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From the *Rainy Place* to the *Burnt Palace*: How Social Movements form their Political Strategies. The Case of the Six Federations of the Tropic of Cochabamba.

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How do social movements form their political strategies? The relevant theory places considerable attention on structure, and argues that when political opportunities are open, movements are more likely to opt for a systemic political strategy; when they are closed, movements are expected to take a more revolutionary turn. However, political opportunities can make some options appear more 'realistic' and others less so–but movements don't always behave 'realistically.' They might explain *when* movements are more likely to mobilise and what repertoires they adopt once they do so, but they don't account for what happens earlier on: through what mechanisms the movements form their political strategies. Exploring the case of the *cocaleros* of the Chapare, this article argues that more emphasis should be placed on mechanisms that are internal to the movements, such as: a) the resonance of other political experiences at home and abroad, b) internal struggles for ideological hegemony, and c) the political formation of their grass roots.

Keywords: Bolivia, *cocaleros*, political strategies, social movements, guerrilla

¡Guerrilla!

- '*Compañeros*, are you inclined towards a rebellion?' I would ask them during the seminars.
- 'Yeees! Armed struggle!' *Evo* would shout.

'No', I would explain . 'Ours is a political struggle for the coca leaf, for the right to participate in the elections with our own candidates.'

Evo is Evo Morales, a *cocalero* (coca grower) leader opting for the *via armada* back then and today's President of Bolivia. The excerpt above is part of an interview the author conducted with Filemón Escóbar, a legendary figure of the Bolivian left, Evo's mentor, and influential advisor and political instructor of the *Seis Federaciones del Trópico de Cochabamba* at the time. *Las Seis Federaciones* (the Six Federations from now on) were the coordinating body of the inhabitants of the Chapare, a previously *de facto* semi-autonomous region where the coca growers administered all day-to-day activities and disputes, and were practically independent from the Bolivian state. They had only one obligation: to register the land that was under the administration of the Six Federations with the National Agrarian Reform Service (*Servicio Nacional de Reforma Agraria*) and, of course, collect taxes on behalf of the state. However, in 1988, officially in an effort to regulate coca production in the country, the Bolivian government passed a law (*Ley 1008*) that criminalised most of the economic activity of the *Chapareños*. It also tried to reclaim authority and sovereignty over the region, thus violating the *de facto* autonomy of the *cocaleros*. And it did so mainly through deploying the military police: the UMOPAR (*Unidad Mobil para el Patrullaje Rural- Mobile Rural Patrol Unit*), also known in the Chapare as the *leopardos* due to the color of their uniforms and the leopard badge they wear on their arm.

The *cocaleros* responded as social movements usually do: with protests, road blockades, marches, hunger strikes, sit-ins, public cultural protest events, occupations of government offices (Healy, 1991: 90) and any other repertoire of action they could employ. To no avail. According to Salazar Ortuño et al. (2008), between 1980 and 2004 the *cocaleros* of the Chapare suffered heavy repression: 95 people–including 8 babies–were killed either by the army or the special antidrug and paramilitary forces, 446 were injured, 121 were tortured, and 4134 were detained. The figures provided by the office of the Chapare Human Rights Ombusdman are more modest: they speak of 33 fatalities, 567 injuries, and 693 detainees between January 1997 and August 2003 (Ledebur, 2005:164). When called to decide on how to react , the option of armed struggle was seriously considered, as the excerpt from the interview with Don Filemón indicates. After all, was it not Evo Morales himself who had

actually warned that the Chapare would become the new Chiapas at the heart of South America? (Astelarra, 2014: 43) However, the civil war Evo warned about and the *guerrilla* he opted for never took place, and he is now President of Bolivia. How did it happen? Why did the cocaleros of the Chapare reject the option of armed struggle and choose the *parliamentary route* to social change instead? And, in broader terms, how and through what mechanisms do social movements decide for certain political strategies and reject others? This article is the product of four months of political ethnographic fieldwork in the Chapare, including more than 20 semi-structured interviews. I focus on the case of the *cocaleros of the Chapare* and argue that if we want to understand the mechanisms through which social movements opt for certain political strategies and reject others, we should focus on certain internal processes. These include: a) the role of intellectuals within the movements and their internal struggle for ideological hegemony, b) the study of previous political experiences, contemporary or historical, at home and abroad, and c) a long political formation of the grass roots that ensures the discipline of the movement's militants.

Political Strategies and Social Movements

Considering the repressive situation facing the cocaleros in the late 1980s-early 1990s, any political scientist familiar with the political opportunities structure–the dominant explanatory theory in the field when it comes to social movement strategies–would have believed that guerrilla warfare would be their strategy of choice. Their relative autonomy had been violated, their main source of livelihood was under threat, and their protests were violently repressed. In addition, their remote, unwelcoming jungle region would be the ideal location for a guerrilla war. They were even already organised in unions and federations, and could count on the militant experience of hundreds of ex-tin miners who had arrived in the region looking for a better life and were determined not to lose their main source of income for the second time, as we will see later on in this article. However, against all–academic or activist–predictions, the *cocaleros* of the Chapare opted for a different, more reformist, strategy: that of forming a political party and competing in the elections, first for local and then for state power. In what follows, I will try to analyse how that happened. But before doing so, I will elaborate on what the relevant theory suggests with regards to the political strategies of movements and how they are formed.

Goodwin (2001: 10) defines movements that 'advance exclusive, competing claim to control of the state or some segment of it' as revolutionary social movements, or–simply put–revolutionary movements. He draws his definition from Tilly's (1994: 134) definition of *revolutionary situations*

which are characterised , among other things, by the appearance of such contenders or coalitions of contenders. This article argues that, while the concept of revolutionary social movements is useful in defining movements that target the control of the state or a segment of it, at the same time it can be confusing because those movements do not always have a revolutionary character, in the sense of changing the regime through revolutionary means or of implementing revolutionary, radical, social transformations within a given territory. The 'revolutionary route', as I call it, is just *one* of the strategic options available to movements and not the *only one*.

Social movements, have two options to choose from when it comes to their political strategies: Those that aim at *state-power* (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2005; Petras and Veltmeyer, 2009; Petras and Veltmeyer, 2011), and those that aim at emancipation (Holloway, 2002; Holloway, 2010). The former refer to gaining control over the state apparatus, 'the set of organisations involved in making and implementing binding collective decisions, if necessary by force.' (Rueschemeyer et al., 1992:6) That can be achieved either through participating in the elections and playing by the rules that have been set up by the state itself regarding the change of leadership (the parliamentary route), or through more revolutionary means: the taking of state/regional power in an 'irregular, extra-constituent, and/or violent fashion' (Goodwin, 2001:8). Now, if a social movement decides to opt for the *non-state power road*, that usually involves more prefigurative politics that revolve around autonomy and the construction of *new* institutional structures, and not just the taking of already existing ones (Holloway, 2002; Holloway, 2010; Zibechi, 2010; Zibechi, 2012; Dinerstein, 2014).

Deborah Yashar (2005) and Eduardo Silva (2009) have studied the social movements that led the cycles of protest of the last fifteen years in Latin America and brought several so-called progressive governments to power (Ecuador, Bolivia Argentina, Venezuela). They argue that all mentioned cases involved an opening of the political system and a rather reformist tendency that focused on electoral politics. Guillermo Trejo (2012), who focuses on Mexico, agrees that in an open political environment it is more probable for movements to opt for reformist political strategies, while more repressive regimes are more likely to cause more violent counter-reactions. These are important contributions that are in line with the Political Opportunities Structure (Tarrow, 1994; Kriesi, 2004; Goodwin and Jasper, 2004; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, 2001) and do, in fact, offer plausible explanations for the *timing* of mobilisation in the aforementioned countries, as well as the *form* it took. However, they do not explain the mechanisms through which the actual political strategies of the movements were formed, the options they considered, and why ones were preferred over others.

However, the choice of a specific political strategy is not necessarily an instinctive, *quasi* spontaneous reaction to external stimuli. In the case studied here, at least, it involved: a) an in-depth study of similar experiences, contemporary or historical, at home and abroad; b) an internal battle for

hegemony between the movement's intellectuals, and c) a long preparation of their grass roots, ensuring their discipline.

The rainy place

The Incas used to call it *Ancha Para*, 'the place where it rains a lot'. Despite being located at the geographical heart of Bolivia, *El Chapare* has always been a place of difficult access because of its dense tropical vegetation and lack of infrastructure. Administratively, it is part of the *Tropic of Cochabamba* which is comprised of the tropical zones of Carrasco, Chapare, and Tiraque, and was colonised rather late by the Bolivian state. The forced labor performed by the Paraguayan prisoners of the War of Chaco, a war fought between Bolivia and Paraguay between 1932-1935 over the control of the region of Chaco (Spedding, 2005; Albro, 2005; Grisaffi, 2013; Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2008), completed the road that would connect the rest of the country with San Antonio (modern-day Villa Tunari) in 1938. From that moment on, the two definitions of indigeneity and their bearers came into conflict in the Chapare: indigeneity in relation to the Bolivian state territory (as in the case of the Aymaras and Quechuas that colonised the Chapare) and indigeneity in relation to time and to the territory of the Chapare itself (as in the case of the Yuracaré and the Sirionó, who were indigenous *to the Chapare* when the Aymaras and Quechuas came to colonise them). The issue is discussed in detail by Canessa (2014). Migrants of diverse sociopolitical backgrounds started moving to the region, some to escape the haciendas of the lowlands and others simply in search of a better life that did not involve the tough conditions of the mining industry. They grew subsistence crops such as yucca and bananas, while coca was also produced in the region but could not be sold outside it as the absence of a road network hindered market access.

However, the colonisers of the Chapare did not arrive to an empty space: the region was populated by the indigenous *Yuracaré, Yuqui* and *Sirionó*, treated by their fellow indigenous *Aymaras and Quechuas* who migrated there as colonised populations. To do justice to the Yuracaré and the Sirionó, I use the term 'colonisers' instead of 'settlers' for the people who moved to the Chapare from the 1920s onwards. Years later, ex-leader of the Chimoré Federation Julio Suzaño would narrate to Sandra Ramos Salazar :

> There were the natives, as well as a spontaneous colonisation: (…) in what is Chimoré here, there was only a community of miners from Catavi that came here in ’47 or ’57 I think, right? They were very happy when we arrived because finally they saw people like them, because they were fighting against the natives, the *savages* [*barbaros* in the original text], now this ethnicity has been extinguished, the Sirionó, many cows died, they also killed savages, they were always taking, stealing and very few [*savages*] were left…(Salazar, 2012:38) -author’s translation)

In the 1950s there was general confusion in Bolivia over the origins of the *Yuqui* people, considered by some as being part of the Sirionó. Therefore, it is very possible that the interviewee in this excerpt is actually mistaking the Yuqui for the Sirionó. As Canessa (2014:160) underlines, in the 1950s and 1960s the citisens of Cochabamba lived in fear of those ‘wild Indians’.

On their return to their places of origin, the colonisers would recruit friends and relatives to follow them in the quest for a better life in the Chapare. The Bolivian state promised more assistance and some bridges were constructed in the late 1960s. Access to the main city and market of Villa Tunari developed gradually and the coca leaf found its trading point, becoming the only viable economic activity for the *Chapareños*. However, the state as an institution remained absent from the region and the locals were forced to self-organise in an autonomous manner in order to meet their social needs. They opted for the form of organisation they already knew from the Revolution of 1952 and some of them from their mining militancy even earlier: the *sindicato* (Union). The country's first *sindicatos* were formed by the Bolivian miners in the 1930s in an effort to create an organised resistance against the local oligarchy–known as *la rosca*–that controlled the tin industry. These unions, according to Postero (2010, 20), gradually became the main form of political and economic resistance and gained a reputation of independence from the ‘corrupt’ and ‘elite-controlled’ *party* (Stefanoni, cited in Postero, 2010). After the 1952 Revolution, the Bolivian state encouraged the *campesinos* (farmers) to join the *sindicatos*, in an effort to replace the previous land-owning structures, but also as a means of controlling and directing them towards a ‘state-led transformative project’, as Hesketh (2014: 157) and Dunkerely (1984:74) argue. However, this top-down effort also gave birth to autonomous or semi-autonomous projects, especially in areas like the Chapare where the state had little or no presence. Ex-cocalero community-leader Leonardo Marca from Chipiriri narrated to this author:

> We were abandoned. The *compañeros* had to self-organise. Nothing can be done individually, but when we are organised, yes we can. The *organisation* was doing things better than the state. In the *sindicato* they opened up streets with their own hands, they made their own

> schools. In the assembly, they evaluated their own living conditions. There were 10 or 15 members in the Directorate of the *Sindicato*, there is, for example, a Secretary of Health whose obligation is to check, if there are many sick people, whether there is a septic well, because sickness derives from that. Later on, from ’86 onwards, there were Health promoters... (Intervew with L.Marca)

From the very beginning, the *sindicato* became the main civil authority in the region administering the *de facto* autonomy of the *Chapareños* (Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2008: 190; Healy, 1991: 89). It was responsible for parcelling the land, resolving local disputes, and administrating the emerging coca trade. Affiliated members (*afiliados*) were obliged to pay a monthly fee of 5 pesos and participate in the communal works (roads, bridges, schools, clinics). In addition, they had to comply with the decisions of the *sindicato*. Thus, as Leonardo Marca narrates, the *sindicato* became the main provider of social services in the region, fully replacing the state in terms of authority and social provision. It also acted as a communication channel between the state and the *Chapareños*, since–from the 1970s onwards–it was responsible for the registration of the land parcels with the National Agrarian Reform Service, tax collection, and establishing transportation fees (Spedding, 2005; Grisaffi, 2013; Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2008). To this day, these duties are still performed by the *sindicatos* in the Chapare (Grisaffi, 2013). A number of *sindicatos* would form a *central*, a number of *centrales* a federation, and all Six federations of the Chapare were coordinated by the *Coordinadora de las Seis Federaciones del Trópico de Cochabamba* (Coordinating Body of the Six Federations of the Tropic; from here onwards, *la Coordinadora*). The *sindicato* had a centralised structure and a predominantly male leadership (Farthing and Kohl, 2010) at least until 1995 when the first female *sindicatos* were formed. Therefore, in the absence of state structures, the sindicato became the local community decision-making body, the federation became the ‘municipality,’ and the *Coordinadora* of the Six Federations the ‘government.’ It could be argued that the Chapare was like a ‘colony’ that maintained loose but rather regular relations with the ‘metropolis’, managing to remain autonomous; however, it maintained its link to the metropolis as a means of legitimisation, both outside and inside the domestic sphere. In fact, the *sindicatos* of the Chapare never broke their ‘unofficial pact’ with the state until the state itself violated their relative autonomy in 1988 with Law 1008.

Law 1008 and the Miners

From the author’s point of view, two developments account for the radicalisation of the *cocaleros* of the Six Federations of the Tropic of Cochabamba:

a) Law 1008, which largely criminalised the region's main economic activity, and
b) The massive arrival of miners who had lost their jobs due to the closure of the tin mines after 1985.

In 1988, the government of Victor Paz Estenssoro (MNR-Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario-National Revolutionary Movement) approved Law 1008 (Ley del Régimen de la Coca y Sustancias Controladas- Law of Regulation of Coca and Controlled Substances**)**, which is known as *la ley mil ocho* . It opened up 'Pandora's box for the country's coca producers' (Oikonomakis and Espinoza 2014). Kathryn Ledebur argues that Law 1008 was a product of long-term pressure exerted by the U.S. Embassy, and its passing was a prerequisite for the release of economic assistance to Bolivia, until then withheld (2005: 151). In an effort to regulate coca production, from that moment on its cultivation would be legal only in areas defined by the law as 'traditional'; all others would be considered 'illegal'. 'Illegal' zones were sub-divided into '*zonas de producción excedentaria en transición'* (zones of surplus production in transition), where coca cultivation would be gradually replaced by other crops with the assistance of the state, and '*zonas de producción ilícita'* (zones of illicit production), where coca bushes would be simply uprooted without any kind of compensation (Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2008). The Chapare (with the exception of Yungas Vandiola) belonged to the last category, and Law 1008 practically marks the breaking of the silent pact that the *cocaleros* of the Chapare and the Bolivian state had held until then, according to which the *sindicatos* would maintain the order and pay taxes to the government and the government would let them run their affairs autonomously. Of course, national and local elections were normally conducted; however, elected authorities would carefully stay away from the harsh conditions of the region and from challenging the authority of the *sindicatos*. Feliciano Mamani, the mayor of Villa Tunari in 2014, when the interview was conducted, remembers that the locals did not even know what their 'elected authorities' looked like, as they would very rarely visit the region. From 1988 onwards, however, the state would have a face for the *Chapareños*. And a uniform: that of the *leopardos.*

> The [only] presence the state had in the Chapare was in the form of the *leopardos*, of the police. Military police that fucked them over. And that was paid for by the *gringos*. *Y punto*! (Interview with Raquel Gutiérrez)

Law 1008 meant one thing for the majority of the Chapareños (except for those with property in Yungas Vandiola): forced erradication. The reference to the *gringos* has to do with the fact that–

according to the *cocaleros*–the war on drugs in the Chapare was led by the DEA, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

More or less in the same period, another process of crucial importance for the later developments in the Chapare was taking place in Bolivia: the closure of the tin mines. Following the collapse of the tin market, the backbone of the Bolivian economy at the time, the government invited Harvard professor Jeffrey Sachs to act as its advisor. Despite the fact that he did not even know where Bolivia was on the map, as he would later on admit, he came up with the infamous Decree 21060:

> First, the October 1985 collapse of tin prices was eating away at the budget and macroeconomic stability. The tin mines were no longer profitable. The mining sector was throwing the entire budget into a huge deficit. The Bolivians undertook a massive cutback on the tin-mining labour force, one that was shocking in scale and heartrending for those affected. Almost five sixths of the tin workers eventually lost their jobs (Sachs, 2005:99).

Among other structural adjustments, between 22.000 and 27.000 miners lost their jobs from the mines that the Revolution of 1952 had nationalised. Ironically enough, the very same President who had previously nationalised the tin mines, Victor Paz Estenssoro, would now be the one to close them down. Many of the miners moved to the Chapare and became *cocaleros* (Grisaffi, 2010; Albro, 2005; Dangl, 2007; Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2008; Spedding, 2005). And they were determined not to lose their livelihood for the second time.

The Road to the Burnt Palace

After 1988 things became very difficult for the *cocaleros* of the Six Federations. Their relative autonomy had been violated, their main livelihood was under threat, and their protests were met with state repression which was particularly brutal during the 1985-1989 period as shown in table 1 (Table 1).

At the same time, a substantial number of ex-miners had moved to the Chapare, in some cases collectively as entire unions. Ex-miner and veteran *cocalero* leader Darío Mendoza remembers that, when trying to find a name for their federation (now called Mamore/Bulo Bulo), the second most popular proposal was *Sangre Minera*, Miner's Blood (Oikonomakis and Espinoza, 2014: 293, Oikonomakis, 2019:154). The Chapare was in turmoil, the Six Federations had to decide what to do, and the option of guerrilla warfare was popular among *cocaleros* and miners alike. I am not arguing that the guerrilla was the most popular option at the time, nor do we know the exact grand plan that the guerrilla

represented: we don't know whether it was supposed to be limited within the territory of the Chapare, or whether it was envisioned as a wider revolutionary experience. We do know, however, that the idea was on the table, even if loosely conceptualised. Don Filemón Escóbar writes in his book *De la Revolucion al Pachakuti: el aprendizaje del aspecto reciproco entre blancos e indianos*:

> …the concept of the guerrilla was very popular with the cocaleros, young, mature, or old. They were all trained to fabricate *caza bobos [artisanal grenades]* including of course the women. (2008:179)

Furthermore, they had already formed self-defense committees (*comités de autodefensa*) and were feeling inspired by the Cuban revolution as well as by Zapatismo. Don Dario Mendoza continues:

> We were thinking of organising ourselves like in Cuba, armed struggle, and we would get together in every *sindicato* and we would plan (the armed struggle). (interview with F. Mamani)

Don Feliciano Mamani adds that there were also 'other national organisations' who were in contact and in agreement with the *cocaleros* regarding the *via armada:*

> We would see Zapatismo and we would say: Why not here in Bolivia? …We will revolt ourselves or we will revolt at the national level. We were already in contact with other [national] organisations, we would say: we have to crush power through the *via armada*. (Interview with F.Mamani)

Of course, it was practically impossible that the Bolivians had even heard of the Zapatistas before 1994. However, Feliciano Mamani's interview indicates that, even when the *cocaleros* of the Six Federation had already formed their 'political instrument' (after 1995, that is) they had not completely abandoned the *guerrilla* option. Furthermore, it is not clear what 'other' organisations he is referring to. Nevertheless, we do know that members of the *Ejército Guerrillero Túpac Katari* were also involved in the formation of the *autodefensas* (Linera and Gutiérrez Aguilar, 1999). Stewart Prest also argues–based on interviews he conducted in the Chapare–that not only had the EGTP started training cells in the Chapare in the late 80s-early 90s, but also that Evo Morales was informed and at least consented to their presence there:

> *Q: Did you have some connection with Don Evo at the time?*
> *CL: Yes, but only as a guarantee, I mean, he actually made contact with us.*
> *Q: Was there any discussion of a grand strategy?*
> *CL: Well, yes, at a very global level, that armed struggle ought to be initiated. Overall, in general terms of armed struggle and the discussion of what work we had implemented, and his acceptance [of that] on his part. Fundamentally [there was] endorsement, acceptance, because without that acceptance we could have been denounced immediately. We would definitely have had the coca* compañeros *against us, or they could have treated us as drug-trafficking groups… they could have tipped an UMOPAR in that zone looking for narcos.* (Prest, 2015:189)

This is one side of the battle for ideological hegemony that was taking place in the Chapare at the time, involving the cocaleros as well as other organisations and intellectuals of the wider Bolivian left: the side of the *via armada*. The other side, that of the *via parlamentaria*, is represented more than anyone by Don Filemón Escóbar, *El Viejo Filippo (Old Philip,* his pseudonym*)* of the Bolivian Left. Filemón Escóbar, a veteran Trotskyist miner and unionist, arrived at the Chapare as a cultural advisor on behalf of the COB (*Central Obrera Boliviana-Bolivian Workers' Central*), the biggest Worker's Union in Bolivia, and offered his services to the *cocaleros*. Between 1984 and 2004, together with other political instructors such as Alex Contreras, Oscar Coca, and David and Germán Choquehuanca, he organised more than 600 seminars and workshops in all Six Federations, as well as in numerous *centrales* and *sindicatos* of the Chapare. In his own words:

> In the seminars, we emphasised that to continue to vote for the neoliberal parties was to vote for the annihilation of our mother organisations. Voting for the neoliberals was the best service we could do to imperialism, to the IMF, and to the World Bank
>
> […] Our seminars were spread all over Bolivia. Our main work was to give seminars… We turned concentrations into seminars for thousands of *compañeros*. Through this consistent and permanent work we forged the political instrument. (Escóbar, 2008: 191-2- author's translation)

According to Pablo Stefanoni (2010, 147) it was through this path (the influence of Escóbar and Choquehuanca) that the ethnic/culturalist discourse reached Evo Morales, who was until then influenced more by the revolutionary syndicalist tradition of the '50s and whose worldview was restricted to the *campesino* demands.

The aim of the seminars was to persuade the *Chapareños* of the historical importance of intervening in the elections and to overturn the guerrilla tendencies that were growing in the *Trópico* (F. Escóbar, 2008: 187). To attain that goal, he would first have to a) discredit the historical examples used by the promoters of armed struggle to appeal to the *cocaleros*, and b) find his own tangible examples of electoral participation that would be, if not more, at least equally inspiring. To deter them from turning to armed struggle, he would talk to them about two failed attempts at armed struggle that had taken place in Bolivia in earlier times: that of *Che* in 1967, which had led to his death, and that of Teoponte, who had aspired to taking up the mantle after Che in 1970, once again without much success. To persuade them in favor of his own preferred political strategy, he spoke of the experience of the *Bloque Parlamentario Minero* (Miner's Parliamentary Block-BMP).

The BMP was the product of a historic decision of the FSTMB (*Federacion Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros*, Syndical Federation of Miners), the biggest mining trade union in the country, to participate in the elections of 1947 with its own 'parliamentary brigade'. The miners of the BMP were candidates under the alliance of two parties, the MNR (*Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario*, National Revolutionary Movement) and the Troskyist POR (*Partido Obrero Revolucionario*, Revolutionary Labor Party), and managed to get twelve deputies and two senators elected, being particularly successful in the cities of Oruro and Potosi. This was an enormous success, firstly because it took place in the country's two major economic centers at the time, and secondly because it occured before the introduction of universal suffrage in Bolivia, implemented after the 1952 Revolution. The idea was to create a *dual power* situation in which BMP deputies would facilitate grassroots pressure for change through their participation in the country's governing institutions. The BMP was short-lived: it was expelled from Parliament two years later. However, its parliamentary experience persuaded Don Filemón that the road to social change could also pass through Parliament. It became a reference point in his seminars in the Chapare 30 years later and he managed to persuade the *cocaleros* using the BPM as a tangible example. It is interesting to note here that Juan Lechín also acted as a paid professional advisor to the *cocalero* Federations in the late '80s -early '90s, according to Healy (1991: 101). He was one of the BPM senators elected in 1947, winning more than 2000 votes in Oruro. . Years later, president of the IPSP of the *Federación Carrasco Tropical* Hilarión Gonzales would tell Durand Ochoa :

> First, we would no longer divide our votes among different parties. We would vote as one unit. Second, we would not give our votes away. We would form our own party and vote for ourselves. *We would do what the miners had not been able to do*. (2014: 160)

In 1994, taking advantage of the Popular Participation Law (Kohl, 2003) that gave extended budgetary and planning capacity to Bolivia's local municipalities (20 percent of the national budget instead of the previous 10 percent), the *cocalero* movement went on to co-found the political instrument IPSP (*Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos*, Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the People) together with other organisations of the indigenous-*campesino* movement of Bolivia, as agreed in the VI Congress of the CSUTCB (*Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia*, United Union Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia). A year later, in the Congress 'Land, Territory and Political Instrument' that took place–ironically enough–in Santa Cruz, stronghold of the Bolivian elites, the CSUTCB, the Federation of Peasant Women of Bolivia Bartolina Sisa (FNMCB-BS), the Syndical Confederation of Bolivian Colonisers (CSCB), and the Indigenous Central of the Bolivian East (CIDOB) established the *Asamblea de los Pueblos* (People's Assembly, ASP) that would later on become the MAS-ISP. After Evo Morales was appointed chairman of the Six Federations in 1996, the *cocalero* part of the CSUTCB began to fight for the leadership of the political instrument, and eventually won it, partly by virtue of its electoral success in the municipal and national elections of 1995 and 1997, especially in the Chapare. In the 1995 municipal elections the ASP (under the banner of the Izquierda Unida- IU) managed to get 10 mayors and 49 local councilors elected in Chapare, and in the national elections of 1997 it obtained 16.5 percent of the vote in Cochabamba and elected four deputies ,amongst which Evo Morales Ayma, with 70 percent of the votes in Chapare and Carrasco, becoming the most voted deputy in the Congress. However, it should be noted that, according to Durand Ochoa (2012, 161), the decision to create a political instrument had already been made by the CSUTCB in 1992, long before the introduction of the Popular Participation Law. Pablo Stefanoni (2010) also emphasises the fact that the plan to create a political instrument was being discussed by the Bolivian *campesino* movement at least since 1988. And, as we have already seen in this article, Don Filemón Escóbar and other political instructors had already been giving seminars in the Chapare in favour of the creation of a political party since 1984 (F. Escóbar, 2008: 201). Another interesting question is why the *cocaleros* decided to trust people like Filemón Escóbar regarding their political strategising. It is my opinion that this occurred because Don Filemón, apart from being a well-respected and charismatic intellectual of the Bolivian left, was also an ex-miner, like many of the *cocaleros* of the Chapare; he was one of their own, and this granted him even greater legitimacy. And, at the end of the day, he was trusted by the *Coordinadora* and by Evo Morales himself.

In 2009 Moira Zuazo (2009) interviewed 85 MAS deputies and senators using a structured questionnaire in order to trace back the birth of the MAS. A big number of those interviewed had joined the MAS *after* its formation; however, a couple of the interviewees, including Wilber Flores Torres and

Gustavo Torrico, were involved in the creation of the political instrument from the moment it was conceived. They trace this back to 1992, that is, *before* the introduction of the LPP. What is also surprising is that **none** of Zuazo's interviewees identifies the LPP as the instigator behind the creation of the political instrument, even though some of them identify it as 'influential' in their personal political development. Therefore, our evidence points towards the fact that the conception of the political instrument of the *cocaleros* (and the *campesino*s in general) was conceived long before the introduction of LPP.

Just like other revolutionary movements , the Six Federations of the Tropic of Cochabamba had already worked significantly on the ideological preparation of their constituencies **before** taking advantage of the political opportunity that appeared in 1994. In fact, it could be argued that it was exactly because of their long preparation that they were able to take advantage of the LPP in a meaningful, organised way and not in an instinctive, *quasi* opportunistic one.

However, it appears that many in the Chapare, including Evo Morales himself, saw the electoral struggle as a tactic, not a strategy. ' Under the poncho we held the electoral card in one hand and the *fusil* (gun) in the other': this was the dominant idea among the cocaleros at the time, even after the first electoral success of their political instrument, the ASP (Asamblea de los Pueblos), in 1995. Evo himself was persuaded that, as they had not managed to stop the eradication of coca, not even through electoral success, they should continue working with the self-defense units 'that would be the core of our future *guerrilla* movement' (F. Escóbar, 2008: 202). Only after the huge success of the 1997 elections that brought Evo to Parliament as a deputy did the guerrilla tendencies start to lose ground and the electoral road begin to gain more and more supporters (Stefanoni,2010: 147). The battle for ideological hegemony within the Six Federations had been won. Eventually, the preferred political strategy of the *cocaleros* of the Six Federations would lead them to the government seat, the Burnt Palace as they call in Bolivia the Government Palace because it was burnt almost to the ground during a 1875 uprising; however, that process is beyond the scope of this paperwhich focuses on the mechanisms through which they chose their political strategy and not on its subsequent execution. For a detailed analysis of that process see Oikonomakis and Espinoza (2014), and Gutiérrez Aguilar, (2008).

Conclusion

In the case of the Six Federation of the Tropic of Cochabamba and their choice of political strategies, two questions can be raised:

1) How and through what mechanisms did they initially choose what political strategy to follow when they first arrived in the region?
2) When the time came for them to change political strategy, how and through what mechanisms did they do so?

When the first *colonizadores* moved to the Chapare, an unknown and inhospitable land, they had to decide on how to deal with the new situation. It seems that necessity–given the absence of the Bolivian state in the region–made them self-organise in a *de facto* autonomous manner, and opt for the *sindicato* as the organisational form through which they would administer their daily social and political life. The choice was not a random one. The *sindicato*, unlike the party, already enjoyed a kind of ideological hegemony among the Bolivian working class and was considered to be less corrupt and not–yet–an instrument of the political ruling elite. In addition, after the Revolution of 1952 the state itself actively promoted the formation of agricultural *sindicatos*; this might have been an additional incentive for the (neo)Chapareños who, at least at the beginning, hoped for some kind of governmental assistance in their quest to colonise the Tropic. However, as this never happened, the *sindicatos* administered all social and political affairs in the Chapare in a practically autonomous manner at least until 1988. To sum up, when the Chapareños had to choose their political strategy, two mechanisms were set in motion: a) necessity, and b) the activation of a historical and contemporary example, that of the *sindicato*, which they already knew and believed in, and which enjoyed some kind of ideological hegemony among the Bolivian working class. After 1952, the fact that the state itself was promoting the creation of *sindicatos* all over the country became an additional incentive, but not necessarily the principal one.

Now, when it comes to the change of political strategy of the *cocaleros*, it seems that things played out in a similar fashion. First, there was necessity: previous conditions had changed, the relative autonomy of the Six Federations in the Chapare had been violated by Law 1008 and by the arrival of the police and military forces in the region, and the *Chapareños* had to react. The first reaction was 'institutional' and 'systemic': protests and marches were met with violence and state repression. There were only two options left as the *Chapareños* perceived it: *guerrilla* warfare and elections (or a combination of both). It seems that several leftist political forces in the country somehow got involved with the Six Federations and tried to influence them politically at the time–old trade unionists and people like Filemón Escóbar favoring the electoral route, several parties of the Left in search of votes (Healy, 1991)–while apparently even the guerrilla group EGTK (Ejercito Guerrillero Tupak Katari-Tupak Katari Rebel Army) got involved in the formation of the first self-defense units. Therefore, there was an ongoing battle for ideological hegemony within the Six Federations even before the introduction of Law 1008, as Don Filemón Escóbar points out. The cocaleros themselves seem to have been favoring

the *via armada*, not only since 1988, but even after their first electoral victories in the Chapare. It is not clear how far they were willing to go; what we do know is that the idea was certainly on the table. However, they finally opted for electoral participation. It is assumed that the new electoral law granting a bigger share of the budget and more responsibilities to the local authorities played a crucial role in the final choice of the *cocaleros*. The chronological order of the events also points towards that direction. However, under closer examination it seems that the decision to form a political instrument was already being advocated within the *cocalero* movement long before the introduction of the Law . Therefore, this author argues that the LPP was an additional factor that might explain the *timing* of the execution of the strategy, but not the mechanism behind its formation. What seems to be particularly important in the process of the selection of political strategy by the *cocaleros* is their use of historical or contemporary examples, national or international. When opting for the *via armada*, the *cocaleros* drew inspiration from the Zapatistas or the Cuban Revolution for example, while those who favored the electoral route were inspired by the experience of the *Bloque Parlamentario Minero*. Of course, in the battle for ideological hegemony within the movement, the persuasion of the grass roots on the viability of one or other historical or contemporary example necessarily involved discrediting the opponent's preferred examples. The failed guerrilla experience of Che Guevarra in Bolivia was used in that direction. In addition, there was a long political preparation of the grass roots that took the form of intensive seminars .

The case of the Six Federations of the Tropic of Cochabamba and their choice (and change) of political strategy seems to pose a challenge to the Political Opportunities Structure. While, according to the theory, there was a lack of political opportunities in the Chapare and state repression was relatively high, the *cocaleros* did not opt for a guerrilla war but chose to take the electoral path instead. In addition, it seems that processes and mechanisms internal to the movement–and not external to it–played the most crucial role within the process of selection of its political strategy. Therefore, while structural factors should by no means be ignored, more emphasis should be placed on mechanisms that are internal to the movements when discussing the formation of their political strategies.The lessons we draw from the *cocalero* experience is that the latter are not a *quasi* instinctive reaction to the opening up or closing of political opportunities, but that a more complex, long-term, internal process is involved that should not be underestimated.

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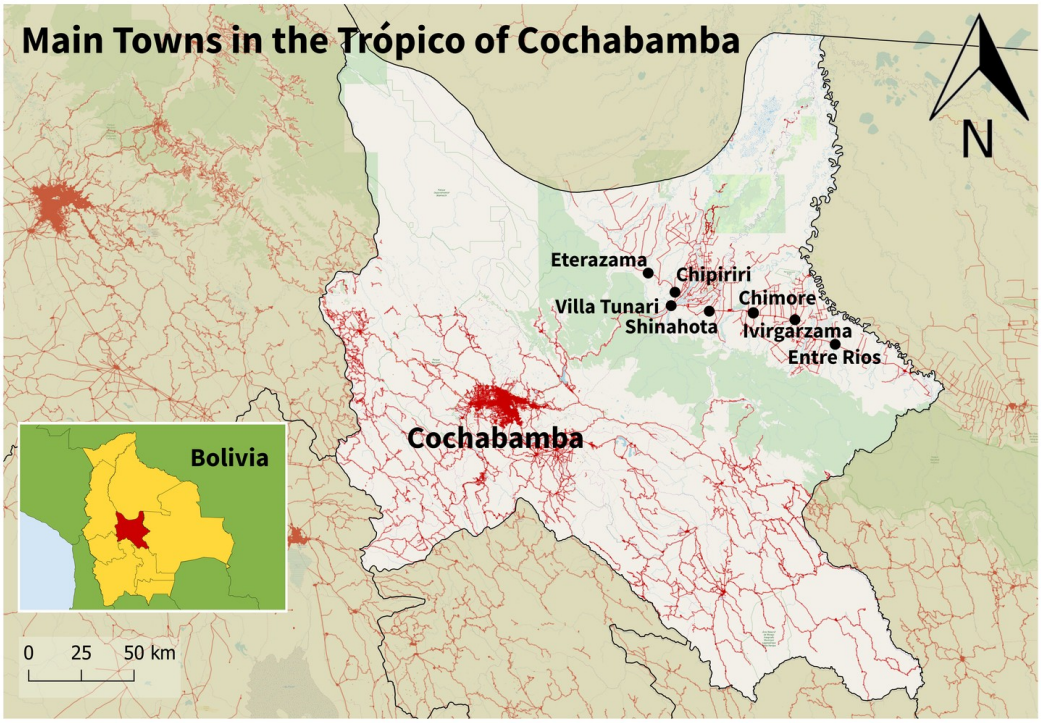
Figure 1: Main Towns in the Trópico of Cochabamba.



Source: Created on QGIS by the author

Table 1: Repression in the Chapare (1980-2004)

Year	Deaths	Injuries	Tortures	Detentions	Rapes
1980-1982	1	0	0	0	2
1982-1985	3	0	0	0	2
1985-1989	22	32	0	603	3
1989-1993	2	10	22	70	1
1993-1997	16	158	4	2184	3
1997-2001	23	132	23	955	2
2001-2002	13	50	60	128	0
2002-2003	12	51	12	158	0
2003-2004	3	13	0	36	0
Total	95	446	121	4134	13

Source: Combined data extracted from Salazar Ortuño et al. (2008)