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and the media in La Paz and El Alto, Bolivia**

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Summary

Condepa was, until 1999, a relatively successful populist political party with a strong base of support among rural-urban migrants, particularly women, living in La Paz and El Alto, Bolivia. In this paper I assess the reasons for Condepa's appeal, through an examination of the link between Condepa and its power base, an extremely popular TV and radio programme. Both the programme and the political party have been successful because of their direct, and often emotional, appeal to their core constituency, focussing on issues of daily concern. They created a sense of family and community, which coalesced around the figure of Condepa's founder, Carlos Palenque¹.

Introduction

Conciencia de Patria (Condepa) burst onto the Bolivian political scene in September 1988, stunning the dominant political classes with its success in the general elections of 1989, when it came first in the department of La Paz (Saravia & Sandoval, 1991). In 1997, despite the death of its leader Carlos Palenque, Condepa reached third place in the national elections and became part of the governing 'megacoalition', controlling two ministries.

Condepa was one of several localist populist political movements that flourished in Bolivia during the 1990s, and it challenged the very nature of Bolivian politics. The political elite of Bolivia is small, and party politics can often seem no more than differences of opinion in the golf club bar of Mallasa, La Paz. Condepa is a resolutely non-middle class party whose base constituency is the '*pueblo*'², by which they mean mostly rural-urban migrants of Aymara background, or '*cholos*'³. Its electoral success foregrounded previously disenfranchised groups of people, making visible a constituency that has subsequently been impossible for successive politicians to ignore. Condepa has always had an extremely high level of female involvement among its activists, and in 1997 it had two female leaders, one of whom, Remedios Loza, is a '*chola*' herself. Her nomination as presidential candidate was unprecedented, and her comparative success horrified many middle-class Hispanicised Bolivians, many of whom have '*chola*' maids.

Condepa withdrew from the governing coalition in late 1998, and split in two: the 'rebels' headed by Verónica Palenque, Carlos Palenque's daughter, and what was left of the original party, headed by Remedios Loza. Mired in corruption scandals, factionalism and accusations of authoritarian leadership, Remedios lost the 1999 local elections in El Alto, the city that had been the heartland of Condepa's support during the 1990s⁴. As was already becoming clear in 1997, the symbolic centrality of Carlos Palenque to the party's success meant a gaping hole was left

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by his death, which Remedios has not been able to fill. The next national elections, in 2002, are likely to see the final collapse of Condepa as political party.

In many ways, Condepa is a good example of populist politics, reliant upon a direct appeal to the urban poor by a charismatic leader (Dix 1985; Conniff 1999). However, its emergence from the communications media is unusual for Latin America, although not unique. Although popular media personalities had entered Bolivian politics prior to Carlos Palenque's shift to politician from presenter of TV and radio programme '*La Tribuna Libre del Pueblo*'⁵, the extent of his success is unprecedented in Bolivia.

This article aims to assess Condepa's strength and appeal, focussing on the experiences of its female activists, who are mostly rural-urban migrants and represent much of what Condepa stood for, as well as being its most loyal constituency. It is primarily based upon interview material collected in July/August 1997⁶, press reports, and TV viewings of the *Tribuna Libre* at the time. This material is complemented by impressions gained during a year's fieldwork in El Alto two years later.

¹ This paper began life as a dissertation for my MA at the Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London, and I am very grateful to James Dunkerley for suggesting that I look at Condepa in the first place. I would like to thank all those who gave interviews, particularly Doña Viviana, and the militants of Sector 6; Condepa and RTP for providing me with access to documents, posters, and tapes of old episodes of the *Tribuna Libre del Pueblo*; as well as Natasha, Ramiro, Doña Eulogia, Jannette (who was in the

unenviable position of being Verónica Palenque's secretary), and Carla and family.

² Lit. 'people' as in people of a country. '*Pueblo*' also means one's natal village, and it therefore has strong connotations of roots in the countryside, family, home community.

³ Ethnicity in highland Bolivia interacts strongly with class positioning: peasants are often called '*indios*', which is usually an insult, rural-urban migrants living in poverty are '*cholo*', and the middle and upper classes are *mestizo* or Creole. In this paper, '*cholola*' is used to identify recent rural-urban migrants. I put it in inverted comments because although all my interviewees felt that '*chola*' was not an insult *per se*, they all agreed that if said in a certain tone, it demonstrates lack of respect. See Bourricaud's work in Peru for further analysis of the concept of the '*cholo*' (1975). It is a highly gendered term, as the female versions '*chola*' and '*cholita*' are used more often than the male '*cholo*', and are less pejorative, having very specific meanings connected to dress, marital status and success in commerce, among other things (see, e.g., Stephenson 1999; Albro 2000; Buechler & Buechler 1996).

⁴ El Alto began life in the 1930s as the location of La Paz's airport, around which a district predominantly populated by poor migrants grew. La Paz is built in a large crater set into the Andean plain, and El Alto is on that plain, to the North-West of La Paz. With migration resulting largely from the boom in the construction industry and subsequent neo-liberal economic restructuring, during the 1980s and early 1990s, it grew at a rate of nearly 10% a year, and in 1985 was granted the status of city in its own right. Today it has a population of about 700 000, the majority of whom are bilingual, speaking Spanish and Aymara or Quechua.

⁵ 'The People's free tribunal'. See below for discussion.

⁶ My initial contact was through two Women's Centres run by NGOs, hence the bias towards women who attended these Centres. I also went to the *Acción Comunal* department of the local government office of El Alto to find interviewees, which further influenced the profile of my sample towards activists. Many of the women did give me the 'party line' in the interviews – one experienced activist even told me that she couldn't comment on the new government because the militants had not yet received instructions of what they should say (AQ: 30.07).

Condepa and the broadcast media: from radio to TV to political party

The event which sparked the formation of Condepa was the first closure of Carlos Palenque's radio and television company, *Radio Televisión Popular* (RTP), in 1988. Since 1968, Carlos Palenque had been a prominent figure in the communications media, first as a folk singer then a presenter, until he bought his own company, Radio *Metropolitana* (now renamed *Radio Carlos Palenque*), in 1980. In 1985, he bought the TV *Canal 4*, and combined the two into RTP (Archondo 1991).

On 9 June, 1988, in a televised programme '*Debate Nacional*', the notorious drug trafficker Roberto Suárez telephoned the channel. On the 14th, the General Direction of Telecommunications announced sanctions against RTP, because "the presenters of the programme gave free rein to Suárez and his son to offend the President and his government" (Archondo 1991:173). Following a 62:19 vote in the Chamber of Deputies, RTP was shut down (Archondo 1991). Supporters of RTP flocked to its headquarters and marched in the streets demanding its reopening, while workers at the channel, including Carlos Palenque and his pregnant wife, Mónica Medina, initiated a hunger strike, depicted with great sensationalism in a television documentary they broadcast in the following year, called '*Condepazo*'.

On 22 June, supporters of Palenque organised a march to the Plaza San Francisco in the centre of La Paz, which "truly

snowballed" (Archondo 1991:187), filling the large main square with people demanding the reopening of the TV channel. Palenque called this "an affectionate coming together of [his] family, ... sobbing with impotence" (Condepazo 1989). The depth of support and numbers of people prepared to demonstrate in Palenque's favour seem to have surprised the government, and, after attempts to intimidate, kidnap and arrest Palenque, the decision to close the station was eventually overturned in the courts and RTP resumed broadcasting on the 8th August 1988, after a closure of 52 days (Archondo 1991).

This was not, however, until after Palenque and his wife had visited many districts of La Paz and El Alto, to "show that they had not left to go into exile" (Condepazo 1989) and to drum up support. A further meeting in the Plaza San Francisco rang to the cries of "*Compadre Palenque, futuro presidente*" ("*Compadre*⁷ Palenque, future president"). Despite Palenque's description of this as "the most unedited cry of history" (Condepazo 1989), we may never be sure just how spontaneous it was, but the sincerity of the fundamental support for RTP among its viewers cannot be doubted. Joaquin Saravia and Godofredo Sandoval asked 100 Condepa supporters what emotions they felt when RTP was closed: 42% said "sadness", and 38% described "an emptiness". Many spoke of crying, "I cried an awful lot. I didn't even cry like that for my Dad when he died" (Saravia & Sandoval 1991:131-2).

⁷ See below for discussion of the meaning of *Compadre*.

This last is certainly an extreme statement, but the numbers of people who filled the Plaza San Francisco for Palenque's funeral in March 1997 attest to strong emotions of grief and loss. Newspaper articles of the time report a scene of multitudes of crying people, shouts that Palenque should not be buried because he might be resurrected, and later, a stone, known for displaying the faces of saints and virgins, which shows the face of Carlos Palenque himself. Behind the sensationalism we can see a strong emotional support for Palenque and for his work. The interviews I conducted, even with those women who were not *condepistas*, show that Palenque touched a chord with many people.

La Tribuna Libre del Pueblo

Why did the 1988 closure of a radio and TV station spark off mass demonstrations that culminated in the formation of a political party? An assessment of the appeal of RTP's most popular and defining programme, *La Tribuna Libre del Pueblo* (hereafter *Tribuna Libre*), helps to answer this question. In 1997, the radio programme was transmitted at midday, while the televised version went out at 10 p.m. The basic format has not changed since it started in April 1980. People come to the studios and one by one go up to the microphone and tell the presenter their personal problems, or publicise local events.

Carlos Palenque presented the show until his death from a heart attack on March 8th, 1997. His wife, Mónica Medina de Palenque, co-presented from 1985 until they separated

in late 1996, when Palenque replaced her with his daughter from his first marriage, Verónica, who took over the program after his death. Remedios Loza worked with Palenque from 1969, and was the Aymara-Spanish translator on the *Tribuna Libre* from its inception. Her long association with Palenque has been accompanied by widespread rumours that she was his mistress. After his death, she continued her job as translator as well as co-presenting with Verónica. In 2000, there were two competing *Tribunas Libres*, one on RTP and run by Mónica, and one on a different radio station presented by Remedios and fellow *Condepistas*⁸.

But the *Tribuna Libre del Pueblo*, as its name indicates, is no ordinary 'Oprah-style' talk show in a Bolivian context. For the '*pueblo*' referred to in the title is a loaded term, reflecting a specific class and ethnic character. The majority of participants and viewers/listeners are recent rural-urban migrants. Rafael Archondo (1991) has demonstrated that *Tribuna Libre* viewers are mostly to be found in the areas of La Paz and El Alto where first, second or third generation rural-urban migrants are concentrated.

⁸ The comments in this paper are based upon the situation in 1997 and before. The loss of the televised version of the *Tribuna Libre* to Mónica has affected *Condepa*'s standing inasmuch as it presents the factionalism for all to see. But Remedios' program is very popular (possibly more so than Mónica's), and both maintain the format of the original version.

Certainly, of the ten women I interviewed, all of whom listened to the *Tribuna Libre* regularly, five were born in the countryside and two were children of migrants; the other three told me that their parents were born in La Paz⁹. Furthermore, a significant proportion of participants in the *Tribuna Libre* are female. In a quantitative study of the cases presented to the *Tribuna Libre* between 28.01.93 – 03.05.93, María Isabel López found that 52% of the participants were individual women, 28% individual men, and 20% groups (1994: 74).

During my interviews, one of the main questions I asked was "Why is the *Tribuna Libre* so popular?" Most women pointed to practical aspects, such as the economic or medical help that participants could expect, for example:

"Someone would go, saying they needed something for their family, and right then and there, they gave it to them...they helped a lot." (BT: 28.07)

"There were sick people who came from all over the place ...and the *compadre* got them cured, sorted out operations." (JA: 29.07)

Some women mentioned their visits to the studios, and how Carlos Palenque had advised them. Sra Julia Achaval told of a time when she had been selling washing powder in Villazón market, but the market authorities had taken her merchandise away from her, because they said she was selling smuggled goods, contraband. She went to the *Tribuna Libre*, and was told by Palenque

himself that washing powder could not possibly be contraband, so the authorities were in the wrong (JA: 29.07).

In fact, the amount of material help that the *Tribuna Libre* provides is relatively small: between 28 January and 3 May, 1993, it only procured treatment for 28 health cases, less than 1% of the total number of cases brought to the *Tribuna Libre* in that period. They gave school-books and equipment in 6.1% of cases. (López 1994: 105) Between January and May 1993, the *Tribuna Libre* passed 135 (10.4%) cases to their team of lawyers, and 25 (1.9%) to the social support team. According to López, the cases of 'social assistance' constituted 19.2% of the total (1994: 105). But for 64% of the *Condepa* supporters interviewed by Saravia and Sandoval, the characteristic which most represented *Radio Metropolitana* was the way they helped people (Saravia & Sandoval 1991). People's perceptions therefore are not an accurate representation of the reality.

Many women noted the new political and social space which the *Tribuna Libre* created for previously marginalised sectors of the population:

"It was a show, like it says, the *Free Tribunal*. Everyone came ... they welcomed everybody – the doors were open. ... They gave us [women] a space; they always helped us. Because women in Bolivia ... we're treated like objects!" (NB: 01.08)

⁹ See references for profile of interviewees.

As Remedios Loza said, one of the conquests of the *Tribuna Libre* was to "give a voice to those without a voice" (RL: 08.08).

This illustrates a fundamental point about the *Tribuna Libre*, and, by extension, Condepa: that the main reason this phenomenon is so unusual and so popular is its function as a socio-political space for disenfranchised people. This is a very conscious part of Condepa's politics, and therefore, the numbers of women who participate in the *Tribuna Libre* and in Condepa itself has particular symbolic importance. Condepa is very publicly prepared to listen to 'chola' women, who represent for most Bolivians 'lo popular' – the popular classes, the 'pueblo'. Robert Albro points out how in provincial highland contexts, "a relationship with the chola's image is now a virtual prerequisite for male popular identity" (2000:31), for politicians seeking success in a populist political environment. Condepa was one of the first political parties to exploit that relationship, largely drawing on its long-established relationship with 'cholas' in the *Tribuna Libre*. This is reflected in the comments of Eduardo Paz in *Hoy* newspaper:

"Condepa had as its sustenance, its base, the marginal sectors of La Paz, ... So the *cholas* (sic.) the mestizos and indigenous people whose culture and image are transmitted on the RTP communications media ... all belong to this party.¹⁰"

Episodes of the *Tribuna Libre* also point to a need for a mediator between the 'pueblo' and the authorities (López 1994). Recent migrants from the countryside, living in extreme poverty, have little or no access to the authorities, such as the police or the school headmaster, and little or no power in relation to their employers. Some come to the *Tribuna Libre* to denounce illegal or unjust behaviour by the authorities and the presenters promise an investigation. No one else is looking out for them. The racism of Bolivian society exacerbates and perpetuates these feelings, by compounding them with stigmatisation (Abercrombie 1992). Psychoanalytical studies have pointed to the brutalising aspects of poverty and stigma (Rodríguez 1989), and certainly many of the cases described in the *Tribuna Libre* are shocking in their violence. López (1994) showed that shows that violence against children and adults made up 16% of the cases between February and May 1993. The episodes I watched included cases of sexual assaults on adults and children, physical fights over market stalls, even a woman who had given birth in a taxi, the driver of which drove off in a panic with the newborn still in the back seat¹¹.

The *Tribuna Libre* therefore responds to the needs of people who live in a context of extreme poverty and racial stigma for support and help, or simply for someone to listen and care:

¹⁰ *Hoy* 02.02.97

¹¹ *Tribuna Libre del Pueblo* 21.07.97

"Every human being needs and deserves someone to listen to them" (MR: 07.08). However, the care that the *Tribuna Libre* provides is not unconditional. In return, it asks the 'pueblo' themselves for assistance, such as in the case of a telephone campaign for funds for a young boy who needed an operation on his jaw¹²;

"They sheltered [the participants], they gave them food, medicine, all the things they needed. ... But also they asked for help from the *pueblo*, the 'hearts of gold' as they say." (NB: 01.08).

This is one of the ways in which the *Tribuna Libre* creates a sense of community and family, although a couple of my informants thought that after the death of the *Compadre*, Verónica was asking for financial help and moral support rather too often (NB: 01.08; FA: 04.08).

The *Tribuna Libre*, community and the Andean family

The *Tribuna Libre*'s popularity also rests on a desire for judgement and direction combined with love and emotion, almost in the manner of a parent. The presenters of the *Tribuna Libre* perpetuate this parental relationship in their treatment of participants and through their commentaries on individual cases. They always turn to the camera after each case, to express outrage and/or expound on the lessons to be learned from individual situations. For example, after the case of the woman who had given birth in the taxi, Verónica exhorted women to go

to hospital when they felt the first labour pains, and not wait until the last moment¹³.

Several of the women I spoke to said that they liked the way Carlos Palenque treated the people on his show:

"I liked his simplicity, the humility he had, and how he was with people, since he had an ability to manage people, to call people to him." (AE: 04.08)
"He always told the truth. If something was bad, he would say so." (BT: 28.07)

However, I found watching him uncomfortable. I felt that he patronised the participants, and treated them like children, but not in a purely paternal sense; his behaviour was more that of a benign master, underlined by the fact that Palenque was *mestizo* rather than 'cholo'. The hierarchy evident in episodes of the *Tribuna Libre* was racist, and mirrored the experiences of discrimination that are part of the daily life of rural-urban migrants in La Paz.

What is interesting is that Palenque's generosity and goodwill justified the way he treated the participants on his show, like a good *hacendado* of old. Personally, I could not perceive his qualities of sincerity, humility, or simplicity; to me, he appeared arrogant and insincere. I was also uncomfortable with the *Tribuna Libre*'s

¹² *Tribuna Libre del Pueblo* 28.07.97

¹³ *Tribuna Libre del Pueblo* 21.07.97

sensationalisation of people's pain. A case which illustrates both these issues is that of a woman who came on to the show to explain how she had lost her 3 year old son.

Palenque then told her to look behind the screens, while an aide brought the boy to him; after the tearful reunion, he instructed her to look after her child "a bit better" in the future¹⁴.

The ideas of community and family are very strong themes of *Tribuna Libre* and Condepa discourse. Some commentators maintain that the *Tribuna Libre* has created a collective identity and new community for uprooted migrants: "Those who visit the 'radio of the *pueblo*' and who assiduously follow its programmes establish relations of identification not only with the medium or with the *Compadre* but also among themselves" (Saravia & Sandoval 1991:123). Palenque always called the '*pueblo*' his family, and just before his death, he appealed to that family for support during the struggle with Mónica over custody of their children¹⁵. At his death, many expressed feelings of orphanhood¹⁶.

Verónica and Remedios presented themselves as the mothers of the '*pueblo*'. They represented two sides of motherhood, Verónica being the '*madre cariñosa*' ('kindly mother') who coos over the children and expresses genuine outrage where appropriate, while Remedios was sensible, wise and unshockable. The family-based rhetoric gave Condepa enormous strength, through the cohesion it fostered as well as the sense of a personal relationship with the

leaders, and of a personal loyalty to the party, another strong theme of a number of my interviews.

For some analysts, the practise of calling fellow members of Condepa '*compadre*' or '*comadre*' fortifies this sense of a family. It has also been identified as means of reinforcing a new urban community, through identification with practises and symbols from the Andean countryside (Archondo, 1991). Condepa's identification with the so-called 'Andean world-view' may have been exaggerated in the Bolivian press¹⁷ at the expense of a more complex analysis of its wide-ranging appeal, but it cannot be ignored. The stress on *compadrazgo* as evidence of this connection is perhaps simplistic: *compadrazgo* is a Catholic relationship, the relationship between the parents and godparents of a child, which has been extended in practice to denote a very strong and long-lasting friendship or alliance. It is not a uniquely rural or Andean relationship, nor is it confined to the lower classes, and it is a fairly long-standing way of structuring clientelistic politics (Mintz & Wolf 1977; Long 1984; Bolton & Mayer 1977). The leaders of Condepa called activists '*compadre*' or '*comadre*', and activists were supposed to use the same terms for fellow *Condepistas*. However, one of my interviewees, in an informal conversation,

said that she would never get used to calling fellow *Condepistas* '*compadre*', and she had been a member since 1988. For her, and I suspect for many others, *compadrazgo* was too intimate a relationship to be extended to all fellow activists.

The mobilisation of family and of the community emerged not only through the use of *compadrazgo*, but also the presence of the couple as a focal point throughout Palenque's public life: with Mónica when they were together, with Remedios throughout, with Verónica when he and Mónica split. This accords with Andean notions of gender complementarity through the importance of the husband-wife unit¹⁸ (Harris 2000 [1978]). It also has parallels in other Latin American political movements, the most obvious example being Peronism, especially at the height of Eva Perón's power.

These parallels are worth exploring further. In fact, both Palenque and his female sidekicks took on Evita's role of giving out charity and making a direct connection with the disenfranchised. Evita mobilised sentiment and emotion in order to gain political support (Goddard 2000), and this is where Carlos Palenque's skill was at its greatest. The comments about his death and about the closing of RTP, noted earlier, hint at the depth of feeling people had for him and this is attributable to his manner with people, however patronising it appeared to me. Visitors to the *Tribuna Libre*, mostly female, constantly collapse in floods of tears as they begin telling their heart-rending stories. All the presenters comfort,

sympathise, cry, call on the *cariño* (kindness, loving feelings) of the 'hearts of gold' who are watching or listening for their help in one way or another, turn to camera with a tragic expression on their faces and speak, with a catch in their voices, of their horror at the story they have heard, etc. However, Palenque was by far the most accomplished at this. He managed sentiment superbly, playing the role of kindly father, or master, but one who understood everyday life and the daily concerns of ordinary people, in contrast, for example, with Juan Perón's distant authoritarianism.

Other parts of Condepa rhetoric use Andean, particularly Aymaran, symbols and language. For example, Condepa's official foundation was held at the archeological site of Tiwanaku, at the time of the spring solstice; their election campaigning has used the concept of '*Jach'a Uru*'¹⁹ and there are numerous campaign photos of Carlos Palenque in traditional Aymara dress (see photo below). The use of rural symbols to reinforce an urban sense of community is particularly appropriate in a context where people have only partially left behind their rural identity. However, although many frequently visit their home villages, and identify strongly with family there, they have also often migrated to La Paz alone, and

¹⁴ *Tribuna Libre del Pueblo* 04.03.97

¹⁵ *Tribuna Libre del Pueblo* 04.03.97

¹⁶ Newspaper articles 10.03.97

¹⁷ *Hoy* 02.02.97

¹⁸ According to this logic, if a spouse is not available for a public occasion, people call on close family members or associates to perform the gender-complementary role.

¹⁹ 'The Great Day' – Aymara utopian concept of the day when suffering will end (Saravia & Sandoval 1991).



Carlos Palenque during the election campaign 1989

Photo by Guillermo García; Archondo 1991

often as children, leaving families behind. This was especially the case for many people who are middle-aged today, and may in part explain Condepa's appeal as substitute family.

However, this is mixed in with more Creole symbolism. For example, an early election TV advert showed several symbols of Bolivia one after another, and they were not necessarily Aymara – a flower, the Bolivian flag, etc. (Condepazo 1989).

A flyer produced for the 1997 election campaign is entitled "Triumphant Letter to the Bolivian People", and behind the words has an image of the sun rising from behind a map of Bolivia. In our interview, Palenque's daughter Verónica even compared her father to the

archetypal Creole symbol, Simón Bolívar:

"I think that, if Simón Bolívar had had a daughter, his daughter would have worked in the same way [as I am]." (VP: 08.08)

Condepa was always very careful to present itself as a *Bolivian* party, rather than simply Aymaran, for very good political reasons: in the 1997 national election campaign, Condepa knew that it had to extend its constituency beyond the highlands in order to have any chance of success in gaining influence in government²⁰.

²⁰ *La Estrella del Oriente* 22.04.97

Clearly, the appeal of the *Tribuna Libre* is complex, and many dynamics are at work, not least the cycle of increased popularity leading to increased effectiveness and therefore popularity – the fact that so many people watch it makes it a very effective way to publicise events, complaints, or appeals. One interviewee pointed out that "since everyone listens to the radio, if you lose a child, it appears" (AQ: 30.07). Even if families are only reunited in a small number of cases – and we are never told just how effective the *Tribuna Libre* is – what is important for Condepa's support is that people believe it to be effective. In addition, the stress on reuniting families further emphasises Condepa's family ethic.

The widespread fame of what the *Tribuna Libre* can do is evidenced by, for example, a lady from Cochabamba who came to publicise her search for her grandchild who had come to La Paz, or by the rural peasants who come to La Paz to participate in the *Tribuna Libre* and publicise events such as celebrations of the Day of the Peasant/Indian²¹.

Nancy Blanco also pointed to the curiosity factor (NB: 01.08), and it is true to say that the *Tribuna Libre* is often entertaining, if in a somewhat macabre way. In many ways, the *Tribuna Libre* also responds to an exhibitionism recognisable in Anglo-Saxon society (Grant, 1997).

Furthermore, many participants do not need the *Tribuna Libre*'s social arm to take action,

publicising an injustice is enough. This may respond to a need to bring an issue out into the open, and it is also often important merely to embarrass the object of a complaint in public. In this sense, the *Tribuna Libre* is both socio-political space for those without access to other types of fora, and a place to perform.

The *Tribuna Libre* therefore addresses (or seems to address) many of the unmet needs of rural-urban migrants. Practically, it responds to the need for health services, legal assistance, conflict resolution and redress. Politically, it responds to the need to speak out, to be visible. Psychologically, it responds to needs for a sense of community, stable families, emotional support and care.

The link between RTP, the Tribuna Libre and Condepa

How important is RTP in general, and the *Tribuna Libre* in particular, for Condepa? First, there is a clear correlation between Condepa supporters – both voters and activists – and viewers/listeners of the *Tribuna Libre*, although by no means all of those who watch the *Tribuna Libre* vote for Condepa. Condepa's constituency is of the same ethnic makeup as the viewers of the *Tribuna Libre*. Its electoral strength is concentrated in the city of La Paz in the areas where rural-urban migrants and their children and grandchildren live. In the elections of 1989, Condepa came first in the department of La Paz, with 27% of the vote,

²¹ *Tribuna Libre del Pueblo* 08.08.97; 31.07.97

but nationally was fourth, with 11% (Corte Nacional Electoral, in Saravia & Sandoval, 1991). The city of El Alto, which is mostly constituted of recent migrants, was the most loyal Condepa stronghold between 1989 and 1999.

For all its efforts, Condepa could not gain as firm an electoral footing in the eastern part of Bolivia as in the highland areas, although between 1989 and 1997 its electoral support did expand to include non-urbanised highland areas. This was partly as a result of vigorous electoral campaigning in the traditional sense, and partly due to 'travelling *Tribuna Libres*', when part of the show was broadcast from Oruro for a week²².

However, evidence of the importance of the link between RTP and Condepa goes beyond such geographical correlation between viewers and voters. The squabbles over the inheritance after Palenque's death demonstrate just how crucial Condepa leaders felt the channel to be. Carlos Palenque and Mónica Medina were not legally divorced when he died and, as his widow, Mónica had a right to the bulk of Palenque's estate by Bolivian law. She had political ambitions herself, starting her own party after they split in November 1996. Also, all of Palenque's business interests, apart from RTP, were put in the names of third parties, so the struggle over RTP was particularly acute. Bolivian newspapers had a field day with the resulting quarrels between Verónica Palenque and Mónica Medina: even the English-language paper asked "When will this soap opera ever end?"²³

Most Condepa supporters were resolved not to let Mónica have access to RTP. Viviana Quispe spoke of sleeping at the studios if necessary, to protect them against her (VQ: 22.07). There were demonstrators outside the RTP studios aiming to guard the "pueblo's patrimony" (VP: 08.08) from this evil stepmother. The demonising of Mónica began immediately after the split when, in December 1996, Verónica accused her of infidelity and a "licentious life"²⁴. Soon after Palenque died, graffiti appeared around La Paz, saying "*Mónica asesina, serás colgada*" ('Mónica, murderer, you will hang'), and every one of my interviewees blamed her in some way for his death. However, with time her possible role was forgotten, and ultimately she won the battle for RTP.

While Condepa leaders distanced themselves publicly from the extreme sentiments expressed in the graffiti²⁵, and were careful themselves never to explicitly blame Mónica for Palenque's death, they nonetheless encouraged just such strong feelings, often using the *Tribuna Libre* to do so. As each quarrel with Mónica arose (e.g. when, according to Verónica, she ordered the bank to freeze RTP cheques), staunch *Condepistas* came to the *Tribuna Libre* to denounce Mónica and offer their support to Remedios Loza and Verónica Palenque in their struggle with her. The presenters of the *Tribuna Libre*

²² *Tribuna Libre del Pueblo* 04.03.97 - 08.03.97

²³ *Bolivian Times* 28.08.97

²⁴ *Ultima Hora* 11.01.97

²⁵ *La Estrella del Oriente* 22.03.97

were careful not to be seen to initiate any of the denunciations, but responded emotionally and seemingly spontaneously. Verónica even cried at the "love she felt" from a lady who denounced Mónica in Aymara, which Remedios had translated for her²⁶. Loyal *Condepistas* responded to the implicit call to come and denounce Mónica²⁷. In this way, the *Tribuna Libre* acted as an official vehicle for Condepa propaganda, and implicitly told its supporters what to think.

More explicitly, the *Tribuna Libre* provided information for *Condepistas* in several ways: for example, around 15% of each programme was taken up with publicising meetings or demonstrations (López 1994; TLP). It was one of the principal sources of news for many *Condepistas* – the *Tribuna Libre* showed a piece about an election held among children, which Condepa had won²⁸, and the three women whom I interviewed in the following days all mentioned this piece of news (BT: 28.07; JA: 29.07; AQ: 30.07).

The trustworthiness of the *Tribuna Libre* and, by extension, Condepa, was a crucial theme for the party. Verónica and Remedios often repeated the slogan "We won't defraud you". By "we" they meant themselves, the *Tribuna Libre* and Condepa, the slippage between the three being crucial, and placing them in contrast to other politicians. So, through making a positive statement about the *Tribuna Libre's* honesty, they were encouraging people to vote for Condepa because it would not defraud them, and playing on the justified mistrust that poor

Bolivians have of other political parties (BT: 28.07; JA: 29.07). But, since the *Tribuna Libre* allowed Condepa to control the information to which its supporters had access, if Condepa were defrauding their 'pueblo', the 'pueblo' would probably not find out.

Rather ironically then, they could of course not prevent issues such as reports of corruption in the party coming out into the open. One of the strongest themes in Condepa politics is that of anti-corruption (VP: 08.08; TLP; interviews; newspapers). But on the *Tribuna Libre*, and when activists or leaders speak, instances of *Condepista* corruption are simply ignored, or if they come to light, the perpetrators are an exception – "black sheep" in the words of Ana Quispe. She was a very senior *Condepista* who worked in close co-operation with the El Alto local government, itself the focus of accusations of corruption related to the building of roads²⁹. None of the other women I interviewed mentioned such specific instances of corruption, perhaps because they were talking with a foreign and fairly ignorant interviewer. However, my interviews demonstrate a willing, although possibly unconscious, suspension of disbelief and cynicism among loyal Condepa supporters.

²⁶ *Tribuna Libre del Pueblo* 05.08.97

²⁷ *Tribuna Libre del Pueblo* 07.08.97

²⁸ *Tribuna Libre del Pueblo* 25.07.97

²⁹ *Los Tiempos* 21.01.97

As important as the positive functions of the *Tribuna Libre* are the negative: what it does not do. Despite *Condepesta* rhetoric about the party's highly democratic nature, none of the women I interviewed saw the *Tribuna Libre* as their way to influence Condepa policy. Verónica Palenque said:

"The *Tribuna Libre* is the mother of Condepa's proposals, because the *Tribuna Libre* is the thermometer which permits us to measure the concerns of the *pueblo*." (VP: 08.08)

However, as the discussion about Mónica indicates, there is a strong tendency for rigorous control of the cases presented on the *Tribuna Libre*. This is not to say, for example, that those who would denounce Mónica were planted, but the fact that they were given airtime set a dynamic in motion, or perpetuated an existing dynamic. It is inconceivable that a supporter of Mónica would have been allowed to participate at that time, despite the belief and rhetoric that the *Tribuna Libre* is open to all. Thus the *Tribuna Libre* directed the "concerns of the pueblo" as well as listening to them, and the exact balance is difficult to measure.

How, therefore, is Condepa policy formulated? A comprehensive answer to this question is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is worth pointing to a few tendencies. The most important of these is the top-down structure of the party: Carlos Palenque appointed the members of the *Consejo Nacional Patriótico* (the leadership council) himself; and María Teresa Zegada

quotes him saying "here we don't consult, we instruct ... Condepa is a military organisation." (1996:20). This is certainly borne out by my interviews: when I asked women how Condepa policies were formulated, most interviewees pointed to the "21 principles", which were the basis of Condepa's founding in 1988 and continue to direct the general philosophy of the party. When I asked who decided on these, they replied that Carlos Palenque had (VQ: 22.07; BT: 28.07; AQ: 30.07).

This is most likely the official line; but it is improbable that Palenque formulated these "21 principles" without any help. In fact, Rafael Archondo writes about the rather sinister involvement of a particular group of leftist intellectuals influenced by Peronism, shortly after they realised the extent of Palenque's power as mobiliser of people during the closure of RTP. Known as the '*Grupo Revolucionario de Octubre*' (October Revolutionary Group), they became influential during the administrations of Generals Ovando and Torres in Bolivia, but in the mid-1980s they were looking for another political machine to influence, since at the time they lacked the charisma necessary to front a campaign for political power themselves (Archondo, 1991).

Many of the individuals Archondo names as part of this group, such as Andres Soliz Rada, Eduardo Paz and Gonzalo Ruiz Paz, were prominent in 1997: Ruiz Paz was the vice-presidential candidate in the 1997 elections and often appeared in the news media explaining Condepa's proposals,

probably to a greater extent than the other parties' vice-presidential candidates (UH: 09.04.97; PR: 12.04.97). An internal campaign document shows that this was a conscious strategy: Ruiz Paz was seen as preferable to Remedios Loza in middle-class fora such as newspaper interviews and television debates, while *Comadre Remedios'* job was to travel the countryside, attend campaign rallies, and use her high profile in favour of *Condepesta uninominal* candidates³⁰ (Ascarrunz, 1997).

The power to define Condepa's policies and political strategy rests primarily with a group of university-educated, *mestizo*, male intellectuals, who form a middle layer between the leaders and ordinary *Condepesta*s. Condepa's literature bears this out. "*El Libro del modelo endógeno*", volumes I and II, set out Condepa's political philosophy. The first is authored collectively by the *Consejo Nacional*, and a list of the members at the end reveals that only two are female – Mónica and Remedios. In the case of volume II, individually authored chapters criticise specific governmental measures, and the CVs before each chapter reveal the high level of formal education which every author has had (Condepa 1993; 1995).

Condepa the political party: gender and symbolism

So, Condepa's hierarchy is as follows: first there are the figureheads, Carlos Palenque, his wife, his daughter, and Remedios Loza. Below them is a layer of *mestizo* intellectuals, predominantly male, which

constitutes the formal structure of the party, from the *Consejo Nacional* down to the Sector Chiefs. They are in charge of the grassroots militants, the part of the party which most conforms in class, educational, gender, and ethnic background with Condepa's main constituency. The role of *Condepesta* women at the grassroots is the focus of this section.

Condepa as female party: the militantes de base

Many of the *Condepesta* women I interviewed maintained that there was a female majority in Condepa. A gender breakdown of Condepa's membership was unavailable, but the meeting of sector 6 which I attended was chaired by two men, and had 15 female and 12 male participants. More important than absolute numbers is the perception of Condepa as a party in which women and men participate equally, however untrue this is in terms of real distribution of power. The first section has examined many of the reasons for Condepa and the *Tribuna Libre*'s appeal to women, and now I turn to some of the ways in which Condepa as political party mobilises gender.

Through the high drama and emotionalism of the *Tribuna Libre*, Condepa converts the rhetorical connections between femininity

³⁰ The *Ley Electoral* of 1996 changed the system of election of deputies, such that half the chamber was elected by proportional representation: *plurinominal*, while half was elected by a district-based first-past-the-post system: *uninominal*.

and emotion into a political program. When I asked what qualities women have that could improve political life, Remedios said:

"We women unify thought and the heart. It always bothers us, hurts us, for example, when children cry; injustices cause us pain." (RL: 08.08)

It is of course not new to make such connections: some 'maternal' feminists have seen the 'feminisation' of the public sphere as a necessity for the democratisation of politics. They argue that women's particular contributions to the public political arena can be based in their experiences as mothers (Elshtain 1991 [1981], Ruddick 1980), a debate with continued salience for the Latin American women's movement (González & Kampwirth 2001). Jean Bethke Elshtain maintains that, through basing itself upon values derived from the private sphere, the family, feminism can use a "politics of compassion" to create an "ethical polity" (Elshtain 1991 [1981]: 350-351).

There are problems with making such connections, of course. As Mary Dietz argues, it is wrong to assume that the realm of the family is always in reality as ethical as Elshtain's idealisation implies, and the relationship between mother and child is perhaps necessarily one of the most unequal in modern society, not a healthy one to emulate in a government that seeks to be egalitarian and democratic. She contends that women must operate in politics as citizens, and that "not the language of love

and compassion, but only the language of freedom and equality, citizenship and justice, will challenge non-democratic and oppressive political institutions" (Dietz 1998 [1985]: 61). However, despite the theoretical problems, there is no doubt that connecting femininity and emotion can be a remarkably successful political strategy.

Condepa also mobilises gender through the theme of women's particular strength, largely deriving from an immediate connection to the everyday experience of poverty. Verónica said:

"I always thought that we women are, first, much less corruptible [than men]. ... And as if that weren't enough, I think that women are more forceful, more prepared to struggle, and work harder." (VP: 08.08)

Most of my other interviewees did not have an opinion on the particular qualities that women might bring to politics, many pointing out that women can be just as corrupt and unethical as men. Many did, however, think that women experience poverty and responsibility more than men, and felt that women were better at struggling for their own and their families' survival (VQ: 22.07; NB: 01.08; CM: 04.08).

The most common answers to the question "why are there so many women in Condepa?" revolved around two issues: first, that women were more aware of poverty and more marginalised than any other group:

"We women suffer, don't we?... We see the reality of poverty... we know how much things cost, prices, better than men." (AQ: 30.07)

Second, there are many female *Condepistas* because Carlos Palenque specifically encouraged women:

"Before our chief died, he always collaborated with women, he always wanted women to get ahead." (VQ: 22.07)

This latter point seems to be the nearest to an official party line: Verónica Palenque said:

"Don Carlos Palenque Avilés was a man who... gave a great deal of importance to women, he gave importance, first, to Remedios Loza ...He did this, and allowed women in general to lift their heads and not be afraid to approach a political party." (VP: 08.08)

When Remedios Loza was invited to form part of a forum for presidential candidates on their proposals for women, she concentrated most of all on the role that Condepa has played in encouraging the active participation of prominent women, i.e. herself and Mónica (Salguero, 1997).

Both arguments are connected in Condepa's discourse: it is very useful for a party which claims to fight for the disenfranchised, marginalised '*pueblo*' to very visibly mobilise in its own favour the most marginalised sector of that constituency, women. The

symbolic power of the large numbers of '*cholas*', or '*mujeres de pollera*'³¹ in Condepa's ranks is crucial. As with the *Tribuna Libre*, the image of the *mujer de pollera* stands for the pueblo. Through their distinctive dress, the women are signifiers of group identity. But the '*chola*' is a complex symbol: not only does she represent the popular classes, she also speaks to the pride of the popular classes in their own potential, since the expense of the clothes worn by the archetypal '*chola paceña*' demonstrate her success, usually in commerce (Stephenson, 1999; Buechler & Buechler 1996).

Increasingly, the symbol of the '*chola*' is essential in Bolivian politics: as Robert Albro has pointed out, "the '*chola*' is proving indispensable as political cultural capital for *men*, who are looking for avenues of legitimation in an increasingly populist climate." (2000: 31; emphasis in original)

Of course, the '*chola*' women themselves do not see their role as purely cultural capital to be mobilised by the male Condepista politicians. And Condepa's discourse is not just about mobilisation in order to demonstrate a certain level of support, or about denouncing the effects of government policy on its constituency. A very strong theme in Condepa's rhetoric is that of self-improvement, both individual and for Bolivia (Miura, 1996). This appeals to the ambitious

³¹ Women in a *pollera*. The *pollera* is the name for gathered skirts. Women '*de pollera*', also wear a shawl (often of vicuña wool and very expensive), a bowler hat, and special shoes. The opposite, 'Western' dress, is called '*de vestido*'

side of recent migrants. Making the decision to move to a hostile environment, to leave the security of the countryside for the hardship of the cities, demands both courage and ambition. Condepa is a means for some to validate that decision, and gain increased status in the process.

My interviewees told of various reasons for moving to La Paz, among them the death of their parents, the breakdown of their marriage, and governmental repression in the countryside. However, part of their personal motives clearly involved the hope that things will eventually improve for them and their families. All were ambitious for their children. They were very proud of the ones who had been or were still at university, and if their children were younger, they fervently hoped that they would be able to go on to higher education.

More personally, Viviana Quispe talks of the level of education which Condepa gave her, while she worked for the party in the local government:

"I never thought I would be someone who works a type-writer ... We're going to work ... we're going to try to get further ahead ... and we are going to feed our children well, and that's why we have to work for the party." (VQ: 22.07)

Self-improvement concepts such as "*salir adelante*" or "*superarse*", meaning "get ahead" and "surpass oneself", are crucial in *Tribuna Libre* and Condepa rhetoric, and,

more importantly, in the discourse of all the women that I interviewed. For these women, when life is so hard, hope alone is not enough; individual initiative is vital. Many of the women I spoke to also attended Women's Centres, run by NGOs³², and spoke about the role of such centres, in educating them, making them conscious of their own personalities, giving them more self-confidence, and teaching them skills which help them to earn money, and move up in life (VQ: 22.07; BT: 28.07; FA: 04.08; AE: 04.08; CM: 04.08; NB: 01.08). The role of NGOs in creating or perpetuating a discourse of self-improvement, and providing people, especially women, with the tools necessary to assert themselves, deserves further examination but is beyond the scope of this paper.

Such '*capacitación*' (capacity-building, training), whether by Condepa or by an NGO, provides people with a sense of individual power and superiority, and this is one of the most important things that I would argue Condepa gives its adherents. Inherent to the sense of community and family is one of hierarchy. A couple of interviewees complained about or hinted at this, and I also noticed it in the Sector 6 meeting. Not particularly gender-based, this hierarchy is one of 'antiquity' – how long a person has been a member of Condepa:

³² See footnote 6. This may have biased the data slightly towards activists, but my subsequent research among people in El Alto has confirmed the general importance of 'getting ahead', whether through business, political activity, or capacity-building training with an NGO.

"In the party there are bad people and good people. There are some who say 'we're old, you're new [and don't know]' ... at times we don't like that, but what are we going to do?" (BT: 28.07)

These senses of individual self-confidence and personal superiority are particularly important for poor Aymara women. Marisol de la Cadena's work in Chasquipampa, Peru, shows how women were identified as "more Indian", because they more often stayed in the community to work the land than men, who went to the city and were therefore more easily seen as *mestizo*. Women's work in the city, such as selling, was "easier", and less prestigious. It is obvious from her research that being Indian is of lower status than being *mestizo* in that particular community (de la Cadena, 1995). Bolivia is similar: nationally, education is a mark of status, and society has traditionally denied women a level of education commensurate with that of men. Even in 1994, nationally, female illiteracy was 27%, while male illiteracy was 11% (Zárate, 1995). The kind of *capacitación*, and therefore status, which Condepa provides is attractive to ambitious women.

However, Condepa 'builds women's capacities' only on specific terms. Brigida Ticona felt that Condepa did not build women's abilities in the same way as the NGO-funded Mother's Centre she attends; she said that her work with Condepa uses up her time more than anything else (BT: 28.07). As a political party, but also as a

government (such as the municipal government of El Alto), Condepa relied very much on the voluntary labour and even financial contributions of its militants, a large number of whom are women. This has close parallels with other Latin American social movements, such as, for example, the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions, which also relied heavily on voluntary female labour for the completion of their political programmes once in office (Collinson 1989; Smith & Padula 1996).

In the local government of El Alto, female Condepa activists worked in traditionally female areas, such as working as a social promoter in the department of *Acción Comunal* (Community Action).

"A social promoter has multiple aspects to her work; she has to be doctor, nurse, teacher, ... she has to look after the health and wellbeing of the citizens of El Alto." (MR: 07.08)

As is often the case with political parties, there is a higher concentration of *Condepista* women in the lower levels of the party, carrying out its essential and defining social work, which has always been seen as a female domain. They are very few in the decision-making areas of the upper echelons of party hierarchy.

Maria Isabel López has also demonstrated the discriminatory nature of *Condepista* discourse as mediated through the *Tribuna Libre*. She sees the *Tribuna Libre* as perpetuating female stereotypes, particularly

that of "the self-sacrificing mother" (1994: 92), which in turn perpetuate discrimination against women. The majority of cases involving women are based around their traditional roles of caring for children, responsibility for their education, and housework; and the commentaries of presenters reinforce female responsibility for the home. (López, 1994)

Condepa therefore does not fundamentally challenge traditional notions of gender such as the gendered division of labour and responsibilities in a patriarchal society. Indeed, there is no real reason why it should. One of the reasons Condepa has so much female support is probably because it values women in one of the most important of their traditional roles, as mother, in language which reflects the reality of their lives.

The politics of symbolism

According to Andres Soliz Rada, "Condepa has always revolved around its key symbols" (PR: 11.03.97). Carlos Palenque was and remains their primary symbol. When he was with Mónica, as a couple they were very important to Condepa propaganda (Miura, 1996); now, the living symbols are Remedios Loza and Verónica Palenque. A study of their power expands two themes which have already been touched on – the symbolic importance of women in Condepa discourse and the rhetoric of the Condepa "family".



Campaign poster, 1997

The caudillo

Carlos Palenque has always been presented as the "caudillo", the driving force of Condepa who integrated all of Condepa's ideology in his person and actions. Nancy Blanco stated "I see him as a prophet." (NB: 01.08) His charisma, personal popularity and power as communicator were the rocks on which Condepa's power rested and, in some ways, continue to be so. Graffiti all over La Paz in 1997 proclaimed him "Saint of Poor People", and there was a shrine to him in the Condepa HQ, the *Casa del Pueblo*, while the commercial breaks of the *Tribuna Libre* were bracketed by excerpts from speeches he gave. His power as an individual for Condepa's staunchest supporters is reflected in the words of Julia Achaval:

"There are a lot of people, many *Condepistas* ... who still go to the radio to talk to *Comadre* Verónica, because they know that *Compadre* Palenque will help them, will send a blessing from above." (JA: 29.07)

Flora Aroya, not a *Condepista*, was uncomfortable with these emotions:

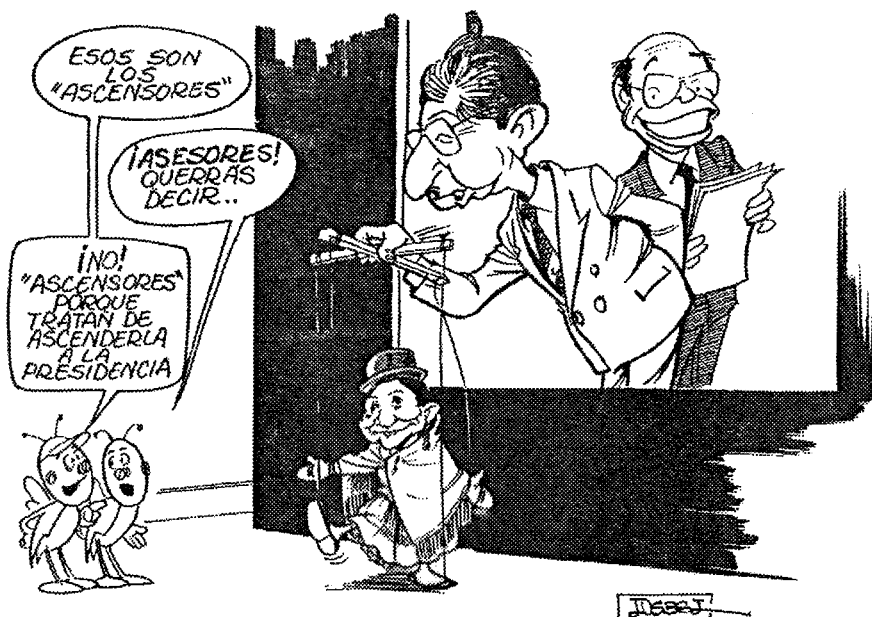
"He's a person, he's not a saint." (FA: 04.08)

But for supporters who are often deeply Catholic, such emotions make the power of Palenque as an individual virtually unshakeable now, after his death.

The election campaign of 1997 was also fought on the basis of his image as an individual. Posters and graffiti proclaimed "*Palenque ¡vive! Remedios Presidenta*", while Verónica invoked his presence constantly in the and newspaper interviews. This was a conscious campaigning decision (Ascarrunz, 1997) but nonetheless, fairly convincing. Verónica did appear to have a very strong sense of mission as her father's daughter:

"I have one objective in life, one only ...: to convert him into an immortal being, so nobody ever forgets him." (VP: 08.08)

Newspapers at the time of Palenque's death declared the certainty of a "homage vote", and most of the women I interviewed thought that, had he lived, he would have become President. Others, *Condepista* or not, felt that Remedios did so well in the 1997 election mostly 'on Palenque's coat tails'. Both of these sentiments express a particular political agenda, and it is not possible to tell just how much of a homage vote there actually was. In fact, Andrea Espinal was sympathetic to Condepa, but did not vote for them because of the internal fighting immediately after Palenque's death (AE: 04.08). However, both during and after the electoral campaign, there was a definite consciousness of Remedios' power as a symbol, in the press and in my interviews.



Cartoon, showing Remedios Loza as puppet, and her asesores³³, Gonzalo Ruiz Paz and Andres Soliz Rada.

Source: *El Deber*, 11.04.97³⁴

The 'chola'

When I asked exactly what Remedios symbolised, two answers predominated. Most women replied that she was a symbol of "la chola Aymara" (PA: 30.07). Andrea Espinal saw her as a symbol of women in general (AE: 04.08). All were very clear that Remedios' status as a 'chola' woman inspired other *mujeres de pollera*:

"Now, *cholitas* are even lawyers, ... thanks to her we are getting even further ahead." (PA: 30.07)

³³ Consultants, advisors

³⁴ "Those are the 'Ascensores'"

"Asesores, you meant.."

"No, 'Ascensores', because they are trying to 'ascend' her to the Presidency"

"For *señoritas de pollera*, [Remedios] has been like a reflection in a mirror, and [they] are following in her footsteps, ... they are in offices, using computers; she's been quite a good mirror for all of them. ... She's a symbol for women; she symbolises that she could do it ... Like she said, 'I was only someone who made shawls, and look where I've got to', and the others coming up now, well why can't they do the same?" (AE: 04.08)

Others pointed to her status as Palenque's political heir, something which was particularly stressed in newspaper reporting of his death. Her loyalty to Palenque is very important for his supporters, particularly after the breakdown of his marriage; she fulfilled the role of a good wife, which Mónica could not: "She's the only woman who has always been at Carlos Palenque's side." (AQ: 30.07). In fact, there are many rumours that Remedios was actually Carlos Palenque's mistress, and that he was the father of her 14-year-old daughter (NB: 01.08).

I would argue that Remedios as a *mujer de pollera* also symbolised the 'pueblo'. When asked how it felt to be a symbol, she replied graciously "I think that I am a symbol that represents the great majority, of which I am part" (RL: 08.08). She illustrates a tendency for women to be signifiers of group cultural identity, often based around dress, and functioning partly as a visual shorthand for other issues, such as female and group

honour (Yuval-Davis 1997). In the context of 'cholo' society in Bolivia, dress is very important and particularly gendered: male migrants quickly abandon any forms of traditional dress they wore in the countryside in order to find work in the city, while women often retain and develop their traditional dress, wearing the *pollera*. Marcia Stephenson argued that the *pollera* is a "visible symbol of resistance", of women who refuse to be "refashioned" (1999: 5). Women who abandon the *pollera* often do so in order to move up in *mestizo* society, to go to university, work in an office, etc.:

"Women *de pollera*, well we're discriminated against. ... It isn't easy to study, to go to the university *de pollera*. You can't find work in an office either." (VQ: 22.07)

Most women I spoke to did not, however, see dress as an important issue: they were not upset if their daughters decided to wear *vestido*, which most had done, pointing out, for example, that *pollera* was very much more expensive than *vestido*, and that "the way a woman dresses doesn't change her" (PA: 30.07). However, some were conscious of the political nature of the *pollera*:

"[*Cholo*] is the original name of this country. Bolivia was made up of *cholos* ... we're the original, not the imitation! ... We came out of the Earth like this, *de pollera*. I feel proud, because we are of this country." (BT: 28.07).

"The *pollera* is the dress of our Bolivia."
(PA: 30.07)

The ability to symbolise group identity can be a source of pride, as the above quotes show, but is not necessarily always in the best interests of individual women. Silvia Rivera maintains that the "silence" - i.e. monolingualism - of Aymara women has been the locus of community resistance to Hispanic culture (Rivera 1990). However, this can result in an inability to demand individual rights, such as labour rights, healthcare and education, from the Hispanic state. Remedios Loza is an inspiration to many *mujeres de pollera*, and a reminder to the rest of society that *mujeres de pollera* can work in prestigious jobs, as a politician, lawyer, or in an office "exactly the same as a man" (CM: 04.08). However, she was criticised for her lack of education, although, as Julia Achaval pointed out:

"If she were *de vestido*, of course they would support her. Because she's *de pollera*, that's why they say the problem is she lacks education." (JA: 29.07).

Many interviewees, in refuting this criticism, pointed to her education resulting from her work with Carlos Palenque, and the fact that she had several '*asesores*' during the electoral campaign (esp. AE: 04.08). Her position at the top of the Condepa hierarchy is dependent on two things: first, her relationship with men, particularly Carlos Palenque, but also those *asesores* who guided and educated her; and second, her symbolic power, as '*chola*', and therefore

signifier of group identity. The Bolivian political elite is not prepared to acknowledge her own, substantial, abilities, and *Condepistas* do not demand this kind of acknowledgement.

The daughter

Palenque's other heir is his oldest daughter Verónica, in 1997 the deputy leader of the party. When I asked about Verónica's positive characteristics, most interviewees felt that her primary virtue was the fact that "she's continuing in the steps of her Dad, she continues to support people." (NB: 01.08) Verónica is keenly aware that her personal power is contingent on that of her dead father, and that she must be seen to be faithful to his ideology and work:

"I have to respect a surname, I have to respect 29 years work. But above all I have to make people respect the instruments he left. He left a media company, and he left a political party. And that's like the inheritance that all Bolivians have received, in order to continue helping the *pueblo*." (VP: 08.08)

It was also very important for my other interviewees that Verónica continues her father's work:

"I consider that she is trying to become what her father was, ... that she must try to achieve this position her father held. It has to be she who provides continuity." (MR: 07.08)

However, some, like Flora Araya, who is not a *Condepista*, felt that Verónica lacked a sense of her own identity, and that she talked about her father too much:

"She has to think who *she* is ... that's what's bad." (FA: 04.08)

Sra. Araya's criticism of Verónica prefigures the current problems that Condepa is undergoing, as Verónica and Remedios struggle to develop an identity for the party based on their own qualities rather than their relation to Carlos Palenque. Condepa thus has been unable to change and respond to new political situations, such as moving from local to national political power. The two female leaders have become open to criticism that they are not fulfilling what the '*Compadre*' would have wanted, and the party has all but torn itself apart.

Conclusion: politics of the everyday

Even Remedios' status as '*chola*' and her constant reiteration of being Carlos Palenque's rightful heir could not win her the 1999 local elections in Condepa's heartland of El Alto. By then, Verónica headed a 'rebel' faction of *Condepista* Congress deputies, also taking with her a number of militants who decided on a 'punishment vote' against Remedios. Rumours abounded about her authoritarian and nepotistic styles of leadership, and the corruption scandals associated with the 1990s *Condepista* administrations of El Alto finally affected her personal political standing. In 1999, however, Carlos Palenque remained as popular as ever in El Alto, a person who had

"helped the poor", and who would have been a good President had he not died (or, according to some rumours, been murdered) before the elections of 1997.

Since 1997, Condepa has found it hard to create an identity as a political party, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this has much to do with its gender politics. A worker in the El Alto local government said to me in 1999 that she thought it was time for a man to lead the party, because women are too stubborn, and Remedios and Verónica could not forget their disputes, whereas men would be able to unite for the sake of the party. From the beginning of Remedios' leadership there was talk of it being "transitory"³⁵. Condepa's appeal rested on the power of Carlos Palenque as symbol, and subsequent to his death, with the ability of the various women in his life to mobilise their proximity to him as their own political capital. When they fought with each other after 1997, there did not exist a strong enough central figure to transcend factionalism through a powerful personalistic (and paternalistic) connection with the '*pueblo*'.

But, while the personalistic side to Condepa explains its vulnerability, it does not explain its success, which was, in fact, based on something much more solid. Probably the main reason for Condepa's popularity in its first decade, particularly among women, is the focus on issues of familial concern.

³⁵ El Deber 01.08.97

The *Tribuna Libre* and Condepa represent an informal form of politics, a 'politics of the everyday', and this is one of the bases of Condepa's strength: it started as a social movement and retained many of those characteristics through the *Tribuna Libre*. This is at a time when "the masses appear to incline more towards social movement organisation than towards formal and traditional mediators [between state and civil society, i.e. political parties]." (Saravia & Sandoval 1991: 205) Condepa therefore had the potential to "articulate the demands of civil society as part of the government process" (Gamarrá & Malloy 1995: 421).

Important in this dynamic of mediation is the personal contact with influential political figures which the *Tribuna Libre* afforded: for example, the programme of 8 August 1997 allowed participants to meet and directly question the two Condepa ministers in the new government. A feeling of a personal relationship with the leaders of a party has been crucial to most populist movements (Stein 1980), and the *Tribuna Libre* made this real. Most of my interviewees had been regularly to RTP, and the personal contact with Palenque, Mónica, Remedios and Verónica was an important factor in their feelings not only that Condepa speaks directly to them but also represents them directly in the formal institutional sphere of politics. When Condepa fractured, and Monica eventually won control of RTP, she and Remedios broadcast rival *Tribunas Libres*, which broke the link between the *Tribuna Libre* and Condepa, and thus removed Condepa's greatest strength.

Because the *Tribuna Libre*, for all its faults, provided a counterweight to the racism against rural-urban migrants that is characteristic of Bolivian politics and society. In such a context, the sense of heightened self-esteem that Condepa can give its activists and voters is crucial. Remedios put it the following way:

"[I am] a symbol that is emerging, and that is demonstrating that the pueblo is capable, no? Able to organise itself, to go forward, and to be participants, for example, in democracy. In Bolivia democracy is becoming deeper every day, with the participation of the *pueblo*. Now the *pueblo* does not only ask to vote, but also to be elected. ... I think that it will be an example for other countries too." (RL: 08.08; my emphasis)

The normative understanding of citizenship in Latin America is as the right to vote and to be elected. Here, Remedios is calling on this, and making herself a focus for the claims of '*cholos*' and of women to enjoy full citizenship.

Furthermore, when it won elections, Condepa delivered on its promises to activists in the ways Bolivian political parties are expected to, namely through providing many with a civil service job (Gamarrá & Malloy 1995), even if they were *de pollera*. Condepa's boldness represents a commitment to the 'popular sectors' that did not go unnoticed (Blanco C. & Sandoval 1993). The highly visible *mujeres de pollera*

working in the local government offices of El Alto were also an incentive for others like them to vote for Condepa, even in 1999 after all the scandals. And the fact that Remedios could speak Aymara made her an appealing candidate for the most Aymaran city in Bolivia in many people's eyes.

The activists not only benefited practically in terms of jobs and other forms of patronage, but also through being part of a community or family that was aiming to self-improve collectively. Individually, through association with Condepa, many underwent some sort of social mobility in their own eyes, defined through concepts such as '*superarse*' ('surpass oneself'), '*salir adelante*' ('get ahead'), and achieved through increased education, '*capacitación*'. Within the hierarchical structure, those most dedicated could enjoy high status derived from length of service, as well as the fulfilment that came from communal activism and the development of new friendships and new experiences. In general, though, Condepa provided them with an outlet for their aspirations, collective and individual. For many, these aspirations had their roots at the point where they or their parents took the decision to move from the countryside to the city. Once there, they found that racism and poverty would make their lives a struggle to do more than simply subsist. Condepa is one of the routes that Bolivian rural-urban migrants have chosen in this struggle.

But despite such positive outcomes, even a cursory inspection reveals cracks, most

notably the fact that, while Condepa was supposedly the party of the '*pueblo*', it is doubtful that the '*pueblo*' had much real access, much less influence or control. While the *Tribuna Libre* was very effective on its own terms, and part of what made Condepa real for its supporters, it was also a means of manipulation – of their information, their emotions, their vulnerability, and their political capital. Condepa administrations in both La Paz and El Alto were some of the most notoriously corrupt in the whole of Bolivia, and it is highly unlikely that the leadership was unaware of this. Carlos Palenque emerged from his plush house in the wealthy suburb of Calacoto in La Paz to connect with 'his *pueblo*' at specific times, essentially at public political meetings and during the recording of the *Tribuna Libre*. I suspect that, in the end, Condepa took advantage of the political capital represented by the '*pueblo*', and symbolised by the '*chola*', in order to serve the ambitions of the leadership and those at the layer just below.

Of course, none of the other political parties in Bolivia have much to recommend them either. Scepticism aside, Condepa certainly, and crucially, helped force the old-style oligarchic parties to acknowledge their constituency as one that wields a relatively large amount of electoral power. They also helped the members of that constituency acknowledge their own political power. In this sense, they can only have changed Bolivian politics for the better.

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VQ: 22.07: Sra. Viviana Quispe (45); from Alto Pampahasi, La Paz; Condepa activist since 1988, migrated to La Paz as a child. Contacted through the NGO Fundación La Paz, Distrito Este – Centro de la Mujer.

BT: 28.07: Sra. Brigida Ticona (26); from Pampahasi, La Paz; activist since 1996, supporter since 1988, migrated to La Paz as a child. Contacted through the NGO Fundación La Paz, Distrito Este – Centro de la Mujer.

JA: 29.07: Sra. Julia Achaval R. (58); from Villa San Antonio, La Paz; activist since 1996, supporter since 1998, parents born in La Paz.

AQ: 30.07: Sra. Ana Quispe (44); from Nuevas Horizontes, El Alto; activist since 1998, Promotora Social in El Alto local government, second generation migrant.

PA: 30.07: Sra. Paola Apaza (38); from Zona Portada, La Paz; activist since 1988, migrated to La Paz as a child.

NB: 01.08: Sra. Nancy Blanco P. (34); from Villa Copacabana, La Paz; activist since 1993, recently migrated to La Paz in order to study at University.

FA: 04.08: Sra. Flora Aroya (30); from Villa 16 de Julio, El Alto; not Condepista, recent migrant because of divorce. Contacted

through the NGO Centro de la Mujer Gregoria Apaza, El Alto.

AE: 04.08: Sra. Andrea Espinal (29); from Villa Santiago 1º, El Alto; not Condepista, second generation migrant. Contacted through the NGO Centro de la Mujer Gregoria Apaza, El Alto.

CM: 04.08: Sra. Clara Mamani B. (58); from Villa 16 de Julio, El Alto; Long-term supporter of Condepa, parents born in La Paz. Contacted through the NGO Centro de la Mujer Gregoria Apaza, El Alto.

MT: 07.08: Sra. Marta Ramírez (50); from Villa Victoria, El Alto; activist since 1988, Promotora Social in El Alto local government, parents born in La Paz.

RL: 08.08: Sra. Remedios Loza; leader of Condepa 1997-present

VP: 08.08: Sra. Verónica Palenque; deputy leader of Condepa 1997-1999

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