

Bridgette Werner  
IRIS Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award

The IRIS Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award supported me through three months of dissertation fieldwork in Bolivia during the fall of 2015. During this time I was able to advance considerably on the first portion of my archival research, build connections with local academics and colleagues, and plan out further stages of research.

My dissertation project focuses on the interrelated conflicts that unfolded in the Cochabamba region of Bolivia in the aftermath of the 1952 Revolution and 1953 Agrarian Reform. These political processes operated in tandem to dismantle the social, economic, and political systems of the past and opened spaces for the creation of alternative projects, while also revealing deep fractures in Bolivian society. In the Valle Alto of Cochabamba, the dual process of agrarian reform and peasant unionization—first executed autonomously by peasant communities and later sanctioned by law and encouraged by the revolutionary party—was closely followed by armed conflict that would snowball into low intensity warfare lasting more than a decade. Known colloquially as the Ch'ampa Guerra, my dissertation proposes that this conflict encapsulates and exposes the interrelated conflicts that emerged from the earth-shaking transformations of rural Bolivian society in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

My dissertation project proposes that Bolivia's post-revolutionary period was marked by the intensification of ties between the revolutionary state and countryside—ties that exacerbated, exposed, and forced into conflict complex, pre-existing tensions between rural communities. The process of agrarian reform, passage of universal suffrage, and generalized expansion of the state into rural regions after the 1952 Revolution enfranchised a whole new set of political actors, tying many groups of peasants to the revolutionary party. These processes also further empowered local union leaders who acted as key intermediaries between the rural political bases and the urban seat of

government. These union leaders acted to represent rural unions, first to organize political bases for the MNR, but later—as the MNR began to fall to pieces in the early 1960s—to organize opposition to what rural communities came to see as unwarranted government incursions. Additionally, deepening rivalries between individual peasant union leaders formed the rhetorical basis of persistent armed conflict in the Valle Alto.

The Summer Fieldwork Award enabled me to complete a significant portion of the regional archival work for my dissertation. I spent the fall in Cochabamba, Bolivia, working in two urban archives that hold key document collections on the 1952-1986 period. The Municipal Hemeroteca (newspaper archive) holds a significant collection of regional and national newspapers in which I was able to follow press reports on the conflict in the Valle Alto and the implementation of the Agrarian Reform decree for key years. Working in this archive was also a methodological learning experience: after working my way continuously through a couple of years of newspapers, I realized that this method would be unsustainable for the whole period of study. When I return to complete my fieldwork in 2016, I will be able to use this experience to refine my methodology for working with print sources, again in the Municipal Hermoteca.

The most important documents that I found in the newspaper archive consisted of press coverage of the Ch'ampa Guerra, particularly photographs of the combatants brandishing their weapons or guarding the trench that demarcated the boundary between warring communities. The newspapers also printed communications from the leaders of both sides of the conflict in which they articulate their reasons for continuing to engage in armed conflict and through which I have been able to trace changes in justifications provided by these leaders. In other words, press reports provide a roadmap to the shifting rhetoric of politicized violence in the Valle Alto. Lastly, the state's efforts at pacification and the involvement of the military in that process comes into sharp relief in these sources.

During the fall I also worked in the archive that really provides the documentary basis for the full period of study: the Prefectura collection at the Ministerio de Descolonización. This collection consists primarily of correspondence between the Prefect (a state governor equivalent) and various levels of government (from the President down to local leaders in far-off provinces), unions, community organizations, et cetera. This collection is of paramount importance to my project, not least because the correspondence between the Prefect in Cochabamba and the Subprefects and other local authorities in the Valle Alto illustrates both the expansion of state power into the countryside and the unfolding of conflict and state response in that region. Having the opportunity to spend a good deal of time working through these sources was essential to my project in part because the archive itself is relatively poorly organized. Thus, my most important archival collection is also the most time-consuming one to work through. I am very grateful for the research support that allowed me to dedicate time to this archive. The support of the Summer Fieldwork Award enabled me to advance on a significant portion of my dissertation research, work that allowed me to draw some preliminary conclusions that will set the frame for the next phase of my dissertation research.