



Which way to social change *compass*?

Exploring how revolutionary movements form their political strategies through the experiences of the Zapatistas and the Bolivian Cocaleros

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Abstract

How do revolutionary movements choose what political strategy to follow in their quest for social change? What mechanisms are set in motion in order for the movements to select their political strategy? And when they shift from one strategy to another, why and how does that happen? In my work, I first identify what the options available for social movements that want to bring about (or block) social change are. I have created a model which distinguishes between basically two different roads to social change: the one that passes through the seizure of state power (the state power road) and the one that avoids any relationship with the state or its functions (the non-state power road). The state power road also has two routes, depending on the means the movements choose in order to grasp state power: the electoral route and the insurgent one. The non-state power road refers to the abstention of any relationship with the state and the engagement with autonomous, prefigurative politics instead.

However, the availability of political strategies is one thing, and the strategy the movements actually decide to follow is another. The former defines the options available for the movements. The latter defines the movements' choice from those options. Through what mechanisms is that choice made? The relevant literature places most of its attention on the political opportunities (or resources) available to the movements. According to it, when political opportunities are opened the movements are more likely to take the electoral route to state power and social change. When they are closed, as it happens under authoritarian regimes, the armed struggle is a more likely option. However, that has to do with the widening or limiting of the options available, and it does not explain how the strategic choice is actually made. Comparing the cases of the FLN/EZLN (Mexico) and the Six Federations of the Tropics of Cochabamba/MAS (Bolivia), two movements that took completely different paths in their quest for social change despite starting from similar standpoints, I argue that the strategic choice of the movements was made through a combination of a) across time and space resonance of own-or-other experiences at home or abroad, b) in-depth study and – sometimes- active research of the resonating cases, and c) active training of the

movements' constituencies to secure the ideological hegemony of the choice made and the discipline of the militants to the selected strategy.

Jury:



Prof. Jeffery R. Webber (Queen Mary University London), Prof. Olivier Roy (EUI), Leonidas Oikonomakis (candidate), Prof. Donatella della Porta (SNS/formerly EUI – supervisor), Prof. John Holloway (Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla)

Bio

Leonidas Oikonomakis is a rapper with hip-hop formation *Social Waste*, a Ph.d candidate in Political and Social Sciences at the European University Institute (EUI), a researcher of the Center on Social Movement Studies (COSMOS) at the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, and a member of the editorial collective of ROAR Magazine.