

Interculturality for Afro-Peruvians: Towards a racially inclusive education in Peru

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Intercultural education policy and programs in Peru emerged as a response to the right of education for marginalised indigenous populations. Under the influence of international dialogue regarding education for all, Peruvian policy has recently proposed interculturality as a guiding principle of education for all Peruvians. In this context, institutions advocating for the rights of people of African descent are proposing intercultural education as a right for Afro-Peruvian marginalised populations. This paper discusses the challenges facing interculturality and racially inclusive education in Peru.

Interculturality, Afro-Peruvian movements, indigenous language, Peruvian education policy, race and education

INTRODUCTION

Interculturality, ... assumes the richness of cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity and finds in the acknowledgment and respect for differences as well as in the mutual knowledge and learning attitude of the other, support for harmonious coexistence and exchange among the diverse cultures in the world (Article 8 - Principles of Education; *Ley General de Educación*).

Intercultural education has emerged in the context of the reform of Latin American educational policies towards the configuration of more equitable, inclusive and democratic education systems. In the last decade, Latin American governments in over a dozen countries have acknowledged the multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual nature of their societies, and thus have admitted the urgency to respond to historically excluded populations. Intercultural education policies in Peru emerged first as a proposal aiming to address the educational rights of indigenous non-Spanish speaking populations. In 1997, almost two decades after the creation of the first intercultural education programs and ten years following its incorporation into the law, interculturality was defined as a guiding principle of Peruvian education. The discourse defining interculturality as educational proposal stresses the strengthening of democracy but fails to address exclusionary practices and profound social inequalities also affecting Spanish-speaking non-indigenous groups.

Socio-economic and educational marginalisation is not exclusive to indigenous populations in Peru. Peoples of African descent, who with approximately 2.5 million inhabitants living in Black communities comprise ten per cent of the total population, are also among the poorest and the least educated in the country (CEDET, 2003). While the intercultural policy promises equal access and quality education for all, this policy is characterised by an apolitical discourse that has largely ignored factors exacerbating inequalities in the Peruvian educational system: it lacks an analysis of race as a separate vector of inequality. This article argues for the incorporation of issues of racial exclusion in the educational policy discourse as an alternative in the formulation of inclusive intercultural education policies in Peru.

First, this article offers a historical review of bilingual intercultural education in Peru focusing on how the Peruvian education policy has used the concept of language diversity to define cultural difference and interculturality. In a discussion regarding inclusive policies and exclusive social practices towards Afro-Peruvians, this paper pinpoints the contradictions between policies of inclusion and pervasive practices of racial discrimination in the Peruvian context. This article proceeds to question the apolitical tone of inclusive intercultural policies that utilise a discourse of harmonious dialogue while masking existing racial tensions in society. At this point, the author argues for the addition of the analysis of racial discrimination in the intercultural discourse, as an effective step towards the inclusion of traditionally marginalised populations in a traditionally exclusionary education system. In a second section, the article offers a description of the work and challenges encountered by Black social movements in Peru in their effort to incorporate populations of African descent in the intercultural policy debate. This section describes some actions to promote social change undertaken by the social movement MNAFC as well as the role of Afro-Peruvian organisations in Intercultural Education.

BILINGUAL INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN PERU: A HISTORICAL REVIEW

Bilingual education in Peru is not a twentieth century invention. The use of multiple languages together with some version of bilingual instruction had been taking place throughout the Americas before Spanish colonisation. During colonial times, encompassing the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, the Spanish throne supported the teaching of the Spanish language in its new territories. Members of the church in charge of 'educating' the people of the New World, however, realised that evangelisation in the Spanish language alone was nearly an impossible task. Throughout the colonies and among numerous indigenous languages, Nahuatl, Chibcha, Tupi-Guarani and Quechua were chosen as *lenguas generales* and thus used to communicate with indigenous pupils in an effort to transmit knowledge of the catholic religion, which was intended to 'civilise' them. Aside from religion, the aim of this mode of instruction was *castellanización*, or the teaching of the Spanish language with the subsequent suppression of the mother tongue.

As the fervour of Enlightenment replaced religious devotion and power in the Spanish throne, the *castellanización* of the colonised populations in the Americas became a central mission. In 1782, King Charles III ordered the extinction of other languages and the exclusive use of Spanish in all colonies. Arguably, exclusionary practices against the indigenous populations during colonial times paralleled those of African slaves whose presence in the Peruvian Colony date back to the early sixteenth century. Still, indigenous people were recognised by law as natural inhabitants of the colonial territories and as such, were to be explicitly included in policies as determined by the Throne. Conversely, because of their condition as slaves, Africans and their descendants in the colony were not granted any recognition similar to that of indigenous people.

People of African descent were brought to the Peruvian colony from Europe experiencing Spanish customs and instruction in the Spanish language before arriving in the New World. While colonial policy would discourage the instruction of slaves, some Africans became literate in the Spanish language, and others, especially the *mulato* children, the offspring of white and Black parents, were eventually freed allowing subsequent access to some form of instruction. A small minority of children of mixed race who were born free in wealthy homes received privileged education and eventually became part of the colonial elites. In the last decades of the colonial rule, educated elites of *mulatos* and *mestizos* (of Spanish and indigenous descent) led the independence movement in South America.

After independence from Spain, the new Peruvian elite who seized political power maintained the beliefs that legitimised colonial relations towards indigenous populations (Freeland, 1996, Gonzales Mantilla, 1999). Thus, when the first Peruvian constitution was written in 1823, Spanish was designated as the official language. The choice of a language spoken only by ten per cent of

the population ignored the existence of hundreds of indigenous languages utilised as the main means of communication by most Peruvians. Moreover, it has been pointed out that, at that time, the “intention to enclose the diverse cultural communities of this country in an imaginary concept of unity that is functional to the construction of the nation-state [was] already present” (Gonzales Mantilla, 1999, p.28). Meanwhile, historical and legislative traditions ignored the conditions of people of African descent in Peru. Thus Blacks remained invisible to most Peruvian national undertakings.

The common denominator of the educational policies in the decades to come was the identification of linguistic difference as a central issue to be addressed. In that light, the problem of indigenous people ought to be addressed through *castellanización*. Meanwhile issues of racial discrimination of non-indigenous peoples, in particular of Afro-Peruvians, were simply obviated. The law of education in 1941 defined the goals of indigenous education as the learning of the Spanish language and the habits of civilised life. Ideas of liberalism and progress gave education the power to become a nation-building and a race-homogenising tool (De La Cadena, 2000). During the 1960s in the frame of the development discourse, politicians would refer to education as *un símbolo de redención social*, a symbol of social redemption (Navarro Grau, 1966). While the policies of independent Peru identified indigenous people either as a social problem to the advancement of the nation, or as an unfairly marginalised group, other groups experiencing a similar burden are obviated. Policies of equal education and social redemption left Afro-Peruvians untouched and their condition invisible to a society clearly divided by class and blinded by its own racially discriminatory practices against indigenous as well as Afro-Peruvians. De La Cadena (2000, p.2) attributes these “exculpations of racism” in the Peruvian society to a definition of race “rhetorically silenced by the historical subordination of phenotype to *culture* as a marker of difference.” Indeed, discriminatory practices in the Peruvian society are not considered racist in the sense that they connote cultural differences as opposed to biological ones.

As a top-down initiative, interculturality in Peru has been treated as a concept strongly linked to linguistic diversity. Guido Pílares from the Bilingual Intercultural office in the Ministry of Education (Personal interview, June 2003), notes that this linkage was established because bilingual education as legally proposed in the early 1920s did not include elements of culture or ethnicity. In the specific case of national educational policies, particularly those of the first half of the twentieth century, there was a culturalist definition of race revealed in an emphasis on the assimilation of the population identified as socially marginalised, namely, the indigenous people, to a rationally superior culture through education and specifically to the learning of the Spanish language. Although not unanimously, leading Peruvian intellectuals of those decades referred to education as the opportunity to improve even the most ‘inferior’ of races (De La Cadena, 2000).

Bilingual intercultural programs and policies in Peru were the result of an historic event which initiated one of the most significant educational reforms in the country. In October 1968, General Juan Velasco Alvarado established the Peruvian revolutionary military government after a *coup d’etat*. This government presented itself as a regime with a moralising mission that would transform the structures of an oligarchic state, through working in favour of the neediest social sectors whose effective inclusion and participation in the national life would constitute the base of the unification and the development of the Peruvian nation. A general educational report prepared by the Reform Commission in 1970, described the situation of the country as one of internal underdevelopment and external dependence (Comisión de Reforma de la Educación, 1970). Underdevelopment was attributed to profound social inequalities that were reflected in an unfair economic distribution, where a small sector of the population monopolised the resources of the country at the expense of the great majority of Peruvian society. These unfair structures, as expressed in this report, had been reinforced through political ideologies that served dominant

groups to the detriment of rural peoples in the interior of the country (Comisión de Reforma de la Educación, 1970, p.11).

The Peruvian education reform proposed by the revolutionary military government in 1972 was considered, at its time, one of the innovative educational reforms undertaken in Latin America (Bizot, 1975; Churchill, 1976; Freeland, 1996). Reform documents stated the aim to build the country along humanistic, democratic and nationalistic ideals. In the light of this humanistic spirit, education would contribute to the structural transformation and development of Peruvian society. The reform proposed flexible and diversified education with a spirit of justice which would take into account the social and regional variety of the country. Reform documents also criticised traditional education, namely the form of education that alienated the poor from the life of the nation. Distancing itself from this form of alienation, the educational reform emphasised the recovery of linguistic and cultural space for indigenous people (Hornberger, 1988, 1997, 2000), but it also constituted the continuation of invisibility for Peruvians of African descent.

The reform calling for national unification and bilingual education offered the possibility of fulfilling one of the greatest promises of long-term improvement and societal integration for indigenous people. Some stated that this reform demanded “the most fundamental shift in attitudes on issues of culture and race” (Churchill, 1976, p.50). The specific policies on bilingualism assumed in the educational reform became most demanding not only in terms of implementation. The new policies demanded a substantial paradigmatic change among different sectors of society. With such ideological baggage, several bilingual intercultural programs were initiated as pilot programs during this regime.

Among the elements representing the social and political impact of this reform was the introduction of the conceptualisation of bilingual education as a ‘valid form’ of educational development (Churchill, 1976). The reform stated the exigency to replace violent *castellanización* with the recognition of cultural differences (Hornberger, 1988). Parallel to these efforts early in General Velasco’s government, a decree substituted the term indigenous with the term *campesino* (peasant) to refer to indigenous populations. Gonzales Mantilla (1999) observes that such a shift attempted to blur “the collective perception of the real complexity of the multiethnic essence of the country” (p. 34). Mirroring the government’s Marxist orientation, this change of terms aimed to reduce a cultural, social and political phenomenon that carries within itself an intense and complex historical weight to a mere economic dimension. However, the introduction of the word *campesino* did not erase the consensual acceptance of the inferior social condition of the indigenous person. The word ‘indigenous’ or *indio*, maintained its pejorative charge associating it with rural, illiterate and impoverished.

The educational reform and the efforts of the revolutionary government were finalised when illness forced General Velasco to leave government in 1974. Bilingual intercultural programs for indigenous people continued operating long after the return to democratic rule in 1980 through the support of international NGOs. The subsequent governments remained concerned with their own political and economic stability, and thus abandoned the original commitment for most education related projects, among those, bilingual programs serving rural minority populations. By the mid 1980s and because of continuous research and publications abroad, intercultural education programs had become well known internationally and would be used to model intercultural education in other Latin American countries. In Peru, it was not until the 1980s that intercultural education would be incorporated into government education policy, as an alternative form of education for indigenous people. In the context of international dialogues advocating the rights of all people to education, the intercultural concept was defined as a guiding principle of the Peruvian education system in 1997.

AFRO-PERUVIANS: INCLUSIVE POLICIES AND EXCLUSIVE SOCIAL PRACTICES

Historically, national educational and social policies in most Latin American governments have overlooked and failed to address the situation of people of African descent (Wade, 1997). Peru is no exception. Since President Ramón Castilla abolished slavery in 1856, under the Peruvian law people of African descent, as all people born in Peruvian territory, are citizens sharing equal rights. Traditionally, however, this population has experienced exclusion from the social, economic and political life of Peruvian society. Afro-Peruvians as most people of African descent in Latin America continue to confront issues of pervasive racial discrimination, extremely high rates of poverty and illiteracy, and limited access to education, health and other public services (Inter-American Dialogue, 2000).

In the Peruvian context, intercultural policy has emerged as a governmental effort to serve populations who have suffered socio-economic marginalisation, a great responsibility of which is placed on a school system traditionally aiming to eliminate the indigenous language and cultural practices. Linguistic and cultural revitalisation are concepts often discussed among policy architects as the dichotomy of indigenous versus non-indigenous is incorporated in debates addressing social inequalities and marginalisation, where the indigenous sector is placed at the bottom of society. Paradoxically, in its attempts to face the most poignant social problems present in school and the overall national society, the intercultural policy discourse overlooks the realities of people of African descent as a clearly marginalised Spanish-speaking sector of the population. In the intercultural discourse, the lack of knowledge of the Spanish language is perceived as the cause for the indigenous ‘distance’ from the mainstream society. Such rhetoric ignores that the issues of discrimination in this context are not limited to linguistic differences. It is not my intention in this paper to analyse the conditions that exacerbate socio-economic differences and the perceived causes of marginalisation in Peruvian society, but to urge for a conceptual broadening of an educational policy formulated to include so-called ‘excluded’ groups in order for this policy truly to address, at least in its design, those it is supposed to serve.

A HARMONIOUS DIALOGUE MASKING RACIAL TENSIONS

Intercultural education policy (BIE) has tended to emphasise a benign and apolitical tone when addressing the relationships among different groups in Peru, thus ignoring the existence of racial tensions, discrimination and the exclusion that has tainted the relations between ethnic groups for centuries. BIE policies have been subject to criticism for ignoring substantial issues of inequality and of internal domination often present in encounters among cultures (Hornberger, 2000). Definitions of interculturality present in official documents portray a harmonious relationship between groups. Government documents establishing the benchmarks of Bilingual Intercultural Education state: “Interculturality means horizontal dialogue, agreement and shared activity between people from diverse groups and cultures in our country” (Proyecto CRAM II, 2003, p.1). In this light intercultural education is understood as necessary in order to strengthen cultural identity and self-esteem of marginalised peoples, as well as to foster respect and cross-cultural understanding.

The existing perception is of celebrated diversity in Peruvian society, where symbols such as music, dances, food and language, have been the main denominators of cultural difference. At the same time, the common discourses alluding to the inexistence of racism in this society build upon what is understood as a traditional practice of racial mixture (miscegenation) and thus the absurdity of racial purity and racial difference because in this country after all *el que no tiene de inga, tiene de mandinga* (who doesn’t have indigenous blood does have it African). In this context of contradictory discourses of cultural difference and racial mixture, which all together deny discrimination and social tensions, Afro-Peruvian groups strive to define themselves as a distinct group with distinct rights. Conversely, initiatives advocating for indigenous peoples’ rights have

been more easily undertaken, although not always successfully, under the umbrella of intercultural policies.

Among the few efforts to address the existence of social and group tensions there is a document produced in 1995 as the result of a national forum on interculturality where academics, indigenous non-governmental organisations and some indigenous leaders developed a definition of interculturality. It was defined:

...as a process of social negotiation which aims to construct dialogical and more just relations between social actors belonging to different cultural universes on the basis of recognition of diversity...It is a notion which encompasses the global society and helps to overcome dichotomies, particularly that of indigenous/non-indigenous...There cannot be interculturality without democracy. (Cusco Seminar, cited in Aikman, 1997, p.469)

Regardless of the relevance of the event, the Cusco Seminar as well as other similar efforts was overlooked when the state defined and designed its intercultural policy. Interestingly, the government law continues to emphasise interculturality as a given respectful exchange of knowledge and mutual learning between cultures. The policy goes as far as to define interculturality as the guiding principle throughout the educational system, which serves all Peruvians (Hornberger, 2000). In this way, the discourse in the law evocates an ideal model of society, failing to address social tensions and violence between groups.

In order to promote actions aiming for the transformation of the Peruvian society, various social movements and organisations representing marginal groups such as the peoples of African descent have begun to call attention to existing group divisions and particularly to racial tensions. The following section describes the emergence of Afro-Peruvian initiatives and their efforts in the promotion of social change in connection to intercultural education.

BLACK SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN PERU

The first actions to organise Black Peruvians began in the late 1950s, but it was until 1986 in the city of Lima, that the first Black movement called *Movimiento Negro Francisco Congo* (MNFC) was founded. The name Francisco Congo was chosen to honour a Black rebel and leader, captured and executed by colonial authorities in the eighteenth century. According to Newton Mori from CEDET (personal communication, July 2003), much of the work done during the first years after the creation of the MNFC focused on organising and defining the movement's ideology and on selecting its representatives who, in most cases, came from leftist political parties as did many of the participants in the movement in those times. Several members of Francisco Congo worked on community development activities including workshops on racism, racial discrimination, identity and self-esteem. Much of the work undertaken in this time was influenced by Freirian approaches to grassroots organisation development. In this perspective what exacerbated the marginalisation of Afro-Peruvians was these peoples' acceptance and therefore passiveness towards their condition of subordination. Thus, it was necessary for the marginalised Afro-Peruvian community to become conscious about their condition in order to become agents of their own liberation. This approach has been maintained by many of the different Afro-Peruvian organisations nowadays. One of those main social movements today is the National Afro-Peruvian Movement FC (MNAFC), created after the reorganisation of the original MNFC.

SOME ACTIONS TO PROMOTE SOCIAL CHANGE

The social movement MNAFC is active in three regions along the Peruvian coast. Its members spread across 12 cities, with a director in each city. MNAFC members continue to meet and organise periodically the movement's plan of action. In a personal interview, in June 2003,

Emmer Casas, current president of the MNAFC and director of the movement in the southern city of Ica, referred to the social and political establishment and further recognition of the movement as one of the greatest challenges of Black advocates. Moreover, referring to the Afro-Peruvian situation in education, he added that “any changes at the educational level will happen once and only when we become recognised as *Afro-Peruvians* through the legislation.” Mr. Casas referred to having Afro-Peruvian communities acknowledged as a minority group with specific rights, so laws could be subsequently created to protect Afro-Peruvians from discrimination and to aim social services and education to their needs as a community.

In an effort to promote awareness about the contributions of Afro-Peruvians to Peruvian history and society, the MNAFC movement developed *Palenque Congo, Manual para líderes y lideresas afroperuanas*, a manual for Afro-Peruvian leaders, which the MNAFC currently distributes among members of the movement or other organisations and also schools. In its content, the manual presents a section on the contributions of Afro-Peruvians throughout history, with facts about Afro-Peruvians who participated in the revolutionary actions during colonial times and the independence war. As a teaching material for schools, the manual shows a clear departure from the government school curriculum that makes no reference to the participation of Afro-Peruvians in events identified as historical and crucial to the construction of the present country. In fact, school textbooks tend to explain the Afro-Peruvian presence through the economic reasons and functions of slavery. Conversely, the manual developed by MNAFC contains sections devoted to explaining the social, political and economic conditions experienced by Afro-Peruvians from colonial times to the present. A paragraph explains that the geographical placement of African slaves was in the coast and not in the highlands due to the need for slave labour in that region, contradicting in this way the traditional explanation for this placement. The manual explains, “this [placement] was not because there were ‘biological causes’ impeding their adaptation to the high altitude...” A second paragraph explains that the slaves “who came to Peru” belonged to highly developed societies and that many had already been trained in European customs. This point clarifies “only a small number of the slaves came directly from Africa...Senegal, Angola, Congo, Nigeria and Mozambique.” Perhaps with the intention to fight the common knowledge that connects African slaves to a presumably underdeveloped world, it is interesting to observe that the wording of this point becomes confusing, conveying a dichotomy of development versus underdevelopment and connecting it with the notions of European versus African societies, all of which may backfire on the initial intent of this argument.

There is a section stating that many of the Africans brought to Peru were priests, musicians, kings, artisans and midwives. To close the section there is a phrase reading “This is why we should not forget that we are the heir and descendants of a great civilisation and cultures” (p. 12). Several statements in the manual convey a message of pride and the urgency to learn the true facts about the presence of Africans and their descendants in the country, since most historical knowledge about them has tended to belittle the value of their socio economic and political participation in national life.

The questions in the manual are an invitation to interaction, but sometimes offer few possibilities for debate. For example one reads: “Talk to your classmates and older people in your community, why didn’t our situation change after the abolition of slavery?” (MNAFC, 2002, p.11). However there are also questions inviting readers to engage in further discussion. Some examples are:

1. In your opinion, what factors explain the problems affecting Afro-Peruvians?
2. Talk to your classmates and explain whether, according to the history of Afro-Peruvians, we are better off now or not. (MNAFC, 2002, p.16)

The last section of the manual addresses the MNAFC movement, referring to its history and the challenges it faces. It also shows the Plan of Action of the Movement for the years 2002-2004.

Interestingly, the questions included in this section invite the reader to discuss the challenges faced by the movement and propose ways to overcome them. It is not clear, however, whether the reader's opinion would be actually communicated to MNAFC or remain unheard.

The information provided in the manual is brief, offering no further analysis of events or facts. At the same time, it can be accessible to a wide range of audiences. The manual is presented as "a tool for the strengthening and mobilisation of the MNAFC as well as a tool to develop the commitment to fight racism, racial discrimination, and to build peace and the respect of human rights" (p.5). While the manual per se may not help to develop commitment to the cause of the MNAFC, the information it provides may change some perceptions of Afro-Peruvians. In addition, this manual would need to provide options for further exploration and questioning, especially when there is acknowledged need – among people in the Afro-Peruvian movement and other organisations – to develop a political proposal.

AFRO-PERUVIAN ORGANISATIONS IN INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

The study on which this article is based coincided with perhaps one of the most significant efforts to incorporate the demands of the Afro-population for intercultural education: the first forum on intercultural education directed to people of African descent was held in June 2003. The title of the event was: *Los Afroperuanos Hacia una Educación Intercultural* (Afro-Peruvians towards an intercultural education). The forum was organised by the NGO ODACH (Organisation for the Development of the Afro-Chalacos) and CONAPA (Commission of Andean, Amazonic and Afro-Peruvian Affairs), a government organisation created during the present regime of President Alejandro Toledo. Guillermo Muñoz, a well-regarded school teacher who represents Afro-Peruvians in CONAPA, and is also a directive member of ODACH, was in charge of the organisation of this event. For him the event was significant as this was the first time the government sponsored Afro-institutions to bring to the fore issues specific to the Afro-community in Peru. Even though the event was co-sponsored by CONAPA, Muñoz and the members of ODACH worked around the clock with minimal resources, in fact, with money from their own pockets to organise the entire event. Muñoz said the work had been quite exhausting and costly for people.

One of the main challenges faced by the organisers was to make of this forum a national event. For members of the Afro-organisations in the rest of the country, a trip to the capital can represent a major expense they are not always in a position to assume. Thus, the event was attended by Afro-Peruvian organisations mostly from Lima and few nearby cities. Among the rest of the audience in the forum were Afro-Peruvian artists, and a few Black politicians. Interestingly, the co-sponsors of the forum – members of the Peruvian congress and some of the principal key-note speakers of the event – were not present.

The forum was held in one of the auditoriums at the Peruvian Congress, a monumental neo-classical building located in historic downtown Lima. The event consisted of three main panels discussing the following issues: the historic contributions of Afro-Peruvian culture, the current situation of the Afro-Peruvian interculturality, and interethnic education from the Afro-Peruvian perspective. The panels had a main 20-minute presentation by the head of the panel followed by three panellists who would present for about five minutes each. The discussants represented academic institutions, social movements and NGOs.

Although the title of the forum read "Afro-Peruvians towards an intercultural education", the program provided at the forum suggested a different aim for the event. According to the program, the forum's objective was "to analyse the historic and cultural contributions of the Afro-Peruvian people in order to reinforce their identity and their socio-economic development." In fact, in a significant part of the presentations, it was mentioned that Afro-Peruvians had made very important contributions to the Peruvian society. As one panellist mentioned, "Peru cannot be

understood without the Afro-Peruvians component.” Some panellists, referred to the need to include such contributions in the school curriculum, Milagros Ramirez, one of the panellists, clarified that Afro-Peruvian had offered significant contributions to society beyond sports, arts and cooking. This clarification joined other voices in the demand to stop the most common stereotypes used to define peoples of African descent in Peru, while it also seemed to acknowledge that such aspects were indeed Afro-Peruvian contributions, although not the only ones, to society.

Intercultural education was, nonetheless, an issue raised throughout the forum. Echoing the current debates regarding interculturality in Latin America – debates which for reasons of space I have chosen not to explain in the present paper – Guillermo Muñoz proposed that interculturality should not only be an educational but also a national project. In the same light, Mr. Muñoz questioned the fact that the efforts of intercultural education in Peru continued to be aimed at rural and indigenous communities in the highlands and the Peruvian Amazon. Other panellists referred to interculturality as the dialogue between cultures, with this recalling the definition delineated in the government education policies, but adding that interculturality begins from the recognition of difference, putting tolerance into practice, to bring it to the interrelation of those who are different. Adding to Muñoz’s proposal of interculturality as a national project, Professor Ruth Lozano referred to interculturality as a political, social and educational process. Among the presenters, only one engaged in clarifying a definition of interculturality.

An interesting aspect of the terminologies used during the forum was the utilisation of the terms ‘intercultural’ and ‘interethnic’. Apparently, these terms were used interchangeably. Signs and posters to the event announced it as “Intercultural Education for Afro-Peruvians”, while materials provided to the attendees used the word Interethnic Education. Days after the forum, during a conversation with a member of CEDET – one of the presenting NGOs in the forum – he mentioned that it was known that Colombian proposals of education for peoples of African descent used the terms interethnic and interethnic education, and that in that sense the word interethnic could be considered more accurate to address the specific educational demands of Afro-Peruvians. This was, however, not a shared view among Afro-Peruvian organisations. The use of the two terms during the forum showed the existence of still unclear definitions of the message that events like this one want to convey for Afro-Peruvians, and also the public this forum aimed to reach.

CONCLUSIONS

Identity development has become the priority mission of Afro-Peruvian NGOs, but in this effort, the tensions and inequalities between different ethnic groups are obviated, portraying instead a rhetoric which parallels that of intercultural education where revalorisation of the marginalised by the marginalised (be this Afro-Peruvian or indigenous) becomes the solution to marginalisation. This tendency clearly leaves central issues untouched. While, at different levels, Afro-Peruvian movements and organisations acknowledge the need of developing a concrete proposal at the political level, the attempts to voice their demands have not yet found a space that would make it possible to dialogue with other sectors of society. On the other hand, the emphasis many Afro-Peruvian organisations have placed on the development of identity and self-esteem of Afro-Peruvians as their main objective, risks limiting their actions to fighting discrimination only from within, failing to address exclusionary practices of other groups which have so profoundly affected the lives of Afro-Peruvians.

In the need to channel their educational demands as a minority group, Afro-Peruvian organisations have begun to use the intercultural platform, a platform also used by indigenous organisations perhaps in a more successful way due to eminent issues of linguistic difference that Afro-Peruvians do not share. This constitutes only a limitation for Afro-Peruvians to the extent that

intercultural education is aimed at attending to populations who speak an indigenous language and not other minorities who share with them marginalisation and socio-economic and political exclusion. However, such purpose, as it has been mentioned throughout this paper, is being contested. Several institutions, aside from Afro-Peruvian organisations, are proposing intercultural education as education for all Peruvians and interculturality as a national and not only educational project. It is important to add here that, as promising as these proposals may sound, there are relevant issues that have been left untouched especially in the design of intercultural education policies at the government level. The focus on linguistic and then cultural difference addressed in the intercultural discourse, masks racial issues which feed exclusionary social practices against, although not exclusively, people of African descent in Peru.

While ideologically, Black movements seem to represent different voices, the messages conveyed are not contradictory: there is a consensus when acknowledging the stereotyped view of the Afros in Peru. There is also agreement on identifying education as crucial to the transformation of such views. What is still lacking is a consensual proposal of an intercultural educational policy that aims to effectively address the conditions of peoples of African descent.

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