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Rural women's rights: the impact of organizing by Bolivia's coca growing women.

By Linda Farthing and Thomas Grisaffi

Evo Morales' administration (2005-2019) had a firm commitment to improving the lives of Bolivia's poorest people, who are mostly rural and indigenous women. A key element in this shift was the influence that the principal rural indigenous women's organization, the Bartolinas, exercised within the Morales government. This article contends that the Bartolinas' success drew in no small measure from women coca growers who organized against the 1990s U.S.-financed War on Drugs in the Chapare region. Focused initially on resisting repression, these women played a central role in the formation of the political party that Evo Morales headed and in strengthening the Bartolinas at the same time as they gradually expanded their demands to include more emphasis on women's issues. They assumed important positions in the Morales government and they played a central role in advancing indigenous and rural women's rights, including achieving electoral gender parity in the 2009 Constitution.

Introduction:

Evo Morales was propelled to power in late 2005 by indigenous organizations, including the rural indigenous women's organization, the Bartolina Sisa federation, more commonly known simply as the Bartolinas,[i] which played a critical role in the government's subsequent success (Sánchez Echevarría 2015, 78). In no small measure this prominent role was driven by the Chapare region's *cocaleras,* women coca growers who organized to actively resist the

US-financed War on Drugs during the 1990s (Román Arnez 2008). *Cocaleras'* repeated leadership of the Bartolinas proved critical to improving the status of rural women, who were some of the country's poorest, least educated, and most marginalized citizens.

Thanks to consistent pressure from the Bartolinas, the Morales' government guaranteed equal pay for equal work, increased women's access to land, education and healthcare and worked to curb endemic violence against women. It also reduced overall poverty from 61 to 35 percent between 2006 and 2017, which affected Bolivia's poorest group – rural indigenous women – more than any other (Claros 2019).

The arc towards increased rural women's rights in Bolivia began with founding of the Bartolinas in the highlands in 1980 propelled by the *katarista* movement[ii] and organizing against the country's 1960s and 70s military dictatorships.[iii] It was established as a federation that was part of the male indigenous peasant union, the *Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia* (Unitary Union Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia – CSUTCB) which had launched six months earlier, affiliated with the *Central Obrera Boliviana* (Bolivia Workers Central- COB). The CSUTCB has remained the stronger of the two organizations, historically representing the domestic unit with oldest male mostly serving as representative, or 'head of the family'.[iv] The Bartolinas organizational structure has always mirrored that of the CSUTCB (Ramos Salazar 2016).

This gender parallelism" (unions separated by gender) as Rousseau and Morales Hudon (2017) describe it, demonstrates how indigenous women's organizing was initially seen as complementary and subordinate to men's unions. They argue (2017, 202) that this reduced conflict between women and men over gender rights within the indigenous movement,

shifting women's demands to a realm outside male-dominated organizations while offering a mechanism to recognize the contributions made by women to the overall movement for indigenous rights. Poveda Padilla (2014, 133) argues that parallel unions facilitated the idea that indigenous women and men had no conflicts or competing interests.

The *katarista*-driven shift from the 1952 Revolution's modernizing conception of *campesinos* (which translates to peasant but in this context refers to indigenous peasants) to the recuperation of a more indigenous based identity (*indigenas originarias* which means first nations indigenous) influenced Morales' government's understanding of women's rights (Sánchez Echevarría 2015). It adopted a philosophical approach to how gender functions based on an often idealized concept called *chachawarmi* (in Aymara, *qhari-warmi* in Quechua) that focuses on complementarity between the genders and is constructed around the married couple – and can be traced to pre-colonial gender systems (Silverblatt 1978). Morales government and his party (*Movimiento al Socialismo* Movement Towards Socialism- *MAS*) argued that this was more favorable to women than colonial or capitalist gender relations (Mullenax 2018, Choque 2006).[v] With a long history in the Andes, *chachawarmi* permeates household and community relations and differs substantially from western ideas of gender equality (Harris 2000, Arnold and Spedding 2005, 157). Masculinity and femininity are usually conceived in terms of activities, rather than the gender of the body carrying out the activities, which "cannot be captured if the term is translated as 'man/woman' or 'gender equality' (Maclean 2014, 80).

Maclean (2014, 79) argues the concept "has resonance with feminist critiques of political economy that challenge the failure to recognise the value of reproductive labour and care work." However, as she points out, this conception of gender complementarity can restrict women (and men) by limiting them to traditional roles. Rivera Cusicanqui (2010, 189) has

denounced male indigenous leaders as glossing over differences between women and men and using *chachawarmi* to promote the idea that indigenous gender relations are harmonious and equitable.

Sociologist Favio Mayta Chipana (2018) however, makes the case that *chachawarmi* reflects the Bolivian context. "(It is)… based on a new feminism adjusted to our reality… takes as a point of departure the principal of duality in equality of decision-making… [and] includes working on gender relations from the family and the community so as to create a process of questioning that is not just focused on gender but on race and class…," he argues.

Mayta Chipana's emphasis on incorporating class and race into gender analysis resonates with Christina Ewig's (2018, 439) research on intersectionality in the Andes. She maintains that class, race and other structural inequalities often have a greater resonance for women than gender, arguing that addressing gender in conjunction with other forms of inequality often better represents women than addressing gender inequalities alone (see also de la Cadena 1995, Canessa 2012). After centuries of racial and ethnic subjugation, for Bolivia's indigenous women, racial equality often trumps gender equality as a lens for understanding the world and as a priority. We draw on this concept of intersectionality as the framework to examine the role *cocalera* women played in advancing rural indigenous women's rights.

This article describes the conditions that drove women in the Chapare to organize and how this was instrumental in a national process of advancing and incorporating Bolivian rural indigenous women's rights. We ask two interrelated questions. First, what are the challenges to greater political inclusion that rural indigenous women faced and continue to face? Second, what did they do that enabled these women to influence national policy and advance

women's rights? We draw on long-term ethnographic fieldwork in the Chapare spread out between 2005 and 2019, secondary research and interviews carried out in person and by telephone from the mid-1900s to present. All translations are by the authors.

The Context: Coca, the Chapare Drug War, and women

The Bartolinas' development as a national political force from the mid-1990s on had much of its roots in the semi-tropical Chapare east of the city of Cochabamba. Population there grew in the 1960s during colonization projects that were designed to alleviate highland overcrowding. Three quarters of these migrants gave the primary reason for their move to the Chapare as a lack of access to land in the Cochabamba valleys, followed by generalized poverty (Coordinadora de la mujer/Defensor del Pueblo 2007, 11, Rivera 1991).

The steady stream of Quechua speaking migrants pushed the original indigenous inhabitants, the **Yuracaré** and the Yuki, into more remote areas to the north and northeast (Benavides 2022). By 2012, almost 200,000 migrants were living in the Chapare, with over two thirds of them still poor, compared with 45% nationally (INE 2012). The newcomers always grew coca, but with the 1980s boom in demand for cocaine in the United States, coca cultivation and migration increased exponentially (Sanabria 1993). Miners who lost their jobs due to tin mine closures in 1985 joined peasant farmers driven off their land by a severe drought in 1982, their economic precarity exacerbated by a relaxation of agricultural imports after 1985 (Millington 2018). Conditions were hard: settlers endured high temperatures, mosquitoes and incessant rain. The region was a male dominated space with men traveling to and from the

region for work but keeping their main family residence either in their natal villages or the poorer suburbs of Cochabamba (Shakow 2014, 69-71, Spedding 2004).

Without local state institutions, strong male-dominated rural unions, affiliated with the CSUTCB, combined indigenous concepts of reciprocity, mutual dependence and care for people and place with union traditions. They handled everything from granting land and resolving boundary disputes to building schools and disciplining antisocial behavior (Grisaffi 2019, 98). They now number close to 1,000 and are organized into six federations under an umbrella organization. To this day, the unions are responsible for collecting taxes from coca, organizing collective work parties, resolving disputes, and setting transport fares. The culture of their union assemblies, which has gradually expanded to include more women, is highly participatory, prioritizing personal responsibility, consensus building, and the direct accountability of leaders to their community (Grisaffi 2019, 152-62).

The U.S. responded to the boom in coca production destined for cocaine with a militarized and prohibitionist strategy. This security-oriented approach generated violence and undermined democratic practices across the Andean region (Ramirez and Youngers 2011). For thirty-five years, the War on Drugs as the policy was called by the U.S., failed to achieve its objectives: coca crop eradication in the Andes has not reduced acreage, because farmers consistently replant the crop in more remote areas, exacerbating deforestation, as well as soil and water pollution caused by fertilizers and pesticides (Dávalos, Sanchez, and Armenteras 2016).

Women play a key role in coca cultivation which is carried out close to home so women can combine work in the coca fields with household obligations (Gumucio 2015). In the Chapare

women and men are usually both responsible for planting, fertilizing, and harvesting coca. Women dominate the transport and commercialization of coca while men do most of the heavy labour preparing fields (Alvarado Choque 2020).

Chapare growers practice a hybrid model to mobilize labour and resources for their farm including drawing on the labour of family members, paid labourers, share-croppers[vi] (*partidarias*), and Ayni, a form of a reciprocal labour exchange which is key to agricultural production and household survival across rural Bolivia (Walsh-Dilley 2013, 666-67). Segundina Orellana, coca union leader and now mayor of Villa Tunari in the Chapare explained:

> Among neighbors, community members, we work (days of …) aynis or minkas for the coca harvest, clearing the land, weeding the undergrowth, or chopping down the forest, all of that we do with aynis. Now, community work (minka) has not been lost….we all must work, all affiliates.[vii]

Women are tasked with managing these intra-familial *ayni* relationships – by showing care and commitment to neighbors and friends though cooking, looking after others' children and generally keeping good relations. Often those who practice Ayni together are also tied through bonds of fictive kin known as *compadrazgo* (godparenthood), which makes up one of the most significant social relationships in Andean rural society (Spedding 1998). Ayni is not just a model of economic organizing, rather it lies at the heart of rural communal life, informing the organization and functioning of agrarian unions (Grisaffi 2022, 583).

Those who own land may also work as day laborers for others to earn extra cash. But in all forms of labour, women's contribution is valued less than that of men. When practicing ayni, a day of labor carried out by a man should be repaid with that of a man and not a woman, and when women engage in paid work, they typically earn lower wages than men.

A varying amount of the coca leaf crop is diverted into the illicit market and processed into cocaine (UNODC 2020). Where growers are involved in the drug trade, men's participation is almost always limited to the first rudimentary stage of production where shredded coca leaf is soaked in solvents to extract the cocaine alkaloid. Women work as cooks to feed the male drug workers and in the transport of coca leaf, chemical inputs, or cocaine paste. Wealthier women who market coca or other products might act as investors, bankrolling younger men to set up and operate a cocaine paste workshop. This means women are a step removed from the trade (Grisaffi 2021).

Until 2005, the U.S. drug war was largely directed at the Chapare (rather than the Yungas of La Paz, Bolivia's other main coca growing region)[viii], with coca eradication the priority. This included forced eradication at the end of the 1990s, which led to 60 farmer deaths because of confrontations between organized growers and security forces (Farthing and Ledebur 2015, 39).

Muehlmann's (2018) observations on the gendered nature of the War on Drugs are confirmed in Chapare women's experience during the twenty year U.S.-financed Drug War. The steep income declines associated with crop eradication tended to fall most heavily on them – particularly female headed households - as women are likely to be paid less, do not

necessarily have equal access to family income, and have fewer possibilities of day labor because of childcare and household responsibilities (Santos 2002, Gumucio 2015).

Interdiction and eradication was carried out by U.S.-trained and funded police and military units (UMOPAR, also known as the Leopards or simply 'Leos') whose harassment, on occasion, included the sexual assault of women. In 2005, a female reporter at the coca union's radio station told us:

> 'Here, more than anything, women suffer violent sexual assaults from the Leos (Leopardos)…I was on the point of going through that. My father was out in the fields, far from the house harvesting coca, and I was at home cooking. It was 1996. Suddenly two men appeared. The Leos. They didn't even say hello…I was just a girl not even 16. I was scared and I started to shake. They said 'why are you scared? You must know something!' I just looked down at the pot. And then 'smack', they kicked over the pot ... and shouted at me, "you know who is '*pisando*' (processing drugs) around here". "No, no, I don't know." They pushed me in the corner and tried to get my clothes off… Then my father arrived…They soon changed their tone, saying that they were just inspecting the property – but he told them to clear off. After I cried and cried... A lot of girls have been raped. And not only the girls, but the women too, older women, married women.[ix]

Following the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre, Washington policy makers linked the war on drugs and the war on terror into a single offensive (Youngers 2003), and indigenous peoples in the Andean region became targets (Radcliffe 2007). Subsequently, both male and female union leaders were targeted by the security forces in the name of the war on terror. In

2007 we interviewed Juana Quispe, a veteran women's union leader who was charged with terrorism and went on to become a MAS congresswoman. Quispe recounted:

> "In Chapare they shot at us, they killed us, they humiliated us, they left orphans, they have done everything to us, but they couldn't beat us -- Even though we were dying we continued to fight, that's why they couldn't do anything, they attacked the leaders, putting all the leaders in jail, accusing us of terrorism, criminal organization, manufacturing explosive weapons and armed uprising, on these four charges they have accused us".[x]

Women's Cocalera Unions: forming the MAS

The women's coca grower unions originated in the Chapare during the 1990s, encouraged by male coca grower leaders who reasoned that U.S.-financed anti-drug police would not be as brutal to women protestors as they were to men during marches and demonstrations (Zabalaga 2004, 8, Zurita 2005, 89, PACS 2009, 108). Leaders Rosena Rodriguez and Juana Quispe explain:

> More than anything, women went first because the men were attacked like animals, for that reason women have always been at the head of the march.[xi]

> Beginning in 1996 we made efforts to have a women's organization. Why? Because it was serious. Children, five-year-old girls, three-year-olds were raped by the

> Leopardos (anti-drug police) here in Chapare. There was a serious struggle, and for that reason we women organized ourselves.[xii]

Prior to this organizing drive, Chapare unions had included a position called "female liaison" (as did the Bartolinas as a Federation within the CSUTCB) (Padilla Poveda 2014, 128), which Sandra Ramos Salazar (2013) describes as an extension of women's domestic duties, a role that was filled mostly by single women or widows. Most future *cocalera* leaders began their union careers in this position "because the logic was …that in their house 'they didn't have any work' to do" (Ramos Salazar 2013, 134). These women were expected to prepare and serve food at meetings and for marches, and when they married, they often found it difficult to continue. In July 2006, Roxana Argandoña then a union leader and district councilor for the Villa Tunari municipality explained how she became involved in the union in 1980. She said:

> "…Before they just ignored the women. Back then we weren't union leaders, no they just called us 'secretary for female affairs.' Women's issues. Nobody paid attention to us. For example, when an important visitor came our job was to cook, to look after them. Back then we were not brave yet. Before they used to say .. no, no, no… why should women participate in a meeting? Only men should participate, that's what they said. But I always used to say no, because I want to participate, I want to have my voice heard too."[xiii]

In 1994, several women were imprisoned during the first Cocalero march (*Marcha por la Vida, la Coca y la Soberanía Nacional*) and were mistreated by the anti-drug police (Ramos Salazar 2013, 116-7, 149). This strengthened women's resolve and combined with their

growing skills in movement logistics, space opened within the movement for greater female participation. As a result, Chapare women developed a sense of purpose that went beyond domestic and family farm concerns, but at this stage their focus was almost exclusively on the coca growers' resistance to repression (Zurita Vargas and Draper 2003). Juana Quispe told us:

> "The Chimoré Women's Federation here has organized with three objectives, first, to defend life because the Leopardos were shooting at us; second, to defend coca, which is the economic sustenance for our family, and finally, to defend the land-the territory, because without land we cannot live."[xiv]

While not much attention was paid to it by male leaders, as early as 1995, *cocalera* women began articulating concerns related to gender. With increasing force over time, they claimed equal rights, respect at home, the right to be leaders, and rights to be named on land titles (Zabalaga 2004, 12). They placed an early emphasis on expanding literacy to promote greater women's participation: As Segundina Orellana told us in 2019: '"before we did not know how to read or write, now we all can"[xv]

One of the milestones in women's organizing was the December 1995 400-kilometer (242 miles) Women's March to La Paz (which is mostly uphill) demanding an end to coca eradication and respect for human rights, which served to further strengthen women's political commitment and organizational skills (Ramos Salazar, 2013, 115). Contreras Baspineiro (1995) who accompanied the march wrote that although women participated in all levels of the conflict between coca growers and the government, they had no role in negotiations with the government, nor were any topics specific to women ever included in

coca grower demands. Despite this political exclusion, women's participation became central to coca grower organizing and resistance as well as in the formation of the MAS party from that point on (García Yapur et al. 2014, 278).

The Chapare women's federation is not an entirely separate structure. While they have an executive committee and representatives at all levels, they do not have their own grassroots unions. The only '*sindicatos'* are the ones originally established during the initial colonization of the region for purposes of self-government. Union ledgers that we revised in 2014, reveal that there are roughly equal numbers of men and women registered as union members, but the extent of their involvement remains shaped by gender.

Each household must send at least one person to the monthly union meeting[xvi] or else they face a fine. At union meetings we observed that roughly equal numbers of men and women participated. Often, but not always, women sit together on one side of the room and men opposite. While women often attend union meetings with small children in tow, we never witnessed a man arrive or care for a child during a meeting (Grisaffi 2019, 153).

Male-dominated union meetings, where the most important decisions are made, have never been easy for *cocalera* women to participate in, partly because with small children often underfoot, they cannot concentrate fully on the proceedings. But also, as veteran leader and subsequently national senator, Leonilda Zurita explained to us in 1999:

> "When we first started, we were afraid to speak or make proposals because sometimes the men would laugh or make comments amongst themselves. So often we would be really nervous and some of us would even tremble from fear."[xvii]

Women largely followed men's direction as they were often shy, uneducated, and inexperienced. Their resolutions and positions usually mirrored those of the men's federation, often word for word (Ramos Salazar 2013, 127). In meetings to choose their leaders, there never lacked a group of men ready to "help them", very often at the request of the women themselves (Arnold and Spedding 2005, 96). Leaders Roxana Argandoña and Apolonia Sanchez explain:

> "There was a lot of male chauvinism; they didn't want to take us into account because we are women, because women have no value, we are for serving in the kitchen or at home to take care of the children."[xviii]

> "As women before we were timid about everything. And were not informed about laws … and so it was important for the women to debate, to discuss just like the men."[xix]

In 1997 Chapare women held a meeting to form a regional Bartolinas organization, the Federation of Women of the Cochabamba Tropics (*Federación de Mujeres del Trópico de Cochabamba* - Fecamtrop) in 1995, also known as the Coordinating Body of the Six Federations of Rural Women of the Cochabamba Tropics (*Coordinadora de las Seis Federaciones de Mujeres Campesinas del Trópico de Cochabamba*, COCAMTROP). The Federation elected Leonilda Zurita Vargas as president, a role she fulfilled until 2006. By the end of the 1990s, the Bartolinas had expanded throughout the Chapare. Maria Ledezma, Executive Secretary for the Federación de Mujeres Campesinas del Tópico de Cochabamba (Fecamtrop) explains:

> "In each union there is a female leader, who form the women's directorate at the level of the central. Women's position has been strengthened a little bit more with the legalization of coca[xx], we have farms, …we have the right to attend (meetings), but we also have the obligation to fulfill our social function in the organization, working for the common good, perhaps even becoming a leader."[xxi]

These activist *cocaleras* have always juggled the *triple jornada* – the triple workday. Not only were they critical to the success of protests against the "war on drugs", but they also cultivated coca and cared for their children and their households. This persists according to *Remigia Ferrel Vallejos*, a current union leader:

> "Women do more work; we have two jobs, you know? Being a woman is not easy, being a mother is not easy, sometimes we work at home early in the morning and we don't have a break. We…work in the *chaco* (fields) together with the man, we come home, and we cook and we wash dishes, we do everything, we don't stop, we still have to wash clothes too. In the morning we get up and it is the same again. Some compañeras live selling all day as well (informal commerce)."[xxii]

The women who became leaders during the 1990s and early 2000s shared certain characteristics, which has resonance with the challenges faced by rural women's leadership throughout Bolivia. Ten out of the eleven women interviewed by Sandra Ramos Salazar (2013, 58) were young and single without family obligations when they became involved in their union.[xxiii] Five of them remained unmarried and without children for most of their union careers. Six of the eleven had one or two children at a time when the fertility rate was five

children per woman in the Cochabamba Tropics (Arnold and Spedding 2005).[xxiv] Ramos Salazar (2013, 130) also found that the *cocalera* leaders almost all had support from a man in their family, usually their father or brother(s). Those who lacked that support had much shorter union careers. Our field observations support this finding, female leaders often talked about how their union career impacted their relationships. Several leaders explained that the men in their lives were 'jealous' of their success, felt emasculated and would not support them to pursue their union activities.

Eight of the eleven women Ramos interviewed wore traditional indigenous dress (*pollera)*, whose wearers routinely suffer racist prejudice. Many Chapare women in the 1990s spoke more Quechua than Spanish, which presented them with another barrier to political participation. Most of these leaders had little formal education which made union participation a vital component in developing their skills. Leonilda Zurita explains:

> "Training for us women was our school; to go to union meetings was our high school, the meetings of the Six Federations was our university, and special national level meetings our specialization. When we were called to participated in the Bolivian Workers Central (COB), one felt profesional, as if you had a profesional title."[xxv]

Women leaders were affected by the gossip that they were "loose" women whose union involvement reflected their desire to have affairs with male leaders (Zabalaga 2004, 16). Two women who married after they became union leaders told Ramos that their partners' doubts that they were faithful led to physical and psychological violence which eventually caused them to abandon their union roles (Ramos Salazar 2013, 136).

The leaders described how they had to be extremely careful not to show ‘weakness’ or emotion because male union leaders would interpret it as a sign that they weren’t disciplined or committed enough to lead (Ramos Salazar 2013, 113). But even with these obstacles, they gradually learned politics, laws, and negotiation through practice, and managed to gain more political space (Arnold and Spedding 2005).

When undertaking duties on behalf of the union, leaders receive a *viático* – a daily stipend to cover expenses. All the women leaders interviewed by Ramos mentioned lack of funds as a serious constraint, particularly given the lack of financial independence most women had (Zabalaga 2004; Ramos Salazar 2013, 145). Even when they found the resources to travel, the amount provided was always less than what went to men.

An increasingly important political space emerged in rural Bolivia with the 1994 Law of Popular Participation which founded municipalities throughout the country, and which channeled national government funding to rural areas for the first time (Kohl 2003). All five of the Chapare municipalities have been controlled ever since by the coca grower unions – with the coca growers party (the MAS), often taking 100% of the vote[xxvi] (Grisaffi 2019, 150-51). Given their hegemony in the region, the unions impose their own forms of decision making and leadership style onto local government - with the town halls acting as an appendage of the union (Grisaffi 2019, 151-72).

The Bartolinas decided to run candidates in the 1999 municipal elections, after what was a turning point in formal political rights for women in Bolivia: the adoption of a 30% female candidate requirement adopted by the national government (Sánchez Echevarría 2015). By 2015, thanks to the 2009 Constitution which mandated gender parity, women councilors went

from occupying 19 percent in 2004 to 51% of the country's municipal councils (Domínguez and Pacheco 2018).

Gender parity is achieved via the 'supplente' (or deputy) system. Each candidate to municipal government is voted in with a deputy and these must always be one man and one woman who switch halfway through the tenure (see Grisaffi 2019, 165). However, the demands on women are greater as coca union member and Vice President of the Villa Tunari Municipal Council, Ruth Sejas Charca, explains

> "Now in the municipality, we alternate between men and women so as to achieve gender parity, but the reality is that we women have more work, because beside our work in the unions and the municipalities we have to take care of our families everyday needs".[xxvii]

With the parity laws, male-dominated parties have tended to sponsor women candidates they can control. There has also been a spike in political violence against women candidates and municipal councilors, particularly in rural areas (Cordova 2017, IHRC 2019). In 2015 Jessy Lopez of the Association of Women Councilors explained:

> "In many cases, we have participation, but no real representation, because women follow men's lead as they have been taught to do since childhood. Many are also terrified of violence and threats"[xxviii]

Women in politics are often tolerated only because of the constitutional requirement. This is reflected by the absence of women in leadership positions: of Bolivia's 339 mayors, the vast majority of them rural, only 28 or 8 % are women (ONU Mujeres 2018, 6). By 2021,

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Bartolinas and MAS activist Segundina Orellana had been elected the first woman mayor of the Chapare's largest municipality, Villa Tunari. However, she is one of only two women among a total of 47 mayors elected in Cochabamba department's 2021 municipal elections (Revollo 2021).

In the Chapare, women now head several organizations and enjoy full participation in union decision-making and in the gender parity policy formally adopted by the Six Federations of the Cochabamba Tropics (*Seis Federaciones del Trópico de Cochabamba*) (Cruz et al. 2020). Nonetheless, the Federations headed by men still play the most important political role. Leaders Apolonia Sanchez and María Javier Yucra comment:

> …."I would say that we are not at 100 per cent but we are advancing. Because before there was no participation by women. Not in the government, not in the town halls. Not in the meetings. They did not let us… . no? So then I think that in comparison, today the compañeras are working in government, chosen by the organizations, and in the town halls. It's not 50% yet, we are still missing a bit. But now the women participate in everything."[xxix]
>
> I have been a union leader, secretary of my organization, and I've even known women who have held positions that usually go to male leaders such as the General Secretary of the union. We have really advanced, no? We have to keep it up."[xxx]

Cocaleras and Bartolinas

Just as occurred later with the cocaleras, the Bartolinas was formed due to a sense of necessity within the CSTUCB. In this case, it was to develop a structure that reflected *chachawarmi* in the campesino movement (Salazar and Broekhoven, 1998 cited in Padilla Poveda 2014, 130). It represented the first time that a union organization in Bolivia had decided to create a women's branch, making the Bartolinas the only women's organization within the COB. However, from the very beginning, tensions existed between which identity was paramount: the status of women, belonging to an ethnic group, or social class and how to articulate between them (Ticona 2006 cited in Padilla Poveda 2014, 113). Nemesia Achocalla, Executive Secretary of the Bartolinas between 2004-2006 explains:

> "We have indigenous sisters who are identified as a movement, who are peasants. We have the other part that would be, as I see it, intermediate - they don't feel like peasants. But when they come from the countryside to the city, they state that they left the countryside, but in that case they don't stop being peasants either. But then most of the women we have are indigenous peasant *compañeras*; They say that although we are peasants in name, but in reality, because of our identity, we are indigenous first peoples."[xxxi]

By the early 2000s the Bartolinas had spread in a patchwork across the country, centered in central and eastern la Paz department, all of Cochabamba, one province in Tarija and the western part of Santa Cruz (García Linera, Chávez León, and Costas Monje 2010, 540). Continued growth, driven in no small part by *cocalera* leadership, pushed its membership to 1.7 million rural women by 2014 (García Yapur et al. 2014, 221). It is the country's largest and most important women's organization, forged into one by shared indigenous identity and values despite significant language and cultural differences (Román Arnez 2008, 32). It is also

one of the largest, strongest and oldest peasant women's organizations in Latin America (FAO nd).

Despite this, in 2006, Aymara sociologist Maria Eugenia Choque argued that within the public sphere, rural indigenous women's participation remained 80% symbolic and only 20% in consequential decision-making (Choque 2006). And for the most part, the MAS government perpetuated the tendency to design rural policies without considering ethnic and social class differences between women from different groups, as Pamela Calla et al. (2006) noted had been the case in previous governments. Union leader Leonilda Zurita comments: "There is still a lack of awareness among men, but we have advanced. Our voice as women is strengthening" *(Leonilda Zurita Vargas cited in Delgado 2010)*

Throughout Bolivia, women coca growers and their organization became a widely emulated model of women peasant organizing, training, and empowerment. However, Freddy Condo, who served as an advisor to the Bartolinas, cautions against granting too much ideological influence to *cocaleras* as he argues that other groups provided them with political education. "The *cocaleras'* political education was strengthened by their exposure to other women's experiences," he argues.[xxxii]

C*ocaleras* have been elected to the top leadership position in the Bartolinas half of the organizations twenty three year history (a total of 12 years), more than representatives from any other region in the country.[xxxiii] This confirms the influence cocaleras have had at a national level in advancing women's rights and the extent to which the Chapare emerged as the strongest Bartolinas organization (García Yapur et al. 2015, 78). "I'm convinced that in the Chapare we have the strongest women's organization in Bolivia," asserted Leonilda Zurita (Garcia Linera et al. 2010, 530).

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In November 2004, the Bartolinas became one of the five founding organizations in the Unity Pact of Indigenous peoples that made up the most loyal pillar of the MAS party. After the MAS won national elections in 2005, leaders of the Bartolinas assumed important positions in Evo Morales' government: Chapare former municipal councilor and national Bartolinas executive, Silvia Lazarte, headed the 2007-8 Constituent Assembly, rural Santa Cruz Quechua migrant Nemesia Achacollo served as Minister of Rural Development and Land, Nilda Copa Condori from rural Tarija served as Minister of Justice and Julia Ramos also from Tarija was Minister of Social Development (Delgado 2010). The Bartolinas were also represented by national deputies and senators – including many of the voices we cite in this article. This made "state features…critical influences on indigenous women's policy outcomes" (Buice 2013, 168).

In 2007, after often political party-driven division that stretched back 30 years between Bartolinas who sought autonomy from the CSUTCB and those who wanted to remain within the men's organization, the Bartolinas became independent and equal organizationally, forming their own confederation (CNMCIOB "BS") (Condo, cited in Poveda Padilla 2014, 129-31). By incorporating "indigenous first nations" into their name for the first time, the new Confederation acknowledged the growing emphasis on indigeneity (Ramos Salazar 2016; Sánchez Echevarría 2015, 6). While this change signaled a significant break with the past focus on joint concerns with indigenous men, the increasing focus on women's issues never went as far as questioning their traditional roles as caretakers and homemakers (Mullenax 2018, 218). The *CNMCIOB-BS's* Strategic development plan Plan 2006-2010 sets out:

> "Dependence on other confederations, such as the CSUTCB was not a good strategy, it implied depending on it to be able to organize the defense of rights, which in general was only for men and women could not raise gender specific demands." [xxxiv]

At a local level, Ramos Salazar (2016) found in interviews in rural La Paz department, where both the Bartolinas and the CSUTCB got their start, that "Men as well as women frequently consider women's "participation" in the union "unnecessary" because women "don't have time"[xxxv], a series of attitudes that reflect those in the Chapare 15 to 20 years earlier and which to some degree had been overcome. This appeared to be a perpetuation of what Calla et al. (2006) had found in rural La Paz in 2006: women were considered in the same category as children and therefore needed men's help in any form of political participation. Nicole Fabricant (2012) observed similar dynamics within the Bolivian landless movement.

The impulse provided by the 1990s War on Drugs repression on women's organizing in the Chapare compared with the rest of the country is most sharply delineated when considered in terms of Bolivia's other coca-growing region, the Yungas, which never experienced the militarized police presence inflicted on the Chapare. While Chapare women were active in local and regional organizations by the end of the 1990s, in the Yungas, women's organizations existed but rarely functioned (Arnold and Spedding 2007, 170). In 2018, after three decades of the Bartolinas presence in the Yungas, their role continued to consist of meal preparation for marches, meetings and events (Apaza Quispe 2019, 38, García Linera, Chávez León, and Costas Monje 2010, 540). Women participants in a Yungas workshop in 2020 still complained that they were excluded from meetings; their husbands forbid their active participation; and that they were called names when they did take part.[xxxvi]

The national level changes for women driven by *cocalera* leadership were evident during the Constituent Assembly, which was presided over by *cocalera* Silvia Lazarte. During the meetings in Sucre, the Bartolinas growing inclusion of women's rights into their platform broke down their earlier divisions with middle class feminists, leading to a collaboration that proved vital in advancing women's rights in the new constitution (Rousseau 2011b).[xxxvii] The successful inclusion of gender parity in the face of substantial Assembly resistance ultimately was moved forward by *cocalera*, Bartolinas leader and then MAS Senator, Leonilda Zurita Vargas, who turned the tide by convincing indigenous women that gender parity and alternation of candidates between women and men was consistent with the vision of *chachawarmi* (Htun and Ossa 2013, 11). She had the backup of Silvia Lazarte who later told us:

> "We decided through our political instrument, the MAS, that it should be 50/50. Half and half, men and women. Women cannot stay behind because we must have the same rights under the law."[xxxviii]

The changes rural women's organizing wrought

The political process initiated by the MAS government "opened new spaces of political participation – especially for working class and indigenous/campesina women – that did not exist in the past (Arnold and Spedding 2012, 320). The MAS advanced a new National Development Plan which stated that everyone should be given equality of opportunity, regardless of their gender and ethnicity. The Vice-Ministry for Equal Opportunities – which falls under the Ministry of Justice - was created in 2009 to develop public policy with an

emphasis on incorporating historically excluded groups, including women, into government policies and laws (Salinas, Castro, and Zuazo 2009).

Bolivia's 2009 constitution is one of the most advanced in terms of women's rights in the world, granting civil rights, gender rights, social equity and equality with men. "The Constitution changed a great deal, raising consciousness of women's rights among many women for the first time," explains Freddy Condo.[xxxix] Rousseau (2011a) notes that it represents a significant societal change because it marks the beginning of a government emphasis on gender equality.[xl]

The Constitution requires gender parity in political candidates and recognizes gender-based political assault as an electoral crime, with sentences of up to five years of prison (Htun and Ossa 2013, 12). By 2014, Bolivia's Legislative Assembly had achieved gender parity, gaining one of the highest rates of women's formal political participation in the world (Farthing, 2015). This continued in the 2019 elections, with women holding 46% of the lower house, and 56% of the Senate (IDEA 2021).

In Morales first government, four indigenous women were made Ministers (Román Arnez 2008, 56). By 2010, ten of sixteen Ministers were women (Farthing, 2015). After the Bartolinas presented a de-patriarchization plan in October 2018, the leadership told anthropologist Charlotta Widmark (2019, 37) that they saw themselves as in a stronger position than ever.

On the critical issue for rural indigenous women of equity in access to land, the Bartolinas made this goal a priority (Rousseau and Ewig 2017). Compared with the early 2000's when 17% of new land titles went to women with 20% of titles joint female/male, presently forty-

five percent of new titles include women's names: in the Chapare, this figure stands at 48% (Lastarria-Cornhiel 2009, 238, ABI 2019). Segundina Orellana told us:

> "Before we didn't have titles, only men did, but now with the agrarian reform, and now women can have title to her land, either on her own or with her husband"[xli]

Another Bartolinas priority was reducing maternal mortality, one of the Bartolinas earliest concerns and the leading cause of death among women 15-49 in lower income countries worldwide. In Bolivia, the rate dropped by half during the Morales government, although it remains one of the highest in the region (UNICEF N.D.).

Conclusions

Originally constituted by male coca growers to assist with resisting the repression associated with the drug war, over the past almost 30 years, the Chapare *cocaleras* have achieved the highest levels of women's political inclusion anywhere in rural Bolivia. As founders of the MAS and the Unity Pact, and through their leadership of the national Bartolinas federation, they were able to advance a stronger women's rights agenda with a focus on indigenous women than had been possible in previous governments (Buice 2013). Cocalera leadership not only strengthened the Bartolinas but also facilitated their entry into political decision-making in the MAS government, which pushed the Morales government towards a greater emphasis on rural indigenous women (Montes, 2011:228). Their influence allowed the Bartolinas to redefine the terms of how rural indigenous women are represented nationally (Rousseau and Morales Hudon 2017).

The MAS's shift from an agrarian union and social movement to political party and then government would simply not have been possible without the active participation and hard work of *cocalera* women. In turn, the party's steady growth in political influence provided working class and indigenous women a vehicle to enter party politics and steadily push for policies that benefited women in general and rural women in particular.

Few *cocaleras*, like their counterparts among indigenous women throughout the country, had much in the way of formal education, but the need to resist the U.S.-financed War on Drugs forced them to develop the skills they needed to be leaders, which in turn made them a central component of the coca growers' movement (Ramos Salazar 2014, 164). As the MAS rose to national leadership, they accompanied its trajectory, extending their influence beyond the Chapare to play a critical role in building the Bartolinas as the voice of rural indigenous women.

These women worked tirelessly, sometimes with middle class feminists as their allies, sometimes with indigenous men, to improve their lives and the opportunities available to them. This intersectionality is at the core of what the *cocaleras* and the Bartolinas have achieved and continue to achieve.

But, in Bolivia's rural areas, including the Chapare, the struggle for women's full rights continues. Principal issues continue to be gender-based violence, political harassment, and a disproportionate burden for women when it comes to family care. Gender inequality persists with regard to access to public services and participation in decision-making (Cruz et al. 2020). Violence against women remains a serious problem: a 2018 survey found that nearly 77% of women interviewed in the Chapare town of Eterazama reported suffering partner

violence (Herbas Challapa 2019). The double or triple workday in almost all families is still rarely seen as anything more than the natural order of things. The view of women as less than men persists, as Segundina Orellana told us in 2019:

> "There is still an attitude that women are inferior, and this begins in childhood. We want to change this but it's not easy because women suffer because they have children, they have family responsibilities, and men just don't understand. So, there are barriers to participation but as well we need more education and preparation in order to lead, to overcome the sense of inferiority which is women and men's inheritance."[xlii]

Rural women still confront challenges with access to health, education, and housing, and still have the lowest earnings in Bolivia but with each generation, they are better educated, more confident and more determined. This is particularly true in the Chapare (Cruz et al. 2020). Union leader Regina Ferrel explains:

> "Before there was a lot of fatalism. Many times in meetings I was told, "Women don't count, the man has to come". That's how they discriminated against me, but I didn't go home and said, "I'm not going to pay dues without knowing what is going on". That's how it was, we didn't even have the right to speak, or have our own names or hold title to land. Now it's almost 50/50, now we have rights, and we participate. We have authorities at every level of government who are women."[xliii]

The success that *cocaleras* and Barolinas had in improving political inclusion for rural indigenous women speaks to the importance of grassroots initiatives in moving social change forward. In the intersectional reality that most women face worldwide, women's rights may

not be primary or even secondary, but the Bolivia case suggests that over time, there can be a tendency for leaders to incorporate a more women-focused agenda as they gain experience and confidence. Rural indigenous women in Bolivia had another advantage: grassroots organizing was able to merge with a government that it felt it was part of. What happened in Bolivia makes clear that to bring about substantial change, both elements are needed: grassroots organizing that respects working class and indigenous women's choice of priorities and as well as initiatives from governments committed to respond to their women-oriented demands.

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

[ii] The *Kataristas* fused Indigenous identity with class consciousness and had tremendous influence in subsequent highland rural social movements, particularly the CSUTCB and the Bartolinas.

[iii] Low income women, both rural and urban were initially organized by the Roman Catholic Church and campesino training centers many of which provided food aid through Mothers Clubs (*Clubes de Madres*) which at its height had 200,000 members throughout the country. This provided a space for women to share experiences and these groups began to articulate resistance to the 1970s military dictatorship at their conferences (Alanes Bravo 1997 as cited in Román Arnez 2008, 31)

[iv] Only in a man's absence is he replaced by a woman, usually his wife or widow, oldest son or on occasion oldest daughter. Single mothers and widows are also generally recognized as family heads. Union participation and communal responsibilities are tied to land, not gender, and if a family has two separate pieces of land, the man participates in the union representing one of them and the woman the other (Arnold and Spedding 2005, 95).

[v] European conquest and colonial rule wrought profound changes to Andean gender systems, subordinating women to men.

[vi] Some landowners allow others to run the farm on their behalf in exchange for a percent of the crop.

[vii] Interview, Segundina Orellana, Mayor of Villa Tunari, Villa Tunari, July 2019

[viii] The Yungas, east of the city of La Paz, is where the leaf has been grown for at least 1000 years. Most growers are from the Aymara indigenous group and while figures have fluctuated over time, the region currently accounts for two thirds of total coca production.

[ix] Interview, Female reporter (name withheld), Chipiriri, October 2005.

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

[xi] Interview, Rosena Rodríguez, Union Leader Central de mujeres de Centrales Unidas, Shinahota January, 2014.

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

[xiii] Interview, Roxana Argandoña, Councilor, Villa Tunari, 30 July 2006.

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

[xv] Interview, Segundina Orellana, Mayor of Villa Tunari, Villa Tunari, July 2019

[xvi] The person who participates in the meeting does not have to be the registered member – simply a representative of the family unit who is over the age of 18.
[xvii] Interview, Leonida Zurita, Leader, Villa Tunari, September 12, 1999.
[xviii] Interview, Roxana Argandoña, Councilor, Villa Tunari, *September 2019. Interview courtesy of the Andean Information Network.*
[xix] Interview. Apolonia Sanchez, union leader, Isinuta. September 2006.
[xx] This refers to the 2004 cato accord which permits each registered grower to cultivate a limited amount of coca leaf (Grisaffi et al. 2021, 4-6).
[xxi] Interview, Maria Ledezma, Union Leader, Villa Tunari, July 2019.
[xxii] Interview, Remigia Ferrel Vallejos, executive, Federación Chimoré, March, 20, 2021. Interview courtesy of the Andean Information Network.
[xxiii] Being without a husband and children is seen as less than fully adult in Andean culture, and implied that these young women were easy to influence and direct by male leaders (Maclean 2014). As unmarried people, they are also considered "incomplete" in the sense 'that no unmarried man or woman may be designated to a position of authority in either the rural community or the urban neighbourhood' (Burman 2011, 79).
[xxiv] Children were seen as a source of inspiration – of knowing what you are fighting for but also a responsibility and an extension of the woman herself. (Ramos Salazar 2013, 142).
[xxv] Leonida Zurita Vargas, July 16, 2013 cited in Ramos Salazar (2013, 120).
[xxvi] For the most recent municipal election results see Los Tiempos (2021)
[xxvii] Interview, Ruth Sejas Charca, Municipal Councilor, Villa Tunari, 25th *July, 2019.*
[xxviii] Jessy Lopez cited in Farthing (2015).
[xxix] Interview. Apolonia Sanchez, union leader, Isinuta. September 2006.
[xxx] Interview María Javier Yucra, Departmental Assemblywoman, Federación de Centrales Unidas de Shinahota**,** January, 29, 2021. Interview courtesy of the Andean Information Network.
[xxxi] *Nemesia Achocalla, Executive Secretary, Bartolinas 2004-2006, April 2004. Cited in García Linera, Chávez León, and Costas Monje (2010, 530)*
[xxxii] Interview, Freddy Condo, advisor to the Bartolinas, La Paz, April 13, 2022.
[xxxiii] Silvia Lazarte Flores (1999-2001), Leonilda Zurita (2001-2003 and 2008-2010) and Juanita Ancieta (2013-2014 and 2015-2016 (Aguilar Jiménez 2018, 5).
[xxxiv] *CNMCIOB-BS, Plan Estratégico de Desarrollo. 2006-2010, La Paz, 2006 cited in Poveda Padilla (2014, 134).*
[xxxv] The activities that were keeping women busy, including cooking and care duties were not valued as 'work' however.
[xxxvi] Information courtesy of Ara Goudsmit who led a workshop with female coca grower leaders titled: "Encuentro de mujeres en contra de la violencia, en defensa del medio ambiente y de la coca" in La Asunta, Sud Yungas, December 12, 2020.
[xxxvii] The Bartolinas' divisions with middle class feminists revolved around their giving greater priority to class and race than to gender (Ewig 2018, 439).
[xxxviii] Interview Silvia Lazarte, Union leader and President of the Constitutenet Assembly (2006-2009). Sucre, February 2009 (Linda)
[xxxix] Interview, Freddy Condo, advisor to the Bartolinas, La Paz, April 13, 2022.
[xl] Arnold and Spedding (2012:307-8) note a potential complication lies in the Constitution's acceptance of traditional community *usos y costumbres* (uses and customs). They provide an example from a community in Oruro where according to local custom, land is inherited by men and livestock (and textiles) by women. This stands in marked contradiction to modernist interpretations of women's rights as defined in the 2009 Constitution.
[xli] Interview, Segundina Orellana, Mayor of Villa Tunari, Villa Tunari, July 2019
[xlii] Interview, Segundina Orellana, Mayor of Villa Tunari, Villa Tunari, July 2019

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[xliii] Interview, Remigia Ferrel, Exuctive de la Federación Chimoré, March 20, 2021. Interview courtesy of the Andean Information Network.