

Indigenous people rights and linguistic rights in Ecuador: the importance of Quechua inside the contemporary Ecuadorian society

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A. Presentation of Ecuador

a. Ethnic linguistic data

The *Republica del Ecuador* is located in the North-Western part of South America, at the boundaries of Columbia and Peru, boarded on its west side by the Pacific Ocean. Ecuador is one of the smallest country on the American continent, since it is 272 045 km², which stands for half the size of France. The capital city Quito (1.3 millions inhabitants) is 2800 meters high, the most populated city is Guayaquil, where 1.5 million persons live.

This country is divided into four geographic areas: the *Costa* which extends over 70 000 km², it runs along the whole length of the country, on the edge of the Pacific Ocean, and 30% of the population lives there; the *Sierra*, name given to the *Cordillera of Andes*, where gather 60% of the population; the *Oriente*, the Amazonian part of Ecuador which consists in half the size of the territory but whose population is less than 10% of the total; and the archipelago of the Galapagos, in the Pacific Ocean, 965 km far from the continent, 7812 km² large and 10 000 inhabitants. Under an administrative approach, the country is divided into 21 provinces, themselves subdivided into counties and urban or rural commons.

According to the *Instituto Nacional de Estadisticas y Censos* from Ecuador (National Institute for statistics and population census), the country population in 2001 was 12.6 millions people. Generally, four ethnic groups are identified: Indian people (40% of the population), mestizos (40%), white people (10%) and Afro-Ecuadorian people (8%). Indian people usually live in the Sierra and in the Amazonian Forest. Yet, very often, they are forced to leave their communities in order to seek for employment in urban areas. Afro-Ecuadorian people live mainly in the Esmeraldas province.

Spanish is the official language of the country and the mother language of 78% of the population. Although several native peoples still live in Ecuador, their ancestral languages are generally threatened and the members of those communities are linguistically assimilated. These people are officially recognized and according to the estimations of the *Confederacion de Nacionalidades Indigenas del Ecuador* (CONAIE)¹ more than three millions persons belong to the Quechua ethnic, 40 000 to the Shuar ethnic, and 4000 to the Chachi ethnic (those ethnic groups are the most important). Quechua is the most used indigenous language, it would be spoken by more than 1.5 million people but it is divided into several categories. Other main native languages of the country are Shuar (over 30 000 speakers), Chachi (5000 speakers), Colorado (about 2100 speakers) or even Secoya (about 290 speakers). Yet, still according to the CONAIE estimates, the total number of American-Indian language speakers would not be higher than two millions persons in Ecuador.

b. The importance granted to ethnic minorities in the political structure: importance of the CONAIE and of the Pachakutik movement

Though Ecuador is today officially recognized as a multiethnic and a multicultural country, this has not always been this way. The recognition of the different nationalities and of the different indigenous peoples from this country is a very ancient claim from native peoples who consider that, without recognition, it is not possible for them to preserve properly their own cultures, lifestyles or even their ancient territories.

The COPENDE² (Nationalities and Peoples from Ecuador Development Council), an official authority depending on the Presidency of Republic and created consecutively to the promulgation of the Constitution in 1998, recognizes from now on indigenous nationalities and peoples as a part of the State. Therefore, it provides the following definitions: by Nationality is meant: "The ancient, anterior people or an entirety of peoples, constituting the Ecuadorian State, that define themselves as such, have a historical identity, a common language and culture, that live inside a determined

¹ Official web site : www.conaie.org

² Consejo de Desarrollo de la Nacionalidades y Pueblos Indígenas del Ecuador : <http://www.codenpe.gov.ec/>

territory resorting to their traditional institutions and to their traditional shapes of social, economic, legal and political organizations and to their traditional model of authority enforcement”. An indigenous people is defined as: “Original collectivities, composed of communities or centers sharing a cultural identity that distinguish them from other sectors of the Ecuadorian society, directed by a particular system of social, economical, political and legal organization”. Then, in the same nationality can be found several peoples sharing some characteristics (a language for instance) but particularized by other elements.

The Indigenous Nationality Confederation of Ecuador (CONAIE) was created in 1986 so as to gather local communities and associations of indigenous people in order to act on the national political scene in Ecuador. The CONAIE can be divided into three main regional federations: the CONFENIAE (Indigenous Nationalities from Ecuadorian Amazonia Confederation) in the Oriente, the ECUARUNARI (Quechua Nationality People from Ecuador Confederation) in the Sierra and the CONAICE (Indigenous and Black Organizations Coordination) on the Costa.

Since 1990, the CONAIE has organized the most important riot Ecuador has ever known (strikes, demonstrations, occupations of large private lands, agricultural blockade). This date points out the entrance of the Indigenous movement in the political system and the beginning of a ten-year struggle that will lead to the collapse of several governments but especially to the adoption of the 1998 constitution and to the involvement of Indigenous personalities in the government.

In 1995, this organization proposes the creation of a new political sphere, with the apparition of the *Pachakutik Nuevo Pais* movement, coming from Indian, peasant and urban struggles from the 1990's. This movement, that gathers 27 local governments and 5 provincial governments, opposes to the corrupted electoral system from those days, participates in the national parliament and even send a candidate to presidential elections in 1996. Even though it didn't succeed to win the elections, the movement appeared to be the third political strength in the country and gained an important number of positions both at a local level but also at the Congress. This party focuses on local entities and sets up a “social control on elected people”, a removability of the mandates in the assemblies in order to struggle against a too present corruption.

Year 1998 outlines the adoption of the new Constitution which recognizes the existence of indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian peoples and nationalities. From now on, “Ecuador is a social state, a state of Law, a sovereign, unitary, independent, democratic, multicultural and multiethnic state” (article 1-1). Paragraph 2 claims that “castellan is the official language, Quechua, Shuar and other ancestral languages have an official use for indigenous peoples”. As a consequence, linguistic rights appear on account of the recognition of this diversity, but these important dispositions do not always benefit from a real enforcement. Therefore, the recognition of these indigenous languages should provide them with a co-official language status with Castilian; they should thus be used at the Parliament, in public administration, courts or even schools. Nonetheless, this does not go this way since only Spanish is used in public sectors, apart from a few exceptions such as media or some primary schools providing a bilingual education. But there is no real linguistic law in Ecuador. The constitution of 1998 also enabled the adoption of some collective rights thanks to the pressure generated by indigenous organizations. Chapter 5 is therefore dedicated to native populations rights and article 83 gives a new definition of those peoples: “indigenous peoples, that define themselves as ancestrally rooted nationalities, and black peoples or Afro-Ecuadorian peoples are part of the one and indivisible state of Ecuador”. Article 84 recognizes and guarantees those peoples several rights such as the recognition of the different cultural identities, property of common lands, respect for natural resources, property of ancestral knowledge, or even intercultural bilingual education.

Indigenous people cultural rights are enunciated at chapter 7, article 62 stipulates then: “culture is the people patrimony and constitutes the essential piece of its identity”, the state has, as a result, to promote culture and to undertake appropriate policies that enable to maintain and to respect the cultural diversity of the country.

Chapter 8 (articles 66 to 79) of this constitution is about education. If, in principle, education is secularized and free for all (article 67), governmental estimates show out that only 53% of the indigenous population can access primary education, 15% to secondary and less than 1% to higher education. The main article of this chapter is without doubt article 69 which guarantees native populations a bilingual and intercultural system of education: “the state will guarantee an intercultural bilingual system of education; will be used as main language the one belonging to a particular

culture and Castilian will be used as the language for intercultural relations”. Nevertheless, this system is today still inefficient, equipments are basic, the low quality of the teaching dedicated to indigenous people generate a lot of school failures and a phenomenon of reject of native languages and cultures. Moreover, the project for intercultural bilingualism is not really sustained by teachers whose skills in indigenous languages are very low and that, consequently, reduce this teaching to basic knowledge. Thus, native people claim a real bilingual intercultural education that would be dedicated to all pupils from the country and not only to indigenous people. Actually, they consider that it is unacceptable that indigenous pupils only could be able to learn another language from their mother language while Spanish speaking pupils only learn Spanish while indigenous languages have a “co-official” language status. They think this bilingualism, if generalized, would enable pupils to know and to respect indigenous cultures better.

In 2002, *Pachakutik* movement got two ministerial portfolios in the just elected Lucio Gutierrez government. However those two ministers quickly opposed to the neoliberal politics of the President and to its alliance with the United States, which took them to resign from their functions in June 2003. Indigenous organizations then decided to break every link with the government so as to find some independence again. But today CONAIE is going through a crisis, lots of disagreements are dividing its components, and the government aims at splitting this organization, resorting to direct donations to some communities instead of others. Leaders accuse each other of corruption and the movement loses part of its capacities to mobilize people.

c. The current situation of minorities rights in Ecuador

Constitution of 1998 has therefore enabled the recognition of Ecuador as a multiethnic and a multicultural state. Indigenous peoples have benefited since then of lots of collective rights, but yet their enforcement remains hard. The government also created several public institutions in order to bring help to indigenous populations and to allow them to take part directly in the enforcement of public policies. In fact, indigenous organizations had an important role in the negotiations with the

government concerning their social and political participations, which turned them into a real national political strength.

In spite of the economic development the country has benefited lately, the different indicators for economic, social and human development of indigenous communities remain lower than the national average. Actually, a governmental survey in 2004 showed out that the percentage of indigenous people that can access fresh water and sanitation is three times lower than the rest of the population. Moreover, infantile mortality rate of indigenous people is 50% higher than the rest of the population³. On account of low wages and of the unemployment rate too important inside the communities, indigenous people immigration towards urban areas keeps growing. To permanent rural poverty are added, growingly, difficult conditions of living that indigenous people have to face in urban areas and that women particularly suffer from. Besides, the access of indigenous people to basic social care, such as education or healthcare, remains limited. Indigenous bilingual intercultural and health programs (enhancement of the value of ancient medicine) proposed by the government did not provide the results expected especially on account of a lack of financial and technical resources.

The Intercultural Bilingual Education National Direction⁴ (DINEIB) created in 1987 and charged with educational programs for indigenous peoples and nationalities can rely on a steady infrastructure at a national level (2 802 education centers spread over 16 provinces⁵) but resources granted are too insufficient for the task it has to take care of. On the top of that, it is obvious that today not every indigenous can access education since their parents would rather keep them on their sides to make them work. “Spanish speaking” schools (that give a teaching in Spanish only and do not enforce bilingual education) have, in general, better financial supplies since several families do not want their children to intend bilingual schools suffering from a reputation of “schools for poor indigenous people”.

Constitution of 1998 also recognizes the enforcement of indigenous justice inside the communities (for example, no prison penalty but purification baths and a

³ *Informe del Relator Especial sobre la situación de los derechos humanos y las libertades fundamentales de los indígenas*, 28 december 2006, p.31

⁴ Official web site : www.dineib.edu.ec

⁵ *Informe del Relator Especial sobre la situación de los derechos humanos y las libertades fundamentales de los indígenas*, p.36

reincorporation inside the community) and indigenous laws. Authorities enforcing the judiciary function can therefore resort to their own norms and procedures to resolve inside conflicts according to their customary laws. The constitutional text asserts besides that members of indigenous communities are allowed to resort to public defenders and to use their mother languages in the event of pursuits launched against them.

However, elaborating a law recognizing indigenous justice generated several conflicts for skills, opposing indigenous jurisdiction and national jurisdiction. Difficulties to access justice actually grew harder because of the absence of an appropriate public defense system and of qualified translators. Furthermore, there are no legal norms that precise the extent and the shapes of enforcement of the functions granted to indigenous authorities, nor law that can make such functions compatible with the national judiciary system. The National Congress advanced in 2002 a law proposal aiming at sharing the competences inside judiciary administration, but this project was left behind due to several oppositions. Yet, it is absolutely necessary to make those two systems compatibles in order to guarantee the enforcement of indigenous collective rights.

Since the 1970's, oil exploitation has become one of the main economic activities in this country. It has been therefore considered by the government as a "national interest activity" the government could break some rules for. The impact of these activities on the environment and the living conditions of indigenous populations has been really important and has generated several conflicts.

The Ecuadorian state recognized from now on some territories (in the Amazonian forest especially) as indigenous peoples properties, which enable them to negotiate directly some agreements linked to the use of their lands and of their natural resources. But, one of the main preoccupations for indigenous peoples remains the progressive deterioration of their housing, and the impact of soil extracting activities on their environment and their rights. Actually, presence of oil on sacred lands causes lots of showdowns between indigenous peoples, government and foreign companies. The latter have polluted lots of indigenous lands, turning therefore water (source of live for those populations) unusable and destroying the environment (deforestation, animal species disappearing...). They refuse to pay for any compensation or to take part in a cleaning and the government can not rely on the

necessary funds to insure the good care of these lands. Indigenous people can not therefore feed or exploits their crops and are then obliged to immigrate towards urban areas. Petrol exploitation on indigenous territories has yet provoked the resistance of some communities such as Sarayaku community in Amazonia that required the protection of the Inter American court for Human Rights.

Peoples that were not touched or that willingly keep away deserve a particular attention because their lifestyles are being affected by deforestation or illegal traffic activities that occur on their territories, which, in the long term, could make them face a danger of extinction. Indeed, although the Ecuadorian decided in 1999 an “intangible territory” in Amazonia where every activity of extraction is proscribed, it does not refer neither to the presence, nor to the necessary means to enforce those dispositions and to prevent the incursion of smugglers. This situation generated violent clashes between invaders and indigenous groups during the past decades. Besides, the government keeps ceding pieces of this “intangible territory” in favor of petrol exploitations and allowing the exploitation of threatened species of trees.

During the last decade, indigenous people in Ecuador got the recognition of their particular rights and fundamental freedoms. This recognition has not however been correctly established and native populations are victims of several discriminations. Facing this, communities rejected themselves their own cultures and tried to run away from their origins, families make then the choice not to transmit their traditions and languages to the new generation any more for fear that the children might be “stamped” indigenous and, as a result, not benefit from any social ascension.

This is especially the case for Quechua language which, although it is a co-official language spoken by more than a million speakers in Ecuador, is being threatened since not transmitted. Indigenous organizations struggled for more than 15 years in order to establish a bilingual intercultural education so as to make the children sensible to the necessity of preserving their indigenous origins. But today, the project is reaching its own limits. On account of a lack of teachers and of a lack of financial supplies, bilingual education is suffering from a crisis.

B. Quechua, co-official language in several countries yet threatened

Quechua, known for having been the Incas language is nowadays the main Amerindian language with more than 10 millions speakers through six countries in the Cordillera of Ands. Nevertheless, this language has never stopped being threatened since the arrival of the Spanish invaders to the Latin-American continent. After the conquest of Peru, European missionaries used Quechua language so as to spread Christianity inside indigenous communities, which allowed it to remain used through a large part of the continent. Descendants of the Quechua people were, later, highly mixed, and could then be able to keep lots of pieces of their culture while integrating some European customs.

Today, Quechua language is one of the rare indigenous languages to be officially recognized in several countries. It is practiced in Peru, in Bolivia, in Ecuador, in Colombia, in Chile and some dialects are found in north-western Argentina.

In Ecuador, several reforms led to make official bilingual education in 1980, it led to the constitutional recognition of the right to use indigenous languages to teach to the children in 1983, it also led to the establishment of a National Direction for Intercultural Bilingual Education in 1987, and to the participation of indigenous teachers at key positions in this direction.

a. History and news of Quechua language

So Quechua is a language spoken by 8 to 12 millions persons in South America but yet under the threat of extinction. The first reason for that is that although it is a single name, this language consists in fact in several dialects. There is a large linguistic diversity. On account of these different dialects spoken in lots of communities through different countries, and because each community exists through its own environment, each sort of Quechua has its own particularities. Therefore, it is not right to advocate a single "situation of Quechua" because lots of factors have to be taken into account. The use of Quechua is not completed according to a continuous region; this language is found in some focuses in northern Peru and in other remote communities in Columbia. In Ecuador, Quechua (called Quichua) is more largely spread; its territory extends along the Cordillera of Ands and in other places in the Amazonian

bank. Quechua users are therefore mainly concentrated in the Cordillera of Andes in Peru, in Bolivia and in Ecuador. Nevertheless, Quechua is not the only indigenous language used in those countries; several other languages are spoken by a limited number of people. Spanish is for sure, at the origin of the disappearing of Quechua and of other indigenous languages in this continent.

During the colonial period, Quechua was used to evangelize indigenous populations. But, from the 18th century, Spanish was appointed official language for evangelization and Quechua was progressively forsaken. As the Catholicism spread in communities, it also contributed to make Quechua language and cultures disappear. Yet, the catholic religion has never managed to eradicate totally native believes or the use of their languages. Indeed, Quechua religion is still practiced besides Christianity, by lots of remote peoples.

Following the Spanish conquest in South America, Spanish became the dominating and official language in those countries while indigenous languages were left apart. A lot of indigenous people were therefore forced to learn and to use Spanish, leaving then their mother language behind. Today, the most essential factor of this language disappearing is due to the attitude of the parents deny bilingual education for their children. Indeed, parents wish their children were educated in Spanish, thinking that a bicultural education would prevent their social mobility. As a result, they can be considered responsible for indigenous languages disappearing.

Quechua is then today, still discredited and suffer from a bad reputation for Andes community. As a result, in some places, indigenous populations that are in touch with urban communities do not hesitate to take some lessons so as to speak Spanish better and, especially, to lose their Quechua accents. But, in the most remote communities, such as Ecuadorian mountains, Quechua speakers try to add some value to their language and to make it recognize as a full part of their cultural identity. The behaviors indigenous populations have towards Quechua depend, consequently, on their own situations and lifestyles. If indigenous population needs to integrate urban areas and to work, they would deny their origins more easily. If, on the opposite, the communities are more remote and are self-sufficient, they would try to add some value to their indigenous identity and, as a result, their language. In rural regions in Andes where Quechua remains more practiced than Spanish (In Peru, Bolivia or even Ecuador), a language is for the people that speak it a really strong

indicator of ethnic identity. For lots of indigenous people, being Quechua is before all speaking Quechua.

Members of an ethno linguistic community are generally less educated and less wealthy than the rest of the population and are therefore forced to move, thus forsaking their traditions so as to benefit from better standards of living. The Quechua population in the Andes has then been through massive migrations towards big cities (Quito, Lima and Bogota). Although these migrations have enabled to introduce indigenous languages, those languages haven't developed. The denial of their own languages and cultures, on account of numerous discriminations prevent Quechua people to use their language in other places from their homes or their communities. Moreover, mastering Spanish language is indispensable for them in order to find a job in those cities and, as a result, they do have to learn this new language. Weddings between Quechua speaking and Spanish speaking people also contribute to the disappearing of this language, just like numerous migrations to other countries, to the USA more particularly where indigenous people in most cases, work as farmers in Utah and in California.

Quechua people from Ecuador are known for maintaining their languages and cultural practices despite migrations. Consequently, migrations of populations do not systematically generate the complete forsaking of Quechua language. Nonetheless, as children are more attracted by urban ways of life than by traditional ones, it is obvious that modernization prevents Quechua language from being transmitted in a regular way to future generations, apart from a few remote communities. Modernization actually is the biggest threat against indigenous culture saving owing to numerous communities' migrations.

The Constitution of Ecuador recognizes from now on the multiethnic and multicultural nature of the country; it also sets up the right to education in mother languages of the indigenous groups while Spanish is the language for intercultural relations. But that recognition is mainly symbolic. Actually, public administration does not effectively apply the different official languages and several persons are unable to translate official documents into Quechua for the benefit of the concerned population. A lack of translators specialized on legal issues has to be pointed out too. All those factors have lead indigenous populations to live in Spanish.

Yet, thanks to the creation in 1987 of the *Dirección Nacional de Educación Intercultural Indígena Bilingüe*, Quechua language imposed itself to the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry for Health recently published a Quechua dictionary of medical terms for a personal use. However, even if this language is growing more and more accepted and used in the public sphere, only few Quechua speaking persons are present in official institutions. Nonetheless, it would be necessary for this language to be spoken among the whole population and not only in indigenous communities so as to be used at a national scale.

Quechua writing was undertaken during the Spanish conquest, but, on account of particular sounds, the transcription changed according to the authors. Several conferences on this theme took place in countries that use Quechua and, today, Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador have a generally admitted orthography. This topic of official writing was only raised in the second part of the twentieth century since, during the colonial period, Spanish conquerors did not want to protect and then to make this language official. However, on this period started the setting up of a frame for a Quechua grammar so as to transcript myths and legends, and to produce a doctrine in Quechua in order to evangelize the population. But the will to write Quechua leads to its unification and then, to the disappearing of its diversity.

For a few years, countries in the Cordillera of Ands have recognized the importance of intercultural bilingual education, but, like for the recognition of indigenous languages, this has not been enforced efficiently yet. Non governmental organizations bring an important contribution to the setting of this bilingual education which was at first used in an experimental way in some communities before the governments accept (for only a dozen of years) to bring an economical and financial sustain.

In 1998, the Constitution of Ecuador has since then guaranteed bilingual education as a constitutional right, specifying that Quechua is the main language for instruction and that Spanish is the language for intercultural communication. The *Dirección Nacional de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe* currently rules schools in regions where the population is composed of more than 50% indigenous people. This is also organized through collaboration with indigenous organizations such as the CONAIE. Even through it is active, this education is not efficient all the time.

The efforts carried out by the government are therefore not sufficient to maintain and revitalize Quechua language; regional and international NGOs are still having today a predominant role to play. Therefore, it is possible to outline that the regional organization PROEIB Andes is really involved in the saving of Quechua language. It proposes a master degree in intercultural bilingual education at the Mayor de San Simon University in Cochabamba in Bolivia, and benefits from international supports from the UNESCO and the UNICEF. The *Grupo Permanente para el Estudio de la Lenguas de Areas Linguisticas de America Latina* (ALAL) is another regional organisation whose goal is to create a folder that puts together all data linked to research projects concerning indigenous languages in South America. Finally, religious organizations also had a fundamental role in preserving indigenous languages. The majority of evangelic Churches strongly encourages the use of Quechua language for religious practices. In Ecuador, the CONAIE charged with organizing principles of intercultural bilingual education. It is actually obvious that, to preserve a language, and, more generally, a culture, the action of members of its community and of its speakers is essential.

b. The importance of Quechua language in Ecuador

Quechua language in Ecuador is not spoken all over the country. It can be found mainly in the Sierra and the Oriente where it is divided into several dialects. This is the first indigenous language in Ecuador, it is recognized as an official language. But, in reality, only 25% of indigenous people (who stand for 40% of the whole population) speak it, as the majority forsook it in favour of Spanish. Only 10% of Quechua communities still use this language in a permanent way; the majority of autochthonous peoples have indeed lost use of their ancestral languages which are, nowadays, only spoken by the ancients (this is the case for the La Chimba community). However, 100% of the Maca community speak Quechua and inhabitants from Otavalo use both languages (Quechua and Spanish) and even learn English owing to the importance of tourism in this region.

Concerning speakers, estimations shows that 80% of children aged from 1 to 5, 70% of those aged from 5 to 10, 50% of those from 10 to 20, 30% of those from 20 to 40 and 12% of those above 40 do not speak Quechua. The loss of this language is not

due to the policies of the country but to the society: mestizos have actually tried to erase their origins and indigenous people suffered from lots of discriminations. Still today families despise their own language and do not transmit it to the children. On top of that, Quechua is used in the private sphere only, there is no official use, and even between families the use is declining. The language is only use in the presence of the ancients.

This indigenous language owns several dialects, different accents and words. Even the origin is the same; each community adapts its language in its own way, thus changing pronunciation and a few letters.

Quechua is an oral language, but in order to transmit it, writing was elaborated, based on Spanish alphabet. However, no one agrees about the numbers of letters Quechua alphabet is composed of because accents change according to the community, and therefore linguists change the writings and all that makes Quechua teaching pretty hard. A unified writing was finally admitted in 1981 thus allowing the creation of a Quechua literature, whose transcription of legends and myths. This generates nonetheless several difficulties since it is an oral and demonstrative language, which makes transcription harsher. This language also suffers from a lack of words necessary to translate some literary pieces written in other languages.

In order to preserve Quechua, government sat up intercultural bilingual education, a program that does not really work because persons charged of its elaboration hardly speak this language. Lots of plans were constituted but they cannot be applied properly as professors have to adopt them in their schools and that each professor does not share the same conception of this subject. What is more is that this education is not implemented by families and let children far away from being able to acquire bilingualism.

Quechua speakers have looked down on their culture for a long time. Several discriminations against indigenous people (especially at schools) have actually urged them to forsake their roots. Yet, we assist today to a relative revalorisation of indigenous culture and to the come back of languages and traditions. Unfortunately this phenomenon is rather based on the touristic attraction and not on a real implementation of minds.

c. Intercultural bilingual education as saving program

Intercultural education was set in Latin America so as to enable indigenous populations to assert their cultures and their languages facing the dominant social class. The goal of bilingualism is to integrate indigenous languages into scholar teaching as an alternative to a Spanish only education that does not take into account the diversity of these populations.

The will to recognize and to teach indigenous language is quite old in Latin America. This initiative appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century in Peru, but the first teachers who granted a teaching in indigenous languages to autochthonous populations had to do it in a clandestine way and lots of them were even murdered by landlords that refused to have to see “their Indians” educated. State authorities refused to recognize such a teaching and wanted Spanish to remain the sole State language. Intercultural bilingual education thus firstly developed in private schools, and more particularly, in protestant private schools. Indeed, the goal of protestant bishops was to translate the Bible into indigenous languages and to impose to indigenous peoples a western way of life so as to delegitimize Shamans and their beliefs.

The first bilingual private school was created in 1946 in Peru with the agreement of the Ministry of Education. Teaching delivered there was done in the children’s mother languages and Spanish was progressively introduced. The first generation of indigenous leaders is constituted of people that benefited from such a teaching. Yet, they quickly rise against this teaching method, charging it with not taking into account indigenous cultures and then, to teach their languages badly.

In the years 1990, the government of Bolivia lead by Sanchez de Losada was the first government which introduces officially intercultural bilingual education in the education system. Nonetheless, it is noticeable that, if the States in Latin America show up favourable to intercultural bilingual education through speeches, reality is different, as governments do not imply much in the realisation of this project. Moreover, Indian people themselves do not have the same vision on this educational system. For some of them, school itself is a sort of western domination. For some others, going back to mother language is a sign of social exclusion.

At the origin, intercultural bilingual education is dedicated to ease dialog between cultures and to consider them all equal, but, in reality, the implementation is more complex. Mastering several languages and cultures does not actually allow understanding issues linked to multiculturalism and benefiting from a limited overview of a culture does not enable to teach it, nor to transmit it properly to next generations. Intercultural bilingual education has thus allowed teaching indigenous languages and cultures associated to them, since the former can not go without the latter. The involvement of communities in the transmission of their languages is essential. Yet, some peoples are opposed to the idea of teaching their cultures and traditions to strangers since they consider their languages as sacred and do not want to inculcate it in an official or even a written way. Some peoples, whose the Quechua people, used to be prosecuted an account of the sole use of their languages, during the European domination period. Therefore, they fear their children might also suffer from discrimination and social exclusion if they do not use Spanish, official languages of these countries. However, the loss of a language generates the loss of a culture and, more generally, the loss of an identity. It was thus proved that children coming back to their roots and the discovery of their origins have a positive influence on their development and may prevent them to turn on delinquency or addiction to alcohol or drugs.

Indigenous populations still face today difficulties for education as their teaching (shamanism methods and medicinal plants) are really different from those practiced in towns. Those people are lowly educated and can not then access steady employment in urban areas where they are marginalized. To face this, numerous foundations and NGOs try to establish educational programs dedicated to the youngest for them to be able to overcome their difficulties at school. University projects are currently being elaborated in Amazonia, especially in the Sarayacu community, in order to enable students to stay on their lands and no to be obliged to settle in towns to carry on their advanced studies. But for a few years, indigenous cultures have been strengthening slowly, especially thanks to the apparition of ecotourism that enables the new indigenous generation to be proud of its origins.

The bilingual educational program proposed by the Ecuadorian government aims at getting children closer to their ancestral cultures through the use of their mother

language. A program of interaction with the *abuelitos*, the ancient of the community, enables to teach children how to live in harmony with the environment, having the smallest impact possible on it. The idea is to learn ancestral traditions based on a respectful cohabitation between man and the environment.

But the program proposed to teacher has to be used as a base only and each professor is expected to study the specific environmental and cultural context specific to the school he is appointed at. They have to, through these researches, study propositions from the government so as to stick closer to the different communities involved. The most important point is that this teaching has to enable to make a link between education, culture and environment.

The main problem is that teachers do not endorse pain for making the teaching more complete and only follow the very light instructions from the governments. Even though this idea seems to be very positive, the request addressed to teachers to create their own lessons bearings is probably too idealistic for lots of schools where teachers concerned only get low wages and are also in charge of administrative functions. The necessity to elaborate written documents is therefore a major difficulty since languages are very often based on oral traditions. Moreover, edition societies do not print work books for only a hundred of students in a lowly used language. It requires the several years of efforts. Numerous NGOs got therefore interested in this problem and currently attempt to create a "Quechua method" that would ease the work of the teachers.

Besides, for the program to be applied properly, it has to be sustained by the community. In fact; it is not possible to make any cultural link between the ancient and the new generation without the support of those who have the best knowledge in this culture: the ancients. The parental support is also essential since school only teaches the bases of an indigenous language. But, for the bilingualism to be fully acquired, it is necessary for the children to practice this language inside their familial environment.

Despite the implementation of this program is officially recognized, the use of Quechua remains limited in Ecuador and Spanish keeps dominating familial relationships. Quechua is thus mainly used for precise functions such as humour, "secret conversations" between parents, and for ritual practices. A few parents

occasionally teach their children Quechua vocabulary through games. Yet, Spanish is, largely, the most used language for communication. Parents do not pay attention for talking in Quechua to their children which makes the natural learning impossible and sets limits to the possibility of bilingualism as children can only handle basic notions.

Consequently, the situation of Quechua can not be summarized in a general way since the state of this language is different in the six different countries where it is used (Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina and Colombia). There are great expectations that Quechua may survive in some regions in Ecuador, Bolivia or Peru as its speakers are still numerous and as governments undertake great efforts, in collaboration with international organizations to ease the transmission of this language to next generations. But public authorities in Chile, Colombia and Argentina do not seem to take this threat seriously and show few interests in preserving this indigenous language. Its use will probably keep decreasing and Quechua language could therefore disappear in those regions in three generations.

Nonetheless, despite governmental action and the support brought by international NGOs, the proportion of speakers among the population of those countries keeps diminishing. Yet, Quechua continues to be spoken in several countries in Latin America despite decades of oppression which is a good reason for being optimistic regarding the future of this language. But, without a planned action undertaken by public authorities, Quechua will disappear in the long term, leaving thus a people without any identity.