

Dear All,

Attached is the edited version of my masters thesis, which I hope will become an article in the future. One of the main things I did so far was to drastically reduce the length of the literature review and get rid of many subsections. Because of this, apart from the (many, as usual) constructive critiques you will have, I was hoping if you could specifically give me your opinion about whether I was able to have it read like a paper rather than a thesis.

I am looking forward to hear your input, thank you for taking the time to read through it.

All the best,

Gabriele

Reclaiming the Streets

Protest, Repression and Territory in the Cochabamba Water War

Abstract: The Cochabamba Water War is a series of protest-events that took place in Cochabamba, Bolivia, between January and April 2000, against the government's privatization of the city's water sources. Tens of thousands of *Cochabambinos* took to the streets and repeatedly confronted harsh military and police repression. I focus on the spatial dynamic of protest and repression, and investigate the underlying motives and consequences of different actors' spatial behaviors. Drawing on Raffestin's concept of "territoriality," I argue that the Cochabamba Water War as a contention that did not start as a conflict *about* territory, but progressively turned into a conflict *between* adverse territorialities *over* territory. Moreover, in this context, the protesters' collective occupation of public space contributed to the breakdown of the dominant neoliberal territoriality through the materialization of a new, collective, democratic counter-territoriality, while the police systematically attempted to prevent protesters from gaining access to symbolically charged public spaces. These observations make the Cochabamba Water War a fecund source of insight for general and academic understandings of protest, repression, and territory as inextricably related phenomena.

In the first months of the 21st century, in an attempt to reverse the privatization of their water resources, tens of thousands of Bolivians took to the streets and, despite the intervention of the police, occupied the central plaza of Cochabamba and thus thrust the city into the global spotlight. After several days of violent conflict, a month of truce and the declaration of a state of siege by the Bolivian government, the private company that held the contract of Cochabamba's water left the country, and the government declared the contract void¹. What has since been remembered as the "Cochabamba Water War" has been widely cited as a victory of "David versus Goliath," and through the years has become an iconic symbol of the anti-globalization movement.

A number of popular and academic accounts have considered the reasons that compelled such a massive and diverse crowd to take to the streets, as well as explained what allowed an initially fragmented movement to ultimately win a decisive victory against one of the world's largest corporations. In my analysis of these events I adopt a perspective which has seldom been accounted for, focusing on the importance of the occupation of public space in the struggle against privatization. I do not argue that space was the *cause* of the mobilization, nor that *everything* in the Water War was ultimately related to space; rather, I show how the Cochabamba Water War provides an essential insight into how space can shape the actions of social actors and, in this particular occasion, played a key role in defining both the collective mobilization against privatization and the repression of the protest.

Building on Claude Raffestin's concept of territoriality, I articulate two main arguments. First, while in the last decades Bolivia has been reorganized according to the logic of neoliberal territoriality, the Cochabamba protesters were able to reterritorialize key spaces of the city, thus creating a counter-territoriality that effectively contrasted community to individualism, public decision processes to behind-closed-doors politics and, ultimately, social justice to sheer profit. Second, and subsequently, I show how police actors attempted to prevent this reterritorialization by impeding the protesters from accessing key symbolic spaces and systematically trying to hinder the demonstrators' co-presence in space.

The images of crowds taking the streets and occupying squares have always represented a quintessential meaning of protest and resistance; just recently, highly mediatized events such as the occupation of Tahrir Square in Egypt and the Occupy movement in the United States and elsewhere have once again contributed to firmly establish the value of crowds in public spaces as a core repertoire of collective action. By showing how the protesters in Cochabamba were able to successfully reterritorialize parts of the city through the occupation of public space, I underline that

¹ For a condensed chronological account of the Water War see Annex A.

the success of an occupation in terms of its ability to aid mobilization is not only defined by sheer physical control of space, but also by the practices that are implemented in the occupied space itself, and the values they convey.

Space, protest and repression

Interest in the analysis of the spatial dynamics of mobilization and protest is rather recent; Martin and Miller have observed that the body of scholarship studying social movements and contentious politics was “by and large aspatial” (2003: 143). Since then, and especially following two articles by Charles Tilly (2000, 2003) on the matter, an increasing number of works on contentious politics and protest have started to explicitly engage with space as an object of study, rather than merely treating it as a contextual dimension (e. g., Auyero 2003; Noakes et al. 2006; Mathieu 2008; Garmany 2008; O’ Dochartaigh and Bosi 2010). From this literature we can discern at least five fundamental ways in which protest and space intersect and interact in complex ways.

First, space can be both a constraining and enabling force for collective action. On the one hand, in his book on black insurgency in the United States, for instance, McAdam (1982, cited in Auyero 2005: 126) mentions how rural isolation and racial segregation initially inhibited protest. However, neighbourhoods (Martin 2003; Spronk 2007) and workplaces can also constitute key spatially-bounded elements that facilitate collective action; even Marx and Engels (1848: 19) noted that the proximity created by factories is key in the organization of proletarian struggles, since it stimulates the creation of class consciousness.

Second, as Melucci (1995) argues, collective identities can be created in the process of collective action, rather than a precondition for it; in this regard, the spatial dynamics of protests have been observed to greatly influence the shaping of collective identity and thereby reinforce mobilization. Many scholars have underlined the importance of street protests, public debates and public squares in reinforcing collective identity (Bosco 2001, Scarpaci and Frazier 1993, Taksa 1994). Bailey and Iveson (2000: 523) go as far as suggesting that “the opinions and values of a counterpublic are not entirely formed prior to their actual performance in a protest in public space.” These observations suggest that, when analysing protest, attention should be given to how different spatially-bound forms of collective action contribute to shape collective identity and class consciousness.

Third, space is not simply a neutral container of collective action, but rather different spaces have different symbolic meanings and functions for different groups, and collective action is often regulated by the meanings that groups ascribe to the space in which it takes place. A clear example

of this is provided by Mathieu (2008), who traces a vivid account of how three key symbolic spaces had a decisive importance in the development of the May '68 Paris protests; the police intrusion in the Sorbonne and the Latin Quarters—both perceived as “student territory” by left-wing students—contributed to escalate students protests, and a group of left-wing students’ act of singing the “*Internationale*” in Place de l’Étoile—a landmark of nationalism—engendered actions of counter-protest and “place purification” by right-wing students. In a similar way, Auyero (2003) illuminates the spatial dynamics of an Argentinian riot by highlighting how specific places—politicians’ houses, the Government House, the Courthouse—were attacked by an angry crowd according to the symbolic meaning attached to them. Mathieu’s and Auyero’s interpretations illuminate the fact that collective action is a product of spatially-bound meanings, but it’s also able to give new meanings to the space within which it takes place; the same action can have radically different values based on the space where it has been carried out, and space assumes different symbolic connotations depending on the actions that have taken place in it.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the purpose of my argument, space is contested. If, as we have seen, controlling space is paramount for those who participate in protest, it necessarily becomes so also for those who are charged with its control. “Repression” is a complex topic, as the term itself is politically charged; it is not a neutral word, and it can be used by social movements to stigmatize actions that the state would call “law and order” (Della Porta 1995: 55). As a result, an important part of the academic literature—namely referring to Della Porta and Fillieule’s (1998) pioneering work—prefers referring to “protest policing”, defined specifically as “the police handling of protest events” (Della Porta and Fillieule 2004: 217).

Other scholars have conceptualized the term “repression” in many different ways, alternatively focusing on its brutality (Stockdill 1996), its disregard for civil and political liberties (Davenport 2000), or a combination of police strategies, tactics and weapons (e. g., Wisler and Giugni 1999; Earl et al. 2003; Franklin 2009; Ayoub 2010; Rafail et al. 2012). As Earl (2003; 2006) perceptively argues, though, focusing exclusively on the observable acts of coercion carried on by institutional agents has led the academic debate to overlook a larger set of tactics and agents that are essential in pinpointing repression. She therefore creates a structured categorization of repression by crossing two broad strategies—coercion and channelling—and three different type of actors—state agents either tightly or loosely connected to national political élites, and private agents. Twelve types of repression are thus identified, with cells 1 and 5 being what I will treat as repression for the purpose of my research; acts of coercion carried out by state agents tightly and loosely connected to national political élites.

The relation between protest and repression has been one of the main concerns of both social movements and repression scholars, who have been exploring repression as an independent or dependent variable of protest. As Davenport (2007) points out, the former stream of research has not led to significant shared conclusions (see e.g., Hibbs 1973; Muller 1985; Francisco 1996; Gurr and Moore 1997).² On the other hand, scholars focusing on repression as a dependent variable have been able to formulate at least one widely accepted theory that seems supported; the “threat approach.” Deeply rooted in the tradition set forth by Tilly (1978) and McAdam (1982), this approach has been explicitly enunciated by Earl et al. (2003), who claim that the more a protest is perceived as threatening by the élites in power, the more it is likely to be repressed. Apart for Earl et al.’s own research—based on protests in New York between 1968 and 1973—other works have tested and confirmed this hypotheses across different times and contexts (Davenport 2007; Ayoub 2010).

The threat approach is particularly relevant in my case study for two main reasons. First, the Cochabamba water war represents a “stereotypical” example for this theory, in that it fulfils all the requirements of “threat” that Earl et al. (2003) find significant; the protest was extremely large, it made use of “confrontational tactics” and had radical goals. Second, the threat approach takes into account—although indirectly—the dimension of space; the aforementioned indicator “confrontational tactics” indicates tactics that are perceived as more threatening and therefore more prone to induce repression. Among these, Earl et al. (2003: 602) mention “sit-ins and derivatives of sit-ins, [...] blockades by protesters, building take-overs, [...] and meeting disruptions”. It is interesting to note—although none of the authors who have worked on the threat approach have done so—that all these protest activities have a substantial spatial dimension, and constitute half of the protest activities coded as “confrontational.”

The combination of these two elements makes my research relevant for understanding the mechanisms underlying the threat approach. Despite the fact that the use of confrontational tactics is arguably the most significant of the variables taken into account by the studies on “threat” (Earl et al. 2003; Ayoub 2010), none of these works ask the question of why confrontational tactics tend to lead to repression. By examining the territorial aspects of a “stereotypical” threat case, I follow Earl’s (2006: 139) recommendation according to which

we should not entirely shift our attention away from already well-researched forms of protest control such as overt protest policing [...] Rather, for these kinds of relatively

² A recent, interesting line of research is investigating the conditions under which repression backfires and ends up encouraging mobilization. For notable examples see Hess and Martin (2006) and Francisco (2004).

well-studied phenomena, scholars need to extend existing research by engaging new theoretical propositions [...] and engaging additional facets of these phenomena.

After having set out the conceptual foundations that underpin this paper as well as having hinted to the correlations that different scholars have traced between them, I present what, I contend, constitutes the “missing link” to interactively understand space, protest and repression.

Territoriality

The concept of territoriality has diverging meanings in two different academic traditions; the French and the Anglophone. The Anglophone definition is notably informed by Sack (1986: 19) who, in his seminal work on human territoriality, defines territoriality as the “attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area.” While this definition is useful in identifying a specific social activity, it also remains essentially behavioural, and by focusing on observable outcomes it deliberately chooses not to deal with the underlying processes that make “territory” such a key aspect of human behaviour.³

In the same years in which Anglophone social sciences started studying territoriality according to these premises, Claude Raffestin, a Swiss geographer, was developing a similar yet profoundly different concept of territoriality, which has been generally and surprisingly ignored by Anglophone academia until very lately.⁴ Raffestin’s territoriality is deeply rooted in his notion of territory, which is radically different from space in that “space is in a position of anteriority with respect to the territory”; space is a given, while territory is space symbolically or concretely appropriated by an actor, who *de facto* territorializes it (Raffestin 1980: 129). Territory is therefore something more than space; it is perception of space as “a given, a first material offered, on the whole, to human activity” (Raffestin 2012: 122) mediated through the subject’s cognitive tools, or again, as Raffestin (1980: 129) himself summarizes it, “space is the ‘original prison,’ while territory is the prison men give themselves.” Starting with this notion of territory, Raffestin (1980, cited in Klauser 2008: 2) defines territoriality as:

a complex system of relationships linking individuals or/and social groups with territory (exteriority) and with others (alterity) by means of mediators (instruments, techniques,

³ For an in-depth analysis of the limits and strengths of Sack’s notion of territoriality see Murphy 2012.

⁴ For an interesting description of the mechanisms that led Raffestin’s work to be dismissed see Fall 2007.

representations etc), in order to guarantee a maximum of autonomy within the limits of the system.

One of the most straightforward examples Raffestin (1980: 147) uses when discussing territoriality concerns southern Italy; “the relation between Italy and Sicily is the story of two conflicting territorialities, respectively characterized by a capitalist economic rationality and a ‘feudal’ political rationality.” It is therefore immediately clear how Raffestin’s concept of territoriality is more encompassing than Sack’s, in that it does not simply focus on one human behaviour, but it rather provides a framework to understand the underlying mechanisms that link together space, social agents and culture. Territoriality is therefore a profoundly relational concept; not only does it encompass “subject-space” and “subject-others” relations, but it also acknowledges that relations exist between different and often diverging territorialities.

Emphasizing relationality elucidates a further, and perhaps more fundamental, trait: that territoriality is always embedded within relations of power, which Raffestin (1996, quoted in Klauser 2012: 113) defines as a “capacity to transform the physical and social environment,” while also placing himself in the Foucauldian tradition by asserting that power “manifests itself in any relation, process of exchange or of communication where, in the relation that ensues, the two poles encounter and confront each other” (Raffestin 1980:45). The relation between power and territoriality is a complex one; power is capable of affecting territoriality, but is also a product of it, in that territoriality codifies the relations of exteriority and alterity in a given social context. Far from being stable and immanent, this relation is continually renegotiated in what, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, Raffestin (2012: 129) defines as process of TDR; territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization. While territorialization indicates the “creation” of territory from space, deterritorialization indicates a crisis of limits and relations in a given territoriality (Raffestin 1988: 275). The final stage of this process is reterritorialization, which indicates the creation of “a new territoriality, a new set of relations of exteriority and alterity” (Raffestin 1988: 275).

Raffestin’s approach to territory and territoriality is a fecund theoretical framework enabling us to consider actors, power and territory as mutually constituting and deeply related. This theory, however, comes with an important flaw. The process of TDR as conceptualized by Raffestin is overly mechanistic and unagentive; it is a theory of transformation that has power as its core, but paradoxically overlooks conflict. Namely, deterritorialization is expressed as a crisis internal to a system, while it surprisingly fails to give a name and a place to the challengers that might be bringing the crisis into being.

In order to account for the conflictual dimension of the TDR process, I thus propose the new concept of “counter-territoriality”. A counter-territoriality is a territoriality emerging from the resistance to a dominant territoriality, and carrying relations of alterity/exteriority that are adverse to those expressed by the dominant territoriality itself. It is more than a specific set of politics, and it is more than prefigurative politics; it is politics materialized in territory, and in opposition to a given territoriality. I argue that the practices implemented in a given space—in the case at hand, an occupied public space—can actively deterritorialize and reterritorialize it, thus contributing to the materialization of new counter-territorialities.

The Cochabamba Water War in context

After Pinochet’s Chile, Bolivia was the second country in Latin America to fully embrace the neoliberal⁵ reforms advocated by the World Bank, the IMF and the United States; starting with Banzer’s dictatorship in the seventies and even more so under democratic rule in the eighties and the nineties, Bolivia has often been cited as “an early neoliberal success story in international development policy literature” (Kohl and Farthing 2006: 14). The greatest leap forward in the affirmation of neoliberalism in Bolivia was the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) through the *Decreto Supremo* 21060 in 1985 under the presidency of Paz Estenssoro, which included a series of policies such as the privatization of state-owned enterprises—and specifically to the closure of state-owned tin mines, which were the centre of Bolivia’s worker movement—the opening of the country to direct investment, the ending of protectionist measures and the flexibilization of labour (Kohl and Farthing 2006: 65-73). This set of policies shook the foundations of Bolivia’s political balances, notably by neutralizing the greatest radical opposition force; the Central Obrera Bolivian (COB). Formerly a cohesive entity representing Bolivian “workers, middle class and urban dwellers as well as rural and indigenous people” (Otto and Böhm 2006: 13), and capable of vetoing political measures, the COB was reduced to a scattered organization unable to organize resistance to government decisions in a cohesive and impactful manner (Farthing and Kohl 2001: 9). The NEP and subsequent collapse of the COB’s power had very significant effects on Bolivia’s labour structure, as well as its civil society; on one hand, there has been a marked increase in informal and precarious labour (Kruse 2005: 122), while civil society has been described as “atomized, disjointed, corporatized” (Tapia 2000: 5). The two phenomena are understandably interlinked, and are not limited to the realm of labour and politics *strictu sensu*; for instance, Goldstein

⁵ I refer here to Harvey’s (2005: 2) conceptualization, according to which neoliberalism is a political economic theory contending that human well-being can be best promoted by freeing individuals’ entrepreneurial dispositions through the institutionalization of property rights and free markets.

(2005: 406) shows how the “cultural logic of individual responsibility, flexibility, and self-help” promoted by the new labour policy encourages a “self-help” logic in the administration of justice which often results in lynching⁶.

The power of neoliberalism as an atomizing force is not unknown; drawing on Foucault’s lectures at the *Collège de France* (Foucault and Senellart 2010), Lemke (2001) observes that neoliberalism attempts to re-shape society by “universalizing competition” as the basis of social activity which, as Read (2009: 30) cogently notes, “encourages workers to see themselves not as ‘workers’ in a political sense, who have something to gain through solidarity and collective organization, but as ‘companies of one’.” In his famous article “*L’essence du néolibéralisme*,” Bourdieu (1998: 3) perfectly summarizes the soul of neoliberalism when he states that it embodies “a program of systematic destruction of the collectives.” Bourdieu’s intuition finds accurate crystallization in Bolivia; as Olivera and Lewis (2004: 106) point out,

the growing fragmentation of conditions in which production activities take place, and the uncertainty and insecurity of employment, makes each member a “traveling” worker. [...] These changes have given rise to the impossibility of shaping a sense of class identity and practicing solidarity in the struggle over demands.

Moreover, Olivera and Lewis (2004: 121-122) observe that “the diverse spaces in which the workforce is concentrated under neoliberalism represents a formidable obstacle to working class organization and consciousness.” This denotes, in my view, a peculiar “neoliberal territoriality,” in that it not only includes a specific organization of the relationship between human activity and space, but it also obviously affects the power relations between social actors; the spatial barriers erected against the organization of workers hinders their ability to unite and effectively face employers.

In this context, the privatization of water in Cochabamba can be viewed as an attempt to solve the long-lasting efficiency problems of the public infrastructure through a strictly neoliberal approach. As of 1997 SEMAPA, the municipal water company, covered only 57% of the population and was running under constant deficit, as well as having chronic problems of water availability, with an estimated unsatisfied demand of 39% (Nickson and Vargas 2002: 104-105). As a response to these shortages, the communities that did not have access to SEMAPA’s water system resorted to two main strategies; buying water from private “water trucks,” or collectively organizing to create infrastructures to access subterranean sources of water (Assies 2003: 19; Peredo Beltrán 2004: 13). The second option could take years to implement, and involved a great effort from each member of a

⁶ For a broader account of the phenomenon see Goldstein (2004).

given community; as one *Cochabambina* interviewed by Peredo Beltràn (2004: 13) illustrates, building collective water infrastructures represents a great financial and organizational commitment.

In an attempt to solve this situation and following the advice of the World Bank, which considered the privatization of the water and sewage utilities in Cochabamba as a condition for the extension of a 20 million dollar loan (Bonnardeaux 2009: 1), the government tried to replicate the rather successful privatization of the La Paz-El Alto's public water company of 1997 (Spronk and Webber 2007: 39). After a bidding process which received only one bid, in September 1999 the national government signed a 40 year contract with the Aguas del Tunari consortium—a joint venture formed by International Water (owned by Bechtel), Edison and a group of Bolivian businessmen⁷ (Laserna 2000: 17; Lobina 2000: 2)—which took “exclusive control over all industrial, agricultural and residential systems, as well as an exclusive right to water in the natural aquifer” (Bonnardeaux 2009: 3). The agreement, which was signed behind closed doors and has never been entirely disclosed to the wider public, also granted a 16% yearly profit to Aguas del Tunari (Schultz 2009: 16).

The territorial tensions between the arrangements ingenuously set up by the communities and the territoriality supported by privatization are intuitively clear. By virtue of the newly signed contract Aguas del Tunari was *de facto* given complete ownership over the community-created and financed water systems, but it also applied a neoliberal rationality to a resource that, up to that point, was considered a collective ownership to which people had access through a complex network of “families, communities, rural unions and water organizations,” and was absolutely detached from any kind market logic (Kruse 2005: 135). Criticisms to the contract started as early as October and, during a meeting held on November 12 to decide how to oppose the privatization, a new organization was founded; the “Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida,” which became the focal actor that united most of the opposition to the privatization of Cochabamba's water.

The Spatial Dynamics of Protest: Reterritorialization

On April the 10th, after four months of intermittent struggle, the Coordinadora announced that the government had agreed to cancel the Aguas del Tunari contract, thus conceding to the demands of the protesters gathered in the main city square; the Plaza 14 de Septiembre (hereafter “the Plaza”). The Plaza is not a neutral space; it is the heart of Cochabamba, its main square, it is a symbolically and historically charged place that, named after the date of Bolivia's formal independence, lodges the Cathedral and the headquarters of the regional government.⁸ Given such a concentration of symbols

⁷ Among which Samuel Doria Medina, a prominent figure in Bolivian politics and real estate (De la Fuente 2000: 1)

⁸ For a broader account on the importance of plazas and public space in Latin America see Low (2000).

of power, when the Coordinadora leaders declared the symbolical “*Toma de Cochabamba*”—the takeover of Cochabamba—on February the 4th, they knew that by occupying the square they would have symbolically conquered the ability to “take our own decisions” (Olivera and Lewis 2004: 33). Two days of intense struggle ensued between protesters and police for the control of the Plaza, which caused one hundred and fifty arrests and ninety wounded (CEDIB 2000); this fight for the Plaza—which I describe in-depth below—epitomizes the importance of territory during the Cochabamba Water War.

In concurrence with those who have correctly argued that the Water War was not merely about water price hikes, but rather a conflict about power and political interests (Claridge 2006; Bonnardeaux 2009), I argue that the Water War represented a territorially-based struggle between a dominant neoliberal territoriality and the counter-territoriality materialized through the actions of the protesters. In this conflict not only the physical control of key symbolic spaces constituted a tangible materialization of territoriality, but most collective actions responded to an explicit or implicit logic of reterritorialization of space in order to achieve final victory. On one hand, protesters systematically attempted to “conquer” spaces that were perceived as representations of neoliberalism, while on the other police forces struggled to prevent reterritorialization by exerting control over the access to strategic spaces or otherwise disrupting the spatial co-presence of protesters.

The struggles on the 4th and 5th of February were not the only instance of reterritorialization during the Water War. The first protest practice that can be understood as reterritorialization is the blockade of highways. The role of highways—and transportation in general—as a key aspect of the modern capitalist system is widely acknowledged (Harvey 1990). A part from being an extremely disruptive tactic this practice represents a powerful reterritorialization of space; blocking a highway affirms the primacy of collective action over the organization of space according to economic functionality and efficiency. It cuts the very veins of neoliberal territoriality by transforming that same space in a territory of resistance. It is not a coincidence that every major protest in the Water War incorporated a highway blockade (Crespo 2001: 61; Assies 2003: 25; Olivera and Lewis 2004: 30, 37; Schultz 2003: 269; Schultz 2009: 19).

The movement of protest also demonstrated a clear evolution in the way it dealt with key spaces that incarnated neoliberal territoriality and its pillars; from outright aggression displayed in the first January protest, by April the protesters developed new tactics that aimed to reterritorialize rather than merely aggress. An example of the former attitude can be found on January the 12th during the first great protest event against the water price hikes; the only reported violence by the demonstrators was rock-throwing against two significant buildings; the regional government building

and the headquarters of the Civic Committee (Assies 2003: 25). While the former makes intuitive sense as a target for a protest against a government law—the government itself was not simply responsible for the water privatization, but was also the main promoter of neoliberal policies in Bolivia since the seventies—the rocks thrown against the latter require more attention. The Civic Committee, whose aim was to organize the opposition to privatization, was formed by representatives of the local élite who had participated in the negotiation of the Aguas del Tunari contract, and was repeatedly considered by the central government as his main interlocutor. In the eyes of the protesters, the Civic Committee was therefore essentially conflated with the neoliberal élites that had facilitated the privatization (Olivera and Lewis 2004: 29). Evidence of the late “territorializing” tactics can be identified on April the 5th, when during a *cabildo*—an open meeting on the Plaza I will discuss later—the crowd decided to head for the Aguas del Tunari office. Upon reaching it, the protesters tore down the “Aguas del Tunari” sign and physically occupied the building (Olivera and Lewis 2004: 39). They then proceeded to the water treatment plant and spray-painted on it the words “*Aguas del Pueblo*”⁹ (Assies 2003: 28).

The difference between January and April is staggering; in the first case, the tactic used—throwing rocks—has no reterritorializing power—it could rather be argued that it strengthens the pre-existing territoriality by resisting it and thus recognizing it—while the April actions show a clear intent of reterritorialization by both tearing down the company’s sign—thus symbolically returning the ownership of the building and the water system to the public—and collectively occupying the offices. An explanation for this tactical evolution could simply be that the movement was stronger in April than it was in January, which would also make its members more bold. But while the act of throwing stones is surely less hazardous than physically occupying a building, the use of a more territorially-aware tactic should also be understood within a broader context of progressive radicalization and development of collective consciousness within the movement about issues such as neoliberalism and alternative societal models. This radicalization is reflected in the expansion of the claims of the Coordinadora—which went from attacking the water rate hikes to putting into question the contract and the neoliberal system as a whole (Assies 2003)—and was strongly affected by the reterritorialization of the Plaza between January and April.

Starting with the first meetings in the Plaza to discuss the privatization at the end of October 1999 (Olivera and Lewis 2004: 27) and up to the last day of turmoil on April the 10th, the Plaza was systematically at the core of the events. Despite its observable centrality in the moments of overt struggle, its initial and arguably more fundamental role was visible in everyday interactions and

⁹ “The People’s Water.”

collective meetings. The anecdote that most effectively summarizes the attempt to reterritorialize the Plaza is probably the banner that was hung in January from the headquarters of the Coordinadora, right on the Plaza. Its words were “*El Agua es Nuestra, Carajo!*”; “The water is ours, dammit” (Schultz 2003: 266). Since the beginning of the mobilization, every Tuesday the Coordinadora organized “protest meetings” on the Plaza in which information about the privatization was provided, subscriptions were collected and the members of the Coordinadora were publicly available to discuss directly with anyone interested (Crespo 2000: 24). This embryonic form of direct contact with the public evolved into a more structured system of assemblies. The first level was formed by small assemblies based on sector, the second level were the Coordinadora meetings, where strategic political analysis and communication took place, while the third level consisted of “*cabildos abiertos*”; open town meetings that took place in plazas, in which up to 100’000 people participated (Terhorst 2003, as cited in Otto and Böhm 2006: 17; Olivera and Lewis 2004: 37-38).

But, as the actions undertaken by the demonstrators between April 4th and 10th show, the Plaza was of great importance also in moments of overt struggle; during these days, the Plaza was “fortified” and used as a “last ground” of resistance by the protesters, who used the cathedral’s bells as a warning system against police attacks and set up a series of checkpoints and barricades around it, as well as using it to organize free distributions of food and first aid (Vargas and Kruse 2000: 13; Schultz 2009: 23). A fundamental role in the reterritorialization of the Plaza as a “territory of resistance” was played by the “water warriors,” groups of marginal youth who found a new way of being integrated in the community through resistance (Assies 2003: 29). As Webber (2011: 155) perfectly described it, “the nobodies became giants” and, I would add, the pedestal that made them so was a uniquely spatial one, namely their ability to claim a role in the struggle for the defence of the Plaza. The importance of the Plaza during the April days was also expressed in more tragic ways; when, on April the 8th, the young Hugo Daza was killed by an army sniper, his body was immediately carried to the Plaza, where people held an “angry, emotional wake” (Schultz 2003: 271). The occupied Plaza and the occupied streets became therefore spaces where emotions were shared and made collective, they became the expression of a new territoriality based on collective solidarity rather than economic individualism; as Dominguez perceptively notes, “after realising that they were fighting for the same cause, their feelings of solidarity were strengthened” (Dominguez 2008: 14).

This progressive process of creation of a collective identity is reflected in the spatiality of mobilization across different areas of the Cochabamba region. In January, the backbone of the protests was formed by the irrigators from the periphery (Assies 2003: 25; Schultz 2009: 19), and a central role in the organization of the January 12th march was played by workers of a shoe factory in

Quillacollo, 13 km away from the city. The differences in mobilization were so evident that Olivera recalls; “We realized that only in the rural areas had workers responded well. A problem existed in the city centre” (Olivera and Lewis 2004: 31). Despite this initial disparity, the February protests—when the first large-scale police repression occurred—saw a progressive inclusion of larger parts of the downtown population in the protests. Again, Olivera remembers that a family living in the city centre opened their house to the protesters during a tear gas attack, and that same family was seen shortly after in the streets protesting; “There they were—with baking soda painted on their faces, with bandanas soaked in vinegar, with rocks, with everything. They had joined the fight” (Olivera and Lewis 2004: 34). By April, the mayor of the city was overheard telling President Hugo Banzer on the phone that “Mr. President, this is not some radical group, it is all of Cochabamba. I just saw my neighbours walking down to protest in the central plaza” (Farthing and Kohl 2001: 10).

This spreading of the protests, as well the ultimate success of the Coordinadora in mobilizing such a large portion of Cochabamba and achieving a surprising victory against privatization, was greatly fostered by the ability of the Coordinadora to physically bring the protests from the periphery to the centre of the city, and to establish a counter-territoriality that, in turn, was able to strengthen and spread a sense of collective identity and purpose through spatial action. On one hand, the struggle that arose from the occupation of space played a key role in creating a collective identity, and a sense of mutual recognition; as Dominguez (2008: 18) observes

The social mobilisations during the Water War showed processes of identification through collective action and not necessarily previous to it. As many ‘water warriors’ express it, the barricades, the marches and the blockades were spaces where people that had never seen each other before used to exchange and share personal experiences.

On the other, the collective occupation of space was essential even outside of the physical struggle expressed through barricades and blockades; I argue that the creation of a counter-territoriality through the reterritorialization of the streets and the plazas in a democratic, collective, horizontal spirit and practices was equally important. Bustamante (2004: 43) contends that the practice of direct democracy was one of the determinants of victory of the Coordinadora and, as Otto and Böhm (2006: 17) point out, “The *cabildos* presented ‘the people’ as a sovereign actor not subjected to decisions made in rooms closed off from the public.” This new, direct, territorially-bound way of doing politics, so directly in contrast with the “privatization of politics” which gave rise to “neoliberal regulations that found themselves on confidentiality” (Vargas and Kruse 2000: 8), constituted a key element both in the creation of a collective unity and in the creation of a counter-territoriality that effectively contributed to the breakdown of neoliberal territoriality in Cochabamba. The *cabildos* were the most

emblematic materialization of a counter-territoriality that opposed the strength of collective participation to neoliberal individualism, a use of space that valued co-presence over neoliberal atomization, a reconfiguration of power in horizontal rather than hierarchical terms. Space, I have argued, is not a neutral container of collective action, but has particular value for different groups. It is clear that the Plaza was a space like no other in Cochabamba, and the symbolical power of the place made its reterritorialization a truly revolutionary act; I contend that the success of the struggle against privatization in Cochabamba shows that the power gained in reterritorializing a space is proportional to the symbolic power of the territory that is being reterritorialized.

As Crespo (2000) observes, the Water War led to the breakdown of neoliberal hegemony in Cochabamba and Bolivia. In the light of the events I have highlighted thus far, I argue that this breakdown was significantly prompted by the materialization of a counter-territoriality through the spatially-bound struggles and occupations that took place during the protests; in this respect, both the co-presence engendered by the collective occupation of public space and the practices deployed in that very space played a key role in the formation of this counter-territoriality. The actions of the law enforcement agents throughout the Water War reflect a clear understanding of these dynamics, and reveal a specific array of tactics aiming to their neutralization.

The Spatial Dynamics of Repression: Enclosing Territory

The repression of the demonstrators in Cochabamba was particularly harsh, and was systematically informed by two essential concerns; preventing the protesters from accessing key symbolic spaces and inhibiting their ability to create co-presence in space. The events I alluded to at the beginning of this section offer the clearest example of the former; after the Coordinadora announced the “*Toma de Cochabamba*” to take place on February the 4th, the central government declared the protest illegal. Since the morning of February the 4th, the clusters of marchers who had gathered at the four cardinal points of the city and were to converge towards the Plaza were confronted with tear gas and clubs by the police¹⁰ (Olivera and Lewis 200: 34), who had also formed a four-blocks perimeter around the Plaza, preventing anyone from entering the area (Algranati 2000: 70; CEDIB 2000; Olivera and Lewis 2004: 34; Webber 2011: 158). The battle rendered every block surrounding the Plaza a “mini-battle field” (Schultz 2003: 266) and, although the protesters ultimately “conquered” the Plaza, the police “rigorously defended” that symbolic space for more than a day (Vargas and Kruse 2000: 12).

¹⁰ With the term “police” I knowingly conflate regular police and military forces; regrettably, none of the accounts I have found make specific, event-by-event distinctions between the two apparatuses, despite generally acknowledging that both were involved in the repression.

The connection between the protester's occupation of the Plaza and the use of repressive tactics by the police is extremely evident; the first episode of repression during the Water War took place on January 13th, when the police used tear gas on the protesters gathered in the Plaza and, as Olivera recalls, the previous instance of these repressive tactics being used in Cochabamba dated back to 1982, when protesting factory workers were massacred in the same place (Olivera and Lewis 2004: 31). Another event of overt repression in a symbolical space occurred on April the 6th, when a crowd of 500 surrounded the prefecture—where the central government was discussing the Aguas del Tunari contract with Cochabamba representatives, Coordinadora excluded—and announced it would not leave until the Coordinadora was admitted to the meeting and an agreement was reached; the police arrested the Coordinadora spokespersons and dispersed the crowd (Olivera and Lewis 2004: 39; Schultz 2000).

The argument could be made that repression just happened to occur where the demonstrators gathered and, since the protests often took place in symbolically charged spaces, repression necessarily happened in the same space. It is also true that in various instances, for example during the aforementioned weekly meetings on the Plaza, or various instances where the protesters occupied the Plaza in April, the police or the army did not even show up (Olivera and Lewis 2004: 39). I nonetheless note that, when repression *did* occur, it occurred in symbolically charged places; for example, no repression was reported during the blockades of highways out of the city centre and, more importantly, the police did not intervene when the protesters occupied the Aguas del Tunari office, thus hinting at the fact that, quite intuitively, spaces that specifically symbolize state power—such as the Plaza or the prefecture—may be regarded as more sensitive when it comes to state repression. Moreover, as the aforementioned facts that took place on February the 4th demonstrate, the police's actions were not a response to the protesters presence in the Plaza, but rather an explicit attempt to keep them out of that specific space; in my opinion this would show how repression was more focused on the space the protesters were trying to access rather than on the pursuit of demonstrators *per se*, wherever they were protesting.

But while on the one hand repression aimed to prevent demonstrators from accessing key symbolic places after protests broke out, less overt, more pre-emptive spatial tactics can also be observed in the Water War. A first minor example can be already found in February, days before the “*Toma*” and the subsequent major “Battle for the Plaza,” when the Bolivian central government sent special police forces from La Paz to Cochabamba and, as the population reacted furiously to the deployment of these “strangers” (Olivera and Lewis 2004: 35), this shows that both the government and the people were conscious that spatial proximity was not only paramount for the protesters, but

also for the effectiveness of the repression. Although it would be hard to prove with certainty, the fact that the police forces were not from Cochabamba has in my opinion increased the harshness of the repression; given how widespread the protest was, and how concerned all *Cochabambinos* were by the privatization, it would be reasonable to imagine that the city's police would not have been so keen to use live ammunition and tear gas on other *Cochabambinos* as the special forces from La Paz did.

These special forces also demonstrated a peculiar attention to the spatial determinants of the protest by attempting to hinder the gathering of protesters. In the days prior to the "*Toma de Cochabamba*," in addition to intimidatingly patrolling the streets in an attempt to discourage participation (De la Fuente 2000: 4), the police set up checkpoints around the city and systematically blocked the buses of *cocaleros* trying to get there for the "*Toma*" (Algranati 2000: 70; Schultz 2000; Olivera and Lewis 2004: 33). A similar concern with keeping the protesters spatially scattered, and taking every care to ensure they could not reunite, can be observed on April the 7th, when many leaders of the Coordinadora were arrested and, despite the availability of a prison in Cochabamba, were sent to San Joaquín en el Beni, in a prison in the jungle (De la Fuente 2000: 7; Schultz 2000).

The combination of these actions clearly shows that spatial concerns were at the core of the repressive tactics deployed in Cochabamba. The strenuous defence of the "heart of the city"—the Plaza—on February 4th and 5th shows how not only the protesters, but also the police forces were aware of the iconic importance of the Plaza, and the consequences that its radical reterritorialization would have had on the strengthening of the protest. Moreover, while enforcing "order" by systematically attempting to fragment, separate, disperse the protesters, the police forces were—mostly unconsciously—re-establishing a neoliberal territoriality where urban space is not a place for politics, where civic matters are not discussed publicly, where freedom is expressed a-spatially, through market mechanisms rather than spatially, through the collective appropriation of the decision-making process. In this perspective, the "confrontational tactics" employed by the protesters were perceived as "confrontational" not merely because of the occupation of public space, but rather because of their potential to actively reterritorialize a symbolic space, thus materializing a counter-territoriality.

Conclusions

The previous sections illuminated two essential dimensions of the Cochabamba Water War. First, the protester's ability to create new counter-territorialities by reterritorializing key public spaces and using them in democratic, revolutionary ways was important in the creation of a shared identity and the victory over neoliberal privatization. Second, the police's tactics during the Water War had

two fundamental aims; preventing the protesters' access to spaces bearing particular symbolical meaning, and trying to prevent the demonstrators' co-presence in space. The wider implications of these findings are in my opinion important both for the practices of social movements and for academic research.

First, protest movements need to be deeply aware of their use of space, particularly when occupying it. Through my analysis of the Water War I have shown that the relevance of the occupation of public space was not simply a product of its physical appropriation—in Sack's territorial sense—but rather of its reterritorialization as crystallized by Raffestin's notion of territoriality. Rather than reflecting mere physical mastery, the function of an occupied space should be the creation of a counter-territoriality through the deployment of practices expressing power relations that are in opposition to the dominant territoriality. In the case of neoliberalism, resistance movements should follow the example of the protesters in Cochabamba, who created a counter-territoriality expressing new democratic, horizontal and just relations between space and society, thus also proposing a radical shift in the power relations between its members; these practices pushed towards the (re)constitution of what Harvey (2012) defines as “the urban commons.” In this regard, a key role is played by direct forms of participation in the decision-making processes, which epitomize a materialization of direct democracy, itself being one of the main foundations of the global anti-neoliberal struggle. In my opinion, what social movements can therefore learn from the *Cochabambinos* is that a special emphasis should be attributed to the specific use of occupied space, rather than just to its control.

On the other hand, concerning protest repression, the Water War is a useful case study in that, by providing blatant, overtly violent, observable forms of repression illuminates how repression is extremely space sensitive. While some recent research on the policing of international summits has started to acknowledge the underlying importance of not overtly violent spatial forms of protest policing (Fernandez 2005; Zajko and Béland 2008), this stream of research has not yet received the attention it in my opinion deserves. This concealed dimension is nonetheless particularly relevant, especially since some scholars have observed the emergence of a new form of protest policing, arguing that since the seventies western democracies have been moving from a regime of “escalated force,” where violence was the norm in policing protests, to one of “negotiated management” mainly relying on negotiation between protesters and police (McPhail et al. 1998). Thus, if space is—as I showed—crucial, it would be necessary to analyse if and how less overt forms of controlling protests—the aforementioned other typologies of protest control identified by Earl (2003; 2006) and the strategies of “negotiated management”—act upon space to neutralize dissent. While in modern “negotiated management” regimes the absence of observable violence might suggest that repression

is not taking place, the same goals that drove the actions of the police in Cochabamba might simply be pursued with different—less “backfire-prone”—strategies; as Mitchell (2003: 2) brilliantly notes, silencing is, after all, a function of geography. Agreeing beforehand upon the route of street protests, appointing specific spaces where protest is permitted, requiring the sponsorship of a recognized—and thus often strictly hierarchical—organization are all ways to prevent, in one way or another, the radical reterritorialization of symbolically charged spaces, hence *de facto* scaling down considerably the ability of protests to create significant counter-territorialities. This regime strongly relies on the state’s prerogative to define the lawfulness of a protest while implicitly retaining control over the means of coercion, thus creating a strong incentive for potential protesters to willingly abide to these norms of “negotiated neutralization” through spatial arrangements.¹¹ In this perspective, the threat approach’s “confrontational tactics” are met with repression because of their refusal to submit to this “spatial neutralization,” and their attempt to reterritorialize significant spaces that would make the protest momentous; the “confrontational nature” of these tactics, I contend, stems precisely from their effectiveness in the use of protest in relevant spaces as a mean to materialize a counter-territoriality. Thus, I finally argue, to evaluate to what extent a “confrontational tactic” will be likely to induce repression it is necessary to take into account two separate but intertwined variables; the counterhegemonic potential conveyed by the protest’s practices, as well as the space they are enacted in.

To conclude, I have highlighted the relations between different social actors and space during the Cochabamba Water War; while, as I already stated, not every action can—or should—be explained through spatial logics, space was nevertheless not a neutral container of social activity. Rather, it was both shaper and shaped by the actions of different actors; in this perspective, territoriality represents a useful notion that helps to illuminate not only observable behaviours, but also the mechanisms underlying spatial conducts. In the light of the facts and interpretations I have provided thus far, I conclude that the Cochabamba Water War can be summarized as a contention that did not start as a conflict *about* territory, but progressively turned into a conflict *between* adverse territorialities *over* territory.

¹¹ The mechanism is similar to what Foucault (1975) defines as “disciplinary power”.

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Appendix A

January–April 2000: A Brief Chronology of the Cochabamba Water War

January 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 hours strike against the privatization declared by the Civic Committee. • The Coordinadora declares an indefinite strike and blockade of the city instead.
January 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of the Civic Committee’s 24 hours strike. • The Coordinadora maintains the highway blockades and organizes demonstrations on the Plaza.
January 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stones thrown at the offices of the Civic Committee and the government building. • While the Coordinadora negotiates with the government, the police uses tear gas on the protesters gathered in the Plaza. • Later that day, the government agrees to negotiate the privatization with the Coordinadora and the Civic Committee over the following three months.
January-February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The negotiations stagnate • The <i>Cochabambinos</i> refuse to pay their water bills and Aguas del Tunari threatens to cut the water to those who don’t pay. • The Coordinadora announces the peaceful “<i>Toma de Cochabamba</i>”, the government sends special security forces from La Paz.
February 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “<i>Toma de Cochabamba</i>”, blockades of the highways. • First major police repression, first major “Battle for the Plaza” • The police occupies the squares around the Plaza and prevent anyone from entering the area.
February 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The “Battle for the Plaza” continues. • The protesters manage to “conquer” the Plaza in the evening.
February 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government agrees to freeze the rate hikes, to renegotiate the privatization and come up with a solution within two months.
February-April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The negotiations stagnate. • March 26: The Coordinadora organizes a popular consultation about the tariff increases, the Aguas del Tunari Contract and the privatization. 48’276 persons vote, the vast majority (99, 96 and 97%) declare themselves “against”. • March 31: Declaration of an indefinite blockade of the city for April the 4th.
April 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blockades of the highways • General strike and occupation of the Plaza

April 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During a <i>cabildo</i>, the large crowd decides to move to the Aguas del Tunari office. The building and the water plant are occupied
April 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The protesters surround the prefecture and require the Coordinadora to be admitted inside, where negotiations are being held. • Leaders of the Coordinadora are allowed in the prefecture and shortly after arrested. • The police disperses the crowd in front of the prefecture.
April 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An unprecedented crowd occupies the plaza demanding the cancellation of the Aguas del Tunari contract and the reversal of the privatization: the plaza is “fortified” and barricades are erected. • The government announces the cancellation of the contract, but this is revealed to be a bluff; during the night leaders of the Coordinadora are arrested and sent to a prison in the jungle.
April 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government declares a 90-day state of siege • The conflict between the protesters—namely the “water warriors”—and the security forces intensify. • Hugo Daza, a 17-year old protester, is killed by an army sniper.
April 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aguas del Tunari withdraws from the country, and the government declares the contract void. • The protesters, reminded of the April 7th bluff, remain in the Plaza and demand proof.
April 10-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An official agreement is reached between the government and the Coordinadora; the Aguas del Tunari contract is cancelled and the water’s ownership is returned to the public company.
April 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The state of siege is lifted

Sources: I have integrated Bustamante (2004) with a combination of the sources used throughout the dissertation, namely Assies (2000), Schultz (2000), Olivera and Lewis (2004).