

## Aymara and highland Quechua

### Profile

Highland Quechua make up almost one-third of Peru's total population. About 4.5 million Peruvians speak Quechua and 8 million identify themselves as Quechua. The Aymara population is estimated at between 500,000 and 600,000. The majority live in small towns, villages and rural communities and are primarily small farmers who may also work elsewhere as day labourers for part of the year. While in the countryside most men speak Spanish, many women, who seldom have occasion to travel to town, may be monolingual in Aymara or Quechua. Language and dress are seen as significant in preserving traditional culture. The Quechua concept of *pachakuti*, a turning over of world/time (*pacha*), holds the possibility of a time when the pre-colonial order, at present below the earth, will return (*kuti*) to power. This belief is a source of inspiration for both Quechua and Aymara indigenous organizations. The majority of Peru's 500,000-600,000 Aymara live in the southern Andean region of Puno. Their way of life is in many ways similar to that of the Quechua but they have suffered less at the hands of Sendero.

### Historical context

Quechua *campesinos* were among those worst affected during the *manchay tiempo*, the 'time of fear' initiated by Sendero Luminoso in the Quechua village of Chuschi in 1980. Initially the guerrilla movement was well received due to its education projects, its cadres' ability to speak the native language and their commitment to local communities, and its system of local justice (for corrupt officials, thieves and wife-beaters). Subsequently, however, Quechua peasants were brutally repressed by Sendero Luminoso; community leaders were executed; indeed, anyone could be murdered for suspected 'collaboration' with government forces or for failing to follow Senderista ideology. In addition, Quechua communities in the conflict zones were also targeted by government counter-insurgency efforts. By the late 1980s they had begun organize themselves into defence committees (*rondas campesinas*), supported by the government, and it was this development, together with improved police and military intelligence, that led to Sendero Luminoso's downfall in 1992.

Despite early anthropological accounts describing Sendero Luminoso as an indigenous movement, its leadership made no mention of indigenous rights and Peru's ethnic identity in its official statements, and it took no account of the traditional patterns of marketing and exchange between highland and lowland groups. Nor did it acknowledge the problems confronting indigenous minorities in adapting these and other traditions in the face of growing urbanization and mass communication. Migration to towns increased as children chose to leave home, but many thousands of Quechua were forced to the shanty towns of Lima and Ayacucho as a result of Sendero's activities and the military response. Although the danger persisted many returned to their homes in the 1990s.

Government policy in Peru has historically supported - at least at a rhetorical level - the cultural survival of the country's Quechua and Aymara populations. During the populist period (1930-50) governments promoted various folkloric festivals and organizations. The radical military government of General Juan

Velasco (1968-75) used much neo-Incaic symbolism. It also promoted bilingual education and recognized Quechua as an official language in areas with a high proportion of Quechua-speakers. In addition, the military government issued new legislation protecting the lands of indigenous communities, although this was aimed primarily at Amazonian peoples; highland indigenous communities were transformed into peasant communities (and thus incorporated into class-based politics) in military nationalist discourse.

Traditionally, there has been little collective organizing along ethnic-based lines in the Peruvian highlands. In recent years, however, this has begun to change; in 1999 highland indigenous communities involved in mining conflicts formed Coordinadora Nacional de Comunidades Afectados por la Minería (CONACAMI). There also exists a Coordinadora Nacional de Comunidades Campesinas e Indígenas de Peru. In addition, highland indigenous leaders have sought unprecedented alliances with Amazonian indigenous movements, through umbrella organizations such as Conferencia Permanente de los Pueblos Indígenas del Perú (COPPIP).

## **Current issues**

Quechua and Aymara women have become active in shantytown organizations; there are also local radio programmes directed by women. These are aimed primarily at migrants and discuss topics such as terrorism, domestic violence and economic discrimination, and warn about the sale of unsafe contraceptives and agricultural fertilizer. In 2001 an Aymara woman from Puno, Paulina Arpasi, won a seat in the congressional elections, thereby becoming the first female indigenous leader in the Peruvian Congress.

There have been advances made in intercultural and bilingual education: increased state funding and institutional support, as well as recent entrepreneurial initiatives such as the provision of Microsoft Word and Google in Quechua. However, many Quechua and Aymara people reject bilingual education, protesting the need for a better education in Spanish in order to progress, and to confront the racism of mainstream Peruvian society. Many would rather their children spoke Spanish rather than their native language, and there have been vociferous debates with local NGOs and indigenous intellectuals about the issue.

The Peruvian government recently created a multicultural state institution, Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo de los Pueblos Andinos, Amazónicas y Afro-Peruanos (INDEPA), which includes Quechua and Aymara representatives. As yet, however, it has not been able to procure any major legislative or constitutional changes. Collective land rights remains a major demand of indigenous organizations in Peru, but no fundamental revisions have been made to the neoliberal policies (the removal of the inalienability and indivisability of indigenous communal lands) instituted during Fujimori's regime. Quechua communities - who often emphasize their *campesino* identity as opposed to indigenous identity - are also embroiled in an important struggle for water resources.