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# Quechuan Modernity and the Literature of Kilkú Warak'a

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## Abstract

In Peru Kilkú Warak'a is often regarded as one of the greatest Quechuan poets. He represents the indigenous movement in the Peruvian literature of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bearing in mind the specifics of Quechua language the following article analyzes how traditional Quechuan folklore changed with coming into modern age and transformed into literature based tradition. There are several differences between Quechuan oral culture that was practiced for centuries by anonymous authors and written literature tradition that was codified in form of scripture that was unfamiliar and atypical for both Quechua language and culture.

[Keywords: Peruvian literature, Quechuan poetry, *indigenismo*, modernity, Kilkú Warak'a]

*Ch'iqtawaqchusunquykitasunquytat'aqarparispas*

*Segaríastucorazón  
Despedazando el mío?*

*Would you cut your heart  
Tearing mine?*

*Qongawankimanchu ¿Me olvidarías? Would you forget me?<sup>1</sup>*  
Kilkú Warak'a

In the Andean region of South America, Quechua or quichua is a language family spoken by the tribes of people referred to with the same name. It is a common knowledge that Quechua is the primary indigenous language of Peru and the language that was expanded and used predominantly during the Inca Empire in Pre-Columbian era. In fact the origins of this Andean language can be traced back to centuries before the Inca Empire was settled. The proto-quechua, as linguists call this former idiom, formed a root that later developed into several regional dialects. The history of this language as vernacular in the area that today constitutes the Peruvian territory is relatively short. It was diffused for nearly 100 years with the conquest under the rule of Inca Pachacútec, Huayna Cápac and Túpac Yupanqui<sup>2</sup>. Then, its own development was suddenly disturbed with the arrival of the Spaniards to the continent during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. And only recently in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Quechua has begun to decline with the compulsory education in Spanish on the

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<sup>1</sup>Translation into Spanish by Odi Gonzales, translation into English by the author.

<sup>2</sup>For more details on the history of Inca Empire, one can refer to Burr Cartwright Brundage 'The Inca Empire' (Norman University of Oklahoma Press, 1985)

territory of its traditional exclusiveness and domination – Peruvian highlands countryside. There are many different, more or less linguistically discerned, divisions of Quechua, though today we identify four major Quechua branches in Peru. They vary in many aspects, speakers of different variants can comprehend them. Therefore, we distinguish *runasimi* (region of Cuzco), *chanka/wanka* (region of Ayacucho), *huayla* (region of Huancayo) and *ancash* (as can be supposed – region of Ancash).

The idiom of Quechua is characterized by various features of traditional and indigenous languages. What is special in the native language is the absence of written tradition. Quechua was restricted only to oral tradition in the time of its development and diffusion and apart of a very simple recording technique known as quipu, it did not have any scripting system. Unlike other major indigenous language families of Latin America as Mayan or Náhuatl that unfolded a specific codification, Quechua was spoken only. The initial condition and the forthcoming cultural and linguistic progress of Spanish left severe marks on the modern Quechua language. In this article I want to show that modern Quechua illustrates varied view of human beings and the world than its traditional Pre-Colombian predecessor. A fact of representing only verbal tradition and becoming a codified language with script and formalized grammar, only after the conquest and colonization prosecuted under different language, left strict marks on language and therefore on Andean folklore. Analyzing contemporary works of Quechuan writer Kilku Warak'a, I aim to prove that modernity affected Quechua culture and language with so far unknown components and characteristics. The literary works of an outstanding Quechua writer prove the alteration of idiom itself and therefore the linguistic model of the world<sup>3</sup>.

Kilku Warak'a, also known for his Spanish name Andrés Alencastre Gutiérrez, is one of the greatest Quechua writers, among a few who wrote or continue writing in this Andean language. Even José María Arguedas himself, the most prominent and famous propagator of Quechua language and culture in Peru, consecrated Warak'a the greatest Quechua poet of 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup>. Andrés Alencastre published under the name of Kilku Warak'a – a pseudonym in Quechua language. Kilku is Quechua hypocoristic for the name Andrés, whereas Warak'a means slingshot. Andrés Alencastre was born on 9th April 1909 in the family ranch Parq'o, province of Canas, Cusco<sup>5</sup> region. If we distinguish the social strata that composed the society of Peru hitherto, he represented the class of landowners<sup>6</sup> and such provenance would be symptomatic for his ongoing literature and life. Though, taking into reference his intellectual work, he represented the neo-indigenism movement

<sup>3</sup>By linguistic model/representation of the world I understand here the manner in which people express and describe the reality that they perceive and experience with their senses. Language is an essential part of culture and as such it codifies various cultural patterns and vision of the world in which it is practiced.

<sup>4</sup>José María Arguedas 'Letrasperuanas', Lima, agosto de 1955, año IV, núm. 12

<sup>5</sup>UbiGonzález 'La dolorosa contradicción de KilkuWarak'a, el poeta quechuamás importante del siglo XX. Introducción y traducción de poemas', in: Mar con Soroche, Santiago – La Paz, Nr 2, 2006, p. 48

<sup>6</sup>In Peru there is a particular term for a landowner – gamonal. It refers to an authoritarian social system in which Indian group was exploited by a group of landowners of Creole or mestizo origin. This system of domination known as gamonalismo was typical for Peru and other Andean countries of South America.

of Cusco intellectuals, the movement that wanted to re-define the so called indigenous problems and reclaimed the rights of Indians. It has to be mentioned here that *indigenismocusqueño* was a discourse led from a specific point of view. The intellectuals representing this current were mainly *blancos* or *mestizos* and somehow they had continued the paternalistic attitude known since the colonial era. Instead of the inner look for the rights and sake of *indios* social group, it was a pure protective glance from outside that deprived indigenous people of self-agency.

Kilkú Warak'a through his career represented various genres of artistic and Quechuan creation. He was an actor, a musician, a poet and a dramatist. Warak'a began his writing career with the elaboration of several *huaynos*. *Huayno*, in Quechua *wayñu*, is the most typical, popular and common Andean music and dance. It is accompanied with Andean folk instruments like charango, quena, siku, lute or mandolin. *Huayno* has a specific rhythm, but the melody is based on the pentatonic scale; it is often sung with high-pitched vocal<sup>7</sup>. Kilkú Warak'a in the decade of 40's composed various huaynos, some of which titles are *Punadesolada*, *Maizalitoquebradino*, *En la laguna de Layo*<sup>8</sup>. In those years he also wrote his first drama *El pongoKilkito*. It was not until 1950 when all his dramatic works were published under the title of *Dramas y comedias del Ande*. In this collection one can find *Los arrieros*, *Ch'allakuy*, *El ayllu de Qhapatinta*, *El pongoKillkito* and *Los cumpleaños de Catita*. In 1952 he published his first volume of poems – *Takiparwa*, constituted of 30 poems. After twelve years he published the continuation of first volume – *Takiruru*<sup>9</sup>, a book of 32 poems. And finally in 1972, he put to press his third and last collection of poems – *Yawar para*<sup>10</sup>.

Analyzing the literature of Kilkú Warak'a we come across several characteristics that were atypical for traditional Quechuan discourse. To find out all dissimilarities we have to describe traditional Quechuan folklore at first. The most typical genres for Quechuan lyric folklore that, as we remember, lacks any form of script, are *ayataqui* – a song of pain and death, *wawaki* – an invocation for a deceased, *aymoray* – an agriculture song connected with sowing and harvest, *haylli* – a song of acclaim and triumph, *harawi* and *urpi* – a kind of love poetry, *huacantaqui* – a song for cherished animals, then *qhaswas* – songs of joy, *wankas* – the song of loss of beloved person and *aranway* – a song of sarcasm and taunt<sup>11</sup>.

As we can notice the traditional Quechuan discourse is based on such types of oral

<sup>7</sup>For more details, refer to Thomas Turino 'Music in the Andes: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture' (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

<sup>8</sup>Gonzáles, p. 48.

<sup>9</sup>Kilkú Warak'a 'Takiruru' (Cusco: Editorial H. G. Rozas, 1964)

<sup>10</sup>Titles of those three volumes can be translated into English in corresponding order: 'Takiparwa' – 'Song of flower', 'Takiruru' – 'Song of fruit' and 'Yawar para' – 'Rain of blood'.

<sup>11</sup>EdmundoBendezúAibar 'Literatura quechua' (Segunda Edición; Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1993); Margot Beyersdorff "La tradición oral quechua vista desde la perspectiva de la literatura", in: Revistaandina -- No. 7 (1986), pp. 213-236

literature as songs, hymns and prayers. What is here most important is that Quechua literature was traditionally handed down only orally and transmitted from generation to generation. Moreover, in reference to creators, these were collective and anonymous. The conception of authorship did not exist. Not only was it not known, but it was not important above all. This kind of verbal literature belonged to the people and was created by the people. As such it represented collective identity and was referring to common events and experiences of all types. The themes that were undertaken in Quechuan folklore are related to myths and holistic conception of cosmogony, nature and agriculture, as well as emotions and moralizations. Obviously, there were two classes of such verbal literature: an official or court literature and much more numerous popular literatures that were created in the common language in day-to-day reality.

It is alleged that Kilku Warak'a re-invented Quechua and Andean culture for the written literature. Obviously such pass into modernity left deep marks on traditional Quechuan folklore. To understand that shift from verbal into written literature, we have to analyse a few characteristics of Kilku Warak'a's writings. In the genre of lyric, instead of traditional Quechan free verse songs, he wrote in fixed verses stanzas and as complete poems with regular set of verses, for instance tercets, quatrains, six-verses and ten-verses<sup>12</sup>. The idea of his dramas and comedies was to describe the life of indigenous and folklore of the Andes, although he did it from the perspective that originated in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Spain. Around 1930's costumbrismo became popular among writers and indigenous activists in Cusco. The objective was to describe not only cultural patterns and rituals, but also social and political reality of the Andean region. Kilku Warak'a found an artistic collection of indios and mestizos – *K'analayullaqtay*, where the actors were presenting dramas and comedies in various cities and villages of Cusco province<sup>13</sup>. At a later time, two dramatic works of Kilku Warak'a, *El pongoKilkito* and *Ch'allakuy*, were also published in France by George Dumézil in 1954, a bilingual edition in Quechua accompanied by a free translation in Spanish<sup>14</sup>. Such spread of ideas was only possible with modernism coming to Andean capital of Cusco. Furthermore, in the time of Inca there was some sort of verbal drama, but not much is known about this matter. Therefore, we can consider Warak'a's plays as essential in the formalization and consolidation of Quechuan drama. Apart from translating his dramas into French, Kilku Warak'a was known to have travelled promoting his literature and Quechua poetry to such remote Andean Cusco places as Bucharest, Moscow or Quebec City.

Furthermore, what is worth noticing regarding the contemporary Quechua literature is the issue of authorship and individuality of the author. Previously the verbal tradition of Quechuan folklore was based on oral transmission from father to sons through

<sup>12</sup>Kilku Warak'a 'Takiparwa' (Cusco: Biblioteca Municipal, 1999); Kilku Warak'a 'Takiruru' (Cusco: Editorial H. G. Rozas, 1964); Kilku Warak'a 'Yawar para' (Cusco, Ediciones Garcilaso, 1972)

<sup>13</sup>Zoila S. Mendoza 'Crear y sentir lo nuestro: folclor, identidad regional y nacional en el Cuzco, siglo XX', (Lima: Fondo Editorial PUCP, 2006), p. 146-147

<sup>14</sup>Georges Dumézil 'Deuxpièces "costumbristas" qhišwa de Killku Warak'a (Andrés Alencastre G.)', Journal de la Société des Américanistes. Tome 43, 1954. pp. 1-82

generations. As it was remarked by Edmundo Bendezú in his analysis of Quechua literature, it was the sign of birth of literature that the anonymous and collective authors of past centuries at that time began to speak as an individual author. Kilkú Warak'a already identified himself as a poet, he signed his works with his name and even published books with a copy of his photograph on the front cover<sup>15</sup>. Such conception of authorship was a new element in Quechuan literature. Only then the writing started to be formal and as such could be studied, analysed and developed with reference to an author. It is also important for the literature to be codified with the object to survive the twists and turns of history. Quechua oral tradition should be the best example, as it started to be written down only after the Spaniards came and settled the Vice-royalty of Peru. That fact had a significant impact on what and how 'was becoming a literature'.

What is also worth mentioning is the matter of language proficiency. Kilkú Warak'a was a master of Quechua, he was able to manage so advanced level of language that was impossible to achieve by a common Quechua speakers. As José María Arguedas wrote about his poetry collected in the volume '*TakiParwa*':

This collection can be considered as the most important contribution to the Quechua literature since the XVIII century. It is comparable to *Ollantay*<sup>16</sup> in the command over the language of the author. We believed that this domain was already unreachable for the current Quechua-speaking man<sup>17</sup>.

Obviously, he was a scholar and a man conversant with various literatures; therefore his capability of language was greater. However, he achieved unexpected level of indigenous idiom that was for centuries developed within popular Quechuan folklore and practised everyday by ordinary people. As we can observe in the excerpt of Spanish translation of one of Kilkú Warak'a's first poems '*Illimani*', his language proficiency was incomparable with any other Quechuan poet:

De todoserviente  
el principio, la semilla elemental  
el amorcreante, amado  
el germinal arquetipo  
en tu hondad entrañad uerme viviente sueño<sup>18</sup>.

Marisol de la Cadena also acknowledges that as a *neoindianist* Kilkú Warak'a was writing in

<sup>15</sup>EdmundoBendezúAibar '*Literatura quechua*' (SegundaEdición; Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1993)

<sup>16</sup>*Ollántay* – it is considered to be the first and the oldest expression of Quechuan literature. *Ollántay* is a drama written in quechua with influences of Spanish language (Colonial era). The existence of different manuscripts of this piece, reflects the idea of communal and anonymous authorship in traditional folklore of Andean region.

<sup>17</sup>José María Arguedas '*Letras peruanas*', Lima, agosto de 1955, año IV, núm. 12, p. 73

<sup>18</sup>José María Arguedas '*Poesía quechua*' (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria, 1965), p. 81. Free translation into English: 'Of all living/ the beginning, the elemental seed/ the creating love, loved, the germinal archetype/ in the deep essence sleep the living dreams'.

*runasimi*, instead of *capacsimi* that was practised by former *indigenistas* from Cusco<sup>19</sup>. *Runasimi* in this context represents a type of mestizo idiom, which originated when the base of native Quechua was influenced with Castile Spanish during the colonization process. It is a fact that it was the common language of Quechua people, but undoubtedly Warak'a wrote with vocabulary, composition and syntax that was unusual among indigenous Quechua people.

Apart of introducing new themes into Quechuan tradition, Kilkú Warak'a also revived already known aspects of traditional Andean folklore. His literature is considered to be the most beautiful poetry in the native language. As we read poems of Kilkú Warak'a we happen to recognize it as a tender and subtle voice, even if regarding brutal and stark reality. Arguedas was always saying that there is song for every life event in Quechuan traditional folklore. Within this song anthology emotions were traditionally described tenderly. As is proved by the opening quotation of this paper and as we can read in the last stanza of the same poem: '*¿Olvidarías a tu amor?/ Al quemora en el limbo de tusojos/ Segrástucorazón/ Despedazando el mío?*'<sup>20</sup> Such subtle voice can be surprising in Andean harsh reality, but in fact the poems are tender and coarse at the same time. The purport of those verses is sad in the meaning, though it is beautiful in the mastery of language and control and restraint of words.

Another issue that was reinforced by Kilkú Warak'a in his literature was the historicism and connection of human beings with nature. In traditional Quechua oral folklore there were numerous references to the legends of Incas, myths of origin and stories of cultural heroes. Warak'a continued this in his poetry; we can notice it, for instance, in the verses from 'Machupichu':

Antigua urbe, morada de los patriarcas  
Ciudad erigida  
Con la sangre y el sudor de los querevuelven el mundo'<sup>21</sup>.

Even if such literature is responsible for reinforcing the location of the indigenous groups in the mythical past, we have to admit that written literature made that mythical past somehow a part of history. The verbal folklore was referring only to ahistorical time and codified literature could be assumed as the first step into rooting Quechua people into the history and incorporation into historical time. Even more important in the Andean vision

<sup>19</sup>Marisol de la Cadena 'Indigenous mestizos: The politics of race and culture in Cuzco, Peru 1919-1991' (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 149-150

<sup>20</sup>OdiGonzález 'Takiparwa/<sup>22</sup> poemas de Kilkú Warak'a; traducción del quechua, estudio y notas de OdiGonzález', (Cusco, Lima: Ediciones Municipalidad de Cusco and Editorial Navarrete, 2000). In the Quechua original: '*Qunqawaqchuyanaykita/ ñawiykiqyananpiawsaqtा,/ch'iqtawaqchusunquykitা/ sunquytat'aqarparispa*'. Free translation into English: 'Would you forget your love?/ The one that dwells in the limbo of your eyes/ Would you cut your heart/ Tearing mine?'.

<sup>21</sup>Makupikcu' - 'Machupicchu'. Free translation into English: 'Ancient city, home of the patriarchs/ City erected/ With blood and sweat of those who move the world'

of the world is the human connection with nature and environment. This aspect was re-invented by Kilkú Warak'a to such degree, that we would rather describe it as atavism. One of his most famous poems, entitled 'Puma', recalls a traditional genre of *huacantaqui*. In the words of author himself:

Espinosa filo d'ostus bigotes  
Al sol deslumbran, relucientes  
Candente brasatulengua  
Se relame por sangre<sup>22</sup>.

All descriptions related to the Andean environment are persuasive and realistic. Both historicism and natural attachment of the people were already present in Quechuan folklore, although Kilkú Warak'a re-mastered those traits of traditional discourse and led them to perfection. In the general analysis of Kilkú Warak'a poetry we shall observe that he revived some of the most important Andean identity and culture aspects, making them more explicit. Though it is obvious that modernity introduced a few unknown issues and changed several aspects of Andean/Quechuan oral tradition and vision of culture and its creator.

Marisol de la Cadena excerpts one famous and meaningful verse of Kilkú Warak'a:

'I will tell you that the time has come for us to recognize that in ourselves there is only fifty percent of Gutiérrez, and that the other fifty percent is autochthonous blood... We are descendants of the Indians, the Kana runa... we are mestizos by blood and neoindios by spirit.'<sup>23</sup>

It is somehow contradictory that at the end of his life he desired to return to the life of landowner – a Peruvian *gamonal*. And actually this decision marked the beginning of the end of his days. On 2nd August 1984 Kilkú Warak'a died in the mutiny of the indigenous people who wanted to reclaim their rights with their own hands and arms. The death of one the greatest Quechuan poets is a symbol of many contradictions that were part of his biography; for instance the relation between his social origins and cultural inspiration of his writings. What is also symbolic is that Kilkú Warak'a died in the same way as his father 63 years earlier and it resembles the plot of his drama *Ch'allakuy* in which the group of indigenous assassines the *gamonal* in revenge to his abuses. He loved the indigenous people and their culture; he somehow preserved until then wordless Andean folklore for the future, and unfortunately his execution was done by the same people who inspired him all his life. During the presentation of bilingual edition of 'TakiParwa' Rodrigo Montoya said about Kilkú Warak'a:

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<sup>22</sup>OdiGonzález 'Takiparwa/22 poemas de Kilkú Warak'a; traducción del quechua, estudio y notas de OdiGonzález',

(Cusco, Lima: Ediciones Municipalidad de Cusco and Editorial Navarrete, 2000). Free translation into English: 'Sharp thorns of your mustache/ Dazzle at the sun, gleaming/ Burning your tongue/ Smack the lips for the blood'.

<sup>23</sup>Marisol de la Cadena 'Indigenous mestizos: The politics of race and culture in Cuzco, Peru 1919-1991' (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 131

He was a ruthless landowner who felt Indian. A strange creature produced by a country as painful as fractured as ours [Peru]. (...) The Andean world is still producing those men and women who failed to unite these two worlds.<sup>24</sup>

One could say Warak'a was a *gamonal*, but his heart and mind were purely indigenous. And only with a mind and heart like this, he was able to create so delightful Andean poetry. In his last collection of poems 'Yawar para' Kilkú Warak'a wrote:

El Ausanqati y el Salkantay son mis antenas receptivas. Yo escucho en sus cimas la queja de los hombres que sufren y quepiden, pero estapetición, justa y tenaz, recibe en respuesta solamente lluvia de sangre y ríos de lágrimas.<sup>25</sup>

[*'Ausánqati y Salkantay are mine receptive antennas. On their summits I listen to the complaints of men that suffer and cry out for, but this request, fair and tenacious, receives as an answer only rain of blood and rivers of tears.'*]

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<sup>24</sup>Cesar Levano 'Poesía y tragedia'. In: *Caretas* Edición Nr 1624, 22 June 2000. Translation by author.

<sup>25</sup>Free translation into English by the author of this article.

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Kilkú Warak'a 'Yawar para' (Cusco, Ediciones Garcilaso, 1974)

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