THE METAMORPHOSIS OF HEADS

Textual Struggles, Education, and Land in the Andes

DENISE Y. ARNOLD *with Juan de Dios Yapita*

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THE **METAMORPHOSIS** OF HEADS

ILLUMINATIONS: CULTURAL FORMATIONS OF THE AMERICAS

JOHN BEVERLEY AND SARA CASTRO-KLARÉN, EDITORS

For Elvira Espejo and other intellectuals of the Andean highlands, and to the memory of Anne Paul

Our ancestors never, never ever knew how to read and write,
they never ever learned, did they?
For our ancestors then, the book was the natural world,
everything that really existed in nature, our ancestors read
in accordance with the season, with the time of year . . .

Professor Domingo Choque, Academy of Aymara Language and Culture, Pusisuyu

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INTRODUCTION

Words—affirms Octavio Paz—may be used to designate a reality or to disguise it.

Karen Claure, *Las escuelas indigenales*

This book examines how the centuries-long struggle for sovereignty in the Andes is played out in conflicting ideas over the nature of writing. It traces at one extreme the colonial confrontation over the expression of divine power, personified in the fateful encounter at Cajamarca in 1532 between the Inka leader Atawallpa, whose textual polity, or textual basis of government, was founded in cloth, and representatives of the Spanish Church, whose textual authority was inscribed in the Holy Scriptures. At the other extreme is the everyday reality of modern neoliberal politics in Bolivia, where the current educational reform program's more secular intent to replace traditional reading and writing practices—in the hands of weavers, local title bearers, scribes, and rural teachers—with alphabetic writing is driven by the demands of globalization.

The terrain between these two extremes introduces the reader, perhaps unfamiliar with the Andes and its woven basis of government, to a portrayal of how human life and notions of personhood become transformed in the passage from woven to written systems of communication, and thence into a modern information economy. This portrayal reveals how the Andean populations enlist weaving knowledge as an unexpectedly subversive device in their resistance to current global changes, such as educational reform, and why officialdom continues to be deaf to their demands.

In this play of globalization and resistance, we trace how the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s and 1990s (more flexible labor markets, state cutbacks in health and education, land reforms) tend to be accompanied by "multicultural"

policies, especially in regions with large indigenous populations. Under the apparently innocent guise of bilingual intercultural education, neoliberal policies are able to impose state hegemony by dividing a common cultural terrain into archipelagos of competing linguistic and cultural groups, deprived of the sovereignty they enjoyed before the Spanish Conquest. This, in turn, undermines the emerging democratic demands of majority indigenous populations in countries such as Bolivia, where 62 percent of the overall population identify themselves as indigenous, according to the latest census (2001). In practice, the familiar colonizing principle of divide and rule is driven by the political control of writing. Describing the history and methods of the repeated attempts in the Andes to control regional writing practices engages us in both practical issues of literacy education and wider philosophical questions of cultural self-determination.

Like Brinkley Messick in *The Calligraphic State* (1993), we examine textual polity as a political entity and a discursive tradition. Drawing on Weber, Messick coined the terms "textual authority" and "textual domination" to describe some of the social and political processes involved in articulating, through relations of power, the authority of certain forms of writing and kinds of texts over others. In these processes, textual domination intersects with other dimensions of authority and the relations of specific modes of production. Our overall task is to understand the interlocking of textual polity, social order, and the forms of discourse in an Andean context, and its cultural consequences.

In examining the initial confrontation over writing during the colonial period, we reconstruct certain aspects of the traditional Inka textual culture, where knotted kipus and exquisite weavings held sway, and trace its destruction with the Spanish Conquest. In the present-day remodeling of scriptural practices, we explore first what alphabetic reading and writing has meant historically for Andean rural populations, and then how this history shapes their present attitudes toward the current educational reform. In between, we show how the centuries of conflict between different reading and writing practices, as well as the gradual emergence of new hybrid forms (the result of the colonial contact between different textual practices), are shaped by the reactions of Andean populations and their representatives to the affairs of state that affect them.

Historically, the scope of this textual struggle pitted entire states and their representatives against one another in matters of administration and fiscal measures; jurisprudence and jurisdiction; political, territorial, and linguistic divisions; and ceremonial and ritual organization. Even now, the ongoing phenomenon of interpenetrating sovereignties still erupts into violent disputes, such as that of October 2003, when the rebellion of the Aymara populations of La Paz that overthrew President Sánchez de Lozada began in the teacher training college of Wari-

sata. While such oppositions have been commonly viewed in terms of rural Andean communities versus the state, the arguments presented in this book reveal other ways in which long-standing disputes between sovereignties color regional variants on a common theme, namely the question of land—the Indian question par excellence.

One of the most significant institutional sites where this textual struggle has been played out is the school. In Bolivia, a multinational and multilingual country, the indigenous nations, languages, and writing practices have suffered fierce repression in the classroom for almost two centuries. Many studies have emphasized the hegemonic nature of schooling, with its multiple forms of oppression of indigenous peoples, a masculinist stance toward gender relations, and so on. Fewer have taken into account the role of the school as an everyday site for contesting power and hegemony. In a historical sense, schools—where we can trace the play of power over centuries—are sites where social memory and alternative models of power relations are worked out.

In this sense, there is much to be gained from an ethnographic reading of schooling from a rural community's point of view. The educational arguments they present here respond to the stark silencing in the current Bolivian educational reform proposals of the voices of Andean populations (community members, children, rural teachers), and the whole gamut of regional schooling and reading and writing practices.

From the historical perspective developed in the early chapters, we argue that present educational reform proposals, based in the attempt to wipe out illiteracy, ignore the very textual practices that have much to contribute to this process in a positive and constructive manner. Instead, notions of schooling, writing, literacy, mathematics, text, meaning, interpretation, and comprehension founded in European-criollo thought (and influenced by multicultural trends from outside), are imposed, while the historical roots of illiteracy are ignored.

We identify a further problem in the discourse of these outside trends concerning bilingual intercultural education. While recognizing the propositional nature of "interculturality" in theory, in practice this position simply subjects diverse indigenous nations to the hegemony of universalism. We argue that the liberal posture of the reform hides yet another colonizing intent to undermine Andean languages and cultures, this time by molding them through alphabetical writing in a wider pedagogical project that seeks to impose the values of a knowledge presumed to be universal concerning being and knowing, corporeality, gender and sexuality, and intergenerational transmission.

METHODS AND SOURCES

In order to express the multivocal nature of these ongoing struggles for sovereignty, we adopt a two-tiered approach regarding sources and methodologies: the first from external debates, and the second from within the region of study.

First, we seek to identify textual concerns of broader comparative relevance, drawing on recent studies focusing on the Americas, for instance the work of Nancy Farriss, Serge Gruzinski, Gordon Brotherston, and T. A. Abercrombie, as well as those from farther afield, for example, the work of Clifford Geertz in Indonesia, Brinkley Messick in Yemen, and Benedict Anderson's groundbreaking study of the textual formulation of "imagined communities" in nineteenth-century nation building.

Farriss's *Maya Society under Colonial Rule* (1984) and Gruzinski's *Conquest of Mexico* (1993) adopt a dialectical perspective that poses the point of view of Indian communities as a whole against Spanish hegemony. These broad sweeps are one of the riches of historical studies of this kind but also show their limitations. For his part, Brotherston, in the *Book of the Fourth World* (1992), adopts a model of historical continuity, whether in Abya Yala (Latin America) or Turtle Island (the United States). In the Andean context he simply speaks of Collasuyu and its ongoing literary tradition (into modern times), viewing the Spanish Conquest as a mere interruption in a much longer historical *durée*. In relation to these, Messick's work on Yemen is a closely argued ethnographic comparison between the traditional Islamic writing practices of the provinces and the modernizing demands of a central bureaucratic state. He, too, focuses on schooling as an institution mediating the textual transformations taking place.

More recently, Abercrombie's *Pathways of Memory and Power* (1998) develops a postcolonial model of Andean historical ethnography that describes "hybrid" textual reformulations resulting from transculturation. His model draws on the linguistic process of pidginization when languages come into contact to describe the "interculture of colonial borderlands," and he rejects what he views as the nostalgia-driven anthropological romance that fails to take sufficiently into account this new postcolonial space (1998, 24). But, as Abercrombie is aware, the pidgin's existence limits the understanding between the parties, just as it limits our own understanding of how local polities might reconstruct their own identities "as opposed to" hegemony. In this sense, the rich redefinition of *mestizaje* he develops plays into the hands of only one group of social actors, while ignoring what Stuart Hall (1996) has called the "strategic essentialism" of historical or modern identity politics currently being played out in the new social movements on the periphery.