

**OPIICS 2019****International Conference of Psychology, Sociology, Education, and Social Sciences****COSMOVISION AND IDENTITY IN MARRIAGE —*SAWARI*— OF  
THE KICHWA PEOPLE OTAVALO, ECUADOR)**

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***Abstract***

In the Andean cosmovision, marriage is one of the most important life cycle milestones just like birth or death. It is celebrated with rituals symbolizing the combination of nature and culture. The few studies on this social reality show that western practices tend to overlap traditional rituals as a result of our lavish modern world. This paper analyses with a qualitative approach the cosmovision revealed in the Otavalo kichwa marriage. More specifically, it pretends to reveal the symbolism and particularities of ancestral Andean rites that have survived in both urban and rural areas and it also looks at how these rituals have been affected by socio-cultural dynamics. To do so, the ethnographic method was used to interview under informed consent 70 selected people from 14 communities. This work was documented with a set of photographs and videos of observed marriage rituals. The analysis shows that traditional marriage is made up of 20 syncretized rites. These rituals foster some Andean cosmovision values such as solidarity, gender parity and interlinked relationship within both nuclear and extended family. Finally, traditional marriage rites have been gradually impacted by social dynamics, geographical factors, educational systems and migrations. However, these rituals redefine themselves permanently to reaffirm the kichwa identity.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Definition of study variables

Cosmovision is how a given culture expresses and understands its core principles, values, and way of life at a given time. Ornelas (2016) and Benítez (2017) refer to the cosmovision as an articulated set of ideological systems and socio-cultural representations that are permanently recreated and redefined to reaffirm the identity of peoples, based on their historical, geographical, economic and intercultural context. Within this perspective, Qhapaq (2012) and Muñoz (2016) argue that Andean peoples share a common cultural matrix, as a result of a shared historical process and territory. Besides, Sánchez (2012) and Cruz (2018) agree that the Andean cosmovision built over the years gathers peoples' view of reality and about their environment.

The cosmovision of the Andean peoples expresses itself through several events and socio-cultural practices occurring during one's life, e.g the marriage. This social reality, along with birth or death, is a significant step in the life of the native people of the Andes since it unveils its cultural DNA (aspect of thought, principles, values, codes, etc.), due to a sequence of rituals, which have been passed on through generations (Cevallos, Posso, Bedón, Naranjo, & Soria, 2017). Essentially, the kichwa marriage ritual -in the cantons of Otavalo and Cotacachi- not only strengthens the social cohesion between the nuclear and extended family, it also becomes the ideal setting for cultural reproduction and continuity (Aguilar, 2014). The kichwas communities living in the cantons of Otavalo and Cotacachi in the province of Imbabura share common cultural features and characteristics but they also have different knowledge and cultural models giving them certain specificity. They have lived under the principles and philosophy of the Andean cosmovision. They have also adjusted to their environment but also to hostile time and events, powerful intercultural relations and, more recently, to technological, economic, socio-political and information globalization. It resulted in sudden and inevitable acculturation and transculturation of their traditional way of life (Benítez, Hernández, Gurría, & Cisneros, 2016).

### 1.2. Similar studies

Until now, several studies have been attempted about Andean people's cosmovision emphasizing religiosity, handicraft, traditions, and oral expressions, their knowledge and habits related to nature and the universe have also been studied in the past. However, studies about stages of their life rituals, i.e. marriage, birth, and death, are quite scarce. It is especially true about the Kichwa people of Otavalo. It must also be considered that like any other life cycle is not immutable as rites and their meanings are driven by historical, geographical, demographic, economic and political factors.

In this regard, Zúñiga (2014) states that the Andean symbolic comes from the interaction between the cosmovision, the relations between subjects that make up the community —as speech producers— and the experience. For Nieto (2001), this "rituality allows people to transit from one state or stage of their life cycle to another one thanks to the rite which acts as a social device" (p.49). In this sense, it can be said that the ritual chain is dynamic; it is permanently transformed and redefined to reaffirm the identity of the peoples, within the framework of tradition and modernity. According to García Canclini (2001), this cultural transformation redefines the tensions between an unstoppable modernity and a vanishing tradition.

It results in the so-called hybrid cultures or transcultural logics in which Kichwa people of Otavalo express their way of life in verbal and non-verbal languages.

Carrasco (1998) affirms that from the Andean point of view the status of an adult is culturally defined by marriage as he acquires social maturity through marriage. Similarly, Benítez, Posso, Cevallos, Gurría and Bedón (2019) state that the kichwa marriage ritual also allows the newlyweds to be shown before the indigenous society such as this way, they are recognized as community's legitimate members with rights and obligations. For Benítez (2017), the kichwa marriage is still patrilocal and endogenous the family unit is socially represented by the man who with his new condition gets involved in the community organization and its decision making.

The kichwa marriage ritual "reflects the syncretism of ancient pre-Hispanic concepts with Catholic and Evangelical practices. Therefore, this complex ritual constitutes a set of unique spiritual, material and affective values emerging from the cultural identities they express" (Benítez et al., 2019, p.27). Usually, the obligations, codes, and loyalties involved in the kichwa marriage are conveyed through sacred and picaresque episodes. Undoubtedly, the purpose of the ritual is to maintain the social group as long as it respects and complies with the norms of social coexistence. Besides, over the last five decades, some researches have deeply contributed to the understanding of this ritual. They are presented below chronologically.

One of the first ethnographic contributions is attributed to Parsons (1945), who describes the cultural practices of the Kichwa of Peguche (Otavalo) from 1874 to 1941 with a special emphasis on marriage as one of the most transcendent social reality in the life of the Andean indigenous. Then, Collier and Buitrón (1971) describes and published the most important habits of the first half of the twentieth century revealing some principles of the Andean cosmovision presented the kichwa marriage rite. A decade later, the ecuadorian linguist Moya (1981) explains some symbols that lay beneath marriage rites highlighting their strong cultural syncretism as a result of the imposition of Catholicism and the dominant culture. Similarly, Kockelmans (1989) states that these practices strengthen kinship, territoriality, language, and culture as the basis of community organization and development.

Among the most recent researches there is the work of Pazmiño (2013); Aguilar (2014); Males (2014); Guaña (2016) and Benítez (2017) who analyze marriage from different angles. Their contributions are very valuable for the understanding of symbolism. All of them agree that the native people from Otavalo decided to maintain their ancestral roots and principles but also to assimilate western cultural matrimonial practices. Until 2019, some researches have focused on Otavalo canton but none have studied the practices in Cotacachi canton —which represents a high concentration of indigenous population with Otavalo Kichwa affiliation—. Moreover, there is no study about the urban and rural cultural specificities regarding ritual marriage. However, in a recent research on marriage —*sawari*—, Benítez et al. (2019) concentrate on the study of the set of unique and diverse customs and traditions that correspond to both cantons.

The present work is based on the contributions presented above. It analyses the place of the cosmovision in the marriage of the kichwa people of Otavalo and Cotacachi and how it acts as a process of identity reaffirmation. To do so, it is necessary to get a closer understanding of the symbolism and specificities of the ancestral Andean rites surviving in urban and rural zones and how they may have been impacted by the socio-cultural trend.

### 1.3. Overview of the area of study

The research took place in the 14 largest Kichwa communities within Otavalo and Cotacachi cantons (province of Imbabura) located in the foothills of the northern part of the Ecuadorian western Andes. This province is bordered by the province of Carchi to the north, by the province of Pichincha to the south, by the province of Sucumbíos (Amazon region) to the east and by the province of Esmeraldas (coastal region) to the west. The following communities were selected for this research: Cotama, Compañía Baja (El Desaguadero), Quinchuquí, Calpaquí, IntyHuaycopungo, Tangalí, Carabuela, Araque, Huaycopungo, Santa Bárbara, El Topo Grande, Quitumba, San Martín and El Cerotal.

Concerning the Kichwa population of Imbabura, the National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (2010) recorded 57,952 indigenous people. It is 83% of the 70,127 self-identified Kichwa imbabureños, including Otavalos, Karankis and Natabuelas sharing the same territory, cultural tradition, and language. Out of these 57,952 persons, 46,151 indigenous people belong to the Kichwa group living in Otavalo and Cotacachi cantons. It represents 11.60% of the province total population (398,000 inhabitants).

This investigation involved 70 knowledge holders related to the Kichwa marriage. Simultaneously, we analyzed seven ritual processes (events) that occurred in different indigenous communities during 2018.

## 2. Problem Statement

In the past decades, globalization, education system, information and communication technologies, the spread of urban way of life, constant emigration and immigration have undermined local cultures and led to the loss of their ancestral and identity legacy. For Benítez (2017), these acculturating trends have been secularly shaping the way of life of the Kichwa people of Otavalo, especially in urban areas. Similarly, Lema (2001), Maldonado (2004), Pupiales and Verdugo (2017) agree that the identity of the Kichwa people has been historically shaped by obligated cultural exchanges, complex and various factors throughout the life of these peoples which have also fostered their unity and continuity. Such strong cultural interactions make ethnic border ambiguous as the true meaning of millenary traditions has been slowly worn off over time, leaving only representations and experiences at an imaginary level.

On the other hand, the systematic oppression and discrimination suffered by indigenous people have made them developed a complex of identity and inferiority, especially among new generations causing as a result ethnic and cultural whitening (Benítez et al., 2016). It has also led them to hide their ancestry or renounce to their heritage legacy. This is the case of the Andean cosmovision connected to the Otavalo Kichwa life cycle. Indeed, Otavalo's vivid and dynamic culture has been little studied in social sciences. Similarly, tourism and the Bilingual Intercultural System failed to revalue the cantons heritage. Other researchers such as Lema (2001), De Carvalho and Flórez (2014) agree that traditional Andean wisdom has been systematically excluded and dismissed by science as it is considered archaic, magical and mythical. Likewise, Rivadeneira (2014) recognizes that the traditional wisdom of the Kichwas people must be understood and acknowledged as a whole where culture and nature are intertwined so that it becomes a way to solve local conflicts.

Given the preceding, the Academy should encourage the protection of local cultures by supporting social science studies. As previously discussed, there are too few studies about the cosmovision and identity

in the marriage of the kichwa people of Otavalo and Cotacachi. Therefore, this research aims to explain how cosmovision and identity are revealed in the kichwa marriage in their geographical and intercultural contexts.

### **3. Research Questions**

Based on what has been exposed above, the following questions may be raised for the purpose of the current study:

What are the specificities and the symbolism of Andean rites that can still be observed in kichwa marriage, according to their geographical and intercultural context?

How have socio-cultural dynamics affected marriage rituals over the past five decades?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Analyze how the cosmovision and identity are manifested in the marriage of the indigenous Kichwa of Otavalo and Cotacachi, according to their geographical and intercultural context.

### **5. Research Methods**

#### **5.1. Type of study**

This anthropological and qualitative study, based on the ethnographic method, made it possible to analyze the cosmovision manifested in the ritual process of the Kichwa marriage, according to its geographical and intercultural context.

#### **5.2. Study techniques**

The research team prioritized participant observation, the interview in depth (holders of traditional wisdom), life stories, as well as the analysis of the photographic and audiovisual record of the last three decades. In all cases, the informants signed an informed consent agreement.

#### **5.3. Participants**

70 holders of wisdom involved in the kichwa marriage rituals in Otavalo villages including taytas mayors, ñawpadores, tailors, tayta and mama waiters, cooks, harpers, violinists, wind instrument musicians, and bartenders participated. They were chosen among the 14 largest kichwa population communities from the cantons of Otavalo, Cotacachi and Antonio Ante. 58.63% of the participants were women, 41.37% men and all of them 30 years old and over.

#### **5.4. Data collection procedure**

This research was approved by the "2017 UTN Call for Research" with the endorsement of the National Secretariat of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (SENESCYT), in the category of Social Development and Human Behavior. The work was split into four stages. In the first

stage, the existing documents from the past fifty years were reviewed. In the second stage, in-depth interviews were prepared and approved by five cultural field professionals. In the third stage, the interviews were conducted and seven marriages taking place in both urban and rural areas were attended in 2018. Simultaneously, some kichwa families' recordings were reviewed to analyze how the marriage ritual has changed in recent decades. Finally, in the last stage, the collected data were sorted out and analyzed.

### 5.5. Data processing and analysis techniques

The analysis and treatment of qualitative data were divided into 3 steps. First, secondary sources bibliographies were processed thanks to the reference management software "Mendeley". Then, the interviews, including audio and video, were sorted out. Also, the qualitative data analysis software Atlas ti was used for attended events. Finally, testimonies were analyzed and correlated to reveal the meaning of the cultural representations of the kichwa marriage ritual.

## 6. Findings

The traditional Otavalo kichwa marriage is made of 20 ritual stages. However, some couples don't comply with all of them because of several factors that are explained below. Each ritual is the combination of values, symbols, elements, languages, beliefs, and feelings inherited from their ancestors (Benítez et al., 2019). In pre-Hispanic times, the indigenous marriages included distinct types of rites because of greater cultural diversity and way of life (Pazmiño, 2013). Later, due to new conquests and colonization, the population assimilated other practices. People often preferred endogenous relations and arranged marriages to consolidate economic, political and cultural systems (De la Riva, 1966; Aguilar, 2014; Cárdenas, 2014).

Today, the first step leading to kichwa marriage is a couple falling in love (*kuyana*) where all young Kichwa are free to choose their partners according to their own sets of wishes. The current research reveals that 90% of kichwa interviewees favor endogenous relationships and 80% of young people fall in love in places where they usually socialize—schools, night clubs, markets, festivals, family events and through social networks—. Kichwa lovers usually initiate a dating relationship (*riksirina*) with "a declaration of love". This relationship does not always end up to marriage. According to Benítez (2017), more than two decades ago, "the theft of *pachallina*" by the pretender was a common practice among kichwas. It symbolized the acceptance or denial of the sacrament of marriage by the woman. Nowadays, it is only practiced in the communities of El Cercado, Iltaquí, Morochos, Tunibamba, La Calera, San Ignacio, Quitugo, San Martín, Turuku, Topo Grande and Piava Chupa (Cotacachi canton).

In these communities, the people who witness the theft of the *pachallina* immediately spread the rumor (*shimikachay*) to relatives, friends, and neighbors. People then normally assume that there will soon be a marriage in their community. So, they are prepared to support and participate in the ritual according to the kichwa tradition of the Andean cosmovision. Following the *shimi kachay*, the groom proceeds to the verbal announcement (*shimi shitachi*) along with his parents. The purpose is to formalize the engagement and to ask for the other's hand in marriage. Nowadays, only 55% of the population follows this practice.

It involves complex negotiations between both families until an agreement is reached. Once settled, it is concluded with a dowry offered by the groom's family consisting of cooked and uncooked food whose

value is between 150 and 300 American dollars. In the past, a *tayta* mayor—a symbolic authority of the community—usually mediated this discussion. Today, this role is held by the *tayta ñawpador* (coordinator) or the godparents. According to the interviewees, during these negotiations, the groom is not always favorable to the groom who has often to come back many times to offer a larger dowry.

The next step of the ritual consists of asking for the hand (*makitamañay*). It is also known as the grand entrance (*hatun yaykuy*), the *yaykuy* dinner or *yaykuy* expenditure. It is quite similar to the rite previously described, except that it requires an even larger dowry and the presence of both nuclear and extended family. It is intended to strengthen the marriage commitment. This practice, along with the *yanapa*, the *minka* and the *randi randi*—community work made by all members of a social group—constitutes the highest degree of Andean reciprocity (Benítez, 2017). The groom's family spends between US\$500 and US\$3,000 for the dowry, the food, the new clothing, and the musicians. According to Pazmiño (2013) and Males (2014), during this ritual, both Andean and Catholic symbols are displayed and Kichwa beliefs and values also blend with feelings of happiness, hope and nostalgia. Besides, the advice given by the bride and groom's families emphasizes the roles and obligations they will have to assume in their conjugal life. Above all, this rite is a space for cultural expression contributing to the transmission of the community's cultural patterns.

Today, 45% of Kichwa couples get married (civil, Andean and religious ceremonies) within a few days after having asked for the other's hand. Others decide to live together for a few months or even for years, before getting married mostly because of the cost involved in the marriage ritual. More than thirty years ago, cohabitation was considered as a proof of marriage (*sirviñakuy*) in which the groom's parents made sure that their son would marry a woman who mastered household chores, as well as techniques for sowing, shepherding and spinning. In this regard, Pazmiño (2013) and Hurtado (n.d.) state that this practice developed within the framework of a patriarchal structure, where male domination has maintained the submission and subordination of indigenous women. Today, patrilocality prevails for 45% of couples while 22% decide to live for a time with the wealthiest family, and 33% move in a separate place (more common in urban areas).

Once the couple decides to get married, the next step is to set up a committee in charge of planning and conducting the different rituals. Some members of the community holders of wisdom about marriage are chosen by the parents of the couple. To do so, the parents give them a basket containing various fruits, bread, a bottle of liquor, roast chicken and cooked potatoes which represents the relationships of reciprocity, commitment, and complementarity. This committee is usually composed of a *tayta* mayor, a couple of *ñawpadores* (spouses), a *tayta*, a couple of *mama* waiters (spouses), a tailor, several cooks, one or more bartenders, one or more musicians, and so on. It is more and more common to add to this list some figures taken from both the Hispano-Criollo and Western traditions.

Simultaneously, as a legacy of the Spanish colonization, both the bride and the groom ask for endorsement for their religious marriage. They chose godparents for the example of work and ethics they represent but also for their economic and social status. According to Benítez et al. (2019), endorsement allows the family to avoid wealth loss and also to climb the social ladder within the communal society. The godparents (*achik tayta maskay*) assume a role similar to the one held by the parents, although it may not

be fulfilled especially when they are mestizos. They spend between 1,200 and 4,000 US dollars (this does not include the cost of the third day of the celebration which was common in the past).

More than thirty years ago, all kichwa couples had three forms of marriage —symbolic, civil, and religious—. Today, only one out of 10 couple follows this tradition. Kichwa grandparents say that the symbolic or Andean ceremony is only practiced in Otavalo canton. It has various wording including: *sawarichina*, *palabrachina*, *palabray*, *sawari rimay* or *rosariar*. This rite takes place right before or after the civil marriage. It is carried out under the guidance of a *tayta* mayor or a *tayta* prayer. The latter commits the couple through the word —advice, reflection, prayer and praise—, and blesses the union using Christian and Andean components.

Couples complying with the three forms of marriage usually have the civil ceremony on the same day as the symbolic marriage which is usually on a Friday morning or afternoon as the religious ceremony is on Saturday for Christians. It should be noted that 74% of Christian Kichwa and 100% of Evangelicals believe that religious marriage is an essential stage, even if it takes place a long time after the civil ceremony. 86% of catholic informants say that the evangelical Protestantism weakens the practice of Andean rites and it is responsible for their slow disappearance because of the strong influence of western habits.

Marriage rites followed by Christian Kichwas may depend on geographical, economic and cultural context. Over the last two decades, the assimilation by urban kichwas of Hispano-Criollo and western marriage etiquette has been very strong —clothing, symbols, arrival and departure etiquette—. In fact, in 93% of the cases observed, the wedding party is welcomed by a court of honor (indigenous young people), 65% of the brides enter the church with their father while the groom waits at the altar, whereas 35% of them walk with the groom and a subset of traditional characters. In all cases, relatives, friends, and neighbors steadily help the bride and groom based on the concept of mutual help.

In the past, families used to celebrate between six and eight days after the religious ceremony whereas nowadays, the celebration does not exceed two days for 92% of the cases mainly due to costs and work constraints. In 11 of the 14 communities considered, the spending involved by the first day of the ceremony is covered by the groom's parents, the second day is paid by the bride's parents and the third day by the godparents (rarely though). The number of guests ranges between 250 and 500 people per day, most of them from the same community. This has a cost between US\$1,000 and US\$3,000. Even if the rites taking place during these festivities vary greatly in form and order, they do contribute to the revival of traditions and they strengthen the kichwa identity since each day offers a space for culture perpetuation and legitimization. The case of Evangelical marriages is different since the celebration only lasts one day and unlike Catholics, Andean rites are usually not carried out as they are considered irrelevant.

Today, only 33% of the guests dance from the church to the groom's house as most of them do it using different modes of transport. In general, the activities during this day have a sacred meaning including the welcome and blessing given in presence of the groom's nuclear family to the wedding party —the bride, the groom, the godparents, the *ñawpadores*, and the bride parents—; the presentation of gifts (cooked and uncooked food) to the bride and groom; the advice given to the couple; the dance of the fandango; the distribution of a basket of food to the members of the wedding party as a symbol of gratitude and strengthening of blood ties and rituals.

On the night of this first day, the coordinators (*ñawpadores*) organize an initiation ritual called "put the bride and groom to bed" (*sirichichina*) or wedding night. For this purpose, the *mama* and the *tayta* waiters prepare, clean and purify a room with typical Andean binary world plants. Only the bride, the groom, the godparents, the couple of *ñawpadores* and a couple of tailors have access to this room while the other guests continue celebrating at the reception site. For thirty minutes, the bride and the groom get advice from the *ñawpadores* and are assisted by the tailor to change clothes and go to bed. Then, the couple is reminded about the basic rules and conditions of the *sirichina*. Failure to comply with the rules may result in the payment of penalties on the next day. During this ritual, spiritual practices and attitudes blend with jokes and picaresque advice.

The following morning, the wedding party joined by a group of musicians and some relatives get to the place where the bride and groom spent their wedding night for the ritual called "raising the bride and the groom" (*hatarichy/hatarichina*). If the *ñawpadores* find out that they did not comply with the established rules —change of setting of objects left the night before on the bedspread—, then the bride, the groom and their godparents have to drink a cup of salty water with chili or a liter of liquor. Otherwise, the newlyweds get blessings from the guests, they eat bread, drink cinnamon water, and also liquor with a *suku* or tender reed —all and thin herbaceous plant—. The couple is then dressed up by the godparents to perform the next rituals.

Then, the ritual following the *hatarichina* is the "birth" (*wacharina*) even though this ritual is less and less practiced. In the past, this practice consisted of throwing *chicha* or liquor in the face of the bride as a joyful representation of the woman's water breaking, the labor and the birth of her first child. It was a symbol of fertility and good omen (Males, 2014 and Benítez et al., 2019). Today, the bride just carries a doll until the ritual of "the face cleaning" (*ñawi mayllay*) begins. Up to thirty years ago, the wedding party used to perform the rite called "pulling and stealing the bride" (*halimay*) while the bride was on her way to either a natural fountain or the bride's house courtyard for face washing. Nowadays, this practice has almost disappeared (Pazmiño, 2013). Actually, families prefer to run around the bride's house with hands tied to wish good luck to the couple.

The face washing ritual (*ñawi mayllay*) is done by eight out of ten couples as it is one of the most common rites. It takes place at either a fountain of natural water or in the bride's house courtyard. This ceremony symbolizes the official introduction to the society of the couple under their new social status. The symbols and elements involved are quite variable depending on the geographical, economic and cultural context. In Otavalo, this ritual is led by a *tayta* mayor —a symbolic community authority— while in Cotacachi it is led by a couple of *ñawpadores*. According to Aguilar (2014), this practice is a form of natural purification of the body and the mind. Besides, the interviewees all agreed (100%) that this ritual enables the couple to exchange vows and promise each other love, fidelity and work commitment.

During this ritual, the family reiterates the roles and obligations that fall to each one in their conjugal life. Many couples take the symbolic bath —the newlyweds, the godparents, the parents and the *ñawpadores*— in a rather spontaneous way as the protocol does not specify any order. The *tayta* mayors or *ñawpadores* usually purify couples using water, different flowers, rosemary, essences and salt. At the end of the bath, all participating couples kiss the cross to show their devotion and veneration to the Christian

God and just like in any other kichwa rituals, it is characterized by infinite joy and mischiefs proper to the kichwa culture.

Little before or after the face cleaning ritual, two out of ten Kichwa couples carry out the "representation of tillage and sowing" rite in a comic way —the man is plowing while the woman is sowing—. It is a way to reaffirm their historical bond with mother earth (*pachamama*). This ritual takes place 200 meters or less from the bride's house in the middle of the laughter and the pleasure of the viewers. Soon after, everybody goes to the party or reception at the bride's parents' house (*warmi wasipi katik raymi*). Here the activities and spending are similar to the ones at the groom's house on the first day of the wedding. Godparents usually give gifts (*karana kuna*) to the bride and groom. The value of those gifts ranges from US\$1,200 and US\$4,000. As usual in moral economy system, the hosts also thank the godparents with a basket of food and fruits which does not exceed 80 dollars, highlighting the value asymmetry.

Nowadays, it is unusual that the godfathers pay for a third day of celebration mostly for financial motives. To avoid future problems, the families are made aware by the godfathers of such decision when they accept their responsibility. If they decide to organize a third day of celebration, the value of the party and gifts will add up to an average of US\$5,000 and the activities will be similar to the previous days' ones. Another practice that is now less common is the collection of money (*hatun tumin*, *wawa tumin* and *aycha*) to buy liquor and food for the additional days of the celebration and even when the bride and groom are not present (Males, 2014). Nowadays, the guests —between 8 and 12 people— may only stay for one extra day of celebration because of the costs involved and their professional commitments.

## 7. Conclusion

The marriage of Christian Kichwa Otavalo people reveals the Andean cosmovision through 20 totally syncretized and partially acculturated rites. Even though only three out of ten couples follow the entire ritual process, it is still part of a customary norm. This Andean tradition has been totally lost within a very time span among Protestant Kichwa mostly due to the fast assimilation of the anthropocentric western cultural cosmovision. This western assimilation does not only impact vital cycle events —marriage, birth and death—, but also the kichwa people's way of life. Therefore, the redefinition of the kichwa identity must be understood with its economic, political, religious, ethnic and social conditions and relations.

Although traditional marriages are becoming increasingly scarce, it is also true that these practices of ancestral roots do contribute to the revitalization and strengthening of the Andean cosmovision principles since they foster solidarity, gender parity, unity in diversity and basically the bonds of reciprocity between the nuclear and extended family. In fact, the majority of Kichwa living in rural areas do not consider their development in an isolated or individualist way. On the contrary, they belong to an entity they represent and feel represented by such as the community organization built on the bonds of kinship, mutual aid, symbolic territoriality, language and culture.

Some of the rites have different names among the communities included in the area of study but still they serve the same purpose. Some other rituals are totally unknown in certain regions and others are outdated and only remembered by kichwas grandparents. 85% of Kichwa children and young people are unaware of the symbolic value of the rites which are part of the traditional marriage because of other

cultures' powerful influence, intense migration, an educational system that occults ancient traditions, and the lack of transmission of these practices within the family and community.

About the practices found in each ritual stage, let's note that there are more similarities than differences between the communities studied. Evidently, the current conjugal ceremonies are set in a complex symbolic-material framework —principles, values, symbols, elements, codes, structures, hierarchies, languages, beliefs, attitudes and feelings—, that the kichwa society has built based on cultural dynamics and location. In any case, marriage ceremonies are perfect settings to transmit, perpetuate and reaffirm the kichwa cosmovision and identity in rural rather than urban areas.

All holders and/or supporters of traditional wisdom related to the kichwa marriage ritual learned by observing and thanks to the Andean reciprocity. Some of these characters —*tayta* mayor, *ñawpador(a)*, *tayta* services, angels or messengers, *mama* waiters, godparents, tailors, cooks, bartenders and musicians— have lost their value and transcendence through time, others have had to assume functions other than those inherited due to the necessity of the community and modern tendencies. However, many of those characters are very versatile as they are able to fulfill at least three symbolic roles —not in the same ceremony though—. The services of these characters are more contracted by families living in rural areas than in urban areas where the Hispano-Criollo and Western patterns quickly overlap the principles of the Andean cosmovision. In short, during the marriage ritual, modernity and the tradition blend pragmatically and outside influence contrasts inevitably with the Kichwa cultural matrix.

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