



\* THE LETTERED INDIAN \*

Race, Nation, and Indigenous Education  
in Twentieth-Century Bolivia

*Brooke Larson*

*The Lettered Indian*

BUY



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in Twentieth-Century Bolivia*

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*For Carter*

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Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world[,] . . . cannot be accomplished by the wave of a magic wand, a natural cataclysm, or a gentleman's agreement. Decolonization is a historical process: In other words, it can only be understood, it can only find its significance and become self-coherent, insofar as we can discern the history-making movement which gives it form and substance.

—FRANTZ FANON,  
*The Wretched of the Earth*

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## PREFACE

Book ideas often have a way of germinating for long periods of time, quite unbeknownst to the future author. I first stumbled on the theme of this book, quite unknowingly, in the summer of 1966, when I participated in an NGO (nongovernmental organization) program in rural education on the outskirts of Pátzcuaro, in Mexico. Like some well-intentioned projects transporting the beneficence of First World technologies, aid, and expertise to parts of the “Third World,” this one backfired. But on a personal level, it taught me something about the ethical ambiguities that rural development projects can engender. Those unintended lessons resurfaced many decades later as I set out to study the history of rural schools in the Bolivian highlands.

But first things first. My initial encounter with the subject of Indian schooling began happily enough. Our work crew’s task was to help lay the stone foundation of a future educational and conference center. In sight of the glistening waters of Lake Janitzio, we chipped away at rocks, filled wheelbarrows, and pushed our loads downhill to the construction site, a short distance from the lakeshore. There, we were told, a local Mexican work crew (working under the direction of a Mexico City architect, who never actually showed up that summer) would begin building an international conference center. Once finished, the gleaming center would become the destination of NGO development officers, agronomists, rural sociologists, development economists, and various educators—all of them eager to advance the Green

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Revolution by exchanging ideas and designing policies to raise living standards, improve the rural workforce, and modernize the countryside in Mexico and other parts of Latin America.

Ineffectual as we were, our tiny do-gooding group seemed to be doing no harm. One day, however, we traveled to the far side of the lake to pay a visit to George M. Foster, the Berkeley anthropologist. This encounter was a disaster. Instead of endorsing our collective work project, Foster delivered a stern lecture about the potential environmental and cultural damage that the Green Revolution, writ large, could unleash on the region's fragile lacustrine ecology.<sup>1</sup> Did we not realize that capitalist farming would eventually erode the topsoil? That modern irrigation works would drain the lake, turning its waters brackish from pesticide runoff? And what would happen to Janitzio's local fishing industry, the traditional livelihood of local villages? How, then, would local communities stem the migratory tide of Tarascan youth, abandoning their parched lands and dry lake beds for the throbbing metropolis of Mexico City or en route to the northern border?

Presented with this dystopian picture, our group faced a moral dilemma, and our work ethic quickly disintegrated. We split into warring factions: the true believers in our project continued hauling rocks; the moral skeptics went on strike. At night, we debated the issues Professor Foster had raised and voted whether to work or strike. As for me, I left the rock pile and spent the remainder of the summer involved in a local literacy project, teaching a small group of Tarascan young women how to read and write in Spanish. It was a wonderful experience, but I soon discovered that even in that nightly literacy class, I had not yet extracted myself from the local NGO project, preaching the gospel of Western progress to local campesinos. Indeed, the textbooks I used in the classroom were actually agro-modernization primers for peasants! Several years ago I came across those illustrated readers. Published in 1958 by the Centro Regional de Educación Fundamental para América Latina, a transnational NGO based in Pátzcuaro, one of the textbooks was aimed at male campesinos in the region. It told the story of a traditional Tarascan fisherman being urged by a visiting white engineer to "give up the old ways" and switch to modern chicken-raising, with the promise of credit and loans from the Credit Bank. Another textbook promoted the benefits of literacy among the illiterate men of the peasant community, so they could overcome their "shame" by learning their letters, recover their sense of honor, and join the modernizing national community. Peasant women were ciphers in those stories, except as apron-wearing wives and helpmates in the chicken-raising

industry.<sup>2</sup> In the time-honored tradition of Mexican adult literacy training, I was helping to socialize my young students in accordance with the patriarchal values of agrarian modernity and national integration.

As I thought about this experience, though, I realized that my complicity was only half the story; and in this case, the textual *medium* (the peasant alphabet reader) was probably far more significant than the intended moral *message*. My students giggled at the textbook's illustrations of the ideal hen farmer and his happy housewife, but they were deadly serious about mastering the rudiments of Spanish literacy. However ideologically freighted their textbook, those young Tarascan women pursued the mastery of alphabetic literacy for their own purposes and at great personal sacrifice. They had dropped their daily work, walked the long road to school each night, and willed themselves to learn spoken and written Spanish so that they might widen their horizons, empower themselves, and improve their life chances. That much was clear from our informal classroom conversations. Looking back from the distance of now, I can appreciate how the very act of mastering their letters represented a courageous act of cultural self-empowerment—a way of pushing against the entrenched odds of growing up poor, rural, and female in the mid-twentieth-century Tarascan highlands. There were, as I later came to understand, multiple narrative threads and layered complexities to the history of local literacy and rural school politics in Michoacán's villages and elsewhere in rural Mexico. Since those days, Mexican scholarship on rural education has exploded. Interdisciplinary research has decentered state-centric approaches to reexamine the dynamic interplay among regional and local stakeholders under shifting cultural and political circumstances in postrevolutionary Mexico.<sup>3</sup> In Bolivia, by contrast, it would take another two decades for ethnographic and historical scholarship on the theme of Indigenous and peasant schooling to finally catch fire.

In the meantime, this formative field experience banished any implicit notions I might once have had about the normative neutrality of knowledge, literacy, and learning. It opened my youthful eyes to the underlying politics of knowledge and schooling, culturally situated forms of learning, and the potentially transformative meanings that “popular education,” broadly defined, might signify to marginal rural constituencies. Refracted through the decades, my memory of that summer of fieldwork in Michoacán—the rock pile fiasco, the anthropologist's admonishment, the pamphlet's chicken-farmer allegories, and the nightly reading circle—sharpened my intuitive appreciation for the manifold, often contradictory ways that literacy, knowledge, and

schooling acquired symbolic and strategic value in traditional rural societies situated on the margins of modernity. I could not have known then that decades (and several books) later, I would be back at the drawing board, thinking critically about the contested histories and politics of rural education—this time, in the context of Bolivia’s tumultuous history of neocolonial violence, nation-making schemes, and Indigenous social movements.

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## Introduction

There are two human inventions which may be considered more difficult than any others, the art of government and the art of education; and people still contend as to their very meaning.

—IMMANUEL KANT, *Thoughts on Education*

When Kant penned his “thoughts on education” in the early nineteenth century, philosophers had long debated the subject. He was influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s 1762 work, *Emile*, the eighteenth century’s most popular treatise on education. That essay had conjured a utopia of emancipation, one where the child’s spirit and intelligence were elevated not through the deadening routines of formal schooling, but through the airy experiences of life and nature. The “natural child,” once liberated, would evolve into a virtuous citizen.<sup>1</sup> To Kant, on the other hand, formal education was the prime instrument of civilization, but also the irrefutable index of superior Western virtues. The unschooled child—and, by extension, the unschooled masses—embodied

the innate primitivism of human impulses: an unbridled “lust for freedom,” “bestly urges,” and “unruly behavior.” The savage child, buried within the body and soul of the Everyman, had to be exposed to civilization’s disciplinary regimes before he could qualify for entry into the social compact of citizenship.

By implication, Kant’s logic adhered to the world’s division of advanced and primitive regions as well. The inhabitants of “savage nations,” he believed, were condemned by nature to languish forever in “a kind of barbarism.”<sup>2</sup> Broadly conceived, his imperial cartography mapped nations and continents along the binary of civilization/savagery—a nineteenth-century literary trope that threw shadows of pessimism and doubt across the utopian schemes of Western state-builders, especially as they fixed their gaze on the colonized regions of the world. Like Kant, post-Enlightenment men of science and letters invoked the authority of “race science” to cast “savage subjects” out of the modern citizen-state on the premise that they were innately uneducable and thus ungovernable by the light of reason. Yet despite his certitude about the twin pillars of civilization, Kant had to concede that “the art of government and the art of education” defied common understanding among enlightened statesmen in his own day. “People still contend as to their very meaning,” he noted in 1803, with a hint of exasperation.<sup>3</sup>

If, in Kant’s view, European philosophers had difficulty coalescing around ideas of modern statecraft, imagine the epic challenges facing Spanish American elites as they tried to adapt European political ideals and institutions to their own ravaged societies and multiracial populations in the aftermath of the Independence wars! A state administration must fill the power vacuum; generals on horseback had to yield to men of laws and letters, trained in modern educational establishments that did not yet exist. From the onset of republican rule, education reform became an obsessive concern. Angel Rama writes, “The unanimous call for *education* rivaled the clamor for *liberty* during these years . . . because the organization of an educational system was [deemed] indispensable to the [new] political and administrative order.”<sup>4</sup> Advocates of secular education faced daunting social challenges (and not only the opposition of the Catholic Church). They had to school a labor force composed of millions of enslaved people, impoverished free people of color, Indigenous peasants inhabiting remote villages and haciendas, and motley plebeian crowds of mixed racial and ethnic heritages—all struggling, in one way or another, to break free of oppression and rise above their humble origins. Outside the urban enclaves of “lettered cities,” literacy rates were dismally low: much less than a quarter of the population was considered

to be functionally literate (that is, able to decipher the meaning of written Spanish letters and words); and many fewer could both read and write. If, as Eric Hobsbawm argues for nineteenth-century Europe, “the progress of schools and universities measures that of nationalism,” Latin America’s new republics had enormous work ahead of them if they hoped to foster national consciousness and forge strong, unified nation-states.<sup>5</sup> Conjuring new nations out of the racial fragments of the old empire and instilling a unifying sense of national belonging to peoples living on the margins hinged on modern educational systems capable of socializing an incipient citizenry.

But as the mystique of education inflated nationalist expectations, it also precipitated decades of discord and debate among Latin America’s erudite writers, pedagogues, and politicians.<sup>6</sup> For some, the theme of education was a framing device for utopian thinking. Writing in the radical Enlightenment tradition, Simón Rodríguez, Simón Bolívar’s famous tutor, argued that the true republic would be forged by public schools and consolidation of a national language—the constitutive elements for instilling a sense of peoplehood in Latin America’s fragmented and inchoate societies. Rodríguez’s egalitarian values and utopian spirit opened a vein of progressive educational reformism in Latin America that inspired generations of advocates and practitioners of “popular education,” down to the present day. If the ideals of republicanism were to flourish, he argued, the public school must cultivate the reasoning ability of its citizenry, and not simply produce legions of elite *letrados* (lawyers, scribes, literary writers, etc.).<sup>7</sup> His Latin American critics, however, called for the application of Europe’s latest disciplinary methods: classroom drills, monitorial routines, and other innovations plucked from the harsh Lancaster model of schooling designed for the children of Britain’s laboring class. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Argentina’s preeminent man of letters and educational reformer, was a famous skeptic of democratic schooling (although he was a great admirer of New England’s “common school”). He believed deeply in the value of public schooling, not only to open young minds to the light of reason but also to reform unruly behavior and instill in the child an abiding sense of moral and civic duty. Sarmiento’s hardline pedagogy was compatible with Kant’s strictures calling for “the inculcation of habit in the youngster’s preparation that he or she may follow faithfully the rules of conduction imposed from above,” notes Mark Szuchman.<sup>8</sup> Beyond this erudite circle of liberal statesmen and pedagogues, Latin America’s elites often looked askance at the republican fervor for public school reform. Either they dwelled on the impossible odds and intrinsic limits that blocked modern

statecraft and public education reform, or they worried about the potential threat that rural schooling, once implemented, would pose to the prevailing political and social hierarchies.

During the late nineteenth century, the entwined intellectual movements of “positivism” and “race science” only intensified debate over the education problem in Latin America. Latin American modernizers put their faith in the power of positivist thinking—that is, they invested their efforts in higher education reform and technical training institutes. Their purpose was to produce a young technocratic elite to meet the imperatives of Latin America’s age of commodity exports and incipient industrialization. Positivist educational reform (spreading through Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Mexico from the 1870s on, and later in the Andean nations) was seen as an institutional and cognitive arm of scientific state-building, economic progress, social uplift, and racial integration. Yet such modernist aspirations were stymied by the ascendance of “scientific racism,” particularly variants of French race theory and social Darwinism. Race-thinking, predicated on the primordial powers of biology, nature, climate, and/or history, shook the modernizers’ faith in the power of modern technology, market capitalism, and social reform to call forth the glories of economic prosperity and racial progress. Out of existential interest, many progressive Latin American statesmen eschewed the most doctrinaire theories of genetic determinism, and instead preferred to frame racial difference as a function of geography, climate, social evolution, or culture. Such “soft theories” of racial inequality opened cracks in the body politic for remedial interventions by statesmen, scientists, and pedagogues—all of them wielding the latest disciplinary tools and social policies designed to turn the racial situation around (toward whiteness or *mestizaje*).<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, European theories of race often projected doleful images of racial hybridity and degeneration, and they nurtured an “aristocratic revulsion for [the idea of] democracy, incipient mass society, and the mixing of peoples.”<sup>10</sup> Precepts of scientific racism even threatened to undermine Sarmiento’s celebrated faith in the remedial power of public schooling to solve Latin America’s racial problems. Although he did not completely abandon his belief in education as the solution to Latin America’s racial backwardness, a toxic (particularly anti-Indigenous) racism infected his evolving ideas, policies, and attitudes toward the subject later in his life.<sup>11</sup> By the 1880s, Sarmiento had become a conflicted man of two minds, a split public persona: while he still championed enlightened school reform, he was also the purveyor of racial determinism. And his racial imaginary was the dark filter through which he perceived

the need to conquer the Indigenous inhabitants of the pampa. Once he was president, Sarmiento acted on that conviction. In 1879–80, he ordered a new military operation (euphemistically named “Conquest of the Desert”) to eradicate the “barbarian hordes” (gauchos, Indians, and caudillos) from the Argentine frontier.<sup>12</sup> In this one tortured soul, we perceive an evolving war of ideas and sentiments that raged between the utopian promise of educational reform and the dystopian threat of racial determinism. That pernicious war of ideas would play out on many platforms in different times and places.

Beyond the southern periphery of Argentina, where the plains rise into the northern hill country and then ascend into the high Andes, the “Indian problem” could not be resolved through military assault, certainly not on the genocidal scale of Argentina’s military conquest. The challenges of nation-building were particularly daunting in the fledgling Andean republics. The void of statelessness in the Andean countryside, and the persistence of colonial norms and racial hierarchies (tribute, communal landholding, indirect rule, caste divisions, etc.), threw up structural barriers to projects of integrative nationalism. Dense settlements of Quechua- and Aymara-speaking pastoralists and farmers, laborers and traders, had subsidized the colonial enterprise for three centuries and continued to serve as the semicolonized rural workforce, even as the rural Andes were swept into transatlantic currents of capitalist modernity. Campaigns of ethnic cleansing would not, and could not, be seriously entertained as a conceivable “solution” to the Indian problem under the aegis of the civilizing state.<sup>13</sup> Alternative solutions would have to be engineered by criollo state-builders, eager to pacify the interior frontiers, integrate the Indigenous population, and improve the racial composition of their Andean republics. Under those circumstances, liberal-positivist elites in Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador were not apt to disavow the potential agency of education and government, even if they had existential doubts about the Indian’s ultimate capacity for cultural assimilation. Indeed, many statesmen and intellectuals embraced the mystique of education as the best, and perhaps the only, pathway toward cultural unity, modernity, and nationhood. In their feverish imaginaries, the exalted figure of the public school teacher, trained in the “normal” (teacher-training) institute, would carry the Kantian torch of enlightened governance and education into the rural Andean hinterlands.

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*The Lettered Indian* explores the contested politics of governance and education that unfolded in the Bolivian Andes, roughly between the early

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1900s and the 1970s.<sup>14</sup> Through layered narratives, this book explores the rural Indian school as a contested site and symbol of knowledge, power, and identity during the political and cultural formation of neocolonial modernity. The book's geopolitical focus is the politically volatile highlands of La Paz, traversing the ethnic borderland of Aymara rural networks and the white urban metropole in the city of La Paz. A preliminary note: this book does not offer an institutional or policy-oriented history of education of twentieth-century Bolivia. Instead, I have drawn widely from a rich interdisciplinary scholarship to explore rural schooling, both in discourse and practice, as an intercultural battleground over wider social issues of race, nation, and education in the making of postcolonial Bolivia.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the book's seven chapters (each of which is interpretive and synthetic and begs for further inquiry) toggle among four arenas of action: a shifting state-centered analysis of educational policy, debate, and ideology; a regional ethnography of Indigenous repertoires of vernacular literacy and school activism; an interethnic sphere of struggle and mediation among radical middle-class educators, urban intellectuals, and working-class activists; and the transnational domain of pedagogical ideas and informal empire. Using multisited and multifaceted approaches, I hope to shed new light on the disparate social groups involved in the politics of governance and education (broadly defined) in Bolivia's racially fraught political environment. As a whole, this book is grounded in ethnographic and historical detail while also fixing its sights on the distant horizon of national and transnational historical change. As we shall see in due course, rural Indigenous communities were both the object of educational reform policies and the source of active peasant protagonists, who often became the driving force behind the expansion of rural schooling. Through their actions and words, Aymara people (in particular) became the subjects of their own (oral and written) history of struggle for literacy and schooling, and the agents of their own emancipation from the scourge of "slavery and ignorance"—the compounded oppression of body and mind that Indigenous people often used to characterize the essence of their racial subjugation. This, then, is their history, which I have reinterpreted within the wider framework of Bolivia's tumultuous and halting journey toward modern nationhood.

Although anchored primarily in the highland regions of La Paz, this book casts its net widely to include a range of disparate criollo and Indigenous characters from both sides of the internal colonial divide, including those interstitial groups who trespassed on the ethnic borderland, and a few foreign interlopers who ventured into the Bolivian Andes to dabble in rural school

reform at particular times and places. While keeping an eye on the wider transregional horizons, I use the lens of ethnographic history to catch sight of some of the local drama unfolding on the ground. There, Indigenous activists actively engaged in fighting for literacy, lands, schools, and the rule of justice as Bolivia transitioned from a dual republic (an institutional hangover from colonial and early republican times) to a centralizing and modernizing state, albeit one cleaved by race and ethnicity, social class, and geography. As political circumstances changed during the 1930s and early 1940s, new educational practices became the seedbed of radical pedagogies, articulated to wider agrarian movements and coalitional class politics. Grassroots peasant movements, and their expanding political repertoires, opened new subaltern spaces for popular education, rural syndicalism, and citizenship practices to flower in the 1940s, helping to catalyze explosive sociopolitical change in the 1950s. By mapping this rough terrain of tutelary peasant politics and insurgent literacy practices over five decades, then, this book unearths some of the constitutive elements of a decolonizing political counterculture that surfaced in the Aymara highlands (and, later, the Quechua valley regions) at key political conjunctures in Bolivian history.

Below, I sketch the book's narrative framework, conceptual orientations, and interwoven themes.

## Enlightenment Fictions, Racist Fears

The book begins by mapping the political geography of the northern Altiplano, an unfolding internal frontier defined by ethnic conflict, the dispossession of communal landholdings, the spread of hacienda servitude, and growing state incursions. Around 1900, the new capital of La Paz became a spatial concentrate of political power, oligarchic wealth, and the state's civilizing ambitions. To unshackle the Aymara-speaking Indian child from the Kantian state of barbarity and backwardness was, for Bolivia's liberal-positivist reformers, the state's indisputable civic and moral imperative. But the establishment of rural schools that would teach Indians their letters, and thus prepare them for the rights and privileges of (male) enfranchised citizenship, threatened to remake Bolivia into a multiracial polity—a utopia that was as remote as it was dangerous in the eyes of the ruling oligarchy.

Chapter 1 ("To Civilize the Indian") explores the contradictory impulses that both impelled and subverted Bolivia's first modern efforts at governance

and education along the ethnic frontier of La Paz during the early twentieth century. Race and education worked at ideological cross-purposes in the modern psychology of the ruling oligarchy. Prescriptive tutelary schemes were vested in the power of schooling to change the outward behavior and inner character of the Indian subject. But social policy reforms unleashed virulent reactions whenever they threatened the status quo ante. Bolivia's enlightened men of science and letters were often, themselves, the progenitors of anti-Indigenous racism. They indulged in cosmopolitan ideas about racial determinism—ranging from social Darwinian strictures against degenerative race-mixing, to climatic racial determinism (claiming that different racial groups were destined to live in separate climate zones), to Eurocentric notions about Anglo-Saxon racial superiority. Each strain of racial theory carried policy implications for how the problem of Indian schooling should be addressed—but bundled together, kinetic ideas about race and education constituted a special field of knowledge (which I call “tutelary race-thinking”). This protean field focused on the putative benefits or dangers, possibility or impossibility, of educating the rural masses and how educational policy should be crafted to fit the peculiar racial needs of the nation. Even Bolivia's optimistic reformers were pulled apart by contrary racial prescriptions. To educate the rural masses was to assimilate, rehabilitate, preserve, and/or segregate the population, sometimes all at once! On one point, however, there was a sense of certitude: the country's racial future and national viability pivoted on the outcome of this ongoing battle.

With the Indian education problem unresolved, the Liberal state's first federal effort at educational reform was bound to fail. As chapter 1 shows, however, several important precedents were set. The Montes regime (1904–7; 1914–17) created a few elementary schools and dispatched a small band of itinerant teachers into surrounding provinces. Meanwhile, pedagogical thinkers built castles in the air about the power of “national pedagogy,” capable of transforming the primitive Aymara Indian into an obedient and efficient farming class. But liberal zealotry was matched by conservative fear, and in the realm of ideas, the agency of enlightened educational reform ran up against determinist theories about race, climate, and culture. On a practical level, the Liberal Party's enemies warned against the danger of lettering Indians, lest they breach the literacy/suffrage divide and clog the political sphere with yet more lawsuits, mass petitions, and vindictive manifestos. Schooling the Indian could be perilous, they warned, if it were to upend the racial caste hierarchy. Thus, if the rural village school was heralded by social

reformers as an evolutionary conveyor belt, moving the lowly *indios* upward from savagery toward civilization, its expansion was thwarted by landlords, conservatives, and provincial authorities, vested in the ancien régime and fearful of Aymara sedition.

In the end, Bolivia's ideologues of race and education bowed to the dictates of "scientific pedagogy" that proclaimed the Indian race to be educable. Furthermore, the viability of the Bolivian nation depended on educational reform: without an assimilated Indian mass of Spanish-speaking farmers and laborers (constituting some 80 or 90 percent of the population around 1900, depending on official racial stats and categorizations), Bolivia could not function as, or even claim to be, a cohesive nationality. Only the practical policy question remained to be solved: How should public instruction be tailored for, and delivered to, Bolivia's school-age children of the Indian race?

This chapter follows the twisted logic of educational advocates and skeptics—both the cosmopolitans and their various critics—who agonized over the Indian problem and its putative solution. It argues that after almost two decades, Bolivia created a blueprint of public education reform, especially tailored to its "peculiar" racial environment. The upshot was a policy plan that split public schooling into two segments, urban and rural, both designed to meet the differential educational needs (mental and manual) of mestizo and Indigenous children. Indian children of the countryside would receive a lesser education. They would be exposed to a "minimal" (usually two-year) curricular course, and they would be immersed in the "national" (Spanish) language in the classroom while gaining "practical knowledge" suitable to their rural milieu, cognitive deficits, and basic subsistence needs. More widely, the goal of rural schooling was to enhance the quality and discipline of the rural Indian workforce while introducing the Indian to lessons in cultural hygiene. Regionalism and ethnicity loomed large in early twentieth-century tutelary race-thinking, making the ethnic "Aymara race" the immediate target of Liberal government school reform and turning the provinces surrounding the white metropole of La Paz into ground zero.

As always, the dynamic interplay of racial theories and pedagogical propositions was profoundly shaped by unfolding political circumstances and by tensions on the ground in particular historical moments. Government school policy (albeit still more imagined than real) was driven by contradictory colonialist needs of racial assimilation and class segmentation. Rhetoric aside, Liberal state school policy walked a fine line between its goal of civilizing the Indians (i.e., bringing them into the nation as efficient workers and loyal patriots)

and its fear of disrupting the fragile racial order in a region where “race war” and “rebellious Indians” were a chronic source of white fear. Engineering this delicate balance drove Bolivian elites to scour the Western world for pedagogical ideas and aid. Europe brimmed with a variety of educational models, and Belgium sent a young pedagogue who helped Bolivia set up its first modern school system in the early 1900s. Other Bolivian educators drew inspiration from North America’s Indian boarding school model of acculturation and from the “Negro industrial institutes,” a pillar of the Deep South’s system of racial segregation. How those eclectic foreign pedagogies were applied to the scientific diagnosis (and institutional remedy) of Bolivia’s “Indian education problem” continued to shape the elites’ ongoing arguments about the vagaries of race, nationality, and education reform until well into the twentieth century.

### Andean Literacy before Schooling

Indigenous school activism and aspirations taking place in the margins of the Aymara hinterland could scarcely be imagined, much less contained, by the *paceño* oligarchy in the early twentieth century. Chapter 2 (“Lettered Aymara”) pivots to resituate the story of school activism that flourished in the outlying provinces of La Paz. It sketches out the wider play of forces that stoked the fires of peasant aspirations for literacy and schooling between 1900 and 1930. As I seek to show, rural school expansion (uneven and tenuous though it was) sprang from the spontaneous actions and organized campaign of Aymara peasant authorities, for whom alphabetic literacy, documentary culture, and judicial politics had become weapons of combat in their legal struggles to defend or reclaim their original title deeds to colonial landholdings. Engaging in subversive appropriation, Aymara political authorities transformed the civilizers’ ideal of the “educated Indian” into a lettered warrior, a bilingual and literate interlocutor capable of challenging the Liberal state’s ruthless policy of territorial annexation and the oligarchy’s racial theories that legitimated it. Resituated in the Aymara hinterland, the prosaic “alphabet” school was transformed into a symbolic site of subversive political activism among a spreading oral/literate network of Aymara and Quechua people.<sup>16</sup>

Although Aymara school-based activism was particularly intense in Bolivia’s northern Altiplano in the early 1900s, it ran concurrently through

the veins of Andean peasant society in various times and places.<sup>17</sup> Traumatic moments of social threat and violence could suddenly inflate the currency of Indigenous bilingualism and literacy, spurring Andean peasant leaders to hone their Spanish legal skills; hire bilingual scribes, notaries, lawyers, or other representatives; and otherwise go to great lengths to produce the bureaucratic and legal paperwork in their dogged pursuit of justice and collective voice—a deeply ingrained folk-legal tradition of judicial politics and representation that had come down through the centuries of living under Spanish colonial rule. Andean colonial *caciques* had wielded the legal protocol and technologies of Spain’s “empire of letters” to negotiate and contest the colonizers’ rules of governance, coercion, and oppression that burdened the colonized peasantry. Judicial politics, resistance, and tactical uses of alphabetic literacy (or, to borrow Rolena Adorno’s compound idea, “writing and resistance”)<sup>18</sup> were baked into the mud bricks of Spanish colonial hegemony and endured, albeit on a more diffuse and local level, during the postindependence era of Andean nation-building.<sup>19</sup> Although most rural people still inhabited monolingual villages and rarely came into direct contact with the *criollo* world of alphabetic literacy, vernacular literacy practices flowered in many Andean regions. Agrarian flare-ups, write anthropologists Frank Salomon and Mercedes Niño-Murcia, suddenly inflated the symbolic and tactical value of literacy learning in rural villages, already engaged in the defense of community as a primordial value among their kinsmen.<sup>20</sup> The turn of the twentieth century was such a conjuncture in the southern Peruvian Andes and northern Bolivian Altiplano. There a booming export trade in wool and the spread of the railroad turned the traditional pastures and cropland of the high plains into coveted real estate, newly vulnerable to *latifundismo* and predatory state policies. As Joanne Rappaport shows, parallel developments engulfed the Cauca region of southern highland Colombia. Their old covenants of communal landholding broken, Indigenous communities under siege began trafficking more heavily in legal, notarial, and archival documents. At such times, the roving *indio letrado*—slandered by city elites as a *tinterillo*, or “ink spiller”—became a colloquial Andean stereotype of the racially ambiguous interloper who incited, and represented, litigious Indians in their courtroom and political battles.<sup>21</sup>

This book traces similar insurgent developments on the Bolivian Altiplano, where local land conflicts flared into a regional movement of *caciques-apoderados*, fighting for their rights to lands, schools, and justice under the Liberal rule of law.<sup>22</sup> Linking the politics of literacy and schooling to the wider

Andean struggle for communal land restitution, I trace the “textual imprints” of Aymara peasant authorities who, through their bilingual intermediaries, played a vital role in mobilizing discursive and tangible support for their right to local elementary schools (as promised by Bolivia’s 1874 Constitution). Individual protagonists can provide glimpses of the lived experiences of rural activists who took up the cause of Indian schooling. Accordingly, the story is threaded with textual fragments extracted from government records, court cases, newspaper editorials and articles, literary works, and other official or semiofficial documents. These “autoethnographic” sources (to use Mary Louise Pratt’s term) were “authentic” lettered artifacts, although mediated by legal protocol, translation, and various tactical considerations, in which “colonized subjects [undertook] to represent themselves in ways that engage[d] with the colonizer’s own terms.”<sup>23</sup> As Andean ethnohistorians have documented, some Andean peasant leaders mastered the craft of interethnic communication. Deploying the protocol and media of their oppressors, Andean activists dispatched mail and messages; mobilized court and political challenges; published newspaper articles and notices to sway public opinion; and conducted research in the archives to buttress their arguments over disputed land claims. More than simply a medium, literacy came to define an objective of Aymara communal politics. Because Aymara leaders invoked colonial law to secure traditional land rights and liberal law to secure the right to education, their quest for land and schooling became inextricably linked by the 1910s. In tracking several Aymara literacy instructors and activists—from Bolivia’s powerful caciques, and their appointed legal advocates, to the anonymous rural teacher—we can partially unearth the half-buried, muffled voices of “rustic illiterates” who founded village schools; demanded the right to education in elaborate petitions and lawsuits; denounced incidents of violence; advocated for the cause of Indian education; or imagined what cultural decolonization might come to mean in a more inclusive, pluralist society. In the course of their activism, some Aymara leaders engaged in adversarial literacy and developed an incipient kind of popular education through their public denunciation of criollo acts of racial persecution, stolen lands, purloined documents, and pillaged schoolhouses. Where texts allow, I open a window into wider political horizons, where identities of indigeneity were articulated within the ideals of communal autonomy and citizenship equality. In several cases, Indigenous petitions from the 1920s and 1930s advanced the causes of Indian territorial repatriation, schooling, and integration into a “renovated” multiracial nation that might yet come to be.

## The Rise and Fall of Warisata

A remarkable communitarian school project that flourished on the Altiplano in the 1930s opens another portal into the Aymara world of rural school activism. Chapter 3 (“Warisata”) takes a close ethnographic look at the intricate local dynamics of communal school-building in the turbulent political environment of the 1930s. I seek to show that, by most measures, the construction of that “*escuela-ayllu*” marked a fundamental turning point in Bolivia’s tortured history of Indian/state relations. Working amid the threat of violence in the heart of “*gamonal* territory,” criollo educators and Aymara peasant leaders collaborated in a unique experiment in communal restitution, self-governance, and community-based schooling.<sup>24</sup> During its formative history, this ayllu-school expanded the existing boundaries of Indian education, invented new pedagogical norms and practices, set up its own governing and judicial structure, and demonstrated to the outside world the oratorical skills and emancipatory aspirations of Aymara authorities. People across the Altiplano were pulled into its magnetic field—precisely the thing that made this fragile school enterprise so “dangerous” in the eyes of conservative elites.

Why and how this Indian school eventually became iconic, a flash point of debate and an object of violence, will emerge in the course of the book’s overarching narrative. But my immediate purpose in chapter 3 is to explore the enabling conditions and social tensions that shaped this groundbreaking project of liberatory schooling and the innovative ways that the school complex was used to reconstitute an expansive geo-cultural space of autonomy in the heart of the Omasuyos province. Had the communitarian school remained a strictly local affair, it might never have attracted much attention, either then or now. But by the late 1930s, Warisata’s geopolitical reach and symbolic currency had exploded beyond all expectation. As its fame grew, streams of Indigenous visitors converged on the school for civic holidays, such as the “Day of the Indian” (established in 1937); other Indigenous pilgrims came by flatbed truck or muleback simply to see the school with their own eyes. From the city of La Paz came youthful dissidents, artists, craftspeople, and teachers to see and celebrate the school, or to stay and participate in this inspiring and creative endeavor. A group of revolutionary leftists wondered aloud, Might this cultural project of Indian redemption offer an alternative exit from Bolivia’s shameful history of violence and internal colonialism? (Many were skeptical.) As Warisata’s fame spread overseas, progressive educators made

their way to the school from places as far away as Lima, Santiago, Mexico City, and New York.

That it flourished for almost ten years in the heart of Omasuyos' hacienda zone was no small miracle, as I hope to show. Warisata represented a novel experiment in intercultural schooling. Adapting itself to the geography and culture of the region, the *parlamento de amautas* (council [or parliament] of wise elders), in collaboration with the teachers, created the original *núcleo escolar*, designed to pull outlying "orphan" elementary schools (barely subsisting on their own) into its protective orbit. By the mid-1930s, Warisata had evolved a pedagogy of civic democracy, agrarianism, and intellectualism that broke down the racial-neocolonial division of labor and radiated a bold ethos of emancipation into the surrounding area, where many rural people lived on haciendas as *peones* attached to their overlords. Arguably, however, its very success proved its undoing. Warisata's growing fame, as well as Elizardo Pérez's troubled association with the populist regime of Col. Germán Busch (1937–39), brought about its political demise. For nothing threatened Bolivia's neocolonial order more than the promise and possibility of a rising cadre of educated Aymara youth aligned with radical teachers and intellectuals who, in turn, were building networks of solidarity across Latin America.

As chronicled in chapter 4 ("Whose Indian School?"), the oligarchy's looming fear of Indian emancipation (rehearsed as "race war" or "communist sedition") unleashed waves of microaggression that swelled into organized state violence in the early 1940s. In hindsight, it is perhaps easy to understand how the oligarchy's assault on the ayllu-school movement at its height would come to represent a tragic episode, and a squandered opportunity, in the political life of modern Bolivia. Dramatic though it was, the state's preemptive act of violence against this monument to Indian emancipation perpetuated Bolivia's longer, deeper history of anti-Indigenous racism, neocolonial violence, and lost opportunities in the field of Indigenous education. Once again, traumatic events lay bare the underlying cultural violence of internal colonialism, rooted in the oligarchy's denial and fear of the educated Indian. At the same time, though, Bolivia's postwar generation of populists, leftists, and nationalists lobbied desperately for "the incorporation of the Indian" into a unified national culture.<sup>25</sup> While the socialist parties and militant trade unions looked to the vanguard action of the urban proletariat, the conservative elite sought to shore up the old regime by recycling the

earlier civilizers' mission, thinly disguised in the anti-Indianist rhetoric of "mestizo" assimilation during the early to mid-1940s. Either way, the left and the right imagined the future of assimilated campesinos in a mestizo nation. The utopian ayllu-school of Warisata apparently had no place in either nationalist scheme.

Of course, there would be no going back to the old reign of oligarchic parties responsible for the disastrous Chaco War and, later, for the state's assault on Warisata. The rise of a powerful spate of leftist parties, followed by the blood-drenched miners' strikes in 1942 and a cycle of peasant strike actions beginning in 1942, marked a political point of no return in the slow decay of the old order—a full decade before the Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario (MNR) seized the reins of power in 1952. The compounded political shocks of violence at the state level—its frontal assault on Warisata and its program of "Indigenous education," followed by the military's massacre of striking tin miners in Catavi—provoked the moral fury of Bolivia's postwar generation of urban dissidents, rural trade unionists, leftist teachers, displaced veterans, and a roving band of peasant organizers (*dirigentes campesinos*).

## Peasant Syndicalism and Popular Education

Revisiting this tumultuous decade, chapter 5 ("Instigators of New Ideas") resituates the locus of Indigenous education in the wider, informal terrain of peasant politics and popular education, rooted in the nascent post-Chaco War movement of peasant syndicalism that spread from the Quechua villages of Ucareña, Cliza, and Vacas in the Cochabamba valleys up into the western Aymara highlands of La Paz and Oruro during the early 1940s. By invoking Gramsci's axiom of "politics as [intrinsically] educative,"<sup>26</sup> this chapter throws light on the emergent political repertoire of agrarian/left activists and their infrastructure of rebel communication, transregional associations, and practices of political socialization (later dubbed *concientización*).<sup>27</sup> More than simply an organized movement of rural trade unionists, with strong alliances to leftist and labor groups in the distant cities, the highland peasant movement sprang from the older *comunario* league of interconnected ayllus, still trying to restore their traditional land rights. But the postwar generation of caciques now shared the political stage with a new breed of rural activist, a roving professional organizer who stirred up Indigenous discontent

in dispersed pockets of rural Cochabamba, Oruro, and La Paz. Feared and persecuted by the landed oligarchy, the “rural dirigente” (a peasant leader with ties to rural syndicalism) began to rearticulate the defensive struggle of Aymara communities with the radical class politics of hacienda laborers, as two flanks of a militant peasant movement. Chapter 5 focuses on how these activists operated on the ground and the subversive role that popular education played in this emerging peasant movement.

To catch sight of this submerged sphere of educative politics, my discussion traces the work of several rural dirigentes who founded rural schools and peasant unions, organized local assemblies and regional peasant congresses, circulated radical print literature, and apprenticed in participatory citizenship practices—all the time laying the infrastructure of an emerging peasant movement.<sup>28</sup> Building up from the pluralist base over the early 1940s, this insurgent peasant politics of knowledge and learning culminated in the nationwide Indian Congress of May 1945. The gathering represented a watershed political moment: the first nationwide conference, organized by regional peasant committees from around the country, until the whole ordeal was hijacked by the government at the very last minute. But the real story here is the grassroots mobilization of material and intellectual capital that leveraged and sustained this unprecedented Indigenous political project in the face of landlord threat, obstructionism, and persecution. A national Indigenous association, representing hundreds of dispersed peasant assemblies, translated local grievances into a visionary political agenda of justice and reform. As performance, the Indian assembly was a stunning show of force. Like most mass gatherings of marginalized or oppressed people, it represented a display of collective self-empowerment, a monument to the organizing capacity and solidarity work of Indigenous activists and teachers, and an unmistakable sign that Indigenous people were both honing their oratorical and organizing skills and broadening their base of ethnic solidarity and class identity.

In the end, however, the Indian Congress devolved into a colonial hall of mirrors—one that offered its Indigenous constituents a breathtaking glimpse of the horizons of *possibility*, along with a disheartening lesson in the structural *impossibility* of Indigenous self-education and emancipation within Bolivia’s rigid neocolonial order. In microcosm, the 1945 congress represented a clash of political agendas, a political contest between the populist state and a militant peasant movement, and the momentary advantage fell to state authorities. Under the populist antics of Col. Gualberto Villarroel (1943–46), the Indian

Congress devolved into a high-stakes drama over the vexed relationship between race, nation, and citizenship that could not possibly be resolved within the prevailing social order, and Villarroel's days were numbered, in any event. By late 1946 and 1947, with Villarroel dead and gone, the Bolivian state resorted to desperate measures, using military technology to crush the rural movement and secure the old oligarchic order. But the unintended lessons of that failed Indian Congress were manifestly expressed in the escalation of peasant strikes and other kinds of rural disturbances (the spread of rural labor unions, leftist revolutionary party operations, and peasant militias). There would be no "negotiated" Indian/state hegemony after all.

### Pastoral Indians, Imperial Incursions

During the 1940s, Bolivia's domestic disturbances resonated in the wider hemispheric arena as the country's volatility became a source of growing concern to officials in the US Department of State, its embassy in La Paz, and a small group of international diplomats, aid donors, and social scientists. North American diplomats were already well versed in Bolivia's postwar politics of economic nationalism and anti-imperialism by the late 1930s, when the military regime of Col. David Toro (1936–37) expropriated the Bolivian holdings of Standard Oil. Diplomatic relations were patched up once the conservative oligarchy came back into state power and Bolivian tin became a strategic resource in World War II. From then on, Bolivia's domestic situation became an object of US intelligence and surveillance, as well as a target of economic (and, later, military) aid, institutional modernization, and strong-armed diplomacy. In turn, Bolivia's relationship with the hemisphere's hegemon would become ever more contingent, complex, and clientelist.

While Washington's wartime priorities and Cold War relations with Bolivia have attracted much scholarly attention, chapter 6 ("Enclaves of Acculturation") explores North America's cultural and political strategies of incursion into rural Bolivia as its agrarian crisis deepened. Even before World War II was over, US social scientists and engineers were eager to stabilize Bolivia's laboring and peasant classes and contain the appeal of leftist, nationalist, and communist ideologies. The tin mines were the main focus of concern, for obvious reasons, but eventually Washington's field agents began to understand how labor stability and communist containment would depend on pacifying the Indigenous peasantry, the geo-cultural reservoir of the urban labor force.

Development, stabilization, and democracy were strategic imperial goals that soon brought Bolivia's Indian problem into sharp focus.

Exploring the linked themes of rural development, cultural hygiene, and Indian schooling, this chapter scales up the narrative analysis to examine the imperial geopolitics of knowledge and the attendant rural school reform policies that converged on the Bolivian Andes between 1940 and 1949. It traces how transnational forces of rural development and strategic intelligence catapulted the country's Indian problem onto Washington's wartime agenda, thus bringing the hoary issues of race, labor, and education into the playbook of diplomats, technicians, and teachers. A well-funded American school reform policy (under the Truman-era "cooperative services") became the new site and conduit for US programs of "rural extension education." That gendered model of resocialization introduced a complex of agrarian workforce training, family norms and homemaking, and community-based programs of social hygiene (designed to eradicate the cultural defects and primitive lifeways) of the Indian. Bolivia became a testing ground for US disciplinary programs, designed to habituate Indians into becoming hard-working, modernizing, self-regulated farmers. Armed with new pedagogical guidelines and goals, newly trained rural teachers became the project's foot soldiers, who were sent off to targeted rural communities to solve the Indian problem—one body, household, school, and community at a time.

By the end of the decade, the US-run Servicio Cooperativo Interamericano de Desarrollo Educativo (SCIDE) won a major concession from a reluctant Bolivian government: North American educators were granted permission to take over and rehabilitate the remnants of Warisata. Armed with the latest theories and methods of "functional education," North America technicians were put in charge of Warisata (along with several other *núcleo escolares*), where they instructed Bolivian teachers-in-training how best to educate and acculturate "their Indians." Where once the original ayllu-school of Warisata had drawn a stream of pedagogic pilgrims from across the Americas, it now became a North American showcase of modern agriculture, public hygiene, homemaking, good work habits, and consumerism. With astonishing strategic foresight (or perhaps it was just a twist of fate?), the United States had burrowed into the interior affairs of Indian education politics at a time of escalating agrarian unrest and growing anti-Americanism—almost as if in anticipation of the 1952 revolutionary upheaval—a decisive political moment in the long struggle for Indigenous citizenship and justice.

## From the Threshold of the Rural School: Rethinking the Bolivian Revolution

Bolivia's trajectory of popular mobilization and oligarchic reaction reached a cathartic moment of rupture and transformation in the uprising of April 1952. Catapulted into power by an armed coalition of miners, workers, peasants, and radical middle-class dissidents, the MNR had an urgent mandate to dismantle the oligarchic order, open the political system, and redistribute property and power to Bolivia's laboring classes and secure its base of popular support. The MNR's cascade of civic and social reforms, together with its coalitional governing structure with the country's powerful labor confederation, signaled the depth and intensity of political transformation during the early years of MNR political rule (1952–64). This historic episode of political mobilization and change was, by most measures, an integrative revolution that swept away all but the vestiges of the neocolonial order. Or so it seemed at the time.<sup>29</sup>

Chapter 7 (“The Hour of Vindication”) locates the struggle over Indigenous education at the axis of Indigenous mobilization and the MNR's historic mandate to shape a modern patriotic citizenry, train an efficient agricultural labor force, and inculcate a spirit of civic loyalty to the popular revolution. Although agrarian reform (1953–54) quickly took political precedence, education reform (1955–56) propelled the revolution's ethos of democracy and integrative politics of cultural nationalism. That populist framework could be read, and reworked, in multiple and contradictory ways. For Aymara activists, the 1952 insurrection invoked a collective sense of “social revindication,” to borrow the poetry of one peasant petition. The authors of this visionary proposal approached the overthrow of the old order as a precipice in time, a moment that called for a moral reckoning with the past sins of oligarchic violence, denial, and alienation of communal lands. A profusion of peasant petitioners, long accustomed to lobbying state authorities for schools and other rights, seized the moment to make their voices heard. The swell of rural unrest only amplified their political demands for lands, schools, unions, and justice in the wider public sphere. On the ground, plots of lands were seized; haciendas were invaded and occupied; Indian petitions flooded the office of the new president; and Indigenous leaders mobilized the paperwork to demand plots of ex-hacienda land or the restitution of communal landholdings. The quiet (and largely forgotten) underside of agrarian transformation was the peasant crusade for schooling that resurfaced in the early 1950s. In

mobilizing for the right to elementary literacy schools, an onrush of rural petitioners demanded “the alphabetization of the Indian!”

From the margins, we can perhaps take the pulse of Indigenous aspirations: in the communal act of building a local school, without the fear of landlord retribution; in the heightened demand for rural teachers and schools, government aid, and NGO collaboration; in the scramble for popular literacy and schooling; and in the outflow of Indigenous youth to the cities in search of new educational and livelihood opportunities. Amid the political ferment, the prosaic village school became a potent symbol of dignity, autonomy, and inclusion. On the Bolivian Altiplano, where Aymara communities had long struggled for community schools and cultivated a tradition of vernacular writing, the revolutionary promise of redemption was enshrined in the schoolhouse. It represented the aspirational space wherein Indigenous children would be released from racial oppression of “ignorance” and “illiteracy” by learning how to read and write in the dominant language. Historically denied their constitutional right to formal schooling, and punished by local potentates or state violence for having tried to claim it, rural people now had a chance to redeem the sacrifices of their forebears. At the most prosaic level, the pursuit of cultural empowerment and emancipation came in the shape of the alphabet reader.

At the same time, the rural elementary school became an indispensable tool of the new state, and there was no time to waste in the aftermath of insurrection. The overnight explosion of Bolivia’s mass electorate (following the promulgation of the universal “vote and voice” in 1952) amplified the party’s need to secure the loyalty of the masses and integrate them into a unifying national culture under the hegemonic state.<sup>30</sup> Much as Eric Hobsbawm described for western Europe, Bolivian state officials looked to the rural primary school as “the secular equivalent of the church . . . imbued with revolutionary and republican principles and content, and conducted by the secular equivalent of the priesthood, or the friars.”<sup>31</sup> To “bolivianize” the Indian majority, to instill in the Indigenous peasantry a strong sense of patriotic loyalty to both nation and party, was the holy grail of the MNR’s newly trained rural teachers, the “apostles of Indian education.” Resocializing the masses would require a massive state apparatus: rural schools, public hygiene, culture brigades, political propaganda, and mass media campaigns, all filtered through government offices, a network of rural teachers, official peasant militia and agrarian unions, and various US and other foreign aid agencies.

From the outset, Bolivian statesmen, intellectuals, educators, *indigenistas*, and artisans looked to postrevolutionary Mexico for inspiration. In particular, Bolivians admired Mexico's nationalist, aesthetic, and educational campaigns that projected a unifying mestizo identity while also repatriating its authentic Indian heritage through the venues of folklore, mural art, and archaeology.<sup>32</sup> Exalting the Indian heritage, while marginalizing the despised "indio" from the modern polity, would be the road toward unity and modernity that Bolivian cultural nationalists hoped to travel. But if the MNR drew lessons from Mexico's project of national integration, it also depended heavily on US material aid, development programs, and technical expertise. From early on, Bolivia's Commission for Education Reform (CRE) worked assiduously with US and UNESCO teams to build a "functional" (or "fundamental") program of rural education. Its primary purpose was to fashion a new revolutionary ideal—the modern campesino—through the application of programs in rural extension, community development, and Indian acculturation.

Even as MNR officials looked abroad for funding and inspiration, they faced a daunting domestic challenge: fifty years of failed school policy now had to be reckoned with. Emblematic of that failure was the unresolved Indian problem, in the assessment of MNR officials. Standing before dozens of international delegates to the 1954 indigenista congress, held that year in La Paz, Vice President Hernán Siles Suazo confessed to the group that the Indian was still Bolivia's "greatest problem."<sup>33</sup> Although he was clearly angling for international aid and solidarity, this confession was a telling sign that Bolivia's new regime was determined, one way or another, to "solve it." As this chapter will argue, the MNR's conception of rural education recycled a brand of tutelary race-thinking encapsulated by that signal colonial trope. The MNR devised a series of institutional and rhetorical ways to dissolve, disappear, or marginalize the Indian problem in the process of converting the despised indio (symbol of the feudal-colonial past) into a "modern campesino" subject (celebrated as agrarian worker, comrade, and citizen). Embedded racism was buried just below the surface of revolutionary, populist, and class rhetoric. The MNR's rural education policy was indicative, as it was still predicated on the underlying racial-colonial logic of "separate and unequal" schooling that had governed the pedagogy of Bolivia's early civilizing elites. Officially, rural elementary schooling would be "universal, obligatory, and free" under the MNR regime, yet also downscaled to provide a minimum of schooling to the school-age children of the rural masses. Literacy brigades would invade the

countryside, but the curriculum would cater to the nation's functional need to anchor the Indian laborer on the land (particularly in the harsh environment of the Altiplano to which the Aymara peasant was uniquely adapted). The MNR's 1955 Education Code also doubled down on the state's larger goal of Indian assimilation into a unifying mestizo nation. Social and civic integration were vigorously promoted, but on the condition that the rural masses shed their native cultural traditions, languages, and identities (a process long dubbed *castellanización*). Indo-Mestizo unity opened civic spaces for the decorative folkloric Indian or the acculturated campesino, but foreclosed the utopian quest for a genuinely postcolonial, multiracial democracy—both democratic and inclusive, but true to its complex cultural heritage of resilient indigeneity, racial mixing, and interethnic mobility. Such were the profound contradictions that delimited the MNR's "negotiated" hegemonic order, as viewed through the optic of educational politics.

Yet, looking across the long arc of social history, it is hard not to perceive in this half-century battle over Indigenous education a high-water mark in Bolivia's cultural politics of revolution. Even before the MNR state could erect an apparatus of popular nationalism and educational reform, the rural school had surfaced, once again, as an impromptu yet potent symbol of Indigenous freedom from slavery and illiteracy (the twin evils of the racist-colonialist order). As the age of agrarian and education reform unfolded in tandem, the village school opened new horizons of possibility for the Aymara "children of '52" (and for other rural people across the highlands and valleys). Andean peasants had established a precedent on which to build their ambitions and demands for "social revindication." For the revolution's children and youth were, in a crucial symbolic way, the cultural heirs of the famous caciques of the 1910s and 1920s; the once-celebrated emancipatory school movement of the 1930s; and the militant peasantry that fought for rural unions, schools, and citizenship through the 1940s. And they too would leave an emancipatory legacy for their heirs.

Eventually, toward the tail end of the twentieth century, the Bolivian state would finally have to accommodate the country's vibrant multiethnic heritage and bank on the possibility that the country's ethnic diversity was not the scourge of the colonial past but, potentially, its greatest cultural asset. This book plots the long, difficult journey toward that belated social revelation.

DUKE

## NOTES

### Preface

- 1 In 1967, within months of our encounter, Foster would publish his best-known book, *Tzintzuntzan: Mexican Peasants in a Changing World*.
- 2 Our illustrated literacy readers included *Nunca es demasiado tarde*; *Hacia el progreso por la unión*; and *Miguel el pescador*.
- 3 As I later learned, rural Michoacán was an epicenter of conflict over the expansion of secular school programs under the Cárdenas administration. See Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire*; and Boyer, *Becoming Campesinos*.

### Introduction

- 1 Rousseau, *Émile ou de l'éducation*, cited and discussed in Donald, *Sentimental Education*, 4–7. Rousseau's complexity of ideas about education is best captured by reading *Émile* against *The Social Contract*, in which he concerns himself with the socialization of the citizen-subject under an enlightened social order.
- 2 Kant, *Thoughts on Education*, 4. A man of the Enlightenment, Kant believed that “proper education,” if applied early in life, could instill in society and the individual the virtues of civilization. But if neglected or denied, “undisciplined men are apt to follow every caprice,” he warned. This same reasoning was projected to the nonwhite world beyond western Europe. There the problem was not only the denial of education or discipline but also the nature of character and culture in “savage nations.” Kant elaborates: “We see this [lack

of discipline] also among savage nations, who, though they may discharge functions for some time like Europeans, yet can never become accustomed to European manners. With them, however, it is not the noble love of freedom which Rousseau and others imagine, but a kind of barbarism—a kind of animal, so to speak, not having yet developed its human nature” (4).

- 3 Beyond his abstract musings, Kant’s words seem to register Europe’s quickening tempo of social change, the profusion of new education schemes, and the intense uncertainty about people’s capacity to be educated for the purpose of social integration and self-governance. Indeed, Britain and the Continent were on the threshold of modernizing the arts of government and education. With the accelerated pace of industrialization, explosive growth of the laboring classes, rise of cultural nationalism, and imperial expansion, “the whole educational system was under new pressures, which would eventually transform it,” writes Raymond Williams (*The Long Revolution*, 164).
- 4 Rama, *The Lettered City*, 42 (emphasis in the original).
- 5 Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution*, 166, quoted in B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 69–70.
- 6 See Puiggrós, *Imaginación y crisis en la educación latinoamericana*, 17. Her seminal work explores formal and informal modes of education as an ongoing crisis and unresolved ideological battle, or *campo problemático*, throughout twentieth-century Latin America.
- 7 Rama, *The Lettered City*, 44–49; Puiggrós, *Imaginación y crisis en la educación latinoamericana*, 18.
- 8 Szuchman, “In Search of Deference,” 9.
- 9 See Hooker, *Theorizing Race in the Americas*; Schwarcz, *The Spectacle of the Races*; and Stepan, “*The Hour of Eugenics*.”
- 10 Hale, “Political and Social Ideas,” 255. Arthur de Gobineau’s “notorious racist views” and Gustave Le Bon’s ideas about racial psychology projected a gloomy outlook, which cropped up in several famous Latin American works in the early twentieth century, such as Alcides Arguedas’s *Pueblo enfermo* and Carlos Octavio Bunge’s *Nuestra América*.
- 11 See Sarmiento’s *Conflicto y armonías de las razas en América*, a social Darwinian treatise “rife with virulent anti-indigenous racism,” notes Hooker (*Theorizing Race in the Americas*, 106).
- 12 Hooker, *Theorizing Race in the Americas*, 70–79, 81, 98, 103, 106–7.
- 13 These themes are explored in my book *Trials of Nation Making*. See also Mallon, *Peasant and Nation*; de la Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizos*; Rojas, *Civilization and Violence*; and Rappaport, *The Politics of Memory*.
- 14 A note on the racialized terms, phrases, labels, stereotypes, and categories that continually crop up in this study: To capture the sentiments

and thoughts of the age, I often use contemporary “keywords” (the term from Raymond Williams), thoughts, and slogans that embody the racist-colonialist, radical agrarian, or national-populist language and tenor of the times under discussion. Given that these offensive categories and discourses are woven into the narrative and contextualized, I hope and presume that I do not always have to use “scare quotes” around them to distance myself from racialized references. By that criteria, the racial-colonial term “Indian” was often used, or invoked, to designate the racialized subalternity of Aymara- and Quechua-speaking peoples living under neocolonial rule; likewise, that self-same category of *indio* was repurposed by Indigenous interlocutors to project a collective voice, vision, or claim into the dominant public sphere. Where the rubric *Indian* (*indio*) is used in discussion, it references the contemporary racial category and various connotations deployed by different groups of protagonists in this story. Indigenous people often self-identified as members of the “Indian race” (*la raza de indios*, or *la raza indigenal*) in their legal documents. Of course, racial slippage, intensive boundary crossings, differentiation of geography, ethnicity, and language, along with social mobility and class stratification, all complicated the racialized nomenclature of social identity, alterity, and hierarchy. More discrete categories (*originario*, *comunario*, *colono*, etc.) were used by contemporaries (and are referenced in this book) to differentiate the landholding status of Indigenous people; urban Aymara people carried (often pejorative) mixed-race labels (*chutas*, *cholos*, *mestizos*, etc.). Aymara and Quechua people were sometimes distinguished by ethnicity, language, and region, but more often were lumped together as *los indios* in the eyes of criollo elites (i.e., Hispanized people of Spanish American descent). By midcentury, agrarian class designations (*campesino*, *obrero*, *agricultor*, etc.) adhered to rural people in the rhetoric of populist, leftist, and syndicalist movements. The symbolic violence of race, ethnicity, and caste categories, as well as the discursive turn toward gendered forms of *campesino* self-identification and state-driven forms of peasant subject-making, are recurring themes in this book.

- 15 In Bolivia, the subject of rural education has been the object of social scientific research, much of it critical of the MNR’s historic 1955 Education Reform. Since the 1980s and 1990s, critical ethnography has focused on the role of state policy and rural school practices in Andean peasant communities, often with an emphasis on the state’s long entrenched “Spanish-only” curriculum. The turn toward “bilingual and intercultural” educational reform, prompted by Bolivia’s Indian rights movements and progressive NGO policies, was finally consecrated in the Bolivian Education Reform Law of July 7, 1994. Bolivia’s new EIB (from the Spanish *educación intercultural bilingüe*) was inspired by this pedagogical sea change, which finally recognized the moral and functional value of cultural and linguistic pluralism as a more equitable and effective way to educate Bolivia’s rural population. In the past three decades,

ethnographers have explored various aspects of schooling within local Indigenous contexts. See, for example, the work of Xavier Albó, Aurolyn Luykx, R. Howard-Malverde and A. Canessa, Andrew Canessa, Denise Arnold with Juan de Dios Yapita, Bret Gustafson, Patricia Oliart, Mario Yapu and Casandra Torrico, and Marcelo Sarzuri-Lima (all listed in the bibliography). Historical studies include M. Contreras, “Educación” and “A Comparative Perspective on Education Reforms in Bolivia”; Cajías, *Continuidades y rupturas*; F. Martínez, “*Régénérer la race*”; Choque Canqui and Quisbert Quispe, *Educación indígena en Bolivia*; Sangines Uriarte, *Educación rural y desarrollo en Bolivia*; Brienén, “The Clamor for Schools”; and Rodríguez García, “Caciques, escuelas, y sindicatos rurales.”

- 16 This chapter draws inspiration, ideas, and secondary sources from the body of work that came out of the Taller de Historia Oral Andina, including the lifelong body of scholarship produced by the late Roberto Choque Canqui (listed in the bibliography).
- 17 On the Peruvian Andes, see Alberti and Cotler, *Aspectos sociales de la educación rural en el Perú*; Oliart, *Políticas educativas y la cultura del sistema escolar en el Perú* and “Education, Power, and Distinctions”; Wilson, “In the Name of the State?”; and de la Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizos*.
- 18 Adorno, *Guaman Poma*.
- 19 See Steve Stern’s classic study of judicial politics, *Peru’s Indian Peoples and the Challenge of Spanish Conquest*; Ramos and Yannakakis, *Indigenous Intellectuals*; Salomon, “Testimonies”; and Penry, *The People Are King*.
- 20 Salomon and Niño-Murcia, *The Lettered Mountain*. They write, “A major aim of village literacy-learning from the start was to defend village interests by presenting cases before authorities in Lima” (58). “Strong literacy is [also] associated with self-defense against fraud and abuse. Writing is even spoken of as the *arma* (‘weapon’) of the community” (25). However, their community-based ethnohistory is primarily concerned with the “internal” cultural meanings and uses of writing and reading as contextualized within the matrix of rural village life, its ancestral rituals, and traditions of self-governance.
- 21 See Rappaport’s body of scholarship on the Cauca region of Colombia, including her coauthored book with Tom Cummins, *Beyond the Lettered City*; Wogan, *Magical Writing in Salasaca*; Lund, “On the Margin”; and Salomon and Chambi Apaza, “Vernacular Literacy on the Lake Titicaca High Plains.” As ethnographers have shown, the tactical use of literacy among non-Spanish-speaking people of the Andean countryside was embedded in fundamentally oral cultures.
- 22 The caciques (Indigenous peasant authorities) and their bilingual representatives (apoderados) represented rural communities’ legal land fights as the “title bearers.” In charge of finding, safeguarding, and litigating colonial title

deeds, they used this paper currency to negotiate Indigenous claims in the courts and ministries.

- 23 Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 7.
- 24 According to de la Cadena, the Peruvian slang word *gamonal* probably originated in the mid-nineteenth century, when urban elites began referring to Peru's semifeudal landholders as *gamonales*. Later, José Carlos Mariátegui and other Marxists used the phenomenon of *gamonalismo* to signify a system of provincial tyranny under the neocolonial trinity of priest, lawyer, and landowner, all of whom exploited the Indigenous underclass (*Indigenous Mestizos*, 78–84). Bolivian leftists applied the label to their own class enemies, the landowning oligarchy and provincial elites, during the buildup to the 1952 national revolution.
- 25 Although my narrative sidesteps contemporary theory about colonization, decolonization, internal colonialism, and “the coloniality of power,” I draw inspiration from that scholarly literature, including the works of Silvia Rivera (see especially “La raíz” and *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa*); Anibal Quijano (“Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America”); and Mary Louise Pratt (*Planetary Longings*, chap. 14).
- 26 See Gramsci's seminal essay “On Education” for insight into the relationship between education (broadly defined) and organized class struggle. For Gramsci, “critical understanding of self takes place . . . through a struggle of political ‘hegemonies’ and of opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics proper, in order to arrive at . . . a higher level of one's conception of reality.” *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 333; and cited in Coben, *Radical Heroes*, 37.
- 27 Activist consciousness-raising (*conscientización*) was theorized and practiced by the educator and philosopher Paulo Freire, whose pedagogic work also informed liberation theology. By the late 1960s, his ideas about an alternative “dialogic” approach to education-for-liberation had swept across Latin America and beyond. See Freire, *Education for a Critical Consciousness* and the classic work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.
- 28 This chapter draws inspiration from Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*; Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*; and Tarrow, *Power in Movement*.
- 29 Critically reappraised by several generations of scholars, Bolivia's epic “national revolution” (1952–64) is still the subject of intense political and historiographical debate. If there is any historiographical consensus, it is that the Bolivian revolutionary regime passed through an early radical (“Jacobinist”) stage in which the MNR issued a series of groundbreaking social reforms (universal suffrage, nationalization of the largest tin mines, a massive agrarian reform, and the overhaul of public education). But as domestic and transnational

circumstances shifted, the MNR regime (or the “’52 state,” as critics call it) began to reinstitutionalize state power, pull back on its redistributive social policies, and yield to US-imposed economic austerity pressures and Cold War policies. After 1960, Bolivia’s clientele status was reinforced by the new Alliance for Progress package of US economic and military aid. In his classic 1970 book *Bolivia: The Uncompleted Revolution*, political scientist James Malloy characterized it as a protracted and unfinished political process. For a set of recent historical reflections and social scientific appraisals, see Grindle and Domingo, *Proclaiming Revolution*.

- 30 Corrigan and Sayer, *The Great Arch*. For classic sociocultural approaches to education, nationalism, and state formation, see B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*; Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*; and Green, *Education and State Formation*.
- 31 Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 267.
- 32 See Vaughn, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*; Dawson, *Indian and Nation in Revolutionary Mexico*; Knight, “Racism, Revolution, and Indigenism”; Gutiérrez, *Nationalist Myths and Ethnic Identities*; and R. A. López, *Crafting Mexico*.
- 33 Siles Suazo, “Speech Delivered by Dr. Hernán Siles Suazo.”

## 1. To Civilize the Indian

- 1 The multivocal concept of national pedagogy accommodated a variety of positivist, nationalist, and traditionalist impulses. In Argentina and Chile, the idea was associated with the spirit of democracy, popular clamor for schools, and university reform movements. During the centennial celebrations around 1910, the Argentina intellectuals Ricardo Rojas and José María Ramos Mejía deployed the ideal to exalt the authentic nation, including its folkloric traditions. See Helg, “Race in Argentina and Cuba,” 45, 64. While Rojas was advocating for a nationalist pedagogy for Argentina, Franz Tamayo championed the idea of a Bolivian national pedagogy in 1910 in a series of newspaper essays. This theme comes up later in the chapter.
- 2 Klein, *Bolivia*, 166–67.
- 3 This unabashed enthusiasm comes from Benjamín Fernández, a lawyer, writer, and early advocate of positivist thinking (he was known by some as “the Comte of Bolivia”). A champion of education reform, Fernández followed in the footprints of other Latin American criollo modernizers, by touring and living in Europe, where he studied their advanced systems of public instruction. See Francovich, *La filosofía en Bolivia*, chap. 28; quotation, 199.
- 4 I. Calderón, “Dreams of the Railroad.”
- 5 ONI, *Censo general* (1900), 2, lxxvi, lxxvii.