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GREEN GOLD, GREEN HELL: *Coca, Caste, and Class in the Chaco War, 1932–1935*

This article investigates the use of coca by the Bolivian Army during the Chaco War of 1932–35. I present research that reveals the surprising extent to which the Bolivian Army provisioned coca to its soldiers as a substitute for adequate nutrition; as a morale booster; as a stimulant; and as a medicine. The article explores the social and cultural implications of mass coca consumption by Bolivian soldiers, many of whom were mestizos who had never before chewed the leaf. Ultimately, I argue that the pervasiveness of coca within the traumatic popular experience of the Chaco War sowed the seeds of a historic transformation of the politics of coca in Bolivia. The Chaco War initiated a process by which coca in Bolivia was transformed from a neo-colonial marker of the Indian caste to a material and symbolic element of an emergent interethnic working *class*. Through a comparative analysis of the Bolivian army's use of coca in the Chaco War with the German army's use of methamphetamine during World War II, this article concludes with a consideration of the ways in which the present case study expands our understanding of the crucial but understudied historical relationship between drugs and warfare.

KEYWORDS: Coca, Chaco War, Bolivia, Drugs and War, Military Social History

Recalling wartime experiences as an infantryman in the Chaco War, Bolivian veteran Eusebio Condoi described the nightmarish ordeal of a weeks-long siege to which his squadron was subjected by Paraguayan forces during the pivotal Battle of Boquerón:

> They [the Bolivian Army brass] delivered us like lambs to the slaughter because our food rations lasted only a few days, and we couldn't hold out without water or nourishment. Once in a while, they would drop containers of water from a plane, but then we would just lick mud. When they would drop coca to us, we

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> would fight over it, because it was our food and reached us only in small quantities.[1]

Beyond the horror soldiers endured when they were cut off from supply lines, these recollections suggest the surprising extent to which the Bolivian Army relied on the coca leaf to keep its undernourished men fighting in a remote and climatically harsh theater of war. Moreover, Condoi was a mestizo, and the image of Bolivian warplanes dropping bags of the leaf for consumption by ethnically mixed troops is particularly striking. In Bolivia, on the eve of the Chaco War, coca chewing—known in the Quechua and Aymara languages as *pijchu* and *acullicu*, respectively—was closely linked to the Indian, as it had been for centuries.[2] As discussed below, ruling-class liberals in the early twentieth century, building on the history of colonial deployment of the leaf as an indigenous labor stimulant, promoted a culture and economy of coca in which the practice of pijchu was a marker of membership in the indigenous laboring caste. Eusebio Condoi's account is dramatic evidence of the central arguments I make in this article: that during the Chaco War the Bolivian army deployed coca on a large scale to its front-line troops, and that this policy resulted in the erosion of the ethnic boundaries that had for centuries delineated Bolivian coca culture.

In recent years, numerous scholars have explored the enduring social and cultural meanings of coca for indigenous peoples in the Andes.[3] In light of the long colonial and postcolonial history of denigration of native Andean culture in general, and coca in particular—intensified by the US-led War on Drugs in the Andes—investigation of the role of coca in indigenous cultural resistance has in many ways been a valuable corrective that supports the efforts of Bolivian indigenous groups to revalorize the leaf as an element of native Andean culture and medicine. Yet, as is clear from both political discourse and patterns of coca consumption, in contemporary Bolivia coca has deeply rooted meanings for working-class mestizos as well as Indians.[4]

1. Testimonio of Eusebio Condoi, in Germán Carlos Pano Condori, *La coca no es blanca* (La Paz: Ministerio de Culturas y Turismo, 2013), 66.

2. So as not to lose sight of the indigenous Andean origins of coca chewing, I refer to the practice as *pijchu*.

3. The classic ethnographic portrait of Andean coca culture as essential to indigenous identity remains Catherine Allen's monograph. Catherine J. Allen, *The Hold Life Has: Coca and Cultural Identity in an Andean Community* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988). See also Alison L. Spedding, "The Coca Field As a Total Social Fact," in *Coca, Cocaine, and the Bolivian Reality*, M. B. Léons and H. Sanabria, eds. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

4. Evo Morales, Bolivia's first indigenous president, has noted that Bolivian coca culture "encompasses the mestizo population." Evo Morales Ayma, "Let Me Chew My Coca Leaves," *New York Times*, March 13, 2009, A21. Anthropologist Thomas Grisaffi has explored ethnic hybridity and class identities within the culture of coca growers in the Chapare. Thomas Grisaffi, "We Are Originarios . . . 'We Just Aren't From Here': Coca Leaf and Identity Politics in the Chapare, Bolivia," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 29:4 (2010): 425–439.

The interethnic nature of coca culture in early twenty-first century Bolivia was a necessary condition for the emergence of the popular "coca nationalism" associated with the political rise of former president Evo Morales (in office from 2006 to 2019) and the Movement Toward Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo or MAS) party he has led since the 1990s. Within that historically influential movement, the coca leaf evolved into a symbol of multicultural anti-imperialist resistance to the US-led War on Drugs. This article locates the origins of popular working-class coca culture in the Chaco War of 1932–35. A protracted and exceptionally destructive conflict, the Chaco War not only drew conscripted Indians and mestizos into an unprecedented interethnic encounter, but also introduced thousands of Hispanicized working-class mestizos, and even some creoles, to the practice of pijchu.

A watershed event in modern Bolivian history, the Chaco War rocked the foundations of Bolivia's socially stratified society. There is broad agreement among historians that Bolivia's catastrophic defeat precipitated the downfall of the Liberal political-economic order that had persisted since the outset of the twentieth century.[5] Moreover, Bolivia's prosecution of total war in the Chaco "shook Bolivia's social structure at every level," undermining the stability of lifeblood Liberal institutions.[6] In the heavily indigenous countryside, mass conscription of peasants triggered widespread unrest that roiled the hacienda system.[7] Indeed, the Chaco War likely set Bolivia on course for, or at least accelerated, the MNR Revolution of 1952.[8]

A well-developed body of historiography illuminates many of the dislocating and collateral consequences of the Chaco War.[9] Yet the impact of the conflict on the culture and politics of coca in Bolivia has thus far eluded scholarly attention. This study demonstrates that the war radically altered entrenched patterns in Bolivian coca politics. In the interethnic cauldron of the Chaco, a generation of young non-indigenous soldiers, supplied by the Bolivian army with coca leaves, breached the ethnic boundaries that had traditionally defined Bolivian coca culture as a marker of the indigenous laboring caste. In this way, the Chaco War sowed the seeds of a revolution in the cultural politics of coca in Bolivia that

5. For classic accounts of the national political impact in Bolivia of the Chaco War, see Herbert S. Klein, *Parties and Political Change in Bolivia, 1880–1952* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 189–198; and James M. Malloy, *Bolivia: The Uncompleted Revolution* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970), 74–77.

6. René Danilo Arze Aguirre, *Guerra y conflictos sociales: el caso rural boliviano durante la campaña del Chaco* (La Paz: Ceres, 1987), 1.

7. Arze Aguirre, *Guerra y conflictos sociales*.

8. See Klein, *Parties and Political Change*, 189 ff., and Malloy, *Bolivia: The Uncompleted Revolution*, 79–81.

9. See for example Arze Aguirre, *Guerra y conflictos sociales*; and Elizabeth Shesko, "Conscript Nation: Negotiating Authority and Belonging in the Bolivian Barracks, 1900–1950" (PhD diss., Duke University, 2012).

would transform the leaf from a marker of Indian caste to a popular symbol of an emergent interethnic working class.

This article is organized as follows. I begin with description and analysis of the Liberal coca order as it existed in Bolivia on the eve of the Chaco War. I then show that, relying on coca as a stimulant, morale booster, hunger suppressant, and medicine, the Bolivian army provisioned its troops in the field with substantial quantities of the leaf. This resulted, I argue, in the breaching of the traditional ethnic boundaries of coca culture, as thousands of Hispanicized working-class soldiers adopted the "Indian" custom of pijchu. Paradoxically, while the war resulted in the embrace of coca by Bolivia's non-indigenous working classes, it simultaneously generated, for the first time in Bolivian history, a fervent *anti*-cocaism among an emergent generation of reform-minded Bolivian elites.

This study contributes to a growing body of interdisciplinary research concerning the multidimensional and, as some have argued, mutually constitutive relationship between drug cultures and war. In the final section of this article, I consider Bolivian military use of coca in the Chaco in relation to that scholarly literature, comparing the Bolivian case with German military utilization of methamphetamine during World War II.

THE LIBERAL COCA ORDER

An indigenous materia medica and sacred rite, coca was repurposed in the sixteenth century by Spanish colonizers as a labor stimulant for the extraction of maximum output from Indian laborers, most notoriously in the high-altitude silver mines of Potosí. On the eve of the Chaco War, most Bolivians who identified as members of the mestizo-criollo strata, which includes creoles and Hispanicized mestizos, still viewed pijchu as a marker of membership in the indigenous laboring caste. As Bolivian diplomat M. Pinto-Escalier pointed out in his nationalistic defense of the coca leaf before the League of Nations in 1924, "[it] is only the Indians and never the whites or half-castes who are in the habit of chewing the leaves of what has been termed 'the divine plant of the Incas.'"[10] Indeed, the diplomat's argument in

10. Statement of M. Pinto-Escalier, "Preliminary Discussion on the Basis of Series of Measures Adopted by the Advisory Committee on the Traffic in Opium and Other Dangerous Drugs." Opium Advisory Committee (OAC), League of Nations documents C.760.M.260.1924.XI, 63. It should be kept in mind that in early twentieth-century Bolivia the ethnic categories of "Indian," "half-caste" (Pinto-Escalier's English translation of mestizo), and even "white" were contested, unstable, and at times a function of the observer's social position. The mestizo category,

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defense of Bolivian coca culture reflected the function of the leaf as both labor stimulant and marker of indigeneity within the Liberal socioeconomic order.

Yet Liberal pro-cocaism was not rooted solely in colonial tradition. Emerging victorious from the Federal War of 1898–99—a civil war between La Paz Liberals and Sucre Conservatives, in which an organized Aymara insurgency played a decisive and, from the point of view of triumphant Liberals, disturbing role—Liberals set out to modernize Bolivian society by re-engineering, and further subjugating, the Indian. As manifested dramatically in the Proceso Mohoza, a post-civil war show trial in which the newly ascendant Liberal government tried dozens of their erstwhile Aymara allies for the crime of perpetrating "race war," consciously neocolonial elites sought to extinguish the political consciousness of the Indian, while cultivating the perceived vigor and productivity of the race as rural and proletarian labor.[11]

While pijchu had profound social and cultural significance for Indians, Bolivian elites in the early twentieth century viewed the leaf as an indispensable stimulant for the Indian as *laborer*, especially on haciendas and in the highland tin mines that were the focus of the Liberal Paceño-dominated export economy. As such, coca production and commerce were also a source of large and steady profits for elite Paceño *hacendados* who owned coca estates in the Yungas of the La Paz Department, which had long supplied copious quantities of the leaf to mining centers on the Altiplano.[12]

encompassing a wide swath of Bolivia's population, was particularly ambiguous. As a political and cultural concept, mestizaje was frequently disparaged in the early twentieth century by Bolivian Liberals, such as luminaries Alcides Arguedas, Bautista Saavedra, and Manuel Rigoberto Paredes, who viewed mestizos as a corrupting influence on the indigenous laboring caste. See Brooke Larson, "Redeemed Indians, Barbarized Cholos: Crafting Neolcolonial Modernity in Liberal Bolivia," in *Political Cultures in the Andes, 1750–1950*, Nils Jacobsen and Cristóbal Aljovín de Losada, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005). Yet, there was nuance to elite views on the question of mestizaje. Javier Sanjines has argued compellingly that pre-Chaco War liberals conceived of ethnic mixture as divided into two distinct subcategories: mestizos and *cholos*, the former referring to Hispanicized mixed-race people and the latter to "Indianized" urban mixed-race people "who follow indigenous cultural norms." Javier Sanjines C., *Mestizaje Upside-Down: Aesthetic Politics in Modern Bolivia* (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004), 194–195 n5. The general acceptance of the former—and denigration of the latter—by politically and economically dominant *criollos* has led some scholars of Bolivian culture to view creoles and Hispanicized mestizos as a unified group: the mestizo-criollo. Sanjines, *Mestizaje Upside-Down*, 24. While the practice of pijchu was not limited to rural indigenous communities, it would have marked the chewer as either an Indian or a cholo, as opposed to a criollo or criolloized (Westernized) mestizo.

11. See Larson, "Redeemed Indians, Barbarized Cholos."

12. For deeply researched treatments of the role of coca commerce in early twentieth-century Bolivia's elite-dominated export economy, see Maria Luisa Soux, *La coca liberal: producción y circulación a principios del siglo XX* (La Paz: Misión de Cooperación Técnica Holandesa : Centro de Información para el Desarrollo, 1993); and Solange Leonor Zalles Cuestas, *Los caminos del poder local en Yungas: coca, vialidad y fiscalidad (1932–1952),* (Sucre: Archivo y Biblioteca Nacionales de Bolivia, 2011).

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This sociocultural pattern continued into the twentieth century and was even purposefully reinforced by the Liberal elites who dominated Bolivia's "national" politics and export-dominated economy of the era.[13] Paradoxically, modernizing Liberals, who were in other respects assimilationist—even ethnocidal—in their approach to Bolivia's "Indian problem," ardently defended this most apparently Indian of customs, the chewing of the native Andean coca leaf. The most celebrated architects of Liberal ideology proclaimed the telluric connections between the native Andean of the highlands, his legendary stamina as a laborer, and his coca habit.[14]

Pro-cocaism was not limited to intellectuals, and throughout the 1920s and early 1930s Liberal governments defended Bolivia's coca economy before the League of Nations in rhetorically nationalistic terms. In April 1932, only months before the outbreak of the Chaco War, the Bolivian government ratified the International Convention on Opium of 1925, at the same time insisting defiantly on three reservations that would preserve indigenous coca culture: "Bolivia does not undertake to restrict the home cultivation or production of coca, or to prohibit the use of coca leaves by the indigenous population."[15] Throughout Bolivia's Liberal period then, oligarchic elites invested economically and ideologically in their country's coca culture, promoting and defending the leaf as a mainstay of a neocolonial caste system. As elites well understood, pijchu could be effective as a marker of neocolonial caste only so long it was exclusive to the Indian population.

Yet why would Liberal coca hacendados, who profited from the coca economy, nevertheless accept and even promote ethnic boundaries for pijchu, rather than endeavor to make coca consumers of non-Indians? This can be explained, at least in part, by the fact that Liberals invested in the coca industry were also deeply invested in the principal pillars of the elite-controlled economy—namely, tin mining and hacienda agriculture—the functioning of which were centered on a neocolonial caste system. Moreover, Liberal *cocaleros*, who were increasingly on the defensive in an ever-more hostile international anti-coca

13. I place the term "national" in quotation marks to reflect the very limited conception of nation espoused by Liberal elites, in which the vast majority of Bolivia's population were excluded from citizenship.

14. In the eyes of a number of Bolivia's Liberal intellectual and political luminaries, such as Manuel Rigoberto Paredes and Alcides Arguedas, coca culture was fundamental to fortifying the Indian "race" as a laboring caste. See Alcides Arguedas, *Pueblo enfermo* (La Paz: Anthropos, 1910), 38; and Alcides Arguedas, *Raza de bronce* (Barcelona: Red Ediciones S. L., 2016) [Kindle DX version], 139. For Paredes, Indian coca consumption fortified the desirable elements of Aymara culture and racial characteristics that were worthy of preservation. Among these were stamina and dietary frugality. Manuel Rigoberto Paredes, "Supersticiones, mitos y costumbres supersticiosas," *Boletin de la Sociedad Geográfica de La Paz* 17:48 (1919): 6.

15. Bolivia's 1932 ratification of the International Opium Convention of 1925, United Nations, *Multilateral Treaties Deposited with the Secretary-General*, vol. 1, part 1, chapts. 1–11 (New York: United Nations Publications, 2002), 372.

climate, leaned heavily into the argument that in Bolivia coca was "innocuous," precisely because it was consumed by Indians only.

While popular sources that speak to ethnic patterns of coca consumption in early twentieth century Bolivia are scant, some popular corroboration of the ethnic boundaries of pre-Chaco coca consumption can be found in oral histories of working-class mestizo veterans who recounted being introduced to pijchu during the war. For instance, Carlos Rodríguez, a mestizo veteran from Potosí, recalled that he had never chewed coca before being introduced to the practice in the Chaco.[16]

Crisis of Liberalism

Beginning in the late 1920s, Bolivia's tin-mining oligarchy (known as La Rosca) and the Paceño political establishment confronted a series of economic and sociopolitical crises that would ultimately bring down the Liberal order itself. The immediate cause was the decline of the world tin market, which was coincident with the depletion of Bolivia's mines.[17] Already weighed down by massive foreign debt, Bolivia's export economy was devastated by the onset of the global Depression in 1929, which triggered the collapse of the country's financial edifice.[18] Rapid inflation ensued, along with rising unemployment and food shortages, all of which fueled social and political unrest and the expansion and radicalization of artisan-labor and student movements.[19] In late June 1930, a military coup backed by traditional Liberal elites of the Altiplano overthrew Bolivian president Hernando Siles.[20] The military junta installed a governing coalition of traditional political parties, called the Republicano Genuino-Liberal coalition, that turned to venerable Liberal statesman Daniel Salamanca to run for president. Upon his election to the office in March 1931, Salamanca responded to his country's political-economic crisis not with structural adjustments but with repression and nationalist, anticommunist demagoguery.[21]

Crisis of Coca

The Liberal Paceño coca industry faced a parallel, and closely related, market crisis in the late 1920s. The Bolivian tin-mining industry had long been by far the most

16. Carlos Rodríguez Cortez in discussion with the author, May 2016. These and other oral histories of Chaco War veterans are analyzed in more detail later in this article.
17. Malloy, *Bolivia: The Uncompleted Revolution*, 69.
18. Malloy, *Bolivia: The Uncompleted Revolution*, 70.
19. Malloy, *Bolivia: The Uncompleted Revolution*, 71.
20. Klein, *Parties and Political Change*, 111.
21. Malloy, *Bolivia: The Uncompleted Revolution*, 71–72.

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important source of demand for Paceño coca, the chief product of elite-owned haciendas in the Yungas of the Department of La Paz, and the troubles of Bolivian tin caused a steep drop in the market price of the coca leaf.[22] Coca promoter Nicanor Fernández was candid in his assessment that the coca industry was, in 1932, in the midst of a "crisis" of "coca commerce," as falling tin prices caused coca prices to follow suit.[23]

In addition to a weakening of domestic industrial demand for the coca leaf, the early 1930s saw a decline in the export market. From 1928 to 1931, Bolivia exported an annual average of about 421,500 kilos of coca, most bound for Argentina with the remainder going almost exclusively to Chile. However, in 1932 exports dropped to about 347,000 kilos, a decline of some 18 percent from the average of the previous four years.[24] Although the reasons for that decline are not entirely clear, Fernández suggested that increases in Argentine and Chilean tariffs on imported Bolivian coca were a significant factor.[25] By 1932, spokesmen for Sociedad de Propietarios de Yungas (Society of Landowners of the Yungas, or SPY) were complaining that the Argentine government, influenced by anti-cocaism emanating from the League of Nations, was seeking to eliminate Bolivian coca imports through heavy tariffs.[26]

In line with the organization's timeworn strategy, the SPY first lobbied Bolivia's national government for increased protection from foreign tariffs and other encumbrances on coca exports. Bolivia's political elite defiantly promoted the coca leaf and called for the Bolivian government to take diplomatic steps to protect this "national" product. As noted by US consul R. F. Fernald, stationed in La Paz in the early 1930s, pro-cocaism among Bolivian elites, intensifying in response to anti-cocaism in the League of Nations, was exemplified by Nicanor Fernández's *La coca boliviana* (1932).[27] Commissioned by the SPY, Fernández's pamphlet provides a window into the organization's perspective on the crisis facing the elite coca industry on the eve of the Chaco War. Fernández presented a spirited, nationalist-inflected defense of Bolivian coca, which he promoted as an Indian labor stimulant, source of nutrition, medicinal herb, and unique national resource. He also noted that Bolivia consumed a considerable share of the agricultural and industrial output of its neighbors to the south, and that Bolivia's regional exchange commodities were limited to coca and coffee.

22. Nicanor Fernández, *La coca boliviana: maravillosa propiedades y cualidades de la coca, opiniones de prestigiosos médicos y naturalistas acerca de la planta sagrada de los Incas del Perú* (La Paz: Editorial "America," 1932).

23. Fernández, *La coca boliviana*, 11–12.

24. R. F. Fernald, US Consul, Coca Leaf in Bolivia, April 8, 1933, National Archives [NA], Record Group [RG] 170, Box 54, 5.

25. Fernández, *La coca boliviana*, 12–13.

26. Fernández, *La coca boliviana*, 13.

27. Fernald, Coca Leaf in Bolivia.

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Fernández thus called on the Bolivian government to negotiate exemptions from Argentine and Chilean tariffs and restrictions on coca imports.[28]

The Bolivian diplomatic corps, for its part, continued to defend coca at the international level, arguing that coca culture and commerce were integral to Bolivian society. As late as October 1932, the Bolivian delegation to the League of Nations continued to insist that coca consumption was indispensable to the well-being of Bolivian Indians, and that any attempt to eradicate it would confront insuperable "obstacles of an economic and social nature."[29] However, by 1932, ominous signs of erosion of the traditional pro-coca consensus among Bolivia's own elites began to appear. Citing recent testimony in the Bolivian senate by national senator Arturo Molina Campero, Fernández acknowledged as much: "The H. Senator [Saavedra] of La Paz has said. . . that the Indian is intelligent when he is not chewing coca."[30]

Faced with the deterioration of the traditional political-economic and cultural structures that had long sustained the share of Bolivian coca commerce dominated by elites (known as *coca de hacienda*), coca defenders began to think outside the box. SPY spokesman Nicanor Fernández did the previously unthinkable: he called for the expansion of coca consumption beyond the indigenous caste, promoting "universal consumption of coca" as a labor stimulant.[31] In his *La coca boliviana*, under the heading "Franquicias Aduaneras y Propaganda Para Ese Producto Boliviano" ("Customs Exemptions and Propaganda for This Bolivian Product"), Fernández wrote:

> Everyone in Bolivia knows the superior qualities and therapeutic, tonic properties of coca, for which reasons the indigenous race, from time immemorial, has incorporated the powerful stimulant coca into its dietary regimen. . . . If coca consumption were to expand to all of the country's social classes, erasing the prejudice that it is damaging to the health and denigrating to a person's dignity and rank, Bolivian production would increase enormously, augmenting production and industrial activity.[32]

Fernández's allusion to the "prejudice" that coca "denigrates a person's dignity and rank" is a clear reference to long hegemonic notions of pijchu as a marker of the Indian caste. Intriguingly, Fernández presented neighboring Argentina as

28. Fernández, *La coca boliviana*, 12.

29. Délégation de Bolivie to the Société des Nations, No. 39/932, October 29, 1932, Archivo del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores (AMRE), Delegación de Bolivia ante la Liga de Las Naciones, Delegación Permanente, 1932–1934.

30. Délégation de Bolivie to the Société des Nations, VII.

31. Fernández, *La coca boliviana*, 14.

32. Fernández, *La coca boliviana,* 14.

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a model for middle-class coca consumption: "After our sumptuous banquets or modest meals, some coca leaves or a cup of [mate de] coca instead of tea would benefit the guests, as happens among some Argentine families who have the good sense to chew coca or drink an infusion instead of Paraguayan yerba mate." Unlike Bolivia, Argentina had no native coca industry, and it received most of its coca imports from creole plantations in Bolivia's Yungas region of La Paz. Much of the coca Argentina imported from Bolivia was consumed by Bolivian indigenous migrant laborers. However, during the first half of the twentieth century, many non-indigenous northern Argentines took up coca chewing.[33] By presenting northern Argentina's coca culture as a model for Bolivia, and calling for "universal consumption" of the leaf, Fernández was thus calling for the de-ethnicization of coca in Bolivia, a radical departure from the traditional caste-centered ideology that had long framed elite approaches to the leaf.[34]

Moreover, written at a time of imminent war with Paraguay, Fernández's comparison of Bolivian coca with Paraguayan yerba mate may suggest the emergence of a new dimension to the commodity nationalism of the Paceño elite. Fernández's boast about the superiority of Bolivian coca to Paraguayan mate may likewise suggest the coca promoter's view of the coming war as an opportunity to revitalize the Yungueño coca industry. And indeed, as Bolivia mobilized for war, SPY hacendados availed themselves of that perceived opportunity, finding an enthusiastic customer in the Bolivian army.

WAR WITH PARAGUAY

In the summer of 1932, taking nationalist demagoguery to its logical extreme, president Salamanca led Bolivia into a foolhardy war with Paraguay. Open hostilities began in August when Salamanca ordered the Bolivian army to capture the Paraguayan military outposts of Corrales, Toledo, and Boquerón in a sparsely populated Paraguayan region of the Gran Chaco. In explaining Bolivian aggression, historians have pointed to the influence of foreign oil companies and to landlocked Bolivia's coveting of an outlet to the Atlantic (through a branch of the Río de la Plata). However, as numerous historians

33. In a provocative study, Silvia Rivera has documented the rise of a coca culture among middle-class and elite Argentines in the 1920s, a phenomenon she links to "the urban elite's romantic discovery of the *gaucho*." Silvia Rivera C., "Here, Even Legislators Chew Them," in *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things: States, Borders, and the Other Side of Globalization*, William van Schendel and Itty Abraham, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 130–131. Rivera also notes that, as a result of the adoption of the habit by northern Argentine elites, the chewing of coca did not function as an ethnic or racial marker but rather had evolved into "a symbol of regional belonging." Rivera C., "Here, Even Legislators Chew Them," 131.

34. Fernández, *La coca boliviana*, 13.

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have convincingly argued, it is most likely that Salamanca instigated the war to stir up nationalist support for his faltering government.[35] In so doing he precipitated a bloody three-year conflict that would be fought in a region as inhospitable to Bolivian highlanders as it was remote to the country's core population centers.

As a matter of political tactics, Salamanca's ploy achieved the desired result, but only temporarily. Owing to overconfidence that Bolivia's larger, more modern army would quickly defeat Paraguay's, Salamanca's aggressive policy initially enjoyed near universal support from Bolivia's otherwise fractious elites. However, poor military results, a mass conscription program in the countryside, and a long, traumatic campaign triggered violent social unrest and political upheaval. It was in this wartime context of social and political ferment that the boundaries that had traditionally delineated Bolivia's coca economy began to dissolve.

There was a flatly ethnocidal dimension to Bolivia's prosecution of the Chaco War. In its bid to preserve Paceño oligarchic rule, the Salamanca government rounded up tens of thousands of rural Indians and marched them hundreds of miles to the "Green Hell" of the Chaco. In his groundbreaking study of the domestic social effects of the war, René Danilo Arze Aguirre has documented a violent and indiscriminate Bolivian military recruitment effort in the countryside, reminiscent of the Spanish colonial *mita*.[36] Thousands of these men died in combat, but many more perished from hunger, thirst, and disease. Overwhelmed by the formidable logistical challenges of fighting in a remote, relatively uncharted theater of war, the Bolivian army marched its conscripts into the hostile climate of the Chaco lacking the means to adequately supply them with food, water, and medicine. Bolivia's Chaco campaign was colonial corvée labor amplified to a particularly murderous extreme.[37] As Arze Aguirre has demonstrated, mass conscription exacerbated interethnic conflict in the countryside, undermining the political-economic foundations of a hacienda system that had expanded aggressively during the Liberal period. Peasants conscripted by the army frequently saw their lands appropriated in their absence by creole hacendados, and indigenous uprisings roiled the agrarian landscape.[38]

35. See for example Herbert Klein, *Bolivia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* (New York and Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1992), 181–185; and Zulawski, *Unequal Cures*, 56.

36. Arze Aguirre, *Guerra y conflictos sociales*, 44–45.

37. For a thoughtful treatment of the feudal aspect of Bolivia's conscription for the Chaco War, see Luis Oporto Ordóñez, *Uncía y Llallagua: empresa minera capitalista y estrategias de apropiación real del espacio (1900–1935),* (La Paz: IFEA, Plural Editores, 2007), 117–135.

38. Arze Aguirre, *Guerra y conflictos sociales*, 2.

Social conflict, dislocation, and the generation-defining trauma suffered by tens of thousands of Chaco combatants likewise destabilized the cultural pillars of Bolivian liberalism. The barracks, trenches, and battlefields of the Chaco were sites of interethnic encounters among soldiers, which, though limited to a considerable degree by systematic racial inequities, were nevertheless unprecedented in Bolivian history. For many Bolivian combatants, encounters with the "other" in their own society undermined belief in traditional racialist caste structures and served as a "catalyst of a long and turbulent dismantlement of the oligarchic edifice."[39] There is wide agreement that the interethnic cauldron of the war was, in the words of sociologist René Zavaleta, a "constituent moment" in the forging of a "national-popular" consciousness that did not previously exist in Bolivia.[40]

THE LIBERAL COCA ORDER CONFRONTS THE CHACO WAR

When newly ascendant Liberals instituted compulsory military service early in the twentieth century, a principal objective had been to more efficiently incorporate the Indian into the nation as laborer while nevertheless keeping him in his place as a subordinate caste. As Shesko has found, pre-Chaco conscription policies in fact reinforced underlying racial distinctions and social hierarchies.[41] Underscoring the ambivalent nature of the Bolivian military's "assimilationist" mission was the fact that the army does not appear to have made any significant effort to eliminate the consumption of coca from within its ranks. To the contrary, despite their perception of coca chewing as a quintessential signifier of Indian-ness, Liberal elites at the outset of the Chaco War envisioned a substantial role for coca in the army. Although Bolivian elites did not believe that the coca leaf triggered aggression in the Indian, they were convinced of the leaf's capacity to enhance the Indian's endurance.

The confidence that Bolivian creoles had in the extraordinary endurance and stoicism of Altiplanic Indians has been documented before. Indeed, historian of Bolivian medicine Ann Zulawski has shown that Chaco-era creole war planners harbored deep-seated racialist notions about Indian health that shaped their formulation of logistical strategy. Primary among these assumptions was

39. Zoya Khan, "Oscar Cerruto's Aluvión de Fuego: An Incomplete Narrative of the Fragmented Bolivian Nation," *Chasqui: Revista de Literatura Latinoamericana* 38:1 (2009): 88.

40. René Zavaleta Mercado, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1986), 261. Arze Aguirre has similarly referred to a "surge of national consciousness" among Chaco war combatants. Arze Aguirre, *Guerra y conflictos sociales*, 80. Klein asserted, "The war shattered the traditional belief systems and led to a fundamental rethinking of the nature of Bolivian society." Herbert Klein, *Bolivia: The Evolution of a Multi-Ethnic Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 187.

41. Shesko, "Conscript Nation," 88.

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"the apparent belief that Indian recruits were so stoic and inured to suffering that they did not need even basic provisions to be effective soldiers."[42] Coca constitutes a singular caveat to Zulawski's keen analysis. On the eve of the Chaco War, Bolivian elites viewed the Indian of the Altiplano as having extraordinary stamina, but they also believed Indian endurance flowed from coca consumption. The celebrated Bolivian physician and writer Jaime Mendoza, for instance, once related an anecdote of an astonishing feat of endurance performed by Indians with the help of coca during the War of the Pacific:

> During the 1879 war with Chile, a group of soldiers who were marched from the Altiplano to the shores of the Pacific had to return, after the dispersal of San Francisco, to their distant homes. . . . They scaled the Cordillera Occidental and crossed the surrounding oppressive high plains, sustained only with handfuls of coca. After several days in which they had had no other nourishment, they reached a ranch where they were able to recoup their energy, and they then continued their trek of fifteen hundred kilometers.[43]

Shesko has recently shown that, at the outset of the Chaco War, Bolivian war planners likely had less confidence in the fighting abilities of rural Indians than has previously been supposed.[44] But Bolivian elites were confident that coca would provide Bolivian front-line troops—indigenous and mestizo alike—with extraordinary endurance. As Nicanor Fernández declared, "Provisioned with coca and coffee, our troops can endure the longest and most arduous campaign in the Chaco. They can defeat not only the Paraguayans but any army in the world."[45] At the outset of the Chaco War, creole elites had remarkable faith that their unique national labor stimulant would channel the power of Bolivia's popular classes in what can be understood as the most acute form of neocolonial labor exploitation—namely, the mass conscription of peasants and proletarian workers to fight and die in defense of the *patria*.

As Bolivia mobilized for war in the summer of 1932, military officials and the SPY touted the coca leaf as crucial to the Chaco campaign. Perhaps not surprisingly, there was significant overlap between military and SPY leadership, most prominently in the person of Abel Soliz. In *La coca boliviana*, Fernández lauded Abel Soliz, chief of the Office of Provisions for the army, for soliciting donations of coca from prominent SPY coca hacendados for military use.

42. Ann Zulawski, *Unequal Cures: Public Health and Political Change in Bolivia, 1900–1950* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 53–54.

43. Jaime Mendoza, "El macizo de Yungas," *Revista de Agricultura* 1:3 (1942): 14.

44. Elizabeth Shesko, "Mobilizing Manpower for War: Toward a New History of Bolivia's Chaco Conflict, 1932–1935," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 95:2 (2015): 318–319.

45. Fernández, *La coca boliviana*, 22.

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Fernández proclaimed that hacendados would contribute coca "in defense of the *patria*."[46] Soliz was himself a prominent coca hacendado and former SPY president. His high-level military appointment indicates the political prestige and influence Yungueño hacendados still enjoyed at the outset of the war, and Soliz was no doubt happy to facilitate the expansion of the market for Yungueño coca. However, in his capacity as an army official, Soliz almost certainly wanted his country to defeat Paraguay. Moreover, he had called for *donations* of coca to the army. Fernández's framing of the provisioning of coca as a "patriotic defense of the *patria*" most likely reflected similarly mixed motives: the salesman's desire to promote his product, combined with a sincere patriotic belief that coca would enhance the effectiveness of the Bolivian army.

In any case, the army in fact acquired considerable amounts of coca leaves to provision troops in the Chaco. Donations of coca to the army were reported with much adulation by the Liberal press. In August 1932, *El Diario*, Bolivia's most prominent Liberal newspaper, published the names of coca merchants who had donated coca, "for the brave soldiers who are heroically defending our national territory in the Chaco."[47] The article noted the quantity and value of these donations and exhorted Yungueño growers to follow suit: "We expect that the proprietors of Yungas and Inquisivi will not fail to make a patriotic gift to the National Army, and that their contribution will surpass that of the [coca merchants], as is only natural; if [the merchants] have donated 81 tambors of coca for the War, the proprietors will at least triple that figure."[48]

The Bolivian army also purchased substantial quantities of the leaf from Yungueño cocaleros. In 1932, the Bolivian Statistical Bureau and Health Department reported that, of a total domestic crop of 1,735,140 kilos of coca leaves, some 260,246 kilos—about 7 percent of national coca production—were "purchased by the government for army use."[49] After the war, prominent physician Juan Manuel Balcazar, who had served as minister of health and of labor, confirmed that, "during the Chaco War, the army accumulated, in its storage facilities, a great quantity [of coca] for free distribution to soldiers" and that "the government sent large quantities of coca to the theater of operations during the Chaco campaign."[50]

46. Fernández, *La coca boliviana*, 21(emphasis mine).

47. "Donativos para el ejercito en campana," *El Diario*, August 3, 1932, reproduced in Nicanor Fernández, *La coca boliviana*, 23.

48. "Donativos para el Ejercito en campana," *El Diario*, August 3, 1932. Not growers themselves, coca merchants or "brokers" purchased coca leaves wholesale from both large haciendas and Yungueño Indian communities for retail sale, primarily in urban and mining centers.

49. R. F. Fernald, US Consul, "Coca Leaf in Bolivia," April 8, 1933, US National Archive, RG 170, Box 54.

50. Juan Manuel Balcazar, *Historia de la medicina en Bolivia* (La Paz: Ediciones "Juventud," 1956), 530.

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At the outset of the war, jingoistic—and overly optimistic—war planners promoted the coca leaf as a key ingredient in the making of the superior Bolivian soldier. However, as the harsh realities of the Chaco set in, the Bolivian army employed the leaf out of desperation: as sustenance for undersupplied troops; relief for besieged and starving squadrons; substitute for sophisticated medical care, which was sorely lacking in the field; and, perhaps, morale booster. It would be difficult to imagine a more climatically hostile theater of war than the Gran Chaco, a vast, thinly-populated, nettlesome region where aridity, temperature extremes, pests, and pestilence made life hellish for soldiers in the field.[51] These conditions, combined with the remoteness of the Chaco to Bolivia's main population centers and logistical incompetence, stretched the Bolivian army well beyond its capacity to adequately supply its troops. This resulted in the deaths of thousands of Bolivians from starvation, thirst, and disease.[52]

Faced with such grave logistical challenges, the Bolivian army brass looked to the coca leaf as a stopgap measure. Dried coca leaves were relatively durable and light in weight and thus could be transported to the Chaco with little spoilage. Although archival records are patchy, there is ample evidence, often in the form of bills of sale to private vendors, that the Bolivian army routinely rationed coca to troops in the field.[53] Moreover, records of internal army communications reveal that, particularly in dire situations, officers provisioned coca leaves to alleviate the hunger of their men. For instance, in a 1934 internal communication, one officer noted that his troops were "exhausted" and "lacking water," but expressed optimism that "water and coca would be sent." He further noted, ominously, that "For tomorrow, we have no supplies of any kind."[54]

There is considerable evidence that, for Bolivian soldiers, coca chewing became closely associated with the endurance of horrific conditions of combat in the Chaco. Oral histories from Chaco War veterans contain frequent mention of receiving coca rations in the field, and indicate that troops became accustomed to the practice, especially in connection with combat.[55] In his wartime journal,

51. Shesko, "Conscript Nation," 240.

52. Shesko, "Conscript Nation," 3.

53. See for example the bill of sale made out to El Jefe del Reclutamiento Beni, Gral. Federico Román for "7 pounds of coca for 0.80" for a total of "Bs. 5.60," January 29, 1934, Archivo de La Paz (ALP), Contraloría General de la República, Box 73, file 280, Another bill of sale, Recibos-Planillas de Socorro, November.18, 1932, records the purchase by the army of 12 pounds of coca from vendor Francisco Tito. ALP, Contraloría General de la República, Box 17, file 76.

54. Informe by Tcnl. Rogelio Ayala Moreira, March 30, 1934, ALP, Julio César Valdez Collection, Box 4.

55. See for example the oral history of Chaco War veteran Luis Michel: "P: Did you chew coca during the war?" "L. M.: Yes, the government provided it to the soldiers," in Arze Aguirre, *Guerra y conflictos sociales*, 180.

celebrated Chaco veteran Sub-Oficial Dn. Demetrio Oyola Justiniano noted wryly that the arrival of coca often signaled that a combat mission was imminent: "Around 6 pm they distribute sweets and coca (bad sign), which happens in preparation for a mission; it (coca) is the favorite supply). . . . We lie down but stay alert and ready."[56] Emilio Fernández Miranda, who served as a military physician in the Chaco, even claimed that at least one unit that had fought in the Battle of Boquerón demanded coca as a condition for returning to the field: "[During the] campaign we had the opportunity to witness persistent demands to the Minister of War for coca, as a condition for returning to the line of fire, by the 14th Infantry Regiment, which had withdrawn from Boquerón to Fort Arce, and which was made up almost entirely of police officers and miners."[57] That such demands came from a unit composed mainly of police officers and miners suggests the emergence in the Chaco of coca as a working-class labor demand.

As a stimulant and substitute for food, coca figured conspicuously in some of the most dire moments of the Chaco War. Numerous Bolivian squadrons were cut off from supply lines for days or weeks by enemy encircling maneuvers, a tactic for which the wily Paraguayan military leadership became known. Accounts from both Bolivian and Paraguayan veterans describe the Bolivian army's practice of air-dropping bags of coca to besieged troops.[58]

The Bolivian army's use of coca during the Chaco War to fortify the heroic resistance of besieged troops has found its way into Bolivian army lore. An internally produced paper provided to me by the Consejo Supremo de Defensa del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, which is charged with maintaining the archives of Bolivia's armed forces, reports the following:

> During the Chaco War, in the heroic defense of Boquerón, and in other battles, the only way to withstand an enemy siege was through the use of the coca leaf which, dropped from planes, enabled the troops to fight even though they were out of food. . . . Likewise, during ceasefires, particularly during the Defense of Boquerón and in the trenches of the defense of Villamontes, Bolivian soldiers proceeded to *pijcheo* or *acullico* with *llujta* in order to relieve hunger and thirst.[59]

56. Diario de Campana del ExCombatiente Sub-Oficial Dn. Demetrio Oyola Justiniano, Guerra del Chaco, 1932–1935, Santa Cruz, January 1978, courtesy of COSDEP.

57. Emilio Fernández Miranda, "La cocamania en Bolivia," Primer Congreso Neuropsiquiátrico Latino Americano, Buenos Aires, 1944, 74.

58. Testimonio of Eusebio Condoi, in Germán Carlos Pano Condori, *La coca no es blanca* (La Paz: Ministerio de Culturas y Turismo, 2013), 66.

59. This undated document is printed on the letterhead of the Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia, which marks it as having been produced in 2009 or later. The document is a fascinating example of continuity between the elite nationalistic pro-cocaism of the early 1930s (which underlay the army's provision of coca to its troops during the Chaco War) and the

Recounting the battle of Pampa Grande of 1933, which ended with a Paraguayan victory, the Paraguayan brigadier general Ramón César Bejarano vividly recalled the Bolivian army's almost surreal way of delivering coca to besieged troops: "The Bolivian air force, as always, was absolute master of the sky, and they calmly bombarded the besiegers and dropped bags of coca to the besieged."[60] Just as coca began to take on nationalistic undertones for Bolivian troops, the Paraguayan general saw the Bolivian leaf as emblematic of the enemy, and he wrote of it in ethnically derogatory terms: "If we had lost the war, the Bolivian flag would now be flying in the Chaco, maybe even in Asunción, and our descendants would now be speaking kechua or aimara, chewing coca and drinking chicha instead of wine."[61] Nevertheless, there is evidence that Paraguayan army intelligence believed that coca did in fact enhance the performance and "stamina" of Bolivian soldiers in the Chaco.[62]

The Bolivian army's utilization of coca for medicinal purposes in the Chaco is more challenging to document, but there is strong indirect evidence of the practice. Zulawski has shown that, faced with a shortage of trained medical professionals, the Bolivian army relied heavily upon indigenous healers, the best-known of whom were (and still are) the Aymara-speaking Kallawaya.[63] Recognizing their medical skills, the Bolivian army enlisted Kallawaya to work as medics in field hospitals in the Chaco. Some well-known Kallawaya healers worked side by side with distinguished creole physicians, who approved wholeheartedly of Kallawaya use of herbal medicines.[64] It is well known that coca has long been a prominent element in the Kallawaya medicinal repertoire, and there can be little doubt that Kallawaya medics made substantial use of the leaf in the Chaco.

In the late 1940s, José Gamarra Z., then president of the SPY, maintained that during the Chaco War the army used coca to treat avitaminosis (vitamin deficiency), a scourge among the undernourished Bolivian forces.[65] Gamarra further claimed that combatants—both Indian and white—who "did not

"popular coca nationalism" of the early twenty-first century that underlies reports such as Cnl. Guido Cuentas Vargas Daen, "La hoja de coca en la Guerra del Chaco"("The Coca Leaf in the Chaco War"), a government report commissioned by COSDEP, Secretaria General Permanente.

60. Brigadier General Ramón César Bejarano, *Síntesis de la Guerra del Chaco: homenaje al cincuentenario de la Defensa del Chaco Paraguyao* (Asunción: Editorial Toledo, 1982), 12.

61. César Bejarano, *Síntesis de la Guerra del Chaco.*

62. Letter from Isidro Ramírez, no. 56, December 28, 1932 Archivo del Museo Militar del Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Asunción, Paraguay, courtesy of Elizabeth Shesko.

63. Zulawski, *Unequal Cures*, 73–74.

64. Zulawski, *Unequal Cures*, 73–74.

65. "The single most common disease treated in the Villa Montes hospital in 1933 was avitaminosis (1,999 cases), which was technically the lack of certain vitamins, most commonly vitamin C, but actually caused by general, extreme malnutrition. . . . . Avitaminosis was a result of the inability of the army to provision its troops in the field and was

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receive their daily allotment of coca were speedily attacked by scurvy (avitaminosis)," while those who did chew the leaf "showed high morale, overcoming the hardships characteristic of the region."[66] Gamarra's claim finds support in research published by Dr. Fernández Miranda soon after the war. In his contribution to the volume *La sanidad boliviana en la campana del Chaco* (1938), the results of an ambitious project to document and evaluate medical treatments that had been administered during the war, Fernández finds that, of the three Bolivian "races," the Indian was the most resistant to avitaminosis. The doctor attributed that resistance, in part, to coca chewing: "The indigenous race was the least affected by avitaminosis in the form of scurvy and beri-berica, as is demonstrated by our statistics. . . . The coca that our Indians habitually chew, does it not contain vitamins?"[67]

The combination of the commercial interests of the SPY, belief in the effectiveness of coca as an enhancer of physical endurance, logistically driven shortages in food supply, and shortages of medicine led the Bolivian Army to make pervasive use of the coca leaf during the Chaco War. In the next section, I investigate the cultural effects of the introduction of coca to thousands of non-indigenous Bolivians.

BREACHING THE ETHNIC BOUNDARIES OF COCA CULTURE

My research has uncovered ample evidence, from both elite and popular sources, that many non-indigenous combatants, having been introduced to pijchu in the Chaco, continued to chew coca when they returned from the war. Among reformist elites, who viewed the war as evidence of the incompetence, archaic outlook, and moral bankruptcy of the Liberal order, the fiasco of the Chaco produced an anti-cocaism rooted in the notion that coca consumption had caused degeneracy and mental unfitness in Bolivian troops. Elite reformers likewise argued that, as a marker of the unassimilated Indian, coca culture prevented the construction of a Hispanicized mestizo national body. On the other hand, for many working-class Chaco veterans, popular nationalism ignited by the experience of the war made pijchu into an increasingly meaningful element of working-class identity.

exacerbated by Argentina's (unofficial) support for Paraguay, which meant food could not reach the Bolivian Army through Puerto Yrigoyen, an Argentine port on the Pilcomayo River." Zulawski, *Unequal Cures*, 62.

66. José Gamarra Z., president of the Coca Producers Corporation and the SPY, to Dr. Tomás Manuel Elio, Minister of State in the Office of Foreign Relations, La Paz, January 14, 1948, US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), NA, RG 170.

67. Emilio Fernández Miranda, "Vitaminas y Avitaminosis," in *La sanidad boliviana en la campana del Chaco*, Aurelio Melean, Jaime Mendoza, and Alberto Saavedra, eds. (Cochabamba: Universidad de Cochabamba, 1938), 315.

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In the aftermath of the war, a number of prominent Bolivian intellectuals and government officials took notice, with varying degrees of alarm, of an erosion of the traditional ethnic boundaries that had delineated Andean coca culture since the colonial era, a phenomenon they attributed to the Chaco War. Writing in 1942, Victor Andrade, a prominent lawyer and politician who in the 1950s would serve the revolutionary MNR government with distinction as ambassador to the United States, observed that "the Chaco War has changed the conditions surrounding coca."[68] Andrade noted that "elements of the ruling classes, who had never chewed coca before, were forced to do so" in the Chaco because "the nature of the terrain, far removed from supply centers, severely impeded the provision of supplies."[69] Writing in 1952 on the question of coca addiction, Dr. Martín Cárdenas, professor of genetics and botany at the University of Cochabamba, similarly observed, "During the Chaco War, coca chewing among the mestizo and white Bolivian soldiers was widespread."[70]

Archival and oral historical evidence strongly suggests that many non-indigenous soldiers did indeed take up coca chewing during the war. Interestingly, one of the more striking examples of coca chewing by creoles in that period comes from none other than Emilio Fernández Miranda, who in the 1940s became a leading proponent of eradicating the coca "vice." In 1944, while serving as chief of Sucre's Manicomio Nacional Pacheco—at the time Bolivia's only mental hospital—Fernández reported that "many citizens who became soldiers, and who had never chewed coca [*picchado*] in civilian life, came to acquire the vice of *acullico* during the campaign."[71] Fernández claimed further that many of these veterans, suffering from mental disturbance and "*cocamania*" (coca addiction), "became patients at Sucre's psychiatric hospital."[72] In the postwar period, Fernández became a leading voice in an emergent reformist elite anti-coca movement, and his reports of "cocamania" should be understood in that light.

However, there are powerful reasons to credit Fernández's accounts of non-Indian coca consumption in the Chaco. It is fascinating that as evidence for his contention that the war had spread the coca habit to the non-Indian population, Fernández offered a vivid firsthand account of chewing the leaf

68. Victor Andrade, "El problema de los Seguros Sociales de Bolivia," *Protección Social: Publicación Mensual de la Caja de Seguro y Ahorro Obrero* 5:56–57 (1942): 13.

69. Andrade, "El problema de los Seguros Sociales de Bolivia," 13.

70. Martín Cárdenas, "Psychological Aspects of Coca Chewing," UNODC, January 1, 1952, retrieved online at https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/bulletin/bulletin_1952-01-01_2_page004.html, accessed December 13, 2019.

71. Fernández Miranda, "La cocamania en Bolivia," 74.

72. Fernández Miranda, "La cocamania en Bolivia."

while serving as an army field doctor in the Chaco. He recalled chewing coca with his colleagues to ward off sleep, hunger, and fear:

> We have our own personal experience in the Chaco campaign (1932) of the effects of coca, where the fear of shrapnel, anxiety about ambush, hunger, thirst, and agitation in the face of danger to our lives sometimes led us to find in *picchu, acullico* or the chewing (*masticación*) of coca, a palliative for our suffering, a stew for our hunger, and a spring for our thirst. At the beginning of the campaign, we chewed greedily. To deaden hunger and thirst and, above all, to stay alert, drivers ingested more and more coca leaves, in order to stay awake, often for five days straight.[73]

The creole doctor even related an account of a frightening hallucinatory experience while chewing coca during the Battle of Boquerón: "I had never walked as far as I did that night: without fatigue but, rather, with a desire to walk; with distant noises and voices in my ears; with sensations of tingling in my arms; my eyes seeing bursts of light, and my heart beating more and more rapidly."[74]

The late 1930s and 1940s witnessed the rise of a major anti-coca movement among the country's elite lettered classes. The shock and recriminations of Bolivia's military defeat in the Chaco reverberated not only through the country's political economy and national politics, but also through its coca politics. Whereas among the literary, intellectual, and medical luminaries of the pre-Chaco period support for coca, and Indian coca chewing, had been a cultural mainstay of Bolivian Liberalism, the wake of the war saw the precipitous crumbling of that pillar. Interestingly, the assimilationist currents that drove this anti-cocaism came not from the right, which continued to count among its number some of Bolivia's staunchest defenders of the *hoja sagrada*, but from the nationalist, socialist, and Marxist left.

Famously, this period saw the emergence, among the *letrado* classes, of a group of young reform-minded writers and intellectuals for whom the trauma of the Chaco had produced deep disillusionment with the traditional Liberal order.[75] The "Chaco Generation," as the influential group of writers and professionals who rejected the oligarchic Liberalism were called, seized on coca as a symbol of the corruption and neocolonial exploitation that had reached ghastly heights

73. Fernández Miranda, "La cocamania en Bolivia," 72.

74. Fernández Miranda, "La cocamania en Bolivia," 73.

75. Klein notes that the Chaco War had "a profound effect on the civilian white and mestizo intellectuals who were drawn to the front . . . there was born among these men a new sensitivity and a new pattern of expectations. Revealing all the nation's glaring faults, the Chaco War produced the *generacion del Chaco*." Klein, *Parties and Political Change in Bolivia*, 189.

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during the war. This generation of reformists also viewed indigenous coca chewing as a physical and psychological barrier to the molding of a modern, assimilated proletarian workforce. Chaco Generation writers churned out "a plethora of social realist novels" that attacked Liberalism, La Rosca, and the army; exposed decadence and corruption within the elite classes; and reframed the interrelated concerns of national development and the so-called "Indian problem".[76]

Within this body of literature, there soon took shape an increasingly ardent anti-cocaism, rooted in a new conviction that the Indian's coca habit had historically prevented the assimilation of the race into a mestizo-criollo Bolivian nation. Anti-cocaism soon became prevalent in post-Chaco reformist literature in Bolivia, and highlights included the celebrated novelist Raúl Botelho Gosalvez's *Coca* (1941) and influential MNR intellectual Augusto Céspedes's memoir of the Chaco War *La sangre de los mestizos* (1936). Revealingly, the coca leaf served at times as a key trope in Céspedes's recollections of caste-based oppression in the Chaco, as is evident in his recounting of the execution of a Bolivian Indian soldier, by his own platoon, for desertion:

> The ceremony was improvised. It was noted that no one knew the procedure for an execution by firing squad. The Indian, almost disconnected from his dramatic importance, in his small, brown humility reminded me of the *repetes* who would wait for medical treatment at the Puesto Moreno hospital.
>
> – He must be given a bit of alcohol—the medic advised.
>
> The Indian spit out the coca he was chewing, in order to drink, with help from the medic. Then he felt around in his pocket with his hand, took out some leaves, and began again to chew. . . . Thus mute, blindfolded, he seemed insignificant on the wide horizon of the scrubland . . . I believe he continued chewing when the discharge knocked him off his feet, launching him to the ground with a jolt of thunder. He lay shuddering on the scrubland like a tarantula that has been trampled upon.[77]

By focusing on the condemned man's coca chewing in the midst of the squad's preparations for his summary execution, Céspedes suggests the cultural function of pijchu as a marker of subordinate caste. Portraying the Indian as so preoccupied with his coca that he is indifferent to, or perhaps even unaware of, his impending death, Céspedes implies that coca is a factor in the Indian's supposed "passivity" in the face of neocolonial oppression.

76. Indeed, the depth of Chaco experience was such that, in the view of some contemporary observers, it produced some of the finest and most consequential Latin American literature of the era. Klein, *Parties and Political Change in Bolivia*, 189–190.

77. Augusto Céspedes, *Sangre de mestizos* (La Paz: Juventud, 1969), 153–154.

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Anti-cocaism likewise emerged in Bolivian medical circles in the wake of the Chaco, as evidenced by the anti-coca writings and advocacy of the aforementioned and eminent Bolivian physician and psychiatrist Emilio Fernández Miranda, who attempted to document the existence of widespread "cocamania" (mental illness caused by coca addiction) among mestizo veterans of the Chaco War.[78] Fernández made that point by claiming that many non-Indians who served in the Chaco War took up coca chewing and returned from the war stricken with cocamania: "Many citizens who served as soldiers, and who had never chewed coca in their civilian lives, acquired the vice of *acullico* during the campaign, and a number of them became patients at the Sucre psychiatric hospital, known as Manicomio Nacional "Pacheco." Finding them improved, we discharged them, only to receive them again when they fell into recidivism.[79]

Fernández's psychiatric observations of middle-class "cocamaniacs" echo, in medical terms, the anxieties about creole coca chewing that run through Botelho Gosalvez's literary work. The protagonist of his novel *Coca*, a young disaffected veteran of the Chaco War, is undone and destroyed by his addiction to the coca leaf, which Gosalvez portrays as producing mental derangement.[80] Nevertheless, although a great many post-Chaco reformist elites denounced coca chewing as a destructive habit, the perspectives of working-class war veterans were often strikingly different. Oral histories of working-class and peasant veterans suggest that pijchu facilitated interethnic camaraderie among soldiers in the field, provided solace from hunger and fear, and even contributed to sentiments of popular-nationalist solidarity. For instance, Desiderio Poquechoque, an oral informant of Arze Aguirre, suggested that coca was part of a shared experience that forged bonds among the troops:

> P: And you would chat about things in the barracks?
> D. P.: Yes, when there was a break, we would go out to play ball . . .
> P: Were some treated better, or with a certain preference?
> D. P.: No, no we [enlisted men] were treated equally. . . .They would give us all coca, cigars, and water. . . . But sometimes there would be no water and we wouldn't drink for three or four days.[81]

Carlos Rodríguez expressed similar associations with the leaf. Rodríguez had never chewed coca before the Chaco War.

78. Fernández Miranda, "La cocamania en Bolivia," 61.
79. Fernández Miranda, "La cocamania en Bolivia," 74.
80. Raúl Botelho Gosalvez, *Coca: motivos del Yunga paceno*, novela (Santiago de Chile: Zig-Zag, 1941), 73–74.
81. Desiderio Poquechoque, a campesino from Tarabuco (Chuquisaca), quoted in Arze Aguirre, *Guerras y conflictos sociales*, 236–238.

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> However, once enlisted he took up the practice and he recalled that Indian soldiers often shared coca with mestizos.[82]

Of course, from the points of view of working-class mestizos themselves, self-identification as a member of that "group" did not necessarily imply solidarity with rural Indians. And while veterans like Carlos Rodríguez and Desidero Poquechoque associated coca use in the Chaco with interethnic solidarity, other mestizo soldiers took up pijchu while maintaining a robust contempt for Indians. Years after the war, Luis Michel, a 73-year-old mestizo veteran from Chuquisaca, derided Chaco conscripts from the rural Altiplano:

> P: Did you meet *llameros* [people from the Altiplano]?
> L. M.: I met people from Potosí, Oruro, Viacha, Challapata. Yes I met them, they are *tatalas*, yes.
> P: What does *tatalas* mean?
> L. M.: Tatalas, the clothes they wear, they're not like us. It's a different type of clothing. The tatalas from Potosí, Oruro, Viacha, Challapata.
> P: And how did the tatalas perform as soldiers?
> L. M.: They are cowards. They aren't like soldiers from here, because southerners, Cochabambinos and Sucreños, are strong and handsome. Paceños and Orureños are good-for-nothings [*flojos*].[83]

Michel's contempt for highland indigenous people was defined primarily by his view of their culture as backward. It is thus particularly notable that he did not refer to the practice of coca chewing as backward or even as distinctly indigenous. Indeed, he continued to chew coca after the Chaco War:

> Q: Do you chew coca?
> L. M.: When I'm working. . . .
> Q: And did you chew coca during the war?
> L. M.: Yes, the government provided it to soldiers.[84]

Michel's opinions evoke a mestizo-criollo working-class identity that, although defined in part by anti-Indian prejudice, incorporates coca as a material cultural element associated with labor. For many mestizo soldiers, the Chaco War

82. Carlos Rodríguez in discussion with the author, May 2016.
83. Luis Michel, of Chuquisaca, quoted in Arze Aguirre, *Guerras y conflictos sociales*, 175–176.
84. Arze Aguirre, *Guerras y conflictos sociales*, 180. Michel was not asked, nor did he indicate, whether he had ever chewed coca before the Chaco War. However, the fact that he highlights having chewed coca during the war because it was provided by the government strongly suggests that this was his initiation into coca culture.

largely sheared pijchu of its traditional cultural associations with Indian-ness, thus clearing the way for the adoption of pijchu by the non-indigenous working classes.

While considerable insight can be drawn from oral histories, the firsthand written account that delves into the meanings that Bolivian combatants ascribed to coca consumption in the Chaco is rare. Jesus Lara's *Repete* (1937), the Chaco War memoirs of the celebrated writer, *indigenista* scholar, and combat veteran, is one such source. Lara's descriptions of pijchu suggest its role in the forging of solidarity among working-class and peasant conscripts in the Chaco.[85] As a lettered mestizo, Lara occupied something of a liminal position in Bolivian society. The educated Lara could pass for *gente decente* but he identified strongly with the working classes.[86] Even before the war, he was active in Bolivia's emerging labor movement, and his working-class revolutionary politics culminated in a 1956 campaign for vice president of Bolivia as a member of the Communist Party.[87] Yet nothing demonstrates the bona fides of Lara's working-class identification and popular nationalism more forcefully than his experience in the Chaco War.

Perhaps more so than most of his comrades-in-arms, Lara explicitly viewed Bolivia's Chaco campaign as a domestic class war in which an elite-controlled government conscripted "the Indians and the workers" ("*los indios y los obreros*") to suffer and die at the front while they themselves watched "the tragedy of the jungle" from "the comfort of the city."[88] In so doing, Lara charged, Bolivia's traditional Liberal elites demonstrated not only their cowardice and effeminacy, but also, in a reversal of the social Darwinism that dominated Liberal racial ideology, their own decadence and degeneracy.[89] On the other hand, the popular classes, by doing the fighting, demonstrated their courage, patriotism, and fitness to lead the Bolivian nation.[90] To his mortification, army administrators initially classified Lara as "suitable for auxiliary services," a classification that implied he was a member of the elite. Wanting "to follow the path of my brother the worker and my brother the Indian, humble beings who know nothing of the delights of the rearguard," Lara recounts with gratification that he was ordered to the front in May 1932.[91]

85. Jesús Lara, *Repete: diario de un hombre que fue a la guerra del Chaco* (La Paz: Librería Editorial "G.U.M.", 1985).

86. See Klein, *Parties and Political Change*, 196.

87. James Dunkerley, *Rebellion in the Veins: Political Struggle in Bolivia, 1952–82* (London: Verson, 1984), 51.

88. Lara, *Repete,* 9.

89. Lara, *Repete*, 8. Young men from the elite classes were commonly designated as "unfit" for combat, thus immunizing them from service on the front lines.

90. Lara, *Repete*, 7–8.

91. Lara, *Repete*, 7–10.

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A *letrado* on the front lines, Lara was distinctively capable of articulating the meanings of the popular culture of Bolivian conscripts, of which coca became a significant element. Like the pro-cocaists of the SPY, and Bolivian army logicians, Lara admired coca's properties as a stimulant and analgesic, at times describing the leaf in terms of the miraculous: "While there are coca leaves, there is never hunger or fatigue . . . coca is a precious balm; it seems to give us inexhaustible energies."[92] Lara suggested furthermore that the leaf had the power to lift the psyche of the soldier traumatized by war, recounting that chewing coca provided him with some relief from "dismay" and "dejection."[93]

But Lara also alluded to deeper meanings that coca chewing had for front-line Bolivian troops. His memoirs suggest that, as a communal activity, pijchu played a role in the forging of wartime bonds that blunted the edges of traditional ethnic distinctions. Lara implied that *all* Bolivian soldiers were potentially coca chewers: "[Coca] seems to give *us* inexhaustible energies."[94] He suggested that in the Chaco *pijchu* characterized not just the Indian soldier but the Bolivian soldier. In one passage, the exemplary Bolivian everyman takes the form of an army captain leading a squadron at the front while chewing coca: "The boys are lively. They sing, cheer and play. The captain goes to the head, on foot like his soldiers and, like them, with a thick wad of coca in his mouth, which swells his cheek such that it seems about to burst."[95] Soldiers also bonded as they chewed the leaf during moments of repose: "That morning the regiment command sent us cigarettes and coca, precious things that were immediately distributed among everyone. The boys agreed to play poker, after the mess, for cigarettes. . . . The boys decided not to start the game without their chief, but they could not resist the temptation to *pijchu*. They assiduously opened the bags of coca and started to chew the miraculous leaves.[96] Lara's descriptions of coca chewing in the Chaco, and his reflections upon the meanings of pijchu for Bolivian soldiers—mestizo and indigenous alike—at the front lines, are powerful evidence of the profound changes in Bolivian coca culture wrought by the Chaco War.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to scholarly understanding of the relationship between drugs and war. Scholars of drug history have long noted the historical

92. Lara, *Repete*, 134, 19.
93. Lara, *Repete*, 218–219, 134.
94. Lara, *Repete*, 134 (emphasis supplied).
95. Lara, *Repete*, 134.
96. Lara, *Repete*, 180–181. While Lara makes no mention here of indigenous coca traditions, it bears noting that the sharing of coca leaves has for centuries played an important role in "the small reciprocities of everyday sociality" in highland Andean indigenous communities. Thomas A. Abercrombie, *Pathways of Memory and Power* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 56.

connections between the two. Courtwright, for instance, in his expansive history of the "psychoactive revolution," observes in general terms that warfare has functioned as an engine of the spread of global drug consumption. "Armies," notes Courtwright, "whose ranks are filled with single, lower-class men plagued by alternating cycles of boredom, fatigue, and terror, were natural incubators of drug use."[97] Recent years have seen the development of an interdisciplinary body of scholarship that focuses on the relationship between drugs and war as a research subject in its own right. This subfield has yielded fresh insights into ways in which drugs and warfare have shaped each other historically.[98]

In a forthcoming article, political scientist Peter Andreas offers a useful analytical framework for conceptualizing the multifaceted relationship between drugs and war, which he breaks down into "five core dimensions." These include 1) "war *while* on drugs (drug consumption by combatants and civilians during wartime)"; 2) "war *through* drugs (using drugs to finance war or to weaken the enemy)"; 3) "war *for* drugs (war over control or access to drug markets)"; 4) "war *against* drugs (using instruments of war to suppress drugs or to attack or discredit military rivals in the name of drug suppression)"; and 5) "drugs *after* war (different drugs emerging as winners or losers in the aftermath of war)."[99]

Andreas's first category, "war while on drugs," implicates not only the tendency of soldiers to seek out psychoactive drugs, but also the strategic deployment of particular drugs by national armies, either to debilitate enemy forces or to boost the performance of their own.[100] However, few detailed case studies of this phenomenon have been published. In perhaps the best known to date, Norman Ohler provocatively argues that it was the Nazi Wehrmacht's systematic provisioning of methamphetamine, in the form of German-produced pills branded as Pervitin, to its troops and officers (including innovative generals such as Irwin Rommel) that inadvertently turned Germany's pivotal 1940 invasion of France into a blitzkrieg. Viewing the early stages of World War II through the lens of drugs, so to speak, thus leads to a revised historical understanding of the blitzkrieg: "Contrary to later accounts, [the German invasion of France] had never been conceived consistently as a

97. David T. Courtwright, *Forces of Habit: Drugs and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 16.

98. Important contributions to this literature include Peter Andreas, "Drugs and War: What is the Relationship?" in *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 22, forthcoming, cited with permission of the author; and *Killer High: A History of War in Six Drugs,* New York: Oxford University Press 2020; Norman Ohler, *Blitzed: Drugs in the Third Reich* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015); and Erica Wald, *Vice in the Barracks: Medicine, the Military and the Making of Colonial India, 1780–1868* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

99. Andreas, "Drugs and War: What is the Relationship?"

100. Andreas, "Drugs and War: What is the Relationship?" 7.

Blitzkrieg, but had, . . . boosted by the large-scale use of Pervitin on the German side, developed a dynamic of its own that was countered only by Hitler, who didn't understand its speed."[101]

The Bolivian case likewise presents a fertile opportunity for exploring the phenomenon of strategic wartime deployment of stimulants as performance enhancers. Indeed, comparing the Bolivian state's strategic deployment of coca in the Chaco with Nazi application of amphetamines during World War II brings out intriguing commonalities and contrasts between the two cases. It is noteworthy, for instance, that both cases involve the use of stimulants to address logistical challenges produced by long supply lines. The German Wehrmacht issued methamphetamine to its troops to enable them to endure extended periods without sleep, thus making possible the speed necessary for successful "lightning" invasions.[102] The Bolivian army likewise deployed stimulants to address difficulties presented by the great distances between central production areas and the battlegrounds of the Gran Chaco. Specifically, the army distributed coca to enhance the ability of its soldiers to tolerate the hunger that resulted from its inability to supply them adequately with food. Moreover, although there is no indication that the Bolivian army believed that coca enhanced the aggression of soldiers, there is ample evidence that coca chewing boosted the morale of Bolivian troops. There is also evidence that the army at times issued coca leaves to soldiers about to embark on night patrols, which suggests the use of the leaf to ward off the fatigue of sleep-deprived soldiers.

Comparison of the German and Bolivian cases also provides interesting points of contrast. In Germany, Pervitin was deployed for primarily offensive purposes—to increase the speed of invasion forces and to enhance the aggression of invading German troops. Indeed, Ohler argues that these drug-induced effects were decisive during the early phases of the war, and thus that "the French were no match for Germany's chemically enhanced dynamism. They kept acting too slowly, were surprised and overrun, and continually failed to grab the initiative."[103] By contrast, Bolivian strategic deployment of coca was primarily defensive, compensating for logistical deficiencies and, at times, outmaneuvering by Paraguayan forces. Indeed, as we have seen, perhaps the most dramatic strategic deployment of coca in the Chaco was the air-dropping of bags of leaves to starving troops cut off from supply lines by Paraguayan forces. Yet both German and Bolivian deployments of stimulants likely affected the

101. Ohler, *Blitzed*, 82.
102. Ohler, *Blitzed*, 69.
103. Ohler, *Blitzed*, 71.

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nature of the wars in question. While German use of methamphetamine may have played a pivotal role in the emergence of the blitzkrieg, Bolivian deployment of coca likely factored into the Bolivian army's ability to keep undernourished troops fighting in a remote theater of war, thus perhaps prolonging what would become the longest international conflict in modern Latin American history.

It is likewise fruitful to compare the nationalist and racialist ideologies that underlay Bolivian and German military deployments of coca and methamphetamine, respectively. Interestingly, both states viewed and promoted as a "national" product the particular stimulant they utilized for military purposes. Ohler shows that the Nazi embrace of Pervitin was linked to the genocidal regime's condemnation of other drugs, such as cocaine and opiates, as foreign contaminants of the Aryan race.[104] Underlying Nazi drug-race ideology was Germany's position as a highly developed manufacturing economy that, having lost its colonial possessions after World War I, lacked direct access to stimulants such as coffee and tea. In light of Nazi Germany's nationalist objective of economic self-sufficiency, stimulants thus "had to be produced synthetically," and the development by Germany's vaunted pharmaceutical industry of the synthetic Pervitin —methamphetamine in pill form—was framed as a source of national pride.[105] "[Pervitin] was marketed as a kind of counter-drug to replace all drugs, particularly illegal ones. The consumption of *this* substance was sanctioned. Methamphetamine was regarded as a kind of panacea."[106]

Though Chaco-era Bolivian governments were not engaged in a program of racial extermination, a combination of racial ideology and commitment to a "national" resource similarly underlay the Bolivian military's use of coca in the Chaco. As we have seen, Paceño Liberals, who still dominated national level politics on the eve of the Chaco War, viewed Bolivian coca as a unique national economic resource, a profitable commodity that facilitated the exploitation of Bolivia's primary labor force, the Indian race, and, thus, the extractive "national" political economy over which Liberal elites presided. The German and Bolivian cases thus exhibit variations of a particular phenomenon in the history of drugs and war, namely,

104. Ohler documents the Nazi regime's virulent anti-drug campaign, which was integrated into its plan for "racial hygiene": "Anyone who consumed drugs suffered from a 'foreign plague.' Drug dealers were presented as unscrupulous, greedy, or alien; drug use as 'racially inferior'; and so-called drug crimes as one of the greatest threats to society." Ohler, *Blitzed*, 19. The Nazis regarded cocaine, which had been wildly popular in Weimar Berlin as "degenerate poison." Ohler, *Blitzed*, 12.

105. Ohler, *Blitzed*, 8.

106. Ohler, *Blitzed*, 32.

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state selection of particular stimulants for military use based in large measure on racialist ideology and resource nationalism.[107]

Finally, Bolivian coca history in the wake of the Chaco War implicates Andreas's fifth analytical category: "drugs after war (different drugs emerging as winners or losers in the aftermath of war)." The present case study adds to our understanding of the capacity of war to alter, not merely expand, drug cultures. The Bolivian military deployment of coca in the Chaco had deep and lasting consequences for the politics and culture of coca in the aftermath of the war. As I have shown, the wake of the Chaco War Bolivia saw the unlinking of coca from caste, the expansion of coca culture to Bolivia's mestizo working classes, and the rise of anti-cocaism among a new generation of elite reformers. This profound change in the dynamics of Bolivia's coca politics is essential for understanding subsequent elite support for both the US-led War on Drugs and the coca leaf's subsequent evolution, in Bolivia, into a symbol of pluri-ethnic working-class identity and popular anti-imperial resistance.

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107. For an extended treatment of resource nationalism in Bolivia, see Kevin Young's monograph *Blood of the Earth: Resource Nationalism, Revolution, and Empire in Bolivia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017).

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