



PEASANT WARS IN BOLIVIA: MAKING, THINKING, AND LIVING THE REVOLUTION IN COCHABAMBA (1952-64)

by José M. Gordillo

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PEASANT WARS IN BOLIVIA

Making, Thinking, and Living the
Revolution in Cochabamba (1952–64)



José M. Gordillo

Peasant Wars in Bolivia

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To Niña, my endless love.

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Abbreviations

| | |
|-------|--|
| ACSJC | Archivo de la Corte Superior de Justicia de Cochabamba |
| AHPC | Archivo Histórico de la Prefectura de Cochabamba |
| AJIC | Archivo del Juzgado de Instrucción de Cliza |
| AJIP | Archivo del Juzgado de Instrucción de Punata |
| AJIT | Archivo del Juzgado de Instrucción de Tarata |
| AJPC | Archivo del Juzgado de Partido de Cliza |
| AJPP | Archivo del Juzgado de Partido de Punata |
| AJPT | Archivo del Juzgado de Partido de Tarata |
| CDM | Comando Departamental del MNR |
| CNRA | Consejo Nacional de Reforma Agraria |
| COB | Central Obrera Boliviana |
| COBUR | Central Obrera Boliviana de Unidad Revolucionaria |
| COD | Central Obrera Departamental |
| CPM | Comando Provincial del MNR |
| FRC | Federación Rural de Cochabamba |
| FSAB | Federación Sindical Agraria Boliviana |
| FSB | Falange Socialista Boliviana |
| FSTCC | Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Campesinos de Cochabamba |
| FSTMB | Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia |
| FUN | Frente de Unidad Nacional |
| MAC | Ministerio de Asuntos Campesinos |
| MAS | Movimiento al Socialismo |
| MNR | Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario |
| MNRA | Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario Auténtico |
| MPC | Movimiento Popular Cristiano |
| PAN | Partido Agrario Nacional |
| PIR | Partido de Izquierda Revolucionaria |
| PL | Partido Liberal |
| POR | Partido Obrero Revolucionario |
| PRA | Partido Revolucionario Auténtico |
| PRIN | Partido Revolucionario de la Izquierda Nacional |
| PSC | Partido Social Cristiano |
| PSD | Partido Social Demócrata |
| PURS | Partido de la Unión Republicana Socialista |

Preface

The fieldwork supporting this book was done in the mid-1990s, when I was preparing my doctoral dissertation. Based on the research findings, I published a book in Bolivia (2000) regarding revolutionary peasants' political experiences in Cochabamba. When looking back at the academic and political context in Bolivia two decades ago, I can better discern now why it was then that my book was so controversial. In fact, I was swimming against the tide, for an "ethnic wave" meant the popular political imagery of the peasantry in Latin America became derogatory again, while simultaneously idealizing that of the indigenous people. This happened as a result of the end of the Cold War in the world and the military dictatorship era in Latin America, during the 1980s. Therefore, when analyzing and projecting social change forwards into the coming twenty-first century, both scholars and politicians at that moment distanced themselves from the previously canonical Marxist concept of "class struggle" and replaced it with the premise of "ethnic conflict."

Twenty years later, however, the pendulum of history has again oscillated. The initially pristine representational image of the *indígena originario* (original indigenous people) has lost its luster in Bolivia. Nowadays, both in symbolic as well as practical political terms, the powerful *cocalero* (coca-leaf producers) unions are at the head of Bolivian politics and its economy. How academics and politicians will react in the future to this shifting political reality is still uncertain, but the fact is that peasants are again back on top of the central political stage. My book is an updated version of the genesis of the *campesino* (peasant) identity and the consolidation of the peasant movement that fought for unionization and political autonomy during the revolutionary period (1952–64) in Cochabamba. Thus, it will not only contribute to the specific understanding of current

cocalero unions' political behavior in the sub-tropical lands of Chapare, but also to the general discussion of the peasants' revolutionary role in Latin America.

I am grateful to Hendrik Kraay for encouraging me to write this book. He has always been generously present, both as colleague and friend, during the ups and downs of the writing process. Language barriers had been especially challenging when writing this book, because it was necessary first to transit from Quechua and Aymara to Spanish, and subsequently to English. I want to acknowledge the extraordinary work done by Joe Trigueiro, who went far beyond his task as proofreader to make the text compelling to the English-speaking reader. The institutional support I had received from Pablo Policzer, the former director of the Latin American Research Centre at the University of Calgary, was invaluable. My appreciation to Brian Scrivener, Helen Hajnoczky, and Melina Cusano at the University of Calgary Press. I am also grateful to Rogelio Velez, Isabel Fandino, and Andrés Lalama, who contributed as research assistants during the initial phase of the writing process.

The book's text was enhanced by wonderful drawings, photographs, and maps. I want to express my admiration for the artistic work by Rene Gamboa Iporre, the Bolivian artist that contributed with the drawings. The fairly unique photographs of the revolutionary actors were provided by Teresa Chávez Vidovic and José Antonio Quiroga, director of Plural editores in La Paz (Bolivia), from the collection of Sinforoso Rivas Antezana. The maps were elaborated by William Gillies. Finally, I want to thank the two anonymous readers of the manuscript for their wise comments and editing suggestions.

José M. Gordillo
Bow Island (Canada), Winter 2022

Introduction

Before the 1952 revolution in Bolivia, the word *campesino* (peasant) was rarely used to designate rural folk living in the countryside. Instead, rural workers were still called “Indians,” a term coined by the colonial state to differentiate the native people from European “Spaniards.” The persistence of the word Indian in the Bolivian lexicon was indicative of how ingrained segregative practices were in social behavior, as rural workers were excluded from fully exercising their rights as citizens due to their alleged position as Indians, at the bottom of the social structure. This study explores the genesis and evolution of the peasant movement in the Cochabamba valleys (see map 1.3), and follows peasants as they struggle to develop their own *campesino* identity as part of a fight for unionization, access to land ownership, education, and political representation and autonomy during the revolutionary era (1952–64).

In April 1952 the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (Nationalist Revolutionary Movement, MNR) seized power in Bolivia, supported by militias composed of urban workers and miners. The revolution initiated a period of transformation in Bolivian society that lasted until November 1964, when the military seized power through a coup d’état. During the revolutionary period (1952–64), rural workers unionized and asserted a more active role for themselves in national politics. In Cochabamba, rural workers achieved an extraordinary political power that allowed them to first occupy and later on distribute lands belonging to the large estates of the valley and the highlands. As a result, former *colonos* (estates’ tenants), *piqueros* (smallholders), and peons were incorporated into the modern nation as *campesinos*.

The historiography of the Bolivian revolution during the 1960s and 1970s focused either on state institutions or on political parties and their

ideologies, and portrayed the proletarian mineworker as the central revolutionary actor. Historians considered the role of the peasants as marginal, because they, allegedly, did not pursue any revolutionary aim. Peasants were also perceived by these authors as a premodern group that had to be educated to fully participate in national politics.¹ Although still depicting the *altiplano* (highland) and valley rural workers as Indians, historians in the 1970s utilized a short-term historical vision when analyzing the rural society of Cochabamba, asserting that cultural boundaries in the region were the weakest in the nation and that the valley Indians were by far the most mobile. In the late nineteenth century, market pressures had stimulated the Indian population to take up wage labor in the highland mines, and many remained in the highlands to work there. Those who returned to the valley, however, brought with them their intercultural experience and their savings, which allowed them to buy land and socially “transform” themselves into peasants.

Scholars in the 1970s were influenced by developmentalist ideas, a conceptual framework that perceived change in the third world as a transition from traditional society to modern society. This structural transition was considered parallel to a process of ethnic evolution from the original Indian to *mestizo* (a person of mixed biological or cultural background), and finally to white. These were rigid conceptual models that obscured a wider understanding of ethnic changes as fluid processes, processes linking identity and politics. Instead, the prevalent idea in the 1970s was that a “caste” system had been inherited from the colonial era—a system which separated Indian, mestizo, and white cultures from one another—and wherein the rural environment was the natural habitat of Indians whereas mestizos and whites resided in the towns and cities. When mobilized rural workers in the Cochabamba valley began to challenge the landlords and central powers, the “caste” system model became a deficient analytical tool to interpret the complexity of rural revolutionary change and the political role played by the insurgent peasant leaders. As posited by historian James Malloy: “Still, it is very important to note that these mobilized Indians did not become citified, ‘choloified,’ or ‘mestizofied’ ... an entire new pattern of acculturation was already under way in the valley before 1952.”² What was this “new pattern of acculturation” about? According to Malloy, acculturated Indians who transformed themselves into mestizos

(and later on into whites) simply followed a path along stages of civilization that ends in modernity. Acculturated Indians who did not follow that road (who were not “mestizofied”) suffered an involution process, a process that scholars such as Malloy thought would lead them back to barbarism. Although Indians were unionized, their “movement was a violent process which stirred general revulsion and fear in white and mestizo Bolivia.”³ In the *Valle Alto* (Upper Valley) of Cochabamba, *caciques* (Indian leaders) emerged from the rural population and began fighting among themselves in search for local power. From the perspective of scholars like Malloy, Cochabamba’s revolutionary-era peasant wars were no more than local feuds among embattled rural strongmen with parochial visions.

Furthermore, the 1959 Cuban revolution and the reaction of the United States to that event preoccupied many scholars so completely during the 1960s and 1970s that the impact of the nationalist Bolivian revolution was eclipsed. When writing about Bolivia, the Cuban revolutionary experience was employed by scholars as a pre-set referential parameter for evaluating all revolutionary ends. The prominent and frequent use of adjectives such as “uncompleted” or “restrained” to modify the perceived extent of Bolivia’s revolutionary transformation in scholarship indicates the intelligentsia’s dismissive attitude concerning domestically led social change in this historical moment. In the end, this academic trend meant that the Bolivian revolution was widely ignored by scholarship.⁴ Che Guevara’s failed guerrilla experiment and his death at the hands of the Bolivian army (1967) further disinclined the intellectuals’ interest to study the Bolivian revolution. Finally, the internal support for a guerrilla movement—especially the support coming from the peasantry—was weak in Bolivia, because Bolivians were experiencing their own nationalist revolutionary agenda.⁵

The Ethnic Turn

The 1980s and 1990s were witness to what might be called an “ethnic wave” in Latin America, if not a tsunami. Workers’ unions globally and in Latin America, suffered under prolonged attack and were practically dismantled, as a consequence of the broad application of neoliberal policies. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the end of the Cold War, diluted the significance of the proletarian class as a major political force in the

eyes of the global elites. Social analysts reacted by abandoning the concept of class struggle and replaced it with the conceptual web of ethnic confrontation. As a result, workers and peasants (and their political agendas) were not interesting anymore, rather it was the “indigenous” people who emerged as the new icon of social conflict and revolution.

In contemporary Bolivia, national politics is still colored by ethnic movements that began in the early 1980s and the political projects these movements advanced through their agency. According to James Dunkerley, the process of writing the history of the Bolivian revolution was interrupted by the repressive military coups of generals Hugo Banzer (1971) and Luís García Meza (1980). The cohort of intellectual exiles that returned to the country in the late 1970s, after the end of the Banzer regime, was exiled again by García Meza. This kind of political gatekeeping has prevented the Bolivian revolution from “becoming historical” until quite recently: “The exiles were thereby obliged to reflect afresh upon a range of compacted experiences, many of which upset the standard Marxist-Leninist paradigm as much as those of liberal democracy and radical nationalism.”⁶ The interpretive vacuum created by the lack of Marxist, liberal, or radical nationalist interpretations was filled up by ethnic rather than class interpretations of the Bolivian revolution, and these were quickly picked up by altiplano intellectuals who had recently migrated to the city of La Paz from the countryside.

International scholars during the 1980s published some interpretations of the Bolivian revolution, although these were minimal in number relative to those published on the Mexican revolution.⁷ When addressing the peasants’ role in the revolution, these scholars continuously downplayed the political autonomy of the peasant movement and overestimated its alleged subordination to either middle-class urban revolutionaries or proletarian vanguards. The political relevance of peasant leaders was diminished when they were held up in comparison to urban politicians or proletarian leaders. Herbert Klein, for instance, asserts that young urban political radicals, not the peasant leaders, were who triggered the unionizing process in the countryside, thus unleashing a scourge of rural violence similar to the “Great Fear” period of the French revolution (July to August, 1789). However, he argues that when the agrarian reform decree was enacted, the political behavior of the peasants changed: “With

the elimination of the hated hacendados and many of their *cholo* [citified Indian] middlemen, and the granting of land titles, the Indians became a relatively conservative force in the nation and actually grew indifferent if not hostile to their former urban worker colleagues.”⁸ Klein simply ignores the revolutionary role that was played by the peasants, claiming instead that by 1964—when the peasant-military pact was already signed and a military coup completed the ouster of the MNR from power—rural workers were no more than a “passive peasantry.”

In a similar vein, Dunkerley states, in an analysis of peasant struggles in the Cochabamba valley, that “this region was again to be the scene of prolonged and violent disturbances during the late 1950s and early 1960s as a result of market conflicts between Cliza and Ucureña and a struggle between local leaders of the peasant *sindicatos* [unions].”⁹ Once again, Dunkerley places the emphasis on parochial quarrels and shortsighted feuds between local “caciques.” According to this perspective, peasants lacked their own political goals and were prone to manipulation by urban politicians. When considering the negotiations between peasants and the military to end the *Champa Guerra* (1959–64) between Cliza and Ucureña in the Valle Alto of Cochabamba, Dunkerley asserts that the truce was only possible due to General René Barrientos’ charm, which had seduced the peasant leaders.¹⁰

During the 1980s, however, the pendulum of history again shifted towards the end of the Cold War era and—as mentioned before—social analysts reacted by abandoning the concept of class struggle and replacing it with ethnic confrontation. The implications of this analytical shift went far beyond academic circles and into political activism, as the new analytic framework was predicated upon the idea that indigenous movements and leaders were the only people capable of legitimately leading Bolivians to a prosperous future. The awakening of new historical eras, however, always requires a revisitation of established histories. In 1984, Silvia Rivera published a book on the political fights endured by the Aymara and Quechua peasantries during the twentieth-century in Bolivia.¹¹ Based upon three case studies (Ucureña, Achacachi, and northern Potosí), she reflects on “the role of collective memory in the contemporary peasant-Indian movement.”¹² Rivera claims that revolutionary politicians had coopted valley peasants in Cochabamba by their incorporation into the revolutionary

state, through the union apparatus of the MNR. Peasants had lost their collective memory in 1952, and the new peasant identity that emerged, alongside the revolution, had fully wiped out all the previous aspects of their original Indian identity. In fact, Rivera advances the idea that the peasants' adscription to the state-sponsored mestizo project was the mechanism used to erase all vestiges of "Indianness" in the minds of the Quechua population of the valley. In contrast, Rivera concludes, the incorporation of the altiplano Aymara population into the revolutionary state was incomplete due to the persistence of a communal mentality, which led to the impossibility of implementing any kind of smallholding system in the highlands. These ideas also laid the inspirational grounds for the emergence of an ethnic movement named *Katarismo* in the Bolivian altiplano, which based its political demands on long-term historical self-perceptions of oppression.

In an article published in 1987, Xavier Albó echoes Silvia Rivera's position by asserting that the agrarian reform was launched by the MNR regime and that peasants were incorporated into the agrarian reform process solely as subordinated actors¹³ Both Albó and Rivera share a premise: that peasants were always subordinated—either actively or passively—to the state's hegemonic agenda. More specifically, they claim that the Cochabamba valley peasants did not have the communal shield to protect themselves from the MNR's hegemonic domination. This position of "inherent subjugation," a position that had motivated the peasant leaders to sign the peasant-military pact in 1964, allowed the peasants to actively participate in the conspiracy against and the eventual ouster of the revolutionary MNR by military coup. As peasants had proved to be manipulable—both authors conclude—only ethnic movements could succeed in the future. The history of the revolutionary valley peasants was, therefore, irrelevant and would be forever relegated to the back burner, if not completely abandoned.

In the late 1980s, Brooke Larson published a regional history book that transformed the scholarly perception of the Cochabamba peasantry.¹⁴ Her pioneering, long-term analysis of the cyclical mercantile forces linking the silver mining industry in Potosí to the agricultural production of the haciendas in Cochabamba unveils a parallel peasant class-formation process in the valley.¹⁵ According to Larson, during the first sixteenth-century

silver cycle, as Indians fled their ayllus and hid in the haciendas to avoid paying tribute, landowners sheltered and protected them from state tax collectors by enlisting the newcomers in their hacienda records. Indians did not enroll as such in the hacienda records, rather they used different fiscal identities to hide their Indian identity, initiating a process of shifting socio-cultural identities that culminated in the emergence of mestizos, a self-identifying group who did not consider themselves to be either Indian or Spanish. In the second nineteenth-century silver cycle, Bolivian liberals opened up the country's markets to international trade, and increased their exportation of silver and importation of staples. Cochabamba's landlords suffered in these new marketplaces, and their businesses languished as they were unable to compete with the foreign, mass-produced agricultural products that had flooded the market and forced down prices. Meanwhile, the mestizo labor force rushed into the mines and, upon their return to the valley—cash in hand—they purchased plots of land from bankrupt landlords. By the mid-twentieth century, the valley mestizos had started building links with urban intellectuals and political activists to demand local education and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in the modern nation of Bolivia for all peasants.

Previously canonical, these essentialist conceptualizations of closed ethnic groups with immutable cultures, living separately in the altiplano and the valleys, were called into question. Ethnic identities were indeed fluid, for people were able to trespass ethnic boundaries if it was in their social or political interest to do so. When colonial Indians fled their communities and reappeared as mestizos in the valleys, they were not betraying their Indian culture but rather resisting colonial oppression through the means of a newly created identity.¹⁶ Scholarly interest began to focus upon peasant consciousness, as peasants were now perceived as active subjects in creating their own history rather than passive recipients only capable of reacting to external stimuli. It might have made more sense if this shift had indeed meant an open scholarly debate over the political roles of both the Indian and mestizo in revolutionary Bolivia, but this did not happen in the 1990s. There are several reasons for this—among them the politicization of ethnicity—and the “ethnic debate” never really took place in academic circles, but instead a monochromatic focus on Indians developed, generally silencing any analysis of mestizos.

In the first two decades of the twenty first century, indigenous people in Bolivia have been at the center of widespread academic and political interest. Previous interpretations of the Bolivian revolution have been revisited under the lens of indigenous revolutionary experience.¹⁷ When reassessing the revolution and its legacy, however, the most prevalent idea put forward was that the MNR regime and its urban intellectual operatives were the ones who initially designated the rural workers as “campesinos” instead of Indians, as part of their push for cultural change, leading them towards modernity.¹⁸ Therefore, it was assumed, the altiplano Indians were defending their culture when they rejected the imposition of the revolutionary regime, while the valley mestizos were largely cooperative with the MNR cultural project. This assumption implicitly denied the campesinos a role as active agents in their own history and redirected the focus of social research towards the history of indigenous altiplano societies, while campesinos in the valleys received far less attention.¹⁹

During the first two decades of the twenty-first century, few authors published books on the political experience of the Cochabamba peasantry. Historians José M. Gordillo and Laura Gotkowitz did, however, publish studies during this period, and their studies emphasize an active role for peasants during both the revolutionary and the pre-revolutionary eras. In 1998, Gordillo published the proceedings of a round table attended by four high-ranking peasant leaders who debated crucial aspects of their political experience in the revolution.²⁰ In 2000, Sinforoso Rivas, one of the top revolutionary-era peasant leaders in the Cochabamba valley, published his own memoirs.²¹ Shaped by their own words and voices, a new image of the valley peasant leader came to blossom, so to speak. The revolutionary-era valley peasant leaders were neither the previously abhorred *caciques campesinos* (peasant union bosses), nor the currently idealized *indígenas originarios* (original indigenous), rather they were seasoned politicians who deftly analyzed and masterfully argued the revolutionary experience in Bolivia as real power brokers and actors.

In 2000, Gordillo published a book analyzing the peasants’ revolutionary struggles against landlords and central authorities in the Cochabamba valley, arguing that peasants were dynamic political actors fighting for their rights.²² Meanwhile, published in 2007, Gotkowitz’s book focuses upon indigenous peoples in the altiplano area of Cochabamba and stresses

“the forces of law” as a central player undergirding the rural political mobilizations in the pre-revolutionary era.²³ Both studies challenged the Katarista outlook of the revolution, which depicts peasants as subordinated actors before the state, as well as minimizing the role played by memory and identity.²⁴ In a 2017 article and 2021 book, Carmen Solíz argues that even the altiplano *comunario* (community) leaders negotiated with the MNR regime their own agrarian reform project, thus also challenging the Katarista interpretation of the comunarios’ political agency during the revolutionary period.²⁵ Chiefly among this interpretation was the conceit that the MNR’s nationalist agenda had simply silenced the demands of indigenous communities and imposed a top-down land reform.

More recent studies by Bridgette Werner²⁶ and Sarah Hines²⁷ have further expanded the time frame and scope of peasant and popular movements in the political history of Cochabamba. Werner not only analyzes the active role of the peasant leaders when negotiating with the revolutionary state, but also extends chronological reach of her historical research on the crucial post-revolutionary era to include the *Masacre del Valle* (Valley Massacre) in 1974, when the military dictatorship bloodily confronted its former campesino political allies. Hines focuses on popular struggles over the control of water sources in Cochabamba. Although the 1952 revolution redistributed land through agrarian reform, the control of water sources was (and still is) a divisive issue in the valley. The peasant unions revolutionary experience proved to be useful for an understanding of contemporary popular movements’ negotiations with the state, such as the *Guerra del Agua* (Water War) in Cochabamba in 2000. Both of these studies reinforce the validity of studies concerning the peasant revolutionary experience in Cochabamba as a means to understand current popular movements and their political agendas.

The Aim and Structure of the Book

This book reveals the active political role played by the Cochabamba valley peasants during the revolutionary period (1952–64), but from a non-state-centered perspective. Rather than looking for causes or outcomes, emphasis is placed on the revolutionary experience of the peasants. Based on contemporary research on social, political, and cultural issues in Latin America, the book goes beyond the recognized contexts

of central power and focuses instead on geographic, generational, ethnic, class, and gender informed aspects of the socio-cultural human-matrix in places where local power is situated.²⁸ This study was also inspired by research on revolutionary Mexico, research that often argues that popular participation and agrarian mobilization were central in the shaping of the revolutionary state. Therefore, far from being a hegemonic state, central power in revolutionary Mexico was weak and was frequently forced to negotiate power with a politically mobilized Mexican society. Influenced by European social history and comparative peasant studies on peasant agency and resistance,²⁹ and inspired by cultural theorists such as Michel Foucault, Raymond Williams, and Joan Scott, among others, regional case studies were conducted about the peasant experience in Mexico that challenged the widely held academic conceptualization of peasants as passive and solely economic human beings. Instead, these studies decentered the hegemony of the Mexican revolutionary regime and mainly employed a gender-based approach in their analysis of identity, subjectivity, and power under that regime.³⁰

The central argument of this book is that the Cochabamba valley mestizo population of rural workers forged their own collective “campesino” identity alongside their revolutionary struggles against regional elites and the state. Their newly created identity allowed the campesinos entry into the Bolivian national political arena as dynamic actors, transformed their subjectivities, and modified the extant political culture of Bolivia.³¹

Chapter one examines the regional long-term historical narrative in order to situate the context from which the Cochabamba valley peasant revolutionary movement emerged in the mid-twentieth century. This chapter describes the process of class-formation and *mestizaje* (process of shifting ethnic identities or mixing cultures) in the valley of Cochabamba, beginning with the Inca state and the organization of a maize enclave in the *Valle Bajo* (Lower Valley), under Inca Wayna Capac. This enclave was established through the relocation of original pre-Inca ethnic groups and the redistribution of agricultural lands. The imperial Inca state reallocated these lands to colonizers from other parts of the Inca empire, such as the current Bolivian altiplano area and Peruvian Cuzco. When the Spaniards arrived in the Cochabamba valley, they established colonial Indian territories only in the Valle Bajo, while Spanish owned haciendas were

established in the remaining lands of the valley. Throughout the colonial period, haciendas were sanctuaries where a great number of altiplano Indian people took refuge, a sociological self-performative identity-shift to avoid state cash and labor tribute. A process of mestizaje began, which lasted until the mid-twentieth century. As a result, the mestizo population in the valley gained access to the agricultural real estate market, a market that had been formerly monopolized by the regional landed elite. During the pre-revolutionary period in the Cochabamba valley, hacienda colonos and piqueros led a struggle for unionization, land ownership, and education, and they were supported by Chaco War (1932–35) veterans, intellectuals, and political activists from several nationalist post-war political parties. During the 1940s, rural workers in Cochabamba challenged the local officials' and the landlords' power by demanding both land and education. Both *comunarios* (community members), in the altiplano, as well as hacienda peasants, in the valley, employed different strategies to fight with the elites. For instance, comunarios resorted to violence in the Ayopaya upheaval (1947), while at the same time peasants peacefully negotiated with the local elites to allow for the organization of their peasant union and rural school center in Ucureña, Valle Alto, (1946). Based upon their own historical experiences, comunarios and peasants assumed dynamic and shifting roles in their fight for the rights of full modern citizens in Bolivia.

Chapters two, three, and four chronologically analyze the process of “making the revolution” (political action) as parallel to the process of “thinking the revolution” (public discourse) in Cochabamba. In the first stage of the revolution (1952–53), a process of peasant unionization began at the same time as the seizure of hacienda lands by revolutionary peasants. The government took control of the process of land redistribution only when the agrarian reform decree was enacted in August 1953. The peasant movement in the valley, however, was not monolithically composed or conceptualized. In the Valle Alto, peasants demanded “agrarian revolution,” which meant a grassroots-controlled distribution of land. The Ucureña peasant center led this faction, under the influence of the Partido Obrero Revolucionario (Revolutionary Workers' Party, POR). In the Valle Bajo, meanwhile, peasants supported the official “agrarian reform,” which was a state-controlled distribution of land. In August 1953, the regime

issued the agrarian reform decree amid intense peasant mobilization. The landlords reacted by supporting a reactionary coup in November that failed in the end. In this initial stage of the revolution, the landlords, peasants, and MNR politicians debated amongst themselves the meaning of the words “Indian” and “peasant,” attempting to assign a concrete character to the revolution.

In the second stage of the revolution (1954–58), peasant struggles intensified due to the MNR’s first left and then right-wing policy shifts. Initially, the party’s left-wing distributed estates’ lands to mineworkers and peasants. Later on, the MNR’s right wing reformulated populist policies, instigating confrontations between workers and peasants. Unionism was weakened as peasant leaders were replaced by political mercenaries. The conservative government of the time sought to modify the spirit of the agrarian reform by allowing former landowners to benefit from the process. Peasants resisted the government’s attempt to centralize power in the hands of official urban organizations to the detriment of their peasant unions. In this second stage of the revolution, the regime monopolized the press in Cochabamba and public discourse focused on the antagonistic relationship between *vecinos* (town dwellers) and *campesinos*.

Finally, in the third stage of the revolution (1959–64), the Champa Guerra between the peasant militias of Ucuireña and Cliza erupted. Over and above the MNR’s internal factionalism, ethnic conflicts between *vecinos* and *campesinos* had even further exacerbated peasant confrontation in the Valle Alto. The plan of the right-wing faction of the party aimed towards the centralization of political power into urban organizations and this triggered human perceptions of domination and subordination in terms of both territory (city versus countryside) and society (*vecinos* versus *campesinos*). Urban revolutionaries—despite their calls for social homogeneity and the incorporation of peasants into the nation—elaborated a scapegoat representational image of the *cacique campesino* (peasant union boss) and equated him to the earlier rural oppressor, the landlord, in an effort to keep peasants as subordinate political actors. Contradictions unleashed as a result of the Cold War ideological confrontation further influenced regional politics by promoting the presence of the Bolivian military in rural areas. The military took advantage of the MNR’s factionalism to negotiate power with the peasant union apparatus and gain

support for the Víctor Paz and General René Barrientos binomial ticket in the 1964 national presidential and vice-presidential election. Peasant pacification by the military transferred political action from the countryside to the city, allowing the military to overthrow the MNR regime through a coup d'état. In this later stage of the revolution, the peasants, MNR politicians, and the military debated negative representations of the cacique campesino in the hopes of further institutionalizing the revolution.

Chapter five analyzes the character of the Cochabamba valley peasantry. After the 1952 revolution, peasant leaders with grassroots support started a long struggle against landlords, politicians, and the military, and through these battles they also forged their campesino identity. Throughout this process, peasant subjectivities were transformed, and a new political culture was created in the nation. Interviews with peasants are used herein to explore their revolutionary experience and political culture. This portion of the analysis focuses on the interrelations of gender, ethnicity, and class in order to interpret and reconstruct the local contexts of power at the time. The peasants' testimonies included illustrate the patriarchal character and strong sexual content of perceived images of authority and power in the Bolivian revolutionary context. Moreover, testimonies display the subtleties of the peasants' negotiations to contest the colonially defined Indian identity and their efforts to impose their own campesino identity vis-à-vis their political opponents.

Revolutionary peasants in the Cochabamba valley actively shaped the outcome of the 1952 Bolivian revolution. Revolutionary changes were profound and irreversibly transformed the Bolivian social-matrix, its economy, and its politics. That is the reason why—as argued in the conclusion of this book—the Bolivian revolution is roughly comparable to any other revolution in Latin America or anywhere else in the world. Close to the seventieth anniversary of the Bolivian revolution, the time has finally arrived for a fresh reflection upon both its limitations and its achievements.

Sources and Methods

As the purpose of this study is to analyze peasant power in the Cochabamba valley during the revolutionary period, regional sources were privileged when searching for local information. To revisit the regional history of Cochabamba, locally published secondary sources are incorporated into

the bibliography. The documents stored in the *Archivo Histórico de la Prefectura de Cochabamba* were crucial to the understanding of regional politics and backstage political deals included herein. Judicial records in the *Archivo de la Corte Superior de Justicia de Cochabamba* and in local justice courts in the Valle Alto contained information regarding local peasant societies, power networks, and the observed patterns of political behavior of the peasants. Information in the Cochabamba newspapers has been employed in this study for a dual purpose: First, to reconstruct the sequence of political events in the revolutionary era; and second, to recover the interpretations of the events through the eyes of players who acted in the political arena. Finally, the interviews with peasants, politicians, and intellectuals—who were witness to or participated in the revolutionary events—are examined to interpret the character and political experience of revolutionary peasants.

Peasants in Bolivia in the mid-twentieth century were mostly illiterate; therefore, their direct voices can barely be found in the written sources. Intermediaries such as government officials, politicians, intellectuals, and journalists, among others, used to tell or write statements “for” or “about” the peasants. Even judicial court records that provide direct statements of peasant witnesses require precautionary measures when attempting a historical interpretation of their voices. In general, it is necessary to be aware that language and power structures indeed affect an intuitive, immediate understanding of the peasants’ voices. More specifically, peasants at that time were either Aymara or Quechua language speakers with limited command of the Spanish language, which was the language of the power elite and their institutions. Once peasants’ voices were finally printed in the Spanish written sources, additional problems emerged if those sources were published again in the English language. In order to ameliorate the language and power burdens, the criterion that has been employed in this study is one of an effort to quote the voices of peasants into the text narrative as extensively as possible. This solution, however, posits some methodological worries, because historians usually prefer interpreting peasant voices instead of directly exposing them to the reader.

Peasant voices in this study do not only come from written sources, but have also been generated by peasants in their interviews. It is important to realize, however, that during the revolutionary era, peasant societies

were particularly patriarchal and women were not allowed to participate in politics. The public was a male-dominated sphere, where women were banned. As a consequence, women are utterly invisible in the main sources (newspapers and archives) of information. When interviewing peasants to explore their revolutionary experience, however, some women's voices finally emerged, either confirming the authoritarian character of the male-dominated peasant society, or expressing their feeling of frustration over their constrained wish to participate in politics due to the perilous political context that was monopolized by aggressive male actors. The men interviewed were former peasant leaders, *chicheros* (chicha producers and sellers), and *vecinos*. The women were wives of leaders, *chicheras*, and *vecinas*. The purpose of these interviews was to explore the discourses generated at the peasant union (public sphere) and at the tavern or *chichería* (private sphere). Both the union hall and the tavern were places where the peasants lived out their everyday, ordinary social experiences during the revolutionary period. When interviewing people, anthropological methods were applied to gather, process, and deliver information, as such, this study crosses the established border between history and anthropology.

In chapters two to four, the description of political action (making the revolution) comes parallel to the analysis of political discourse (thinking the revolution). The premise considered is that “acting the revolution” and “thinking the revolution” were both linked processes which were produced simultaneously, but they were not mere reflections of each other. Public discourse is not limited to reflecting reality, but rather constitutes an active part of that reality. More than being just a vehicle for communicating ideas, language functions as a system of meanings and as a process of signification. Therefore, the multiple operations of public discourse are political acts, because they are framed and undergirded by concrete power relations.³²

To examine public discourse during the three consecutive revolutionary periods, chapters two, three, and four consider newspapers' editorials, communiqués, denunciations, and commentaries upon peasant issues. Direct peasant voices that were published in the newspapers increased in number gradually as the peasant leaders' political autonomy evolved. The Champa Guerra (1959–64), which happened in the third revolutionary period, was the pivotal event that hoisted peasants as independent

interlocutors in the political arena, unleashing a rhetorical explosion within the upper echelons of the peasant cadres. According to Jerry Knudson, the success of the Bolivian national revolution was only possible because of the influence of newspapers and literature upon the middle-class.³³ After the initial revolutionary events of April 1952, as the peasants took an active role in regional politics, the local press devoted more and more space to publishing news about peasant political activities. The media-based process of inserting representational characterizations of peasants into the political consciousness and public discourse of Bolivia was intense. In the months preceding the revolution, for instance, *Los Tiempos* newspaper published around three-monthly news items concerning the peasants. One year later, this number saw a twenty-fold increase, when it reached an average of sixty items per month. Additionally, the number of editorials, articles, greetings, commentaries, communiqués, and images related to peasant political activity also steadily increased over the course of the revolutionary era, reaching a climax in the early 1960s when peasant wars broke out in the Valle Alto.

In chapter five, peasant voices, coming from both men and women in the Valle Alto, describe intimate aspects (living the revolution) of the everyday life experience of the revolutionary generation. Their testimonies showed how sexualized the perception of authority and power had become among members of this revolutionary cohort. Their testimonies also illustrate the way in which ethnicity and class were intertwined as issues, something that happened when peasants confronted urban dwellers to impose their own campesino identity. Their vivid narratives regarding the “liberating” market forces that allowed their fight against the oppressive power of the landlords was in stark contrast to their unpleasant memories of political turmoil in the Champa Guerra. The underlying message of their narratives was that even though painful, the revolutionary experience was worth living. They believe that the revolution opened a window of opportunity allowing them to fully integrate themselves into the modern Bolivian society.

In the conclusion of the book, there is an analytical reflection upon the historical status of the nationalist Bolivian revolution, the revolutionary role of the mestizo peasantry in the Cochabamba valley, and the political as well as subjective transformations that were endured by the

revolutionary campesinos. This final reflection on the Bolivian revolution itself and the role of revolutionary campesinos is situated within the context of academic and political debates during the first two decades of the twenty-first century in Bolivia.

