Chapter 4: Cala Cala beyond *"lo Afro"*

Cumplir Función Social, Identidad Yungueña and the Comunidad Cocalera

In the preceding chapter, I have shown how collective identification as Afrobolivians, locally expressed through the term *"los Afros de Cala,"* is an important horizon of community for the people in Cala Cala. In this chapter, I will introduce another horizon of community before discussing their entanglement and emerging political and legal constellations that change the relationship between those horizons. I will initially approach this alternative horizon of community through an analysis of the emic concept *"cumplir función social"* (lit.: "[to] fulfill/perform a social function"). *Cumplir función social* is derived from the community's organization in a peasant union *(sindicato)*, but the ideas associated with it transcend institutionalized contexts. I will then discuss the importance of discourses on regional identity *(identidad Yungueña)* for people in Cala Cala and outline the sources of this regional culture and the lifestyle associated with it. As will become clear, the particular landscape, history and the multiethnic makeup of its society due to migratory flows in and out of the Yungas are decisive factors here. Next, I will consider the fundamental role of the practice of cultivating coca and its impact on labor exchange, solidarity and cohesion in a *comunidad cocalera*. Finally, I will introduce the coca field as the main space of social interaction in Cala Cala, highlighting the consequences that this has for how competing perspectives on collective identifications are debated.

"Cumplir función social": becoming a member of the *comunidad* through practice

As I mentioned at the outset of the preceding chapter, Cala Cala is considered and treated as part of the *comunidad Nogalani* in administrative settings. This is due to the fact that they share a *sindicato campesino*. People's everyday usage of the term *"comunidad"* mirrors this broader understanding to a great extent. When I travelled with people from Cala Cala to the towns of Coripata, Arapata or Trinidad Pampa – for example in order to visit the market there – we sometimes met people and

my companions from Cala Cala engaged them in conversation. When I asked who those people were, the answer was often something like this: This is Robustiano, he's from the *comunidad ("Es Robustiano, es de la comunidad")*. The meaning of *comunidad* and a shared sense of identity as *comunarios* (as the members of the *comunidad* are called in emic terms) in those contexts thus went beyond *"los Afros de Cala Cala."*

The *sindicatos campesinos* (peasant unions) to which this dimension of *comunidad* is closely related were established after the National Revolution in 1952 by the Government of the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR)* as a means to politically and economically organize the inhabitants of the former *haciendas* (see chapter 2). The *sindicato* as an institution is of crucial importance for a variety of reasons. In particular, the *sindicato* handles questions of land tenure and oversees compliance with the provisional land demarcations and rights established through the 1953 land reform. This is especially important since there has been no official measuring, demarcation and/or individual land titling since the reform in the 1950s and any claim to land or quarrels about boundaries and usage rights have to be negotiated within the *sindicato* structure. Furthermore, all matters of infrastructure (the community school, the construction and maintenance of roads, drinking water and electricity supply) are handled by the *sindicato* on behalf of the *comunidad*. The local *sindicato* and the regional *subcentrales* and *centrales* (consisting of various local *sindicatos*) are also important in terms of political representation on the regional and national levels and funding from the national and municipal governments is channeled through those institutions to the *comunidades*. Through the *sindicato*, the *comunidad* is also represented in the regional coca producers association (*Asociación Departamental de Productores de Coca ADEPCOCA*), an organization that handles all issues related to the commercialization of the coca leaf. ADEPCOCA issues the credentials *(carnet de productor)* that allow peasants to transport their coca harvest to La Paz and sell it on the only legal marketplace in La Paz that is also run by ADEPCOCA.

Yet the *sindicato* is not only important in terms of institutionalized relationships. As Caroline Conzelman (2007:193) has described for the case of Coroico (Nor Yungas), *sindicatos cocaleros* function as a "system for community governance" that transcends issues strictly related to politics, labor and land tenure to "encompass all issues related to communal life"; in many regards, "a *sindicato* functions as the community" (Conzelman 2007:169). All households in a *comunidad* must be members *(afiliados)* of the *sindicato*. To become a member, a household must first own land within the territory of the *comunidad*.[1] But the requirements for membership

1 Obtaining land in a Yungas *comunidad* is possible in a variety of ways including inheritance, purchase and some very particular local arrangements that are characterized by a combination of temporary usufruct rights with specific labor obligations towards the owner that can result in obtaining permanent access. For details see Spedding (1994:41–45).

do not end there. What is even more important is what people locally refer to as *"cumplir función social,"* performing a social function in the *comunidad*. Membership is thus never achieved permanently, but has to be continually reaffirmed through practice.

Cumplir función social is a complex concept. It includes meeting specific formal obligations towards the *sindicato*: attending monthly *sindicato* meetings, paying quotas for *sindicato* expenses, participating in communal works (concerning schools, roads, or potable water supply) and/or attending political rallies and protests organized by the *sindicato*. It also means assuming an office in the *sindicato* hierarchy from time to time. Attendance at the monthly meeting and the observance of obligations concerning communal works and rallies is controlled very strictly and any member who fails to comply with the requirement will inevitably have to pay a fine *(multa)*. Beyond these rather formal obligations, it is expected that no member disturbs the peace of the community, engages in illegal activities or makes the community look bad *("hacer quedar mal a la comunidad")* for getting into trouble in other *comunidades* or in the neighboring towns. People that do not observe these rules are not only in danger of being fined monetarily, but will also lose the support of the *sindicato* in cases where they need a conflict to be resolved within or beyond the *comunidad*. If a household fails to fulfill the social function that is expected, its members can become the object of public reprimand and scorn, monetary sanctions and eventually – in extreme cases – people are evicted from the *comunidad* and their land is confiscated by the *sindicato*. No household – or even the whole of Cala Cala – could therefore afford to withdraw from the *sindicato*. This would mean not only withdrawing from an institution, but relinquishing membership of a community of social, economic and political practice.

Since it is firmly rooted in the practices of *cumplir función social*, collective identification as *comunarios* is viewed as processual from an emic perspective and belonging has to be reaffirmed continuously. This also means that the boundaries of *comunario* identity are inchoate to a large degree. In this sense, this collective identification differs from the emic perspectives on *"los Afros de Cala Cala,"* who are often represented as constituting a more stable collective with clearer and less permeable boundaries. The processual and performative notion of *comunidad* expressed through *"cumplir función social"* functions in a different register and, in my view, this also explains why references to allegedly stable categories of identification like *Afroboliviano* or *Aymara* are regarded as secondary when debating membership as *comunarios*.

Local traditions and *identidad Yungueña* in Cala Cala

Beyond constituting a single community of practice mediated by the *sindicato* and the 'social functions' an individual or a household "performs," there is also a very strong sense of common history and tradition in Nogalani that is expressed in the celebration of religious holidays, community fiestas and ritualized contexts like burials of deceased members of the *comunidad*.

A few weeks into my fieldwork, I participated in the events surrounding the holiday of *"Todos Santos"* (All Saints' Day). As in other parts of Bolivia, one important part of this holiday is the visiting of *mesas*. *Mesas* (lit.: tables, see fig. 10) are set up by the relatives of deceased community members for the spirit of the dead that is said to visit the house on *Todos Santos*.

Figure 10: Comunarios sitting next to a mesa prepared for the spirit of a deceased family member in a house in Cala Cala (photograph by the author).

People prepare the *mesas* with the favorite food and drinks of the dead relatives and invite people from the *comunidad* to their houses to pray for the spirits in front of their *mesas*. Visitors are offered drinks, bread and coca and are received throughout the entire day (see Canessa [2012c:157–159] for a detailed description of *Todos Santos*). I accompanied Víctor on his tour of different houses and during our

visits to *mesas* in Cala Cala, Bella Vista and Nogalani, people repeatedly started discussing 'traditions' of the community.[2] The *tradiciones* people were discussing were all common 'traditions' of the *comunidad* not particularly associated with either Aymara or *Afrobolivianos*. In the context of *Todos Santos*, interpreted by most people as one of the *comunidad's* most important 'traditions', it became apparent that an interest in this type of tradition was very widespread. On the one hand, people argued that the maintenance of these traditions was a fundamental part of defining the identity of the *comunidad*; on the other hand many contributions during the exchanges I witnessed echoed a seemingly nostalgic preoccupation with the fact that many of the local 'traditions' were in fact waning. "How might it have been before?" *("¿Cómo habrá sido antes?")* was the most vividly discussed question. People share the assumptions that many things must have been lost, that the ancestors *(los abuelos)* must have done things differently. Furthermore, the question of who could know how to revitalize what has been lost was of paramount importance.

After some drinks – praying at a *mesa* is always rewarded with alcohol, coca and bread – people start talking about legends. One narrative that caught my attention was a legend of *hacienda* gold that is said to be hidden in *tapados* (hidden deposits of gold also occasionally associated with Andean religious beliefs (Spedding 2014)). These *tapados* are reported to burn at certain times of the year, the blaze of the glowing gold being discernible from afar. Yet nobody has ever been able to find the gold. When you get too close, the villagers said, it disappears. One man reported that he witnessed foreigners *("gringos")* turning up near the village. They were carrying secret maps and were using metal detectors to look for the gold. Yet they were also not able to find it. Everybody present started to wonder who might know where the *hacendados* hid their fortunes. The general thrust of the story is a shared feeling of having been tricked out of their fair share of the riches of the *haciendas*: How could the fruits of the work of so many people have been taken away? Why do we suffer, when there was so much money? What do we have to do to change our lot? These nostalgic tales express the desires and questions belonging to all *comunarios*. Not once did anybody make reference to Afrobolivians, Aymara, or any other clearly defined ethnic collective. The frame of this kind of tale is a shared sense of *Yungueño* and *cocalero* identification. Like the narrative above, there are many others. They are about quasi-mythical creatures that roam the outskirts of the community *(el tigre wasqueador)*, stories about the *camino de la muerte* (the road that leads to the Yungas and is infamously known as the Road of Death due to the high number of fatal accidents) and the spirits of the deceased that wander at the side of the road. My point here is that these are shared traditions and myths of a

2 This was certainly at least in part triggered by the presence of 'the anthropologist' (a profession almost naturally associated with an interest in 'traditions' of the people in Bolivia).

Yungas *comunidad*, not of any ethnically defined group in particular. In many instances, history and traditions are framed as the common and shared history of the *comunidad* and all the people that live there.

Beyond debating common traditions and history, a sense of 'belonging together' as a *comunidad* is furthermore expressed in the practices of festivities like *Todos Santos* or the patron saint's *fiesta* of the *comunidad* and through other ritual practices like the wakes and burials of deceased *comunarios*. In those contexts, community solidarity and belonging are created and performed in practice. Similar to what Andrew Canessa describes for the village of Wila Kjarka, fiestas are "occasions when the whole community acts as one household sharing food, drink, and coca together." He argues that "it is thus through fiestas and the sharing of food, alcohol, and coca with each other and the spirits that the community and its identity is created and affirmed" (Canessa 2012c:123).

Another illustrative example of how Cala Cala and Nogalani are entangled as one single *comunidad* was a *velorio* (wake) for a recently deceased person that I attended while staying in Cala Cala (for a full discussion of a *velorio* in the Yungas see Spedding 1996:82–85). Roberto's wife had alerted us to the fact that a man from Nogalani had passed away and that the *velorio* was going to take place that same day in the house of the family of the deceased. When we arrived, a great number of people were already sitting in the room where the coffin was displayed, as well as on the patio and on the stairs outside. Family members distributed coca leaves, soda and *pasankalla* (toasted white maize, typical of the *altiplano*, particularly the region around Copacabana on Lake Titicaca) for the people attending the wake. Inside, an Afrobolivian woman from Cala Cala was praying with the closest family members of the deceased, speaking in Spanish and Aymara interchangeably. She was *de pollera* (wearing the typical skirt, shirt and bowler hat of the *chola paceña)* and Roberto told me that she was involved in one of the evangelical churches based in Nogalani as a pastor. He added that this woman was widely respected among the members of the *comunidad*. Most of the family of the deceased were also members of that church *("También son hermanos")* and Roberto explained to me that there had been quarrels about land among the children of the deceased man and that the *pastora* was trying to reconcile them in light of their father's death. Later, we sat with other members of the *comunidad*, chewing coca and drinking soft drinks – due to the fact that the evangelical *hermanos* rejected the consumption of alcohol, which would otherwise have been served during the *velorio* (cf. Spedding 1996).

During these conversations, I was approached by various members of the *comunidad* who volunteered to explain the tradition of a *velorio* to me.[3] The important

3 It was soon common knowledge that I was doing some kind of project on the community and without me ever specifying, people assumed that I must be interested in the 'traditions' of the community. I have found that this is a very common assumption people have when

point here is that they approached the subject from a perspective that regarded tradition as something related to the *comunidad* and the region, not to specific ethnoracial collectives. In their comments on traditions they rather focused on the fact that the growing presence of Pentecostal churches is having an impact on how certain traditions are performed. When I later spoke to Roberto about the *velorio*, he also mainly focused on the peculiar aspects of the ceremony due to the family being *hermanos*. During that day, the only instance when anyone made reference to a distinction between Aymara and Afrobolivians was when – at the sight of the Afrobolivian *pastora* reconciling mourning family members in Aymara – Roberto told me that he did not understand what she said, but that his mother was equally fluent in Aymara, as were many *Afros de antes*.[4]

What these examples show, I argue, is that there exists a common horizon of community, tradition, and history that is expressed and reaffirmed through practices during religious festivities and ritual occasions, as well as mirrored in people's comments on these occasions. Moreover, the sense of commonality and solidarity expressed in those contexts finds a discursive referent in the concept of *identidad Yungueña*. As in many other regions in Bolivia, the inhabitants of the Yungas share a very strong sense of regional identity and the local traditions I have described are an important part of this. Additional markers of this shared identity as *Yungueños* include the climatological features of the region, which are so vastly different from the cold, mountainous *altiplano* and the peaks of the Andes, as well as a shared sense of history and suffering (mostly at the hands of the land-owning elite) as *Yungueños* beyond local *comunidades* (Spedding and Colque 2003). Most important, however, is the region's close and intense relationship with the coca leaf: "For the zone of coca cultivation, there is one central element that defines regional identity: the very fact of being cocaleros" (Spedding and Llanos 1999:285, my translation).[5] The overarching identification as *cocaleros* is the cohesive factor in a region that has historically been associated with colonization and migration (Spedding 2009:441f). This is not to say that there are no references to ethnoracial identifications with regard to the Yungas. Inhabitants of the Yungas have been described as "*los otros Aymaras*," whose lifestyle and culture differs significantly from the Aymara groups in the highland regions of Bolivia, although they speak the same language and are thus often considered part of the same ethnic group (Equipo CIPCA 1976). Similarly,

dealing with foreigners in their community, especially foreigners who conduct some kind of research.

4 In practice, the loss of bilingualism on the part of Afrobolivians does not hinder communication with the wider community since practically all inhabitants nowadays speak Spanish. Until after the land reform, this was different, as many Aymara were monolingual Aymara speakers.

5 "*Para la zona cocalera, hay un elemento central que define la identidad regional: el mismo hecho de ser cocaleros.*"

the hyphenated denomination *Afro-Yungueño* is quite common for describing Afrobolivian cultural traditions originating in the Yungas. However, ethnoracial differences are regarded as secondary. Echoing Alison Spedding's contributions (Spedding 1994; Spedding 2009; Spedding and Colque 2003), in a series of influential publications, Xavier Albó and his CIPCA research team have described the Yungas as a region fundamentally influenced by coca cultivation, characterizing, for example, the region around Coripata as a "land of anguish and coca plantations" *("tierra de angustia y cocales")* (Equipo CIPCA 1977).

Figure 11: Typical Yungas landscape with cocales in Cala Cala (photograph by the author).

Recently, Alessandra Pellegrini Calderón has emphasized the continuing importance of coca for the region and the particular stance *cocaleros Yungueños* take towards plurinational identity politics by positively rejecting the 'indigenous people slot' (Pellegrini Calderón 2016). Moreover, coca cultivation not only fundamentally influences *Yungueños*' economy, but has also become an important factor in endowing a particular regional political solidarity. Defending their right to coca cultivation has united *Yungueños* behind a common cause very firmly for generations and in mid-2017, just about a month after I left Cala Cala and Bolivia, tens of thousands of *cocaleros* from the Yungas were protesting against the government's new legislation on coca in the streets of La Paz. All this serves as a backdrop for a fairly strong discourse on *Yungueño* identity and culture firmly associated with coca cultivation. It is important to note that this perspective is not only put forth in

scholarly publications; it is something people in Cala Cala and Nogalani – Afrobolivians and Aymara alike – express frequently. Coca, however, is not only important as the basis of regional identity and political solidarity. It is also of vital economic importance and cultivating coca is the activity that shapes nearly all contexts of everyday life.

The coca economy: cooperation, cohesion and the distribution of labor

The most important aspect of daily life in Cala Cala is coca cultivation. The necessities associated with coca production determine the terms of cooperation and social cohesion, and shape relationships between individuals, households and groups. Beyond merely economic aspects, being a *cocalero* entails engaging in social relationships that span the whole community and serve to constitute it as such. Most *comunidades* in the Yungas are not only communities in a geographical sense and because they share a history as a *hacienda*, they are first and foremost *comunidades cocaleras*. Being a *cocalero* – and thus forming part of a *comunidad cocalera* – means developing communal ties around what Alison Spedding has called the "coca field as a total social fact" (Spedding 1997). According to this notion, being a *cocalero* means more than engaging in a certain agricultural activity and encompasses values, beliefs and practices that span the whole spectrum of society. These assertions fit Juan Angola's interpretation of the role of coca for Afrobolivians. For Angola, it is mainly by way of integrating in the coca economy that they have "put down roots" (*"en la coca se enraiga su Africanidad en el entorno Boliviano"*) in Bolivia and in the Yungas social fabric (Angola Maconde 2003:3). Saying this goes beyond the symbolic and rather hollow identification with the coca leaf that has prevailed in the political arena in Bolivia in recent years (cf. Grisaffi 2010). From this perspective, the constitutive element of *Afro-Yungueño* lifestyle and a determining factor for everyday social practice is the *Yungeño* part of the hyphenated denomination. The 'Afro' part is definitive only to a lesser extent, despite the fact that it seems to become ever more prominent in the realm of political positioning. Being *Yungueño*, as we have seen, means to a great extent being *cocalero*. In what follows, I will briefly describe systems of labor exchange, since they fundamentally determine how people relate to each other and thus provide a good vantage point from which to discuss the salience (or lack thereof) of ethnoracial categories.

Growing coca and the social significance of the exchange of labor

Life in Cala Cala is determined by the rhythm of agricultural work and organized mainly within small households that are the basic units in social and economic respects. Most households depend almost exclusively on the cultivation of coca leaf

for survival. A household generally consists of two generations (a couple and their children), occasionally of three generations (including the parents of one of the spouses). Even though it is not uncommon for children to participate in the agricultural chores, most of them nowadays spend the majority of their time in school, joining their parents for work in the afternoons or on the weekends. Days in the Yungas start early. Women generally get up before sunrise and prepare both breakfast and lunch for all members of the family. After a simple breakfast consisting of bread and tea or *sultana* (an infusion made of coffee cherries) the children leave for school. Adult members of the household prepare to leave for the coca fields where they spend the rest of the day. In some cases, people eat a bowl of soup or *almuerzo* (lit. "lunch," usually at least one source of carbohydrates like noodles, rice or *yuca* [manioc] with meat and vegetables) right before leaving; in other cases they just take their food with them. In the fields, they complete different tasks depending on the requirements of their or other people's crops (dig, weed, harvest, etc.). Normally, people stay in the fields the whole day and return to their houses at dusk. This makes the coca field the main site of interaction with members of the wider *comunidad*. Depending on the occasion and the tasks that have to be completed, the group of people working together in one field varies greatly, from working completely alone to being part of a larger group of about a dozen people.

The fundamental importance of organizing the Yungas workforce stems from the fact that growing coca in the Yungas is a very labor-intensive endeavor. Due to the landscape in the Yungas, the botany of the plant and the fact that the leaves are very fragile and only intact ones are eligible for traditional consumption, coca agriculture has not undergone much mechanization. Comparing accounts of early colonial sources describing coca cultivation with what one encounters in the Yungas nowadays, one does not find great differences in terms of planting and harvesting techniques or the implementation of technology (Spedding 2004). Being a *cocalero* remains an occupation that demands a lot of manual labor and relatively little technology. The large amount of labor required makes it necessary to establish mechanisms for exchanging labor between households within the *comunidad* since, at times, it is impossible for a single household to provide the workforce needed by itself. This occurs when a new coca field has to be planted, during the rainy season when the growth of weeds becomes excessive and the fields need to be taken care of regularly, and during times of harvest (up to four times a year). For each of these tasks, all *cocalero* households have to mobilize support from the *comunidad*. For example, the very complicated process of digging and terracing a new coca field requires the work of several men over several days. Weeding larger coca fields can also not be accomplished by a household alone. And especially when the leaves are being harvested, good timing and sufficient labor at a specific moment is of paramount importance. If the leaves are not harvested within a determined timeframe, the quality and/or quantity of the harvest decreases with

grave economic consequences for the household. In coca production there is a division of labor according to gender. Women are generally *k'ichiri* (harvesters, *k'ichir* means [to] harvest in Aymara), whereas men most often dig and plant new fields and weed the existing *cocales*. At times, men also participate in the harvest though, and it is also known for women to occasionally weed a *cocal*.

Ayni

When I first arrived in the town of Coripata, I met two *cocaleros* from Cala Cala and Afrobolivian historian Juan Angola Maconde from the neighboring community of Dorado Chico. When I explained my interest in the community to them, Angola told me: "It is good that you are here. In Cala Cala, you will be able to experience *ayni* [reciprocal exchange of labor] between Afrobolivians and Aymara." He went on to emphasize that Afrobolivians and indigenous groups have been living together for centuries and that there has been a lot of exchange between the two groups. Cooperation and exchange is not limited to the coca economy but in the realm of everyday agricultural practice it is most salient and also most regular. *"Hacerse ayni"* is a fundamental economic necessity in a *cocalero* community and a practice that determines social relations within a *comunidad* to a great extent (see Spedding 1994).

Neither in Cala Cala nor in Dorado Chico (according to Juan Angola Maconde) did people make a distinction between Afrobolivians and Aymara when it came to the subject of discussing *ayni*. The families I lived with engaged in *ayni* exchange likewise with Afrobolivian and Aymara households. Both Roberto and Verónica went to work in other people's fields while I stayed with them and never expressed any reservations about working for somebody based on his ethnicity. Determining their willingness to accede to a plea for *ayni* were practical reasons, economic calculations or already existing obligations to reciprocate *ayni* they had received previously. Verónica sometimes only reluctantly agreed to work on somebody's harvest due to the fact that she considered the field poorly taken care of and too weed-infested, which meant that there was constant danger of overlooking a snake and getting bitten. Or she would hesitate to accept an offer to work for money and rather accept an offer to "win *ayni*" *("ganarse ayni")* since she would then be able to claim the payment of an *ayni* debt instead of trying to convince others to work for her as a *jornalero* when she had need of help (see below). On other occasions she would chose to work in a certain field because a friend of hers had already accepted an owner's offer and they would be able to work together all day, which she found enjoyable. This non-exhaustive list of reasons could be continued; the point is that this type of reasoning and deliberation is much more common than approaching the subject in ethnic terms. To put it bluntly, I never heard anyone saying: "I am not going to work in X or Y's field because he/she is of this or that ethnicity." The same

is true for Roberto, her husband. When he was asked to help another member of the *comunidad* he pondered economic factors, personal preferences, and basic circumstances in order to determine what he was going to do. From what I observed in the *comunidad*, other households made similar choices and there were no open references to ethnicity or 'culture' in this regard. As far as the information I collected in Cala Cala goes, there is no differentiation based on ethnic categories in the realm of *ayni*. [6] There is also no ethnic dimension to specific tasks, no system of ethnic trades and no ethnic division of labor. Nor are sources of livelihood or certain lifestyles associated with certain ethnic groups (as is the case, for example, in the pastoralist-agriculturalist divide in parts of Africa (Pelican 2015)).

Jornales/mink'a

Besides *ayni*, there have always been other modalities of organizing the workforce in the Yungas. Hiring *mink'as* (in Aymara) or *jornaleros* was and is a very common procedure when a household is in need of extra labor. A *jornalero* is paid a specific sum of money *(un jornal)* for a day's work in other people's fields. Unlike *ayni*, *jornales* do not imply a reciprocal relationship and the salary has to be paid the same day. In the past, working as a *jornalero* was regarded as a disgrace. Young men having to earn a living as *jornaleros* were considered inferior since they neither had a coca plantation of their own nor were part of a household with enough work (i.e. *cocales*) to keep them occupied. What is more, their need to generate immediate cash income was seen as a sign of poverty and financial need (Spedding 2009:464; see also Spedding 1994). Likewise, hiring a *jornalero* was also the less desirable option for the hiring party. It was assumed that an *ayni*-giver would complete the assigned tasks more thoroughly, since he or she expected to receive *ayni* in return at some later date. A *jornalero*, the assumption goes, gains significantly less strategic advantage in completing the tasks to the ordering party's satisfaction and even has little moral obligation to do so. In recent years, however, a significant shift has been occurring in terms of the economic and moral evaluation of *jornaleros*. Some would even go as far as to say that most people nowadays prefer to hire *jornaleros* over participating in *ayni* networks, since being part of such networks implies incurring significant debts and social obligations. The same facets of *ayni* that had been prized as fundamental pillars of community solidarity and social cohesion nowadays seem to hamper individuals' entrepreneurial activities. Well-off households

6 There are, to be sure, accounts (Léons 1972; Rey 1998) that report differentiation in ethnic terms between Afrobolivians and Aymara in the context of *ayni* in the past. Afrobolivians in Chicaloma, for example, preferred to work in so called *juntas* (working groups) and were not as deeply entangled in the *ayni* networks of the Aymara segments of their community (Léons 1972). Similarly, Rey (1998) asserts that in the *comunidades* around Coroico, *ayni* exchange does not cross ethnic boundaries.

prefer to invest money over incurring *ayni* debts and therefore gladly hire *jornaleros* to avoid the obligation to reciprocate on the other households' terms in the future.

Faena

Another mode of organizing collective work is the so-called *faena*. It dates back to the times of the *hacienda* and was mostly practiced when a significant labor force was needed at one particular moment in time. It is also sometimes referred to as *trabajo festivo* (work party) and the organizers of the *faena* are required to provide the workers with food and (alcoholic) beverages (Spedding 1994:78). Beyond the merely economic aspect, *faenas* also have ritual dimensions. For example, when planting a new *cocal* or for its first harvest, a *faena* is organized to ritually establish the new field (Spedding 1994:79). This mirrors not only the difficulty and intensity inherent in this task, but also the fundamental importance that the planting of a new field covers in the lifecycle of individuals in a *cocalero* community. By planting their 'own' coca field that usually produces harvests for up to forty years and thus lasts for their whole working life, young males become 'men,' full members of the community and the head of their household. As far as my interlocutors in Cala Cala are concerned, *faena* is hardly ever practiced anymore. Roberto remembered participating in various *faenas*, yet they were always 'special occasions,' not an everyday affair, and nowadays are even rarer. During the *hacienda* period, many landowners prohibited *faenas* organized by their *peones* and tried to do away with this 'uncivilized' custom that frequently ended in a generalized intoxication of large groups of workers. Roberto mentioned *faenas* where the organizing party would dig in bottles of beer and alcohol *(trago)* in the ground at the end of the stretch of land that was to be prepared for planting, encouraging the diggers to advance swiftly and rewarding them with an extra share of alcohol if they completed their task. He also mentioned that in the past it was not uncommon for the Afrobolivian population of Cala Cala to hold *faenas* with the neighboring Afrobolivian community of Dorado Chico, which would not participate in the community's *ayni* networks. Yet, as he emphasized, there has not been such a *faena* in a long time, since preparing new coca fields nowadays is done under the modality of *contrato*, where a group of people are paid a fixed amount of money in order to complete a specific task.

Libreada

A significant change in the coca economy occurred by introducing the practice of *libreada*, a way of organizing the coca harvest that originates in the region of La Asunta, an area of colonization and mainly 'non-traditional' coca growing (according to Law 1008) (Spedding 2004:139ff). The term *libreada* refers to the practice of measuring work by the exact amount of *libras* (pounds) harvested. In Cala Cala, the *libreada* is employed both for *jornaleros* and for *ayni* exchange. Before, a day of *ayni*

comprised six *mitis*, i.e. six rounds of filling a cloth *(mit'iña)* tied around the waist with coca leaves. Nowadays, each *k'ichiri* pours the harvested coca from the *mit'iña* into his or her individual plastic bag, which is weighed at the end of the day. The corresponding payment or the *ayni* debts repaid or obtained are then established according to the weight of the leaves. Thus, for example, a good *k'ichiri* might be able to repay an *ayni* of twenty pounds in half a day, even though the other person had to work for an entire day to harvest the same amount of leaves. Most *k'ichiri* see this as a change in their favor, since they are paid for the exact amount of coca harvested. Before, many people stated, they were often subject to abusive owners of coca fields that would demand larger *mitis* or an additional round in an effort to exploit the *k'ichiris* they hired. The *libreada* also means that each individual can decide the rhythm and intensity of working more freely. Even though it is frowned upon for a person to rest for overly long periods of time in the field or too often, it will all be settled by the weighing in of the harvested leaves, which determines the salary for the day. The *libreada* also enables a more flexible adjustment of payments for the *k'ichiri* since the amount of money paid for a pound changes with the market price for coca leaves. The salary of the workers thus corresponds with the fluctuation of prices, whereas before only the owners of the *cocal* and the merchants could benefit from fluctuation. Yet the distributive effect of this is limited. Since most *k'ichiri* are part of a household that owns coca fields of their own and at some point occupies the position of hiring party, the gain in flexibility as *k'ichiri* results in the obligation to follow the same rules as owner and hiring party.[7]

Beyond structuring days, years and lifecycles and determining how households relate to each other through the necessary exchange of labor and the networks of cooperation, solidarity and economic integration this engenders, the lifestyle associated with coca cultivation also marks the more mundane activities of everyday life. For example, rather than the houses or patios of particular households, the central plaza of a village, the church or *sindicato* building *(sede sindical)*, the coca field is the main site of socializing and communicating with people from the *comunidad*. The monthly *sindicato* meeting is often crammed with dozens of topics and does not allow for much casual encounter, and the visits people pay each other at their houses are quite infrequent, rather short and mostly guided by a clear objective like asking someone for help in the fields or buying/selling coca. The space for casual conversation and gossiping is therefore the coca field.

7 If anything, the *libreada* has strengthened the economic position of women within the household. Besides being traditionally responsible for the management of the household finances (a very common trope in Bolivia), women now also contribute a growing share of the cash income, since the *k'ichiris* are more often women and they usually outperform men in harvesting by far.

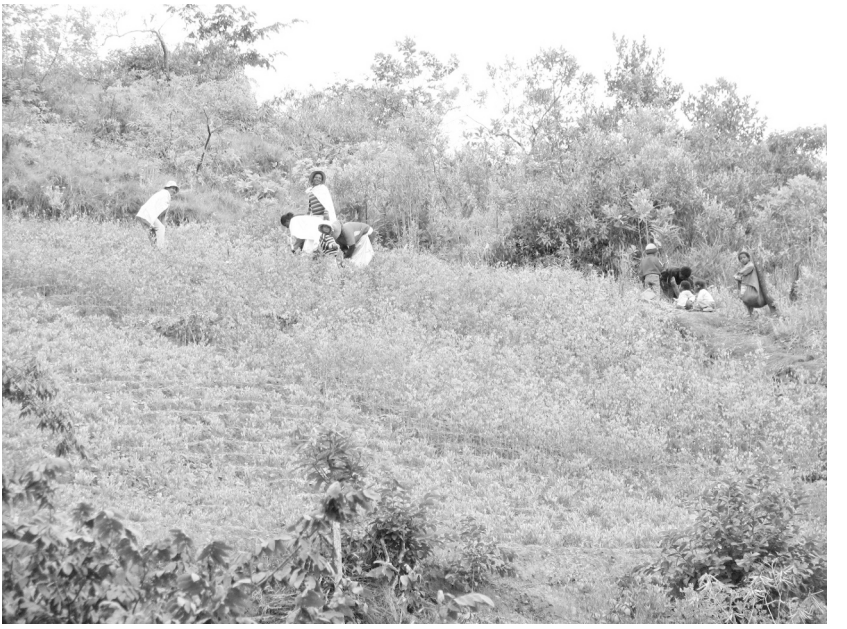
Debates in the coca field

The coca field as a *total social fact* as described by Alison Spedding is "a social nexus that unites […] diverse elements and activities" (Spedding 1997:69) of *Yungueño* life. It is, very importantly for my discussion of how certain horizons of community become meaningful, the main site of communication within the *comunidad*. Given the fact that everyday life in Cala Cala – as well as in most other Yungas *comunidades* – revolves around the cultivation of coca, it is not surprising that most conversations happen while working in the field or during the short breaks from work called *aculli (acullicar* literally meaning [to] chew coca, *aculli* being the act of chewing coca or any break from work more generally). There are other occasions – *sindicato* meetings, *talleres*, informal gatherings or occasional visits to people's houses – but these are less frequent and less intense in comparison to the interactions in the coca field. People spend up to twelve hours a day in the fields. Most of the time they are at least accompanied by the members of their household and very often people work in groups of up to a dozen in a field. As the *k'ichiris* are expected to advance "*wachu wachu*" (row by row) synchronically, they are always close enough to each other to converse. Topics include discussing family affairs, gossiping about fellow *comunarios*, discussing business (coca prices, wages, travel costs), politics, organizational aspects and the weather. In short, the coca field is the primary context for interaction within the *comunidad* and for debating a variety of issues.

Always accompanying the work is the *radio cocalera*, a small portable radio that virtually all *cocaleros* own and that is therefore the most constant and everyday form of engagement with national and local news and politics in Cala Cala.

Most people I worked with regularly listened to Radio Yungas or Radio Coca, two local radio stations from Chulumani and Coripata. The programs transmitted by Radio Yungas and Radio Coca are a combination of local and national news, political debates, announcements by *sindicatos*, local branches of ADEPCOCA *(Asociación Departamental de Productores de Coca)* and the municipal governments, as well as occasional musical interludes. Even though most households nowadays own at least one TV, the radio remains the primary source of information, especially at the local level. National TV stations only rarely cover smaller local news and watching TV has a much more recreational aspect than listening to the radio. The radio provides the *Cala Caleños* with a wide range of vital information. Many *sindicatos* convene their meetings through the radio or announce communal workdays *(trabajos comunitarios)* through the medium. If a note or information "has been on radio Yungas" *("salió en radio Yungas")*, it is taken to be common knowledge, since it is widely assumed that in all households at least one member listens to the radio and can communicate the news. For example, if a household fails to participate in a compulsory event that has been announced on the radio, it cannot claim to be exempted from the corresponding *multa* (fine). The radio – besides the monthly *sindicato* meeting –

Figure 12: People working together in the coca field (photograph by the author).



is also the main arena for political debates in the Yungas. Before elections, political opponents debate on air: critics of certain representatives voice their concerns on the radio and the authorities are given the opportunity to respond to the allegations directly or on one of the following days. The local news section covers everything from politics, the current prices for coca on the Yungas markets and the Villa Fátima market in La Paz, to warnings about bush fires, road blockades or the very common landslides on the Nor and Sud Yungas road. More often than not, due to its immediacy and local scope, information from the radio directly feeds into what is perceived by people in the fields. One day, Roberto directed my attention to clouds of dust behind one of the mountain ranges to the south. It was very early in the morning and we had just arrived in the field and were chewing coca before starting to work. As the radio reported problems on the Sud Yungas road between Chulumani and Unduavi, Roberto told me: "See the dust behind the mountains? The trucks from Sud Yungas have to take a detour because the road is blocked." Whereas the connection between the news on the radio and what was happening locally was in this case quite obvious and discernable even for the recently arrived fieldworker with little knowledge of Yungas geography, further along into my fieldwork I realized that this was the case even in instances where the connections were not as

Figure 13: La radio cocalera (photograph by the author).

easily visible as the dust on the road. This mainly concerns issues of politics and the coca economy. Most people are personally acquainted with the representatives appearing on the radio and hearing their declarations and what happens *"en la radio"* is mostly of very immediate concern to the people. I am stressing this point because I take the immediacy of the radio broadcasts in terms of their relation to everyday activities and concerns to be of utmost importance.

In contrast to the topics with immediate relevance like those mentioned above – most notably anything that has do to with coca – there were also moments when people commented on radio broadcasts in a different way, expressing what I interpreted as a mixture of amusement, puzzlement and disbelief. In what follows, I will discuss two short examples that give an impression of how topics – law and politics on the one hand and Afrobolivian identity politics on the other – with less immediate relevance are debated.

Law and politics as seen from the coca field: *"hoy en día, todo es ley"*

As opposed to immediately relevant local news and radio debates among local leaders, the ubiquitous government messages concerning certain legal novelties and

political initiatives are mostly perceived as 'very far away' and are commented on in a very different fashion to those relating to local Yungas affairs. Yet they also serve as starting points for discussion around the issues addressed in the broadcasts and are thus an interesting context for understanding what people think about certain topics. This became clear to me when one day we listened to a broadcast related to a new legal regulation concerning intra-family violence and aspects of gender violence in Bolivia. The parliament had just passed a law incorporating a system of local-level justice, officially attributing certain competences to the *sindicato* in cases of violence within the family. The radio spot (transmitted in Spanish and Aymara) alerted women to the importance of reporting abuse to the authorities and informed them that according to the new law, the first contact person is as of now the local *sindicato* authority.

In a mocking tone, one of the *cocaleros* stated: "Nowadays, everything is law" *("Hoy en día, todo es ley.")*. This statement sparked a discussion around the law on violence against women and the prevalence of legal regulations in recent times more generally. People agreed that they considered it a lost cause and that the law would certainly not be observed *("no se va cumplir")*. Intra-familial violence is widespread and fairly normalized in Yungas *comunidades* – as elsewhere in Bolivia (Montaño 2016; Spedding 1994). Yet intra-community conflict, as ubiquitous as it might be, is a subject generally muted in public conversation, where people seek to maintain an image of equality and unity among members of the *comunidad* and social convention prohibits the open expression of conflicts (Spedding 1994:180). This is also true for intra-marital conflict. The husband is the representative of the household in public and it would be a serious insult to his symbolic dominance and authority if his wife spoke publicly about being abused, especially in front of other men (Spedding 1994:186).[8] Having a woman report intra-familial violence to a *sindicato* official, in the eyes of the *comunarios*, would be unthinkable as a generalized rule. It caused serious amusement among both men and women participating in the conversation that such an approach would even be considered. Moreover, and beyond the specificities of the law, it was clear that they considered the attempt by the state to determine and readjust the jurisdictions of certain institutions (in this case the *sindicato* vs. the municipal courts and the police) as an interference in the affairs of the *comunidad*.[9] Given that the Yungas' experience with state intervention has mostly been in the context of coca eradication programs, it is not surprising

8 It is even expected that young couples fight quite a lot in the first years of their marriage and it is only considered disgraceful if spouses keep solving their conflicts with physically violent means after several years of marriage, when they should have 'learned to get along' (Spedding 1994:186).

9 Although the law suggests otherwise, it is in most cases the *sindicato* that solves intra-community conflicts in the first place.

that people in Cala Cala are very suspicious of any attempt by the state to interfere in their internal affairs.[10]

The radio broadcast – in this case a government-sponsored advertisement intended to inform the population on legal reform – served as a way into a discussion of legal and political affairs more generally. It is rare for people in the Yungas to be confronted with this type of information in television broadcasts and even less likely to be encountered through written sources like newspapers, which are almost completely absent from everyday life in the Yungas. Listening to the news is a thoroughly social affair, since most often people do it in the coca field alongside other people while they are working. This also means that broadcasts are often immediately discussed and contextualized within the interpretative framework of the *comunidad cocalera* and its logics. During these discussions, people often very clearly expressed how relevant the news are to the practices of their day-to-day lives. In my view, the opening statement ("*hoy en día, todo es ley*") cited above and the ensuing discussion express a general weariness of legal reform, especially in contexts that many people do not deem to be the jurisdiction of the state, in this case family life in the broadest of senses.

Raíces Africanas and *Radio Afroboliviana*

Another interesting case in point is the well-known radio show *Raíces Africanas* (African Roots) that has been broadcasted for over fifteen years by different local radio stations throughout the Yungas every Friday between 7pm and 10pm. Its foundation in 2001 was supported by a series of workshops and *Raíces Africanas* was initially conceived in order to facilitate the exchange of information among dispersed parts of the Afrobolivian population in different *comunidades* in the Yungas. The program is conducted by Jorge Medina, an accomplished Afrobolivian activist, founder of the *Centro Afroboliviano para el Desarrollo Integral y Comunitario (CADIC)* and the first Afrobolivian to be elected to National Parliament in 2009.

According to many of my interlocutors, the program was quite popular in the first years after its foundation. For many people it was their first experience of engaging with the emerging Afrobolivian political movement and the process of cultural revitalization. It is also often cited as one of the main reasons Jorge Medina was able to gain such great popularity and become one of the most visible Afrobolivian leaders. According to its creators, *Raíces Africanas* and the recently founded online station *Radio Afroboliviana* serve as a means to spread information

10 This seems to be common in other parts of Bolivia as well, as the comments of anthropologist Nico Tassi suggest. He reports that rural authorities tend to view the Plurinational State like an NGO, applying protective strategies in order to prevent the state from interfering with their internal affairs (Tassi quoted in Soruco Sologruen 2012:20).

concerning "the development of Afrobolivian culture in the country, with a touch of entertainment and information."[11] *Radio Afroboliviana* is presented as a "tool for communication in the context of the *proceso de cambio* where the *naciones y pueblos indígena originario campesinos, y las comunidades interculturales y afrobolivianas* make up a substantial part of the entirety of Bolivian society."[12]

The radio being such a fundamental part of everyday life, I asked people in Cala Cala about the program and what they thought of its content. Most people told me that they were familiar with it but did not listen to it on a regular basis and they offered different explanations for this. On the one hand, they said that the widespread availability of mobile phones made it much easier to communicate with their kin and friends not living in Cala Cala and that the radio was not needed for that purpose anymore. Moreover, they considered the informational aspects of the show hardly relevant. Roberto once told me that Medina – in his eyes – *"solo habla payasadas"* ("he only clowns around"), when we listened to the show one Friday night at my request. Roberto expressed personal dissatisfaction with Jorge Medina as a political leader, but also displayed a general weariness with regard to Medina's discourse of "speaking to all Afrobolivian *comunidades* in the Yungas." For him, the relevant aspects of his sense of being *Afro* are his kin, whom he reaches by mobile phone, and the local context of Cala Cala that he feels is not represented by Medina's broadcasts. Consequently, on other Friday nights Roberto would watch TV or go to bed early. *Raíces Africanas* was nothing he would ever comment on or discuss without me asking. Other inhabitants of Cala Cala didn't attribute any particular importance to the program either. Not once did I have the impression that the radio show was in fact, as it proclaims, a communicational tool for dispersed Afrobolivians. The most common reaction to my questions concerning *Raíces Africanas* was a shrug of the shoulders and in many instances I had the impression that this was not only true for this particular show, but also for the ideas, organizations and people associated with it.

By contrast, the whole community was captivated by the radio broadcasts surrounding the ADEPCOCA-led mobilizations of *cocaleros Yungueños* in La Paz protesting against the *Ley General de la Coca* in various weeks in 2017. During that time, there was hardly another topic that was discussed in Cala Cala and it was quite obvious that most of the people considered the question of coca to be of very direct and paramount importance for their daily life and economic survival. Of course, the events preceding and following the passing of the *Ley General de la Coca*, were

11 *"El desarrollo de la cultura afroboliviana en el país, con un toque de entretenimiento e información."*

12 *"Herramienta de comunicación en el contexto del proceso de cambio que vivimos en Bolivia, donde las naciones y pueblos indígena originario campesinos, y las comunidades interculturales y afrobolivianas, constituimos parte sustancial del conjunto de la sociedad boliviana."* See http://www.radioafrobolivia.com/azuca_pal_cajue.html [18/01/18].

far from quotidian, yet even during times of less conflict the most mundane news concerning coca prices, the situation on the market or even the state of the road to La Paz received more attention than *Raíces Africanas*.

Plurinationality as *"discurso ajeno"*

The comments on and discussion of radio broadcasts is, in my view, a quite adequate indicator of how far and in what specific sense certain news, campaigns and information relate to people's more immediate concerns. Whereas broadcasts on coca, *sindicatos* and local politics are discussed in a way that make their immediate importance quite clear, matters like information campaigns on recently passed laws and regulations are perceived as much more remote and less immediately significant. This can, at least in part, also be explained by their more national scope. Yet, since a significant share of legal reform that is advertised in Yungas radio broadcasts is directed at rural residents and/or 'indigenous groups' allegedly inhabiting this territory, it is striking how little they seem to have in common with people's everyday concerns. They are at times the subject of mocking comments, hinting at their irrelevance and inflationary appearance, but are mostly just ignored and not further discussed. The impression I got from numerous conversations during work in the coca fields is that most legal efforts are interpreted as either irrelevant or as threatening to the long-established lifestyles of the *comunidad*. They are seen and commented on as outside the scope of community life or foreign to it *(ajenos)*. This impression changes to some extent when people (Afrobolivians and Aymara alike) are actively prompted to comment on the Constitution's provisions concerning *naciones y pueblos originarios*. In these instances, comments tend to be much more positive and the impact of certain laws is evaluated as being quite significant, as opposed to the reduced importance it is granted in more informal contexts.[13]

This situation makes it highly difficult to reach a clear-cut conclusion in terms of assessing the relevance of legal provisions, social movement discourse and identity politics in general. On the one hand, my data suggests that without being prompted specifically, people place little importance on these matters and in everyday affairs they hardly play a role. Yet, when asked, many of my interlocutors were able to offer quite nuanced views on these topics, hinting at the fact that certain aspects of identity politics do resonate with local perceptions of social categorization. I would thus suggest that we are dealing with a situation where reference to ethnic identity and related stereotypes is often just a step away, and can be activated by a particular situation, comment, piece of information or conflict. I interpret this

13 This is one of the instances showing that interviewing people on these matters produces highly biased accounts that differ greatly from the experiences of participant observation and informal conversations.

highly volatile situation as another hint at the often unfathomable yet pervasive presence – or availability – of ID-ology and "rights talk" (Merry 2003) as a model for interpreting and enacting social relations; a presence that has an impact far beyond the realm of concrete legal provisions, but is a part of a subtler legalization of identities and related social relations. Engaging with legal discourse and identity politics through radio broadcasts, and the ensuing discussions, is at the same time the most common and everyday genre of engagement and the most elusive. Engagement is less focused, less explicit and less directed than in formalized contexts, but the information, opinions and options presented therein become increasingly internalized and thus contribute a conceptual backdrop that the more formalized contexts (see below) can build on.

Mobilizing Cala Cala: ADEPCOCA and the *Ley General de la Coca*

The limited mobilizing potential of plurinational identity politics in Cala Cala became especially obvious when I witnessed the mobilizing potential of *cocalero* identity. As I pointed out in chapter 3, the local significance of the concept of *el pueblo Afroboliviano* – the central category of Afrobolivian political discourse in recent times – is rather elusive. Mobilizing *Cala Caleños* as *cocaleros*, on the other hand, has a completely different force and relevance. In early 2017, after years of deliberation, negotiation and – as many people in the Yungas remarked – deliberate procrastination, the MAS government set out to reform the legislation concerning the cultivation of coca, its trade and its illegal usage in cocaine production. Until then, the legislation pertaining to coca cultivation was still to a large extent based on the polemical Law 1008, passed by Bolivian legislators in 1988 under international pressure led by the USA in its 'war on drugs.' To replace Law 1008, the government drafted Law 906, the *Ley General de la Coca*. It was not only hotly debated throughout the country, but was also the center of attention in the Yungas during the first half of 2017. I arrived in Cala Cala in the middle of the most serious disputes just a few days after thousands of *cocaleros* from the Yungas had been protesting in La Paz against Law 906 and were violently repressed by the police. The issue people were concerned about most was the increase in the legal limits for coca cultivation in the Chapare region in Cochabamba (an Evo Morales stronghold) while maintaining the strict limits established in 1988 for the Yungas. ADEPCOCA and the people from the Yungas argued that if there were to be adjustments and/or increases of the legally permitted cultivation of coca, it should be the Yungas benefitting from this increase and not the Chapare. Throughout various weeks between mid-February and the end of March 2017, there was hardly another topic in Cala Cala than the new *Ley General de la Coca*. Negotiations and the eventual signing of a compromise by a government-friendly faction of the Yungas' leadership with the authorities –

and the subsequent rejection of this very same compromise by ADEPCOCA – lead to a series of debates, confrontations, conflicts and even open hostilities that have still not ceased today. For example, in June 2017, Cesar Cocarico, Minister of Rural Development, had to be evacuated from the town of Arapata by helicopter after a group of *cocaleros* attacked an event where the minster was speaking about the contents of Law 906. The media have reported a number of other smaller incidents all related to different issues regarding the law. Roberto and I spent hour after hour during the evening listening to Radio Yungas to remain updated on all aspects of the *Ley General de la Coca*. Roberto repeatedly prepared himself to travel to La Paz, since ADEPCOCA had determined that one third of its affiliated members *("se despliega un tercio de la base")* had to be mobilized at all times in order to maintain the protests in La Paz and all over the Yungas. This meant that all members took turns travelling to La Paz, participating in road blockades, public gatherings and marches. Travelling and participating in protest rallies is an important part of *cumplir función social* and although Roberto would of course have preferred to stay at home and work his fields, he was ready and willing to follow the instructions of ADEPCOCA in order to fight for their common cause. What I would like to illustrate with this example is the fact that hardly any topic moves Cala Cala as much as coca. This is in part rooted in coca's seminal economic importance but does not stop there. It was not only rational economic calculation that led people to mobilize against Law 906, but also a shared sense of a coca-related Yungas identity that they did not find adequately represented in the law and in the government's attitude more generally. ADEPCOCA mobilized people through a strongly regionalized sense of identity and belonging as *cocaleros Yungueños*. Beyond the economic importance of coca cultivation and its central role for conceptualizing regional identity, being a *cocalero* is thus also very importantly a political identity.