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Women's Voices on the Executive Council

Popular Organizations and Resource Battles in Bolivia and Ecuador

by

Paul Dosh and Nicole Kligerman
with photographs by James Lerager

In the 2000s, Bolivia and Ecuador were marked by battles over natural resources in which mass mobilizations challenged the neoliberal privatization of resources such as water and natural gas. In El Alto and Quito, these mobilizations boosted the public standing of women whose frontline militancy helped confront privatization and build momentum for the election of women to top leadership. Although gender discrimination persisted, women's activism in these resource battles demonstrated to men their capacity to lead in arenas other than health, family, and education. In the wake of these conflicts, variations in women's voice—the power to speak, set agendas, and dictate discourse—on the executive councils of popular organizations prove to be determined by societal sexism, leadership and training opportunities for women, the presence of more women on the executive council, the status of the council seats won by women, and the particular organization's decision-making process.

Keywords: Bolivia, Ecuador, Natural resources, Social movements, Women

In the 2000s, popular movements in Bolivia and Ecuador responded to neoliberal privatization of natural resources with mass mobilization (Dangl, 2007; Buitrón, 2008). In El Alto, Bolivia's 2003 plan to export gas through Chile provoked massive protests that paralyzed the metropolitan area, reversed the

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policy, and created momentum for popular control of natural resources. In Quito, the attempted privatization of water in 2004 provoked popular opposition that led to its defeat and the constitutional prohibition of water privatization. In both countries, these battles occurred as part of the contemporary struggle against neoliberalism and the larger struggle against exploitation that dates back to colonial times. These repeated mobilizations forced the resignation of presidents in Bolivia in 2003 and 2005 and in Ecuador in 1997, 2000, and 2005.

These resource battles have attracted intense attention, but the role of women leaders has often been overlooked (though see Arnold and Spedding, 2005; Hylton, Choque, and Britto, 2005; and Cabezas, 2008). Although women leaders are commonplace in the lower ranks of popular movements, scholarship on their impact is often confined to issues such as women's equality, family, health, and education (e.g., Moser and Peake, 1987; Müller, 1994). An ambitious generation of scholarship has explained the dynamics of feminist and women's movements in Latin America (e.g., Radcliffe and Westwood, 1993; Rodríguez, 1994; González and Kampwirth, 2001; Molyneux, 2001; Baldez, 2002; Kampwirth, 2004; Shayne, 2004), but further research is needed to examine the impact of female leadership among organizations battling for objectives not traditionally considered gendered. Many scholars of women's political roles in Latin America take Maxine Molyneux's (1985) work as their point of departure, working from her concepts of practical gendered versus strategic feminist interests. Julie Shayne (2004: 3–4) builds on Molyneux's work by focusing on women's participation in revolutions where their initial objective, survival, though a practical demand, was neither gendered nor feminist in Molyneux's sense. Complicating Molyneux's binary, our research focuses on female leaders who organize around resource privatization, challenging patriarchy by fighting for their practical needs.

Although resource management is not typically considered a gendered activity, the relationships of men and women to natural resources can differ markedly. Zwarteveen and Bennett (2005: 18) argue that "water development policies and projects, always presented as gender neutral, in practice, almost always have gender-differentiated outcomes." Gender dichotomies are further reinforced in the resource-management planning process. For instance, when water is framed as a basic need in the private sphere, women's needs are discussed; when the focus is irrigation policy, however, it is framed as a masculine issue and women's voices are excluded (Zwarteveen and Bennett, 2005: 15). This silencing of gendered experiences of resource access leads to a masculinized discourse and resource-management systems that do not reflect differentiated experiences.

In the past decade, there have been limited but significant changes in the role of women within government and society in Ecuador.¹ Since 1995, the women's movement in Ecuador has become increasingly important and has created a focused agenda, leading to the Violence Against Women Law, the Maternity Law, and an increase in the proportion of legislative seats held by women from 4 percent in 1998 to 25 percent in 2007 (World Development Indicators Online, 2009). The easy availability of international nongovernmental organization (NGO) money for gender issues, however, has led many political groups to

become NGOs, sometimes weakening the movement's ability to advance its political agenda (interview, María Hernández, Mujeres por la Vida president, Quito, July 30, 2008).

In Bolivia, advances in women's rights have been constrained by polarization between what Karin Monasterios (2007: 33) describes as the "NGO-based 'gender technocracy' and the anarcha-feminism embodied in the Mujeres Creando movement." Outside this tension stood the majority of Bolivian women, mainly indigenous, most of who were not represented by these two tendencies. Under President Evo Morales, however, the government has shown a preference for bypassing NGOs and negotiating directly with the grassroots. At the same time, the proportion of women in the Bolivian national legislature increased from 7 percent in 1997 to 17 percent in 2007 (World Development Indicators Online, 2009). More dramatic, after his 2009 reelection Morales appointed women to head 50 percent of his cabinet ministries.

The promises of Bolivia's 2009 Constitution and Ecuador's 2008 Constitution also exhibited some contrasts with respect to gender. For example, where Bolivia adopted requirements for gender parity for party elections, Ecuador's assembly embraced more progressive issues, such as paternity leave and providing social security for homemakers (Hylton and Thomson, 2007: 140; Asamblea Constituyente, 2008). These distinctions between Bolivia and Ecuador should not be overstated, however, as the overall societal context in both El Alto and Quito continued to be one of widespread and deeply rooted sexism.

During the resource battles in El Alto and Quito, thousands of women took the greatest risks and often led struggles on the front lines. Women had long played leadership roles at the neighborhood level but had largely been excluded from the executive councils of popular organizations. In the wake of these resource battles, the executive councils of some groups witnessed an increase in women's *voice*—the power to speak, set the agenda, and dictate discourse. As described by Sian Lazar (2008: 243–246), voice remains a culturally and politically important concept for the direct democracy practiced by popular organizations. What explains variations in women's voice?

To answer this question, we examine four popular organizations selected for their key roles in the broader movements surrounding either El Alto's 2003–2005 battle for gas or Quito's 2004–2007 battle for water. In El Alto we focus on the Federación de Juntas Vecinales de El Alto (Federation of Neighborhood Councils of El Alto—FEJUVE) and the Central Obrera Regional (Regional Workers' Central—COR), and in Quito we study the Ecuarrunari federation of indigenous peoples and Foro Urbano (Urban Forum). We focus on gender dynamics within the executive leadership, but our analysis is informed by the experiences of women at three levels including the rank-and-file membership, local neighborhood leaders, and the executive council.

Case analysis highlights five factors that help explain variation in women's voice. First, a high level of *societal sexism* continued to characterize both Bolivia and Ecuador, though in Ecuador sexism was decreasing more steadily. In both cases, however, sexism powerfully constrained increases in women's voice. Second, organizations varied in their *leadership and training opportunities*. Although most groups had lower-ranking posts open to or designated for women, some organizations also had leadership academies for women. Third,

the *change in presence* of women on the executive council varied, though in all cases the percentage of seats occupied by women increased. Fourth, the *change in status* of the particular council positions occupied by women also varied. We gauge status by a position's degree of influence in the perceptions of executive council members. And fifth, the hierarchical or horizontal orientation of the *decision-making process* made increases in women's voice more or less likely, as hierarchical groups with greater concentration of power proved more resistant to change. Horizontal structures are those that allow members at the base to have input into decisions at the executive level. Drawing on our analysis of the causal processes observed (see Brady and Collier, 2004: 252), we argue that increases in women's presence and status on executive councils is most likely to result in increases in voice in groups with horizontal decision-making and high levels of leadership and training opportunities for women. By contrast, in organizations with hierarchical decision-making and a low level of leadership and training opportunities, increases in women's presence and even status may fail to yield increases in voice. To explore this argument, we begin with an overview of the El Alto battle for gas and describe our two Bolivian case studies, the FEJUVE and the COR. Turning to the Quito battle for water, we examine the Ecuadorian cases of Ecuarrunari and Foro Urbano. Comparative analysis develops the argument, and we conclude with a summary of findings.

EL ALTO'S 2003–2005 BATTLE FOR GAS

El Alto, Bolivia, a city of nearly 1 million inhabitants perched on the rim of the high-altitude basin that forms the capital city of La Paz, has long been known for its grassroots mobilization and militant political participation at the local level. As the mainly indigenous population continues to grow because of migration from the altiplano, much of El Alto still lacks basic services. Formed to meet the basic needs of Alteños, in 2003–2005 popular organizations played key roles in the battle for gas. Importantly, the case of El Alto must be understood in the context of a series of struggles provoked by the process of privatization under President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada in the 1990s (Kohl, 2004; Kohl and Farthing, 2006: 102; Gordon and Luoma, 2009: 85). These struggles have their roots in the militancy of miners in the 1952 Revolution and the *cocalero* (indigenous coca producers') movement's mobilizations in the late 1980s and 1990s, but the most recent cycle of protests began with the 2000 battle for water in Cochabamba, continued with the 2000–2002 Aymara peasant insurrections in the altiplano, shifted to the 2003 Black February tax protests (particularly in La Paz and Cochabamba), and culminated in the battle for gas, the exile of President Sánchez de Lozada, the resignation of President Carlos Mesa, and the election of Evo Morales (Figure 1) (Olivera with Lewis, 2004: 161–172; Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2008; Shultz and Draper, 2009).

With El Alto as the key battleground, the October 2003 mobilization against foreign control of gas stands out as one of the most militant and effective grassroots campaigns in Bolivian history (Figure 2). In 2003, Sánchez de Lozada unveiled a plan to export Bolivia's natural-gas reserves, the second-largest in South America, by selling gas to Mexico and California via a pipeline in Chile.



Figure 1. Women Activists Marching in Support of Evo Morales at an Election Rally in La Paz, December 2005 (photo © James Lerager)



Figure 2. Statue of Che Guevara in El Alto (photo © James Lerager)

Arguing that Bolivia would see little profit from the sale and that the national need for gas would not be met, hundreds of thousands of Bolivians mobilized against the plan through protests and road blockades. Women in El Alto often directed and organized the subsequent uprisings, painting antiprivatization graffiti, passing out flyers, constructing road blockades out of household items like mattresses, making bombs, and organizing community kitchens when access to food greatly diminished during the conflict (Arnold and Spedding,

2005: 64–68; interview, Celia Salazar, Colectivo de Mujeres, June 18, 2008; interview, Isabel Atencio, Colectivo de Mujeres, June 30, 2008). Ultimately, this contributed to a month of siege and a march down into La Paz on October 17, led by women clad in black mourning those killed by government forces. Despite pleas to do otherwise, women continued to march, driving back military tanks and eventually forcing Sánchez de Lozada into exile (Dangl, 2007: 148).

Although the export plan was the direct catalyst for the battle for gas, it drew together disparate forces whose demands rapidly grew far beyond the issue of export of natural gas. Drafted by popular organizations such as the COR, the October Agenda outlined three main demands: nationalization of gas, a constituent assembly, and an end to impunity for government officials involved in the killing of civilians such as the 67 people killed in the battle for gas (Kohl and Farthing, 2009: 71). In May 2005 the Bolivian congress passed the Hydrocarbons Law, which was nominally intended to return control of natural resources to the Bolivian government while raising taxes, but popular reaction in El Alto and elsewhere was overwhelmingly negative, reigniting the battle for gas in May and June of that year. This second massive mobilization, led in part by the FEJUVE and the COR, again shut down El Alto and La Paz and sought the nationalization of gas, the shutdown of the legislature, and the resignation of President Mesa (Webber, 2005: 43). Mesa resigned on June 6, but the movement's goal of nationalization proved elusive. In December, however, Evo Morales was elected president, and national rhetoric shifted away from privatization and toward nationalization despite resistance from resource-rich provinces such as Santa Cruz. Simultaneously, the presence of women leaders increased on the executive councils of Altoño popular organizations.

THE FEJUVE: TOKEN GAINS IN WOMEN'S VOICE

Founded in 1979,² the FEJUVE has become one of the two most important popular organizations in El Alto and represents over a half million neighborhood residents (Albó, 2007: 35). Beginning with 44 neighborhood assemblies in 1979, the FEJUVE grew to include 86 by 1984, 422 by 2004, and 600 by 2008. Over this period, various governments have established patron-client relations with the FEJUVE, facilitating a period of more authoritarian organizational leadership in the 1990s (Sandoval and Sostres, 1989; Quisbert, 2003; Albó, 2007; interview, Ismael Herrera, FEJUVE president, June 16, 2008). In 2008, the FEJUVE's 600 member neighborhoods were divided into 11 districts, and each district elected approximately 4 delegates to the FEJUVE executive council, which had 52 members.

Prior to 2003, FEJUVE women's opportunities for leadership experience and training were limited to a handful of local positions and occasional leadership training via NGOs.³ During this period, women held only 0–2 executive council seats in any given year. The few women who achieved council seats often left their positions mid-term, citing familial constraints and an inhospitable work environment (interview, Máxima Escobar, July 2, 2008). Women leaders were thought to be at greater risk of divorce and domestic abuse. Furthermore, within the FEJUVE it was common for women to fight among



Figure 3. Máxima Escobar, First Woman *de Pollera* to Become a FEJUVE Executive Council Member (photo © James Lerager)

themselves for the limited power already allocated to women (interview, Roxana Sejas, June 19, 2008). Despite these obstacles, in 2002 the FEJUVE elected its first woman *de pollera* (indigenous dress) to the executive council, Máxima Escobar (Figure 3). That same year, an El Alto district for the first time sent a woman as the leader of its 20-person delegation to the FEJUVE assembly (interview, Luisa Crespa, council member, June 20, 2008). These gains set the stage for the subsequent increase in women among the top leadership.

Beginning in 2003, the FEJUVE initiated a shift from being a purely civic popular organization focused on neighborhood or “street-level” demands toward a civic-political popular movement focused on broader national political transformation (interview, Máxima Escobar, July 2, 2008). This process began dramatically with the October 2003 gas protest, whose mobilizations drew upon thousands of FEJUVE rank-and-file members, though the executive council, led by President Mauricio Cori, did not get involved until the protests were well under way (Lazar, 2008: 62, 235). The protests attracted massive participation by women, and the FEJUVE was the first major group to take the lead in the general strike that shut down the metropolitan area.⁴ Said Roxana Sejas, president of the Asociación de Mujeres Trabajadoras de El Alto, “When we met in October 2003, it was all women, but the men shut the doors and wouldn’t help. But then when Goni [Sánchez de Lozada] looked weak and it seemed like we would win, then the men decided to participate” (interview, June 19, 2008).

In January and March 2005, the FEJUVE mobilized against water privatization on behalf of 57 neighborhoods to advocate the renationalization of water and challenge the high water prices charged by Aguas del Illimani (a subsidiary of the Paris-based water giant Suez). It called a general strike, which

lasted three days as negotiations occurred with President Mesa. The FEJUVE won the battle, lowering the per-household connection fees from as much as US\$445 to as little as US\$50. In May and June 2005, the FEJUVE led the second iteration of the battle for gas, a three-week general strike that led to Mesa's resignation and set the stage for the historic election of Morales. This period marked a high point for internal democracy within the FEJUVE, but as popular movements began to demobilize and find a new path in the Morales era the FEJUVE resumed its reliance on clientelistic and less democratic relationships. A resurgence of exclusionary leadership aggravated this process and stoked internal tensions, contributing to a sense that the FEJUVE's influence was in retreat (NACLA, 2005: 41; Webber, 2005: 40–46; interview, Luisa Crespa, June 20, 2008).

By 2008, women's representation on the FEJUVE council had increased to 10 of the 52 seats (19 percent), but this was not matched by increases in status or voice (see Table 1). For example, women held the positions of secretary of gender and secretary of microenterprise, but interviewees viewed neither of these posts as influential. Women increasingly participated but remained confined to workshops and seminars and were generally excluded from the president's inner circle (interview, Máxima Escobar, July 2, 2008). Furthermore, female critics of the women who were in positions of (limited) power alleged that these women had been allowed onto the executive council specifically because they did not know how to fight for women's rights and therefore would not "rock the boat." On a district level, women also remained underrepresented. Citywide, about 50 of 600 (8 percent) of neighborhood presidents were women in 2008 (up from 20 of 600 in 2003; interview, Isabel Atencio, June 30, 2008).

In 2008, opinions among female FEJUVE leaders exhibited minor differences of degree but a broad consensus about the problem of discrimination. Nearly every female council member described incidents of overt disregard and disrespect for women, including flagrant and misogynistic verbal abuse of women leaders in public meetings that had humiliated women and reduced them to tears. FEJUVE Secretary of Gender Marta Machicado (interview, July 3, 2008) argued that "the patriarchal system persists" but women share the blame because they often defer to machista norms. Because of this, she works primarily with the rank-and-file membership, teaching women to advocate for their rights. Eliadora Ramos (interview, former FEJUVE council member, July 1, 2008) contended that gender discrimination was more pronounced in the upper ranks of the FEJUVE because, with leaders from all over El Alto, people did not know each other well and had not seen the tangible contributions of individual women leaders (Figure 4). Lourdes Gomes de Pacheco (interview, July 3, 2008) argued that women were more effective leaders than men in setting the organizational agenda because of their greater transparency and more sophisticated understanding of the way people function socially. "As women, we can do things much better than men. Why not a female president of Bolivia, of the FEJUVE, of the COR?"

Most women leaders painted a picture in which men excluded women from meetings by holding them in locales such as bars. FEJUVE council member Luisa Crespa (interview, June 20, 2008), however, juxtaposed women's willingness to take risks on the front lines with their refusal to speak out and shape discourse about these actions. "Why do women march and then go back

TABLE 1
Women's Voice on Executive Councils of Popular Organizations

<i>Cases</i>		<i>Explanatory Factors</i>			<i>Outcome</i>	
<i>Popular Organization</i>	<i>Societal Sexism</i>	<i>Leadership and Training Opportunities</i>	<i>Change in Presence^a</i>	<i>Change in Status</i>	<i>Decision-Making Process</i>	<i>Change in Voice</i>
FEJUVE	High but decreasing slowly	Low	From 2 of 52 to 10 of 52	Remained low	Hierarchical	Remained low
COR		Low	From 3 of 51 to 8 of 51	From low to medium	Hierarchical	Remained low
Ecuarunari	High but decreasing steadily	Medium	From 1 of 9 to 3 of 10	From low to medium	Hierarchical	From low to medium
Foro Urbano		High	From 5 of 12 to 4 of 6	Remained high	Horizontal	From medium to high

a. Number of seats occupied by women before and after the resource battle. Note that in the cases of Ecuarunari and Foro Urbano the size of the council changed.



Figure 4. Eliadora Ramos, Executive Council Member of the FEJUVE (photo © James Lerager)

to the house?" asked Crespa. "I don't like this. Why don't they participate and discuss issues before the march?" They are willing to protest, she complained, but will not invest the hours to create a good proposal. "I'm not that kind of

woman," she continued. "I speak out. I went to the Aguas del Illimani [water company] offices. I petitioned. I learned and discussed. I did the work." As described above, this trend can partly be explained by the familial and time constraints facing women leaders, but an inhospitable work environment also remains a likely culprit (interview, Máxima Escobar, July 2, 2008).

THE COR: LIMITED GAINS IN WOMEN'S VOICE

The COR was formed in 1985 as an umbrella organization for El Alto's unions, federations, and associations.⁵ Now led by an executive council with 51 representatives from 42 popular organizations, the COR represents close to 500,000 workers and is a significant political actor in both municipal and national politics. Every two years, 660 delegates from the affiliated organizations elect members to the executive council.

Prior to 2003, there were few opportunities for women's training and leadership other than those described for the FEJUVE. During this time, only 0–3 women sat on the COR executive council in any given year, and they primarily represented gendered interests. Women in the COR were largely confined to groups like the Federación de Mujeres—a group that was ostensibly intended to represent "women's interests" to the COR but sometimes served as a dead-end organizational ghetto for women who aspired to leadership. Indeed, as women began to assume nongendered COR posts, the Federación de Mujeres found itself embroiled in internal conflict over whether and how women should agitate for increased power within the COR.

Between 2003 and 2008, mobilizations catalyzed an increase in women's standing within the COR. COR leaders almost uniformly acknowledged that it was in large part the activism of women that enabled the successful mobilizations of the 2003–2005 battle for gas and that the victory of the protests was a victory for the base. Since the 1985 defeat of the miners, Bolivian popular organizations including the COR had experienced a 15-year period of general decline and retreat, so this resurgence of mobilization was significant not just for the issue of natural resources but also for the general level of influence of popular groups. The COR promoted nationalization of natural resources, but by 2008 a dissenting faction including COR president Edgar Patana (interview, June 30, 2008) agreed with the Morales administration that some private investment was necessary (Figure 5). The COR remained in a difficult position in its relationship to the national government, however, trying to balance support for Morales with the need to remain independent, particularly as the base membership threatened to oppose Morales if the government did not pursue full nationalization, localize production, and retain profits from natural resources within El Alto (interview, Carmia Moscoso, COR council member, June 20, 2008).

In 2008 women leaders had increased presence and status (see the comparative analysis below for details), but this was not matched by an increase in voice. Women held 8 of the 51 seats (16 percent) and some positions outside of traditionally "gendered" committees such as social assistance and women and family but frequently felt disrespected at meetings. There was also a marked



Figure 5. Edgar Patana, President of the COR (photo © James Lerager)

increase of female participation in the base organizations of the COR and in the number of mid-ranking delegates to the COR who were women (interview, Román Valdez, COR council member, June 6, 2008). Within the *gremiales* (the overwhelmingly female street vendors' union within the COR), 12 of the 15 leaders were women, including the president, Juana Cabrera (interview, June 19, 2008). However, some interview subjects (e.g., Ana Kudelka, Citizen Action director, June 13, 2008) stated that three key male leaders dominated the organization, and Lazar's (2008: 196) analysis supports this view.

Despite these gains, sexism persisted, and the COR's eight female council members remained marginalized from decision making. According to women leaders, men talked on their cell phones, left the room, or put down their pens and refused to take notes when women spoke during meetings. Additionally, women claimed that many men did not want to discuss gender issues, women leaders were expected to serve food, and men were almost always in charge of committees. Said COR council member Carmia Moscoso (interview, June 20, 2008): "I can't stand it when women leaders serve food to men at meetings. I am critical of them. It is because of their formation."⁶

Although women leaders expressed the desire to improve their standing within the COR and help control organizational direction and discourse, they cited obstacles including lack of economic and moral support from their spouses, rampant machismo, and the expectation that they maintain their homes and families while working in both the COR and an outside job. Women leaders often did not complete their terms in office, whereas it seemed much less common for men to resign early from their posts. Moscoso explained that she was a mother, a journalist, the leader of the Federación de Prensa, and a COR leader—a difficult combination when "patriarchy is still firmly entrenched in society and in women as well." Despite this, many female leaders like Juana Cabrera, as well as COR president Edgar Patana, were optimistic

about the possibility of increased female participation as well as the potential to have a female executive leader of the COR. Said Cabrera: "We are going to do it. Anything is possible" (interview, June 19, 2008).

QUITO'S 2004–2007 BATTLE FOR WATER

Ecuador's colonial history and policies of natural-resource extraction, particularly of oil, mining, timber, hydroelectricity, and water, have resulted in widespread protest, debate, and international attention. While much of the resource extraction has taken place in rural areas on indigenous territories (Sawyer, 2004), recent attempts to privatize services in urban areas have also resulted in the mobilization of popular movements. The attempted concession of water in Quito, which opponents showed to be a covert form of privatization, resulted in repeated mobilizations in 2004–2007 (Buitrón, 2008).

The successful mobilization against the concession of water in Quito was highly organized and included many women on the front lines of protest. In 2004, investigative journalists uncovered the city government's plan to grant concessions (water processing and distribution) to the London-based corporation PricewaterhouseCoopers. The government claimed that it did not have the funds to manage the water system. The *Coalición en Defensa del Agua* (Coalition in Defense of Water), an alliance of environmental, indigenous, worker, and popular organizations, emerged to defeat the plan, arguing that the concession was neither economically viable nor necessary and that the municipality could sustain its public water system. Through a combination of protests, workshops, radio programming, and public debates with municipal and PricewaterhouseCoopers representatives, the *Coalición* galvanized opposition to privatization. Many of its most important leaders were women, who participated at every level of protest and organizational strategy planning, including the original discovery of the privatization plan; the movement's horizontal structure allowed for notable levels of gender egalitarianism during the three-year battle (interview, Rosa Rodríguez, spokeswoman and one of two top leaders of the *Coalición*, August 4, 2008). In March 2007, Mayor Paco Moncayo announced that the municipality would abandon the water concession plan.

The defeat of the plan marked a victory for popular movements in Quito and resulted in increased awareness of the dangers of water privatization. The effort was a major success and contributed directly to the prohibition of water privatization in Ecuador's 2008 Constitution (Figure 6). The important role of women within these protests both raised their visibility and contributed to their voice on the executive councils of participating popular organizations.

ECUARUNARI: MODERATE GAINS IN WOMEN'S VOICE

Formed in 1972, Ecuarunari is a powerful national political force that aims to represent the political, economic, cultural, and social values and needs of a variety of indigenous nationalities throughout the Ecuadorian sierra. Although not all of Ecuarunari's members are indigenous, they share an "indigenous



Figure 6. A Foro Urbano Press Conference Advocating Approval of Ecuador's Constitution (photo © James Lerager)



Figure 7. Humberto Cholango, President of Ecuarunari (photo © James Lerager)

indignation" (interview, Gonzalo Guzmán, Ecuarunari council member, August 5, 2008). Over 500,000 members participate through base organizations, and at the highest level they are represented by an elected 10-member executive council, which is based in Quito (Figure 7). Since 2006, 3 of the 10 council members have been women, the largest number in Ecuarunari's history.

Long before the 2004–2007 battle for water, Ecuarunari had articulated an integrated understanding of the connections between different forms of exploitation in Ecuador, particularly that of natural resources. Leaders argued



Figure 8. Blanca Chancoso, Founding Secretary General of Ecuarrunari (photo © James Lerager)

that resource exploitation contaminated environmental health and disrupted ancestral processes of crop cultivation (interview, Gonzalo Guzmán, August 5, 2008). Ecuarrunari has also developed strong positions against genetically modified crops, the use of pesticides, crop exportation, widespread immigration, mining, over-fishing, and dollarization. It staged uprisings in the early 1990s to demand a greater role in government for Ecuador's indigenous population and has held massive protests against free-trade agreements and Plan Colombia. The organization uses a variety of tactics to support its goals, including mass protests, land takeovers, policy proposals, and educational workshops and campaigns. In its mobilizations, high levels of women's participation have enhanced its credibility.

Before 2004, there were opportunities for women's leadership and training within Ecuarrunari. Many of these opportunities were facilitated by Blanca Chancoso, the director of Ecuarrunari's Escuela de Formación Política de Mujeres Líderes Dolores Cacuango (Dolores Cacuango School for the Political Formation of Women Leaders). Chancoso was Ecuarrunari's first secretary general (1979–1983), but since then every head of Ecuarrunari has been male, and there generally has been only one woman on the executive council, holding the post of leader of women's and familial issues (Figure 8).

Named for an indigenous activist and educator and founded in 1998, the Cacuango school was designed to respond to the challenges that face indigenous women. Over the course of four years, the school quickly grew into a powerful force for women's political empowerment, but it suffered setbacks in 2002 when some male leaders of Ecuarrunari and the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador—CONAIE) became uncomfortable with increasing female empowerment. However, the backlash was mitigated by fresh and diplomatically savvy leadership at the Cacuango school and by women's

improved standing after Quito's battle against water privatization (interview, Blanca Chancoso, leader of the Cacungo school, August 5, 2008). The explicitly political school aims to affect entire communities by empowering their leaders. Free workshops held throughout the provinces help women find employment, become politically active, and resolve daily problems. Workshops are held every two months and consist of three 10-hour sessions. About 50 women (and occasionally a few men) participate in each workshop, supported by scholarships to cover the costs of food, transportation, and lodging, thus reducing the main cost to participants to a few days' lost income (interview, Blanca Chancoso, August 5, 2008).

In 2004–2007, resource battle activism increased the standing of women leaders within Ecuarrunari. Ecuarrunari became involved with the *Coalición en Defensa del Agua* at its inception, working alongside and lending credibility to *Coalición* leaders Ricardo Buitrón and Rosa Rodríguez. The *Coalición* began a campaign to educate the Quito public about privatization through workshops, radio programs, and educational outreach, all of which prominently included women (interview, Floresmilo Simbaña, Ecuarrunari council member, August 6, 2008). While rural indigenous communities were already aware of the harmful effects of neoliberalism through their involvement in previous resource battles, the urgency of action was heightened because the plan included extracting water from indigenous territory to give to the city. The *Coalición* united municipal Quito with its surrounding indigenous communities in protest, eventually defeating the concession plan. The active participation of women throughout the struggle both in leadership positions to coordinate mobilizations and on the front lines of protest suggested the important role of women (interview, Rosa Rodríguez, August 4, 2008).

By 2008, women leaders had experienced increases in presence, status, and voice (see the comparative analysis below) in comparison with the period immediately preceding the battle for water. Many Ecuarrunari leaders observed an increase in women's participation, which they attributed to the Dolores Cacungo school (interview, Magdalena Aysabucha, council member, August 4, 2008). Rosa Cusco (interview, August 5, 2008), executive council member for internal development, stated that she and other Ecuadorian women were "waking up" and realizing their potential as politically active women. She cited her participation in the leadership school as key to this awakening. Overall, women leaders in Ecuarrunari stated that their male colleagues were generally respectful toward them and that they felt valued as partners within the organization. Yet it remained a struggle to be equally recognized; *machismo* persisted at the executive and base level, and women's participation was sometimes unwelcome. In 2008, the three female council members were working to increase the percentage of women leaders within both the executive committee and the base organizations to 50 percent (interview, Magdalena Aysabucha, August 4, 2008).

FORO URBANO: A DOMINANT ROLE FOR WOMEN'S VOICE

Founded in 2004 in Quito, Foro Urbano has a lineage that can be traced to the *Coordinadora Popular de Quito* (People's Coordinating Committee of

Quito—CPQ), a group involved in struggles for social justice, basic services, and indigenous rights. The CPQ incorporated youth groups, women's groups, micro-lending organizations, and progressive Christian organizations (Dosh, 2009: 98). Together, they created a vocal articulation of complementary urban interests and a new vision for the direction of Ecuador epitomized by the founding of the Itchimbía land-invasion settlement in 1995, which prompted a seven-year battle with the city government over the disputed land that resulted in permanent homes for the settlers (Dosh, n.d.). Active on the national stage, the CPQ merged with 14 smaller popular movement organizations in 2004 to form Foro Urbano (interview, Luis Esparza, Foro council member, August 3, 2008).

Led by a six-member executive council, Foro Urbano includes three principal popular organizations: *Mujeres por la Vida* (Women Struggling for Life—MPLV), composed of five territorial organizations within Quito, the *Red de Vivienda* (Housing Network), including 2,000 families searching for land to build communities, and the *Red de Barrios* (Neighborhood Network), encompassing 50 poor neighborhoods.⁷ Foro scored quick victories by placing two of its leaders on Quito's metropolitan council in 2004 and four of its leaders in Ecuador's Constitutional Assembly in 2007. In 2008 Foro leaders articulated plans to seek the Quito mayoralty and extend their reach into every province in the country (interview, Augusto Barrera, Quito city councilman, August 7, 2008).

Before 2006, Foro Urbano offered substantial opportunities for women's leadership and training at all levels of the organization (Figure 9). Yet MPLV president María Hernández argued that gender issues were not significantly discussed within Foro Urbano, although MPLV was trying to change that (Figure 10). Supported by international NGO money, MPLV ran frequent leadership programs for local leaders and councilwomen, training them in methods of political action (interview, Betty Tola, Constitutional Assembly member, August 3, 2008). These programs gathered women to discuss both global and local issues such as emigration from Ecuador, women's rights, and globalization; participants were encouraged to become neighborhood activists to convert increasing political and social awareness into action (interview, Sara Proaño, Foro Urbano director of health programming, July 29, 2008).

Beginning in 2006, Foro Urbano played an important role in halting the attempt to privatize Quito's water. MPLV, in particular, was more active than other groups under the Foro umbrella both in direct action and in debating themes of resource privatization at meetings and assemblies. "These struggles are always conducted more by women," said María Hernández (interview, July 30, 2008). With years of organizing experience, Foro's involvement was key in the public information campaign, lobbying of lawmakers, and mobilization through direct action during the struggle against PricewaterhouseCoopers. Protests were not aimed at massive disruption but intended as agile, targeted symbolic actions (interview, Patricio Endara, Foro Urbano president, July 31, 2008).

By 2008, Foro Urbano women leaders had experienced an increase in presence and voice within the organization. According to all observers, MPLV had become the most powerful branch of the Foro, with 1,500 active members and over 3,000 occasional participants (interview, Alba Mera, financial coordinator of Foro Urbano and MPLV, July 24, 2008). Furthermore, three of the four women on Foro's executive council were also MPLV leaders. The leaders of



Figure 9. A Workshop Offered by Foro Urbano and Mujeres por la Vida (photo © James Lerager)



Figure 10. María Hernández, President of Mujeres por la Vida (photo © James Lerager)

MPLV were previously local leaders who worked in marginalized urban neighborhoods, but beginning in 2006 it grew substantially and expanded to other cities (interview, Virgilio Hernández, Constitutional Assembly member,

August 4, 2008). When Foro Urbano was formed in 2004, the Red de Vivienda was the key pillar of the organization, and gender issues were rarely discussed or taken into account. By 2008, however, MPLV had become widely regarded as the "backbone" of Foro. All of the women leaders had gone through leadership schools and then gone back to their communities to organize, strengthening MPLV and its position within Foro.

Mujeres por la Vida does not appear to have ghetto-ized women or women's issues but rather has provided an increasingly dominant position within Foro from which women dictate internal discourse and help direct the group's external agenda. MPLV leadership training institutes were cited as influential in the increasing role of women within Foro (interview, Patricio Endara, July 31, 2008). It was noted by MPLV leaders that husbands frequently did not support their wives' involvement in the leadership schools but those able to attend experienced increases in their self-esteem and politicization. According to María Quispe (interview, July 28, 2008), director of development for Foro and MPLV, "the idea is to involve families. . . . Men are also mistreated and oppressed and then go on to repeat oppressive cycles." María Hernández (interview, July 30, 2008) also pointed to the leading roles played by women in mobilizations and actions in defense of water as a key factor contributing to MPLV's growth in power within Foro. In the wake of such leadership on the front lines, Foro's internal practices began to reflect gender-specific objectives such as the use of inclusive language, and its external agenda included priorities such as advancing proposals within Ecuador's Constitutional Assembly for reproductive rights and social security benefits for homemakers (interview, Betty Tola, August 3, 2008).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

To explain variations in women's voice, our comparative analysis focuses on five explanatory factors: societal sexism, leadership and training opportunities, change in presence, change in status, and decision-making process. High levels of societal sexism in both El Alto and Quito likely constrained increases in voice for women in all four organizations. Although sexism remained high in both cities, some evidence suggests that sexism was diminishing at a slightly better pace in Quito. This modest difference may help explain the greater gains in women's voice in the Quito organizations.

Prior to the resource battles examined in this study, women had had two types of leadership and training opportunities: (1) positions either open to or assigned exclusively to women and (2) leadership training programs within or outside the organization. Of the four cases, Foro Urbano had the highest level of leadership and training opportunities for women, Ecuatorunari had a medium level, and the COR and the FEJUVE had low levels. Within Foro Urbano, Mujeres por la Vida provided abundant leadership positions that were open only to women, including its own top leadership spots, but women leaders from other Foro member organizations exercised a similarly high level of voice and seemed as likely as men to achieve high-ranking positions. Ecuatorunari had an executive committee post for women and familial issues. The COR, similarly, had a position for women's issues, and the Federación de Mujeres of El Alto

had two representatives to the COR. The FEJUVE, although it had posts such as secretary of gender, possessed an informal inner circle of power that overtly excluded women. At the neighborhood level, however, some committees were formed entirely of women. Ecuarrunari and Foro Urbano had well-attended internal leadership academies for women's empowerment, whereas the COR and the FEJUVE had no leadership schools. Some NGOs in El Alto, such as the Centro de Promoción de la Mujer Gregoria Apaza, did train women leaders, but in our interviews only one woman leader in the COR and the FEJUVE mentioned having participated in these schools. FEJUVE Secretary of Gender Marta Machicado (interview, July 3, 2008) aspired to create training workshops comparable to those offered by leadership training academies and NGOs, but with no money for activities it seemed improbable that her plan would amount to much compared with programs that had institutional support.

In terms of presence, all four cases saw increases in the number of women elected to executive councils. The FEJUVE experienced the sharpest increase, jumping from 2 to 10 women on its 52-member council (a 400 percent increase in the proportion of seats held by women). The COR saw an increase of 3 to 8 women on its 51-member council (a 166 percent increase). In Ecuarrunari, council representation of women jumped from 1 of 9 leaders to 3 of 10 (a 173 percent increase). And for Foro Urbano, previously 5 of 12 council members were women, and this changed to 4 of 6 (a 60 percent increase). Furthermore, *Mujeres por la Vida*, while always an important network within Foro Urbano, became the driving force of the organization.

The status of women on executive councils increased in two of our four cases, with women elected to positions that were considered more influential. For Foro Urbano, status remained high as women continued to hold important positions including president of *Mujeres por la Vida*, directors of the health care network and training programs, and liaison to neighborhood networks. And in the FEJUVE status remained low, with women locked out of the informal circle of power. By contrast, in both Ecuarrunari and the COR, status levels increased from low to medium. Though Ecuarrunari's first executive leader was female, a woman has not held the position since, and until 2006 there generally was only one woman on the executive council, typically relegated to the post of women's and familial issues. Beginning in 2006, however, women held not only the post for women's and familial issues but also the posts of international relations and organizational development, which were considered more influential. In the COR, some of the eight women on the leadership council held "gendered" positions that were less respected, such as secretary of social assistance and secretary of children and youth, but others held positions viewed as more important such as press secretary.

In the FEJUVE, the COR, and Ecuarrunari, hierarchical decision-making processes proved less permeable to women agitating for greater voice, whereas Foro Urbano's horizontal decision making distinguished it and complemented the group's emphasis on women's leadership. Two possible indicators of decision-making horizontality are the raw number of executive council seats (the FEJUVE has 52, the COR has 51, Ecuarrunari has 10, and Foro Urbano has 6) and the relative number of seats based on membership size (the FEJUVE has approximately one council seat per 10,000 members, the COR has approximately one per 10,000 members, Ecuarrunari has approximately one per

50,000 members, and Foro has approximately one per 12,000 members). However, we found that the informal process of making decisions was far more indicative of inclusion or exclusion than the formal structure. Indeed, even doubling the number of council seats assigned to women might not significantly increase the FEJUVE's horizontality, since its antidemocratic tendencies and "old boys' club" atmosphere so sharply undercut women's attempts to speak and participate in decision making. Though not as severe, the COR's traditional lines of authority dampened the impact of increases in women's presence and status, yielding no major change in voice. And in Ecuatorunari the upstart influence of women provoked a backlash; Ecuatorunari women overcame this reaction, but gradual gains in voice likely happened in spite of, not because of, Ecuatorunari's hierarchical orientation. Foro Urbano, however, was a more inclusive and egalitarian group both in terms of its informal atmosphere and in terms of common practices such as allowing Foro members not on the executive council not only to attend council meetings but also to contribute agenda items and lobby the council for policy proposals.

Comparing the cases, the outcome for women's voice varied: in the FEJUVE and the COR it remained low, in Ecuatorunari it increased from low to medium, and in Foro Urbano it increased from medium to high. Thus, even with gains in presence and status, the goal of having a voice in agenda setting proved elusive for most women. Within the FEJUVE, for example, women felt severely disrespected and harassed; reports of male leaders, including the president, making women cry were common. By contrast, Foro Urbano exhibited the highest level of women's voice, with gender equality and women's participation among its stated goals. Women were the driving force for both the external (activist goals) and the internal (organizational practices) agenda. The women leaders of Foro Urbano stated that they focused on the linguistics of gender inclusion (e.g., insisting that speakers address "*compañeras y compañeros*"); the respect that these women experienced allowed them to focus on discourse. Women in Ecuatorunari had some voice; they held important positions, and women leaders reported feeling "more or less" equal, but machismo and sexism persisted. Women's voice was not taken into consideration within the COR. Though male leaders of the COR openly acknowledged that women were very important on the front lines of mobilizations and within the base, this had not translated into a respectful environment within the organization, and women felt extremely disrespected, particularly in meetings.

Although not central to our argument, dimensions of class and ethnicity also merit discussion. Insofar as ethnicity functions as a part of class, the mestizo membership of Foro Urbano could be considered of a more affluent class than the primarily indigenous membership of the other organizations. Yet in the 1990s, the CPQ leaders who would later found Foro Urbano lived in shanty homes, often did not have food to eat, and held the same type of informal-sector jobs as members of the other organizations. The limited higher-education experience of several Foro Urbano leaders was an important asset in their struggles, but it did not fundamentally distinguish the group. University education was rare in all four organizations; for example, a very small number of COR leaders had some postsecondary education. Thus, despite this variation, these cases are more similar than different with respect to class, education, and employment.

Although Foro Urbano emerged from the urban wing of the indigenous Pachakutik party, Foro is notable for its largely nonindigenous membership. Ethnicity constitutes an important variable for explaining many outcomes associated with popular movement struggles, but does gender inequality differ by ethnicity? In our interviews, women of all ethnicities emphasized the near-universal prevalence of gender discrimination. Their male counterparts, however, mostly insisted that gender discrimination did not exist in the indigenous world. Ecuatorunari's President Humberto Cholango's comment was typical: "In the Andean world, there is no discrimination. Sexism was brought by the West" (interview, July 31, 2008). An exception was Ecuatorunari Secretary of Natural Resources Gonzalo Guzmán, who, when asked if men and women had equal voices within the executive council, replied, "Not yet" (interview, August 5, 2008).

CONCLUSION

In the 2000s, Bolivia and Ecuador were marked by battles over natural resources in which mass mobilizations challenged the neoliberal privatization of resources such as water and natural gas. In El Alto and Quito, these mobilizations boosted the public standing of women whose frontline militancy helped challenge privatization and build momentum for the election of women to top leadership. Although gender discrimination persisted, women's activism in these conflicts demonstrated to men their ability to lead in arenas other than health, family, and education. Yet subsequent shifts in women's voice on the executive councils varied. Our analysis suggests that in a context of societal sexism, simply electing women in greater numbers and even to posts of greater influence is unlikely to change who speaks and who sets the agenda and dictates the discourse. Only when gains in presence and status occur within horizontal organizations that provide systematic opportunities for women's leadership training and experience are we likely to see major improvements in women's voice.

As social movements continue to resist resource privatization, analyzing the extent to which women's voice is included becomes increasingly important. In Ecuador, tensions between indigenous organizations and President Rafael Correa led to the October 2009 creation of a mixed commission made up of CONAIE, affiliated groups like Ecuatorunari, and government delegates to debate reforms to the Mining Law and two water laws (Zibechi, 2009). Social-movement leaders argue that these natural-resource laws still operate on a neoliberal, extractivist model that fails to shift the relationship between the state, citizens, and the exploitation of natural resources (Dosh and Kligerman, 2009). In Bolivia, the 2009 Constitution promises to expand the state's role in natural-resource management. In a speech given in February 2009 in El Alto, President Morales stated that "after 20 years of permanent struggle against the neoliberal model . . . a new Bolivia is born" and that "for the first time in the history of Latin America, and in the world, basic services, water, electricity, telephone are now a human right; they will be a public service not a private business" (Dangl, 2009). As citizens of Quito and El Alto push for alternative models of resource use and a rejection of neoliberalism

and neocolonialism, it is crucial to understand whether and how women's voices can shape the discourse and set the agenda for these movements.

NOTES

1. In Ecuador, the fertility rate dropped from 3.1 births per woman in 1997 to 2.6 in 2007. Simultaneously, the percentage of women in the labor force increased from 42 to 52 percent. The ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education stayed static—100.9 girls per 100 boys in 1997 and 100.3 in 2007. In Bolivia, by contrast, the fertility rate decreased from 4.3 in 1997 to 3.5 in 2007, and the percentage of women in the labor force increased from 60 to 66 percent. The ratio of girls to boys in school went from 96.0 in 1998 to 98.7 in 2007 (World Development Indicators Online, 2009).

2. Prior to its incorporation in 1979, the FEJUVE existed in much less significant forms as far back as 1957 (Mamani Ramírez, 2005: 117 n. 10).

3. Observing a history of gender discrimination among El Alto's neighborhood councils, some feminist NGOs created capacity-building programs for women specifically to help them win seats on local neighborhood councils (Molyneux and Lazar, 2003).

4. Though the battle for gas erupted in October, popular mobilization was in part sparked by the September 2003 killing by the armed forces of several peasants in and around Warisata, including a nine-year-old girl. Peasant mobilization in protest of these human rights violations helped fuel the broader uprising in October. Kohl and Farthing (2009: 70) note that the earlier months of 2003 also witnessed a number of smaller protests aimed at the renationalization of gas.

5. The COR was first called the Central Única de Trabajadores de El Alto (Workers' Central of El Alto—CUTAL), and its antecedent organizations date as far back as 1971 (Mamani Ramírez, 2005: 123 n. 12). Originally conceived of as a regional subgroup of the Central Obrera Boliviana (Bolivian Workers Central—COB), the COR has become more autonomous over the years. Paradoxically, its founding was spurred by neoliberalism, which drove more employed workers into the informal sector and thus swelled the ranks of potential COR members (Albó, 2007: 36).

6. Lazar (2008: 196–203) provides examples of women leaders' performing this type of domestic task for male leaders.

7. We were unable to get an accurate membership count from Foro Urbano, but estimates put it in the realm of 70,000.

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