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Comparative Racisms in Latin America

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Race Inscription and Fetishism via Language: Multicultural Andean Imaginaries

Language has always been readily identified as a marker of difference in the Latin American landscape. The physical nature of language through sound assists in compartmentalizing, clarifying and describing difference. Following this, the justification for and effect of this compartmentalization through language use has seen several phases throughout different geographies. In the Peruvian colonial period, the creation of documentary texts for non-Spanish language, along with the increased bilingualism in Spanish and Indigenous languages on the part of the state and people during the colonial period, was with the express purpose of the subjugation of Indigenous populations and their conversion to Christianity. During this period, a hierarchy of language was established that posited Spanish language as the language of the state, inherently higher, official, and more important – leaving Indigenous languages seen only as a means to convert Indigenous peoples to European systems. Throughout later centuries, within this language hierarchy, Spanish language in Peru also came to represent an escape from lower status imposed in Indigenous communities with further access to jobs, education, and participation in state economies and governments. Following Indigenous rebellions, not least of which the 1780 Túpac Amaru II rebellion, the Peruvian state outright banned the public use of Quechua, the largest Indigenous language spoken in the region. Nevertheless, Quechua language use continued in the private sector.

In the multicultural neoliberal turn, Peru shifted its response to Quechua language. The recognition of Quechua as an official language of Peru in 1975 was a defining mark in the multicultural framework. The state's sudden shift in perspective about appreciating language during the internal conflict was coupled with a boom in domestic and international tourism and the expansion of landgrabs in Indigenous territory for land exploitation. In this essay, I explore the context of language as a marker for race, and the paradoxical nature that the multicultural neoliberal Peruvian state takes in its fetishism of language through the dual subjugation of Quechua speakers and appropriation of Quechua language.

In section 1, I explore the practice of racial legalization through language in statemaking that created the conditions for this paradox to exist. I build on the work of Goldberg (2002) and put the framework of racial states in conversation with the neoliberal concepts identified by Comaroff & Comaroff as *Ethnicity, Inc* (2009) and Rodríguez-Garavito as *Ethnicity.gov* (2011) to explain how and why language can be used by neoliberal states to subjugate and monetize minoritized languages and their speakers. Section 2 is an exploration of the paradox of linguistic fetishism in practice in Peru towards Southern Quechua speakers, seen through the work of Huayhua (2015) and Gonzales (2023), two Quechua speaking scholars who document the intricate ways that Quechua and its speakers are at once subjugated and monetized within the current Peruvian state framework. With this essay, I posit two departures from extant literary and theoretical canon. I depart from traditional linguistic study with an examination of how power structures interface with language both physically and metaphysically. I depart from conversations the theoretical canon of race, ethnicity and statehood by intersecting language as a dominant undercurrent of racial policy, law, and fetishization.

Operations of Race Legalization and Language Fetishism

The grounding framework for this essay is through the state-imposed nature of racial politics and identities, the linguistic undercurrent of those impositions, and in the neoliberal multicultural turn, the appropriation of the state of minoritized language. To this end, this section explores the significance and context of linguistic policy in the formation of race through legalization. For Goldberg:

Law fashions state identity and order over increasingly diffuse regions, people(s) and activities. *People are united in the face of their apparent anonymity by legal instrumentalities, discourse, and the legal consciousness of their diffusion through the population promote, even as law defines and divides those it united in contradistinction to those falling outside the defining criteria*
(Goldberg 2002, 139)

In doing this, the *lingua franca* of law fashions two identities, that of the exemplary person, a reasonable person and the standard; and the outsider, the irrational person, the threat. Goldberg insists that in distinguishing “exemplary persons” through law and legalization, the modern state narrows heterogeneity in form as it sharpens the particularity of social distinction (2002, 149). One of the diffuse activities implicated in identity-making is language. Goldberg suggests that the state molds a language, a grammar and a vocabulary, through which it rules – particularly through law, administrative lexicon and the spoken word (2002, 150-152). In this model, language exists as both a metaphysical language system that defines and refines the set of codes that inscribe heterogeneity through law and administration, and a physical language system, the spoken word.

Distinction marked by physical language does not need to be exemplified further than through the national and subnational borders defined by linguistic difference throughout the world. However, in a state-making context as opposed to a state-defining context, identifying

language speakers and assigning a state and racial identity based on that language allows for that identity and language to be alienated, dehumanized, and dominated, and as easily fetishized, promoted, and tokenized as it exists outside of a “standard.” In that way, language becomes minoritized, even if not representing a minority. The “abstracted connectivity and fabricated similarities” (Goldberg 2002, 140) is fashioned to physical language, becoming an index of race, and subsequently attaches to its speakers the same racial attitudes of inmodernity, incapacity, or an inherent or historical human lack, and thus, a threat to modernity, progress, or social order.

The response to this threat exists in two ways. The lexicon of the law, as suggested by Goldberg, becomes the medium of symbolic, cultural, commodity and capital circulation and exchange, and the producer and arbiter of difference, the marker, mediator, and manager of disputes (2002, 150). The response to the dispute of language is the dismissal of those identified as not beneficial to the state, substantiated by narratives of irrationality or incoherence assigned to minoritized language that in turn substantiate the subjugation of racial identities. This positionality then allows for repression and dismissal of racialized persons and minoritized language speakers and their removal from state operations. Written language systems and literacy in particular become markers of this irrationality and incoherence in the context of predominantly oral languages like Quechua. More often, the prevailing state response to language and minoritized language speakers becomes violence. The overt repression of minoritized language; the use of minoritized language in the name of furthering homogenizing policy; the insistence that language is a barrier to prior informed consent, and therefore cannot be meaningfully used to oppose expansion in Indigenous territories; and the enacting of physical violence including disappearances and murder with the justification that they do not contribute to

the national identity or purpose. These practices leave minoritized languages and their speakers as implicated within the state lexicon but as occupying a lower hierarchical positioning within it.

In the neoliberal multicultural turn, the response to minoritized languages and their speakers, working through the fetishism of law, instead acts to fetishize minoritized language as a marker of race for capital and material gains for the state. Rodriguez-Garavito proposes Ethnicity.gov as a framework for understanding the proliferation of terms under the neoliberal governance paradigm, such as “participation,” “empowerment,” and “consultation” of “stakeholders” in all types of regulations, especially in this case, Indigenous peoples (2011, 272). Ethnicity.gov as a framework expands on the work of Comaroff & Comaroff’s *Ethnicity, Inc.*, which involves the process of “cultural commodification, and the incorporation of identity in which it is imbricated” (2009, quoted in Rodriguez-Garavito). This commodification can be used, then, to exploit Indigenous peoples and the material and linguistic markers of their racial identity for the global economies particularly of tourism and land possession.

Rodriguez-Garavito asserts that Ethnicity.gov is the system by which these forms of domination are codified, and neoliberal legal subjection becomes a defining aspect of the hegemonically safe, just, development-oriented national identity. In this way, recognizing minoritized language as an “official” language of the state imposes the ideology that the languages, and therefore their speakers, are on equal footing. It does not, however, use the metaphysical language of policy, law, and administration to benefit the minoritized language or its speakers. The fetishism of language is the process of appropriating language that operates through recognizing the difference of language, both in the threat it poses and the benefit it maintains for the national imaginary. It posits a seemingly equal playing field — one in which Indigenous language and identity is recognized and in fact celebrated, with the added benefit of

nullifying the argument that the state could try to undermine minoritized peoples' rights and freedoms.

This interwoven nature of law and language is the context that allows for the multicultural neoliberal paradox of language fetishism. Because language is doubly implicated in fashioning state and race, it can at once be used to subjugate speakers through metaphysical language, and to appropriate the physical language for state benefit. Language is a simple distinction in that it can be easily recognized by both the state and the populus for inscribing identity. This seemingly neutral recognizability is what provides the context for the fetishism of language. Physical language can be easily used to define collective subjects, to dominate them, and in turn benefit financially from them and codify this domination and benefit in metaphysical language.

In conclusion, proposing these responses to minoritized language diametrically does not adequately describe the fetishism of language. The responses of the state under this system work in tandem to at once recognize the inmodernity of racial identifiers like language and in turn subjugate the populations that use them, *and* recognize the value that the appropriation and fetishization of them brings to the national identity. The national imaginary of the "reasonable person" becomes one who takes pride in the Indigenous roots of the nation, but can recognize the inmodernity, incoherence, and threat of markers of Indigeneity, including language. The assimilation of racialized people into a multicultural national imaginary involves forcing an attitude shift in the populations it subjects that fetishizes language: seeing its use both in subordination and appropriation to form a national identity.

The case of Peru/Southern Quechua

In the Peruvian/Southern Quechua context, the fetishism of language materially manifests through state actors using Quechua in Quechua-speaking communities to rationalize their subjugation and impose assimilating tactics onto the population. In turn, the state uses Quechua outside of these communities to promote a national imaginary that capitalizes on indexing Indigenous identity, particularly in the tourism industry. In this section I explore two instances of the state's use of Quechua language in the process of language fetishism.

Huayhua observes subordination through language in Quechua communities through everyday interfaces with the state. Huayhua's examination of *visita domiciliaria* practices in Quechua speaking communities highlights how physical language is used to subjugate Quechua speakers through the basis of the metaphysical language of law and administration (2015). *Visitas domiciliarias* consist of investigators imposing the presence of the state by inspecting homes in rural communities and assessing their adherence to cleanliness guidelines. These investigators, though primarily relying on Spanish when discussing the function of their visit and the consequences of refusing such visits, also use Quechua to soften the nature of their intrusion, as Huayhua notes in one interaction between a Quechua-speaking woman (Ñaña) with an investigator:

A: *Y:: este- como se llama- de una vez seguimientuta ruwayrusayki mama* (.)

A: And::: this- how can I say- I will proceed right away with the supervision *mama*(.)

[...]

A: *Makichanchista imakunapaq maqchikunchis mamita*(?)

A: And why do we wash our little hands, *mamita*?

(Huayhua 2015, 114, 116)

Huayhua positions the investigator's use of Quechua as one that attempts to bridge the formality of the state into friendliness or kinship in the private sphere, however, this use of Quechua "does not bring the agent 'closer' to the villagers and it does not lead to her acceptance as a temporary member of the household" (2015, 114). Subordination through metaphysical language operates here under the guise of administration, in the examination of one's cleanliness and the ability to take care of one's self and health, while appropriating the use of Quechua to soften or rationalize the visit. Huayhua asserts that even within morphological expressions of reference (*doñita*, *mamita*), these representatives of state administration place individuals in a lower position to their interlocutors (2015, 115). Here I will add to Huayhua's assessment of the condescending attitude that the agent takes with the host. The condescension within the physical language works in two ways: in Quechua with the diminutive suffix *-cha* in *Makichanchista* (translated by Huayhua as "our little hands") and in Spanish with the diminutive *-ita* in her direct pronoun referent (*mamita*).

The paternalization of those identified as threats, in this case Quechua speakers, holds the implication that the state is acting in the best interest of this population. However, the judgement of cleanliness in these communities, as Huayhua suggests, is nothing more than a reinforcement of the perception of Quechua speakers and practices as other and as needing to be inspected and improved. Cleanliness is the guise through which subordination and dismissal is established in these visits. "This need to cleanse 'unclean' Quechua practices," Huayhua suggests, "is a 'civilizing' project that aims to include villagers as members of the Peruvian citizenry" (2015, 113) In doing so, the state uses the metaphysical language of administration and law, requiring certain cleanliness standards, as a vehicle through which physical language is used to intrude on, belittle, and dismiss Quechua speakers.

Gonzales, by contrast, has recently documented Quechua neologisms in manuals, teaching texts, schools, essays, theses, and promotional materials about the Andean world. He notes that these neologisms are not created by the community of speakers, but by literate, mestizo, bilingual subjects with the purpose of parading Quechua language regardless of the neologisms' incompatibility with Quechua speakers' worldview, cosmology, or comprehension (Gonzales 2023). Gonzales encountered a sign outside Cusco's Velasco Astete International Airport that greeted arrivals to the city, reading: BIENVENIDO | ALLIN HAMUQ | WELCOME. *Allin hamuq*, here, is a direct translation of *allin* in Quechua as "good"/ "bien"; and *hamuq* as "to come"/"venir." Here, linguistic fetishism is operating in the framework of Ethnicity, Inc., positioning the neologism *allin hamuq* as equal to (and literally, next to) Spanish and English greetings (*bienvenido* or *welcome*) assumes an artificial connection with "standard" languages that undermines the oral, precise, and concrete tendencies of Quechua speakers. The phrase *allin hamuq* is not an equivalent greeting in Quechua. Gonzales explains that the expression is jarring to a native speaker's ear, and in fact, doesn't mean anything at all. There exists no phrase or expression of "welcome" in Quechua. For Gonzales:

Van relegando términos originales de nuestros mayores, procreando sustituciones insulsas, que no alcanzan el rigor, la sutileza, humor y cuota justa de poesía con que la comunidad de hablantes decanta cada neologismo en el devenir del tiempo.

They are relegating original terms from our elders, creating insipid substitutions, which do not reach the rigor, subtlety, humor and fair share of poetry with which the community of speakers decants each neologism in the course of time. (2023)

It is clear then, that this sign was not made to welcome Quechua speakers. It is a facade of celebration, an appropriation of language, that proves the worth of Quechua is only to an outside, non-Quechua speaking community. It has no roots in or material gains for Quechua speakers. It exists as an appropriation of language for the express purpose of defining a collective national

imaginary that includes Quechua speakers only insofar as it exotifies the borders of what it means to be Peruvian and what it is to exist in Peru. The placement of the sign outside of an international airport supports the assumption that its benefit is not for Quechua speakers, particularly not those Huayhua observes existing in the periphery of the state, but for the benefit of those entering the area from outside the nation. Specifically, here, language fetishism benefits tourism. Upon seeing this sign, tourists may think that their travels here are to the benefit of these indexed Indigenous communities, as it seems these communities have cosigned in greeting their arrival. However, the sign operates in precisely the opposite way, by appropriating the use of Quechua with no gain for its speakers.

Further examples of this practice are seen in the translation of the Peruvian national anthem, legislature, and legal documents including the constitution into Quechua. For Gonzales, these translations created by academics, politicians, and class elites, those collectively identified as the “reasonable” people, are the creation of an artificial, illusory and insipid language that is in turn only understood by these groups (2023). In this way, when metaphysical language through policy, documents, and national identity markers are translated artificially into a language that is not coherent to its speakers, the facade of celebration is maintained along with the blame of incoherence in the collective racialized subject, Quechua speakers. These metaphysical linguistic creations, though in Quechua, do not exist for the benefit of Quechua speakers. Instead, neologisms and other appropriations of Quechua act as both a marker of a national identity for benefit, particularly here in the indexing of an Indigenous, Quechua-speaking, multicultural national identity, and as a defense against practices where Quechua speakers are subordinated.

This is the inherent paradox of linguistic fetishism. Physical language is used in Quechua speaking communities to place Quechua speakers in a subordinate position. Additionally,

physical Quechua language is the means through which the metaphysical language of the state is imposed in assessing speakers' adherence to laws, policy, and administration that belittle, dismiss, or discredit them. In turn, physical Quechua language is used as a fashioning for a national identity that indexes Indigeneity. This process appropriates Quechua to encourage tourism and to strengthen the national identity and pride as one that indexes Indigeneity, though removed from its inmodernity, incapacity, or incoherence. In turn, this appropriation is incoherent to Quechua speakers. But by operating under language fetishism, it does not matter that Quechua speakers do not understand these appropriations. These translations are not made for their benefit.

Conclusion

The frameworks provided by Goldberg & Rodriguez-Garavito allow for a deeper understanding of the current state of language as race and language fetishism in the Peruvian/Southern Quechua context. It is in this context that the role of language is made clear in the operations of race legalization, prosecution, and appropriation. The state interfaces with language to create racial identities, and under this model, minoritized languages can be both subjugated and appropriated for state benefit. This is done both through the metaphysical (legal or administrative lexicon) and physical (Quechua) language. The neoliberal multicultural turn consists of the contradictory responses to minoritized languages: repression and violence on one hand, and appropriation and exploitation on the other. Language fetishism operates by using language in constructing racial identities and enabling the exploitation of those identities.

Materially, language fetishism and the paradoxes it entails are seen in the Peruvian context through the work of Huayhua and Gonzales. The state's use of language in

Quechua-speaking communities serves to both subjugate Quechua speakers, rationalize that subjugation and impose assimilation tactics. Additionally, the state appropriates Quechua to strengthen an imagined national identity that indexes Indigeneity, creating neologisms that are disconnected from Quechua worldview, cosmology, and coherence. These linguistic appropriations serve to commodify Quechua for commercial benefit, rather than benefiting Quechua speakers.

In short, language fetishism operates as the “Indigenous solution” to the “Indigenous problem.” The state indexing Indigeneity through Quechua language for external benefit while in turn subjugating Quechua speakers internally through language are the material conditions in which the state is allowed to enact this paradox. Language fetishism operates by using language as a tool of the state to racially mark communities, and in turn justify their subordination and dismissal while appropriating that language for material benefit.

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