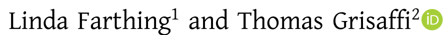
Latin American Research Review (2024), **59**, 785–802
doi:10.1017/lar.2024.14

LARR Latin American Research Review

ARTICLE

On Their Own Terms: How Cocalera Organizing Expanded Indigenous Women's Rights in Bolivia



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(Received 25 July 2022; revised 06 October 2023; accepted 17 October 2023; first published online 25 March 2024)

Abstract

A key element in the historically unprecedented advances in indigenous women's political representation under Bolivia's Evo Morales's administration (2006–2019) was the influence that women coca growers played in the rural women's indigenous organization known as the Bartolinas. Driven in no small measure by their resistance to the US-financed War on Drugs in the Chapare region, the *cocaleras* became both Bolivia's strongest indigenous women's organization and its most dedicated advocates for indigenous women's rights. This article contends that intersectionality—of gender, class, and indigenous identities—is at the heart of understanding indigenous women's transformation from "helpers" of a male-dominated peasant union to government ministers in the space of ten years. Not only did they effectively deploy *chachawarmi*, the Andean concept of gender complementarity, to advance their rights in a way consistent with their cultural identity and political loyalties, but they also benefited from the gains of a predominantly urban middle-class feminist movement even though they formally rejected the feminist movement's composition and perceived orientation.

Keywords: Bolivia; coca; Bartolina Sisa; Chachawarmi; intersectionality

Resumen

Un elemento clave en los avances sin precedentes en la representación política de las mujeres indígenas bajo la administración de Evo Morales en Bolivia (2006–2019) fue la influencia que las cocaleras desempeñaron dentro de la organización de mujeres indígenas del campo, conocidas como las Bartolinas. Impulsadas en gran medida por su resistencia a la Guerra contra las Drogas financiada por Estados Unidos en la región del Chapare, las cocaleras se convirtieron en la organización de mujeres indígenas más potente de Bolivia y en sus más dedicadas defensoras de los derechos de las mujeres indígenas. Este artículo sostiene que la interseccionalidad —es decir, el entretejer de las identidades de género, de clase e indígena— está en el centro de la comprensión de la transformación de las mujeres indígenas de "ayudantes" de un sindicato campesino dominado por varones a ministras de Estado en el espacio de diez años. Estas mujeres no sólo implementaron efectivamente el *chachwarmi*, el concepto andino de complementariedad de género, para promover sus derechos de una manera consistente con su identidad cultural y sus lealtades políticas, sino que también se beneficiaron de los logros de un movimiento feminista predominantemente urbano de clase media, a pesar de que rechazó formalmente la composición y orientación percibida del movimiento feminista.

Palabras clave: Bolivia; coca; Bartolina Sisa; Chachawarmi; interseccionalidad

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https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2024.14 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Evo Morales was propelled into leading Bolivia's government in late 2005 by a formidable coalition of social movements that initially organized in the mid-1990s as the political representation of the country's indigenous peasant movement.[1] This alliance, which formed a loose party configuration (Movimiento al Socialismo, Movement toward Socialism or MAS), expanded into urban areas after 2002 and included representatives of Latin America's most politically marginalized group, rural indigenous women (Rousseau and Ewig 2017, 426). Their organization, the Bartolina Sisa federation, more commonly known simply as the Bartolinas,[2] played a critical role in the government's subsequent success, in no small measure driven by the Chapare region's *cocaleras* (women coca growers) who had organized to actively resist the US-financed War on Drugs during the 1990s. "I always say women are stronger thanks to coca, thanks to the government of the USA," maintains former union leader Apolonia Sánchez.[3]

Although the newly elected Morales government had no explicit gender equality platform and tended to be reactive rather than proactive on women's issues, thanks to consistent pressure from the Bartolinas and middle-class feminists, it guaranteed equal pay for equal work; significantly increased women's access to land, education, and health care; and worked to curb endemic violence against women (Blofield, Ewig, and Piscopo 2017, 348).[4] It also reduced overall poverty from 61 percent to 35 percent between 2006 and 2017, which affected Bolivia's poorest, least educated, and most marginalized group—working-class indigenous women—more than any other (Claros 2019).[5] As well, a new constitution adopted in 2009 led to one of the highest percentages of women lawmakers in the world (IDEA 2021).

The arc toward increased rural women's rights in Bolivia began before *cocalera* organizing energized it with the founding of the Bartolinas in the highlands in 1980, propelled by the Katarista movement and the resistance against military dictatorships in the 1960s and 1970s.[6] The Bartolinas was established as a part of the male indigenous peasant union, the Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (Unitary Union Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia, CSUTCB), which itself had formed six months earlier, affiliated with the Central Obrera Boliviana (Bolivia Workers Central, COB). The CSUTCB remains the stronger organization, historically representing the domestic unit with oldest male mostly serving as representative, or "head of the family."[7]

[1] We use the term *indigenous peasant* interchangeably with *campesino* as almost all *campesinos* in Bolivia are of indigenous origins.

[2] Federación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas de Bolivia Bartolina Sisa (FNMCB-BS); after 2007, Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas de Bolivia Bartolina Sisa (CNMCIOB "BS"). Bartolina Sisa was an Aymara woman who in 1781, along with her husband, Tupac Katari, led an Indigenous rebellion, putting the city of La Paz under siege.

[3] Interview, Apolonia Sánchez, former Federación de Mujeres Campesinas del Trópico de Cochabamba (FECAMTROP) leader and head of the Cochabamba Department's Decolonization unit (2016–2019), Villa Tunari, 20 July 2023.

[4] Between 2000 to 2018, Bolivian girls and women suffered the highest percentage of partner violence in Latin America and the Caribbean (Sardinha et al. 2022, 809).

[5] Poverty reduction was primarily achieved through direct cash transfers.

[6] The *Kataristas* fused Indigenous identity with class consciousness and profoundly influenced the CSUTCB and the *Bartolinas*. On the resistance to dictatorships, low-income women, both rural and urban, were initially organized by the Roman Catholic Church and campesino training centers, many of which provided food aid through mothers' clubs (*clubes de madres*), which at their height comprised two hundred thousand members. These organizations joined the resistance to the 1970s military dictatorship (Román Arnez 2008, 31).

[7] Only in a man's absence can a woman replace him, usually his wife or widow, oldest son or occasionally oldest daughter. Single mothers and widows are also recognized as family heads. Union participation is tied to land, not gender, and if a family has two separate plots, the man represents one holding and the woman the other (Arnold and Spedding 2005, 95).

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This gender parallelism (unions separated by gender), as Rousseau and Morales Hudon (2017) describe it, suggests how indigenous women's organizing was initially seen as complementary but subordinate to men's unions, or what Molyneux's (2001, 140–162) typology of women's movements characterizes as directed rather than associative, where independent women's organizations form alliances on shared goals, or independent, where women set their own goals, organizational structures, and methods.

In Bolivia, gender parallelism effectively reduced conflict by shifting women's demands to a realm outside male-dominated organizations while providing a mechanism to recognize women's contributions (Rousseau and Morales Hudon 2017, 202). Separation has had both positive and negative impacts: it provided a safe space for women to develop their ideas, capabilities, and confidence—what Nancy Fraser (1992) terms a "subaltern counterpublic"—but it also excluded them from direct involvement in political decision-making (Arce Cuadros 2022, 161; Deere and León 2002). Poveda Padilla (2014, 133) argues that this structure enabled indigenous women and men to believe that they had no conflicts or competing interests, even when they did.

This article draws on the intersection of indigenous, working-class, and female identity as the framework for examining the role the *cocaleras* played in strengthening the Bartolinas' pursuit of indigenous women's rights. It considers how organizing against the War on Drugs fueled this process, which involved collaboration with a male-dominated indigenous movement and later with urban, middle-class feminists, even though the Bartolinas considered feminism alien. For this discussion, we draw on long-term ethnographic fieldwork in the Chapare from 2005 to 2023, secondary research, and interviews carried out in person and by telephone from the mid-1990s to present. All translations are by the authors.

In what follows we lay out the concept of *chachawarmi* as a key organizing principal framing the political ascent of female coca growers' unions in the context of the US-backed drug war. We then consider how the *cocaleras* and their matrix institution, the Bartolinas, created platforms for political participation, revalidating their culture and identity and drawing on dense local networks to facilitate their movement's growth (Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson 1980). We contend that indigenous women's intersectionality—of gender, class, and indigenous identity—articulated through the concept of *chachawarmi* is at the heart of understanding their transformation in ten years from "helpers" of male-dominated peasant unions to government ministers. The final section explores the fallout of the 2019 coup on the *cocaleras* and the national Bartolina organization.

Chachawarmi

By the time Evo Morales came to power, campesino emphasis on class-based struggle had broadened to recuperate a more indigenous-based identity, including conceptions of women's roles (Sánchez Echevarría 2015). These revolved around a precolonial gender system known as *chachawarmi* (in Aymara; *qhari-warmi* in Quechua) that focuses on complementarity between the genders, with the married couple at the core.

Across Latin America, indigenous systems of gender parallelism were transformed by European conquest and subsequent state-building efforts—with an emphasis on subordinating women to men (Dore and Molyneux 2000; Silverblatt 1987). Even so, the concept of *chachawarmi* continues to permeate many Andean highland communities and differs substantially from Western ideas of gender equality (Burman 2011; Harris 2000). Masculinity and femininity are usually conceived in terms of activities rather than the gender of the body carrying out the activities, which "cannot be captured if the term is translated as 'man/woman' or 'gender equality'" (Maclean 2014, 80). This makes women's subordination less related to the gendered division of labor than to women's political and

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educational exclusion (Arce Cuadros 2022, 161). In many rural communities, single women are not respected in the same way that those in couples are, giving *chachawarmi* an outsized social and political influence.

For Sánchez Echevarría (2015), the Bartolinas embraced *chachawarmi* as a culturally appropriate lens for understanding gender. It served as part of their resistance to assimilation into modernist, market-oriented individualism, a process that intensified during neoliberalism's heyday from 1985 to 2005 (Flores Carlos 2009). Both a practical and a strategic tool, *chachawarmi* provided the Bartolinas legitimacy within the indigenous-identified state, as well as the MAS party, their unions, and their communities (Jáuregui Jinés 2019). The concept was quickly adopted by the MAS government, which considered it more favorable to women than colonial or capitalist gender relations (Mullenax 2018; Choque 2006).

Chachawarmi is "based on a new feminism adjusted to our reality . . . that is not just focused on gender but on race and class," according to the sociologist Favio Mayta Chipana (2018). His consideration of class, race, and gender as one system resonates with decolonial feminist theories (see Pitts, Ortega, and Medina 2019), as well as with Christina Ewig's (2018, 439) research on intersectionality in the Andes that led her to argue that race often holds greater significance for women than gender. This is certainly the case in Bolivia, where after centuries of racial and ethnic subjugation, racial equality consistently trumps gender as a priority for indigenous women (see also de la Cadena 1995; Canessa 2012).

The Bartolinas' commitment to *chachawarmi* also served to distinguish them from urban feminists, whom they identified as white, middle-class, and a product of capitalism, even when they were in the same political party (Montes 2011, 28; Arce Cuadros 2022). Tensions between Bartolinas and feminists were exacerbated by the hundreds of years of indigenous women's servitude to lighter-skinned women, who often viewed them as clients of their nongovernmental projects rather than as political partners (Arce Cuadros 2022, 163; Rousseau and Ewig 2017, 426). Except for the feminist anarchist groups Mujeres Creando and Feminismo Comunitario, until recently Bolivian feminism has rarely taken indigenous women into account, in either theoretical or ideological terms (Aillón 2015). Feminists often criticized *chachawarmi* as granting women no more than symbolic power, and as exercised in only limited local spaces, even if its transformative potential was acknowledged (Arce Cuadros 2022, 199; Rivera Cusicanqui 2010, 189).

The mistrust between the Bartolinas and feminists also reflects differences between Western privileging of the individual and indigenous worldviews that emphasize the collective. Feminism is often construed by indigenous women as another Western imposition and one that foments division with indigenous men (Flores Carlos 2009). This mirrors Abu-Lughod's (2002) criticism of Western liberal feminism as guilty of neo-imperialism, where indigenous or local gendered expressions take different forms from those accorded to the liberal self.

Coca, the drug war, and women's organizing

The Bartolinas' growth as a national political force is rooted largely in the semitropical Chapare east of the city of Cochabamba, where the 1980s boom in US demand for cocaine led to exponential growth in internal migration to cultivate coca. Miners who lost jobs due to closures of tin mines in 1985 joined mostly Quechua-speaking peasant farmers from Cochabamba's valleys who had been impoverished by a severe drought in 1982 and the neoliberal relaxation of agricultural imports after 1985. Across the Americas, the negative impacts of neoliberal reforms fell most heavily on women and indigenous peoples (Hall and Patrinos 2005).

Without local state institutions, unions formed, modeled after their highland counterparts and affiliated with the CSUTCB or with the Confederación Sindical de

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Colonizadores de Bolivia (CSCB),[8] combining indigenous concepts of reciprocity, mutual dependence, and care for people and place with Western union traditions. The male-dominated unions organized into federations that handled everything from granting land and resolving boundary disputes to building schools and disciplining antisocial behavior (Grisaffi 2019, 98). Linked together through the powerful Coordinator of the Six Federations of the Cochabamba Tropics (Coordinadora de las Seis Federaciones del Trópico de Cochabamba), they now number close to a thousand.

Women play a key role in coca cultivation, which takes place close to home, allowing them to combine farmwork with household obligations. While both women and men usually plant, tend, and harvest coca, women dominate coca sales while men do most of the heavy labor, such as clearing land (Alvarado Choque 2020). Women most often manage reciprocal indigenous labor exchanges (*ayni*) between people who are frequently tied through bonds of *compadrazgo* (godparenthood), one of the most significant social relationships in rural Andean society. The resulting high density of ties this produced between women facilitated the creation of the type of social movement networks that have been associated with mutual support, commitment, self-sacrifice, and continuity over time (Krinskey and Crossley 2015).

Most of the Chapare coca crop is processed into cocaine. Where growers are involved in the illicit trade, men's participation is almost always limited to the first rudimentary stage of production, whereas women work as cooks and transport leaf, chemical inputs, or cocaine paste. Wealthier women, most often involved in commerce, sometimes bankroll younger men to operate a cocaine paste workshop, in which they share profits (Grisaffi 2022).

The United States responded to the coca boom with a militarized and prohibitionist strategy that sought to criminalize growers. For twenty-five years in Bolivia, the War on Drugs (as the United States called the policy) failed to consistently curb coca cultivation while also generating violence and undermining democratic practices. This policy approach was also highly gendered (Muehlmann 2018; Buxton, Margo, and Burger 2021): the steep income declines provoked by forced eradication at the end of the 1990s fell most heavily on women—particularly female-headed households—as women are paid less, lack equal access to family income, and have fewer employment possibilities (Gumucio 2015; see also Bautista-Revelo et al. 2021).

Interdiction and eradication by US-trained and funded police and military units (Unidad Móvil Policial para Áreas Rurales, or UMOPAR, also known as the "Leos") included sexual violence. In 2005, a female coca grower told us:

> Here, more than anything, women suffer violent sexual assaults from the Leos … I was at the point of going through that in 1996. Suddenly two men appeared. The Leos … I was just a girl, not even sixteen. They pushed me in the corner and tried to get my clothes off … Then my father arrived from the fields … They soon changed their tone, saying that they were just inspecting the property—but he told them to clear off. After, I cried and cried … A lot of girls have been raped. And not only the girls, but the women too, older women, married women.[9]

Following the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City, Washington policy makers linked the War on Drugs and the War on Terror into a single offensive (Youngers 2003), and indigenous Andeans became targets (Huanca Rodríguez and Vásquez 2022). In 2007, Juana Quispe, a veteran women's union leader who was charged with

[8] In 2009, the CSCB changed their name to the Union Confederation of Intercultural and Indigenous Communities of Bolivia (CSCIOB).

[9] Interview, female coca grower (name withheld), Chipiriri, October 2005.

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terrorism and later became a MAS congresswoman, recounted: "In Chapare they shot at us, they killed us, they humiliated us, they left orphans, they have done everything to us, but they couldn't beat us—even though we were dying we continued to fight; they put all the leaders in jail, accusing us of terrorism, criminal organization, manufacturing explosive weapons and armed uprising."[10]

Given coca's importance to household finances, growers mobilized to defend the right to cultivate it, utilizing the vocabulary of indigenous rights and national sovereignty that appealed to a Bolivian and increasingly international audience (see Grisaffi 2019, 119–123). Against this backdrop of repression, male leaders became more open to women's unions and actively encouraged women to form their own unions. Like highland indigenous campesino leaders who promoted women's organizing in the 1980s, they reasoned that UMOPAR would not be as brutal to women protestors as they were to men (Zurita 2005, 89; PACS 2009, 108). Women deploying traditional gender roles to advance their movement's goals is widely practiced worldwide and meant that Chapare women's earliest protest activity involved putting their bodies on the line (Arce Cuadros 2022, 130; Principe 2017). The leader Rosena Rodríguez explained: "More than anything, women went first because the men were attacked like animals, for that reason women have always been at the head of the march."[11]

Previously, Chapare unions had a position called "female liaison" (as did the Bartolinas within the CSUTCB) (Padilla Poveda 2014, 128), a role filled mostly by single women or widows (Ramos Salazar 2013). Most future *cocalera* leaders began their union careers in this position, but when they married, they often found it difficult to continue. In July 2006, Roxana Argandoña, then a union leader and municipal councillor, described her 1980s union involvement: "Back then they just ignored the women. We weren't union leaders, no, they just called us 'secretary for female affairs.' Nobody paid attention to us. When an important visitor came our job was to cook, to look after them. Back then we were not brave yet. Before they used to say why should women participate in a meeting? … I always used to answer no, I want to have my voice heard too."[12]

By the mid-1990s, some *cocaleras* began articulating both practical and strategic concerns related to gender.[13] With increasing cogency, they demanded respect at home, in leadership positions, for equitable land titling, and education and literacy (Zabalaga 2004, 12). However, while the Chapare women's federation organizes all women under its wing, the only local *sindicatos* are those established during initial colonization. Union ledgers we reviewed in 2014 revealed that roughly equal numbers of men and women were registered as members, even though their involvement remained shaped by gender, as the meetings have never been easy for *cocaleras*. Often with small children underfoot, they cannot concentrate fully on the proceedings; we never witnessed a man arrive with or care for a child at a meeting.

The veteran leader and national senator (2006–2009) Leonilda Zurita added: "When we first started, we were afraid to speak or make proposals because sometimes the men would laugh or make comments among themselves. So often we would be nervous and some of us would even tremble from fear."[14] As a result, women largely followed men's direction, and their resolutions usually mirrored those of the men's federation, often word for word (Ramos Salazar 2013, 127). When choosing their leaders, they never lacked men ready to

[10] Interview, Juana Quispe, leader, Federación de Mujeres, Chimoré, July 2007.
[11] Interview, Rosena Rodríguez, Union Leader Central de mujeres de Centrales Unidas, Shinahota, January 2014.
[12] Interview, Roxana Argandoña, councillor, Villa Tunari, July 30, 2006.
[13] Practical concerns are a response to immediate perceived needs. Strategic concerns are concrete objectives to overcome subordination, most often focusing on political and institutional changes (Molyneux 1985).
[14] Interview, Leonida Zurita, leader, Villa Tunari, September 12, 1999.

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"help them," very often at the request of the women themselves (Arnold and Spedding 2005, 96). Roxana Argandoña clarified: "There was a lot of male chauvinism; they didn't want to take us into account because women have no value; we are for serving in the kitchen or at home to take care of the children."[15]

By January 1995, three women's federations had formed, duplicating the structure of the male-dominated federation. In March of that year, a special CSUTCB congress met with the participation of the federations to form a political instrument representing campesino electoral interests in elections. Women's involvement proved a game changer because male *cocalero* leaders, led by Evo Morales, sought to position themselves as the vanguard of the campesino movement, and they needed cocalera backing to do it (Arce Cuadros 2022, 76). Apolonia Sánchez recalled: 'We were obliged to get organized, even if the men did not want us to. Above all our brother Evo said "yes, together with the women we will defend ourselves"'.[16]

Another critical turning point came with the four-hundred-kilometer Women's March to La Paz in December 1995, generally supported by male leadership, to demand an end to coca eradication and respect for human rights. Mistreatment and imprisonment by the antidrug police strengthened women's resolve, and their growing logistics skills boosted organizing (Ramos Salazar 2013, 116–117, 149). Chapare women steadily developed a sense of purpose beyond domestic and family farm concerns, but at this stage, their focus was almost exclusively on protecting themselves (Zurita Vargas and Draper 2003). Juana Quispe told us: "The Chimoré Women's Federation here organized with three objectives, first, to defend life because the Leos were shooting at us; second, to defend coca, which is the economic sustenance for our family, and finally, to defend territory, because without land we cannot live."[17]

Alex Contreras Baspineiro (1995), who accompanied the march, noted that although women participated fully, they had no role in subsequent negotiations, nor were any topics specific to women ever included in *cocalero* demands. Nonetheless, for the first time in Bolivia's history, indigenous women acted as representatives of social movements and negotiated with the government without political parties or male intermediaries. This fundamentally changed how women were perceived politically and opened up the possibility that they could act autonomously, marking a shift from "directed" to "associative" movement (see Molyneux 2001, 140–162; Arce Cuadros 2022, 77–78).

From then on, women's participation became vital to *cocalero* resistance (Jáuregui Jinés 2019; García Yapur, García Orellana, and Soliz Romero 2014, 278). In 1997, with four local federations then in place, Chapare women formed the regional Coordinating Body of the Federations of Rural Women of the Cochabamba Tropics (Coordinadora Campesina de Mujeres del Trópico de Cochabamba, COCAMTROP), that affiliated with the national Bartolinas.

Women leaders from this period shared certain characteristics, similar to other women's leaders throughout Bolivia. Ten of the eleven women leaders interviewed by Sandra Ramos Salazar (2013, 58) were young, single, and without family obligations.[18] Five of them remained unmarried and childless for most of their union careers, and the other six had only one or two children at a time when the fertility rate was five children per woman in the Chapare (Arnold and Spedding 2005).[19] They almost all enjoyed support from

[15] Interview, Roxana Argandoña, councillor, Villa Tunari, September 2019, interview courtesy of the Andean Information Network.

[16] Interview, Apolonia Sánchez, Villa Tunari, July 20, 2023.

[17] Interview, Juana Quispe, leader, Federación de Mujeres, Chimoré, July 2007.

[18] Being without a husband and children is seen as less than fully adult in Andean culture, and implied that these young women were easy to influence (Maclean 2014). They are considered "incomplete" in the sense that "no unmarried man or woman may be designated to a position of authority" (Burman 2011, 79).

[19] Children are seen as a source of inspiration—of knowing what you are fighting for but also a responsibility and an extension of the woman herself (Ramos Salazar 2013, 142).

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a male relative, usually their father or brother(s), and those who lacked that support had much shorter union involvement. Our field observations support this finding: female leaders often talked about how the men in their lives felt emasculated and were "jealous" of their success. However, the male-dominated unions had to give up some space for them, precisely because they needed women to achieve their broader goals.

Eight of Ramos's interviewees wore traditional indigenous dress (*pollera*), whose wearers routinely suffer racism. Many Chapare women in the 1990s spoke more Quechua than Spanish, which presented another barrier to participation beyond the local level. Apolonia Sánchez explained that most had little formal education which made union involvement vital for developing public-speaking skills, knowledge, and for managing organizations.[20] She stressed that the union was like a school and a training ground: "I feel proud to be a woman who is from the countryside, who wears the pollera. Maybe I am not a professional, but I have been trained within this organization (the union). I have learned a lot, so I always say all of us are professionals."

After 1997, female leaders hosted regular programs on the coca union's radio station (Radio Sovereignty), including on gender-specific issues such as domestic violence, reproductive rights, and female workload, which was vital for organizing and education. According to the women we interviewed, these programs slowly transformed gender relations in the home, as such issues would not normally be discussed openly. Listening to the radio became part of the daily work of building a subaltern counterpublic that empowered women to act (Grisaffi 2019, 180–184).

Men frequently accused female leaders of being "loose women" who just wanted to have affairs with male leaders (Zabalaga 2004, 16). Two women told Ramos that their partners' doubts that they were faithful led to physical and psychological abuse, which caused them to abandon their union roles (Ramos Salazar 2013, 136). Women described how they couldn't show any "weakness" or emotion because male leaders would interpret it as a sign that they weren't disciplined or committed enough to lead (Ramos Salazar 2013, 113), findings that were mirrored in our own research.

Men, too, are subject to gossip—during fieldwork we often encountered rumors that male leaders would get drunk, have affairs, attend brothels and spend union cash to do so. This did not appear to have a detrimental impact on a man's union career; in fact, such a reputation might strengthen it. We observed how attendance at drinking sessions establishes a man's position, as it is there that relationships are built and deals are brokered. Women either self-excluded from male-dominated spaces or, if they did attend, would generally leave early, lest they face accusations of being "loose." This was particularly the case for younger female leaders; older married women had more freedom.

For union tasks, male leaders receive a *viático*, a daily stipend to cover expenses. None of Ramos's interviewees collected one, a particularly serious constraint given most women's financial dependence (Zabalaga 2004; Ramos Salazar 2013, 145). Our research revealed that even when they secured union resources, women complained that they got less than what went to men.

Activist *cocaleras* have always juggled the *triple jornada*—the triple workday. Not only were they critical to the success of protests, they also cultivated coca for income and cared for their children and households. This is still often seen as the natural order of things. Honorata Díaz, municipal councillor for Villa Tunari (2005–2010), explained: "Women's work is still the family: raise children, cook and once that is done, then we can leave home and work as union leaders."[21] For Remigia Ferrel Vallejos, another union leader: "Being a woman is not easy, being a mother is not easy, sometimes we work at home early in the morning and we don't have a break. We . . . work in the *chaco* [fields] together with the

[20] Interview, Apolonia Sánchez, Villa Tunari, July 20, 2023.

[21] Interview, Honorata Díaz, municipal councillor (2005–2010), Villa Tunari in Eterazama, April 13, 2023.

https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2024.14 Published online by Cambridge University Press

man, we cook and wash dishes, we do everything, we don't stop, we still must wash clothes too. In the morning we get up and it is the same again."[22]

Despite these limitations, the Chapare cocalera organization became a widely emulated model of women peasant organizing, training, and empowerment throughout Bolivia (García Yapur et al. 2015, 78). Their organizational strength proved crucial to forming the MAS and to indigenous women's entrance into electoral politics (Jáuregui Jinés 2019).

Cocaleras and Bartolinas

The Bartolinas formed as a result of men's sense of necessity: to develop a structure within the CSTUCB that reflected gender complementarity (*chachawarmi*) (Salazar and Broekhoven 1998 quoted in Padilla Poveda 2014, 130). It represented the first time that a Bolivian union organization decided to create a women's branch, making the Bartolinas the only women's organization within the COB. However, from the very beginning, tensions existed between which identity was paramount—as women, as belonging to an ethnic group, or as socioeconomic class—and how to articulate between them (Ticona 2006 quoted in Padilla Poveda 2014, 113).

The 1990s were a time of transition within the CSUTCB, as the center of struggle and rural social movement power shifted to the *cocaleros* in the Chapare. This profoundly changed the Bartolinas as well, because the *cocalera* movement injected energy and determination into the national organization. After participating in forming the political instrument that led to MAS in the late 1990s, *cocaleras* have been elected to top leadership in the Bartolinas more than representatives from any other region or sector.[23]

An increasingly important political foothold, which also cracked open the door for indigenous women to enter electoral politics, was state decentralization in 1994, which was implemented alongside multicultural, pluriethnic, and gender-sensitive reforms. The Law of Popular Participation (LPP) founded new municipalities throughout the country, channeling national government funding to rural areas for the first time (Kohl 2003). In the Chapare, all five municipalities have been governed ever since by the coca grower unions—with MAS often taking 100 percent of the vote—in municipalities widely considered among the country's best managed (Grisaffi 2019, 150–151; Kohl 2003).

This change was preceded by three years by another law that proved crucial for rural indigenous women. In 1997, thanks to sustained organizing and lobbying by Bolivia's increasingly vibrant feminist movement, a quota law passed mandating that women account for 30 percent of political candidates (Montes 2011, 223). This victory convinced the Bartolinas to run in the 1999 municipal elections on the MAS ticket. It also increased their contact with feminist nongovernmental organizations, some of which provided training courses and seminars (Jáuregui Jinés 2019, 157). From that point on, the Bartolinas steadily increased the number of municipal councillor posts they held, although they rarely became mayors. The electoral experience and its inequalities facilitated a steady expansion of their awareness of gender injustice (Arce Cuadros 2022, 84; Jáuregui Jinés 2019).

By the early 2000s, the Bartolinas had spread in a patchwork throughout the country, centered in much of La Paz department and all of Cochabamba (García Linera, Chávez León, and Costas Monje 2010, 540). Continued growth, driven in no small part by *cocalera* leadership and MAS government literacy and rural education programs, pushed its membership to 1.7 million rural women by 2014 (García Yapur, García Orellana, and Soliz

[22] Interview, Remigia Ferrel Vallejos, executive, Federación Chimoré, March 20, 2021, interview courtesy of the Andean Information Network.

[23] Silvia Lazarte Flores (1999–2001), Leonilda Zurita (2001–2003 and 2008–2010) and Juanita Ancieta (2013–2015 and 2015–2017) (Aguilar Jiménez 2018, 5).

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Romero 2014, 221). Now the country's largest and most important women's organization, despite significant language and cultural differences, the Bartolinas is also one of the largest, strongest, and oldest indigenous women's organizations in Latin America (Román Arnez 2008, 32; FAO n.d.).

In November 2004, the Bartolinas joined four other indigenous organizations to create the Unity Pact of Indigenous peoples that became the most loyal pillar of the MAS party. After winning the 2005 elections, four indigenous women were made ministers—something unprecedented in Bolivia (Delgado 2010). According to Melissa Buice (2013, 168), this reflects how state features are "critical influences on indigenous women's policy outcomes," as Rousseau and Ewig (2017) found in comparing advances in indigenous women's rights between Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia. Without the MAS in government and the party reliant on indigenous votes to remain in power, the Bartolinas could never have achieved what they did.

In 2008, after thirty years of debate over the question of autonomy from the CSUTCB, the Bartolinas became organizationally independent and equal organizationally, forming their own confederation (CNMCIOB "BS") (Condo quoted in Poveda Padilla 2014, 129–131). Their Strategic Development Plan for 2006 to 2010 set out their position: "Dependence on other confederations, such as the CSUTCB was not a good strategy, it implied depending on it to be able to organize the defense of rights, which in general was only for men and women could not raise gender specific demands."[24]

Feminists and Bartolinas: Gender parity in action

Rousseau and Ewig (2017, 426) and Arce Cuadros (2022, 26) contend that indigenous women's political empowerment can advance only when the indigenous movement is strong and women's position in that movement is robust. We suggest that another factor is also at play. A growing feminist movement proved critical through its gender parity initiatives in 1997 and 2006–2007, curiously repeating the pattern of Bolivian middle- and upper-class women who fought for women's voting rights beginning in 1929 (Aillón 2015). However, the 1929 initiative specified that voting rights should only be granted to literate women, effectively excluding indigenous women who were then denied all access to formal education. Almost a hundred years later, that history created a negative backdrop to efforts at collaboration between indigenous women and upper-middle-class white or mestiza women (Aillón 2015).

An example of these tensions is contention over abortion (Dibbits and Pabón 2012). The Bartolinas oppose it vehemently, arguing that feminist demands for abortion rights are a veiled threat of ethnocide and that abortion has a negative effect on communities (Deere and León 2002). This attitude prevails even though abortions are Bolivia's third leading cause of maternal death, and even higher among indigenous women, with most abortions occurring in rural areas (UNICEF n.d.).[25]

A critical moment for advancing indigenous women's political representation arose during the 2006–2007 Constituent Assembly, whose president was the Chapare *cocalera,* municipal councillor, and national Bartolinas executive Silvia Lazarte. The assembly was the most diverse decision-making body in Bolivian history, with more indigenous and women's participation than ever before.

While the Bartolinas initially distanced themselves from the feminist coalition (Movimiento de Mujeres Presentes en la Historia, MMPH) that they had previously participated in, their platform prioritized women's rights. They demanded gender equity

[24] CNMCIOB-BS, Plan Estratégico de Desarrollo, 2006-2010, La Paz, 2006, cited in Poveda Padilla (2014, 134).

[25] In Bolivieka, the maternal mortality rate dropped by half during the Morales government, although it remains one of the highest in the region (UNICEF n.d.)

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in land titling, small business support for rural women, sanctions against domestic violence, and rights to education and health services. Faced with substantial resistance to this agenda from indigenous men, the Bartolinas made common cause with feminists, largely convinced by *cocalera* and Bartolinas leader Leonilda Zurita, who argued that gender parity was consistent with *chachawarmi*. However, they maintained their fierce opposition to abortion (Htun and Ossa 2013, 11).

The Bartolinas growing political maturity was evident through their effective alliance with Bolivian feminists, even though men initially accused them of trying to divide the indigenous movement (Jáuregui Jinés, 2019, 113). Their persistence convinced the Unity Pact to include their proposals alongside those on race and class (Flores Carlos 2009, 81). Demonstrating a newfound independence, indigenous women initiated many of the new constitution's intersectional clauses, shaped by their understanding of *chachawarmi* (Rousseau 2011b; Jáuregui Jinés 2019, 104). Jáuregui Jinés (2019) contends that for the first time they saw with three eyes—race, class, and gender. While still largely associative in relation to men's campesino unions, they were moving closer to becoming an independent actor.

Bolivia's 2009 constitution is one of the most advanced in women's rights in the world, granting civil and gender rights, social equity, and equality with men. "The Constitution changed a great deal, raising consciousness of women's rights among many women for the first time," explained Freddy Condo, a longtime adviser to the Bartolinas.[26] Rousseau (2011a) considers it as ushering in a significant change because it marks the beginning of a greater government emphasis on gender equality.

By 2010, the Bartolinas held ten Legislative Assembly seats, a leap forward from 2005, when they won three (Jáuregui Jinés 2019, 146). The Legislative Assembly achieved gender parity in 2014, one of the world's highest rates of women's representation (Farthing, 2015). This continued in 2019, with women winning 46 percent of the House and 56 percent of the Senate (IDEA 2021). Between 2015 and 2020, 25 percent of legislators were Bartolinas, but few held leadership positions in government (Sánchez, Pereira Álvarez, and Quisbert Carvajal 2019).

A principal reason given by MAS party leadership for this exclusion was that the low educational levels of most indigenous women (and often indigenous men as well) precluded leadership roles for them. The MAS increasingly utilized this argument on lack of "expert knowledge" to "invite" candidates—well educated and therefore almost exclusively middle class or above—both into the legislature and into the administration, a move that occasionally was supported by the Bartolinas themselves, who worried they weren't ready for the responsibility (Jáuregui Jinés 2019, 139; Sánchez, Pereira Álvarez, and Quisbert Carvajal 2019, 143). Nonetheless, women's rights progressed: in 2012, the MAS party adopted gender parity and by 2014, 45 percent of the party's leadership were women, a higher percentage than any other political party (Sánchez, Pereira Álvarez, and Quisbert Carvajal 2019).

At the municipal level by 2015, women councillors had more than doubled their seats from 2004 (Domínguez and Pacheco 2018). Gender parity is achieved via the *suplente* (or alternate) system, with candidates voted in as a pair: one man and one woman who switch halfway through the term (see Grisaffi 2019, 165). This *alternancia,* or shared office, in rural areas draws on indigenous traditions of rotating leadership. However, in practice, women are often pressured to give up their positions sooner than required. "Councillors have had their house set on fire, their children assaulted, and been physically attacked, all so that they'll resign early," according to Jessy López, the director of the Association of Female Councillors of Bolivia. "We frequently have participation, but no real representation, because women follow men's lead as they have been taught to do since

[26] Interview, Freddy Condo, adviser to the Bartolinas, La Paz, April 13, 2022.

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childhood," she continued (Farthing 2016). This situation has largely been ignored by the MAS, which has tended to characterize such strife as personal disagreements (Arce Cuadros 2022, 246).

Serving as a councillor puts additional pressures on women, as the *cocalera* and former vice president of the Villa Tunari Municipal Council, Ruth Sejas Charca, explained in 2019: "Now, we alternate between men and women so as to achieve gender parity, but the reality is that we women have more work, because beside the unions and municipalities, we have to take care of our families everyday needs."[27]

Women remain largely absent in municipal leadership: of Bolivia's 339 mayors, most of them rural, only 8 percent were women in 2018 (ONU Mujeres 2018, 6). In 2021, the *cocalera* and Bartolinas activist Segundina Orellana became the first woman mayor in the Chapare's largest municipality, Villa Tunari. However, she is one of only two women among a total of forty-seven Cochabamba department mayors (Revollo 2021). Female mayors face sexist abuse. Comments made on the *cocalero* Facebook page Radio Kawsachun Coca about Shinahota's former mayor Matilde Campos reveal open misogyny. User comments include: "everyday this whale gets fatter."[28]

In 2006, the Aymara sociologist María Eugenia Choque argued that within the public sphere, rural indigenous women's participation remained 80 percent symbolic and only 20 percent in consequential decision-making (Choque 2006). Ten years later, Sandra Ramos Salazar (2016) found in interviews in rural La Paz, where both the Bartolinas and the CSUTCB got their start, that "men as well as women frequently consider women's 'participation' in the union 'unnecessary,'" attitudes that reflect those in the Chapare fifteen to twenty years earlier and that to some degree had been overcome.[29] This appeared to be a perpetuation of what Calla, Huanto, and Sarsuri (2006) found in rural La Paz in 2006: women were considered in the same category as children and therefore needed men's help in any form of political participation. Nicole Fabricant (2012) observed similar dynamics in the landless movement, made up largely of highland immigrants, in eastern Bolivia.

A setback and resurgence: The 2019 coup and its aftermath

After the Bartolinas presented a depatriarchization plan in October 2018, the leadership told the anthropologist Charlotta Widmark (2019, 37) that they saw themselves as in a stronger position than ever. However, in November 2019, following disputed elections, a coup forced the MAS party's Evo Morales into exile and replaced him with a hard-right interim administration led by Jeanine Áñez. The resulting unrest (which included the Bartolinas) led to military repression that resulted in thirty-five deaths, including eleven coca growers (Farthing and Becker 2021). Much of the racist ire that surged during the coup and its aftermath was directed toward indigenous women: a market vendor recalled that after the coup, "motorbikes drove by and hit us" (Farthing and Becker 2021, 144). Anyone associated with MAS was persecuted, which combined with the COVID-19 pandemic, represented a significant pushback against indigenous and women's rights.

A year later in 2020, a reconstituted Unity Pact (which included the Bartolinas) asserted renewed independence from MAS and had joined with urban social movements to force new elections, which brought Luis Arce, Evo's minister of finance and MAS militant, to

[27] Interview, Ruth Sejas Charca, municipal councillor, Villa Tunari, July 25, 2019.

[28] Radio Kawsachun Coca Facebook page. Livestream 'Entrevista con Matilde Campos, alcaldesa del municipio informa sobre las acciones que llevan adelante frente a la pandemia'. Comment by Dimitry Guerrero posted 3rd June 2020. https://fb.watch/plpoApE4UL/

[29] A caveat here: while they share many cultural characteristics, the Aymara and valley Quechua speakers have distinct histories and cultural practices which inevitably influence gender relations.

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power. His more technocratic government diminished the influence coca growers had wielded under Morales, in part by replacing coca union leaders with his own supporters in government jobs. This included Alieta Ortiz, a former radio station reporter who complained that she was blacklisted from working as a government "communicator" because she was from the Chapare.[30] *Cocalera* influence also dropped in the Bartolinas—no coca grower has headed the national indigenous women's organization since 2017, the longest period since 1999.[31]

The move to select leaders from regions beyond the Chapare reflects a continuing increase in political maturity among Bolivia's indigenous women nationally. This was patently evident by 2023, when Bartolinas leadership declared a "frontal fight against *machismo* which is the source of violence and violation of our rights" (CNMCIOB "BS" 2023). They were actively working on social and economic projects, particularly favoring small producers; presenting proposals for extended laws against feminicide, infanticide, and rape; and insisting on 50 percent quotas for governors and mayors. Nonetheless, splits in the Bartolinas (and other Unity Pact organizations) between pro-Morales and pro-Arce factions threaten to stymie future advances in indigenous women's rights (Molina 2023).

Conclusions

Originally constituted by male coca growers, the Chapare *cocaleras* have achieved the highest levels of indigenous women's political inclusion in rural Bolivia over the past almost thirty years. As founders of MAS and the Unity Pact, and through their leadership of the national Bartolinas federation, they have advanced a stronger indigenous women's rights agenda than was conceivable in previous governments (Buice 2013). *Cocalera* leadership not only strengthened the Bartolinas so that the organization now has a presence in every corner of the country but also they facilitated entry into political decision-making, pushing the MAS government toward greater emphasis on rural indigenous women (Montes 2011, 228). Their influence allowed the Bartolinas to redefine the terms of how rural indigenous women are represented nationally (Rousseau and Morales Hudon 2017). Belonging to the *cocalera* and Bartolina organizations has given this group of indigenous women something they couldn't get anywhere else: a sense of being valued, of being represented by others like them, and of being heard (Arce Cuadros 2022, 251).

Thanks to sustained mobilization over four decades, with virtually no material resources, a double and often triple workday requiring considerable personal sacrifice, low educational levels, and often limited Spanish, along with constant discrimination from both men and nonindigenous people, these women achieved greater political representation than any group of indigenous women in Latin America. They got there through perseverance, the successful framing of their struggle around *chachawarmi*, and the good fortune and hard work of successfully electing an indigenous-oriented political party that they helped create. Their political utility to men also played a key role. While men initially used women's bodies and labor while denying them any decision-making role, this patently unfair political arrangement tipped in women's favor when men needed women's backing to advance their political agenda. As a result, women became less reliant on men, moving their organizations closer to what Molyneux (2001) calls independent.

After almost thirty years of continuous organizing in the Chapare, women there now participate more fully in union decision-making, backed by the gender parity policy

[30] Alieta Ortiz, executive secretary to mayor of Villa Tunari, Villa Tunari, 20 July 23.

[31] Wilma Choque, FECAMTROP vice president, argued that Arce put "his people" into the highest leadership positions of Bolivia's social organizations, including the Bartolinas, with a view to control them. Interview, Villa Tunari, 21 July 23.

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formally adopted by the Coordinator of Six Federations of the Cochabamba Tropics (Cruz et al. 2020). The process initiated by the MAS government successfully "opened new spaces of political participation—especially for working class and indigenous *campesina* women" (Arnold and Spedding 2012, 320).

Nonetheless, the federations headed by men still play the most important political role and gender inequality endures (Cruz et al. 2020). Violence remains a serious problem: a 2018 survey found that nearly 77 percent of women in the Chapare town of Eterazama had suffered partner violence (Herbas Challapa 2019). Conservative views of women persist, as Segundina Orellana, who subsequently was elected Villa Tunari's mayor, told us in 2019: "There remains an attitude that women are inferior, and this begins in childhood. Women suffer because they have children, they have family responsibilities, and men just don't understand . . . . we need more education and preparation to lead."[32]

But leaders also recognize the substantial gains they have won. The union leader Regina Ferrel Vallejos explained: "Before there was a lot of fatalism. Many times, in meetings I was told, 'Women don't count, the man has to come.' . . . But I didn't go home and insisted, 'I'm not going to pay dues without knowing what is going on.' That's how it was, we didn't even have the right to speak, or have our own names or hold title to land. Now it's almost 50-50, now we have rights, and we participate. We have authorities at every level of government who are women.[33]

Another union leader, María Eugenia Ledezma, said: "We have achieved greater gender parity in the Chapare than any other part of the country. We remain the best organized and play both a regional and national role because our membership comes from all over Bolivia. Our struggle is not just for this region, it's for the whole country."[34]

The success that *cocaleras* and the Bartolinas had in improving political inclusion for rural indigenous women on their own terms through the organizing frame of *chachawarmi* speaks to how women's participation in grassroots movements can move women's rights forward. In the intersectional reality that most women face worldwide, women's rights may not be primary or even secondary, but the Bolivia case suggests that over time, there can be a tendency for women leaders to incorporate a more women-focused agenda as they gain experience and confidence, and as men's reliance on their support grows.

Feminist scholars have long argued that formal equality is not sufficient to enforce substantive equality between women and men. Male-centric definitions of citizenship have long been central to policy making—forcing women to fit the mold of a male idea of citizenship (Koch 2018; MacKinnon 1991). But by entering the highest levels of government, playing a key role in rewriting the constitution and maintaining grassroots mobilization, the *cocaleras* and the Bartolinas advanced policies that directly addressed substantive gender inequalities. Their experience provides lessons that could inform not just indigenous women's movements in the Andes but also diverse women's struggles across the world.

Acknowledgments. The authors thank everyone who participated in this research, in particular the coca grower organizations and municipal governments in the Chapare. They thank the anonymous referees for their helpful comments on earlier drafts. They also thank Kathryn Ledebur, Óscar Zambrana, Alieta Ortiz, Insa Lee Koch, Caroline Conzelman, Maritza Paredes, Álvaro Pastor, Ara Goudsmit Lambertín, and Sara Aliaga Ticona.

[32] Interview, Segundina Orellana, mayor of Villa Tunari, Villa Tunari, July 2019.

[33] Interview, Remigia Ferrel, executive of Federación Chimoré, March 20, 2021, interview courtesy of the Andean Information Network. On the critical issue of equity in land access, compared with the early 2000's when 17 percent of new land titles went to women with 20 percent of titles joint female-male, presently 45 percent of new titles include women's names: in the Chapare, this figure stands at 48 percent (Lastarria-Cornhiel 2009, 238, ABI 2019).

[34] Interview, Maria Eugenia Ledezma, executive secretary, COCAMTROP, April 15, 2023.

https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2024.14 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Funding. This work was supported by the European Research Council under grant ERC-2019-ADG 884839/EXTORT and the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) under the university allocation system (University of Reading).

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Cite this article: Farthing, Linda, and Thomas Grisaffi (2024). On Their Own Terms: How Cocalera Organizing Expanded Indigenous Women's Rights in Bolivia. *Latin American Research Review* **59**, 785–802. https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2024.14

https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2024.14 Published online by Cambridge University Press