Dilemmas of justice in the post-neoliberal educational policies of Ecuador and Bolivia

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Abstract
The election of the first indigenous president in Bolivia, Evo Morales (leader of the Movimiento al Socialismo, MAS), and of Rafael Correa in Ecuador (leader of Alianza País, AP) were important turning points in the social and economic history of these two countries. Both were elected with anti-neoliberal platforms of social movements. Their election promised radical changes in public policy in order to change the historical injustices that had remained unresolved with the rise of democracy. Redistribution, recognition of ethnic differences, and broader participation in the policymaking process were the three bottom-up demands for justice that brought these governments to power. In this article, I discuss how in these two cases the three bottom-up demands for justice – that emerged under the double transition to democracy and neoliberalism – have been incorporated, in different ways, in education policy.

Keywords
Redistribution, recognition, participation, education policy, left-turn, Bolivia, Ecuador

Introduction
The dawn of the 21st century was characterized by political upheavals in Bolivia and Ecuador. Massive protests arose from indigenous social movements, unions, teacher syndicates, neighbourhood organizations, women movements and other social actors; presidential interruptions, illegitimacy of the new democratic institutions, and crisis of party representation were symptoms of a challenging situation. The political crisis coexisted with an economic collapse and a social debt that was greater than that registered before...
the return to democracy. During the 1980s, these two countries regained democracy after decades of non-democratic governments. The re-establishment of democratic rule and elections created public expectations for change in the population. However, the double transition to democracy and simultaneously to neoliberalism in the 1980s had not tackled the social inequalities and hence had not succeeded in bringing about a fairer arena for citizen participation in both countries.

In the decade following these political upheavals, the direction and contents of public policies have taken quite different directions in Bolivia and Ecuador. Both countries elected new governments following a period of social movement mobilizations and tried to move away from the core principles of neoliberalism by enhancing state interventions. These two countries reached a critical juncture at the beginning of the new century. It involved similar bottom-up demands: first, demands for redistribution aimed at addressing economic exclusion resulting from the state’s neoliberal retrenchment; second, demands for the recognition of ethnic diversity; third, demands for political participation that challenges the limits of a merely procedural democracy. In this article, I will explain the differences between left-wing educational policies in Ecuador and Bolivia regarding the attention on these three dimensions.

The empirical presentation of these cases provides an invitation to think about justice and its dilemmas in what has been called post-neoliberal contexts (Postero and Goodale, 2013; Macdonald and Ruckert, 2009; Silva, 2009). The analysis of the left turn in Bolivia and Ecuador’s education policies brings empirical evidence to the extended debate in justice theories about the relation of redistribution and recognition (Fraser, 1995, 2005, 2008), the relation between multiculturalism and the welfare state (Keith and Kymlicka, 2006), and the injustices in terms of representation or voice (Fraser 2005, 2008). Is it possible to combine redistribution with its goal of equality with recognition which focuses on difference in public policy? Is it possible to reach universal citizenship with a broader process of participation in the public policy design that includes some voices and excludes others? These are the main questions that this article tries to answer in order to address the theoretical debate about justice and its dimensions.

Bolivia’s left-wing government implemented an education reform based on the idea of decolonization and the recognition of specific indigenous identities. Decolonization is a concept that originated in the critique of the ‘coloniality of the State’ (Gustafson, 2009). It attempts to address the reproduction of ethnic and economic marginality of specific groups that has remained in the Latin American states after the colonization. In terms of education in Bolivia it means a shift from what new policymakers consider the blanco-mestizo science-centred project towards the revaluation of ancestral knowledges, the recovery of indigenous mother tongues (in all Bolivian schools, not only in the intercultural ones), and a new epistemology based on the communal wellbeing and productivity. The famous Warisata indigenous school experiment, founded in 1931, was the inspiration of what is aimed to become the new post-neoliberal Bolivian school.

The Ecuadorian reforms are based on the idea of equality; they aim at creating a ‘social economy of knowledge’. The new education policy was designed to reduce the inequality between public and private education, to increase the quality of free and public education, and to change the production matrix of the country from a primary-resource-based economy to a knowledge-production economy. Far from the decolonization aimed at by the Bolivian reforms, the objective of the Ecuadorian reforms was to achieve universal
standards of science and to follow the patterns established by the countries that produce science and technology in the higher education system.

This text will be structured as follows: the first part of the document describes Ecuador and Bolivia’s common pathways of neoliberal education policies during their double transition to neoliberalism and democracy. The second part briefly discusses the leftist turn towards what has been called post-neoliberalism. The third and fourth parts analyse the current public education policies in these two countries, explaining the differences in the educational models that followed under the new leftist governments.

This article is based on a comparative method. Although, these two countries have generally been grouped together in most of the analyses of left-leaning governments, the comparative method used in this research brings empirical evidence of clear differences of policy choices in these cases. I will present data collected during nine months of fieldwork in the two countries. During two periods in 2015–2016 and 2016–2017, I conducted 60 interviews and focus groups with public policymakers and major organizations involved in education (syndicates, indigenous organizations in education). I also visited two schools and interviewed students, parents, teachers and people from nearby communities. The article builds on these data – interviews, focus groups and ethnographic fieldwork in schools – in addition to secondary materials and official documents of the two countries.

The common pathways in Bolivia and Ecuador’s education policies under the double transition

Bolivia and Ecuador regained democracy sharing similar structural problems of inequality and cultural exclusion. This transition to democracy was accompanied by major changes in social and economic policies as both governments simultaneously reduced state interventions and applied structural adjustment measures.1 I will now highlight the similar dynamics in the education policies that these two cases developed under the double transition to democracy and neoliberalism2 since the 1980s.

When Bolivia and Ecuador turned to democracy, changes to their national education policies were implemented. These transformations were part of a set of policy changes resulting from state retrenchment measures that implied a progressive reduction of the social expenditure destined for education. As a result, since the 1980s Bolivia and Ecuador experienced an increase in school dropouts in the rural areas and within the poorest quintiles of the population. The gap between the private provisions of education increased in relation to the public one, as I will demonstrate in the following paragraphs.

From 1980 to 1990 Bolivia experienced the first generation of neoliberal reforms, which emphasized the reduction of state interventions and social spending. According to the CEPAL (2017) database, by the end of the period 1980–1989 social expenditure per capita declined from $75 to $38. This lead to an increase in inequality in all social realms and, in the area of education specifically, in public school attendance. A few years later the 1994 Reform in Education sought to alter the trend in inequality by increasing rural supply and building schools in rural areas (Cajías, 2014). This was part of the second generation of neoliberal reforms (Burki and Perri, 1998). Although access to the first years of basic education had increased with the application of the second generation of reforms (Contreras and Talavera, 2004), the gap, especially with regards to the retention of the poorest quintiles of the population in the education system, increased. According to the Educational
Evaluation System of Bolivia, in 2001 there was a great disparity between urban and rural areas. Outside the cities 49.1% completed primary education in contrast to 84.9% in the urban area (ASDI, 2005). The increase in school dropouts and the gap in students’ retention were the most alarming elements that resulted from education-related neoliberal reforms in Bolivia. The problem lay not in access but, instead, in the possibilities of the poor to stay in school. Early child labour incorporation or parents’ difficulties in paying increased school costs were some of the factors associated with the alarming dropout rate in the rural areas and among the poorest quintiles of the population in Bolivia.

In Ecuador the double transition involved a drop in social indicators in the field of education as well. By 1980, Ecuador allocated 33.02% of the national expenditure budget to education, and by 1990 that figure had been reduced to 17.01% (Ossenbach, 2014). The investment reduction implied, as in Bolivia, an increase in gaps and a fall in access and permanence numbers in rural areas and among the poorest quintiles of the population. A progressive increase in private provision of higher education was also one of the consequences of neoliberal policies in Ecuador. Until 1970, higher education was largely concentrated in public universities, with only two private universities. However, in the following decades the situation was reversed. In the 1990s, 14 private universities had been created, outweighing the public education offer. By 2008 public universities amounted to a mere 28 out of a total of 70 (Weise and Laguna, 2008). In addition, public universities had progressively increased their fees. Higher education became a private good, accessible only to those sectors of the population that could afford it. The dismantling of the public education system became one of the most efficient mechanisms for the reproduction of inequality and the consolidation of the class structure.

Another result of the reduction of social spending in both cases was the decline in teachers’ real wages (Contreras and Talavera, 2004). As a result, during the 1990s and the first years of the new century, teacher syndicates focused on claiming their union demands in long-lasting strikes, which were common in Bolivia and Ecuador. In many cases, teachers abandoned the classrooms in public schools for months. Consequently, many parents started organizing to face the learning loss of their children. According to the president of the federation of parents in Bolivia, Franklin Gutierrez, due to the prolonged strikes in most of the country, some parents created assemblies to ask the church to take charge of the schools. Together, the church and the parents offered the teachers an additional bonus in order to avoid their participation in the protests. Other parents decided to pay the local teachers with independently collected money, or to create a single-teacher school, and in some cases parents who could afford it opted to transfer their children to a private school. The rise of small private schools was a result of long-lasting teachers’ strikes and the deterioration of public school conditions in both countries:

According to the teachers, the only syndicates that remained organized in the 80s were their unions. They say that because of their struggles there still is public education in Bolivia. However, private education of poor quality arose under neoliberalism because teachers’ unions were involved in many strikes. Poor quality private schools appeared so that children would not continue to miss class. (María Luisa Talavera, interview)

Simultaneously, during this period Bolivia and Ecuador experienced advances in relation to issues of recognition in the area of education, especially regarding ethnic recognition. In both cases, bilingual intercultural education systems were implemented for the first time for
communities and ethnically diverse nationalities. Indigenous organizations and nationalities of the two countries gained autonomy in the context of the identification of Ecuador and Bolivia as multiethnic states in the new constitutions of 1990s.

The degree of autonomy achieved by indigenous organizations was greater in the case of Ecuador. The CONAIE (Council of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities Ecuador), which was a confederation of several, quite distinct indigenous peoples, was successful in aggregating the different indigenous nationalities of the whole country in one single organization. It triggered a stronger capacity of influence in the national level and a higher level of autonomy within the State for indigenous organizations in Ecuador (Yashar, 2005: 85). As a result, in 1988 the DINEIB (National Direction of Intercultural and Bilingual Education in Ecuador) was created and financial, pedagogical, and administrative autonomy was granted to the CONAIE.

The production of textbooks and teaching materials in native languages, the creation of bilingual intercultural schools, and processes of training bilingual teachers were part of the advances in recognizing ethnic differences in education during the 1990s in both countries (Cajías, 2014; Howard, 2009). The demands on identity recognition in the education system were a vehicle for ethnic empowerment and the emergence of new leaderships (Gustafson, 2009; Howard, 2009).

Finally, the revitalization of participation was another common aspect of the double transition in Bolivia and Ecuador. Both countries were widely studied as examples of cases in which citizen participation challenged the minimalist conception of democracy. In the area of education, Bolivia and Ecuador experienced an expansion of new organizations of parents and students. The process of participation became more dynamic in this period, especially at the local level and within the implementation phase of and in the context of decentralization reforms.

Parents' federations in Bolivia and committees of parents in Ecuador during this period had the task of conducting the administrative management of the schools, supervising teachers, supporting school infrastructure, equipping classrooms, evaluating teachers in the case of Bolivia, and even preparing school breakfast in the case of Ecuador. Decree 23949, issued in 1995 in Bolivia to define the participation of parents, presents a clear example of the approach of the participation process in education during this period. It explicitly included articles focused on the management that parents should carry out relating ‘controlling the attendance of teachers, principals and other administrative staff’ or ‘ensuring the maintenance and good use of existing infrastructure in the units’. The co-management of education was also one of the elements that contributed to the increase of educational gaps and dropout rates, since the cost of infrastructure, school food, and administration of schools in the public system were transferred to the parents.

To recapitulate, the educational policy in the context of the double transition to neoliberalism and democracy shows a common path in Bolivia and Ecuador. First, a progressive loss of social rights, an increasingly wide gap in access to and permanency in education, and a relative increase in private (compared to public) education. Second, there was a greater recognition of those actors with specific ethnic demands through the creation of bilingual intercultural education systems in both countries. Third, with the turn to democracy, local participation was revitalized, but it was integrated in the management of public education, transferring this task, abandoned by the state, to emergent organizations (Dagnino, 2007).

Data presented in the previous paragraphs can lead us to a definition of neoliberalism and democracy turns as a ‘citizenship regime’ that extends political and civil rights while
declining in social rights (Yashar, 2005: 48). In Fraser’s words it will be explained as a transition from redistribution to recognition in policy. According to Fraser after the fall of the communist regimes and the hegemony of neoliberal paradigm, ‘cultural recognition displaces socioeconomic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and the goal of political struggle’ (1995: 166). The cases of Bolivia and Ecuador under the double transition clearly show this displacement in their policies, redistribution and social agenda decline at the same moment when the democratization process and recognition became important.

The response of new citizens and emergent actors in the context of democratization make the cases of Bolivia and Ecuador specific. In these two cases the gains in political and civil rights and the recognition of ethnic differences led to struggles of new indigenous movements and other social movements against the ‘maldistribution process’ (Fraser, 2008). The recognition of ethnic specific rights allowed the creation of ethnic movements and parties (Van Cott, 2005). Indigenous movements led the struggles for redistribution and created an anti-neoliberal platform against commercial trade agreements, and the privatization of gas, water, and other strategic resources. These two cases show that the struggles for recognition ‘provided a context for the left to get involved in politics again, by providing an issue on which progressives felt it was possible to make a difference’ (Keith and Kymlicka, 2006: 17). In a similar fashion, Van Cott (2006) has evidenced that, in the case of Bolivia, struggles for recognition have encouraged struggles for redistribution.

The contradictions generated by the broadening of political rights and ethnic recognition that empowered new collective actors and the progressive loss in social rights caused both countries to enter a critical juncture that was accompanied by institutional changes (Collier and Collier, 1991). The critical situation was similar in both cases: street protests, the emergence of new social movements, presidential interruptions, appearance of movements-parties, and an abrupt change in the party system (Bastidas, 2017).

The leftist turns and education in Bolivia and Ecuador

The 2005 elections in Bolivia gave a wide victory (with 54% of the votes) to the first indigenous president in the world. Evo Morales, the politician, worker, cocalero and indigenous leader, became president. The Movimiento Al Socialismo (MAS), which brought him to power, was considered the political branch of indigenous peoples and peasant trade-union organizations. MAS was the example of a successful ethnic party originating from the movements (Van Cott, 2005). Evo’s electoral victory was ‘indicative of the rising power of indigenous people within Bolivian society’ (Lazar, 2008: 8). In his inaugural speech, Evo remembered that ‘traditional elites used to cut the hands and take out the eyes of the first indigenous person who learned to read and write’. He pledged to place education at the heart of his ‘socialist revolution’ for those historically excluded.

Meanwhile, in Ecuador, Rafael Correa, an academic known for his criticism of neoliberalism, came into power with the support of a platform of anti-neoliberal social movements. This platform was converted in the political party, Alianza País (AP) that supported his candidature. It could be said that the AP was specifically created for the candidature of Rafael Correa in the elections of 2006. This was a clear difference with Bolivia, where the MAS had had a long-standing presence in the country’s political system since 1990s. The AP became the major party in parliament in its first election in 2006. In his inaugural discourse, Correa promised education for all and confronting ‘the country’s violent inequality’.
Although indigenous movements led the protests that occurred throughout a decade in Ecuador, they were not part of the new AP party. The Council of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) was not part of the country’s leftist turn, even though it was characterized as the strongest indigenous movement in Latin America (Yashar, 2005: 85), and Pachakutik, its political branch, was a case of successful transition from movement to party (Van Cott, 2005). They had ascended to government in alliance with the previous elected president, Lucio Gutiérrez. Once in power, Gutiérrez changed his transformative campaign promises and did not honour the agreements with CONAIE. Gutiérrez was ousted from power after a period of protest of the ‘forajidos movement’, composed by middle-class urban movements from Quito. Later, when Correa was elected president, ‘the forajidos’ and other middle-class urban mestizo groups had achieved a prominent space in AP base structure, while indigenous movements were facing an organizational crisis and a decline of their organizational structures (Baud, 2007: 32; Krupa, 2011: 155; Yashar, 2005: 151).

Bolivia and Ecuador were part of what has been called the ‘pink tide’ in Latin America. The common element of this turn was the aim to build stronger state capacities in a context of a greater integration of the region in global capitalism (Panizza, 2009). These countries’ last decade experiences may be called post-neoliberal as they challenge the core principles of neoliberalism and interrupted the neoliberal Washington Consensus and the austerity imperative of multinational institutions in Latin America (Postero and Goodale, 2013; Macdonald and Ruckert, 2009; Silva, 2009). However, the notion of post-neoliberalism is still under discussion because of the continuities with neoliberal policies that all these experiences clearly show. In this article I will use the term ‘post-neoliberal’ to refer to a period in which the state claims more centrality by leading public policy and increasing social investments, while other aspects stand in continuity with neoliberalism.

Some authors have classified Bolivia and Ecuador, together with Venezuela, as part of the ‘radical, populist, breakaway left’ (Alcántara, 2008; Moreira et al., 2008; Weyland, 2009). However, their attempts to retreat to the national sphere have generated markedly different responses. In the cases of Bolivia and Ecuador, the type of leadership of Evo and Correa, the party structure of MAS and AP, and the internal dynamics of civil society might be some of the main sources of differentiation. In the following two sections, I will show the evidence of this difference reflected in the education policies that these two countries implemented in the last decade.

**Bolivia: decolonizing education**

The election of Evo Morales after Bolivia’s critical juncture was the venue for a transformation in the area of education. The 2006 Congress of Education in Bolivia opened a wide participatory process for the design of a new education law. The conception and debate of the new law lasted five years in the pursuit to get a wide consensus about the future of the education in Bolivia within the new context. The design of this new law was the terrain of ideological and political debates: as stated by the vice-minister of science and technology in Bolivia, ‘the private universities’ council and churches were part of the first groups that left the debate about the new law because of the controversy regarding the decolonization emphasis that the new law was conveying. It questioned the coloniality behind the history of the church in our countries and the established science model of the university’ (Jiovanni Samanamud, interview). After several conflicts and disputes, clearly, some voices gained...
more influence over the new law design than others. Even though it was aimed to be a wide participatory process, actors surrounding the alliance between the state and the social movements became the main designers and implemented the public educational policy.

One of the main disputes in the participatory process of the law design arose between CEPOS (Native Peoples’ Educational Councils) and the urban teachers’ syndicate. CEPOS, an organization created for the participation of indigenous and native people in the area of education, claimed an emphasis in the aspects related to the decolonizing axis and the urban teachers’ union wanted a stronger inclusion of the socio-economic aspects of the educational transformation. In a public letter addressed from the ‘Bloque Indígena Originario’ to the Ministry of Education and one of the former indigenous leaders of MAS, Feliz Patzi, CEPOS stated that the project of the law, drafted in the participatory process following the 2006 Congress, had to be approved in ‘the way the indigenous nationalities with the rest of the Bolivian organizations have agreed’, and that they ‘didn’t recognize the High Level Commission in the Congress that is negotiating the modification of the draft with the urban magisterium’. They also stated that they ‘don’t accept, under any pretext, whether it is historical, sociological, or anthropological, the change of the terms “native indigenous” for others like “worker-peasant” in the Law of Education’. For them historically, ‘the few initiatives of education in favour of the native people were shattered’ and so now ‘finally came their time to decide about the education they want’ (Bloque Indígena Originario, 2006).

The statements of the ‘Bloque Indígena Originario’ show the complexities of the participatory process in current Bolivia. Not all the organizations or citizens have the same voice and capacity to influence. Those movements that are part of the alliance with the MAS have been an active part of the policy design, while others are still excluded (or self-excluded) from the participation process. CEPOS, parents’ federations and rural syndicates were the main actors in the design of the law laid out in the ‘Consensual and approved document of the National Congress in Education’ (2006). The document reports on the process of deliberation and the law itself. Once it was delivered to congress, the organizations that were part of the participatory process disallowed any further change by the state and the commission in the assembly, clearly preventing the legitimate democratic institutions making changes to the agreements previously reached by social movements. This example shows a widely studied problem in Bolivian democracy. As many authors have highlighted, there is an unresolved tension between collective citizenship exercised by social movements and organizations and the liberal and individual citizenship notion of democracy. The collective and specific pressures of social movements in Bolivian institutions are considered a threat to state development (Barrios Suvelza, 2008). They are in tension with the notion of individual citizenship (Lazar, 2008) and with an inclusive universal citizenship (Salman, 2009, 2011).

The Avelino Siñani-Elizardo Pérez law was finally approved in 2010 (Ministerio de Educación de Bolivia, 2010). Its name accounts for the centrality of ethnic recognition in this law. It refers to the founders of the Warisata experience: a school created in 1931 whose objective was to develop a unique pedagogy from and for the indigenous world. The Warisata school was created in the context of struggles between the traditional land-owning elites and liberal elites. It was considered a way of developing communitarian organization against the latifundium and a response to the homogenizing educational paradigm of the liberal reforms, which were trying to include the indigenous people in a mestizo Spanish-spoken educational system (Larson, 2007).
The idea of Bolivia as an indigenous nation gained prominence in the new law and in many other reforms in Bolivia. According to the new law, ‘education shall be unitary, public, universal, democratic, participative, communitarian, focused on decolonization and of good quality’ (Article 1). The articulating theoretical focus of the new educational legislation was decolonization. This background implied attributing the same status to ancestral knowledge as to science (Gustafson, 2009). The aim was to move from what the policymakers conceived as a ‘science-centred blanco-mestizo project of the nation’ to a decolonized education that gives ‘equal space to science and ancestral knowledge’ (Walter Gutierrez, interview).6

This way the new law set the principles of interculturality and multilingualism as mandatory for the whole educational system: public and private, urban and rural. The native languages of the indigenous peoples were admitted as first or second language depending on the case: first language for those nations belonging to the multinational state, and second language for educational communities outside territories belonging to an ethnic autonomy (Article 7). From the focus on bilingualism in the rural area, which was problematic in the 1990s reform, the new aim was to apply multilingualism (Spanish, native language and English) in the entire educational system.

In pursuit of the construction of a new decolonizing epistemology, the law aimed at the implementation of a holistic educational model: ‘Far from the competency-based neoliberal model, our aim was to develop a holistic model that would take into account four spheres: the being, the knowing, the doing, and the deciding, as we are not only people with specific competences for the capitalist system. We are human beings with feelings, with a past, with a capacity for transformation; so we have to aim for an education system that does not only rely on our competences essential for the capitalist system’ (Jiovanni Samanamud, interview). In the current education system the spheres of being, knowing, doing and deciding have been incorporated in the curricula and in the new evaluation system.

In the 1994 reform, intra-culturality was set as a new principle in addition to the already recognized interculturality. This entailed not only establishing a dialogue between different cultures, but also recovering the lost knowledge of every culture that colonized history and education had left out: ‘If interculturality was comprehended as the reciprocal dialogue among culturally differentiated citizens, intra-culturality affirmed the right to otherness, understood as the cultivation from within (or intra) the cultures of their own histories, languages, and knowledge’ (Gustafson, 2009: 102).

Bolivia’s left turn brought about a set of new principles and changes: multilingualism instead of bilingualism of the 1994 reform; a holistic model instead of a competence-based model; interculturality together with intra-culturality. In the following part, I will show how this decolonized framework was implemented in a particular educational unit. So far I have presented my findings on the policymaking process, obtained through interviews with policymakers and the study of official documents and the new legal revisions. In the next part I convey the findings of my ethnographic fieldwork in one school in El Alto city, where I conducted participant observation and carried out several interviews with students, teachers, parents, and organizations involved with education in the community: unions, Aymara CEPO, parents’ federations. I will discuss the responses, conflicts and demands on justice that reveal the dilemmas of the current decolonized education approach in Bolivia.
School ethnography in Bolivia under post-neoliberalism

The education unit Jose Manuel Pando, which I visited several times, is located in Senkata, one of the traditional neighbourhoods of El Alto city. El Alto is considered a satellite city of Bolivia’s capital, La Paz. It has been widely studied because of the strength of its social movements, federations and organizations that originated in this relatively new city. El Alto emerged after the Gas War in 2003, which was led by the Alteños and changed Bolivia’s recent history. According to Lazar (2008), the city’s identity is characterized by the majoritarian indigenous self-identification of its members and high levels of civil culture. This has engaged citizens in recent successful struggles.

Since the inauguration of the MAS government some changes have taken place at this school in El Alto city. The school counts 500 kids in primary and 390 in secondary education. One part of the school was built a decade ago with by parents’ organization, the other is a new building constructed after the election of the new government, as happened at most other public schools during Evo’s government. However, the school still has limitations of space, no green areas, a lack of equipment and small classrooms in relation to the number of students.

Before the long process of debating and the adoption of the new law, one of the first and only changes to the school was the construction of a new building and the implementation of the ‘Juancito Pinto Bonus’, a conditional cash transfer programme that delivers 200 bolivianos per year to each child that stays in the educational system. It is a programme oriented to stimulate the permanence of the poorest quintiles in the public educational system, even though its conception is similar to the one of the monetary transfers programmes that were implemented to relieve the social costs of the structural adjustment reforms in the 1990s. The programme has created a family incentive to keep children in schools and has contributed to a significant reduction of school dropout rates (CEPAL, 2012). According to the parents, they use this money to buy their kids Christmas presents or to pay for books and school supplies needed at the beginning of each school year. Most of these parents’ main economic activities are commerce, infrastructure, mechanics or they are owners of small-scale businesses in El Alto. When their material conditions improve, parents prefer to transfer their kids to the private school, which they consider to be of a better quality.

After the law’s approval in 2010 some things have changed due to the decolonization goal. All the teachers of this school followed the courses offered by ‘Profocom’, a state agency that developed a massive teacher training, which tends to socialize the experiences that some teachers already have and that shed light on a decolonizing education system. After following this training, the teachers received a Bachelor’s degree, which was one of the main incentives for the teachers to follow the training. Profocom’s training programme was different from the traditional educational trainings offered in the ‘normales’ and in the pedagogic institutes. It was the first massive training programme delivered by a centralized state agency with the aim of developing an epistemic change in education. According to Lourdes, a sixth grade teacher, ‘in Profocom we understood what a decolonized education is, the changes of the new law compared to the 1994 reform, [and] the new principles of the model, but we still need more resources to apply it in the classrooms. For example, if we have to go to the community with our students to recover the ancestral knowledges of the elderly people, or to develop a communitarian project as it is supposed to be, we need...’
to have money to take a bus, to have lunch, to pay something to the people in order to give us their time, but we still lack all that’ (Ana María Ayvar, interview).  

The establishment of the decolonization model in the classroom has been difficult in the absence of sufficient material conditions and resources. The massive training programme did not solve this complexity. For Marta, another teacher, the current model ‘is extremely complex because it involves a lot of creativity from teachers and also because it is a model that does not exist in any country in the world and therefore ends up being a test, and the teachers have limited pedagogical resources or support to implement it’ (Marta Quiroquíncho, interview).

The curricular changes are probably the most groundbreaking in the actual implementation of the public educational policy. Nowadays in José Manuel Pando school, there is a basic curriculum that is common to all schools in Bolivia and includes traditional subjects (Mathematics, Language – which now includes Spanish, a native language and English – Science, and so forth), and a regionalized curriculum that has been designed by the Aymara CEPO because El Alto is considered an Aymara territory. The Aymara regionalized curriculum includes subjects such as justice, health and ancestral medicine, territory, music, dance and games (Consejo Educativo de Pueblos Aymara, 2013).

The current model aims at overcoming the classroom-based model and creating a new problem-solving-based model oriented to be inserted in the communitarian production. In this sense, all public schools must develop a communitarian project. In the case of José Manuel Pando, during 2016 the project entailed the recovery of ancestral food and recipes. In 2017, it focused on the traditional way to preserve rainwater. The whole school works on the same project throughout the year: bakeries, sustainable waste management systems, sewing workshops and fairs reviving the Andean diet were some of its fruits that I observed during an annual fair of socio-communitarian productive projects.

The increase in the model’s complexity – various spheres of evaluation, several curricula differentiated by nationality, multiple languages, new subjects (to recover ancestral knowledge) and the socio-communitarian productive project – has not been accompanied by an increase in the technical capacities of state institutions (technocratic bureaucracy is seen as a form of colonialism for the new actors that design Bolivian public policy), or material conditions of schools (teaching materials, infrastructure, school equipment). Therefore, it ends up being a model that depends strongly on the creativity and initiative of the teachers. The decolonized ideal relies today on the idea of teachers ‘as soldiers of transformation’ (López Cardoso, 2012).

Much of the protests and conflicts around education in Bolivia continue to be focused on the axis of insufficient infrastructure and equipment and a weak redistributive process. In Bolivia, the income increase resulting from the exportation of raw materials was related
not only to the growth of social expenditure but also to the generation of savings. In this
sense, Bolivia post-neoliberal model follows a more orthodox economic model than
Ecuador, even though its educational proposal is more radical in terms of epistemic
transformation.

Finally, a deep complexity in the case of Bolivia is that the decolonization model,
applauded by the Councils of Peoples and Nationalities, is not necessarily the model that
most Bolivian students and parents want for their schools. José Hernández (interview),
representative of the parents of José Manuel Pando del Alto School, was applauded by the
parents when, in a committee of parents I attended, he stated that ‘it is okay to recover the
culture, the history of our ancestors, but we will not allow our children to stay in the past,
not to learn how to manage a computer or not being able to speak English in a globalized
world’. In a similar fashion, a representative of high school students pointed out in an
interview: ‘We want to see us as young people of this century, we want classrooms better
equipped technologically; we cannot escape the technological advances of the world’ (Daniel
Ramos Quishpe, interview).

In general, parents and student leaders that I had the opportunity to talk to agreed on the
idea that the quality of education is not improving in contemporary Bolivia. They see the
new breakaway model as a risky experiment applied mostly to public schools, while noticing
that private educational institutions continue to improve in terms of quality. Consequently,
they fear that their children’s education under the new model will lose ground to the private
system, deepening educational inequality. The focus on decolonization reflects an ideal
adopted from indigenous movements, but in practice it is still an experiment.

Some variables can explain the emphasis on ethnic recognition in the Bolivian proposal.
First, the indigenous population in Bolivia is greater, in percentage terms, than in the case of
Ecuador. Second, Evo Morales is an indigenous leader – an important fact in a presidential
system – with a majority in Congress. Additionally, MAS, which took on the leftist turn in
the Bolivian case, was part of the ethnic parties studied by Van Cott (2005). He describes
MAS as the product of a long-term period of mobilization: indigenous social movements are
central to its structure, which took shape outside the institutional framework before the
party took a successful leap into politics. Within MAS indigenous movements have been
able to articulate class-based demands from, among others, unions, syndicates and workers
organizations. Some indigenous movements remain central to the structure of the ruling
party in Bolivia.

**Ecuador: the science paradigm and the production matrix change**

In Ecuador, like in Bolivia, the election of intellectual economist Rafael Correa and the AP
Party promised changes in the field of education. In its own leftist transition Ecuador opted
for an educational reform centred on modern science, positioning itself at nearly the other
extreme of the Bolivian decolonized model. Its proposal considers education, particularly
higher education, as the basis to overcome the country’s primary export matrix that pro-
duces an asymmetrical integration of the country within the global system. It remains the
main postulate of the dependency theory about the unequal integration of Latin American
countries in global capitalism as suppliers of commodities (see for instance: Cardoso and
Faletto, 1969; Gunder Frank, 1967).

The goal of Ecuador’s new educational policy was to create a ‘social knowledge economy’
that will allow the country to move beyond the ‘exportation of finite natural resources and
become exporters of infinite scientific knowledge’. Underlying this premise is the attempt to build an economy like that of knowledge-producing countries, with the difference that in Ecuador ‘the knowledge generated would serve social ends and would avoid privatization at the hands of profit-driven corporations’ (René Ramirez, interview).12

This pursuit of a social knowledge economy is at the heart of what Ramirez [the minister’s mentor on science and technology policies] conceives as the key to transforming Ecuador’s economy from one of dependence on the North and on multi-national corporations to one of increased autonomy and service to the common good through the transformative effect of freely accessible knowledge on the productive systems of the country. (Restakis, 2014: 3)

In order to achieve the goal of a knowledge economy, Ecuadorian reforms in the last decade have paid greater attention than in the Bolivian case to reforming state capacity. From a period of high participation in the design of the New Constitution, Ecuador moved to a state-centred perspective in the design and implementation of the new educational law and public policy. Thus, by designating itself as the main designer and policymaker of education reforms, the reformed state weakened the participation process that had been opened up by the new constitution.

The reform of the state, led by the National Secretary of State Planning (SENPLADES), followed the classic Weberian notion of a state organization. According to Senplades’s Report on State Reform, under neoliberalism ‘there was a considerable tendency to corporatize the institutionality of the executive functions: 69% of the autonomous and ascribed institutions have a corporate character, with the particularity that they represent, above all, the interests of business groups that had gained prevalence in corporatist institutionality under neoliberalism’ (2008: 9). The report showed that the state structure under neoliberalism relied on the ‘capabilities of corporative pressures of the groups, specially from market-oriented ones’ (SENPLADES, 2008: 9). The goal of these new state-wide reforms was to ‘reduce the autonomic margins of corporative institutions’ and ‘to increase the levels of coordination, planning, and national agenda of the state’ in order to gain universal capacity (SENPLADES, 2008: 15). This process differed starkly from the Bolivian example, in which the collective pressures of social movements on institutionality have increased after MAS’s appearance in government.

In the context of these reforms, three major changes characterized Ecuador’s new education structure. First, the ministry of education assumed greater competences at the central level and de-concentrated13 in regions, circuits and districts that constituted the new representations of the ministry in the territory. It made the state more accessible to the people (SENPLADES, 2008), while it also meant a greater reach of the state in the country. Second, the degree of autonomy granted to indigenous peoples and nationalities within the state in the intercultural bilingual education programme was reduced with the reform. Its execution was no longer the responsibility of the indigenous social movement CONAIE, which had gained autonomy over the intercultural bilingual education system in previous decades. Instead, it became part of the ministry and was composed of technical bureaucrats elected on the basis of merits, and carried out by people close to the minister. Before, CONAIE was allowed to elect authorities, hire teachers, develop bilingual textbooks and design curricula. This autonomy was a vehicle for the empowerment of indigenous leaders and a source of access to resources for the movement. The loss of autonomy over the management of the bilingual intercultural system has been one of the main sources
of conflict between the government and CONAIE. Third, a new set of institutions, practically inexistent under neoliberalism, was created to promote higher education, research and innovations: the National Secretariat of Science and Technology, the Council for the Accreditation and Evaluation of Universities and the Council of Higher Education, to name a few. A new and more solid state institutionality was central to the changes set in motion during the post-neoliberal cycle in Ecuador. Consequently, technocratic bureaucracy became the central force driving the design and implementation of the education policy. The social movements that led the critical transition towards post-neoliberalism remain voiceless in Ecuador’s new public policy design model.

The significant increase in public expenditure was another important feature of Ecuadorian reforms. According to data from CEPAL, social investments per capita went up from USD 75 in 2000, to USD 227 in 2013 (latest available data). In this context of enhanced state capacity and increased social investments infrastructure, the territorial penetration of the ‘infrastructural state’ was achieved (Mann, 1984). This led to huge changes in the supply of public education, significantly changing the educational landscape. Communitarian and bilingual schools built with the efforts of parents and indigenous organizations under the double transition have been reduced significantly. Students who used to study in their own communities have now been incorporated into the larger circuit of public schools and high schools such as the Millenium Units. From small schools with poor infrastructure and a lack of resources, the country is moving towards the construction of larger educational facilities with greater resources, shared by a larger student population. Efficiency, attendance and redistribution seem to be valued over cultural relevance in the Ecuadorian model.

One of the main achievements of the education reforms has been the increase in secondary education attendance in communities where it was previously low. According to Wilson Ortega (interview), Ecuador’s vice-minister of education, the larger part of school drop-outs in the public education system would be registered at the end of primary school, since most community schools in rural areas lacked high schools. The strategy of transforming public educational facilities into larger schools and high schools responded to a need for higher attendance rates. In fact, the population between 7 and 24 years of age from quintile 1 went from an attendance rate of 66.7% (2000) to one of 81.6% (2013), being the quintile whose regular attendance to elementary or high schools increased most significantly (CEPAL). The problem of drop-outs was faced but, as I will show, in the ethnography of the school it also engendered a new problematics.

**School ethnography in Ecuador under post-neoliberalism**

I collected evidence how the new paradigm in education in Ecuador changed the provision of education in Guamote, one of the rural areas of Ecuador. Guamote is located in the southern province of Chimborazo. It is considered one of the poorest districts of Ecuador and is confronted with the worst social indicators. According to the last national census (2010), 70.2% of Guamote’s population suffers from ‘extreme poverty’ due to Unsatisfied Basic Needs (UBN). Also, the majority of the district’s population self-identifies as indigenous (94.4% in 2010 Census). Guamote has been the centre of communitarian organization, becoming, as in the Alto case, one of the main hubs of resistance during the double transition. Guamote developed a bottom-up process of participation that drew the attention
of other indigenous organizations in the country. It was therefore crucial to the organizational capacity of a network of indigenous movements during the 1990s.

The Velasco Ibarra education unit, which is located in Guamote, serves 2900 students. Since the reforms it has suffered far-reaching changes. First, the unit merged three different schools, together forming a ‘reunified school’. The school building was expanded to accommodate all students after the integration with these two other schools, a project made possible by the government’s infrastructural investments. At the same time the student population has risen significantly since the execution of the last reforms, for several reasons: first, because after the reform three year olds started to attend the new public pre-primary educational facility, which was inexistent before in the public system. Second, because an important part of the population that used to study in their communities now travel (between 35 mins and 2 hours) to attend this school located in the urban centre. Third, because some students transferred from small private schools to this new reunified school, either because its status among the population improved, or because some of the single-teacher or bilingual schools in their communities were discontinued.

The Velasco Ibarra education unit has gained status in the eyes of parents. It was already considered the best high school in Guamote before the reform, and now the school offered alluring new equipment, a greater pool of teachers – hired throughout the last decade – a new psychology department, and free access to textbooks and school materials. Also, this unit has implemented standardized state regulations that allow it to offer an international baccalaureate since 2014. The majority of parents aspire all these changes, although attending this school presents more difficulties in terms of transportation than going to a local one.

The students coming from bilingual schools now have to study from standardized Spanish textbooks provided by the state to all public education units. They also have to follow a new standardized curriculum, a unified baccalaureate, take a standardized test to be admitted to the university and conform to other forms of homogenization that characterize the current reform in Ecuador. Commuting times from their localities to the new school are up to two hours. State agents promised to provide transportation to facilitate school transfers, but in the Guamote case this promise was never materialized. This has led parents in some communities to self-organize and take turns driving the local children to school. Others even decided to rent their children a room in the city centre, exemplifying the extent to which parents of these communities prioritize enrolment at this modernized school.

Several studies show that in Andean countries education has been seen as a way to gain citizenship, making it one of the most important demands of indigenous groups to the state. According to Baud (2007: 26), ‘urban intellectuals and politicians ignored the twentieth-century history of indigenous communities initiating their own projects of modernization and nationalism. Education was one of the fundamental demands of these communities and their frustration was great when the state could not, or would not fulfil its responsibilities in creating a safeguard system of rural schools.’ This is the case in this reformed school, which by being outside the communities is losing its cultural bond, while it is, at the same time, being praised by parents who want this type of education – in Spanish, in the urban centre – for their children.

In the Ecuadorian case, contemporary social demands and social conflict in the area of education are centred on a critique of modernization and homogenization produced by the standardization of education, the vertical state-centric model of decision making and the meritocratic system that attempts to avoid the structural differences and diversity that characterize Ecuador. Correa’s focus on meritocracy and equality represents a new model
that has its own difficulties. The reactions against this homogenous meritocratic system were not long in coming and triggered significant conflicts: the closing of the bilingual and single-teacher schools was resisted by some community organizations, even though parents – not necessarily organized – had agreed to it.

Some national indigenous organizations (such as CONAIE), in articulation with traditional teachers’ unions and a series of left-wing movements that seriously doubt the capacity of state intervention to resolve long-standing social injustices by itself, are opposed to the current education system for two reasons. First, they accuse it of committing ethnocide by ‘forcing the indigenous population to homogenize themselves inside millennium schools or reunified schools that were created from an urban-mestizo perspective’. Second, because ‘In a pluri-national country, there cannot be a standardized model of education. That is a fundamental contradiction that we will not tolerate; we will keep our schools even if they are not formally recognized by the state’, states one of the leader of CONAIE (Simbana, interview).16

In the case of Ecuador, the state – with its bureaucratic system and a new technocracy – is the principal actor in the design and implementation of public policies. The new institutional apparatus in Ecuador is part of an integral reform that aims at modernizing public institutions and increasing the degree of autonomy of the state vis-à-vis the market and civil society pressures, attempting to structure a more universalistic state. This has led to a technocratic way of public policy implementation that suffers from many problems regarding the inclusion of civil society organizations in the design and evaluation of public policy. Ecuador is a case in which the government distances itself from a large part of the organizations that led the resistance against neoliberalism, although it is itself a result of those struggles.

Some variables can explain the reforms of the Ecuadorian education model in the last decade. First, before AP became the ruling party, the indigenous movement had suffered a decline and Pachakutik had lost seats in parliament. While MAS’s current structure is based on a long process of mobilization and the involvement of social movements, AP became the majority party in congress after its first elections. It was not part of the ethnic parties studied by Van Cott. It is probably because of the lack of party structure that state enhancing was the way to govern in the case of Ecuador. AP is composed mainly of mestizos, middle class and state technicians. It is a multi-faction party, encompassing different ideologies and tendencies. Besides, Correa does not have his roots in social movements, like his Bolivian colleague Evo, but in the academic community, and the dynamics of social movements in Ecuador changed radically after the decline of the indigenous movement and the penetration of the state in the territory.

**Conclusion**

In the context of the double transition towards neoliberalism and democracy, Bolivia and Ecuador experienced a decline in the redistributive process and a rise of recognition demands being met. The excluded groups, especially those who suffered from ‘maldistribution injustice’ (Fraser, 2008), were not able to be part of the design of public policies. Injustice in terms of redistribution produced ‘political voicelessness’ in the institutional frame (Fraser, 2008, 2009). Cultural and ethnic recognition arisen under the double transition, however, favoured the political opportunities of indigenous movements to lead the
resistance against neoliberal reforms and to claim broader participation in the institutions of democracy (Van Cott, 2006).

At the beginning of the 21st century, both countries entered a critical juncture (Collier and Collier, 1991). The critical situation was similar in both cases, with a political and economic upheaval that I have explained in the first part of the article. A new cycle that has been called post-neoliberal (Postero and Goodale, 2013; Macdonald and Ruckert, 2009; Silva, 2009) was the result of the institutional changes that took place in Bolivia and Ecuador. The three main types of demands of justice that opened a post-neoliberal cycle in Bolivia and Ecuador were redistribution, a more substantial recognition of cultural and ethnic difference, and broader participation in the policymaking process. These three main demands for justice were, however, incorporated in different ways by the two governments studied in this article.

In terms of the strengthening of state implementation capacity it is Ecuador that has gained ground. With regard to the recognition demands it is clear that Bolivia has made more progress than Ecuador, which has, in this area, taken some steps backward under post-neoliberalism. When it comes to participation, this has been more effectively enhanced in Bolivia, resulting in a process that included not only the ethnic and cultural diversities’ groups – as the neoliberal policy already did – but also the rural syndicates and the parents’ federations in the process of designing education policy. However, it is a selective process of participation, demonstrating preferences for government-friendly factions. In Ecuador the technocratic bureaucracy that emerged in the recovered state has been the main voice in the policy process. A broader political voice and participation remain unresolved in the policymaking process.

Bolivia prioritized ethnic and cultural inclusion as the remedy to injustices. Mis-recognition of indigenous and other excluded cultural groups was the main injustice post-neoliberal educational policy tried to address, but this shift in emphasis opens many questions about the universal inclusiveness of Bolivian educational model: is the ambition of decolonization through education a shared goal by a diversified society? Are the movements that are part of MAS’s structure entitled to represent all Bolivian citizens?

By contrast, Ecuador has primarily focused on the redistributive demands. It developed a model that has enhanced state capacity in education and aims to create a national knowledge economy through the modernization of state institutions and homogenous education provision. This case shows the shortcomings of a redistributive and modernization-centred model, which fails to include ethnic groups and to give voice and a place social movements in the state. A broader and universal reach of the state capacity has problems to enhance participation and recognition of ethnic differences in the education policy in Ecuador.

These two pathways show their own limits in bringing justice to all spheres in which injustice was diagnosed. The need to address the problems of ethnic exclusion, socio-economic inequalities and the lack of voice and participation seems to be a very difficult task in countries where states and democratic systems are redefined after a relatively recent critical juncture. Furthermore, in both cases, the governments’ economic dependence on the extraction of natural resources and international commodity flows to finance public policies appears to be an additional obstacle for the pursuit of justice. On account of these difficulties, it is highly unlikely that public policy choices in these two unequal Andean countries will be able to tackle all dimensions of injustice.
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Notes
1. Structural Adjustment refers to a set of economic reforms first introduced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a loan condition for developing countries. This measure involved a combination of free market policies such as privatization and fiscal austerity.
2. I use the term ‘neoliberal’ to distinguish from the liberal reforms of the second half of the 19th century. Neoliberal reforms have redefined the economies and social programmes of Latin America since the 1980s. The first generation of neoliberal reforms tried to reduce state size following the Washington Consensus (Williamson, 1990). The second aimed to improve social programmes and reduce poverty, seen as conditions for economic growth (Burki and Perry, 1998).
3. Franklin Gutierrez, President of Parents Federation of Bolivia, interview, 11 November 2015, La Paz.
4. Marí­a Luisa Talavera, professor at Universidad Mayor San Andrés – UMSA, interview, 8 October 2015, La Paz.
5. Jiovanni Samanamud, vice-minister of Higher Education in Bolivia, interview, 8 December 2015, La Paz.
6. Walter Gutierrez, director of the Inter-cultural and Intra-cultural unit of the Minister of Education, interviewed several times during 2016 and 2017, La Paz.
7. Ana María Ayvar, sixth grade teacher of José Manuel Pando, interview, 15 February 2017, El Alto.
8. Marta Quirquincho, fifth grade teacher of José Manuel Pando, interview, 12 November 2015, El Alto.
9. José Luis Álvares, president of the Urban Teacher’s Unión in La Paz, interview, 15 October 2015, El Alto.
10. José Hernández, president of parents’ committee in the José Manuel Pando school, interview, 10 December 2015.
11. Daniel Ramos Quishpe, president of high school students’ federation, interview, 15 December 2015.
12. René Ramirez, national secretary of higher education, interview, 10 February 2016, Quito.
In the new state reforms of Ecuador, de-concentration and decentralization are different processes. De-concentration is the transference of management to state representation in the subnational level. These representations are politically dependent on the national level. On the other hand, decentralization is the transference of competences to autonomous agencies in subnational levels.

Millenion Units are big new schools developed as an education strategy by the AP government in Ecuador. The schools are built in areas with high prevalence of poverty, they have more resources, such as big green spaces, laboratories, ample classrooms, auditoriums, computers and technology. These schools replace small schools and integrate more than one community.

Wilson Ortega, vice-minister of education in Ecuador, interview, 29 January 2016, Quito – Ecuador.

Floresmilo Simbaná, member of CONAIE in education affairs, interview, 5 February 2016.

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