From the Local to the Regional and Back: Bolivia’s Politics of Decolonizing Education in the Context of the ALBA--TCP

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Chapter 12
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Introduction
The government of President Evo Morales is committed to transforming Bolivia amidst a context of deep and continuing processes of poverty, inequality and conflict. Bolivia has always been a country of extremes and contrasts and has historically struggled to establish internal cohesion and a national identity in the face of substantial ethnic and geographic diversity (Kohl and Farthing, 2006: 40). Estimates on the number of indigenous groups and languages (or cultures) in Bolivia range between 34 and 37 (Nucinkis, 2004; Albó, 2005; CEPAL, 2005). The election of Evo Morales in 2005, Bolivia’s first indigenous president, is symbolic of the rise of indigenous social movements in the last few decades. The reality of ethnic and cultural diversity is, for the first time in the nation’s history, recognized in a new ‘Plurinational Constitution’, which establishes the Plurinational State of Bolivia. Ratified by popular referendum on 25 January 2009, the Constitution provides the basis for the government’s rejection of neoliberal policies and exclusionary globalization processes, in line with a longer popular struggle against neoliberalism over the past two decades. Bolivia joined the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America–Peoples’ Trade

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1 This chapter draws on extensive fieldwork in Bolivia of both authors. Mieke Lopes Cardozo conducted fieldwork for 10 month in total between 2007 and 2012 and Jesse Strauss spend 3 months in Bolivia for his research in 2009. During those fieldwork periods we collected a broad data set including a wide range of interviews, observations, focus group discussions and workshops with policy-makers, teachers, teacher trainers, student teachers, (inter)national NGO-staff and academics in the field. We sincerely thank Prof. Michiel Baud, Dr. Mario Novelli and Dr. Antoni Verger for their critical input in the writing process of this chapter. We are also grateful for the feedback of Dr. Thomas Muhr, two anonymous reviewers and the other authors of this edited book for their insights and reflections. Throughout the chapter, translations from original quotes in Spanish are the authors’.

2 A CEPAL survey of 2001 shows that 65.8 per cent of the population of age 15 and above auto-identifies as indigenous, with the highest concentration in the urban areas of La Paz and Cochabamba because of urbanization flows (CEPAL, 2005: 32, 44, 45).

3 With an approval rate of 61.4 per cent of the electorate (90.3 per cent turnout) (CNE, 2010).
Agreement (Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América--Tratado de Comercio de los Pueblos, ALBA--TCP) in 2006, thus regionalizing the bilateral project between Cuba and Venezuela. In line with political cooperation with other ALBA--TCP member states, Bolivia has introduced social reforms of different kinds. Central to the new approach towards people-centred governing is the education reform process, which has involved the formulation of a new education law. Within this context of transformation, this chapter analyzes Bolivia’s interpretations of, and dialectical relationship with, the ALBA--TCP Education Declarations, including Bolivia’s coordinating role in the ALBA Editorial Educativo Council.

Bolivia’s new Plurinational Constitution proposes an Education Reform entitled Avelino Siñani–Elizardo Pérez (referred to as Proyecto de Ley ASEP, or the ASEP Law), which aims for decolonized, inter- and intra-cultural, communitarian and productive education. This law epitomizes the country’s efforts to create a plurinational society in which indigenous peoples and their cultures are re-valued. It aligns with some of the major themes of the ALBA--TCP and its education policies that aim at addressing historical and social injustices, respect for cultural diversities, respect for Mother Earth (La Pachamama), and a communitarian and productive system of knowledge generation and economic development. These aspects are derived from the notion of ‘vivir bien’—‘to live well (enough)’—which has been an influential element of current political discourse in Bolivia (see also Lopes Cardozo, 2011). In Bolivia the decolonization of the education system is seen as one of the main vehicles to work toward this way of living. Vivir bien, is an important concept also adopted in other leftist oriented Latin American countries, albeit in slightly different ways. The local concept of ‘vivir bien’ (Bolivia) and/or ‘buen vivir’ (Ecuador) has travelled to other Latin American contexts through its integration in the ALBA-TCP discourse. As such, it has become regionalised through the ALBA-TCP, and further territorialised by other governments (e.g. Venezuela, Nicaragua). In Bolivia, ‘to live well’ is defined as ‘access to and enjoyment of resources and material assets; affective, subjective and spiritual realisation; in harmony with nature and the wider community’ (Ministerio de Planificacion del Desarrollo, 2006--2010).

This chapter discusses various perceptions of these new education policies and practices from the perspectives of a wide range of educational actors, such as the urban and rural teachers’ unions, teachers-in-training and in-service teachers,

With ‘communitarian education’, we do not refer to a political philosophy of ‘communitarianism’, but rather to the Bolivian contemporary notion of ‘community-based’ education. We use the word ‘communitarian’ so as to follow to the Bolivian discourse.
policy-makers and experts. An examination of the ASEP reform, and particularly with regard to its prospects for implementation, the chapter provides insights into the possibilities and limitations of Bolivia’s recently shifted innovative processes in relation to the ALBA--TCP and the concept of ‘vivir bien’.

**Theoretical Considerations: Multiscalar Governance, Social Justice, and Decolonization**

Globalization and regionalization should not be considered one-way processes of influence from the top (global and/or regional levels) down (to national and local levels). Alternatively, we draw from Roger Dale’s ‘Globally Structured Educational Agenda’, and particularly his conceptualization of ‘global’, implying ‘social and economic forces operating supranationally and transnationally, rather than internationally, to elude, break down or override national boundaries, while reconstructing the relations between nations’ (Dale, 2000: 428). Following a ‘Politics of Education’ approach, which avoids methodological nationalism, it is also important to ‘explore the relationships between the different scales of governance’, with governance not necessarily performed by the state (Dale, 2005: 124, 129, 139-41).

Dale’s understanding of the pluriscalar nature of educational governance (2005) is in so far useful as it allows to take the national level policy making of the new ASEP law as a starting point, whilst also engaging with the importance of processes at the regional and local (practical) scales. These interactive geographies of scale place actors with differing resources at various levels of the policy-making process. As a consequence, changes cannot be attributed to any single actor or scale. Furthermore, we acknowledge that globally defined education agendas—or, in the case of ALBA--TCP, regionally defined agendas—are diffused to national and local scales. Therefore, agenda setting is not simply a one directional ‘top-down’ process, since governments and society also influence regional and global agendas from the ‘bottom up’ through mass-based and/or grassroots people’s ideas. These processes are dialectical, and relate to the upscaling and downscaling of educational policy guidelines, as exemplified by the case of the Bolivian government’s coordinating function of the ALBA--TCP education programmes. We thus aim to provide insights into recent developments around the new ASEP law as a way of revealing how regionalism in the form of

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5 Although Dale’s Globally Structured Education Agenda approach is linked to the phenomena of capitalism as a common interest of transnational forces, we find elements of his work useful for the analysis of the ALBA-TCP regionalism—a counter-hegemonic and anti-capitalist initiative—and particularly the dialectical inter-relatedness of the Bolivian proposed education reform and the ALBA-TCP.
the ALBA--TCP education policies influences and is influenced by national and local scale action in Bolivia.

Both the ALBA--TCP education policies as well as Bolivia’s education reform strive for an education system that ensures social justice (Ministerio de Educación de Bolivia, 2010b). Nancy Fraser’s three-dimensional conceptualisation of social justice, is particularly useful for understanding and explaining struggles for social justice of local scale actors, such as social and indigenous movements (see Fraser, 2005a; 2005b; on the issue of recognition, also see Chapters 9 and 10, this volume). As illustrated in Table 2 below, this social justice framework analytically distinguishes three interlinked dimensions: the socio-economic dimension (linked to redistribution); the cultural dimension (or recognition); and the political dimension (of representation), the latter one including three levels of misrepresentation.

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<th>Dimension</th>
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Table 1, Fraser’s three-dimensional conceptualisation of social justice (source: Lopes Cardozo 2011; adapted from Muhr, 2008b: 58)

Representation, the political dimension of social justice, can occur at three different levels (as presented in Tabel 1). This dimension does not only deal with the first level ordinary-political misrepresentations (denying full participation as peers in social interactions). It also deals with a second level boundary-setting mechanism of misframing in the context of globalization, criticizing the framework in which the national state is the sole political space that excludes marginalized groups from any influence. On a third level it states that many injustices in the world are not territorial in character, and that chances to live a good life are not fully dependent on internal (state) political constitutions, but also on, for instance, regional political agreements such as those constructed through ALBA. According to Fraser, there is thus a third meta-political level of misrepresentation, where the majority of people are excluded from participation in meta-discourses that affect them. Indigenous groups, environmentalists, development activists and international feminists have started to claim their rights to stand up against non-territorial powers or structures (the international financial market, global governance on climate change) that influence their lives.
Similar to Sheila Aikman’s (2011) application of Fraser’s work to indigenous education in an African context, we see it as relevant to study the case of the alternative and progressive Bolivian education reform, and its regional linkages with the ALBA-TCP. Fraser’s analytical framework of justice starts from the principle of ‘participatory parity’, which is appropriate for our analysis of the difficulties of genuine participation and ownership of ASEP at different scales. By applying Fraser’s approach we try to avoid methodological nationalism through the inclusion of the multilevel dimension of representation in our analysis (Fraser, 2005a). In this regard, when writing about Bolivian politics of education and the ASEP reform for decolonizing education, ‘coloniality’ theory has to be considered. In short, coloniality, as developed by Arturo Escobar (2007), Walter D. Mignolo (2007a), Ramón Grosfoguel (2007a), Anibal Quijano (2007), José Luis Saavedra (2007), and others, is a postcolonial approach to understanding the past whilst seeking to create an equitable and socially just future (see also Lopes Cardozo, 2011: 30-31).

The outlined theoretical considerations lead this chapter through three levels. The following section explores Bolivia’s national political economic context, including the new Plurinational Constitution as well as the contents of ASEP, to analyze the extent to which both the ALBA-TCP and Bolivia’s constitutional claims toward vivir bien are taken up in the design of the law. The objective is to generate broader understanding of the innovative contents of Bolivia’s new education reform ‘programme’ by also looking at the ‘program ontology’, or how this policy was designed and works (or, the ‘theory’ behind the programme; see Pawson, 2002; Dale, 2005). We then move to the regional scale and the principles of the ALBA-TCP with regard to the educational sector, by eliciting the dialectical linkages between the ASEP law and the ALBA-TCP education policies. Finally, the process of interpretations of the ASEP law, which is called ‘program mechanism’ (Pawson, 2002: 341-342), will be discussed from the perspectives of local scale practitioners involved in Bolivia’s education sector. The chapter concludes by providing some reflections on the main challenges and opportunities with regard to Bolivia’s education reform plans, and how those challenges scale up to the larger ALBA-TCP processes, as an humble contribution to future evidence-based development discussions.

The National Scale: Bolivia’s New Reform for Decolonized Education
The year 2006 marked an important year for Bolivia and its role in Latin America and the Caribbean. The year began with the inauguration of Evo Morales, the first indigenous president of a country with a majority indigenous population. The year
continued by embracing innovative development policies, especially in response to Bolivia’s ubiquitous economic poverty, as it is South America’s poorest country. Eager to construct solidarity within a politically polarized world, on 29 April Bolivia joined Venezuela and Cuba as the third member of the ALBA--TCP. Morales and his political party Movement Toward Socialism (*Movimiento al Socialismo*, MAS), had been politically formed through leading, and struggling with, social and indigenous movements fighting for over a decade for political and social justice. Once in government power, MAS saw joining the ALBA--TCP as in line with the party’s own politics, as a way to promote those politics in the regional alliance.

The Bolivian government is committed to political discussion and concrete initiatives, regarding an education system for critical thinking, epistemic dialogue, and imagining an alternative future by embracing coloniality’s critiques. Inspired by Paulo Freire’s (1977) work, the envisaged result is a transformative restructuring or deconstruction of the education system, together with the revaluation of ‘original’ or indigenous knowledges and values through education. Summarily, the main objectives of the education policies are the opening up of different knowledges toward cultural and linguistic diversity and the creation of a critical awareness, to function as an instrument of liberation of marginalized groups (Gamboa Rocabado, 2009). The ASEP reform is part of Morales’ wider ‘politics of change’, that understand education as the primary approach to social, political and economic restructuring of society, thus re-imagining education for decolonization, critical analysis and ‘*vivir bien*’. Precisely these concepts are also contained in the ALBA-TCP education declarations. As education strongly forms young people’s relationships with the world around them, ASEP is considered a concrete articulation of the Plurinational Constitution’s general aims, and offers a new understanding of citizenship. The new education reform is a powerful part of the national agenda, taking up 31 of the Constitution’s 411 articles.

Specifically, the reform is built around the following four pillars, as identified by the Bolivian Ministry of Education: a) decolonization; b) intra- and inter-culturalism, alongside plurilingualism; c) productivity; and d) communitarian education. While the government uses these four categories, our research has shown that the definitions of these pillars are not entirely clear, which poses a challenge to creating a strong new curriculum. The law itself is that applies to all formal education settings, including schools from kindergarten through post-

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6 The Bolivian approach shows similarities to the ideas of Freire when he was involved in decolonizing the education system of Guinea-Bissau (1977). On the issue of indigenous knowledges, also see Walsh (2007a, b).
secondary schooling, with the aim to include also disabled and hard to reach students in remote areas. The law stimulates public education over private and *de convenio or religious schools.*

Decolonization functions as an umbrella-pillar. It is primarily the rejection of ‘colonization’ or ‘colonizing education’, and specifically the education reform of 1994 which, as most Bolivian education actors would agree, was developed without the participation of teachers or societal groups, but rather between the education ministry in collaboration with international consultants such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the German Agency for Development Cooperation (*Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit*, GTZ). Less than a month after joining the ALBA--TCP, the Morales administration revoked this 1994 reform, claiming its mainly neoliberal body of thought was no longer viable, (Gamboa Rocabado, 2009:26). This ‘out-with-the-old-policy’ was not limited to education, and coincided with Bolivian lawmakers and intellectuals re-imagining social and cultural engagement.

However, ASEP’s second pillar still draws strongly from the 1994 reform’s concepts of inter-culturalism and bilingualism, which was mostly applied selectively to rural and indigenous areas -- leading to a somewhat segregationist approach -- allowing urban and *mestizo* populations to continue Spanish-dominated life as normal. In contrast, the new form of decolonial inter-culturalism is imagined for Bolivia’s entire population. The concept in the new education law is also coupled with that of intra-culturalism. While *inter-*culturalism offers students skills in relating to other groups, *intra-*culturalism engages reflection and growth of one’s own identity. Many Ministry of Education officials and Bolivian academics have assured us that the coupling of the two is very intentional, as neither one alone can successfully construct plurinational citizenship. As the most practical concept in ASEP, plurilingualism exemplifies the inter- and intra-cultural process: students will learn the native language local to their area, Spanish, and a foreign language (generally English).

Productive education, the third pillar, offers Bolivians a new type of engagement with the local and national economy. As the 1994 education reform geared students toward either manual forms of labour or academic education, ASEP bridges the two. Under the new reform students will finish secondary school with

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*De convenio schools are co-funded by the state and private institutions, and frequently are religious. Due to this funding scheme, these schools are free of charge.*

*In Bolivia, the term *Mestizo* refers to those from a mix of both Spanish and Indigenous descent.*

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a technical-humanistic degree, utilizing and producing practical and intellectual knowledge in both the workforce and the university. Ideally, this critique will allow students to bring innovative change to the country. As explained by one indigenous movement leader, productive education aims to create workers that have the skills and motivation to use ‘the country’s enormous potentials in the agricultural production or the production of hand-crafted goods’.

Communitarian education is ASEP’s least defined and fourth pillar. While it relates to the larger, non-school community, it is not entirely clear on how it does so. The three general interpretations are, firstly, that the community actually plays a recognized role outside of the school day; secondly, that schools invite ‘guests’ from the community into the classroom; and, thirdly, some combination of the former two. This has implications for the role of the teacher, since...

‘...the teacher is not only there for the student, but also for the family. This is the new teachers’ profile, the practice of education is not only between the four walls of the classroom, but in the community, in the neighbourhood.’
(indigenous movement leader, at the time of writing staff member in the Ministry of Education)

This increases the pressure on the quality of teacher training in order to prepare teachers for such an encompassing future role. Also, crucial to communitarian education is the objective of ‘an equilibrium between the human being and nature in the individual and collective, to live well in community’ (Proyecto de Ley, 2007, emphasis added). Thus, La Pachamama, or Mother Earth, is central in ASEP’s vision of an integral education.

**From the Local to the Regional and Back**

As stated, Bolivia became an official member of the ALBA--TCP in 2006. Since then it has been mutually contributing to and learning from allied states as it has been involved in both ‘open’ and new forms of regionalisms through ‘counter-projects’ (Muhr, 2008b). Some critics have polemically called Bolivia’s foreign policy ‘schizophrenic’, as they claim it is driven on one side by an ideological block (being ALBA), and on the other hand by pragmatic choices (Gray Molina, 2009). Considering the geopolitical and structural challenges Bolivia faces, we might question whether Bolivia’s choice to strengthen their (regional) South-South and other strategic alliances is a matter of ‘schizophrenia’, or perhaps more a matter of seeking alternative (non-neoliberal) models for cooperation and ‘development’ - or ‘to live well’.
Bolivia’s relationship with the ALBA--TCP has been reciprocal. This mutual ALBA--TCP--Bolivia relationship should be recognized whilst acknowledging the difficulty of extracting specifics of what each has contributed to the development of the other. We aim to sketch out here how with regard to education, the ALBA--TCP and Bolivia mutually influence each other. Notably, there were four ALBA--TCP education summits and meetings—in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in April 2008; on Isla Margarita, Venezuela, in March 2009; and two workshops on Education for ALBA, in León, Nicaragua, in May 2009; and in Managua, Nicaragua, in June 2009. The products of each of these events advance very similar ideas as Bolivia’s education reform, and emphasize the need for a common curriculum between ALBA--TCP countries. Again, this references Bolivia as an educational leader among the ALBA--TCP community. Bolivia has also engaged with the ALBA--TCP with regard to education through the Yo Sí Puedo! literacy programme, which brought Cuban teachers to areas with low literacy rates. As a result of both that programme and Bolivia’s independent initiatives, the country was declared free of illiteracy on 20 December 2008.

A document entitled ‘Chronology of the Regional ALBA Educational Project’ published in 2009 offers a summary of education-related initiatives by the ALBA-TCP community since its first education-specific meeting in 2007. It identifies the regional bloc’s education development as ‘a socially fundamental axis for the development of solidarity, cooperation and complementarity between our nations that in turn strengthens the process of unifying the peoples of the South.’ The 2009 document goes on to explain that regionally aligned education should benefit the ‘living conditions of the most excluded peoples’ (MPPES, 2009: 1). As Bolivia is the Western Hemisphere’s most ethnically diverse country, and has a devastating history of ethnic marginalization, it plays a leading and exemplary role in regional educational development. This role was recently recognized when the coordination of the ALBA--TCP Editorial Educative Council (Fondo Editorial Educativo) was being put in the hands of Bolivia’s Ministry of Education. The purpose of the Editorial Educativo Council, which was approved at the 5th ALBA--TCP meeting in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in October 2009, is to ‘create, publish and distribute texts and/or educational materials of common interest for [ALBA--TCP] member countries with the purpose of strengthening educational politics for the benefit of our peoples’ (ALBA--TCP, 2009).

In line with the international trend following the UN Millennium Development Goal of (primary) Education For All, the ALBA--TCP Cochabamba Declaration supports ‘quality education for everyone’ and recognizes schooling as ‘an
inalienable social and individual [right] to guarantee the economic development required by our societies’ (ALBA, 2008). Beyond these fundamentals, it also emphasizes respect for indigenous cultures and the roots of Afro-descendants. As Bolivia’s ASEP reform focuses on a new kind of cultural engagement, it seems to be in line with these premises, which relate to Fraser’s ‘recognition dimension’ of social justice. Moreover, the Cochabamba Declaration affirms that the two ALBA--TCP grandnational projects (GNPs)--the GNP Literacy and Post-Literacy and the GNP ALBA Education, which were ratified at the workshop--‘decidedly support the liberation of the people of the South in the search for authentic sovereignty and necessary social justice’ (ALBA, 2008). While the document discursively differs from ASEP, the concepts are the same: a decolonial (or liberatory) curriculum toward inter- and intra-culturalism. The other ALBA--TCP education meetings on Isla Margarita, in León and Managua, reaffirmed much of the Cochabamba agenda, and demonstrate discursive links with the different pillars of the Bolivian ASEP law. These and ongoing meetings have resulted in a call for and the development of a common curriculum for primary and secondary levels of education. In line with Bolivia’s ASEP pillar on productive education, educational research and the creation of a pedagogical journal were debated in the Managua meeting (MPPES, 2009: 6). The resulting Managua Declaration goes beyond the need for quality and liberationist education by advocating educational legislation tailored to each of the ALBA--TCP’s countries’ constitutions leading to ‘deep transformations’ as demanded by the peoples. (ALBA, 2009). Maintaining a unified educational stance among the ALBA--TCP countries, the Declaration opposes strict standardization. Just as ASEP has aspects which are decentralized, so does the ALBA--TCP education agenda, yet a clear definition of how the lower and contextualised levels of power and educational policy should look like are not clearly defined.

Similar to the ASEP reform and Bolivia’s new Constitution, the ALBA--TCP also reaffirms a respect for the natural world. Bolivia’s engagement with these principles received international attention during the Climate Conference in Copenhagen in January 2010, when Morales defended the ideas of respect for Mother Earth and vivir bien which, as previously indicated, means to live well enough, rather than living well at the expense of other people and nature (see, for instance, Democracy Now, 2010; see Chapter 13 this volume).

The purpose of this section is to recognize the relationship between Bolivia and the ALBA--TCP politics and initiatives, especially with regard to education. The two have much in common, as they have evolved dialectically, one constituting the other, since 2006. It is clear that the ALBA--TCP, as a regional alliance, has
contributed to national political considerations of the Bolivian government. At the same time, Bolivia’s Ministry of Education has taken the lead in promoting social justice and coloniality thinking in the politics of schooling, with the ALBA–TCP educational initiatives looking toward Bolivia for inspiration. However, there is debate around both the meaning of Bolivia’s new politics and how it is being implemented and will affect change in and outside the classroom.

Challenges to the Implementation of the ASEP Reform

While Bolivia’s new Constitution and the ASEP reform work toward addressing historical injustices, especially regarding the systematic marginalization of indigenous peoples, the decolonial ideas are certainly not uncontested. The Constitution and ASEP clearly have a base of support, but there is also significant opposition and resistance, both coming from the ‘old elite’ as well as from within the political support base of the government. This section briefly presents the main arguments that challenge the education and constitutional reforms.

Firstly, Bolivia’s Ministry of Education maintains the position that ASEP has been created by educational actors. It has used this position to differentiate the process of formulating ASEP from that of the 1994 law which, as previously stated, was mostly the product of high-level government officials and foreign consultants, with some consultative input from societal groups. Embracing a decolonial method, then, should mean significant participation by the people at the ‘bottom’ of the educational power structure, that is teachers, their unions, parents, administrative staff of educational institutions, and social movements. Nevertheless, numerous teachers described the opposite, revealing a lack of a genuine form of Fraser’s conceptualization of ‘ordinary’ political representation, or the first level of Fraser’s representation dimension as illustrated in Table 1 above. For instance, a primary school teacher in La Paz explained how ‘in general, those who make the reforms work behind a desk and don’t have contact with children […] They don’t have the experience of being in a classroom’. This response was not unique and stood out as a large pattern from teachers, teacher trainers and teacher students throughout our research. Because of this discrepancy between the government’s participatory discourse and experiences of a majority of educators’, a professor and expert on inter-cultural education described the government’s position as just ‘another discourse’, adding ‘While they say it was created with social participation, this is clearly a justification for those who created the new law’. On these terms, the ‘justification’ would allow for the

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9 For example, indigenous protesters who first thought the new constitution would be a ticket to inclusion in Bolivia’s future, later on stated that Morales and ‘his’ constitutional assembly have not dealt with issues of greater autonomy and representation (Almudevar, 2007, BBC 06-08-07).
imposition of ASEP, rather than true teacher ownership and implementation through participation. As the government defines participation as central to the decolonization process, the governments’ decolonial analysis calls into question its own actions.

Secondly, as one Bolivian education researcher explained, there is opposition to the reform. In addition to the more ‘open’ forms of resistance coming from the political opposition, including the former ruling elite, as well as for instance the Catholic church, there are also more ‘covered’ criticisms to the new law. The researcher explained:

There is a strong identification of the bases--of parents, of popular sectors--with the government, with Evo Morales […] This lowers the capacity of debate…[Debate] isn’t prohibited, but if you criticize the government in a constructive way, politically you are on the other side, against it. There are only two sides.

If this is the case, MAS supporters have not spoken out against the education reform or the surrounding discourses, even if they had deep disagreements with it. A school director in Vinto stated: ‘The law hasn’t respected all the demands of the teachers to make it better. There is a total discontent. Ideologically [teachers] agree with this government, and in order to not be in disgrace, they won’t speak their mind publicly’. These quotes reflect well the difficulty of an open and critical political dialogue, as political affiliations seem to withheld some teachers from openly expressing their critique. These ‘covered’ criticisms illuminate two major problems. One is that teachers are less likely to contribute to the implementation of ASEP if they are not involved in developing the policies. Also, some teachers struggle with managing the relationship between teaching and the political environment of change, which has characterized Bolivia’s past four years, and there is generally little space for reflection with colleagues or support in terms of in-service training.

However, there are also teachers who feel ownership of the law. Those who do are often deeply involved in its elaboration, emphasizing, for example, that ‘we made it ourselves!’ The National Rural Teachers Union (Confederación Nacional de Maestros de Educación Rural de Bolivia, CONMERB) as well as the Education Councils of the Native Peoples (Consejos Educativos de los Pueblos Originarios, CEPOs), for instance, feel a deep sense of ownership of the ASEP law. As CONMERB’s Executive Secretary explained: ‘the law Avelino Siñani was born out of [CONMERB]’. However, when confronted with the idea that not all
teachers felt the same level of ownership, the Executive Secretary responded in a much softer tone: ‘Here in the Federation, the leaders—not everyone—but the leaders created and approved the law’. This suggests that even when a participatory discourse becomes practice by including representatives of societal groups, in this case teacher unions and the CEPOs, this still does not necessarily mean that all members of these groups in fact have a sense of ownership over the process. Thus, even living up to Fraser’s ‘ordinary first level of representation’ is in reality a huge challenge.

These feelings of ownership stand in stark contrast to the resistance that is demonstrated by many teachers, as for instance represented by the Urban Teachers Union (Confederación de Trabajadores de Educación Urbana de Bolivia, CTEUB), particularly in La Paz. Other groups of educational interest groups are also resisting the reform and bring with them a new set of challenges. In response to questions regarding which groups resisted the new education plans, the following were mentioned by various respondents: the ‘old’ elite/oligarchs; the lowland regions (who rally around the creation of autonomous political and educational alternatives); the ‘far left Trotskyist’ teacher union in La Paz; the catholic church; conservative forces within universities; private institutes and universities; and ‘conservative’ elements within the Ministry of Education. Criticism from within the Ministry of Education was for instance raised by one official:

‘The problem with this new law is that it only takes the indigenous point of view as a reference, and it bases everything on the experiences in Warisata in the 1930s. It is too much focused on changing educational management to become more communitarian, and it lacks a proper pedagogical paradigm.’

Related to this perceived pedagogical disconnect is the challenging effort to create a universally accepted curriculum as part of the ASEP reform. Many are concerned with the lack of knowledge of indigenous languages among teachers, a

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10 There has been a call for autonomy in the economically dynamic lowland movements in the western media luna (half moon) region – controlled by a powerful elite. The argument used is that autonomy is a necessary step to liberate this relatively wealthy region from the political domination, the ideology and the poverty of the altiplano (highlands). We should, however, be careful with such simplistic visions on ‘for or against autonomy’, since different indigenous groups also strive for different forms of autonomy. Autonomy struggles are also fought out in the education sector, were alternative education policy initiatives – the so-called ‘estatutos autonomicos departamentales’ – were created in the lower regions of Bolivia. These documents are highly debated in terms of their legitimacy, congruence with the national Constitution and influence on education.
serious obstacle to the full implementation of the plurilingual requirement.\textsuperscript{11} Teacher education institutes are widely perceived by respondents to be crucial for successful implementation, yet also quite conservative and difficult to change (Lopes Cardozo, 2011).

Another issue of concern is that many teachers feel they are trapped in a situation of ‘chaos,’ an ‘impasse’ or ‘crisis,’ because of a lack of clear guidelines and timelines on how and when to implement the new reform. This has resulted in the continuation of the previous policy, with which they have been familiar--either that of the 1994 reform or an earlier one under which they received teacher training. This has serious implications not only for the way teachers understand the current situation, but also for the way they judge the new law. For most of the teachers, the simple lack of knowledge about the new reform is another pressing issue supporting their opposition. While teachers are generally aware of the new discourse, there is no clarity about conceptual definitions in the reform. The definitions of ASEP’s pillars remain vague, especially with regard to the impact on teaching and learning processes within the classroom. A lack of communication between the Ministry of Education and schools has allowed teachers to take issue with the law for the simple reason that it has not been clarified to them. Moreover, as the reform’s opposition particularly in the urban union CTEUB is quite passionate, it is capable of imposing its own narrative on teachers. Some teachers have access only to oppositional sources of information and know very little about the full process.

Another issue in debate is around the question of whether ASEP fosters unity (as it is intended in its design) or drives stronger social divisions. On the one hand, according to a former minister of education, the new law aims to overcome the historical division between rural and urban education by unifying, for example, all teacher unions and teacher training institutes rather than maintaining the urban/rural divide. On the other hand, however, critics of the new law warn that instead of unifying the Andean and lowland region and rural and urban areas, it supposedly reinforces regional divides. In line with the critique of potentially furthering divisions is a fear of a ‘reverse form of discrimination’. We recognized a fear of exclusion and discrimination coming from those groups that do not necessarily feel part of the decolonizing, communitarian and productive education plans: urban middle class citizens, people that do not identify as indigenous, and

\textsuperscript{11} Another complicating factor is that some of the indigenous languages only have an oral tradition, which suggests a problematic relationship between the use of Spanish and those languages in the classroom. Even if the curriculum is adapted to be locally relevant, according to a ministry official, there is a lack of interest among indigenous groups to systematize their cultural heritage according to modern classroom styles.
people from outside the Andean region. Critics, for instance from more conservative staff within the Ministry of Education, point to how the new ASEP law over-emphasizes rural areas. Communitarian education, in their view, would be less relevant to the individualized environment of the cities, an opinion that was confirmed by some urban teachers. Still, there is an urgent need to overcome the deep historical structures of discrimination against indigenous peoples in Bolivia and ASEP is designed in order to respond to this situation.

Various Bolivian teachers and academics explained that students and their parents are interested less in the decolonization project, as they see it as an imposition onto their lives. Because impositions can be considered colonial tactics, the design process and prospects for implementing the reform, or the ASEP reform ontology, might be viewed in a similar way. This is a position which should be respected, as Bolivia is one of the poorest countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, and many indigenous and/or rural peoples live in very marginalised socio-economic positions. These marginalized groups simply want to make sure their children grow up to have an improved standard of living. In their eyes - and reflecting a long and deeply rooted history of a Spanish oriented society -- this means focusing on Spanish in school rather than their indigenous language and heritage, as well as supporting migration to the cities, and effectively contributing to indigenous assimilation into mestizo culture.

**Reflections on Decolonization in a Colonized World**

ASEP engages new approaches to teaching and learning, and the Bolivian process is clearly an important socio-educational innovation. Through dealing with issues of cultural diversity and historical marginalization, Bolivia is wrestling with its historical injustices. Fraser’s (2005a; 2005b) elaborate three-dimensional framework of justice helps understand the ways in which justice is part of both the ASEP policy programme as well as the program ontology of ASEP (Pawson, 2002), thus the actual law on the one hand and the process of the creation of the law together with its prospect for implementation on the other. Following the ideology of the ASEP law, justice pursued in Bolivia’s education system within the broader political changes seeking to live well (*vivir bien*) will mark a new kind of citizenship. In consideration of the interplay of the multiscalar politics of education in the ALBA-TCP, these ideas are gaining prominence, as is manifest in the coordinating role of Bolivia in the regional educational innovation strategies. The reciprocity embodied by the ALBA--TCP, and emphasized by the declarations of the regional education meetings in Managua, Isla Margarita, León and Cochabamba, has resulted in an incipient unified educational initiative and
discourse that aims to address the historical injustices throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. The education initiatives of ALBA--TCP are dialectical, ideas and practices rooted in the local and interacting throughout the national and regional scales. Yet, actual implementation of these initiatives is neither uncomplicated nor uncontested, as our study has shown.

This is, in part so, because the new forms of cultural recognition, and the decolonial project generally, is not welcomed by all actors. Resistance to the ASEP law comes from various societal groups, including the urban teachers’ union, political leaders of the lowlands and middle class citizens in urban areas. Moreover, parents see indigenous languages and cultural references in schools as unwanted aspects of the new governing approach, arguing that their children need to learn the dominant language (Spanish) for social mobility. For reasons like these, it is important to first question whether ASEP is an imposition onto the lives of Bolivia’s population, and subsequently (if so) whether decolonization can be considered legitimate as an imposition. Given the government’s discourse of participation in the creation of ASEP, it seems that the government of Bolivia considers decolonization only valid when pursued by the people themselves. We argue that, in accordance with our analysis of challenges to the implementation of ASEP, without sufficient support from teachers and other educational actors, the program mechanism (or national and local interpretations) of ALBA--TCP meta-political level needs to be re-examined. There is a lack of a genuine participation and ownership of educational actors at the local level on the interlinked meta-discourses in the ALBA--TCP, as it is only Bolivian government representatives that represents the Bolivian population. This reflects Fraser’s third, meta-political level of misrepresentation. Taking into account the critiques we highlighted on the lack of a genuine level of participation of teachers and society at both the national and the regional political scales, even according to the approach of the state and the promising social justice oriented policies, the decolonial project seems flawed. On the other hand, however, working towards decolonization in a colonized world is itself a contradiction, and we should not expect it to be a smooth process.

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