culture and society in Peru was also initiated by the Spanish government. The Spanish administration had its centre in Lima -near the coast- not in Cuzco - the previous capital of the Incas- which is situated in southern Peru.

The citizens of Spanish descent were considered to be members of the Spanish nation - the colonisers- while the population of Indian descent was considered to belong to the Indian nation - the colonised. The members of these separate nations had different obligations to the Spanish crown.

In the 1820's Peru gained independence from Spain, giving origin to a new nation, at a theoretical level the separated nations of Spanish and Indians melted together. In reality the division between the citizens of Peru was maintained, but in a new order. It was a population which now consisted of Indians, mestizos, descents of the African slaves and the white Spanish population.

At that time existed a nationalistic potential within the Quechua culture. The Quechuas considered themselves capable of fulfilling their obligations to both the Peruvian state and their local Indian communities. Some of these Quechua Indians called that to be a good *republicano* and it could have been this kind of double identity which could have been required to involve the Quechua Indians in a common Peruvian political frame of mutual understanding. Instead, the nineteenth century was a period in which the Peruvian Indian population was excluded from the national social and economical development. The Quechua Indians condition as low paid labourers in Peru was of course still important, but the Quechuas importance as taxpayers declined.

During the nineteenth century the Quechua Indians were passed by the mestizos in the "hierarchical ladder" of Peru. Partly because of the bigger number of mestizos and partly because of the mestizos important function as workers and businessmen at the base of society. The Indians were never integrated into a functioning national system of control.

### ***Quechua Indians in modern time***

Friedmans definitions of *traditional ethnicity* -collective membership based on kinship- and *ethnicity based on identification* -weak to strong and the other way around- are useful to explain the Quechuas possibility of ethnic identification. The first definition at a regional perspective and the second, at a national perspective. The Quechua Indians are not isolated islands in Peruvian society. They have, for example, been very active participants in the modern processes of urbanisation in Peru. It is also important that the Quechua culture is not homogeneous at a national perspective. It is directed regionally but with common opportunities to national identification. In short, they live with common traditional and cultural elements.

The word *Indian* is very often linked to a negative stigma in Peru. Because of that a Quechua Indian can choose to stress another identity, for example *campesino* -peasant- or *indigena* -people of origin- and in that way dismiss the negative label *Indian*. In other words, the Andean Quechua Indian is situated in a pretty broad spectrum of alternative labels of identification and these labels are often connected to specific situations. It is not fair to make the definition of the Quechua Indians too narrow, to just include them as members in some limited economic perspective based on class, for example as Andean peasants.

The border between the Quechua Indians and the mestizos is open at a theoretical perspective. An Indian has the possibility to give up his external attributes, learn Spanish and join the population of mestizos. To be an Indian or a mestizo in Peru is very much a question of being able to participate in the western or the Indian lifestyle.

The modern form of antagonism between Indians and mestizos is built on a hierarchical model of social integration which means that the Indians are subordinated to the mestizos.

The Indian has nearly no opportunities to move upwards on the social ladder -as an Indian. The word *cholo* is used for those Indians who only partly have been transformed into a mestizo membership. Cholo is also a position in society where the former Quechua Indian emphasises his distance to his Indian identity. A cholo is on his way to a new way of living, a lifestyle based on western elements. In Quijano's analysis, *el cholo* is a symptom of the conflict between the white-Spanish and the Indian spheres of living. It is also the conflict between an industrial and a preindustrial culture. They exist side by side, but not without opposition, and Peruvian society is formed after a system which favours the white Spanish population and their culture. The "group of dominance" always writes its own history and they never -or very rarely- let other people into the sector of power. From Quijano's standpoint, the Indians -also Quechuas- are victims of western capitalistic development. But from my point of view it is also important to stress the fact that both the Quechua Indians and the cholos in modern time are quite active participants in the capitalistic process.

### ***National integration, modernisation and identity***

The regime of General Velasco 1968-75 tried to develop and modernize Peru through a strategy of nationalisation of banks and heavy industry. At the same time they wanted foreign investment and money to build up the export industry. At regional level private estates were expropriated and transformed into cooperatives under supervision of the Peruvian state. The way the people worked in some of these cooperatives was based on the collective working conditions of the Quechua Indians. Velasco's aim was to change the nearly feudal structure in the countryside. Another aim was to unify different social and ethnical groups into a nationalistic brotherhood, but Velasco's project of national unification and development was never fulfilled.

The industrialisation and primarily the urbanisation of Lima and the coastal area has in modern times escalated. But in the Peruvian highlands reign opposite circumstances based on economic stagnation. The internal immigration to Lima has in modern times included many Quechua Indians from the Andean highlands.

In regards to the immigration to *barriadan* -slum district in the suburban area- it can work as a process of liberation for the Quechua women of the andes. They come in contact with women who do not have the same form of female subordination as in the Andean highlands. The income of these women through paid work has the same importance as their husbands. However, it is very often a liberation within a limited frame and the paid work involves mostly typical female work, as laundresses or housekeepers.

Montoya is using *the metaphor of the mirror* to explain with Indian eyes what happens when the Indian is confronted with Perus national model and its values. The process of looking at himself in the "national mirror" is at an imaginary level. The Quechua Indian is at that level trying out the different patterns which are involved in the national set of characters. If the character and its pattern fit, the Indian gets his "card of identity" which is a sort of recognized competence to participate in the national society. But a Quechua Indian must change to fit the white national way of living in Peru. For that reason he can choose to put on a mask -playing theatre- or deny the white model of national dominance in order to stress another identity. One of Montoya's interviews shows the possibility of learning how to become an Indian. A woman who formerly had denied her identity as a Quechua Indian starts to learn and

understand the Quechua culture. At the end of the process she starts to stress her former identity as a Quechua. From my point of view it also shows the possibility of harmonizing two cultural backgrounds.

The modernisation and huge urbanisation of Peru can be considered a national strategy of integration. For a Quechua Indian it is also about the possibility of getting a national identity and status in Peruvian society. Viewed, however, not as a Indian but as a peasant by the authorities, one of the lowest ranks in society.

This strategy was very obvious in General Velasco's law of agrarian reform 1969. Its decree dismissed the *word* Indian in official documentation and replaced it with the word *campesino* -peasant. One of the goals of the Velasco-regime was to integrate the Indians into a national membership based on a peasant class. The term *campesino* was later transformed by the Quechua Indians to be synonymous with the word Indian. Non-Andean farmers call themselves consistently *agricultores* -farmers. The division remained but with new labels, *campesinos* and *agricultores*.

### ***Education as a cultural project***

Education, which is nationally strictly controlled, can be very destructive from an ethnical point of view. In the public schools of Peru school uniforms are obligatory. The boys hair is cut very short and part of the teaching has similarities to military drills. You are educated to love the "fatherland" in a very authoritarian way. The day in school starts with the Peruvian national anthem and continued with a great deal of military discipline.

Education can also be a part of an ethnic group's strategy to try to get greater influence on the surrounding national society. The Quechuas are trying to acquire the knowledge of the national programme of education and afterwards use it for their own purpose. The purpose is not always congruent with the political intentions from the national point of view.

The Andean population -among them the Quechua Indians- in their eagerness for education are looking for a tool to participate in a democratic struggle against the mestizos and the local holders of power. They are also searching for the truth to liberate themselves from national structures of falsification. There is a myth among the Quechua Indians that education is a saviour and that it is equivalent to getting a paid job. If you have a job then you are saved from economic poverty and the future is secured. The myth is also about getting entrance into the Spanish speaking "white" life-world and its possibilities. The "myth of education" is a picture which is projected from the white population of Peru. Even when the Quechuas appropriate this projection -education as a saviour- they very seldom manage to reach beyond the peripheral part of the "white world" and its possibilities.

Education for a Quechua Indian can also be a way to try to reach a higher social position in society as a mestizo. The Quechuas' expectations of a better life as mestizos is fuel in this machinery. The first border that must be crossed is to learn the Spanish language. The next border to cross is to get an education or a skill that has a value on the national arena. In the end a Quechua also needs to use social struggles to adapt the inner skills, external attributes and be identified as a Peruvian mestizo.

The paradox in this "machinery of frustration" is that a Quechua Indian can lose his original identity on the way and that the goal of mestizo not always fulfil his expectations. In other words, whether a Quechua Indian manages to reach a position as a mestizo in society or not, frustration can be high. Society can no longer absorb all the highly educated.

### *Sendero Luminoso*

At the university the Andean student -in our case the Quechua Indian- became familiar to ideas which deal with the change of society. But these ideas are at odds with the social and economical reality of Peruvian society. The Mao-inspired guerrilla Sendero Luminoso can in this process present an alternative "a messianic saviour" for the young and rootless who search for a new order, a context to share or participate in. Sendero can help these people see the "truth", but only as long as the truth is in the same conformist way for everyone in the social movement or organisation.

Alberoni's term *nascent state* is similar to a new social movement which is an alternative to the prevailing institutions in a society. It is also, in its ideal theoretical state, a sort of declaration of love to the movement where its members are situated in a sphere of positive energy. *Nascent state* creates among its members a feeling of separation between the new changeable social movement and the firm continuous society. The separation between the movement and the surrounding society is totally felt by its members, although the movement must exist in the same ground as the society. Both get fuel from each other and are in that sense also feeding each other. When Sendero was starting to take shape as a social movement in the beginning of 1970 it was probably experienced in a similar way by its members as Alberoni's description of "nascent state".

It's also possible to describe Sendero Luminoso's development through Wiewiorka's term *antimovement*. It is a form of movement which is based on totality and its ideology is aggressively directed towards the established society. In many cases the destruction of the prevailing order is the central theme of the mythology of an antimovement.

I consider that Sendero Luminoso in its development has changed from a social movement to an antimovement, and from a freedom fighting guerrilla to an organisation which uses terror as a means to reach their goal.

The "project" Sendero Luminoso was started by a faction of the communist party *Bandera Roja* -The Red Flag. In the beginning of 1970 Sendero was established as a social movement in the province of Ayacucho in the highlands of Peru. The centre of the movement was the university of San Cristobal de Huamanga in the town of Ayacucho and it was in that university that Sendero's leader Abimael Guzman, worked as a teacher. Sendero's ideological foundation consisted of a synthesis of Marxism, Leninism and Maoism. As a social movement Sendero expanded through the students of Ayacucho, who spread the ideological message to both their local villages -among them Quechua villages- and other universities.

In the middle of 1970 Sendero Luminoso's character of antimovement was much clearer. Ideas and strategies based on armed struggle against the existing Peruvian society, were now beginning to fill up the "ideological container" of Sendero. Mao Tse-tung's military strategy during the Chinese revolution was important. Exactly as for Mao the peasants should

constitute the human base in the revolution. In 1976 Guzman's political faction lost its control over the university in Ayacucho. Theoretically constructed guerrilla strategies were now transformed into fact and four years later Sendero began its armed revolutionary struggle. Sendero had now changed from an antimovement to an armed guerrilla organisation.

During the beginning and middle of the 1980's Sendero Luminoso carried out armed actions directed against Peruvian hacienda owners and the system of repression and injustice that the owners represented. In the point of view of the Quechuas, Sendero should be seen as guerrillas fighting for their freedom. Later the guerrillas have themselves become powerholder of repression. Sendero prohibited commercial farming in their "liberated zones". The peasants -among them many Quechua Indians- were locked out of their local marketplaces which are very important for their economic survival. In that way lost Sendero most of the Andean peasants voluntary support. Violence and terror were now also directed towards the peasant population, to get their support through fear.

The road which leads to terror -from a social movement's ideological startingpoint to real action- must be very difficult to predict in the beginning, when the "ideological container" of a movement more and more integrates strategies for armed actions which later on can be directed towards the civilian population of a society.

### ***Sendero and the army, institutional nationalism and alternative***

From the state of national order that the Peruvian army represent it is possible to put the label *terror* on Sendero and the label *fighters against terror* on the army. Then we get a polarity which consists of *terror* and *anti-terror*, but both sides use armed violence as a means for their actions. In this field of armed violence is the Andean civilian population situated.

In extreme cases the Quechua Indians can be killed by Sendero if they are classified as traitors or "infected" of Peru's institutional order. The next day other members of the same group of Indians can be killed by the army because they are considered to be Senderistas by the Peruvian army. People who live within the field of violence have very small possibilities of not being affected.

The ethnic background of the Quechuas is used by both Sendero Luminoso and the Peruvian Army for their own propagandistic purpose. Sendero's strategy is to use a terminology of class distinctions. On the top is the white Spanish speaking upper class which is synonymous with the colonial heritage and the old, conservative order. Sendero uses the long period of oppression and ethnic discrimination against the Quechuas as a weapon directed towards the upper class. Sendero speaks about a future society where everybody should be equal. To be a white or rather to be classified as one, is synonymous with upper class membership and the white population are the enemy. Class and ethnic identity are Sendero Luminoso's strategies, first comes class and then ethnic identity, this explains to a certain extent their brutality. An Indian who is considered a traitor to his class or a collaborator with the white population can be executed. People who are on the "old road" must be removed. Sendero is the "new road" and in its idealistic, utopian state, the new road is built on the revolutionary power of the masses.

The Peruvian army also uses the ethnic identity of the Quechua Indians, but in their case to construct a prototype of the enemy. Andean Quechua Indians are linked too with Sendero. The Quechua Indians become synonymous with terror and danger, and are seen as possible

killers. The army propaganda -which has a detrimental effect on the Quechuas- shall appeal to the mestizos in the Peruvian society. In this strategy Quechua Indians become synonymous with Sendero Luminoso.

The armed actions of Sendero and the army -which very often strikes the civil population- are part of a complex pattern of rationality for action and thereproduction in words or in writing after the event. In short, rationality and the mythological construction support each other and give alibi for further actions of terror.

The reproduction in words and its message gets a central place in this process, the name of it could be : *The underlying rationality which leads to actions of terror*, in other words, the concrete goal or what the actors will gain through actions of terror. Now we have a pretty complex process which consists of the following key components ; the rationality of terror and its mythology, the reality in actions of terror and the construction in word or writings after the event. These key components shall not be seen as chronological fixed units. After a while the units starts to mingle with each other. The distinctions between them disappear and what's left is only the projection of the "threatening other", in other words ; the projected picture of the enemy and terror as an ongoing power in the society. Its fuel is paranoia, a paranoid picture of a threatening enemy and fear that becomes like paranoia. All this creates processes of mythological constructions before and after the different events of terror.

The present Peruvian conflict can be seen as the ultimate consequences of the cultural meeting between Indians and Spaniards in 1532. From that meeting developed -in contrast to each other- two main and parallel spheres, or life worlds, in the same nation. One of these spheres consists of Andean Indians and the other of a white Spanish-speaking population. They are both -in their polarisation- the fertile soil of the armed conflict.

There is an institutional nationalism in Peru and it is built on colonial continuity and the Spanish conqueror Pizarro is part of it as a glorified symbol. This picture also includes the national liberation in the 1820's and the war against Chile at the end of the 1800's. Even the empire of the Incas belongs to Peruvian nationalism as a historical monument of the past. In institutional nationalism, the Quechuas, Aymaras and the Indians of the jungle are excluded. It is only after their transformation to peasants or skilled workers that they get a place at the bottom of the hierarchical ladder of Peruvian society.

In Peru there is also a different alternative to the institutional form of nationalism. It is partly built on the historical process of Indian resistance against the colonial holders of power and their influence. The alternative nationalism struggles against ethnical discrimination and these movements consists partly of students and intellectuals, also different groups of Indians - among them members of the Quechuas- are part of the alternative nationalism. The struggle is about possibility, the right to both maintain an ethnic belonging and a position of equal membership in national society. Different studies are done to show alternative solutions within the Peruvian nation. Even Sendero Luminoso and other guerrilla groups in Peru, can be seen as speakers in that sphere of alternative development.

In my opinion, neither the Peruvian army nor Sendero Luminoso are representatives of cultural multiplicity. Both sides represent -from different ideological angles- a solution of homogeneity. In the case of the army ; the nationalism of the white life-world and in the case of Sendero; a communistic society of utopian equality.

From just a theoretical point of view, the solution to the armed and social structural conflict in Peru is quite simple. It is situated at the same level of the Peruvian constitution, it is the beautifully written formulation of ethnical identity and equal rights. Although the social and political reality of Peru makes its constitution a visionary thinking. Theoretical solutions to concrete problems in a society often become just visionary. Anyhow, Montoya speaks of a possible solution to the conflict in Peru : The right to be different and that society respect the formula that makes people different. This solution harmonizes both cultural variety and integration in my way of thinking. Although this solution is not simple, it must be based on peaceful and permanent communication within society.