

THE CLAMOR FOR SCHOOLS  
RURAL EDUCATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF STATE-COMMUNITY CONTACT IN HIGHLAND  
BOLIVIA, 1930-1952

POR

MARTEN BRIENEN

Junior Researcher, School of African, Asian, and Amerindian Studies  
at Leiden University, The Netherlands

---

*Este artículo interpreta el avance de la educación indígena boliviana (1900-1950) a partir de la noción de que fueron las comunidades indígenas que impulsaron la rápida expansión de la educación indígena durante las primeras décadas del siglo XX, y de que hasta las reformas educativas que tuvieron lugar a partir del año 1931 —la fundación de la famosa «escuela-ayllu» de Warisata— se puede considerar la educación indígena como asunto netamente indígena, en el cual el estado central juega un papel muy superficial y limitado. Además, este artículo reinterpreta el papel de dicha escuela-ayllu de Warisata dentro de las reformas educativas de las décadas de los 1930 y 1940, sugiriendo que justamente esta «casa de los explotados» fue el instrumento primordial a través del cual el estado central supo reintegrar las diferentes escuelas indígenas que hasta entonces existían en un estado de casi completa independencia del mismo estado.*

PALABRAS CLAVES: *Bolivia, educación indígena, Warisata, ayllu, SCIDE.*

---

INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

In the 1940s, the Bolivian Ministry of Education undertook the complete reorganization of rural and indigenous education, attempting for the first time to put into place in the entire country a system of indigenous education that was specifically designed to educate the indigenous peoples of Bolivia into a «new

---

<sup>1</sup> This text has been adapted from my paper by the same title, presented at the September 2001 LASA conference in Washington, D.C.

breed of Indians».<sup>2</sup> The reform was intended to spread across the country's rural areas the model that had been developed a decade earlier by teachers Elizardo Pérez and Avelino Siñani at the (at least in Bolivia) famous *escuela-ayllu* of Warisata, which was intended to provide a curriculum especially geared towards the needs of the indigenous peoples of the Bolivian highlands —and was adapted by the government for use in the lowland regions of Santa Cruz, La Paz, Beni, and Pando departments —that would enable these peoples to improve their living conditions and money-earning skills through improvement of agriculture, the introduction of new crops, and the development of market-oriented *artesanías*; in the end, the schools would also instruct children and their parents as to their duties and rights as citizens and would thus accomplish what earlier attempts at rural transformation had failed to do, namely the construction of a coherent Bolivian nationality to include the indigenous peoples.<sup>3</sup> At least, this was the gist of the *escuela ayllu*, as it had been envisioned by Siñani and Pérez as well as, of course, by the government officials of both the Ministry of Education and the *Consejo Nacional de Educación* (CNE) who had adopted and transformed this model into official government policy between 1936 and 1939, preferring to call them *Núcleos Escolares Campesinos* (NEC) in the highlands and the *Núcleos Escolares Selvícolas* (NES) in the tropical lowlands.<sup>4</sup>

In the short space of a few years, the system of indigenous education was expanded from 126 (organized in 18 *Núcleos*) primary indigenous schools (*escuelas seccionales*) serving some 8,491 pupils in 1943, to a massive system of 898 such schools (organized in 42 *Núcleos*) with an enrollment of 40,016 students in 1948.<sup>5</sup> While these numbers suggest a large increase in the amount of indigenous schooling in the Bolivian rural areas, it was more a question of semantics than of an effort to build such schools: the implementation of the nuclear system consisted largely of the conversion of previously existing independently functioning

---

<sup>2</sup> Lit. «UN NUEVO TIPO DE INDIO». Archivo de La Paz, fondo del Ministerio de Educación (ALP/ME); Vocalía de Educación Rural; oficios recibidos, jefes de distritos Escolares (MEVER-OR); 1944: 24 JUN 1942, No. 75/42, Director del Núcleo Escolar Alcatuyo TO Vocal de Educación Indígena: Culturización.

<sup>3</sup> On the aims of Warisata and its philosophy, see: Elizardo PÉREZ, *Warisata: la escuela-ayllu*, La Paz, CERES/HISBOL, 1992, pp. 222-227.

<sup>4</sup> It seems wise to point out at this time that this paper will deal with highland communities and specifically not with lowland communities; the reason is that circumstances and goals of schools in the lowlands were much different from the highlands and also that the erection of an educational system in the lowlands followed the needs and desires of the state and *not* of peoples indigenous to these lowlands. My impression of educational projects in the Amazon Basin is, to put it mildly, an excessively negative one.

<sup>5</sup> Of which about three-quarters attended. Archivo y Biblioteca Nacionales de Bolivia. Presidencia de la República; Palacio de Gobierno (ABNBPPG). Vol. 1743, Ministerio de Bellas Artes y Asuntos indígenas: Memoria 1946 (Junio 1945 – Junio 1946), annex #4, no date; Consejo Nacional de Educación (1943), pp. 16-17, graph 1; ALP/ME vol. 152, Correspondencia 1948. 21 JUN 1948: informe: Labor realizada en la sección estadística 1948.

*escuelas unitarias* (also *e. rurales*) to *seccionales* (also *e. indigenales*) dependent on a *Núcleo*.<sup>6</sup> Thus, all but 126 of the 898 *escuelas seccionales* counted in 1948 had been *escuelas unitarias* prior to the reform (which really got underway with the advent of United States aid workers in 1944).<sup>7</sup> As a matter of fact, very few new schools had been created by the state in the interceding period, as can be shown by the fact that the total enrollment for the combined *escuelas rurales* and *escuelas indigenales* remained almost exactly the same.<sup>8</sup> However, the transition of so many schools from the ranks of *rurales* into those of *indigenales* helps us get an idea of how many of the *rurales* had been set up for the benefit of indigenous communities rather than for *blancos* and *mestizos*, since it was not until this reform that a specific distinction was made between indigenous (*escuelas indigenales*) and non-indigenous (*escuelas cantonales*) schools.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly enough, the Bolivian ministerial authorities, which did keep in regular contact with teachers, were equally unable until these reforms to say how many schools had been created for the benefit of the indigenous population.

The logic behind the reform then, although it was considered a step towards education for all rural Bolivians, was not to build new schools on some grand scale—something of which the state would be financially incapable of doing at any rate<sup>10</sup>—but really to create a formal division between indigenous and non-indigenous education, partly in the hopes of implementing a specific curriculum and program for the «pronta incorporación del indio a la vida civilizada.»<sup>11</sup> Although there had been intense discussions as to how what type of education the Indians should receive, in practice, until the creation of Warisata in 1931, no coherent strategy with regard to indigenous education and how it should be implemented had been developed. Even Warisata's foundation, regarded by many

---

<sup>6</sup> Throughout this paper I have maintained a distinction between *escuelas seccionales* or *indigenales* as opposed to *escuelas unitarias* for reasons of clarity, even though it would be more accurate to replace «unitarias» with «rurales». The distinctions exist on different levels, and the *escuela rural* was not always an *escuela unitaria*, but could in theory also be *completa* or *incompleta*. In reality, though, almost all the later *seccionales* had been *unitarias* and an adherence to proper nomenclature would serve no other purpose than to sacrifice clarity to purism.

<sup>7</sup> On the United States mission and its involvement in Bolivian education, see: Marten BRIENEN, «Histoire secrète d'une présence étrangère dans l'éducation rurale bolivienne, 1944-1956», *Histoire et Sociétés de l'Amérique Latine*, vol. XII/2, Paris, 2000, pp. 29-49.

<sup>8</sup> These numbers would be 76,454 in 1943 and 75,530 in 1948. CNE 1943, 16-17 graph 1; ALP/ME, Vol 599, Varios 1948 Tomo I: Informe Labores Estadísticas 1948, June 1948.

<sup>9</sup> ALP/ME, Vol. 708 Correspondencia y varios 1945: Jefe dpto escolar TO Minister of Education: Petición de la HCN 90/45.

<sup>10</sup> It was estimated that merely to provide adequate buildings for the schools already in existence, 2.5 times the government's total yearly budget would be needed. ALP/ME, vol. 702, Correspondencia 1951, No. 50/51, 10 OCT 1951, Alberto Iturralde TO Carlos Ocampo: plan general de edificaciones escolares.

<sup>11</sup> ALP/ME, Vol. 708 Correspondencia y varios 1945: Jefe dpto escolar TO Minister of Education: Petición de la HCN 90/45.

as the single most important step towards the creation of an «indigenous education» —which, as we shall see later on, is not true— had been a private initiative, although blessed and funded by the state, of two staunch supporters of indigenous education.<sup>12</sup> It is in this context of interest to mention that no rural teachers handbook was drafted until the mid 1940s, and even that was to be the creation of foreign aid workers rather than of the Bolivian education officials themselves.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, until the adoption of the Warisata model by the then Minister of Education general Alfredo Peñaranda in 1936 and 1937, the shortcomings of indigenous education went far beyond the mere absence of a strategy for the education of the indigenous peoples, as activities with regard to the construction of schools by the state had also never really materialized. Very few schools had been constructed by the state throughout the first decades of the twentieth centuries, and many of the high educational ideals held by leading proponents of indigenous education such as Daniel Sánchez Bustamante had failed to bring about anything more than short-lived and generally abortive experiments such as the so-called *escuelas ambulantes*, which between 1906 and 1919 sent teachers around different communities in any one area to move along a predefined itinerary teaching for a short while in each of the localities to which they were assigned.<sup>14</sup> It may be true that some «fixed» schools were also erected by the state in these years, but although we lack exact figures, it is clear that there were not many.<sup>15</sup>

This, then, leaves us with somewhat of a mystery: if the state was not expending great efforts to build these schools, then who was responsible for the creation of the 898 indigenous schools that were part of the nuclear system in 1948? Some of them had indeed been constructed by the state, but for the real answer we must turn to the plethora of requests that were sent to the Ministry of Education —or, somewhat to the Minister's dismay, presented in person by indigenous delegations<sup>16</sup>— throughout the first four decades of the twentieth century by *colonos* and *comunarios* alike, asking permission to start schools in their respective haciendas and communities. As Raúl Calderón Jemio has shown, indigenous efforts to obtain permission for the creation of schools in the indigenous

---

<sup>12</sup> The best, although not most objective, overview of the history of Warisata is its founder's autobiographical account of his experience. PÉREZ [3].

<sup>13</sup> On the history of the rural teacher's handbook, the *guía didáctica para maestros rurales*, see: BRIENEN [7].

<sup>14</sup> On the *escuela ambulante*, see: Françoise MARTINEZ, «La création des «escuelas ambulantes» en Bolivie (1905): instruction, éducation ou déculturation des masses indigènes?», *Cahiers de l'UFR d'études Ibériques et Latino-Américains*, vol. XI, Paris, 1997, pp. 161-171 and Roberto CHOQUE CANQUI, «La problemática de la educación indígena», *Data: revista del instituto de estudios andinos y amazónicos*, vol. V, La Paz, 1994, pp. 9-34.

<sup>15</sup> Elena GETINO CANSECO, *Bolivia: influencia de las transformaciones socio-políticas en la educación*, Barcelona, doctoral thesis, 1989, pp. 77-86.

<sup>16</sup> ALP/ME, Vol. 259 Circulares # 5b, 1936-1942. P. 411, No. 68, 22 AUG 1941, Minister of Education Adolfo Villar TO Archbishop of La Plata: analfabetismo.

communities (*ayllus*) date back at least to the very start of the twentieth century, providing us as he has with examples as early as 1901.<sup>17</sup>

The presence of numerous schools on private haciendas, not generally known having the *colonos*' best interests at heart, is even more revealing. Although Bolivian lawmakers had provided legislation in 1923, and again in 1936 and in 1945,<sup>18</sup> making it mandatory for haciendas with a population of first 60 (1923) and later 30 (1936 and 1945) or more children of school-going age to create schools at the expense of the landlord, it becomes immediately obvious from the reports emanating from the Ministry of Education that in those cases where such schools were being created, this had nothing to do with a willingness on the part of the landlord to comply with the law, and everything to do with the insistence of the *colonos*, who were facing severe repercussions for doing so, would direct pleas for help to the local and national authorities, often through networks of the *caciques apoderados* movement.<sup>19</sup> Still, only relatively few *hacendados* complied with the law at all.<sup>20</sup> More importantly, most of the hundreds of schools that by the 1940s were functioning in the indigenous rural areas—both in indigenous communities and on the haciendas—received little or no financial or material support from the state and were almost entirely funded and supported by the Indians, often at great expense.<sup>21</sup>

During the reforms of the late 1930s and the 1940s, as the state built practically no new schools, annual reports from the Ministry of Education show us that there was still a rapid expansion taking place in rural areas, as indigenous communities and *colonos* requested permission to start new schools—which, unfortunately, were not included in statistical analyses of primary education, leaving us to guess as to how many of such schools existed: in 1947, the Ministry reported that since 1945 some 676 authorizations had been granted for these *escuelas rurales particulares*, and it is unclear whether these even include new schools in *ayllus* or

---

<sup>17</sup> Raúl CALDERÓN JEMIO, «Paradojas de la modernización: escuelas provinciales y escuelas comunales en el Altiplano de La Paz (1899-1911)», *Estudios Bolivianos*, vol. II, La Paz, 1996, pp. 111-123.

<sup>18</sup> Decreto Supremo of JAN 1923, Decreto Ley of 19 AUG 1936, Decreto Supremo of 15 MAY 1945.

<sup>19</sup> ALP/ME Vol. 708 Correspondencia y varios 1945, 16 OCT 1945, Minister of Education TO President of the National Congress: respuesta a su oficio no 249/45. Also see: Vitaliano SORIA CHOQUE, «Los caciques-apoderados y la lucha por la escuela (1900-1952)» Roberto CHOQUE, Vitaliano SORIA, *et al.* (eds.), *Educación Indígena: ¿ciudadanía o colonización?*, La Paz, Aruwiyiri, 1992, pp. 59-75.

<sup>20</sup> The Ministry estimated in 1945 that there were some 1500 haciendas with over 30 children of school-going age, and of these no more than 228 had indeed constructed schools in compliance with the law. ALP/ME Vol. 708 Correspondencia y varios 1945, 16 OCT 1945, Minister of Education TO President of the National Congress: respuesta a su oficio no 249/45.

<sup>21</sup> ALP/ME Vocalía de Educación Rural; oficios recibidos, jefes de distrito Escolares 1944, 1 SEP 44, Vocal de Educación Indígenal TO Minister of Education: informe.

are limited to those on *haciendas* and mining camps.<sup>22</sup> In the year 1945 alone, the Ministry reports that some 193 schools had been constructed by indigenous communities and some 228 on haciendas, in mining camps, and plantations.<sup>23</sup>

It would seem, then, that despite the pro-education rhetoric that had been uttered by various governments and politicians in the preceding decades, throughout the first half of the twentieth century much of the actual creation of schools and the expansion of education into the rural areas was driven by the Indians themselves.<sup>24</sup> This stands in shrill contrast to the idea that education for the indigenous masses — especially when envisioned as a «redemptive» or «expansionist» state endeavor — in Bolivia, as Manuel Contreras suggested, «no surgió por demanda popular [...] sino del Estado.»<sup>25</sup>

It seems almost contradictory to find that the driving force behind the expansion of indigenous education in Bolivia in the early to mid twentieth century should have been the Indians themselves, given that indigenous education in the twentieth — and even nineteenth — century is often regarded as a process whereby an expansionist and racist state sought to «civilize» savage Indians towards more western or modern moral and cultural standards, in the hopes of exterminating «inferior» indigenous culture in favor of a process of cultural and racial homogenization.<sup>26</sup> Educational projects fostered by American states — since this is

---

<sup>22</sup> Since in most of such reports, numbers are provided for both the mining camps and haciendas on the one hand (*fondos rústicos*) and indigenous communities on the other. ALP/ME vol. 152, Correspondencia 1948. 21 JUN 1948: informe: Labor realizada en la sección estadística 1948.

<sup>23</sup> ALP/ME Vol. 708 Correspondencia y varios 1945, 16 OCT 1945, Minister of Education TO President of the National Congress: respuesta a su oficio no 249/45.

<sup>24</sup> The exception is in the tropical lowlands, where NES's were constructed with the specific purpose of going out into the forests and interning «savages.» Conditions in these schools were worse than anywhere else, and one cannot escape the feeling that physical coercion was the primary means of education here, as we also have reports of those who «escape» and are brought back. Not to mention that these schools dealt with serious health-issues and a disproportionate number of the attending «students» died from a variety of diseases and conditions. See for examples: ALP/ME, Vocalía de Educación Rural; Oficios Recibidos de Núcleos Indigenales 1944, 14 APR 1944, Director Núcleo Casárabe TO Jefe Distrito Escolar Beni: INFORME, ALP/ME Vocalía de Educación Rural; Oficios Recibidos de Núcleos Indigenales 1944, 13 FEB 1944, Director Núcleo de Recuperación Selvícola TO Inspector de Educación: INFORME, and ALP/ME, Vocalía de Educación Rural; Oficios Recibidos de Núcleos Indigenales 1944, 27 OKT 1944, Director Núcleo Casárabe TO Vocal de Educación Rural y Campesina: INFORME.

<sup>25</sup> Manuel CONTRERAS, «Reformas y desafíos de la educación», Fernando CAMPERO PRUDENCIO, *Bolivia en el siglo XX: la formación de la Bolivia contemporánea*, La Paz, Harvard Club de Bolivia, 1999, p. 485. Here, he quotes Carlos NEWLAND, «The Estado Docente and its Expansion: Spanish American Elementary Education, 1900-1950», *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 26, 1994.

<sup>26</sup> There are many works on the subject. Suggested reading includes: Françoise MARTINEZ, «Le renouveau du souci éducatif en Bolivie au début du XXème siècle: La polémique Tamayo/Guzmán (1910)», in *América: Cahiers du CRICCAL*, vol. 20, Paris, 1996, pp. 255-264, Raúl CÁLDERON JEMIO, «La «deuda social» de los liberales de principios de siglo: una aproximación a la educación

not limited to Latin America—that specifically targeted indigenous populations are indeed often regarded in the light of a rhetoric of racial difference, cultural homogenization, and the supremacy of white elites, and especially so in the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>27</sup> There does indeed seem to be a contradiction between the prevalent notion of indigenous education as a state ploy to «homogenize» the Bolivian population through an indoctrination of the indigenous element therein on the one hand, and the fact that indigenous communities of the highlands seem to have fully embraced education and appear to have been the main force behind its expansion in the Bolivian rural areas<sup>28</sup>.

In this paper I intend to examine this apparent contradiction between state policies and the indigenous embrace of educational institutions, on the basis of my own research into Bolivian education as a factor in the development of Bolivian nationhood and the relationship between the state and the indigenous communities, including communities of *colonos*. I will examine the rhetoric behind the Bolivian indigenous educational project, the development of Bolivian rural schooling, and their effects on the interaction between the state and the Indians, in an attempt both to debunk some of the more commonly held beliefs with regard to Bolivian education and to attempt to explain the apparent contradiction outlined above as the difference between rhetoric and reality, as well as being born of an *idée fixe* of «alien realities» that necessarily result in an opposition between the state and indigenous cultures. In the end, the question is whether it can be said to be true that the school is a battlefield between an expansionist state and oppressed indigenous communities.

#### THE BIRTH OF INDIGENOUS EDUCATION IN BOLIVIA

The official rhetoric with regard to education during the first half of the twentieth century was fairly straight-forward, even if different currents of thought provoked the necessary internal debates among Bolivian intellectual and political elites. The «Indian Problem,» a convoluted interpretation of Bolivian underdevelopment and social/ethnic problems as rooted in cultural/racial heterogeneity

---

elemental entre 1900-1918», *Revista DATA*, V, 1994, pp. 53-84, Humberto MAMANI CAPCHIRI, «La educación india en la visión de la sociedad criolla: 1920-1943», *Revista DATA*, vol. V, 1994, pp. 79-98, Aurolyn LUYKX, *The Citizen Factory: Schooling and Cultural Production in Bolivia*, Stony Brook, State University of New York Press, 1999 and Marta IRUROZQUI 1999, «La ciudadanía clandestina: democracia y educación indígena en Bolivia, 1826-1952», *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe*, vol. X/1, 1999, pp. 61-87.

<sup>27</sup> Although individual localities and departments had made an effort into indigenous education prior to this. Edgar Armando VALDA MARTÍNEZ, «Sobre la instrucción primaria en Taha, Nor Lipez. 1897-1899», *Revista DATA*, vol. V, 1994, pp. 35-52.

<sup>28</sup> The notion of education as the state's attempt of expansion can be found in many articles, but nowhere so eloquently put as by Vitaliano Soria Choque, see: SORIA [19].

and the role that the indigenous should or could play in the modernization of Bolivian economic and social structures, had long kept the Creole nation-builders in somewhat of a quandary as to the place of the Indians in society.<sup>29</sup> In so far as Creoles judged the republican history of their young nation, throughout the nineteenth century these Indians had stubbornly refused to be incorporated into new economic and social models, apparently clinging to outmoded, colonial, and thereby anti-modern institutions such as the *ayllu* and maintaining social and religious traditions that could be—although not always as convincingly—traced back to colonial and precolonial times as reminders of an in Creole minds troubling past.<sup>30</sup> The battle over the continued existence of the *ayllu*, which had been identified in the nineteenth century as responsible for Bolivian backwardness and should therefore be rooted out, climaxed during the Federal War of 1898-1899, during which indigenous leaders and groups were accused of engaging in «una guerra de exterminio de la raza blanca» that caused widespread fear among the urban classes of *blancos* and *cholos* alike.<sup>31</sup> The fact that it is unlikely that any indigenous conspiracy to overthrow Creole power in favor of an indigenous republican project existed among indigenous leaders (most notably the infamous Pedro Zárate ‘el Temible’ Willka), did nothing to stem these urban fears of the «savage indigenous masses» that threatened to wipe out civilization as Creoles understood it.<sup>32</sup>

Had discussions on the future of Bolivia during a large portion of the nineteenth century been centered on the notion that the Indians as a social category would eventually disappear altogether one way or another, either through the abolition of the indigenous social structures or through evolution itself, the Federal War changed the tone and direction that such discussions were taking.<sup>33</sup> The

---

<sup>29</sup> Marie-Danielle DEMÉLAS, *L'invention Politique: Bolivie, Équateur, Pérou au XIX siècle*, Paris, Éditions Recherches sur les Civilisations, 1996, pp. 357-377, Marta IRUROZQUI, «A bala, piedra y palo». *La construcción de la ciudadanía política en Bolivia, 1826-1952*, Sevilla, Diputación de Sevilla, 2000, pp. 56-80.

<sup>30</sup> Troubling in the sense of being the descendants of the same foreigners that were ousted in 1824.

<sup>31</sup> Quote from general José Manuel Pando, as quoted by René ZAVALETA MERCADO, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia*, México, Siglo XXI Editores, 1986, p. 154.

<sup>32</sup> It did not take much, for example, to put an end to the «indigenous rebellion» that so terrified urbanites. Marie-Danielle Demélas reports it took no more than two weeks and one battalion («Illimani») to put an end to the «insurrection.» DEMÉLAS [29], p. 395. Also, Marta Irurozqui suggests that this «indigenous plot» is more likely to be the «product of Creole fear [...] than Indian aspirations.» Marta IRUROZQUI, «The Sound of the Patutos: Politicisation and Indigenous Rebellions in Bolivia, 1826-1921», *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. XXXII/1, 2000, p. 100.

<sup>33</sup> Since the Indian was supposedly of a weaker race, it was argued that they would disappear off the face of the earth eventually. Martínez quotes the 1900 census, which stated that: «[...] en breve tiempo [...] tendremos a la raza indígena, si no borrado por completo del escenario de la vida, al menos reducida a una mínima expresión.» Françoise MARTINEZ, «La peur blanche: un

indigenous uprisings (real and imagined) shook the Creole conscience into examining Bolivian society and redefining the nature of social realities; perhaps the most important realization was that the Indians would not, in fact, «go away» and that Creoles therefore had to come to terms with the fact that the indigenous component of Bolivian society was permanent, and that any future Bolivia—prosperous and modern or otherwise—would in some form or another have to include this indigenous element as a social and economic reality.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, in an effort to gain insight into the origins of the «indigenous rebellion» of the Federal War as well as some of the more broadly measured out atrocities that had been attributed to the Indians—notably the Mohoza massacre, the source of «orgías de un canibalismo sin límites»<sup>35</sup>—Creole intellectuals engaged in an introspective effort, attempting to make sense of their society and the manner in which social realities and relationships had developed. Taking shape as an early twentieth century Bolivian *indigenista* discourse, much of the Bolivian predicament of ethnic strife and social discord began to be seen increasingly in the light of historical developments in which the Indians had emerged as perpetual victims of abuse, injustice, and exploitation by rural elites.<sup>36</sup> The new logic, then, dictated that the Indians adhered to their outmoded and anti-modern institutions because they were captives in a prison of ignorance and backwardness perpetuated by *hacendados*, *corregidores*, and *curas*.<sup>37</sup> Although the notion of the Indian as a racially inferior being was certainly no less rampant at the start of the twentieth century than it had been prior to the Federal War, the idea did begin to take hold of enlightened elites that problems of a social nature impacted on indigenous society more than genetic predisposition. Above all, this meant that the «Indian Problem» could be resolved and that the Indians were salvageable from their ignorance and savagery; the work for the betterment of indigenous society thus came to be regarded as a redemptive effort for the liberation of the Indian, his emancipation, no less, from the shackles of colonial oppression wrought upon them by equally anti-modern rural elites.<sup>38</sup>

---

moteur de la politique éducative libérale en Bolivie (1899-1920)», *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Études Andines*, vol. XXVII/2, Paris, 1998, p. 272.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 272-275. Franz Tamayo is perhaps the most significant exponent of this revision of Bolivian self-identity, claiming as he did that the Indians should stand at the very heart of Bolivian identity. See: Josefa SALMÓN, *El espejo indígena: el discurso indigenista en Bolivia 1900-1956*, La Paz, Plural Editores, 1997.

<sup>35</sup> SAAVEDRA, Bautista, *El ayllu*, La Paz, Editorial Juventud, 1903, p. 145.

<sup>36</sup> See Michiel BAUD, *In de schaduw van de bosrand: over de dekolonisatie van de Latijnsamerikaanse geschiedenis*, Leiden, CNWS Publications, 1997.

<sup>37</sup> Marta IRUROZQUI, *La armonía de las desigualdades: elites y conflictos de poder en Bolivia 1880-1920*, Madrid, CSIC, 1992, pp. 152-153. Meaning also that actions against the power of local authorities served for the «liberation» of the subjugated indigenous classes. See, MARTINEZ [33], p. 281 on Ismael Montes.

<sup>38</sup> See: BAUD [36], Irurozqui [37], pp. 147-154.

In the early twentieth century, the almost panacaeic solution to Bolivian underdevelopment, heterogeneity, and social strife was sought in the form of education, which was thought to offer great promise indeed. In itself, the notion of reorganizing the catastrophic state of «regular» education in the country seemed an important goal for the incumbent Liberals that took the reins of power after the Federal War, as it spoke of their commitment to the ideals of a modern and prosperous Bolivia.<sup>39</sup> According to the leading intellectuals and politicians—including President José Manuel Pando himself—the indigenous inherited traits of «savagery» and «barbarism» could be tempered through education.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the immediate threat—of grave concern to urbanites in the immediate post-war—of the «Indian Masses» could be averted, as Indians would now be taught proper moral and cultural values, their aggression restrained, and be taught the national language, Spanish.<sup>41</sup> These things combined would prepare the Indian for his final inclusion into the national project as a responsible and productive citizen, allowing the nation-state to flourish in some distant future.

The Liberals' enthusiasm for indigenous education was part of a much wider general interest in education, given the state of disarray in which Bolivian education found itself; there was no professional teacher training program of any sort; there were relatively few schools, and little supplies of any kind.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the first years of Liberal power were marked by an attempt to organize and nationalize Bolivian education, giving it a centralized direction overseen by the state and elaborating a national curriculum as well as text-books for use around the country—none of these had existed prior to 1900.<sup>43</sup> Not until 1909 was a teacher-training program established (the *Escuela Normal de Sucre*).<sup>44</sup>

Along with these innovations came the first steps towards indigenous education, then recognized as being of great substance for the creation of the nation-state. The first step of significance was the establishment in 1907 of a system of *escuelas ambulantes*, for lack of any *escuelas fijas* in the rural areas that would be easily accessible to the Indians with a reasonable degree of ease: the primary schools that did exist in rural areas were generally concentrated in and around the towns and villages, catering mainly to *vecino* populations, and often at great distances from the indigenous communities and haciendas.<sup>45</sup> In the *escuela ambulante* scheme, which had been imported from the United States where it had «[...]

---

<sup>39</sup> MARTINEZ [26], p. 255.

<sup>40</sup> CALDERÓN [26], pp. 54-55 and MARTINEZ [33], p. 281.

<sup>41</sup> CALDERÓN [26], pp. 58-67, MARTINEZ [33], pp. 166-169, and SORIA, [19], pp. 50-52.

<sup>42</sup> According to the 1900 census, out of a population of 1,766,451 no more than 11,650 attended schools. Getina, *Influencia de las transformaciones*, p. 47, 52-53.

<sup>43</sup> GETINA [15], pp. 60-69.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 46

<sup>45</sup> On the *escuelas ambulantes*, see: MARTINEZ [33], GETINA [15], p. 58, and CHOQUE [14], pp. 14-15.

civilizado la raza indígena más belicosa y refractaria de los EE. UU. de Norte América [...],»<sup>46</sup> rural teachers would go from community to community along a predetermined trajectory and thus be able reach more Indians and instruct them in the most elementary subjects: reading, writing, Christian values, and morality.<sup>47</sup>

The *escuelas ambulantes* ran into problems so great, that no more than three years after the start of the project its spiritual father, Minister Juan Misael Saracho, declared it a complete failure.<sup>48</sup> In the first place, the system was inconvenient to teachers as they were obliged to bring their materials—if they indeed had any—with them, on foot, and subject themselves to the harshness of rural life; not surprisingly, few were interested even for the pecuniary rewards offered by the state, and the teacher shortage that would dominate any further experiences in Bolivian education had been born.<sup>49</sup> In the second place, and perhaps the most important of both, the project had been limited geographically to the areas immediately surrounding La Paz, as it turned out those were the only areas in the country where the state was able to impose its will on landlords and local authorities;<sup>50</sup> both of the latter responded to the advent of indigenous schooling with a mixture of disdain, protest and flat-out violence.<sup>51</sup> These problems were to become recurring themes in the further development of Bolivian indigenous education.

The experiment may have been a failure, but it was not without some important consequences. It convinced the state of the necessity of «fixed schools» in the place of the failed *escuelas ambulantes*, since many of the problems had been related to the lack of buildings and the inconvenience of constant travel. More importantly, however, the project had also included stipulations that allowed any community that wished it, to build a school of its own under the sole condition that it could attract a teacher; these schools would receive all necessary materials from the state in order to have the school function properly.<sup>52</sup> This element in early Bolivian educational legislation was to shape the development of indigenous education in the decades to come, especially as the transition from a policy of ambulant teachers was traded in for the establishment of «fixed» indigenous schools.<sup>53</sup>

Unfortunately, these schools, too, had to be manned, and in the absence of any preparatory course for rural teachers plans were made for a rural teacher-training program (*escuela normal rural*), the first of which opened its doors in

---

<sup>46</sup> GETINA [15], p. 58. Abbreviations are hers.

<sup>47</sup> MARTINEZ [14], pp. 166-169.

<sup>48</sup> MARTINEZ [33], p. 280.

<sup>49</sup> MARTINEZ [33], p. 280, MARTINEZ [14], pp. 170-171, and SORIA, [19], pp. 50-52.

<sup>50</sup> MAMANI CAPCHIRI [26], p. 80.

<sup>51</sup> SORIA, [19], pp. 50-52.

<sup>52</sup> A promise that proved impossible to keep as hundreds of schools were constructed by communities throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

<sup>53</sup> MARTINEZ [33], p. 280.

1910.<sup>54</sup> Several more followed in 1915, 1917, and 1919. The first school never produced a single teacher and the others very, very few indeed.<sup>55</sup> To make matters worse, those few who did obtain their certificates at the Rural Normal Schools generally made their way to the urban centers, which also suffered from lack of trained professionals—lest we forget, the first «regular» Normal School had not been established until 1909—and where both pay and working conditions were considerably more attractive than in the small make-shift rural schools.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, in 1919, President Bautista Saavedra—generally recognized as an important proponent of indigenous education of the era—closed the schools for their apparent inability to even put a dent in the troubling teacher shortage in the rural schools.<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile, the total number of primary schools in the republic had grown from 187 in 1910 to 430 by 1916, indicating that the failure to produce rural teachers severely impacted on the quality of the expanding system.<sup>58</sup> It would, however, not be until the 1930s that a real effort was made to establish new Rural Normal Schools in the republic.

Thus, as the state in the early twentieth century almost immediately recognized education as an important tool in the creation of its nation-state, the first decades of the century were marked by a period of experimentation with indigenous education. It was during this period of experimentation that the state quickly ran into some of the more pressing problems it would be facing, as it attempted to create a system of indigenous and rural education. In the first place, there was a lack of direction; even though in 1919 the state had devised an *estatuto para la educación de la raza indígena*, through which indigenous education was to be shaped and molded and which proposed a mixture of theoretical and applied subjects—such as math, Spanish, agriculture, carpentry, etc.—there were virtually no means of implementing this ambitious statute.<sup>59</sup> Especially the utter failure of the Rural Normal Schools to produce rural teachers interested in actually teaching in indigenous communities and their subsequent abandonment impacted the state's ability to carry through on any ideas it had about how indigenous education should function and what the schools should be teaching.

---

<sup>54</sup> Eve-Marie FELL, «Warisata y la irradiación del núcleo escolar campesino en los Andes (1930-1960)», Pilar GONZALBO AIZPURU, *Educación rural e indígena en Iberoamérica*, México, El Colegio de México, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1996, p. 210.

<sup>55</sup> FELL [54], p. 210, Roberto CHOQUE, 'La educación indígena boliviana. El proceso educativo indígena-rural', *Estudios Bolivianos* vol. II, La Paz, 1996, pp. 148-151, Faustino SUÁREZ ARNEZ, *Historia de la educación en Bolivia*, La Paz, Editorial Trabajo, 1963, pp. 242-245.

<sup>56</sup> CHOQUE [55], pp. 148-151, SUAREZ [55], pp. 242-245

<sup>57</sup> CHOQUE [14], pp. 15-21.

<sup>58</sup> SUÁREZ [55], p. 250.

<sup>59</sup> Guillermo LORA, *El sindicalismo del magisterio, 1825-1932*, La Paz, Editorial Las Masas, 1979, pp. 194-196. According to Getina Canseco, the *Estatuto* dates from 1918, rather than 1919. GETINA [15], p. 78.

Furthermore, the state was unable to build and maintain schools; in the first place, budgetary restrictions would not allow anything on a scale as grand as was being envisioned by the enlightened few (such as Juan Misael Saracho, Daniel Sánchez Bustamante, or even Franz Tamayo); projects to introduce schools into the communities without stretching the budget—the *escuelas ambulantes*—never did catch on; and to make matters worse, the state saw its plans obstructed by local authorities who saw the schools as little more than bulwarks of indigenous agitation and subversion.<sup>60</sup> The best answer the state could come up with, was what amounted to a capitulation to its own inadequacy, transferring its responsibilities to others. The state had already allowed indigenous communities to build schools for themselves since 1907. In 1923, unable to effectuate the system of rural education as it had been envisioned, President Saavedra decreed that all indigenous communities and haciendas with a population of 60 or more children of school-going age were obliged under the law to open a school at their own expense. The state would then ideally see to the distribution of goods needed for these schools, including books, pencils, paper, blackboards, and so on and so forth.<sup>61</sup> For all of the difficulties encountered by the state in the first decades of the creation of an indigenous educational system, it would be its willingness to let communities take over that would mold the system as it proceeded to develop in the following decades.

#### THE EXPANSION OF INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

Since the state's solution to its inability to create and maintain schools resided in the relegation of this responsibility to others, allowing any community with a large enough population of school-going age to request authorization for the establishment of a school as early as 1907 and then imposing it as a requirement on the larger haciendas and indigenous communities in 1923, the upshot of the state's desire to create a system of indigenous education would turn out to be that indigenous communities—including those on haciendas—became almost wholly responsible for development and implementation of indigenous education. It is unfortunate that the sources we depend on for our analyses—in this case, the archives of the Ministry of Education and of the Prefectures—do not allow us to develop more than a vague idea of the makeup or even number of these indigenous schools.<sup>62</sup> We do know for certain, however, that such schools were being created already early on in the twentieth century, and that the rate at

---

<sup>60</sup> SORIA, [19], pp. 59-75.

<sup>61</sup> The latter being well-intended but quite beyond the state's abilities. MAMANI CAPCHIRI [26], p. 84.

<sup>62</sup> Mainly due to a lack of statistical analysis by researchers as well as to the untrustworthy nature of the state's statistical analyses, when indeed it bothered to make them at all.

which new ones were being founded was steadily on the increase, signifying that indigenous communities from around the country and especially in the highland regions of the department of La Paz seem to have fully embraced the notion of education for their children.<sup>63</sup>

The lack of successful teacher-training programs meant that the most significant problem for those who wanted to start a school for their children was that they had to improvise a teacher. Professional and experienced teachers—two different categories under the Bolivian system—nearly always elected to stay in the better-paid positions in the urban centers, and very few indeed would ever venture out into the countryside; indeed, not even those that had emerged from the appallingly unsuccessful *escuelas normales rurales* chose this harsh life of abject poverty, constant harassment by local officials and landlords, and self-sacrifice.<sup>64</sup> The damning lack of such professionally trained individuals in the nation's urban school-system served as a guarantee for the *normalistas* that they would be welcomed quite enthusiastically into the urban system, even if their own training had qualified them specifically as rural teachers.

The answer to this problem, interestingly enough, originated in the military barracks, as the armed forces had devised its own literacy and educational projects in the barracks for the indigenous conscripts.<sup>65</sup> It was often the young men who returned home from the barracks literate or semi-literate who would take on the position of teacher in their communities and haciendas of origin.<sup>66</sup> While this resolved the most immediate problem that would be caused by the absolute absence of rural teachers,<sup>67</sup> it also resulted in a rapidly expanding rate of schools manned by teachers who had received no professional training and of whom by 1943 still some seventy percent had never even finished primary school.<sup>68</sup> Given

---

<sup>63</sup> CHOQUE [55]. Interestingly enough, it has been suggested that indigenous communities resisted the establishment of schools in their communities for fear of exploitation by Creole teachers. Given the fact that few, if any at all, such Creoles could be enticed to venture out into the communities and that literally hundreds of schools were founded by communities between 1900 and 1940, this seems a highly questionable conclusion. E.g. Karen CLAURE, *Las escuelas indígenas: otra forma de resistencia comunaria*, La Paz, HISBOL, 1989, p. 96.

<sup>64</sup> That the life of a rural teacher was not desirable was known to the Ministry of Education, as it responded to many requests for teachers stating anything to the effect that none could be sent «que por la miserable suma de 300 Bs acepte cargo fuera de la capital.» ALP/ME, *Oficios Recibidos 1939*. Number O/39, 30 MAR 1939: Jefe del Departamento de Educación Rural TO Corregidor de Huancare: Cooperación.

<sup>65</sup> See: Juan R. QUINTANA TABORGA, *Soldados y ciudadanos: un estudio crítico sobre el servicio militar obligatorio en Bolivia*, La Paz, PIEB, 1998, pp.27-73.

<sup>66</sup> MAMANI CAPCHIRI [26], pp. 85-89.

<sup>67</sup> Since authorization for the founding of a school depended on the presence of someone qualified to teach. Qualifications, however, were not strictly enforced.

<sup>68</sup> National Archives and Records Administration, Washington D.C., Recordgroup 229: Office of Inter-American Affairs, MLR 87: Records of the Department of Information Education Division

the difference in pay between the cities and the rural areas —not to mention other aspects of urban life versus rural life— in 1944 the *Vocal de Educación Rural e Indígena* (The CNE official responsible for indigenous education) reported that of the 1,182 *escuelas unitarias* in the rural areas—including both indigenous and non-indigenous schools— not even one was manned by a qualified teacher;<sup>69</sup> in one particular case, the *mayordomo*'s thirteen year old daughter, held the position of teacher at the local school in Ayata (Muñecas Province).<sup>70</sup> In 1947, of 7,283 teachers no more than 1,618 (22.2%) had been professionally trained either at a Rural Normal School or a Normal School.<sup>71</sup> By 1951, of a total of 922 qualified rural teachers, no more than 388 (42.1%) were active in rural and indigenous schools; the rest had opted for a life of relative leisure in the cities.<sup>72</sup> All of the others were either completely unqualified—the *interinos*— or had received qualification after ten years of experience in the field as *interinos*: the *titulares*.

Of course, the lack of professional staff was but one of the problems facing the indigenous schools. The joint United States-Bolivian Labour [sic] Commission stated in 1943

that only seven of all the Government primary schools were originally constructed for educational purposes; that 74% of pupils are without chairs or desks; [and] that only two of all the public educational institutions have adequate libraries.<sup>73</sup>

Even though the state had promised it would furnish the indigenous schools with the necessary materials and equipment, it was financially incapable of making good on its promise. In part, the state's difficulties in providing materials were blamed on the obstruction by local authorities; in many cases, lower authorities such as the *corregidores* refused their cooperation and hampered efforts to have schools established, but at the higher levels as well we find that sub-prefects (provincial governors) and even full-fledged prefects hampered the dis-

---

- Project Files (NARA/229/87); Box 1149 (BX1149). Map: Grants for Bolivian Teachers: 8 APR 1943, Kenneth Holland to Harold Davis: Bolivian Commission Report.

<sup>69</sup> The unitary schools were semi-independently functioning schools with one teacher. «1,182 escuelas unitarias, cada uno a cargo de un maestro interino.» ALP/ME, Vocalía de Educación Rural, Oficios recibidos de jefes de distritos escolares 1944. 01 SEP 1944, Vocal de Educación Rural e Indígena TO Minister of Education: INFORME.

<sup>70</sup> Archivo de La Paz, Prefectura de La Paz (ALP/PA), box 212: Correspondencia Ministerios, 1939 vol. I. Number 62, 23 MAY 1939, Prefecto de La Paz TO Jefe del departamento de educación rural del Consejo Nacional de Educación: Cantón Ayata.

<sup>71</sup> ALP/ME vol. 152, Correspondencia 1948. 21 JUN 1948: informe: Labor realizada en la sección estadística 1948.

<sup>72</sup> ANB-736; PresRep; PalGob; Corr Minedu 51-II, Informe 17 July 1951; Jefe estadísticas a MinEDu.

<sup>73</sup> As quoted by Kenneth Holland in: NARA/229/87, BX1149. Map: Grants for Bolivian Teachers: 8 APR 1943, Kenneth Holland to Harold Davis: Bolivian Commission Report.

tribution of materials, either in an effort to block schools' abilities to function or for mere monetary gain —the illegal and corrupt sale of such materials.<sup>74</sup> Even though we admittedly have little direct information of this type for the years before 1930, it seems unlikely that the situation would have been much better than in the years after.

Such problems notwithstanding, indigenous enthusiasm was unwavering and by 1919 there was a steady flow of new schools being added to the indigenous educational system, insofar as indigenous education in this period was deserving of the substantive «system.»<sup>75</sup> So much so, that in order to counter the resistance of obstinate local authorities and *hacendados*, and to streamline the process of requesting authorization for new schools, indigenous leaders —*caciques apoderados*— united themselves in an effort to create a society that would oversee the construction of these new schools and deal directly with the state as to their creation and maintenance, channeling the many different complaints, problems, and bids for help through a single society: in 1930 the *Centro Educativo de Aborígenes «Bartolomé de las Casas»* was formally incorporated.<sup>76</sup> The *Centro Educativo* has been accredited with the creation of many schools in La Paz department.<sup>77</sup> Another such society was created in 1929 under the leadership of Eduardo Nina Qhispi, entitled the *Sociedad República de Collasuyu*.<sup>78</sup> The premises of this society were basically the same as those of the *Centro Educativo*, establishing a direct line of communication with the state in order to avoid some of the troublesome aspects of dealing with local authorities in order to build more schools.

#### WARISATA AND THE RETURN TO GOVERNMENT CONTROL

The real turning point of indigenous education, however, is generally recognized as being the 1931 creation of Warisata; the *escuela-ayllu* envisioned and developed by rural teachers Avelino Siñani and Elizardo Pérez.<sup>79</sup> At Warisata,

---

<sup>74</sup> ALP/ME, Oficios Recibidos 1939. Number O/168, 17 APR 1939: Jefe del Departamento de Educación Rural TO Prefect of La Paz: Subprefecto de Ayata.

<sup>75</sup> Soria, 'Los caciques-apoderados', p. 64.

<sup>76</sup> See: SORIA, [19], p. 63-68 and Ramón CONDE MAMANI, 'Lucha por la educación indígena 1900-1945', *Revista DATA*, vol. V, 1994, pp. 85-95.

<sup>77</sup> Reportedly, within a year of its creation some 96 indigenous schools were created with the aid of the *Centro Educativo*. SORIA, [19], p. 66.

<sup>78</sup> Although other scholars have opted for alternate spellings (such as «Qullasuyu»), I have deliberately chosen to stick by the name as given to it by its founder in 1929. See: SORIA, [19], pp. 69-75.

<sup>79</sup> Pérez is more generally accredited with Warisata's creation, even though Siñani had already been running literacy campaigns and operating small schools at Warisata for many years. See: TOMASA SIÑANI DE WILLKA, 'Breve biografía del fundador de la «escuela-ayllu»: un testimonio escrito sobre Avelino Siñani', CHOQUE and SORIA [19], pp. 125-134.

with the blessing of the Ministry of Education,<sup>80</sup> a new experiment was started which differed from previous state-led attempts at constructing a form of indigenous education primarily in that it was *not* a state-led affair. Pérez explains his initial motivation for the school as being rooted in the notion that indigenous education would never succeed unless the school was integrated into the indigenous community itself. The curriculum should reflect the needs and wants of the indigenous community, and indeed the adult members of the community should have a say in how the school should be run.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, the Warisata school has been taken as somewhat of a revolutionary development in Bolivian rural education. Most often, the school and its progress have been regarded as formative for the development of a «real indigenous education,» rooted in the elaboration of a curriculum suited to the needs of the Indians, rather than limiting itself to a program that was described either as «simplemente alfabetizadora» or as «formal and academic;»<sup>82</sup> unsuitable for the Indians in either case.<sup>83</sup> At the same time, Warisata marked the first renewed concerted effort at resolving the teacher-shortage problem by doubling as a Rural Normal School, with the blessing of the Ministry of Education.

The revolutionary nature of Warisata is generally overstated, especially in terms of its goals and aims for the creation of an indigenous curriculum. Indeed, the goals formulated as the essence of true «indigenous education» as it was «invented» at Warisata might as well have been copied directly from the 1919 *Es-tatuto*: not only were both based on the notion that there should be a separation between theoretical knowledge and applied arts and crafts, but the individual subjects to be taught at the schools were much the same.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, Warisata was a turning point in the development of Bolivian rural/indigenous education

---

<sup>80</sup> According to Pérez himself. PÉREZ [3], pp. 69-71.

<sup>81</sup> The *Consejo de Amautas*. CLAURE [63], pp. 99-102.

<sup>82</sup> Raymond H. NELSON, *Education in Bolivia*, vol. I of *The Bulletin of the U.S. Office of Education*, Washington, United States Government Printing Office, 1949, p. 22; This characterization was also given to education in the *escuelas unitarias* by Ernest Maes, the director of operations of the *Servicio Cooperativo Interamericano de Educación* (SCIDE) in 1948: NARA/RG229/88: Records of the Department of Information, Education Division; General Records relating to Field Operations; BX1175: Bolivia, no date, Ernest Maes: «an experiment in internationalism», p. 6. Also: ALP/ME, Vol. 708 Correspondencia y varios 1945: Jefe dpto escolar TO Minister of Education: Petición de la HCN 90/45.

<sup>83</sup> Maes reported that the problem lay in the fact that «they [the Belgian mission led by Georges Rouma of 1909] imported the Belgian system, lock, stock, and barrel, including its emphasis on the humanities and the encyclopedic curriculum. [...] [I]t was obviously not the system needed by the Bolivia of 1909, or of 1947, for that matter.» NARA/RG229/87, BX1175, Bolivia, no date, Ernest MAES: «an experiment in internationalism», p. 6.

<sup>84</sup> For an overview, see: CHOQUE [14], p. 24. Indeed, Maes's disparaging remarks as to the introduction «lock, stock, and barrel» of a Belgian system of education in the Bolivian countryside are unjustified. NARA/RG229/87, BX1175, Bolivia, no date, Ernest MAES: «an experiment in internationalism», p. 6.

for a number of reasons, all of them other than the introduction of a «new» curriculum for the benefit of the indigenous community. First and foremost, its structure was entirely different from that of the *escuelas unitarias*, which lacked supervision and control.<sup>85</sup>

What made the *escuela ayllu* so very different from the regular *escuelas unitarias* that had been spreading around the countryside—reaching a total of 481 *escuelas rurales fiscales* in 1935, according to official figures<sup>86</sup>—was the manner in which it combined a system of direct supervision with the ability to run many small schools from one central location. Thus, a large school was created in a populous indigenous area or community—like Warisata—functioning as an administrative and organizational center, as well as serving as the central location for classes and courses of theoretical subjects: the *escuela central* or *escuela matriz*. Around it, many smaller schools like the former *escuelas unitarias* would function in smaller communities and outlying areas and these would serve primarily for the development and elaboration of courses and skills in practical, applied fields such as agriculture: the *escuelas seccionales*. All of the *seccionales* were supervised from the *central* and followed directions and a curriculum devised at the *central* with the cooperation of the indigenous community (through the *consejo de amautas*). Thus, a single school of this type could entail as many as 30 *seccionales* along with one *central*.<sup>87</sup> The principle advantage of the scheme was that in this manner, the very few professionally trained teachers could go a long way to providing services for a great many schools whereas the literally thousands of *interinos* could be kept under close watch and guided by the *normalistas* at the *central*.

Given the new type of organizational structure that the Warisata model provided, it is little wonder that the government—especially after the Chaco War ended in 1935—turned its attention to the experiment. Given that hundreds of *escuelas unitarias* were functioning around the country at that time—and we may never know the exact numbers—and that every one of these was manned by an *interino*, the educational system was highly deficient and lacked organizational structure. Officially, the teachers were under the supervision of inspectors

---

<sup>85</sup> NARA/RG229/88 BX1175, 22 NOV 1946, Colonel Arthur Harris: Report on Educational Program in Bolivia», p. E 3.

<sup>86</sup> GETINA [15], pp. 132-134. It should be noted that these figures are probably low and do not, in all likelihood, include any schools other than the ones officially funded by the state (*escuelas fiscales*) as opposed to the *escuelas municipales*, funded by local authorities. The *municipales* were reverted to the state's authority in 1936. ALP/PA 212, number 47, 4 MAY 1939, Germán Busch: Decreto Supremo 4 MAY 1939: Sueldos. Unfortunately, this transfer of authority took years to complete and had not been finished yet until 1940.

<sup>87</sup> SERVICIO COOPERATIVO INTERAMERICANO DE EDUCACIÓN 1955, *Scide's Projects: To Better Education for a Better Life*, La Paz, SCIDE, 1955.

of each of the school districts, but we know that this supervision was lacking in reality and that inspectors made visits randomly and most infrequently. Furthermore, the inspectors often reported back on the deplorable conditions they encountered in the *escuelas rurales*—such as finding teachers who did not speak Spanish, or schools that functioned in the open air— but little or no action was taken to follow up; teachers might have been frightfully incompetent, but there was simply no way to replace them nor to alleviate some of the other more pressing problems, such as the lack of teaching materials, chairs, desks, writing implements, paper or basically anything else commonly associated with a «school.» As one inspector put it: «[s]e llaman escuelas, a oscuros tugurios, [...] carentes de mobiliario y material didácticos y a cargo de maestros impagos y de cultura deficiente [...]»<sup>88</sup> Another stated: «no tienen [los alumnos] un lápiz, una hoja de papel, un libro, por último se dice que aprendan a escribir. En qué? Y dónde? Desde luego como son casas de indios ni las paredes son lisas para que el niño pueda apoyar el papel y escribir en ellas».<sup>89</sup>

In effect, in the hundreds of rural schools that had been constructed—for lack of a better word<sup>90</sup>— since the early 1900s, teachers were mainly left to their own devices, to teach without the most basic materials or instructions. These schools often had been constructed by the local Indians themselves, eager to further the interests of their community and their children and in recognition of the importance of schooling for their future, and continued to exist without help or assistance from the state in any form.<sup>91</sup> Basically, then, indigenous education had become an almost exclusively indigenous enterprise with the state's willingness to relegate the construction of new schools to the haciendas' *colonos* and the independent *comunarios* for lack of any viable alternatives. More importantly, the shortage of *normalistas* and the adverse working-conditions had made that most of the *escuelas unitarias* were manned by those few members of communities who could at least read and write—and not even always that<sup>92</sup>; a large proportion of those who could read and write were those who had enjoyed some

<sup>88</sup> Archivo Central del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Culto (MINRE), Min-1-126 Ministerio de Educación, oficios recibidos 1940: Number Reservado 281/40-6238/515, 17 MAY 1940, Ministro de Educación TO Ministro de RREE: INFORME RESERVADO.

<sup>89</sup> ALP/ME Vocalía de Educación Indígena y Rural; Procesos 1941. 26 SEP 1940, Director Visitador Provincial de la provincia Cornelio Saavedra del departamento de Potosí: INFORME GENERAL, page 20.

<sup>90</sup> Since some did indeed function in the open air: ALP/ME Vocalía de Educación Rural; oficios recibidos, jefes de distritos escolares 1944, number 415/44, 27 NOV 1944, Inspector departamental de Cochabamba TO Vocal de Educación Rural: PROYECTO DE ORGANIZACIÓN.

<sup>91</sup> E.g. ALP/ME, Vocalía de Educación Rural, Oficios recibidos de jefes de distritos escolares 1944. 01 SEP 1944, Vocal de Educación Rural e Indígena TO Minister of Education: INFORME.

<sup>92</sup> Many *visitadores* and *inspectores* reported that teachers were often unqualified to the point of being nearly illiterate themselves.

basic education in the barracks as a part of their military service.<sup>93</sup> This fact is significant not only because it shows the dire straits in which education found itself, but also because it illustrates to what extent educational efforts were maintained within the community, as these *interinos* came from the haciendas and communities on which their schools functioned. Even in the case of the *normalistas rurales*, we find complaints that they also often returned to their native communities to exercise their functions there.<sup>94</sup>

Thus, even if Warisata could be said to have been the birthground of a revolutionary new indigenous curriculum—which it cannot—given the circumstances and organization or lack thereof of rural education, there was no means for the state or any supervising body to implement it; schools and teachers were too isolated, supervision was lacking, teacher training virtually absent for many years, and no written materials really existed to be used as handbooks or guides. It may be true that many *circulares* and *memorias* were routinely sent out among the teachers to inform them of their duties and of the latest regulations, but the organization as it stood made it impossible to control the application of regulations along with any given curriculum. For example, *visitadores* and *inspectores* of these schools often reported back that the children were not being taught to speak Spanish with any degree of efficiency; in part, this was blamed on lacking materials, but the fact that many teachers were indigenous to the communities in which they worked and thus often shared a common indigenous language made it so that classes in these communities were often taught in the native language rather than in Spanish. This, lest we forget, was many years before the subject of education in the native language became a bone of contention between educational experts and ideologists. As such, the fact that teachers were often native to the communities in which they worked was considered a significant problem:

La ignorancia, se ha de suprimir desde la escuela, con maestros que vengan de otros centros o pueblos; por que con los actuales se siguen las costumbres de los viceabuelos [*sic*], abuelos, padres y otros miembros familiares. Los maestros actuales continúan enseñando las costumbres autóctonas. No teóricamente, sino prácticamente con los mismos procederes.<sup>95</sup>

The problem, as we may surmise, was that these teachers stood almost separated from control that the state would like to have, but in allowing rural education to be controlled almost entirely by individual communities, they had also created a situation in which their control was fairly limited. With no possible

<sup>93</sup> MAMANI CAPCHIRI [26], pp. 85-89 and QUINTANA [65].

<sup>94</sup> ALP/ME Vocalía de Educación Rural; Oficios Recibidos de Núcleos Indigenales, 1944, Number 44/44, 16 MAY 1944, Eusebio reyes Beltrán TO Toribio Claure: Ref. a circular no. 2/44.

<sup>95</sup> ALP/ME Vocalía de Educación Rural; Oficios Recibidos de Núcleos Indigenales, 1944, Number 44/44, 16 MAY 1944, Eusebio reyes Beltrán TO Toribio Claure: Ref. a circular no. 2/44.

replacement for teachers that refused to cooperate or implement ideas devised in the Ministry's bureaus, few if any disciplinary sanctions would even have been possible. At the same time, of course, the concern was real and justified: how could these teachers be expected to teach the children the most basic and elementary skills, such as reading and writing? Furthermore, the isolation of many of these teachers, far removed from government centers and control mechanisms —apart from the occasional visit by an inspector— opened the profession up to all manner of abuse; there are enough reports of teachers abusing their position in communities and on haciendas to suggest that this, too, was a real problem that genuinely concerned the state's officials: as the head of the department of rural education of the Ministry of Education put it in 1948:

Los demás planteles de distinto tipo [*i.e. escuelas unitarias*] permanecen en una completa quiebra orgánica, pedagógica y de disciplina por la falta de una autoridad superior que dirija y controle su funcionamiento y desarrollo.<sup>96</sup>

Given these circumstances, the *escuela ayllu* developed by Siñani and Pérez was quickly recognized by post-War (Chaco) politicians to offer a tremendous opportunity to change all that for the better and to reestablish control over the many hundreds of schools that had been «doing their own thing.» The structure of the Warisateño model allowed for a *central* to exert control and influence over the *seccionales*—all of which had at one point been *unitarias*; better yet, theoretical training was concentrated at the *central*, while the *seccionales* were intended to be used only for practical and applied agricultural sciences and experimentation, allowing for a handful of *normalistas* at a *central* to serve a much larger community all at once and thus eliminating some of the drawbacks of a system overly dependent on *interinos*.

Moreover, the idea of having a *central* act simultaneously as a teacher-training center with good hopes of offering a wide variety of practical experiences in *seccionales* close-by was regarded as a positive thing. Still in somewhat of an experimental stage, the Warisata model was adopted by an enthusiastic General Alfredo Peñaranda, Minister of Education under the short-lived «Military Socialist» regimes of 1936-1939 and dubbed the *Núcleo Escolar Campesino*, indicating its centralized structure.<sup>97</sup> Within a relatively short period, Peñaranda traveled across the countryside establishing more of these *Núcleos* and in effect graduating it from an experimental model into a full-blown matter of official policy.<sup>98</sup>

The experimental school with all of its idealism and self-proclaimed revolutionary programs fit very neatly into the ideals of the «Military Socialists,» a movement

<sup>96</sup> ALP/ME, vol. 152 Correspondencia 1948, 18 FEB 1948, Jefe del departamento de Educación Rural TO Director General de Educación: INFORME LABORES 1947.

<sup>97</sup> PÉREZ [3], p. 158.

<sup>98</sup> Through the *Estatuto Orgánico de Educación Indígena y Campesina* of 16 AUG 1936.

that claimed to seek «social justice» for all Bolivians and thus to integrate the Indian into the nation and liberate him from oppression and ignorance—which really does not sound all that different from the rhetoric of the Liberal governments that had preceded it—in the name of socialism.<sup>99</sup> Much like the early twentieth century, they had high hopes for achieving their goals through an improvement of educational practice in Bolivia, and they left a legacy of educational legislation like no-one had ever seen before; the *Estatuto Orgánico* of 1936 was but one of their great projects, which also included the famed decree of 19 August of 1936 on the obligation of haciendas and other commercial entities with more than thirty indigenous children to build and maintain indigenous schools at their own expense.<sup>100</sup> It was also decreed that each municipality was obliged to reserve eight percent of its budget for the maintenance of local schools, now that they were no longer directly responsible for them—indeed also dated 19 August 1936. Importantly, the «Military Socialists» were the first to establish a fixed set of regulations for teachers and schools, a document in which the *Núcleos* figured as an important factor and in which these *Núcleos* were given quite extensive authority over their communities.<sup>101</sup> These attributes included, for example, legal jurisdiction to settle disputes and disagreements between the Indians that «belonged» to a certain NEC. It also made the *Núcleos* officially responsible for the protection of the same Indians against abuse by landlords and local officials, such as the *corregidores*.<sup>102</sup>

Within a year, the «Military Socialists» extended the *nuclear* system from three to ten serving a total of 10,000 children—a number that is much too high, as two years later the official count for the *escuelas indígenas* stood at 6,140, of which only two thirds were attending.<sup>103</sup> That may not seem like much, but the object of the scheme was not necessarily to construct new schools; rather, it was to incorporate the *escuelas unitarias* that served mainly indigenous communities—since certainly not all did—already in existence within this organizational structure over time. The notion that the system offered an excellent opportunity to create order in a previously chaotic system of independent *unitarias* caught on quickly, and even after the death of «Military Socialism» in 1939—as President Germán Busch committed suicide in September of 1939—new governments equally took to the *nuclear* system as the most fitting model for the further de-

---

<sup>99</sup> The «Military Socialists'» brand of socialism, however, was remarkably national-socialist in nature and should not be considered socialist in the traditional sense, but rather constituted an Italian-styled fascist project that most utterly failed to achieve its goals. See: Marten BRIENEN, *The Liberal Crisis and Military Socialism in Bolivia, 1930-1939*, Leiden, unpublished Master's thesis, 1996.

<sup>100</sup> Much like Bautista Saavedra's 1923 decree to the same effect.

<sup>101</sup> The *Normas y Bases de la Educación Boliviana* published by the Ministry of Education and Indigenous Affairs in 1939. See: GETINA [15], p. 123.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 124-125.

<sup>103</sup> The later number seeming much more accurate and in line with the further development of the *escuela indígenal*. *Ibidem*, pp. 118, 132.

velopment of indigenous education, and the system continued to expand. The number of *Núcleos* grew quickly to eighteen in 1943 and forty-two by 1947, integrating as many as 898 *seccionales* into the system.<sup>104</sup>

The big change that was taking place with the incorporation of the Warisata model by the «Military Socialists» and then passed on to the governments that followed in the 1940s, was that the model allowed for the first time to create a *system* of indigenous education that not only included ideals as for the educational needs of both the Indians and the state but, perhaps much more importantly, provided a manner in which the schools under the system could be closely monitored and the curriculum could be implemented in the many indigenous schools. The centralized model of the *Núcleos* further allowed for the state to create a stronger, more viable system of schools that would be better equipped to deal with hostile neighbors and officials who opposed the very idea of education: the size of the schools and the dramatically improved contact between the schools' directors and the state allowed for a much more active and direct role for the Ministry to resolve conflicts and intervene on the schools' behalf: whereas individual teachers of small, isolated schools were vulnerable to abuse and resistance by *hacendados* and officials, the *Núcleos* were much stronger and better able to resist infractions and obstruction. In short, not only did the *Núcleos* empower the schools themselves in the face of resistance and hindrance, it also made it possible for the state to regain control over the hundreds of indigenous schools that had been popping up over the previous four decades.

#### TRANSFORMATION OR REFORM?

From the manner in which many scholars have chosen to address the development and use of Bolivian education—as much, perhaps, as education elsewhere—one would get the impression that rural and indigenous schools have been intended and used mainly as a double-edged sword in the struggle between a state seeking to expand its power into the rural domain and an indigenous ethnic group hoping to resist precisely that expansion. In Bolivia, specifically, the field of education is generally interpreted as a battlefield of an ethnic struggle between what Tristan Platt described as «alien realities».<sup>105</sup>

<sup>104</sup> The rapid expansion of the system after 1944 was due also to the intervention of United States aid workers of the *Servicio Cooperativo Interamericano de Educación* (SCIDE). On their involvement in Bolivian education from 1943 to 1956 see: BRIENEN, [7]. ABNBPPG. Vol. 1743, Ministerio de Bellas Artes y Asuntos indígenas: Memoria 1946 (Junio 1945 – Junio 1946), annex n° 4, no date; Consejo Nacional de Educación (1943), pp. 16-17, graph 1; ALP/ME vol. 152, Correspondencia 1948. 21 JUN 1948: informe: Labor realizada en la sección estadística 1948.

<sup>105</sup> Tristan PLATT, 'The Andean Experience of Bolivian Liberalism: the Roots of Rebellion in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Chayanta (Potosí)', Steve STERN (ed.), *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World 18th to 20th Centuries*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1987, p. 317.

In accordance with this vision it is believed that the Creole state looked to rural education as a manner through which to domesticate the Indian «como dócil instrumento de trabajo» and to «eliminar la organización de los ayllus y comunidades y liquidar la cultura nativa.»<sup>106</sup> Education, in this view, was regarded exclusively as a means by which to «deculturate» the indigenous masses, strip them of their social organization, and indoctrinate them with the moral and cultural values of the dominant minority of urban Creoles, who regarded indigenous culture and indigenous ethnicity as racially and culturally inferior.<sup>107</sup>

Conversely, it is argued that the indigenous enthusiasm for education in the same period followed a completely opposite logic, as the school is considered the center of indigenous resistance against the state's evil ploy. According to Vitaliano Soria, the Indians

«[...] buscaron en la escuela una estrategia de defensa de su propio proyecto de sociedad, que se basaba en el fortalecimiento de sus ancestrales formas de organización socio-económica.»<sup>108</sup>

Thus, Soria and others place the indigenous embrace of education in a long history of indigenous resistance against the state's expansion and its obsessive inclination towards the destruction of the *ayllu* and of indigenous culture altogether. In a word, the schools represent the physical place in which the state's modernizing nation-building efforts clashed with the indigenous communities' efforts to maintain their traditional structures and social difference.

This is also why Warisata is often considered to be such an important turning point in the history of Bolivian education: it is argued that this school, co-founded by a native Aymara, represented the first step towards an indigenous education built on the foundations of indigenous social organization and intended specifically to maintain and preserve indigenous culture, for example through the celebration of indigenous festivals.<sup>109</sup> As Juan Luís Martínez put it, it is seen as «la casa de los explotados, símbolo vivo de la lucha por la justicia y la libertad, emblema de las antiguas rebeldías indígenas, jamás extinguidas.»<sup>110</sup> It was a school founded, built, and run by Indians themselves and as such, Warisata is analyzed as the very embodiment of the indigenous school as a tool for resistance against the state and its politics of deculturation.

<sup>106</sup> SORIA, [19], p. 49, 76. See also: CLAURE, [63].

<sup>107</sup> DEMÉLAS [29], pp. 343-399, LUYKX [26], CLAURE, [63], pp. 35-44, CALDERÓN [26], pp. 55-57. MARTINEZ, [26].

<sup>108</sup> SORIA, [19], p. 59.

<sup>109</sup> CLAURE, [63], pp. 99-100.

<sup>110</sup> Juan Luís MARTÍNEZ, *Algunas experiencias de educación popular en Bolivia: (Estado de Arte)*, La Paz, CEBIAE, 1991, p. 26 as quoted in Marcia STEPHENSON, *Gender and Modernity in Andean Bolivia*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1999, pp. 54-55.

If Warisata is to be considered this representative of the school as an effort of resistance and cultural preservation, then we must wonder what really made it so different and so special. Almost all schools in indigenous communities and on haciendas had been founded, built, and run by members of these communities themselves, and there were hundreds of them long before Pérez had ever even met with Avelino Siñani. The curriculum developed at Warisata was the same, almost word for word, as that proposed in the 1919 *Estatuto*, which had been developed by representatives of those most despised of Bolivian twentieth century nation-builders: the reviled, intolerably racist, anti-Indian Liberals. Even the fact that, as Pérez so prominently mentions in his autobiographical history of Warisata, the school had been designed specifically to function in the indigenous communities in stead of in the rural towns and villages, thus to make the school accessible and truly Indian, was not revolutionary or even innovative;<sup>111</sup> the *escuelas ambulantes*, utter failures though they might have been, had been devised by the Liberals with that same goal in mind, some twenty-five years earlier. In most analyses of Bolivian indigenous education, however, Warisata's most important and groundbreaking contribution was that it celebrated, validated, and strengthened indigenous culture, and as such constituted an alternative to the traditional schools that sought only the destruction of what was the essence of indigenous culture.

It is not so difficult to understand why state policies with regard to education are generally interpreted in the light of an expanding state that sought the homogenization of Bolivian culture, through the destruction of indigenous culture. The first steps towards and indigenous education in the early twentieth century were marked by a desire to «homogenize» Bolivian culture, rooted in the firm belief that there was only *one* culture; western culture as represented by Creoles. As far as these Creoles were concerned, the Indian was devoid of culture and sooner or later, «el impulso de la civilización llegará hasta él para aplastarlo o levantarlo.»<sup>112</sup> The schools as they were first implemented in the 1900s were indeed intended to bring about homogenization through the «civilization» of «the uncivilized.»<sup>113</sup> Creoles considered themselves eminently better human beings, more rational and more civilized than the Indians, and we see this reflected in the goals of Bolivian education.

At the same time, the desire for a homogeneous nation-state clashed with the Creole belief in his own superiority.<sup>114</sup> By the time of the *escuelas ambulantes*, the notion that the Indian lacked culture was already under heavy attack from noted intellectuals such as Franz Tamayo, who published his *Creación de una*

<sup>111</sup> Pérez [3], pp. 69-70.

<sup>112</sup> Felipe SEGUNDO GUZMÁN, as quoted in MARTINEZ [14], p. 170.

<sup>113</sup> MARTINEZ [14], pp. 163-170.

<sup>114</sup> A clear discussion of early twentieth century debates on the type of education that should be offered can be found in MARTINEZ [26].

*pedagogía nacional* in 1910; Tamayo argued strongly against the introduction of a European-style curriculum as it had been introduced in the years before, and instead favored the creation of a «national pedagogy» rooted in the cultural values and experiences of the Indians—in his mind constituting the essence of the Bolivian national character.<sup>115</sup> This development ran parallel to the growing *cholificación* of the urban centers, as more and more indigenous individuals made their way into the cities. As much as the Creoles had desired the adaptation of indigenous individuals to modern life in the name of a homogeneous society, the real effects of such integration and adaptation were most unwelcome. In 1931, the very same Franz Tamayo had this to say about the effects of literacy and urbanization on the Indians:

Sea por la escuela rural o urbana o por el cuartel de conscripción, hoy el indio alcanza la letradura y ¿cuál es el resultado? [...] Ese indio es el gendarme que hoy mismo encontramos en las esquinas de nuestras ciudades. [...] es el mayor flagelo después del colono español de la Conquista, para la propia raza y para sus propios congéneres. Intacto y primitivo, descomunadamente orgulloso de la pequeña superioridad que le da la letradura [...] su rasgo típico es la crueldad y el espíritu de venganza.<sup>116</sup>

In the Creole mind, the notion that western values and lifestyles perverted the Indian had begun to take hold in the 1910s and was increasingly coupled to the idea that the life that Indians led in their communities in the countryside—far away from the urban centers—was better and more appropriate. With this came the acceptance of indigenous lifestyles as a cultural phenomenon, rooted in a long history and not without merit. The fear of Indian migrants invading the cities and turning them into centers of *cholo* rather than of western culture, then, began to impact on the goals behind indigenous education, which became increasingly oriented towards the preservation of indigenous culture and to keeping the Indian in his «natural habitat.» Since the cities perverted the Indian, his education should seek to maintain him in his traditional social structures. The focus of education should therefore be on agriculture and *artesanías*, industries that better conformed to the social and ethnic idiosyncrasies of the Indian himself, and be less directed to «civilization» in the European sense.<sup>117</sup> This idea of a separate education, guided by the needs and characteristics of indigenous culture, found its expression already in the 1919 *Estatuto*, which established precisely that this was the direction that indigenous education should take.<sup>118</sup> Thus, notwithstanding the continuing rhetoric of some old-style Liberals in favor of ho-

---

<sup>115</sup> SALMÓN [34], pp. 67-84.

<sup>116</sup> As quoted in CHOQUE CANQUI [55], pp. 80-81.

<sup>117</sup> SORIA, [19], p. 53.

<sup>118</sup> LORA [59], pp. 194-196.

mogenization, the approaches to education had already been shifted from homogenization to biculturalism between 1907 and 1919.

By the time that Warisata was founded, the notion of homogenization as a sought-after goal had been completely abandoned in favor of a biculturalist approach that favored the separation between indigenous and non-indigenous education and in which indigenous education was specifically intended to:

rehabilitar las masas campesinas e incorporarlas a la vida civilizada y a la ciudadanía nacional, sin desvincularlas de su ambiente, de sus ocupaciones propias y de la convivencia con los suyos.<sup>119</sup>

The evolution we see in the approach to indigenous education is one that advanced from a desire to create homogeneity—the primordial concern of the nineteenth century—to the acceptance at least of *lo indígena* as an acceptable and integral part of society in its own right; this did not mean that *lo indígena* was not considered to be in need of cultural, social, and economic «improvement,» but it does indeed mean that Creole legislators and educators had reconciled themselves with the notion of a heterogeneous nation in which the Indians would play their own part and in their own way, without becoming imitation-Creoles or, worse still, *cholos*. What the officials of the Ministry of Education were looking for was to

[arraigar] al campesino a su medio y proporcionándole los recursos que hagan su vida en el terruño».<sup>120</sup> At the same time, they wanted to «combatir enérgica y sistemáticamente los vicios sociales que desintegran la personalidad física y espiritual del indio[; m]ejorar las condiciones de vida y trabajo del Campesino[; t]ransmitirle costumbres civilizadas[; e]nseñarle a cuidar y educar a sus hijos[; t]rasmitirle un mínimun [sic] de cultura integral[; y s]ustraerle de la ignorancia, del fanatismo y de la superstición, transformando sus hábitos retardados,[pero] sin desvincularlos de su ambiente [y conservando] las cualidades del aborigen, exaltando los valores espirituales autóctonos». <sup>121</sup>

Even though there is an obvious element of racist superiority to these goals as set forth by the state, their intent is clearly not to destroy indigenous culture but rather to reform it. Although it is easy to mistake one for the other, the difference between them is vast. More importantly, these reformist tendencies intended to improve upon indigenous culture were no different than those espoused by Warisata and its creators. The *Declaración de principios de la escuela campesina*

---

<sup>119</sup> ALP/ME, Vol. 708 Correspondencia y varios 1945: Jefe dpto escolar TO Minister of Education: Petición de la HCN 90/45.

<sup>120</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>121</sup> Guillén, 'Objetivos'.

signed at Warisata in 1937 by proponents of the Warisateño model stated its goals as «la formación de hombres cuyas condiciones le hagan inconfundible: sobrio, esforzado, alegre, idóneo, limpio, sano de cuerpo y de espíritu, dueño de su personalidad y sentido de responsabilidad [...]»<sup>122</sup>

In a word, at its creation in 1931, the ideals behind the famous indigenous school of Warisata were firmly in line with those held by officials of the state in terms of what direction indigenous education should take; a reform of indigenous culture, but without its destruction. Thus, the ideals behind indigenous education in the state's view were perhaps partly directed towards increased economic output and indigenous participation in the overall economy, they also included the defense of the Indian against abuse by *hacendados* and local officials and a program to aid the Indians in their struggle for the preservation of land and the integrity of their communities.<sup>123</sup>

The fact that Warisata fit in very neatly with the ideals of state officials around the same time is further demonstrated by the fact that the model was quickly adopted by the state and graduated from an experimental school to the model to which all of Bolivian indigenous education was to conform, converting hundreds of *escuelas unitarias* into *seccionales* within the span of a single decade. The accomplishment of Warisata was not its curriculum or its integration into the community, but that unlike the *escuelas unitarias* it made it feasible for the first time to implement such a curriculum, notwithstanding that the curriculum itself was hardly any different from that developed by the state's officials in 1919.

Perhaps this is the most ironic aspect of the history of Warisata, since it is so generally perceived as the embodiment of an indigenous effort of resistance against the state, whereas when we look at the development of Bolivian rural education, the conclusion is inescapable that this *escuela-ayllu* would turn out to be the exact opposite. For even though it cannot be denied that the state initially intended to use education as a means to transform indigenous society in accordance with its vision of the nation-state, its inability to effectuate its reforms and educational plans had meant in practice that the spread of education in the rural areas was left almost entirely to the indigenous communities and *colonos*, rendering indigenous education an almost exclusively indigenous affair. Warisata changed all that, allowing the state to reintegrate the hundreds of independent *escuelas unitarias* run for the Indians and by the Indians into a nationally directed and centralized educational system built following Warisata's lead, allowing the strict implementation and application of plans and ideas developed at the top.

<sup>122</sup> PÉREZ [3], pp. 168-169.

<sup>123</sup> In Guillén's words: «defender al aborígen de la violencia, del abuso y de la explotación de que es víctima». Guillén, 'Objetivos'.

## THE INDIGENOUS SCHOOL: A BATTLEFIELD OF ETHNIC STRUGGLE?

Given that for several decades indigenous education was mostly in the hands of indigenous communities themselves and that this situation had been the result of the state's willingness to relegate this responsibility to the communities, it is difficult to look upon the indigenous school as a battlefield between the state's expansion and indigenous resistance. First of all, the very reason that the state handed away responsibility for the creation and maintenance of indigenous schools had been the result of its inability to expand into the rural areas. This inability of the state to impose its will outside the cities has been the subject of a number of interesting studies, including that by Carmenza Gallo, who argued that—to sidetrack for a bit—one of the main reasons that the state developed such a fiscal dependence on the tin-industry was its incapacity to extract taxes from the rural areas.<sup>124</sup> Likewise, the failure of the *escuelas ambulantes* was directly tied to the fact that the experiment had remained limited to a small region around the city of La Paz, since the state was unable to combat the fierce resistance to the very concept of indigenous schooling anywhere further away from its main power base.<sup>125</sup>

In the same sense that Marta Irurozqui has argued that mid to late nineteenth century indigenous rebellions were not directed against the state's policies of agrarian reform because the state had proven utterly incapable of actually implementing and overseeing them,<sup>126</sup> the essence of my argument against the notion of the indigenous school as an armament against state policies of indigenous deculturation in the first half of the twentieth century is that this state was incapable of implementing these policies in the face of resistance from rural elites and that they, therefore, were of little immediate concern to the indigenous communities.<sup>127</sup>

In fact, even a cursory examination of the requests for authorization to build schools sent by indigenous communities to the Ministry of Education reveals the most compelling reason that indigenous communities had for wanting their schools in the first place: «sólo queremos la instrucción de los niños aborígenes para que no sufran lo que nosotros sufrimos.»<sup>128</sup> The community Indians and their leaders—the *caciques apoderados*—recognized the importance of education early on, as can be illustrated by the fact that even before the *escuelas ambulantes*, they were already creating schools in the face of considerable repression by local authorities and landlords, who would threaten to mutilate the *comunarios*

---

<sup>124</sup> Carmenza GALLO, *Taxes and State Power: Political Instability in Bolivia 1900-1952*, Philadelphia, temple University Press, 1992.

<sup>125</sup> SORIA, [19], pp. 50-52.

<sup>126</sup> IRUROZQUI [26] and Marta IRUROZQUI, 'Las paradojas de la tributación. Ciudadanía y política estatal indígena en Bolivia, 1825-1900', *Revista de Indias*, vol. LIX, number 217, 1999, pp. 705-740.

<sup>127</sup> SORIA, [19], p. 49.

<sup>128</sup> As quoted in SORIA, [19], p. 59.

and *colonos* or to poke their eyes out.<sup>129</sup> As Soria points out, illiteracy was one of the main problems that indigenous communities were facing in their struggle with local *hacendados* and *vecinos*, as it barred them from understanding and interpreting existing legislation, made official documents pertaining to the ownership of land inaccessible, and resulted in complete dependence on literate *vecinos* for their official representation, which was problematic since not all *vecinos* would serve the Indian communities with their best interests at heart; these middle-men were put in positions of tremendous power over the Indians, and this did not always work out to the Indians' benefit as many of these *vecinos* had a stake in landholding issues themselves.<sup>130</sup> Schools would enable the Indians to gain access to the law of the land, including the many dispositions in favor of the Indians—for example, prohibiting forced labor—as well as to legal documents for use in litigation and legal battles over land, without the need for untrustworthy middlemen.<sup>131</sup>

There is no doubt, then, that the education that was sought by indigenous communities was indeed a form of resistance against repression and abuse. Resistance, that is, not against the state but against local *corregidores*, *hacendados*, and *curas*, who abused and exploited the Indians, usurped their lands, and stripped them of their rights. It is, however, equally important to recognize that the value of education in the development of twentieth century Bolivia went far beyond the main theme of literacy as presented by Soria, Choque, and others, who have overlooked another key aspect of the introduction of schools into the indigenous countryside: the fact that the indigenous schools were drawn into the state's educational system—as these schools specifically fell under the direct authority of the Ministry of Education, rather than of the *municipalidades*—and therefore often represented the first and only official state institutions in these areas.

Even for the relative independence of the *escuelas unitarias*, which also meant that the state was in no position to impose a curriculum, and although the state was unable to furnish the schools with the materials it had once promised them, their teachers stood in direct contact with the Ministry of Education and the school districts, and thus presented the Indians of the communities and haciendas with a direct line of communication to the state that completely bypassed local authorities; the teachers, as they were officially employed by the state, fell outside of the jurisdiction of the *corregidores* and *mayordomos*.<sup>132</sup> Consequently, the

<sup>129</sup> CALDERÓN [17], p. 111-123, SORIA, [19], p. 61.

<sup>130</sup> Tristan Platt has also described the—not always selfless—role of such middlemen in the late nineteenth century conflicts. PLATT [105], pp. 304-309.

<sup>131</sup> IRUROZQUI [26], pp. 104-105.

<sup>132</sup> Which led to conflicts with such local authorities; the sub-prefect of cantón Ayata (Abdón Saavedra) in 1939 demanded that no teachers be appointed without his prior approval, or he threatened to refuse them any cooperation whatsoever. ALP/ME Oficios Recibidos 1939, number O/198, 17 APR 1939, Jefe del departamento de Educación Rural TO Prefect of La Paz: Subprefecto de Ayata.

archives of the Ministry of Education contain countless documents written by teachers outlining some of the problems their communities were facing, and denouncing abuse, exploitation, and fraud committed by local officials. More importantly, the responsible Ministerial officials generally acted on the information that reached them, ordering prefects and sub-prefects to intervene on the communities' behalf. The exchange of information went both ways; the Ministry of Education, throughout the twentieth century, was actively sending out information to rural and indigenous teachers with regard to legislation that was thought to be of relevance, such as recently passed legislation on education as well as, for example, *pongueaje*.<sup>133</sup>

By the same token, the expansion of education in the rural areas thus made it possible for the state to gain access to the communities, through the teachers and also bypassing local authorities. In recognition of this, the fact that the Ministry of Education also became the Ministry of Indigenous Affairs in 1937 should be considered significant; with this move, the Ministry became directly responsible for the development and implementation of legislation to protect the indigenous communities from such things as *corvée* labor, *pongueaje*, and other unpaid services to local officials and landlords.<sup>134</sup> It was granted the right to exercise jurisdiction over the Indian communities and transferred this right to the *Núcleos*. At the same time, the attributes of the larger school-centers were extended far beyond mere education of local children, and included healthcare, vaccination programs, and legal help against local authorities and landlords: the Ministry saw its responsibilities in matters of Indigenous Affairs as follows:

Asumir la defensa de los derechos indígenas, conociendo las quejas y denuncias de los nativos, en La Paz, directamente el departamento, y en el interior de la República por intermedio [*sic*] de las prefecturas y sub-prefecturas. [...] Y además, prestándoles la misma cooperación en litigios de deslinde y usurpación de terrenos.<sup>135</sup>

When we choose to take these things into consideration and do not reject them as mere pro-Indian rhetoric uttered by self-serving state officials —as is frequently done— it becomes more difficult to view the development of indigenous education in Bolivia as either an indigenous attempt to ward off the state's

---

<sup>133</sup> MINRE, vol. MIN-1-107 oficios recibidos del Ministerio de Educación 1938, number s0011/38 r1919, 16 MAR 1938, Ministro de Educación TO Ministro de RREE: Proyecto de decreto.

<sup>134</sup> That is, the Ministry had been given the «Indigenous Affairs» attribute in 1936, but not until 1 JAN 1937 was a department (Oficialía Mayor de Asuntos Indígenales) created to oversee the work in this respect.

<sup>135</sup> ABNBPPG vol. 459 Honorable cámara de Diputados, Minutas de Comunicación; number B904/43, 21 AUG 1943, Presidencia de la República TO Honorable Cámara de Diputados: petición de informe de los diputados Francisco Lazcano Soruco, Isaac Salazar, Ricardo Anaya y Facundo Flores.

modernization or as a state attempt to destroy indigenous culture. Rather than supporting the common notion that the state intended to use education as a means of furthering the ultimate destruction of the *ayllu* and of indigenous culture as an entity, my research has suggested to me that the school, and even more so after the introduction of Warisata, functioned as a bridge between the state and the indigenous communities, allowing them to enter in direct contact; the schools' teachers, unqualified though they might have been, were at once representatives of the state in the communities, and representatives of the communities in the state.

Thus, the state was able to expand its power in the rural areas and to exert much greater control in indigenous communities than ever before, while the communities gained direct access to the state, its resources, its legislation, and the protection that these offered them in their struggle with local landlords and authorities. It is hardly surprising in this light that the latter resisted vehemently and incessantly attempted to boycott and obstruct the schools, harassing teachers, arresting students and their parents, and refusing to contribute financially.<sup>136</sup> The picture that emerges is not unlike that presented by Marta Irurozqui with regard to the agrarian reforms of the late nineteenth century, during which the intent of the reforms—to distribute land directly among former *comunarios*—had been thwarted and frustrated by local *gamonales* and *hacendados* for their own personal gain.<sup>137</sup>

It is further interesting to conclude that rather than an effort of deculturation, indigenous education was a largely internal indigenous affair for a good portion of the early twentieth century; schools were run by indigenous teachers, generally members of the very same communities in which they served, they were erected by the members of these communities, and they were supplied—if at all—by the communities. Even though the teachers maintained contact with the state, the state's ability to control the schools directly was fairly limited, due to the absence of replacements willing to work under such conditions. This situation did not change until the invention of the famous *escuela-ayllu*, which as it seems is famous for all the wrong reasons. Warisata did not introduce an innovative curriculum, as is often claimed, nor did it represent the first step towards true indigenous education; rather, it was the beginning of the end for the exclusively indigenous *escuelas unitarias*, as the Warisateño model created the right circumstances for the state to regain control over its educational system.

That is, of course, not to say that the state did not seek to alter the structure and functioning of indigenous culture. In the early twentieth century, the idea

---

<sup>136</sup> CHOQUE [55], pp. 29-40. In the case of Warisata (province of Achacachi), the head of the department of rural education noted that «Los funcionarios de Achacachi, que a la vez son latifundistas, han optado por al táctica de perseguir, uno por uno, a los amigos de Warisata y nunca les faltan pretextos para atropellarlos.» ALP/PA 212, number 336, 28 JUNE 1939, Director general de dirección general de educación indígena y campesina TO Prefect of La Paz: el indígena José Pajari-to Arismendi.

<sup>137</sup> IRUROZQUI [26] and [126].

behind the *escuelas ambulantes* had indeed been to undo the *ayllu* and the provincial backwardness that it represented to old-style Liberals. It is, however, ahistorical to extend this notion of homogenization into later decades, especially the 1930s, as by that time a radical change had taken place in the ideas behind indigenous education. It had specifically become an effort to maintain indigenous culture as separate from urban culture, to maintain the Indian in his «natural habitat;» it had become an effort to «conservar las cualidades del aborigen, exaltando los valores espirituales autóctonos.»<sup>138</sup> It is true that this position of cultural separation had its roots in a racist appraisal of the Indian, since it was assumed that

los indígenas, cuando emigran hacia los centros urbanos, donde llevan una vida de abyección, se pervierten mayormente, porque en esos centros encuentran todos los refinamientos de los vicios.<sup>139</sup>

The idea of Creole superiority is well displayed in such statements, finding expression in the desire to reform indigenous culture so that it would conform more to the moral and cultural standards of urban Creoles, but however racist and arrogant we may now find such statements or even the mere desire to adapt indigenous culture to modern circumstances, it is a far cry from intending or desiring the annihilation of indigenous culture as an obstacle to progress. Furthermore, the types of reforms that the state had in mind were no different from those proposed by important indigenous intellectuals—and activists—such as Avelino Siñani and Eduardo Nina Qhispi. Centering around hygiene, economic production, and literacy, these reforms were in fact intended to strengthen the indigenous communities and «prepare» them for active political participation; it was also a means to guard them against abuse and exploitation by a rural elite that was seen as at least as much, if not more, of a problem to national unity than the existence of an indigenous culture.

Finally, to return to the contradiction of which I made note in the beginning of this paper, namely the opposition between the state's intentions of indigenous acculturation and the fact that the proliferation of educational facilities in and around indigenous communities must be attributed to these communities themselves—often at great cost—my research has suggested to me that this contradiction finds its origins in two main causes: first of all, the works that have dealt with indigenous education in Bolivia and that stress the racist notions behind indigenous education as a means of promoting urban Creole values and transforming indigenous society according to mainly Liberal western models have

---

<sup>138</sup> Guillén, 'Objetivos y orientaciones'.

<sup>139</sup> ALP/ME, Vol. 708 Correspondencia y varios 1945: Jefe dpto escolar TO Minister of Education: Petición de la HCN 90/45.

focused too much on a racist rhetoric uttered at the start of the twentieth century and do not take into account the vast ocean of difference between the rhetoric and the development of indigenous education in practice. That is to say that while the intent may initially have been, for example, to teach the Indians to speak Spanish rather than their native languages, the reality of daily practice was that since it was indigenous teachers native to the communities in which they served that were supposed to put this in practice, either little or nothing came of it. The notion of deculturation through education cannot be applied to such schools in such communities and with such teachers, and indeed the school district inspectors complained that this was the case.

Secondly, I have found that the idea of a «struggle for education» as it is suggested by Vitaliano Soria, Roberto Choque, and others is perhaps too strongly rooted in the idea that the objectives of the state and the objectives of the indigenous communities must be incompatible. The Bolivian state's inability to effectively govern the rural areas because of fierce resistance from rural elites can in fact be coupled to the indigenous communities fight against the very same rural elites. In this particular sense, the indigenous school as an institution of the state that was often run by a member of the indigenous community becomes the focal point of an exchange between the two and for mutual benefit. Where literacy is most often quoted as the main asset offered to the communities through education, enabling access to legal documents and legislation, I would also argue that the school as an institution by itself, beyond its educational aspects, was an asset of equal or perhaps even greater value. At the same time, it is important to recognize that whereas Soria, Choque, et al. suggest that the state's primary concern was with the destruction of indigenous culture, this too seems to have more to do with our notion of absolutely opposed desires between the state and the communities, and I would like to argue that even though the state in the nineteen-thirties admittedly sought to create «a new breed of Indian,» there is a vast distance between the desire to reform indigenous culture —much as indigenous leaders themselves aspired to— and to annihilate it.

The expansion of the state's influence into the rural areas also directly affected the communities' ability to ward off expanding haciendas and to combat abusive local authorities, while the state embraced the Warisateño model precisely because the objectives of the former and those of the latter were like-minded. At the same time, the type of change that Creoles hoped to introduce in indigenous society through education in and after the 1930s was not unlike similar reformist tendencies among indigenous leaders. The answer to the contradiction between the indigenous embrace of education and the state's efforts to expand its influence, therefore, is that there is not necessarily a contradiction at all, but that many of the objectives held by either party were quite compatible.

---

*This article argues that in the development of a system of indigenous education in Bolivia, the indigenous communities or ayllus were mainly responsible for the rapid spread of indigenous schools throughout the Bolivian rural areas in the first decades of the twentieth century, and that these communities remained the driving force behind the expansion of indigenous education until the educational reforms of the 1930s and 1940s, during which time the state reestablished its control over the almost entirely independently functioning indigenous schools. Likewise, this paper also argues that contrary to its popular image as the «house of the exploited» and breeding ground of indigenous radicalism and politicization, in the end it was the famous «escuela-ayllu» of Warisata that after its foundation in 1931 would become the means through which the state managed to regain control over the rural and indigenous educational system during the aforementioned reforms.*

KEY WORDS: *Bolivia, Indigenous Education, Warisata, Ayllu, SCIDE.*

---

Fecha de recepción: 10 de Abril de 2002.

Fecha de aceptación: 9 de Septiembre de 2002.