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Chapter 1: *Rhythms of the Pachakuti*, Duke University Press 2014

<https://www.dukeupress.edu/Rhythms-of-the-Pachakuti/>

<CT>The Coalition for the Defense of Water and Life

<CST>The Massive Public Defiance of State Order

<P1>In this chapter I will present a version of how the event known as the Water War occurred in Bolivia. I will also explain Cochabamba's regional political organization known as the Coalition for the Defense of Water and Life (Coordinadora de la Defensa del Agua y de la Vida), also called La Coordinadora, which is how I will refer to it here. The Water War marks the beginning of the Bolivian people's struggle to regain social agency against the plundering of public resources, and it is a key event in the struggle to recover common property, which exists beyond the state. Therefore, I will begin here.

<A>La Coordinadora and the Water War

<P1>La Coordinadora was established on November 12, 1999, in a meeting convened by the Departmental Federation of Irrigation Farmer Organizations (FEDECOR) from Cochabamba. This association's members are locally known as *regantes*, farmers with irrigation rights. The meeting was held at the headquarters of the Federation of Industrialists of Cochabamba, which includes participation from different professionals and engineers in the region, members of the Bar Association and Engineering Association, as well as environmentalists. Two items brought them together. The first was the scandalous contract that conceded the service of water and sewer systems in the city of Cochabamba and the surrounding area to the Aguas del Tunari consortium,

which was a local subsidiary of the Bechtel transnational corporation. The second was the passage of Law 2029 for Water and Sewer. This law established the regulatory framework to seize water systems management from local and municipal control in order to transfer it to private hands and regulate it top-down from a state structure known as the Water Superintendency.¹

Three sectors were represented there: peasant farmers dependent on irrigation, industrialists, and environmentalists. Each sector had its own history of defending water rights and collective—community and labor—rights, and they had all been critical of liberal state mechanisms for seizing and privatizing resources that had once been public. La Coordinadora was thus established as a space for coordination and struggle. Its purpose was to prevent the seizure of water, understood as a public resource and managed independently by farmers who used it for irrigation, and privatization of the water supply system for the distribution of drinking water, which had always been under municipal control. La Coordinadora also opposed the new legal frameworks that regulated water through concessions granted by a top-down, unmanageable state entity: the Water Superintendency.

Therefore, since its inception, La Coordinadora constituted a space to bring diverse people together. Faced with certain governmental decisions, these people were forced to join forces to defend water, a basic shared necessity. Given that each of the affected sectors suffered the aggression differently, they each understood the threat of Law 2029 and the concession of control and distribution of drinking water in a different way. However, founding La Coordinadora opened up a space for planning *par excellence*. First, they managed to define as a group the unique way in which each sector was affected by what the government was imposing. Second, they viewed the way that each sector endured this state imposition as nothing more than

a particular manifestation of the pervasive aggression directed at all of them and at society in general.² From this “basic consensus,” La Coordinadora, *as a group*, managed to develop a way to overcome the aggression it faced. This was La Coordinadora’s most important contribution to the legacy of Bolivia’s recent struggle.

Let’s review briefly La Coordinadora’s three sectors and each one’s contribution, as this will help us answer who constituted La Coordinadora. I think this question presents a better method for an in-depth understanding of the event’s social meaning, rather than the question “*what is* La Coordinadora”; however, this is not meant to negate the validity of the other approach for studying social reality in certain contexts.

The Irrigators Organized in FEDECOR

<P1>La Coordinadora’s principal social force, since its inception during the Water War and for several years thereafter, was the peasant irrigators from the four areas that comprise the Department of Cochabamba’s interandean valley region.³

The irrigators were members of FEDECOR since 1997, belonging to organizations to defend and manage water for irrigation since 1992. They represent the vast majority of men and women in Cochabamba’s valleys who live and work within a community framework largely defined by domestic units.

In Cochabamba’s valleys there exists a local ancestral knowledge for using, managing, and protecting water. It is based on a complex and varied mosaic of “uses and customs” primarily founded on the autonomy to regulate water usage according to complicated supra-community agreements. Generated in meetings, these agreements are obligatory for anyone who depends on and who has rights to use a common water source. Omar Fernández and Carmen

Peredo, important protagonists for the defense of water, affirm the following in relation to “the types of water rights”: “The irrigators established various types of water rights, reflected in the different relationships surrounding access to it and its use. In the same way, within each irrigation system, the irrigators have a process of defining and consolidating their water rights over time. Each irrigating family has rights to water, expressed in water ‘rotations,’ or regular access to water on a predetermined schedule. The requirements are defined based on the characteristics of the rights” (Peredo, Crespo, and Fernández 2001, 12).

Since approximately 1990, the Bolivian State, some NGOs and certain “development assistance” corporations, such as the German GTZ, began an extensive evaluation of the Cochabamba valley’s hydraulic resources. They were essentially promoting “projects for the modernization of irrigation systems.” These are designed top-down, following a technocratic rationality. Examples of this are the Inter-valley Irrigation Program sponsored by the departmental government and backed with German funding. It planned to consolidate an irrigation system in Totora Kocha, a reservoir-lake in the Cordillera Tiraque mountains. Another was the Laka Laka Irrigation System, whose water source is the Calicanto River (Peredo, Crespo, and Fernández 2001, 14). The farmers from the valley region accepted the construction, expansion, and maintenance of the irrigation systems. However, from the beginning, their particular form of water resource management, based on ancient Andean practices of land and water use under communal control, clashed with modern administrative logic.

At the same time, due to Cochabamba’s urban growth, the authorities sought a corresponding expansion of the water supply for urban use. Their intended use for the water, which is very scarce in the region, sparked conflict between various levels of government

bureaucrats and agrarian users of water sources in the nearby valleys. Omar Fernández explains it as follows:

<EXT>We irrigators did not have a formal organization. Well, you could say that there were informal organizations, but they were not even part of the peasant union. They existed with their own uses and customs, with their own distribution, etc. But they had not managed to come together. So, I was with the irrigators from Tiquipaya, and we asked ourselves: why can't we work together? Besides, laws started appearing since about 1985, and we noticed that those laws were beginning to affect us. For that and other reasons, we joined forces. Another strong motivation to come together has been that the city of Cochabamba has planned to drill wells in our communities to take water to Cochabamba, drinkable water, and this has also caused the overexploitation of underground water sources, leading to environmental damage. In many of our communities, the first thing that has happened is that they have lost their natural springs. For us, the springs are the water's eyes emerging from the land. There were irrigation systems flowing from those springs as well. But with what they have done making wells, those water's eyes have dried up and the humidity has also dropped. . . . That was the first impact on us. (qtd. in Ceceña 2002, 52)</EXT>

Regarding the organization of FEDECOR, Omar Fernández suggests the following: “After the Agrarian Reform (1953), the peasants' water usage respected the Andean systems of *mitas* and *suyus*.”⁴ Relationships of reciprocity and fairness were widespread, including communitarian work in the reservoirs or for improving irrigation systems defined according to *mitas* or *suyus*. This process generated organizations of irrigators who work under an organic structure; the

community assembly is the final authority. They were autonomous and followed a path toward consolidation, finally arriving at a matrix organization: the Departmental Federation of Irrigation Farmer Organizations (FEDECOR)” (Peredo, Crespo, and Fernández 2001, 18; and explanations from Omar Fernández during the period of the Water War).

Primarily an agrarian water management organization, FEDECOR had dedicated eight years between 1992 and 2000 to reconstructing ancient communitarian practices for water management. It also provided information about these practices, simultaneously giving them “legal existence” and a modern “name”: the Irrigators’ Federation, with legal status.⁵ In its statutes, agreed upon in 1997, FEDECOR established itself as “the matrix organization for all the systems and irrigation organizations in the Cochabamba valleys whose principal purpose is the integral management of water resources through uses and customs.” According to Carmen Peredo, this means “respect for natural authorities, for the communitarian way of solving problems of access to water or to improving its infrastructure, respect for water rights and distribution” (Peredo, Crespo, and Fernández 2001, 57). Therefore, at least since 1997, which is three years before the Water War, FEDECOR had become an official voice in the departmental and national government for questions and problems related to water, hydraulic projects, irrigation systems, and the like. Moreover, since that time, two important FEDECOR leaders, Omar Fernández and Carmen Peredo, were systematically studying the traditional system of water usage. Omar Fernández presented “The Relationship between Land and Water in Tiquipaya’s Peasant Economy” as his thesis for graduation at the Universidad Mayor de San Simón (UMSS), the regional public institution of higher education. In 2000 Peredo also presented a law thesis at UMSS titled “Rules Proposal for the Applicability of Law 2066 Based on Uses and Customs.” In

other words, by the year 2000, FEDECOR had already accumulated extensive organizational and investigative efforts.

Furthermore, the irrigators also led at least three great mobilizations in the period immediately prior to the Water War:

<NL>1) On August 21, 1998, with a gathering of nearly twenty thousand irrigators, and coinciding with a coca farmers' protest that included Evo Morales's participation, the irrigators presented Cochabamba's parliament with a "legal proposal for regulating water according to its uses and customs."

2) At the end of 1998, the so-called Well War occurred when inhabitants of the central valley refused to allow the Municipal Service for Drinking Water Company (SEMAPA) to drill a series of deep wells, which opened a space for negotiation.

3) Finally, on November 4, 1999, roads were blocked for twenty-four hours in the area around Vinto and toward Sacaba. The army intervened militarily in the roadblock, meeting with resistance from the irrigators. Specifically after that roadblock on November 4 and the repression that followed, La Coordinadora was founded on the twelfth of that same month. (Interview with Omar Fernández in Ceceña 2002, 58 and ss).</NL>

The Cochabamba Federation of Factory Workers

<P1>While the irrigation farmers constituted the principal force behind La Coordinadora in terms of organization, capacity for mobilization, and knowledge of the water issue, Oscar Olivera and the Cochabamba Federation of Factory Workers (FTFC)—known simply as the Factory Workers (Los Fabriles)—contributed their own resources. This included contacts with

the press and intellectual media, their ability to present problems publicly, and their widespread moral authority.

The FTFC, affiliated with the General Confederation of Factory Workers of Bolivia and the Workers' Central of the Department of Cochabamba, and incorporated as such into the Bolivian Workers' Central, was an anomaly within Bolivia's classic union framework at the end of the twentieth century. As in all parts of the world, neoliberal reforms inflicted a systematic attack on labor rights that dramatically weakened traditional union structures (see Gutiérrez Aguilar 1998; García Linera 1999). However, in Cochabamba, a small-scale organization had received increasing attention at least since 1997. This was the FTFC and in particular their executive secretary Oscar Olivera.

Several years prior to 2000, Oscar Olivera began a process of visualizing, organizing, and denouncing precarious work, the so-called labor flexibilization and the anomalous forms of subcontracting that are common in a large number of work centers. Above all, this made it possible for him to erode the liberal discourse of "modernization" and "progress" associated with neoliberal reforms and the sudden loss of collective bargaining and labor rights. Based on a network of efforts with intellectuals and youth, the FTFC created the Group of Work and Support for Cochabamba Factory Workers, which was dedicated to studying and systematizing work conditions in the region's factories and shops. Olivera, for his part as a union leader, invited the press to make "surprise visits" to shops and factories where serious violations to workers' rights had been documented. In this way he denounced the most extraordinary abuses. All these efforts aimed at exploring labor conditions under the neoliberal order gave Olivera insight into the concrete forms of family, artisan, and organized labor in small shops. These three forms of labor constituted the majority of the workforce in the region at a time when factories were being

drained by layoffs and irregular contracting, which, for that very reason, caused the union structures to lose their bargaining power with the state.

Throughout 1998 and 1999, Olivera held regular press conferences on the deplorable working conditions faced by the population, publically denouncing the worst labor rights violations. These press conferences made him a critical, known, and credible expert on “the effects” of neoliberalism in Bolivia. At the same time, they afforded the factory workers a much more precise understanding of what was happening in society in general, such as the plundering and looting that took a toll on the entire population in various ways.

Furthermore, for three decades the FTFC controlled certain material resources, which were put at the disposal of the mobilized population during the Water War. They included a union headquarters in the city’s main plaza, where La Coordinadora would work for years; a factory workers’ sport complex, where various open meetings took place in an actual stadium; and another group of properties that were put at the disposal of different sectors of the population—whether they were unionized factory workers or not—who were fighting in the struggle to defend water. This fact, occurring from the year 2000 onward, marked true innovation in union behavior, as it went against general procedures for workers who, following labor-union standards, only utilize assets at their disposal to defend their own members. The FTFC opened its spaces so that the “simple and hard-working” population as a whole, with or without a formal contract, affiliated with a union or not, could have access to them. Oscar Olivera affirms the following:

<EXT>Organically, the working class has been completely debilitated in many parts of the world—and particularly in Latin America. There are fewer and fewer

workers organized in labor unions. More than an organic participation of factory workers going out into the street and blocking roads to protest along with other sectors, our contribution has been as a reference. . . . The Coalition for the Defense of Water and Life is an organization that *is a kind of citizen's union*. It brings together various social sectors, both from the city as well as from rural areas. It differs from traditional unions because, although it is similar to a traditional labor union, it is more expansive to include the entire society. (Ceceña 2002, 68; emphasis added)</EXT>

Thus, in effect, La Coordinadora's office, its meeting spaces, telephone, the factory workers' auditorium, and its "sports complex" were put at the disposal of Cochabamba's mobilized population. This afforded a very solid material backing for the type of "citizen's union" that Olivera mentioned. All those resources contributed in an important way to unite the growing social energy from the rural areas horizontally with the existing unease in the city. This unification occurred during numerous meetings and rallies convened by La Coordinadora.

On the other hand, Oscar Olivera lives in a neighborhood on the western end of the city of Cochabamba that is not connected to the central water distribution network. He and his neighbors receive water in their homes from a collective, independent system. The residents contributed to the drilling of a well that provides drinking water, and that well is managed locally. In other words, Olivera and his family, just as many other factory workers, union leaders, and residents of Cochabamba's suburban areas, were not simply aware of the existence of various independent drinking water networks throughout the city, but they were members of them and had participated in them.

With that experience, having accrued vast prestige, and thanks to an extensive network of relationships with the press and with intellectual and labor union sectors, Olivera and the factory workers reacted to Cochabamba's water problem during the second half of 1999. This included the concession contract from the water distribution company to the Bechtel transnational corporation and the risk that Law 2029 meant for the irrigation farmers and for the population in suburban areas. In that way, they became La Coordinadora's principal cornerstone.

The Environmental Defense Committees and the Professional Schools

<P1>Environmental activists from the region and some representatives of Cochabamba's regional professional schools also held an important place in the Coalition for the Defense of Water and Life. They contributed legitimacy, capacity for technical discussion, and influence among the middle class. Two environmental groups deserve particular mention: the Cochabamba Environmental Forum and the Committee for the Defense of Water. Formed in 1999 when the political elites began discussing the law for water privatization, both groups merged after learning that a contract had been signed with the Bechtel Corporation, under the name Aguas del Tunari, conceding control of the distribution of drinking water. Gabriel Herbas, an important leader in La Coordinadora, explains the situation:

<EXT>In 1999, we learned that the Cochabamba mayor's office had underwritten the contract with Aguas del Tunari. Since we connect environmental issues to water issues, we immediately understood the problem both in terms of the concession and the subsequent price increase. We began investigating . . . and in the month of July 1999, we published our first manifesto as the Committee for the Defense of Water. It included a series of partner entities, unions, civil engineering

associations, architects, economists, biochemists, and various others who used it to make their voices heard. We purposely convened all these sectors, which had been left out of the process for concession to Aguas del Tunari. Our effort was well received because it was organized by environmental organizations rather than political parties. (Qtd. in Ceceña 2002, 30)</EXT>

These organizations were very important in the months leading up to the Water War. They carried out several media campaigns, organized forums and conferences, and published articles in newspapers explaining Law 2029 in detail and how, in that law, an article that privatized virtually all the water in the country was “secretly introduced” (Herbas qtd. in Ceceña 2002, 31). Similarly, in their public statements, the Committee for the Defense of Water’s technicians and intellectual leaders began educating the entire population. First, they explained the most obscure intricacies of the concession contract. Second, and perhaps most importantly in the long run, they explained the new state structure for regulating natural resources developed to limit the influence of the long-standing industry-based ministries and the implementation of the so-called *Superintendencias*, which were regulating authorities. This transformation of the state apparatus was presented during Sánchez de Lozada’s first government (1993–1997) as “modernization.” There was a consolidation of markets in Bolivia to produce and manage resources that had previously been public, such as electricity, hydrocarbons, mining, and water. In this sense the *Superintendencias*—energy, hydrocarbons, mining, and water—constituted the central bodies for regulating new markets for each of the aforementioned activities, which concentrated all decision-making power.

Public forums were held to explain and discuss all of this in 1999. This allowed Cochabamba’s population to clearly understand that the state had abandoned its traditional task

of responding to public demands—for example, the value of drinking water—in order to presumably define itself as a kind of intermediary in a market within which private companies would sell their services. Moreover, this information allowed the FTFC and its May 1st Union School to carry out extensive campaigns explaining the significance of so-called state modernization.

This alliance between intellectuals and academics disturbed by the liberal processes of state modernization and the concession of public resources to private companies generated information on various levels and from different directions. This spurred an intense political process that Cochabamba's society experienced over the following years. Virtually every neighborhood and location in the entire valley knew what a Superintendencia was doing—especially the one regulating water—and how they were planning to implement a “water market.” Of course, this was in addition to being informed of the abuses and secrets in the actual Cochabamba contract conceding water rights.

This group of professionals and experts contributed knowledge, technical skill, and specific critical elements that were used extensively within La Coordinadora. They sought to inform the population of what was happening and to debate expertly with the different governmental commissions that tried to negotiate ways out of the conflict during January and February 2000. Moreover, in the midst of these heterogeneous social processes to debate public matters, it became clear that the confrontation transcended breaking the contract for water concession. It required the modification of Law 2029 as well as important aspects of the recently created liberal state structure. It became evident that the underlying question consisted of the “social recovery of common assets” and that this linked it to a struggle both against and beyond

the corporative power of transnational corporations, as well as the Bolivian state and its regulations.

It is also worth mentioning that several of the most important experts at the beginning of the Water War very quickly abandoned that role. However, they left copious information and arguments to those who followed.⁶ As numerous local social leaders—of neighborhoods, unions, work centers, and so on—began to understand the content and progression of liberal transformations in the state apparatus, there was one question that most preoccupied the mobilized population: Who decides public matters? This challenged the power of the regulating authorities and, in general terms, liberal state logic. This aspect of the Water War marked an authentic political innovation in Bolivia at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It will merit a more detailed reflection later.

<A>The Sequence of the Water War and a Reflection on Subsequent Events

A Brief Synthesis of the Events of the Water War

<P1>The Water War was organized from the start as a systematic “assault” on Law 2029 and on the concession contract with Aguas del Tunari to deliver drinking water. That does not mean that the Water War was envisioned and designed for a special team to follow a set course to the letter; that could not be further from the truth. What is true is that, with a deep understanding of the control and water management problems provided by the peasant irrigators and with the meticulous study of the concession agreement undertaken by environmentalists, from January 2000 they worked collectively and openly to elaborate common objectives achievable through social mobilization. These objectives included reversing the concession contract and modifying Law 2029 in its most extreme points. This element formed the basis for the solid pact between

the city and rural zones during the course of the confrontation. Above all, that commitment, previously agreed to and discussed, outlined the choices that the spokespersons and representative leaders from La Coordinadora were making as the events unfolded. It is worth emphasizing here how important it was to establish clear autonomous objectives for the movement. A very broad spectrum of Cochabamba's population knew how the concession agreement for Cochabamba's water had been negotiated with Aguas del Tunari, and they understood the threats that it contained and what Law 2029 meant. This enabled the articulation of a flexible action plan to approach the conflict multilaterally. The rhythm of social mobilization and the tone of the action were generated during meetings. Furthermore, the objective, understood by all as a kind of prior agreement, defined the "us" that produced discussions and that led to La Coordinadora's communiqués and resolutions (see table 1.1).⁷

La Coordinadora's first protest was a roadblock from January 10 to January 14, 2000. It was put in place as negotiations began. After a tense meeting attended by hundreds of neighborhood residents and peasant irrigators, who acted as delegates representing their "roadblock points," the decision in favor of the roadblock was communicated to the general population by explaining that the "first battle of a long struggle to recover water and life had been won." Naming the protest in this way eventually gave the event a general meaning, and it quickly became the accepted way to refer to the collective undertaking: the Water War.

The second action, or rather the "second battle of the Water War," consisted of what was called "Taking Cochabamba" (February 4–5). According to the organizers, the goals of this protest were "to seal the union between the city and rural zones in an embrace" and to underscore La Coordinadora's influence while negotiations were at a standstill. This led to a civil

riot, a semi-insurrection with participation from the entire Cochabamba population and extensive rural contingents.

Finally, the third moment in the Water War is what is known as the April conflict, conceived from the beginning as the “final battle.” It began with a new roadblock, followed by occupying the water company, and it ended with a general rebellion that General Bánzer’s government could not silence.

<Table 1.1>

There were at least three levels of participation throughout the Water War. The first consisted of a very well-organized and unwavering protest by the peasant irrigators who maintained the roadblocks by rotation, taking turns, similar to the way they manage the use of water. The second was the massive, angry response by the urban population that built the city’s barricades and kept Cochabamba in a state of chaos. And the third involved participation by the “water warriors.” Without having been assigned the task, these young students and residents, who were mostly from the city of Cochabamba’s southern zone, assumed the role of frontline brigades.

Finally, it is worth noting that in the moments of extreme upheaval, during the confrontations of January, February, and April, the Chapare region’s coca growers also joined the struggle, demonstrating solidarity with inhabitants from the city of Cochabamba and from the nearby interandean valleys.

During the months from January to April, the most prominent leaders from La Coordinadora, who called themselves “spokesmen,” particularly Oscar Olivera and Omar Fernández, had to use everything in their power to make some sense of the events that were

quickly unfolding.⁸ That was where La Coordinadora gained its extensive experience in bringing groups together. It is no simple task to rally such diverse contingents and to get them in tune with each other for a joint struggle. That was the origin of La Coordinadora's alternating strength and weakness. When it functioned as a space for struggle, La Coordinadora acquired visibility and presence. Its activities multiplied during times of struggle. On the other hand, as it was not an institution, it essentially disappeared when the population withdrew. In a way La Coordinadora faced a very complex problem common to any social structure that considers itself a "space of confluence for struggle," the question of permanence over time. Nevertheless, with respect to its organization, La Coordinadora followed an interesting path, which will be the focus of the reflections in the second chapter of this book. For now, it is worth outlining what happened after April 2000 when Bechtel was ousted.

La Coordinadora's Subsequent Tasks

<P1>On April 9 the people of Cochabamba cordoned off and occupied the facilities of the old municipal water and sanitation company (SEMAPA), which some months before had changed its name from Aguas del Tunari. On April 11 the Bolivian state repealed the Law 2029 and passed the law amending the Water Law that recognizes the water cooperatives and associations as legitimate entities for providing services under the title Drinking Water Service Provider Entity (EPSA). Over the following weeks, La Coordinadora named engineer Jorge Alvarado as SEMAPA's director, and it created new management for the company made up of people designated by both La Coordinadora and Cochabamba's mayor's office. A period of great exuberance and social creativity then began, which lasted approximately one year.

Cochabamba's public discussion and extensive political activity centered on the following topics:

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- To state clearly and publicly the collective rejection of defining water as a market commodity, for any reason, under any pretext, or in any form. It was up for discussion at the time if water should be understood as a public right, if its access should be considered a human right, or if it constituted a common good. In any case it was fundamentally understood by everyone involved that its commercialization was not acceptable.⁹

- To plan and carry out “SEMAPA’s social reconstitution.” This referred to a complicated attempt to produce a transformation within the “recovered” municipal water company that included both the organizational and labor structures. It also sought to redefine the relationship between “the company” and Cochabamba’s population in a way that would lead to the construction of what was referred to back then as “social control.”¹⁰

- Based on the above, the practical limits for the normative framework—liberal state—were collectively established. As part of this process, there was an attempt to “reconstitute public property under social control.” This paved the way for the slogan for achieving a “constituent assembly without party intervention to build the country in which we want to live.”¹¹ </BL>

These three topics were approached collectively and actively, and they merit further reflection. The backbone of the “interior horizon” of Cochabamba’s political activity for a long time, they clearly influenced the national political landscape that followed.

On the first topic, dozens of forums, conferences, seminars, and colloquia were organized to define and clarify water as a commodity, as a right, or as a common good. These conversations also broadened the collective understanding of the meaning and profound implications of each of these ways to define water. Some were small and spontaneous, carried out in different public locations, such as the Auditorium of the Workers Federation, the offices of Foro Cochabambino del Medio Ambiente (Cochabamba Environmental Forum; FOCOMADE), and different university facilities.¹² Others were much larger and had greater resonance, with the presence of international experts on the topic. Their conclusions appeared in the press, and they acquired collective importance through the general dissemination and discussion of their fundamental messages on the local radio station.¹³

These various actions for public planning on a topic of such decisive importance for collective life empowered numerous political groups throughout Cochabamba's valleys and connected diverse social sectors. Over the course of eight months, almost no one was excluded from the discussion about what to do with water, how to conserve and purify it, and how to widen its distribution. There was a widely held belief that there would be no toleration of any future attempt by traditional party elites and transnational corporations to plunder resources.

In a vast sea of circulating opinions, proposals, and discussions, La Coordinadora decided to create a technical support team. This team's primary goal was to articulate a reasonably clear vision of the following: the water problem in Cochabamba, SEMAPA as a company, and possible structural changes within it; and strategies to promote social participation to manage the company's activities. The technical support team identified three underlying problems, which were the focus of its activity. The first was the question of SEMAPA's legal property. The second concerned the administrative reorganization of SEMAPA's operations, placing emphasis on

disrupting the relationship between the company's employees and the general population. The goal here was to break the "company-client" relationship. Finally, accomplishing these two previous goals would lead to establishing conditions for SEMAPA's integral redefinition as a "public company under social control." To achieve this, "an ambitious organizational plan at the grassroots level in the urban zone" was proposed. It consisted of contributing to "establishing drinking water committees in various neighborhoods throughout the city,"¹⁴ which "would be independent of the Neighborhood Councils and of the party influence that corrodes them" (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2001a).

A question arose after recovering SEMAPA's privatized legal property: How would it be possible to recognize the widespread feeling of public property shared by the region's citizenry beyond defining the legal character of SEMAPA simply as a municipal company (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2001a)? To tackle this question, they coined the term "social property," which was used to emphasize the nature of what they sought to construct. "Social property" was different from the traditional forms of "state" property (state, municipal, decentralized, and so on) and from "private" property (individual, by shares, cooperative).¹⁵

There were legal obstacles to defining the company this way. Cochabamba's population had "deprivatized" and "reconstituted" SEMAPA, but it still had to fit within the existing regulatory framework. On the one hand, they had to preserve the municipal public property as a decentralized company with "limited" management autonomy. This forced La Coordinadora and its technical support team to focus their attention "on the ways to guarantee a real link between SEMAPA and the population, decentralizing decision making, and incorporating mechanisms for social participation." The goal to construct the "company as a self-managed social property" thus clashed with the existing legal infrastructure and was limited by the bureaucratic framework.

However, during this entire planning process and the analysis of the mechanisms and rationale for state regulations, a question arose that grew in importance over time: How to promote social wealth beyond the mere legal *status* of companies as state institutions? In Cochabamba the problem with offering practical answers to this question sparked a discussion of the need for a constituent assembly.

At the risk of oversimplifying, it is possible to affirm that the following ideas were widespread at the grassroots level: Now that SEMAPA has been deprivatized, we cannot create a company in the way we consider necessary because the laws prevent us from doing so. Conclusion: we need to change the laws. This very simple portrayal of the issues at hand speaks to a profound transformation in social attitudes that took place over approximately two years in Cochabamba and its surrounding valleys. As the population began to exert its authority, the law clearly represented an obstacle to limit the collective will. They chose to change the law rather than adopt the traditional attitude of restricting the collective will to fit the regulatory framework. Moreover, they made this choice knowing that the objective may not be immediately achieved. This led to talk about the desired objective, and in Cochabamba it sparked a discussion about the constituent assembly, an idea that went beyond a response to the practical difficulties for “reconstituting SEMAPA.”¹⁶ The following general definition was developed and widely distributed during those years (2000–2001): “The Constituent Assembly is a new type of political organization created to participate in, to discuss, and to decide upon collective matters” (Gutiérrez Aguilar 2001a).

Conceptualizing the constituent assembly as a “decision-making political organization” relates more broadly to other issues that La Coordinadora had redefined as the new way to experience politics. In that context the constituent assembly was perceived as and expected to be

an authority for civil society's political organization. It would enable working men and women to recover the capacity to plan and participate in public matters. In other words, the constituent assembly was considered "a way to recover and exercise political sovereignty, meaning the capacity for decision-making and participation in public affairs, which is currently mortgaged in the political party system." This description of the assembly clearly does not propose redefining the relationship with the state. It is suggested as a tool to break the relationship with the state and to build "capacity for decision making on public affairs" based on other practices.¹⁷ La Coordinadora explained these ideas in various ways over the following years; however, except in notable moments, it did not achieve a conceptual hegemony of the type that had existed in Cochabamba between 2000 and 2001. Later, when in 2007 the constituent assembly finally began its efforts under Morales's government, La Coordinadora's most distinguished members and spokesmen were no longer part of the organization.

<A>The Coordinadora's Attempts to Create Links beyond Cochabamba

<P1>We already mentioned the particular confluence of social forces that gave birth to La Coordinadora in November of 1999 as a noninstitutional articulation of the struggle. Still pending is a more detailed reflection on the limit of these "spaces of confluence for the struggle," namely its permanence over time.

During the year 2000, La Coordinadora went from directing the first successful popular uprising since the 1985 liberal structural reforms to trying to guide the subsequent "social reconstitution" of Cochabamba's municipal water company, SEMAPA. This second objective, however, was not La Coordinadora's only activity after April. Besides continuing to urge public discussion concerning the privatization of natural resources, with emphasis on water although

not solely on it, La Coordinadora's leaders promoted links to other social forces. In particular they sought to engage with the Aymara organized in the United Confederation of Working Peasants of Bolivia (CSUTCB) and with the Chapare region's coca growers. None of these efforts was without tension.

Between the end of 2001 and 2003, La Coordinadora periodically linked organizations in the multifarious Bolivian social struggle, which included the Aymara community members and the Chapare region's coca growers. La Coordinadora put its know-how and skills developed in 2000 at their disposal. It is virtually impossible to offer an exhaustive list of the numerous activities that La Coordinadora's leadership carried out during those years, above all because their lack of institutional formality implies scarce attention to "listing" and "documenting" activities undertaken. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning the space assigned to La Coordinadora within the facilities belonging to the FTFC. Known as the Blue Room, this became the central space for coordinating local resistance efforts and, at times, national ones for many years.¹⁸

The Blue Room is a large space on the third floor of the FTFC in Cochabamba's Central Plaza. It is furnished with a large table for meetings, some thirty to forty chairs, a telephone, and a computer. This room became a space to meet with people from other sectors, and it is primarily a space for informal gatherings during times of great social upheaval where people can plan, make agreements, and organize joint committees. Even now, La Coordinadora's physical space constitutes a certain type of "agora," a public place for meeting and decision making. Most people there belong to or represent some neighborhood, trade, union, labor group, or even formal political organization. At the meetings, importance is given to anything occurring on a national

scale and, when that is the case, they assess whether or not to have a more open invitation to the public to plan and decide on whatever the topic may be.

This is a type of elastic, independent, nimble organization that easily shifts from a small meeting between representatives to an open convocation, rallies, or large events. As it does not belong to “anyone” because it encompasses “everyone,” it represents the potential to identify a new type of citizenship. Oscar Olivera expresses this idea when he describes La Coordinadora as a kind of “citizen’s union.”

La Coordinadora’s membership is essentially based on an individual’s voluntary decision to join. Beyond words, it implies individual and above all collective participation in discussion and decision making about questions of collective agency. La Coordinadora has thus continued to be a privileged space for autonomous noninstitutional politicization for the myriad of heterogeneous social networks that form Bolivia’s social fabric.

Although it is committed and participative, La Coordinadora’s loose and informal associative form presents serious risks, particularly during elections. Various representatives, senators, and employees from different parties have previously been prominent figures in La Coordinadora. Even so, this space and its most well-known spokesman Oscar Olivera always stayed out of the electoral activity that they nevertheless represent. It is possible to argue that La Coordinadora, after the Water War, has essentially been defined by its multiple efforts. At the risk of oversimplifying, we can summarize these efforts as follows: expanding active solidarity through participation and social mobilization for the most important struggles from those years, especially the roadblocks in La Paz and the protests against the forced eradication of coca in the Chapare region; systematic activity to analyze, clarify, report, and discuss government actions

that either sought to contain the advance of other struggles or that specifically provoked some sector; and constantly pushing for open and public planning on topics affecting the population as a whole, which included organizing countless gatherings, “schools,” forums, meetings, symposia, and rallies, principally in Cochabamba.

In addition to the aforementioned efforts to articulate and stimulate political planning, La Coordinadora’s most prominent spokesmen Oscar Olivera and Omar Fernández served for over two years as mediators between Felipe Quispe and Evo Morales with varying degrees of success on each occasion. Oscar Olivera offers the following explanation:

<EXT>[La Coordinadora’s activity] has led to our occupying a space as mediators with moral authority, a position that allows us to call people together, to weave together that social base that is now fragmented, distrustful, submissive. That is what we want and the possibilities exist. I have discussed this with Felipe [Quispe] and Evo [Morales], noting that La Coordinadora has brought them together. . . . [However,] there is a big difference in attitude between the *caudillos* and at the grassroots level. When we managed to bring those two caudillos together, at one point in the Aymara conflict in the highlands [September 2001], it was incredible to see them together! And people wept at the embrace they gave each other. I was there as a spectator. They looked like peasants seeing each other after a long time: “brother, it’s so great to have done this! . . .” Then you saw feelings of joy and hope in people. But the elections came—in 2002—and you again see the selfishness. Each is running on his own ticket because one does not want to change the color of the ballot and the other one wants to be first because he is older. (Interview with Oscar Olivera in Ceceña 2002, 77)</EXT>

Olivera and Fernández made various attempts to reconcile Felipe Quispe and Evo Morales between September 2000 and June 2002, when the general elections were finally held.¹⁹ These agreements were usually not easy because they were always marked by the profound rivalry between these two figures for leadership. They generally limited themselves to agreements, which were not always kept, to carry out simultaneous protests. Even so, these agreements often contained different lists of demands. There were also promises, which were similarly not always kept, to appear together for negotiations. Since March 2002, when the electoral process began, and with both Morales and Quispe having their own “registered” party before the National Electoral Court—Morales’s Movement toward Socialism (MAS) and Quispe’s Pachakuti Indigenous Movement (MIP)—these agreements became more and more difficult. In a letter from Álvaro García Linera, dated December 2001, he expresses these difficulties very well:

<EXT>Regarding the meeting with [Evo and Felipe], the meeting went well after taking a long time to get started, although it was marked by a somewhat bitter flavor given the topic at hand: the elections. Evo came with his showcase of offers. . . . Felipe, for his part, had his doubts, but he was backed by a whole brood of greedy campaigning Indianists (both young and old) willing to risk it all to gain access to some post in the name of the “Indian cause.” In the meeting I realized that I don’t have the stomach for this. So I distanced myself, made recommendations (that I wrote to you about a while ago), and I attempted to mediate the entire discussion with the future of social movements. Everyone was in agreement. Yet when the time came (to make decisions), they quickly turned to the pragmatics of the positions, the candidacies, the electoral process, etc. It

seems to be the same as the armed struggle mess; the electoral mess has its own logic, its own dynamic that works independently (from more profound projects for transformation). All I could do in the end was phone Oscar and tell him that there is very little possibility for agreement. (Personal correspondence with Álvaro García Linera, December 20, 2001)</EXT>

In the end, given its organizational looseness, La Coordinadora never managed to overcome the regional margins of its public activity in any decisive way. However, it did manage to get itself in synch with other social organizations, such as FEJUVE-El Alto and various organizations for drinking water management in Santa Cruz, for example. It was also able to share all of its experience in defending water, as well as its knowledge about the intricacies of government regulations and the ways to evade or confront them. On the other hand, the mediation strategies that La Coordinadora generated, in a contradictory and difficult way, also managed to “irradiate” other geographic zones and relevant topics. This led to wide-ranging agreements at various levels. We will discuss this later when we analyze the process concerning what is referred to as the Coalition for the Defense and Recuperation of Gas. In any case La Coordinadora seemed to “grow” as a noninstitutionalized social configuration more through replication than structural growth. In summary, during the Water War, and above all through La Coordinadora’s activities, the meaning of what may be thought of as politics became inverted. This produced a discourse that would later be profoundly influential.

<A>The Horizon of Meaning Opened by La Coordinadora

<P1>It is not an exaggeration to underscore the radical organizational innovation that La Coordinadora represented in the year 2000 as a loose connection between heterogeneous social

groups that achieved the first “popular triumph.” That triumph was Bechtel’s expulsion and the modification of the Law 2029 after fifteen years of neoliberal reforms and the constant suppression of acts of resistance, which were basically in self-defense.

To end this chapter, I will briefly outline what I consider most important in the struggle undertaken by thousands of people from Cochabamba within the space of confluence, planning, and constructing meaning, which La Coordinadora represented. I will first address the way La Coordinadora proposed confrontation from political and material autonomy, and then I will present the elements that made it possible to glimpse—and sporadically experience—emancipatory social agency capable of inverting the order of capital and the state.

La Coordinadora always remained outside of institutional regulation and frameworks. Oscar Olivera expresses this idea as follows:

<EXT>I believe that La Coordinadora is now a space. I refer to it as a space because we have yet to meet the minimum requirements for it to be an organization. We do not have financing from anyone. We do not have our own statutes. Not having statutes was one of the obstacles blocking La Coordinadora from taking possession of the water company (directly, in April 2000). We were illegal. We were legitimate, but we were illegal. A lot of people said: “Oh no! Because we don’t have statutes, legal status, we have lost the ability for the people to run the company.” We said: “*No, we don’t want it.*” First of all, we don’t want to be legal because all of the system’s institutions are corrupt, every last one. *We do not want recognition from these people* who are corrupt, who are rotten. We are not interested in that recognition. What interests us is being

recognized by you, *compañeros*. But it is as if people are starting to change a particular belief, because people refer to a “corrupt state,” but later they go and ask for recognition from that corrupt state that has been in power for years. . . . On the topic of the statutes, *they set certain rules of the game that later lead to a fight to control the organization’s leadership*. In other words, this creates factions and similar things. Here, on the other hand, everyone comes and goes. Yes, we are the spokesmen when something happens, but there is an inherent revocability. We cannot proceed on our own ignoring what the people want. (Interview with Oscar Olivera in Ceceña 2002, 76).</EXT>

These reflections by Olivera are important because they express the will shared by the spokesmen and most prominent figures from La Coordinadora to maintain a space to connect diverse social forces in a way that functions outside of the Bolivian regulatory and institutional framework. In my opinion the explicit desire to “be illegal” implies that they do not want to be subjected to established power structures. Meanwhile, Oscar Olivera was the executive secretary for the FTFC, and Omar Fernández was the executive secretary for the FEDECOR. This is an interesting contrast as both were formally elected heads of organizations with “judicial legal status” (statutes, legal recognition, internal regulation). Yet both perceived the association for the struggle that occurred within La Coordinadora as a space that did not require institutional status.

This desire for “noninstitutionality” proved shocking not only to the government but also to people’s “common sense” as well. It is worth mentioning, since it goes beyond mere anecdote, that the word “Coordinadora” is a singular feminine noun in Spanish that sounds like it could refer to a woman. For that reason, “La Coordinadora” was often confused with “the female coordinator” who was wisely leading the uprising, although no one knew who she was. The fact

that it was such a novel form of coordinating the struggle added to that confusion. La Coordinadora functioned outside of the “normal” *known and predictable* organizational framework of popular Bolivian struggle: unions and trade associations. Many people, even those participating in meetings and mobilizations that had been convened by La Coordinadora, believed that this title in fact referred to a real woman. On February 10, 2000, an article from Cochabamba’s newspaper *Los Tiempos* ran with the title: “More than Once, La Coordinadora Was Confused with a Woman.” That article cites declarations made by Oscar Olivera. He states the following:

<EXT>In a heated meeting that took place before the pressure measures began early in the year, one of the factory worker labor leaders affirmed in salient parts of his speech: “Compañeros, we believe the time has come to know who the Coordinadora is.” The others attending the meeting had to explain to him that “the people who were at the meeting were the representatives of the water defense entity.” Another occasion was in a meeting of the water committees held in a suburban zone of the city. After listening to Omar Fernández’s and Oscar Olivera’s explanations, a retired professor remarked: “Now we want you to report on the dealings with the government, and let ‘La Señora Coordinadora’ do it herself. We want her to introduce herself.”</EXT>

The chaos that ensued was such that it nearly brought the meeting to a standstill. The strangest anecdote of all, however, occurred during the confrontations in February when, during a short ceasefire between the police’s tear gas and the popular offensive, some nuns made their way to the heart of the conflict and offered to take “La Señora Coordinadora” to their convent to protect her from the repression.

Also on February 13, 2000, an editorial in Cochabamba's newspaper *Opinión* read as follows:

<EXT>I would like to meet the Coordinadora! Who is this woman so brave she has made the government tremble? That was the question posed by an elderly woman at noon on February 4 in the midst of the K'ochala uprising. This is clearly an innocent statement by someone who must surely be a direct descendent of one of the Heroines of la Coronilla from the 1812 fight for independence. It suggests bravery, on the one hand, but also the dramatic quality that that epic achievement had for the defense of life. It was admiration on the one hand, but also the desire to follow that paradigmatic social behavior.</EXT>

<P1>Beyond anecdote, it is astonishing that some people in the uprising could not immediately understand how their own act of coming together and fighting, in a way absolutely independent from known institutionalism, constituted the meaning of the term "Coordinadora." They instead wanted to specifically identify a "woman."

It was also worth noting that the government did not have to actually recognize La Coordinadora's real existence beyond its criticized "legal inexistence." This means that the mobilized population, through actions and persistence, forced the government to recognize an entity that openly refused to follow established laws. In January 2000, before and during the Water War's first act of protest, known as "the first siege," the government spent several days arguing that La Coordinadora did not have a legitimate negotiator since it "did not exist" as a "legal representative" for anyone. It even accused La Coordinadora of being a "ghost organization" (*Opinión* and *Los Tiempos*, January 10–15, 2000). Faced with the continuing

roadblock, the government finally had to negotiate with “the ones who don’t exist.” This institutional discourse gave rise to popular humor. In the parades and preparatory celebrations for Carnival that year, groups of young people dressed up as ghosts wearing signs that said “Aguas del Tunari,” the company contracted for the water supply that they were fighting against. The government’s accusation that La Coordinadora was a “ghost organization” thus provoked a popular reply qualifying Aguas del Tunari as a ghost company.

Ultimately, La Coordinadora’s lack of institutionalization was the foundation for its political autonomy. It was similarly defined by the material independence of its members. During the Water War, groups of people mobilized and protested independently both in material terms and on the political decision-making map. Each water committee, each neighborhood association, each vendor and trade association, each union, and so on participated in the meetings and in the different roadblocks and protests representing their own organizations according to their own associative practices and procedures for membership.²⁰ Both the FTFC and FEDECOR, organizations with legal personnel, had certain resources at their disposal, and they put their own funds from union dues to work for the uprising. This gave La Coordinadora significant material independence. For example, it had a place for meetings, to hold rallies of varying capacity, and it had some financial resources for the most urgent immediate expenses. This allowed it to have complete political autonomy for years.

La Coordinadora essentially facilitated the use of all the combined resources, both from unionized sectors as well as from workers who were not unionized, as “use value” to serve the uprising and collective decision making. La Coordinadora’s activities generated a tremendously powerful space for cooperation between different groups. More or less beginning in February 2000, the government began circulating the accusation that “obscure entities financed La

Coordinadora,” to which La Coordinadora’s spokesmen carried out a campaign in response. They explained that the uprising really did not prove “costly” because the “costs” consisted of collectively using what they already had. After the initial impulse of the struggle, and especially beginning in 2001 and 2002 when it became necessary to assign certain tasks related to water management, that response changed. Then a series of new, related problems emerged associated above all to the functioning of a “nonexistent legal entity.” It continued this way until La Coordinadora’s end, with international financing organizations, and primarily with NGOs. These problems are vast and complicated. They deserve their own discussion that will be addressed in the general reflection on the obstacles to social unification through extra-institutional means.

La Coordinadora introduced a different way of “making politics.” In other words, it opened a horizon of meaning—situated in space and marked by time—that allowed people to “make politics in a direct way” without collapsing under the weight of the state. As the most prominent spokesmen from La Coordinadora affirm, the struggle in Cochabamba produced several outcomes: “people lost their fear,” “people recovered their voice,” people understood that “they could win,”²¹ and people did not place themselves in the role of “petitioners” to the state. They presented themselves as independent, meaning as a group of people who could meet, plan, decide, and achieve a goal.²² These results, together with the accomplishment of having built a space for collective planning, marked the beginning of a generalized perception of Cochabamba’s men and women as no longer “obedient” and “powerless” compliers to decisions made by others but as capable and responsible people who could intervene in, gain knowledge about, and provide solutions to social problems. In Bolivia this all defined a “new shared meaning of dissidence”:

<EXT>For more than fifteen years, labor's best creation, the Bolivian Workers' Central (COB), was defeated not only through repression but also through the absence of an alternative social horizon. The legitimate defense of the conquests never went beyond evoking pacts of the nationalist state, and so-called socialism, an elaborate overhaul of state capitalism. . . . Cochabamba, and to a certain extent the Aymara uprising in the altiplano, has broken this bleak collective predisposition. La Coordinadora's proposal for a self-managed company has shattered the false duality between private/state that has guided contemporary political models. Just as political will was expressed as something controlled by everyone from rallies to meetings, La Coordinadora's assembly affirms that collective wealth, such as water, should be treated the same way. It should be managed by those who use it. It should be self-managed by the citizens themselves. With this comes a new sense of social sovereignty previously held by the state. What is shared, or collective, no longer belongs to the state, which has been demonstrated to be a type of private property for government bureaucrats. What is shared, in common, is not the purview of an "illusory community" of bureaucrats; it is the management run by everyone. It is the ethical sense of responsibility and some techniques pertaining to such a case, such as rallies, meetings, rotation of posts, social financing. . . . Two new long-term social proposals remain: self-management and community. A general meaning of social dissidence grew during the 1940s in the twentieth century and was fed to us. Similarly, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, another meaning has been born now from the impetus of a social rebellion. The construction of a horizon of

action that represents an alternative to the one that exists inevitably passes from now on through those two great discursive junctures of the masses in action: political-economic self-management and the community or broadly defined ayllu. (Gutiérrez Aguilar, García Linera, Prada, Quispe, and Tapia 2000, 177)</EXT>

Two basic concepts in this horizon, community and self-management, became the cornerstone of meaning of an important aspect of the Bolivian uprising as a whole: social reconstitution of wealth and the refounding of the nation. This is despite the fact that one outcome from all of this, especially after Morales took office as the Bolivia's president, has been the restructuring of the state as an entity that is separate from and privileged above the social whole.

Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, La Coordinadora initiated a "strategy for articulation," a way of formulating political problems through the question, "Who decides public matters?" The importance of this for the emancipatory struggle is not insignificant. Even today, it remains the foundation for open political debate in Bolivia. A communiqué from La Coordinadora dated January 20, 2000, expresses this in the following way:

<EXT>What is really being discussed?

What is really being discussed is the CONTENT OF GOVERNMENT DECISIONS. Are the decisions being made in the population's interests or are they simply adapting to what foreign financial entities prescribe? . . . This is the underlying problem. Who decides the population's present and future, its resources, and its work and living conditions? Regarding water, we want to decide for ourselves: that is what we call democracy.</EXT>

There was a rejection of the prerogative of political leaders to monopolize political decision making on questions that affect everyone. There was also a persistent challenge and rejection of private plundering of social wealth by transnational corporations. Under these basic notions, the recurrent collective mobilization and uprisings continued to unfold until 2005. Let's now consider two other sides of these struggles.

<A>Chapter 1. The Coalition for the Defense of Water and Life: The Massive Public Defiance of State Order

<NO>¹ As in every Latin American country, “neoliberal structural reforms” also brought substantial changes to the governmental administrative-bureaucratic framework. The change most clearly addressed by the protest was the structure of the Superintendencies (water, energy, mining, and so on), which seek to regulate the space and time of public life as if it were a market. In other words, they view themselves as mediators in that space, defining possible social interactions as solely mercantilist relationships.

² See especially, Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida 2001a, the document titled “Departmental Coalition for the Defense of Water and Life” from January 28, 2000. Its argument is structured in the following way: “Question 1: What is the problem with water in Cochabamba? This means to clearly establish the problem to overcome. Question 2: For whom does La Coordinadora speak? The response to this is that the peasants who rely on irrigation, the urban committees for drinking water who are not part of the central distribution network, and users of drinking water who are connected to the network all speak through La Coordinadora. Question 3: Why are Law 2029 and the concession contract with Aguas del Tunari not good for us, the people of Cochabamba?” The way in which La Coordinadora expressed its objectives and its measures will be analyzed later in more detail.

³ “The valleys of Cochabamba cover diverse areas at different altitudes. We will consider the participation of four in the water conflict: the Valle Alto Basin, Sacaba, the Central Valley, and the Lower Valley” (Peredo, Crespo, and Fernández 2004, 11).

⁴ “*Suyu*” is a Quechua word that means space or place. It also refers to a particular extension of land, a certain right to water, or to an amount of work. “*Mita*” is an Andean practice that refers to rotational access to water or rotating work shifts. It was utilized during colonial times as an institution to regulate the forced work of indigenous peoples in silver mines.

⁵ The backbone of FEDECOR is the Tiquipaya-Colcapirhua Association of Irrigation Systems (ASIRITIC). It was founded in 1992 and combines more than two thousand users and families. Its first president was Omar Fernández (Peredo, Crespo, and Fernández 2004, 57).

⁶ Two cases exemplify this extreme: Representative Maldonado and Doctor Soria. Both attempted, through all means and channels at their disposal, to take the movement in less radical directions, vying for personal gain. They were not expelled from the movement; they abandoned it.

⁷ The book *Nosotros somos la Coordinadora* [We are the Coordinadora] was published in 2008 to celebrate the anniversary of the Water War. It includes various communiqués and documents from the year 2000. Their analysis reveals the internal logic of La Coordinadora’s discourse: to establish the “we” in the leadership and to describe the goals of the struggle in the clearest way possible.

⁸ La Coordinadora’s most prominent leaders from January to April were Oscar Olivera, Omar Fernández, Gabriel Herbas, and Gonzalo Maldonado.

⁹ One of the most important examples of this was the following: “The El Paso community transferred water from one of its wells to the urban population (in the northern zone) for free.

This was over a period of a few weeks and equaled half of the water processed by SEMAPA” (Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida 2001a, public declaration by Oscar Olivera on May 8, 2000).

¹⁰ There were various efforts to carry out the “takeover of the drinking water supply company in Cochabamba” and to “establish methods for social control.” For the objectives of this study, it will be essential to consider the work of the technical support team for La Coordinadora during the period from October 2000 to February–March 2001. I participated directly then as a member.

¹¹ This statement—or variations of it—was reflected in innumerable flyers, speeches, pamphlets, and posters.

¹² This was the meeting place for professionals and environmental groups that participated in La Coordinadora.

¹³ The most important of these seminars took place at the end of November 2000 in the city of Cochabamba. Maude Barlow, a well-known Canadian activist and defender of water rights, attended along with other influential people, mainly from English-speaking countries.

¹⁴ Some years later, this early organizational effort formed the Southern Zone Association of Independent Drinking Water Systems (ASICA-Sur).

¹⁵ These distinctions were the product of equally broad planning. In December 2000 and January 2001, the technical support team organized at least two open meetings with Cochabamba’s population to determine SEMAPA’s legal character. This was in the midst of governmental declarations in the media arguing that the leadership and SEMAPA’s director were “illegal.” They also criticized the way that La Coordinadora was influencing the duties and projects that the company was initiating at that time. There were several proposals on “how to reorganize SEMAPA.” Some suggested “the formation of a type of society based on shares distributed among

all users and neighborhood residents” or organizing a large cooperative. There was also a proposal to maintain SEMAPA’s public-municipal character. The latter was the option that eventually prevailed, most of all due to the numerous bureaucratic-legal difficulties that any change to the legal *status* would require, which included the requirement to obtain a “transmission of public patrimony law.”

¹⁶ For a concise discussion of the popular roots of the desire for a Constituent Assembly, see Mokrani and Chávez (2006). See also Olivera and Lewis (2004), particularly the chapter “For a Constituent Assembly: Creating Public Spaces.”

¹⁷ For information, see the semimonthly newspaper *Así es*, numbers 1 and 2, La Paz, Bolivia. See also Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida (2001b, *Actas del Foro Sobre Asamblea Constituyente* [the publication from the event that was held in November 2000 in Cochabamba]).

¹⁸ While there is no record of daily activities, meetings, and contacts, some of La Coordinadora’s members keep a dossier of letters and documents that show what was occurring in Cochabamba during that time. There are dozens of letters from trade organizations, neighborhoods, associations of vendors from the main markets, and from political organizations of all sizes. They document the specific water problem experienced by each one of those organizations, and La Coordinadora is “asked”—more or less—to “consider the specific problem.” Many of these letters were answered during those months, either verbally or in writing, more or less with the same argument: “La Coordinadora is not an entity to ‘manage complaints’ or ‘process business matters’; your specific problem is similar to all these others, and we have to respond equally to all with our decisions and possible solutions.” Although, of course, when someone from La Coordinadora could “lend a hand” in some specific case, there was an attempt to collaborate (Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida 2001b).

¹⁹ The year 2002 was a general election year in Bolivia. Elections were announced in March 2002 and took place on June 30 of that year. Among the eleven parties that participated on the ballot, both Morales's MAS party, which received second place overall in the voting, and Quispe's MIP were included. The MIP was created in November 2001 and obtained 6 percent of all the votes. For information, consult www.cne.org.bo. From that moment, MAS became the principal opposition party with an important number of representatives and senators.

²⁰ The communiqué from La Coordinadora dated January 28, 2000, states: "Our voice is not aligned with parties or political offices. Nor can it be bought by private enterprise or hidden interests. We speak what we feel and what the population communicates to us. That is why we are different from other institutions and individuals who reappear today and seem ambivalent; those who say that they have or who have been deceived, or who have carried out public functions in an indolent manner."

²¹ Communiqué from La Coordinadora dated February 6, 2000.

²² Claudia Espinoza, in a note from the national weekly publication *Pulso* (May 5–11, 2000), states the following: "What occurred in Cochabamba was not a mere warning to the political system for it to just tighten some loose screws. . . . No one there was asking for or demanding 'fair rights' from the state, as old-style unionism usually did to generate agreements by negotiating the terms of subordination. This time, popular organizing efforts imposed their own style of making politics. People ignored the political agency and the legal authority offered by the ballot box."