

Multiculturalism and Representations of Indigenesness in the Bolivian Educational Reform*

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ABSTRACT

Drawing upon ethnographic fieldwork, this paper examines the representation of indigenesness within the context of the Bolivian educational reform of 1994. During the reform era (1994-2005), Bolivian education made impressive strides in promoting multiculturalism, and educators advocated for the importance of valuing indigenous cultures and often championed their own roles in supporting the national goal of cultural equality. This paper argues, however, that the discourse and activities for valorizing indigenesness at the level of actual practice within schools tended to simplify indigenous cultures into their folkloric artifacts and romanticized indigenesness as socially static, traditional, and bound to rurality. Rather than understanding indigenous culture as flexible and dynamic, the discourse circulating within the school environment from both teachers and the government represented indigenesness as dichotomously opposed to nonindigenesness, modernity, and urban environments. Such restrictive portrayals served to set standards of behavior for indigenous people to reject the lure of the city and the corrupting influence of modernity in order to preserve their authentic indigenesness and the cultural diversity of the nation.

Key Words: multiculturalism, Bolivia, education, indigenous, recognition

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INTRODUCTION

The Bolivian Educational Reform, established as constitutional law in 1994, proclaimed in its introductory words that Bolivian education “is the highest function of the State, because it is the right of the people and an instrument of national liberation [...]” (Law 1565, art. 1, sec. 1). The law’s stated objective was to create a new social order: an active, participatory democracy founded upon equal citizenship. The educational reform was part of a series of sweeping national legislative changes centered on popular participation (Postero 2007). Fundamental to this democratic endeavor, the state declared Bolivia a multicultural nation for the first time and established Quechua and Aymara as official languages alongside Spanish. While the overall reform was extremely comprehensive with policies that addressed virtually every aspect of education from budget and administration to infrastructure and curriculum, this paper examines one specific aspect of the reform: the representation of Bolivian cultural diversity and indigenouness at the level of implementation. That is, it examines the rhetoric and practices of multiculturalism inside schools, where students would directly come into contact with the reform’s multicultural policy.

Despite its claims for fostering democracy and social equality, the reform had been controversial since its origins on various fronts. One of the important contentions was that the reform proposal was developed by a taskforce –composed of Bolivian and international experts and World Bank support- outside of the Ministry of Education and influence from the teacher’s union. When President Evo Morales took office in 2006, he abandoned the educational reform, and in December 2010, he issued a new law of education, known as “Avelino Siñani - Elizardo Pérez,” which declares not only “liberation” but significantly also “decolonialization” and “anti-imperialism” to be among the foundational bases of education (Law 070, article 3, sec 1). Although many teachers expressed vehement opposition to the reform for a variety of reasons including its foreign ties, virtually every educator with whom I spoke voiced support for the reform’s multicultural objectives of respecting cultural diversity and valuing indigenous cultures.

In line with Lipsky’s (1980) concept of “street-level bureaucracy” –that ground-level *practices* rather than policy intentions effectively become the policy being carried out- I focus on representations of indigenouness as articulated and enacted within schools through classroom textbooks, diversity celebrations, and the presentations of teachers – the actors charged with carrying out the reform. This paper also

explores the implications of these representations, which I argue reinscribed stereotypes of indigenous identities and promoted nationalistic moral obligations centered on multiculturalism that unequally disadvantaged indigenous citizens. While the old educational reform may no longer be official policy, much of the ideology underlying its representation of indigenesness preceded the reform and was engrained into dominant cultural discourse on multiculturalism that extended beyond the educational institution. As such, both teachers who supported the reform law as well as those who opposed it generally engaged in the same type of rhetoric when it came to promoting multiculturalism and indigenesness. Thus, I present this research as a case study of implementing multiculturalism that continues to have significant current relevance as Bolivia begins a new chapter in multicultural education and other countries also embark on their own journeys to promote ethnic equality and understanding through education.

Methodology

This paper, which focuses representations of indigenesness, is part of a much larger research project on Bolivian educational reform implementation based on a total of eighteen months of fieldwork conducted in Bolivia in 2000 and 2004-2005, ending just before the election of Morales. During this time I engaged in participant observation, which included attending classes and school events, interacting with students and teachers both during and outside of school hours, and studying printed materials used in the classroom including textbooks, reform publicity placed both within schools and the community, and literature published by the Ministry of Education. I also conducted eighty interviews with teachers, administrators, and others working in the education sector; these interviews were conducted in Spanish at their schools, offices, homes, and in public meeting places. My research sites varied widely from rural areas to towns to city centers. As my overall research highlighted policy implementation, my methodology attempted to capture the circumstances inside schools and the perspectives of teachers, the "street-level bureaucrats" responsible for carrying out the reform. Since the reform's social equality goals for promoting multiculturalism and improving educational achievement often focused on rural indigenous communities, the majority of my fieldwork was spent in rural areas. Many of the rural teachers I interviewed identified as being indigenous or as having an indigenous background and strongly connected with the political struggles of indigenous Boli-

vians. The ethnic identity of these teachers is relevant in contextualizing many of the quotes that appear later in this paper and strongly highlight how indigenous teachers themselves often engaged in discourse that served to distinguish “authentic” indigeness, which they venerated, as separate from their own identities and experiences.

Background to the Educational Reform

Bolivia’s GDP per capita, life expectancy rate and gender-development are ranked among the lowest in all the Americas (UNDP 2004, 141, 241). Sixty-one percent of the population identifies as indigenous (INE 2001). However, universal suffrage was not even established until the 1952 revolution, and despite gaining voting rights and their numerical majority, indigenous Bolivians have continued to be marginalized politically, economically, and educationally (Klein 2003; Miller 1991). For example, Bolivian school enrollment rates are 84 and 85 percent for nonindigenous girls and boys respectively compared to only 69 and 75 percent for indigenous girls and boys respectively (INE 2003, 106). There are over thirty different indigenous ethnic groups, but the largest two groups –Quechua and Aymara from the Andean highlands- make up 56 percent of the indigenous population and another 38 percent of the indigenous population does not identify with any particular indigenous group (INE 2001). The Bolivian government does not have an official statistical breakdown of ethnicities composing the non-indigenous population. However, one source (CIA 2010) reports that mestizos and whites respectively compose 30 percent and 15 percent of the total Bolivian population while the remaining 55 percent of the population is divided between Quechua and Aymara.

With the adoption of the educational reform, radical changes were made to all components of education from curriculum and pedagogical style to the entire philosophy of education. An important part of the reform and the state’s acknowledgement of itself as a multicultural society was to replace the very Spanish/European-centric, urban-focused curriculum with one that integrated in the indigenous experience and reflected the realities of the majority of Bolivians. Specifically, the reform promoted a particular type of multiculturalism known as *interculturalidad* – a philosophy that went beyond merely recognizing or co-existing with other cultures (as suggested by basic multiculturalism) to also advocate for sharing and interaction among cultures (Luykx 2000).

Especially early in the reform era, the government produced many publications promoting the merits of the reform to both teachers, who

would be implementing the policies, and the general public. Posters and billboards, prominently placed in some cities, contained catchy slogans such as “Our diversity is our strength” and “Education is everyone’s homework”. The accompanying pictures almost invariably featured a group of Bolivians from different races/ethnicities, who were identifiable as such by their dress in distinctive traditional indigenous clothing. The most significant component of the reform that directly addressed the incorporation of indigenous cultures into the schooling system was the adoption of bilingual education.

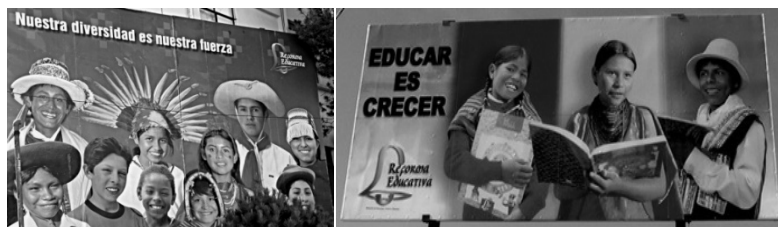


Figure 1. Examples of billboards promoting multicultural education and the reform

In rural areas, many children start school knowing the indigenous language they learned at home and only begin to learn Spanish once in school. Bilingual textbooks in Quechua, Aymara and Guaraní contained representations of daily life for each culture, often showing children wearing traditional indigenous clothing and hairstyles in their classrooms and homes or outside in the country surrounded by agricultural fields and/or farm animals. One of the new math textbooks, for example, depicted indigenous farmers calculating their agricultural yield in their fields; another lesson referred to mathematical tools used by the Incas. Schools received new illustrated storybooks published by the Ministry of Education, some of which had indigenous characters and/or were bilingual. The reform required schools to incorporate civic days and fairs into their curriculum that highlighted the diversity of Bolivia (i.e., its people, geography, foods, dances and music). Representations of indigenusness and performances of cultural diversity also became more popular for traditional holidays such as Patriots Day.



Figure 2. Examples of bilingual and culturally inclusive textbooks published for the educational reform

Ultimately, the impact of all of the above mentioned implementation techniques were modulated by the teachers: they would decide what posters to hang on their classroom walls, how often they would use the new textbooks and storybooks, the types and content of the diversity celebrations held at their schools, what languages they used in front of their students, and what they taught –intentionally and unintentionally- to their students about multiculturalism. As such, my research pays particular attention to the perspectives of teachers and how they conceptualized indigenusness and cultural diversity based on interviews and participant observation. Their general views of indigenous culture and diversity informed how they interacted with and implemented policies for multiculturalism. As mentioned earlier, many teachers opposed the reform but still strongly endorsed multicultural ideals and the valorization of indigenous cultures. As I would discover, despite controversies over the reform, when it came to national cultural diversity and indigenusness, education employees ranging from bureaucratic administrators in government offices to indigenous teachers in remote rural schools spoke in very similar terms. This paper endeavors to demonstrate that the reform’s methods to recognize indigenous identities and celebrate them as vital to Bolivia’s multicultural identity was a double-edged sword: in addition to celebrating diversity, official recognition could also stereotype people by ethnicity, reinstating and creating static notions of identity that were as binding as liberating.

REPRESENTATIONS OF INDIGENOUSNESS

Based on the themes that emerged from the dominant representations of indigenusness and discourse on cultural equality in the reform context, indigenusness was largely understood as being defined and sustained by (1) its cultural folklore, (2) its location in a rural geography and lifestyle, and (3) its dedication to tradition. Specifically, the concept of real or authentic indigenusness was articulated in terms of its oppositional relationship to nonindigenusness – that which was labeled white/mestizo, urban, and modern, and thus, engaged the logic of *Andeanism*. Starn (1991) explains Andeanism as a representation that dichotomizes lowland, urban mestizos from highland rural indigenous peasants, portraying the latter as “outside the flow of modern history” (64). In the Bolivian context, this timeless unity with one’s ancestors, untouched by modernity and globalization, was not limited to Andean highlanders but extended to all indigenous cultures in their respective rural environments. This paper takes the position that such dichotomous representations perpetuated an understanding of ethnicities based on mutually exclusive and contradictory groups, which dangerously served the process of racialization, creating and reifying distinctions between people. Andeanism has its roots in the *indigenismo* movement, which advocated for indigenous-centered politics, connected contemporary indigenous peoples to the grand civilizations of their ancestors, and fought for the vindication of indigenusness from racist characterizations that labeled them inferior to mestizo/white (Starn 1991). Similarly, the dichotomized representations of indigenusness during the reform, which created standards for authenticity and circumscribed boundaries around and between cultures, were strongly entrenched in the positive political goals of recognizing the nation’s cultural diversity and promoting ethnic equality.

Indigenusness Is Folklore

One of the most popular refrains within education circles concerning the reform was that Bolivian education and society had an obligation to “valorize indigenous cultures”. As such, I was interested to know what was meant by “indigenous culture” – what exactly was it that was to be valorized? Frequently, educators who addressed this question gave responses centered on it being “its music, its dances, its traditions”. For example, teacher Juan captured this idea with the following elaboration:

In addition to ethnic equality, we need language equality. Here in Bolivia [...] there are 33 *different* ethnic groups [...]. They have different customs, a different culture, and portions of the Altiplano have different customs. Parts of the Yungas are different too. For example, at parties they dance morenazas and cullawadas whereas over in Pando they don't dance those, because their culture is very different. [...] The blacks, the Afro-Bolivians, dance the saya (original emphasis).

Furthermore, Bolivia's rich cultural heritage was often celebrated in schools on special occasions through engagement in indigenous folklore, including performing dances, playing music, and wearing traditional clothing. In many school events where these rituals took place, celebrations tended to focus on the artifacts of indigenous culture extracted from their contexts and those who had originally produced them. They were not observances of cultures in integral form, but were instead in many ways stereotypical and isolated specific practices plucked out of their cultural context for general consumption. In numerous conversations, it became apparent that culture was being defined in terms of its tangible folkloric expressions. Although these are important aspects of culture, they are not the whole of it. They do not address what it means *to be* indigenous in Bolivia, that is, the intangible aspects of culture, whether they be the values associated with various indigenous cultures, their history of oppression that has shaped who they are, or their ongoing social struggles for equal rights. As the meaning of culture has been a topic of debate even within academic circles, it is unfair to expect these teachers to do better. However, in an era when indigenous rights have taken center stage in education and politics, scholars and policy makers must consider the background assumptions that have informed understandings of indigeness and policies of multiculturalism.

Rudrappa's (2004) research on nation and ethnic integration in the United States illustrates how some immigrant minorities translated their culture to the majority in forms considered appropriate for general consumption; that is, things that could be touched, tasted, and seen, decontextualized from their source like objects in a museum display. The alienation, the history of exploitation, the present-day racism that characterized their lives were not part of the cultural narrative put into public circulation. In Bolivian schools, the conceptualization and celebration of culture in terms of its folklore similarly promoted fragmented and superficial associations with a limited range of cultural elements as constitutive of intercultural exchange and the preservation

of these *things* as equivalent to cultural preservation. Multicultural idealism may have wished to avoid the problematic aspects of cultural equality that were directly located in indigenous people's legitimate social grievances, preferring to focus on an optimistic vision of a culturally diverse society disconnected from political-economic structural change. Hale (2004) addresses this concern in the broader context of Latin America through his concept of the "*indio permitido*" ("authorized Indian"). Purposely leaving intact the connotations associated with the historically pejorative term *indio*, this label refers to the type of indigenous person that multicultural politics has sanctioned to exist based on their adoption not only of an ethnic identity but also of the proper neoliberal-approved concept of citizen, which excludes unauthorized political mobilization associated with "troublemakers".

In looking at how indigeness was represented as folklore in Bolivian education, there was also the issue of *who* represented this image of indigeness. The representation of a culture as its folklore allowed it to be easily accessed and consumed by outsiders. In some relatively larger schools, this included nonindigenous students dressing in traditional clothing from numerous indigenous groups and performing dances or participating in a parade of costumes across the schoolyard to the cheers and applause of fellow students, teachers, and parents. In many schools in Quechua regions, for example, Quechua cultural performances were executed by Quechua students and teachers. However, in acknowledging the range of cultural diversity in Bolivia, the same Quechua students may have also donned costumes and performed dances of other indigenous cultures. For instance, in one school's celebration of Patriots' Day, Quechua students wore black face paint, nubby wool head caps, and tropical clothing as they danced the samba in representation of Bolivia's African music and dance heritage. Ironically, within an African Bolivian community where most teachers were of mestizo or Aymara backgrounds, African Bolivian students performed traditional dances from Tarija, a department on the other side of the country that had no personal cultural association to either the students or the teacher.

Such student performances in costume were arguably a mere masquerade of the Other rather than participation in interculturality. The situation reminded me of the world traveler who dances the tango, enjoys kimchi, or listens to American rap music and feels they "know" these cultures and believes that their genuine appreciation of these diverse cultural elements is antithetical to racism. Folklore or cultural artifacts are significant because they are manifestations of the people

and culture that originated it. Within school diversity celebrations, cultural folklore was to a great degree separated from its cultural origins and embeddedness in living cultures.

Although some people have advocated for cultural “purity”, arguing that only authorized members should be able to participate in a culture’s folklore, while all else is deemed cultural appropriation, this position can also lead to a fetishizing of culture, essentializing social practices as necessarily a part of one people and not of another. As we seek to find human solidarity in a globalizing world, we are more likely to find it in sharing our experiences and cultures than drawing boundaries around them. However, I suggest there is a danger when a culture becomes defined as everyone’s culture and therefore open to interpretation by anyone but yet continues to be upheld as a representation of that culture and its people. Anyone includes those who have never and will never have to live the realities of being a member of that culture, ethnicity, or race, those for whom the breadth and complexity of a culture can perhaps too easily become nothing more than its good music, entertaining dances, and pretty clothing.

It was not uncommon for reform supporters to describe social discrimination (either ethnic or gender) and then follow it up with “but now the reform changes that”. This made me wonder what actually served as evidence that the reform had changed or improved inequality. In the following quote, rural teacher Antonio explained what he personally thought it meant to be indigenous given the context of the reform’s ideals and popular rhetoric on indigenusness, equality, and cultural preservation:

Indigenous. That would be an original people, which came from era of the Incas. There has always been a variety of cultures and also a variety of ethnic groups [in Bolivia]. [...] These days, culture and ethnic groups were already disappearing, but this reform proposes to recover all of those values of the past in culture, in language, in tradition, in folklore, in dance, in instruments, in many areas.

In his description, it was the rescue of folkloric cultural practices that was reversing indigenous cultural extinction. However, such popular views fell short of acknowledging that the very need for celebrating Bolivian indigenous heritage had stemmed from the marginalization of indigenous populations. The derogation of their cultural expressions as backwards or as something to be appreciated on the level of spectacle rather than art was indicative of the rejection in society of indigenous

people. Therefore, we cannot view the national celebration of their folklore as an end in itself in terms of cultural affirmation. While bringing these folkloric expressions of culture into the mainstream of education could socialize early awareness of cultural diversity, it was doubtful that mere appreciation of a culture's folklore and enjoyment of its performance negated, challenged, or even acknowledged the continuing marginality of indigenous people.

Ironically, despite the ubiquitous celebrations of cultural diversity through the practice of other groups' folklore, there was simultaneously an overwhelming characterization of indigenous cultural survival as predicated on indigenous peoples' continued practice of their *own* culture. It was this rationale of cultural preservation that served as a key organizing principle in the discourse of indigenous cultural authenticity and the binaries that delineated the difference between indigenous and nonindigenous Bolivians. I now turn to examine these discursive dichotomies of authentic indigenusness.

Indigenusness Is Rural

Reflecting the demographics in Bolivia, the word *rural* was popularly used as a synonym for *indigenous*, and the word *urban* was used to signify *nonindigenous* people of mestizo or European heritage. As such, it was commonplace both in informal conversation as well as official government reports to use the word *campesino*—literally meaning person of the countryside—to unequivocally indicate a person of indigenous background in Bolivia. Reflecting this connection between rural life and indigenusness, a common complaint reform advocates and many rural teachers about mainstream education was that it was not at all applicable to the daily lives of indigenous students who lived in rural areas. That is, pre-reform textbooks were full of pictures of people who did not look like them, lived in homes that were not like theirs, and did things in the city that they had never seen before in real life, and occasional representations of indigenous people were exceptions. According to the 2001 Census (INE 2003), 74 percent of rural indigenous people aged ten or older who are economically occupied worked in the agricultural sector. Indigenous people are also more likely to be poor and rural, which puts many modern conveniences out of reach. Their homes tend to be modest, often made of exposed adobe with numerous family members sharing a room. In contrast to this reality, non-reform school texts mainly portrayed people who were distinctly white and middle-class.

Therefore, the reform textbooks, which were designed to be gender and culture sensitive and regularly depicted images of both rural and urban areas, came as a much-needed corrective in terms of how the people of Bolivia were being represented. Bilingual reform textbooks in particular featured pictures of indigenous families in relatively small houses, working the land, taking care of domesticated animals. Smiling indigenous children were shown exploring the natural landscape. Generally, the images tended to be ones of bucolic bliss, images that erased or challenged prevailing negative notions of rural life and the people who live there as backwards or suffering for their circumstances. These images redeemed rural life as something positive: their lives may have been humble, but they worked hard, life was good, and they were happy. Images of urban life in reform textbooks depicted another yet equally pleasant lifestyle: people used public transportation and drove cars, adults worked in office buildings, and children wore t-shirts and sneakers. Again, children were shown smiling and curious about their environment. These two contrasting images implied that these lifestyles were different but neither was better than the other: indigenous rural people had their way of life and nonindigenous urban people had their way of life.

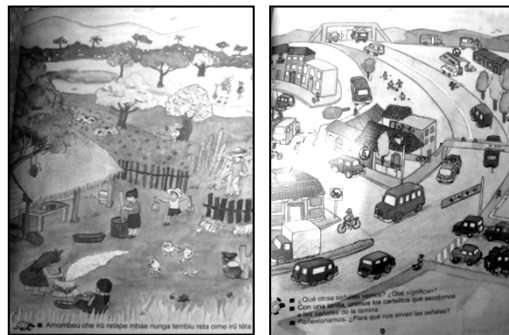


Figure 3. Examples of rural and urban life as portrayed in a bilingual textbook (left) and Spanish-language textbook (right)

In creating a representation of rural indigenous Bolivian life, which had been previously ignored by education, the reform played into the long-standing conceptual dichotomy that isolated indigenous and non-indigenous into distinctly oppositional geographic camps of rural and urban, respectively. Such distinctions in textbook imagery were meant to represent and acknowledge the different lived realities of people, yet they also served to reify these distinctions, solidifying ideas of where

indigenous and nonindigenous people belonged. Teachers also contrasted between the extremities of urban and rural life and it was rare to hear about life in towns and suburbs, those places that did not fit neatly into the rural-urban dichotomy. It should be noted that rural teachers in particular often strongly distinguished rural and urban life with the political purpose of pointing out the hardships faced by indigenous people to which they thought nonindigenous urbanites were oblivious; however, ultimately this distinction reinforced the dichotomies of rural-urban and indigenous-nonindigenous.

Since dominant discourse largely conceptualized indigenous cultures in terms of material culture and folklore, many educators' explanations connecting indigenes to rural rather than urban residence centered on the how geography related to one's ability to display the clothing, foods, and habits associated with one's indigenous heritage. Teacher Paloma was particularly well versed in educational reform rhetoric as she had formerly been a pedagogical advisor for the reform, an educator who was trained and employed by the Ministry of Education to assist teachers to understand and implement the reform in their classrooms. In the following quote, she described what happened to indigenous people when they left their rural area:

When they are in the *campo*, they still have [...] a lot of their own culture, but when they leave to the city [...] to work, they don't want to be *campesinos*, because they think that people are going to reject them. So, when you go to the *campesino's* place, he's there with his indigenous clothing [...], **but** when he comes to the city, if its possible, he puts on blue jeans or fabric pants, because they think that this is more prestigious. That is, he thinks that dressing in this manner is going to get him better treatment in the offices, in businesses. But when he's in his place, he puts on his clothes, chews his coca, and eats *Lagua* [traditional soup]. This happens with women too. They have their special clothing that is called *ax-su* [...] that they have woven. Now, I believe that already they are losing it, because it uses a lot of their time to make clothes. Now the women use *polleras* [skirts], [indigenous women] *cbolitas* come here [to the city] and if they are going to be employed for some time, after six months, they stop [wearing *polleras*] and start to use dresses, pants. They usually have their braids, then they cut their braids off, and one can see this in the city (original emphasis in bold).

The belief that even *temporary* geographical displacement in the city to find work could not only permanently disrupt the indigenous person's cultural habits but also their identity was highlighted by rural

teacher Claudio:

[Economic] necessity forces people to migrate to the city. [...] In [the city], they learn lots of things such as how to speak Spanish and how to eat better. These people return to their communities as different people, as changed. After two or three years [in the city], they're not the same people. Even someone who doesn't speak good Spanish, who mixes his languages, comes back thinking he's not indigenous but rather a civilized person. [...] For a culture to remain, shall we say, intact, a person should not move away from their community. [...] When they leave their community, they witness different customs. In order to keep their culture, they should keep their community.

In the above described scenario, the Quechua person who had spent a few years socializing with people in the city became someone that was appropriate to neither rural nor urban culture: their speech was a mixture of Spanish and Quechua and they thought they are no longer indigenous but “civilized”, yet they were not urban either since they could not properly speak Spanish.

Thus, according to the prevalent descriptions given by educators, exposure to the city led to the slow demise of the indigenous person's practice of their culture. In the end, Bolivian educators overwhelmingly described the survival of real indigenous culture as incompatible with the urban environment. Furthermore, the discourse strongly suggested the duty of indigenous people to stay local or hold strong in order to preserve their cultures against opposing cultural pressures. The oppositional logic of the indigenous-nonindigenous binary superimposed on the rural-urban binary made urban space antithetical to indigeness. Even as increasing numbers of indigenous *people* entered urban spaces, which one would have expected would serve to negate the dichotomy, the binary logic dictated that their *culture* was being eradicated from them, rendering them no longer truly indigenous. Thus, urban space remained conceptually nonindigenous despite the people who inhabited it. The propensity of nonindigenous urban culture (as it was so conceived) to “reject” indigeness in its midst was mostly taken as a given. Urban space did not belong to indigenous people, and therefore, they did not set the agenda of acceptability and practice within its boundaries; they therefore would acquiesce to its cultural rules. Such explanations did little to challenge anti-indigenous forces in the city, to demand room for indigenous expression in urban spaces, to acknowledge that cultural “contamination” was not a one-way street, or to suggest that the movement of indigenous people into

urban areas could possibly serve to disrupt the status quo and preexisting forms of cultural hegemony.

Educational achievement and professionalism were also important goals of the reform. As such, what did this dichotomized rural-urban representation mean for indigenous children who wanted to go to universities, which were in the city? In the rural-urban dichotomy, teachers tended to associate rural people with uneducated farmers and housewives, urban people with educated white-collar professionals, both men and women. The discourse clearly did make room for indigenous students who left their rural communities for advanced education; however, this imagined scenario often ended with the suggestion that these individuals should return to their roots in the countryside. Here, they would carry out their profession in the indigenous community, helping their own people with the skills they had learned in the city. For example, a children's storybook published by the Ministry of Education chronicled the young life of Maria, a poor, rural, indigenous girl who got the opportunity to further her education through her friendship with a girl from the city. Captivated by all she had learned in school, Maria grew up to be a teacher, but in the end returned to the rural community to teach. In the village, she settled down with her husband, and as a teacher, she was able to share the joys of school with indigenous children similar to her as a young girl. Ultimately, she belonged in and returned to the rural community. Such stories validated the option of living in rural areas rather than imagining it as a place no one would live given the choice to live elsewhere. Yet, they were specifically stories about indigenous people, and as such they served to circumscribe their geographical domain.

In a discussion about indigenous people who had gained financial success in the city, rural teacher Rosa, who self-identified as Quechua, turned the topic to address the obligation of such individuals to "their people".

If [indigenous people in the city] have money, for example, this doesn't necessarily mean that the indigenous here [in the rural area] will get ahead. What's more, they forget about their people, they don't return, they don't come back to their villages. They forget; they forget their origins, forget their culture. They don't remember. Now that they are elsewhere, they forget about their character and about other people. What do things matter to them anymore? [...] It's bad; it shouldn't be this way. I am who I am, and I should continue to be true to who I am. I'm not saying I'll necessarily be the exact same person when I die. I know that there will be changes, but we still need to try to help people who need it, to

search for – *to look for some way to make them come back and help their people in some way* (emphasis added).

This was not necessarily a description of actual Bolivian demographics of rural-urban migration, but rather of the type of discourse and representations popular within education. As in many other developing countries, Bolivian residential demographics have been changing. There is increasing urbanization, with more formerly rural residents seeking to better their economic situation through work in the city. While indigenous people are more likely to live in rural areas than non-indigenous people, the majority of Bolivians –including the majority of indigenous citizens- now live in urban areas. As of the 2001 Census, 65 percent of the indigenous population lived in urban areas compared to 35 percent who lived in rural areas. Among the top five most populous indigenous groups, all had a larger percentages living in urban areas than rural areas (INE 2011). As such, they could no longer be said to be strictly rural, particularly when one considered not just residency in urban areas but also temporary travel in and out of urban or peri-urban areas (i.e., towns and suburbs).

Indigeness Is Traditional

The Andeanist dichotomization of rural-indigenous to urban-nonindigenous stood in close relationship to how the former was imagined as traditional and, by oppositional logic, the latter as modern. Progressive educators and educationalists often said that Bolivia needed to preserve *its* “traditions”. This generally referred to indigenous Bolivian practices, not traditions that were brought in during Spanish colonialism. As such, indigeness was painted as truly traditional and European or white as something modern, even though the latter’s history in the Americas went back five centuries.

Many educators described Bolivian national culture as synonymous with its indigenous cultures while, in contrast, they constructed Spanish culture as a Western/European interjection upon authentic Bolivia, echoing ideas of *indigenismo*. Teachers’ discourse, particularly those with rural backgrounds, often supported indigeness as being essentially a part of the nation-state in a way that the dominant Spanish culture was not, even though official reform policy positioned both as part of the multiethnic pantheon of a new Bolivia. Certainly, part of the valorization of indigenous culture was to recognize it as belonging to Bolivia’s rich cultural heritage that extended back thousands of years.

However, cultural recognition is not just about the past; it is about the present and the future and, importantly, how the past informs the latter two.

In imagining indigenusness in folkloric terms and bound to practices rooted in the rural land, much as it has been for centuries past, indigenusness became defined as “traditional”, that which has been and will continue to be without change. In this way, indigenusness was conceptualized as a static culture that had to stay as it was to maintain its integrity. Its identity was rooted in its adherence to practices that it had always held; it was culturally frozen, obliged to continually replay the same rituals and exhibit its grounding in tradition to validate its authenticity as indigenus. Contrary to the dichotomy of classic Andeanism, which suggested an essentialist characterization of indigenusness as impervious to outside influences, the reform’s version of indigenusness was quite fragile, because it had no latitude to adapt and change without being in danger of losing itself. Similar to the viewpoint that successful indigenus people had an ethical obligation to return home and give back to their rural community, another line of discourse implied that indigenus people also had societal obligations to the cause of national diversity and multiculturalism to keep their traditions alive against the tide of change. In contrast, nonindigenus people of the city were free to be swept away in the current of global progress.

Similar to Paloma, teacher Lara was also a former pedagogical advisor and therefore well acquainted with official reform discourse. Lara now taught in a rural school, but she positioned herself to me as an outsider, expressing distain toward her “left-leaning” rural colleagues and demands from indigenus groups that she considered excessive. She had political ambitions, and I first met her through her connection with an international development agency that had put on a teacher-training workshop she had attended. In the following quote, Lara insisted on the importance of preserving traditional “technology” against the onslaught of modernity that threatened indigenus culture.

There’s an area called technology and practical knowledge, technology that can be recovered. There’s technologies that long ago were better than that of today, for example, handmade things, clay pots, vases, things that didn’t cost the *campesinos* a lot. There was the pot, there was the raw material. They didn’t need to buy any pots from the city, but now this is being lost. There are a few people that still know how to make big pitchers to store supplies, to store water so that it wouldn’t get dirty. But now, no. It is being lost; everyone wants to buy plastic, steel, and over there is the

problem of rescuing this technological learning of the ancestors, wooden spoons were made. [...] Now, one has to go to the city to buy your stainless steel spoon; they don't want the plates, all that, anymore.

The mere use of the word *technology* for handmade vessels suggested that these were something as good and advanced as what modernity had to offer, that the traditional should not be abandoned in favor of its newer replacements. Her delineation between tradition and modern was not only a description of de facto circumstances, it was normative: indigenous people should act in ways that maintained their traditional practices, even if they were inclined to do otherwise. Embedded in vocabulary and concepts that could have been lifted from the latest international literature on sustainable development, she proposed this technology was more appropriate for *campesinos* not only because it worked sufficiently well but also because it was inexpensive. While in certain respects, clay pots may have their allure both practically and culturally, they could also be fragile and difficult to clean, and one had to wonder if teacher Lara used them herself or what obligations non-indigenous urban people had to use these traditional technologies in order to ensure that they were not lost forever. White and mestizo people could buy steel and plastic in the city without guilt; when indigenous people did they same, they were supposedly turning their backs on their culture.

Nonindigenous culture, in contrast, through its relationship with urban modernity, was predicated on change. Mestizo/European Bolivian lifestyle was described as dynamic and continually influenced by ongoing changes in Western culture abroad that filtered into the city. As such, its shifting nature was indicative of its very identity; it validated and reaffirmed itself by progressing, changing, and developing. Thus, in this conceptualization, the phrase "Western modernity" was a linguistic redundancy; modernity was necessarily Western and vice versa. Furthermore, modernity, which was represented as a nonindigenous cultural phenomenon, was tied to Bolivia's expanding international connections and relations. Therefore, indigenous was local, but nonindigenous was global. Indigenousness was portrayed as confined to its proper space and not beyond; to leave its space was to lose its identity. Not only urban culture as a way of life but also its modern technology, which was both an example of global culture and a medium for its dissemination, was viewed a corrupting influence against indigenous cultural survival.

Cultural Purity and Identity

In the dichotomous mapping of geography (rural-urban), chronology (traditional-modern), and ethnicity (indigenous-nonindigenous) as clustered polarities, concern over exposing indigenous culture to outside influences rested in a perspective that integration diluted appropriate ethnic socialization, confusing cultural norms and allegiances. This was not only an issue when Quechua people, for example, moved into urban areas but also when they moved into regions traditionally occupied by other indigenous ethnicities, such as Guaraní, where their own culture might become entangled and diluted by another indigenous culture. The message was that mixing among different people, including between different indigenous groups, was a threat to the survival of specific indigenous cultures and therefore to ethnic equality. Ironically, this was in direct contradiction to the reform's philosophy of *interculturality*, which emphasized interaction and sharing between cultures rather than simple co-existence.

Teachers often described the act of “intermixing” with negative consequences, and they often recommended ethnic isolation as a strategy for preserving cultural diversity. Concerns about intercultural mixing were not limited to social exchange; some educators also articulated how cultural identity and racial integrity were degraded through biological mixing. For example, rural teacher Augustina, complained that white and mestizo people still discriminated against originary (indigenous) people as they did during Spanish colonialism, and contemporary Bolivians tried to hold onto those supposedly elite ethnic identities. She explained,

[For some Bolivians] there is still this sentiment of oneself being Spanish, but I said to them that I would be proud to be originary of this land. I don't want to be mixed, and we do not know if we are *criollos*, or if we are our race. Now, it isn't originary; we are mixed all of us.

Thus, interracial mixing had prevented Bolivians, including herself, from knowing who they were. Aymara teacher Juan explained what happened when people of different indigenous ethnicities and languages married, giving the example of a Quechua husband and an Aymara Spanish-speaking wife. He said that their children ended up speaking Spanish and then perhaps Aymara as a second language since the mother was the primary caretaker, but Quechua would become lost. In another example, speaking of the African Bolivians in the community

where she taught, teacher Vera, who identified as mestizo, said,

They speak Aymara, but you know what? This is a race of blacks, of a mixture of blacks and indios [...] They don't have their own culture. I mean, they're creating [...] a combination of cultures. The indio, for example, has his culture, right? [...] On the other hand, the blacks absolutely have a different culture: I mean the saya; it's their dance. And now, how are these people living? They're intermarrying. They have nothing pure, nothing truly their own.

These teachers focused on the importance of keeping cultures distinct by not mixing them. The boundaries of each culture circumscribed the proper habitus of each, outlining their separate milieus and appropriate behaviors.

CHALLENGING REPRESENTATIONS

The Myth of Authenticity and Cultural Binaries

Educational reform did not create the polarized images of indigenous and nonindigenous identities, but in many ways, it embraced them. Particularly as articulated by teachers, the accentuated differences that once constituted the rationale for discrimination became the foundations for celebrated diversity and a national unity based on allegiance to multicultural ideals. The ubiquitous representation of the rural, traditional indigenous person, with the blessing of reform education, formed the image of cultural authenticity and the standard that should be emulated in order to assume the identity of indigenous ethnicity. Thus, the urban, modern indigenous person was viewed as an untenable identity or at least an inauthentic one. If one wanted to lay claim to real indigenous identity, one had to stay rural and traditional. Living in the city and being exposed to modernity imperiled indigeness, implying a social obligation of indigenous people to stay isolated for the sake of not only their own cultural survival but also the nation's heritage.

While educators and educationalists bifurcated indigenous and non-indigenous into dichotomous identities of rural and urban, traditional and modern, reality has been hardly so neat in its categories. The transcendence of rural and urban boundaries by indigenous people is very common in Bolivia. Perhaps no better example exists than the Bolivian

women known as *cholitas*. Today, these women of indigenous ancestry have an iconic presence in Bolivia as they have continued the practice of wearing the same traditional Spanish finery that distinguished their class hundreds of years ago, which includes a distinctive hat appropriate to her region (in the La Paz region, it is a felt bowler), two long braids, and a many-layered *pollera* skirt. In her seemingly anachronistic garb, the *cholita* is a ubiquitous and famous figure of the Bolivian highlands and a popular subject of tourist postcards. Although her clothing replicates the urban Spanish styles of centuries past, for many, her particular dress has ironically now become a symbol of her traditional Bolivian indigeneity.

Importantly, the *cholita* illustrates the fallacy of the indigenous-nonindigenous binary. In this vein, Gusfield (1967) argues that tradition and modernity are a false polarity, writing “[t]he relations between the traditional and the modern do not necessarily involve displacement, conflict, or exclusiveness (351)”. Such assumptions rest on a conceptualization of tradition and modernity as existing on a single linear trajectory that extends from the past to the future. In reality, the traditional and the modern intertwine and unfold in both directions in relation to each other. The past –or more correctly, traditions, which are socially constructed understandings of a nation’s past– inform the particular version of modernity that will arise in the future. Similarly, the narrative of a nation’s history and traditions are often reimagined and rescripted to better accommodate a nation’s goals for the future (Gusfield 1967; Anderson 1993). Rather than weaken tradition, modernity may strengthen it. For example, in the Andes, computers assist indigenous scholars at urban universities to train bilingual teachers of indigenous languages (Garcia 2005).

Appiah (2006) asserts that in a globalized world, folkloric expressions or cultural artifacts are the only aspects of culture that should be preserved, and he questions “cultural preservationists” who advocate for the maintenance of cultural authenticity, which often becomes a mechanism for denying individual freedom within those cultures. Discussing what he calls “the Medusa Syndrome”, Appiah (2005) describes the dangers of official political recognition of identities. That is, defining the appropriate ways of living one’s culture or gender, creating expectations that refute individuality and self-determination in the expression of one’s identity, turns identities rigid – solidifying them into stone like one of Medusa’s victims. The Bolivian case well demonstrates Appiah’s claim that “in the realm of identity there is no bright line between recognition and imposition” (110). In Bolivia and else-

where, recognition must acknowledge the flexibility of cultural identities, reflecting not only individual agency but also the fact that cultures are social entities and therefore necessarily dynamic and not static monoliths.

A strategy of cultural preservation that requires people to engage themselves in the habits and practices of their ancestors supports the notion that cultural authenticity exists, an essentialness that is unmitigated by time or social context. The immense variety of cultures that can be seen around the world now did not come into existence fully formed; they are the result of millennia of social and cultural change. The ideal of cultural authenticity is ahistorical, a myth that obscures the reality that cultures have always been changing and often as a result of outside influences, whether this was five centuries ago or five years ago. However, changes that occur within the span of a nation's collective memory are often labeled as a corruption and a "contaminant". Ironically, many cultural goods that are regarded as examples of a particular culture's unique heritage actually have a history that speaks to cross-cultural exchange and influence of the past. For example, Bolivians often referenced the Yampara indigenous people of Tarabuco as epitomizing authentic indigenous culture and labeled them as role models of cultural pride and preservation for their unusually strong adherence to their traditional practices, most obviously exhibited in their clothing. In the town of Tarabuco, residents walk around in full traditional dress intermingling with *cholitos*, *cholitas*, and on weekends, with the foreign tourists, who come in by the bus load to for the chance to view an example "authentic indigenous culture". One of the most distinctive features of the Yampara's traditional indigenous dress is a helmet-like hat, the design of which was actually inspired by Spanish conquistadors' fashion hundreds of years ago.

Poverty and Wealth: the Unacknowledged Binary

The binary constellation of cultural representations, which included geography and chronology, also included economics; however, this last binary category of poverty and wealth had a very troubled placement among the other binaries within the reform. Indigenousness was not only understood as being rural and traditional but also poor, and non-indigenous was associated with not only urbanness and modernity but also wealth. Rural teachers in particular powerfully connected indigenousness to poverty and embedded this connection within a larger dichotomous configuration that delineated between what was indigen-

ous and what was not. In this particular regard, teachers' depiction of indigenusness contrasted sharply from the romanticized imagery contained in the government textbooks they used in their classrooms. That is, in comparison to teachers' lament that poverty was part and parcel with indigenusness, poverty seemed conspicuously absent in the official visual imagery of indigenusness that the Ministry presented for public consumption. The state's perceived lack of consideration to poverty in the reform was a major grievance of teachers who worked in rural areas. Administratively and behind the scenes, of course, the Ministry had anti-poverty programs that targeted rural areas, and it clearly acknowledged poverty as a serious problem that affected education. However, the Ministry's multicultural goal was also to venerate and celebrate rurality, traditions, and folklore in a positive picture of indigenusness. Poverty did not comfortably fit within this sanitized image and understandably was not part of the politically correct discourse and imagery of interculturality that the Ministry publicized.

Not only were indigenous people known to be disproportionately poor, in some contexts, the term *indigenous* was used synonymously with *poor*. For example, when I asked rural teacher Victor how he identified his ethnic origin given that his father's heritage was Spanish and his mother's was Quechua, he answered that he was basically "middle class". Later, while addressing whether recent demonstrations by *campesinos* were more about ethnicity or economics, he expanded, "We [Bolivians] would be classified into three groups: indigenous, middle class, and high society as we call it or the bourgeoisie, which is a small group, but really it has a lot of strength". I wondered what such a viewpoint as expressed by Victor would imply for a wealthy indigenous person. Would their ethnicity change dependent on their economic situation? How did this replay yet another dimension of the binary elaborated earlier in this paper? Was indigenous ethnicity not only bound to maintaining one's rurality but also to maintaining one's poverty?

Both rural and urban teachers very commonly described *campesinos* as poor; they also often spoke of economic opportunities in the city that beckoned people to leave rural areas. However, these conversations of rural economic marginality did not so often mix with their other conversations that promoted cultural maintenance as dependent on rurality. Even among teachers who decried the Ministry's inattention to rural poverty as indicative of the reform's failure, within the context of discussions about cultural preservation and equality, they did not address the economic implications to indigenous people of a formula for cultural survival that relied on indigenous imperatives of

rurality and tradition. It is relevant to mention here that the reform's attempt to establish bilingual education met strong resistance by Quechua and Aymara parents in many communities. Rather than embracing bilingual education as an affirmation of their culture, many indigenous parents believed it to be detrimental to their children's advancement in Spanish. Although their assessment of bilingual education in general was misplaced, these parents correctly identified Spanish fluency as key to being able to get a job in the city, which held more financial opportunities than the countryside. These parents thus viewed the government's bilingual education policy as yet another method to keep their families poor, trapped in rural areas with limited recourses.

Textbook illustrations of happy indigenous families on the farm, surrounded by chickens, gardens, and trees on the hillside, painted an idealized and romanticized picture of the experience of indigenous people at one with nature and living off the bounty of the land. In reality, the land was often not so bountiful and a rural lifestyle of subsistence agriculture often went hand-in-hand with poverty. Victor's conflation of ethnicity and class in describing the protesters against the government served to highlight rural teachers' criticisms: the reform, and the state that put it forth, could not begin to address what it meant to be indigenous without addressing what it meant to be economically marginalized in society.

CONCLUSION

The polarities that defined the "authentic" identities of both indigenous and nonindigenous people set behavioral standards for each group. However, as this paper illustrates, the conscientious maintenance of national cultural diversity fell disproportionately on indigenous people, because the rigidity of their idealized cultures rendered their ethnic identities fragile and thereby perpetually endangered. In the context of contemporary globalization and of increasing connections and interchanges internationally and nationally, the preservation of indigenous cultures was conceptualized as requiring constant effort pushing against so-called contamination. In contrast, nonindigenous culture, imagined as a flexible pan-Western urbanized modern sensibility, simply was seen as the status quo dominant culture regardless of what shape it took of how it changed. Government pictorial illustrations of Bolivia's diversity that represented indigenous peoples through elabo-

rate traditional cultural costumes and nonindigenous culture as white people dressed in t-shirt and blue jeans –rather than the traditional historical costumes of the Spanish or other Europeans- revealed how different cultures and their presumed authenticity were differently understood in relation to time, which was divided into mutually exclusive chronological categories of traditional and modern.

In the context of a new national identity based on diversity and multiculturalism, indigenous cultures were recognized as valuable to all of Bolivia; however, the onus to save cultures did not fall upon all Bolivians equally. I conclude that in the name of cultural liberation, indigenous people had performative obligations not to forget their traditions, not to be assimilated, not to abandon rurality or the folklore of their heritage. For them, listening to rock music or enjoying the latest fashion trends flirted with cultural treason. The reform's educational objectives that pushed professionalism for all impelled indigenous students to further their education, to attend college or university in order to "be someone", but these social pressures also accompanied expectations to return to their rural home, for if they stayed in the city and take up modern ways, they risked injury to their very indigenesness.

By contrast, nonindigenous people had few of these obligations; they were urged to enjoy and celebrate indigenous culture but with little commitment or obligation. Their contribution to the multicultural cause, for example, learning Quechua as a second language, showed patriotic solidarity and was highly recommended by almost all educators, but they were unlikely to be blamed if they chose to learn English instead, for example, so they could travel abroad. They were, after all, at least fulfilling their normative ethnic identity as participants in a globally connected modernity. They were allowed to engage in cultural consumption at leisure. They could attend university in the city, become professionalized, and then live where they wished. In so much as multiculturalism was understood in nationalistic terms and part of a newly imagined Bolivian future of social equality and ethnic diversity, the maintenance of indigenous cultures and the traditions associated with them became acts of nation-building. According to teachers' discourse, indigenous people's failure to stem the loss of tradition was leading to the slow demise of their culture. Since the national dream of multiculturalism and social equality depended on cultural diversity, the disappearance of traditional culture in Bolivia would not only be a wound to indigenous identities, but to the nation's identity, which teachers described as derived from its ancient rich cultural diversity and geographical heritage. Furthermore, some teachers characterized

indigenous people's continuous presence on Bolivian land that predated the Spanish as that which legitimized contemporary Bolivia's territorial sovereignty. That is, Bolivia's right to be there was based on Bolivia being an indigenous nation.

Bolivian multiculturalism in the reform era shared distinct similarities with the case study of liberal multiculturalism in Australia detailed by Povinelli (2002). Australia's official recognition of aborigines illustrates what Povinelli describes as a new type of post-colonial oppression in which indigenous people must meet impossible standards of authenticity in exchange for cultural rights. Thus, the greatest beneficiary of official multiculturalism ends up being not minorities but the dominant population, who can rewrite their nation's historical narrative as one of atonement for racist sins of the past and redemption through recognition of cultural difference. These patterns between Australia and Bolivia highlight the problematic theoretical underpinnings in popular conceptualizations and implementation strategies of multiculturalism that have become aligned with human rights and gained strength around the globe.

Lastly, the dichotomized conceptualization of indigenous and non-indigenous promoted by the reform sanitized ethnic difference into an image of diversity where groups simply lived culturally different lives rather than politically, economically, and socially different lives. It subtly erased oppression and struggle in much the same way that *National Geographic's* portrayal of people of color is one of "tranquility and well-being" in which the audience is "seldom confronted with historical facts of racial or class violence, with hunger as it unequally affects black and white children, or with social movements that question established racial hierarchies" (Lutz and Collins 1993, 164-165). Even though rural teachers engaged in the binary logic representing indigenous-nonindigenous, when they rallied against the reform and the government that produced it, they saw their protests as an attempt to give voice to that struggle for equality. In consideration of the images and representations associated with indigenosity that emerged or were upheld in the implementation of reform multiculturalism, this paper has questioned how representations that are meant to liberate can also serve to oppress. Furthermore, as Fraser (1997) explicates regarding the "postsocialist condition", those who are concerned with the cause of social equality must consider how policies of cultural recognition simultaneously may also circumvent issues of economic redistribution.

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