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Citizen Chávez

The State, Social Movements, and Publics

by

Anthony Peter Spanakos

Scholars are divided over whether the emancipatory politics promised by new social movements can be attained within civil society or whether seizure of the state apparatus is necessary. The Bolivarian Revolution led by President Hugo Chávez presents a crucial case for examining this question. Chávez's use of the state apparatus has been fundamental in broadening the concept of citizenship, but this extension of citizenship has occurred alongside the deliberate exclusion of others. This has not only limited its appeal as a citizenship project but created counterpublics that challenge the functioning of the government and its very legitimacy. Analysis of Bolivarianism in terms of micropublics shows both how otherwise disparate micropublics fuse together and why their union remains contingent and dependent on the figure of Chávez, its most significant producer.

Keywords: Venezuela, Publics, New social movements, Hugo Chávez

It took me two solid years in the best boys' school in the world to learn that trick. The fellow who taught it to me is now the President of Venezuela.

—Citizen Kane

The Zapatistas in Mexico and indigenous groups in the Andes have reversed capital flows, vetoed certain policy decisions, and, in Ecuador, facilitated the early termination of unpopular presidencies (Yashar, 1999; Jackson and Warren, 2005). An unorganized mass of middle- and working-class protesters in Argentina in December 2001 demanded “que se vayan todos” (that they all go), accelerating the collapse of the de la Rúa government (Carassai, 2007). Chavistas declared, “¡Que no volverán!” (That they not return!), referring to the political class associated with pre-Chávez Venezuela (1958–1998), during the 2004 recall referendum (Hellinger, 2005: 15). Indeed, Latin America appears the location par excellence of the immediate but ephemeral social movements and protesters that Hardt and Negri (2004) have called “multitudes.” Do these “multitudes” contribute to a new political engagement and political process? Or can they do so only if they occupy formal institutions of political power?

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While Holloway (2002) and others have argued in favor of a politics of resistance that sees state power as anathema, Wilpert (2007) has argued that taking power has been necessary for bringing change in Venezuela. The focus on Venezuela is not incidental; Bolivarianism in the era of President Hugo Chávez is the most prominent contemporary case in which social-movement discourse is promoted by the state itself. It is therefore a crucial case for scholarly scrutiny (Gerring, 2007), and the consequences of its ability to improve citizenship, to “democratize democracy,” are far-reaching.

This paper first examines the relationship between social movements and the state, the formation of publics, and the debate over whether social change requires taking state power. The next section analyzes how the micropublics that preexisted Chávez were incorporated into the framework of Bolivarianism by analyzing the public discourse of the president and in-depth interviews.¹ Rather than co-opting the micropublics that support new social movements, Chávez (co)produced them, organizing and shaping them into a public and constructing a new vision of the citizen that includes a broader group of people but excludes “enemies” of the regime. The case of Venezuela is therefore potentially of interest to advocates of the taking of state power by social movements and as an example of the way in which power, ideas, and leadership can pull micropublics into a larger collective organization (Ikegami, 2000: 994).

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, PUBLICS, AND THE STATE

Social movements during the period of nation-state building (the 1930s to the 1950s) in Latin America revolved around the demands of the excluded masses for entry as citizens into the matrix of a purportedly homogeneous nation, suffrage within a relatively closed political system, and status in the growing market. This entry took place primarily through populist and autocratic regimes that encouraged collective organization according to sectors (Collier and Collier, 1991). Social movements wanted space and agency in what Habermas (1989) called “the public sphere,” a space of rational deliberation among equal bearers of status. But the public sphere in Latin America was characterized by authoritarian power relations, hierarchical and discriminatory social systems, and markets that had limited penetration in society. In fact, it was more like Fraser’s (1993) characterization of Habermas’s public sphere in that it ignored, marginalized, and silenced people who lacked the space, language, or status to deliberate in it. Fraser argues that one must think of counterpublics, groups that suffer the trauma of subaltern identity—shantytown dwellers, the dark-skinned, mothers of the “disappeared”—and seek to overcome this trauma through a politics of recognition that renders the subaltern human, citizens, wholly moral beings in a given political context (Taylor, 1994).

The new social movements emerging in the late 1960s and 1970s as a response to postindustrial political and economic conditions sought to reconfigure political space and authority by reconceptualizing citizenship and the balance between state and society. Under authoritarian governments in Latin

America, civil society was a relatively safe space for protest, and identity politics carried an immediacy and authenticity that were hard for dictatorships to deny. The new movements organized people on the margins of power with the goal of creating and empowering a counterpublic, transforming the cultural ground on which politics took place. Indeed, in a critical review Pichardo (1997: 425) writes that “the principal contributions of the [new-social-movements] perspective are its emphases on identity, culture, and the role of the civic sphere—aspects of social movements that had been largely overlooked.”

A politics of resistance based on authentic representation of a particular identity and a struggle for political cultural recognition and democratization of democracy involves a struggle of groups within counterpublics to be “seen” by each other and the state (Taylor, 1994; Rubin, 2004). But, as Ikegami (2000: 993) notes, while the notion of the counterpublic corrects some of the shortcomings of the Habermasian concept of the public sphere, it does not delve deeply enough into the sociological and ontological nature of identities. Rather, academics should consider publics as “sites of cultural production and identity formation” in which power is distributed unequally and from which politics can emerge (Ikegami, 2000: 992). In an analysis of publics in Venezuela, Smilde (2004: 180–181) defines them as “relational contexts in which normally segmented social networks and their associated discourses come into contact in open-ended ways . . . sites in which distinct networks are bridged, new understandings develop, and coalitions are formed.”

The contingency and multiplicity of this concept of publics help explain the dynamics of the new social movements—their “ephemeral” and “episodic” characteristics and their potential for longer-lasting commitments and communicative networks (Hardt and Negri, 2004). Such networks have been poorly constructed and fragile during the past two or three decades, in which mass collective action has become less common and institutions and citizenship have increasingly been understood in liberal and legalistic terms. Not surprisingly, the new social movements have been seen as both the only response and a fundamentally inadequate response to these structural changes.

Following the new-social-movement theorists who advocated Gramscian strategies of resistance, occupation, and, eventually, hegemonization of cultural space (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar, 1998), Thomas Holloway (2002; 2005) writes that taking the state is not necessary and can even be counterproductive for a radically democratic agenda. The state is essentially a repressive centralizing agent antithetical to the democratic, socialist, and decentered goals of social movements. Becoming part of the state is therefore dangerous for social movements advocating social emancipation. In response, Wilpert (2007: 217) writes that “Venezuela . . . challenges the notion that the world cannot be changed by taking power.” Similarly, Petras and Veltmeyer (2007) argue that the condition of “los de abajo” is not a matter of culture but the product of capitalism and the sort of state that it produces. In a debate with Holloway at the World Social Forum, Callinicos (2005: 65) argues that “for any movement towards self-organisation to succeed in breaking the power of capital, there has to be a moment of concentration and centralisation”—that confrontations with

capital require the power of the state. Finally, Lebowitz (2006: 107) writes that “the first step in Venezuela was to gain control of the existent state. Contrary to the pretty words of some poets, the world cannot be changed without taking power.”

The use of state power to reinforce or create the publics that sustain social movements is a critical issue for emancipatory politics. The centrality of Bolivarianism to this question is seen in Holloway’s (2005: 68) comment that “it was not as it is sometimes put in terms of ‘Venezuela shows we must take power.’ . . . But . . . it will be very important to see how that tension plays itself out in Venezuela.”

BOLIVARIANISM: MR. CHÁVEZ GOES TO MIRAFLORES

Many people asked me to launch a campaign for governor. . . . I said, “No, we are going for a constituent assembly. . . . we need to go for power in order to transform the country.”

—Hugo Chávez

Chávez placed front and center a group that had been largely invisible to the previous generation of politicians and policy makers. One respondent, a student, said, “We were a group that was not taken into consideration. It was Las Mercedes [a rich neighborhood in Caracas] that ruled” (interview, Catia, April 12, 2008). Chávez saw his electorate, and in doing so he participated in making that electorate into a public.

The Bolivarian Revolution is shaped and defined by regular, public speech acts in which Chávez creates the public that he is addressing and the discursive environment that supports his government (Warner, 2002: 414). The Bolivarian public coexists, as does any public, with many other potential publics and wins space in the imaginary of Venezuelans when its members adopt its premises and prescriptions. It must correspond in some way to their daily lives, but its strength lies not so much in the credibility of the message as in its iteration (Roy, 2006). For this reason, though the public is independent of the state and any other institution (Warner, 2002: 414), the state has tools that allow it to find its audience and universalize the attributes of that audience, transforming it from *a* public into *the* public (Roy, 2006: 228). Being ubiquitous and having a guaranteed audience for regular messages as the state apparatus does is of considerable importance in shaping a public.

BEFORE CHÁVEZ

Whereas new social movements are recognized by their collective resistance against a state, the Bolivarian movement was recognizable only after it was invoked by a populist candidate and then president. The increase in strikes, protests, and political instability during the 1980s and 1990s is seen, in Epimethean fashion, as the source of Bolivarianism (López, 2005). Given the similarity between the class-based anti-neoliberal, anti-imperialist claims of this period and the discourse of then coup leader and eventual president

Chávez and the readiness of the protesters to accept the latter as a leader, López speaks of “Bolivarianism before Chávez.” Leopoldo Puchi (2008), a sociologist and leader of the Movement Toward Socialism, considers the two decades of protest unified by resentment and unhappiness but not in terms of a more positive association with a national program, set of institutions, or leader. He argues that it was Chávez who unified these various groups and that this unification took place primarily in terms of a politics of hope and rejection of the past rather than around any ideological or programmatic appeal. Identifying social movements not by their collective and coherent resistance but by the overlapping micropublics that sustain them (Smilde, 2004) sheds some light on this question. Many of the micropublics preceding Chávez did aim “to extend their networks and the influence of their discourses and thereby gain the social influence they lack in institutionalized politics” (Smilde, 2004: 195). There was considerable diversity among and between these publics, but the majority of the ones that were most sympathetic to Chávez were made up of the radical left and/or popular classes.

Chávez certainly struck a chord with many disorganized groups—micropublics lacking institutional channels but sharing certain ideational perspectives—when he and other junior officers led a coup in 1992. There were significant divergences of political ideology among the coup leaders, and the plan to set up a civic-military state of exception was unknown to most of the soldiers involved (Marcano and Barrera, 2004). The remarkable support for the coup plotters² despite the fact that their motivations and goals were largely unknown or unclear suggests a high level of antisystem sentiment. Though there may have been little articulation of a specific political ideology, a multiplicity of micropublics maintained sympathetic narratives that opposed neoliberal economic programs and a political elite that was seen as out of touch with reality. These micropublics entered into (and exited from) alliances with others in protesting economic policies and President Carlos Andrés Pérez. They also entered into (and exited from) mobilizational, associational, and electoral alliances with political groups that opposed the governing party (supporting Pérez as presidential candidate in 1988) and a coalition of pro-system parties that were not part of the traditional diarchy of Acción Democrática–Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (Democratic Action–Independent Committee for Electoral Political Organization—AD-COPEI) (supporting Rafael Caldera’s candidacy in 1993). Support for these groups had declined in favor of the Chávez candidacy by 1998, but the micropublics that entered into the electoral coalition were not inevitably bound to Chávez, his discourse, or the policies he proposed.

While there was no self-conscious new social movement that could be called “Bolivarian,” the micropublics that supported Chávez had lasting influence. Indeed, Canache (2002: 70) writes that “one key component of Chávez’ victory was the existence of an early foundation of popular support. Had Venezuelans united to reject Chávez following the 1992 coup attempt, he could not have positioned himself later as a viable presidential candidate.” The micropublics supporting Chávez came primarily from the lower and working classes. There was division within the left due to the involvement of military officers, but support for the regime was so low among all classes and ideological sectors that a certain respect was awarded to the lieutenant colonel.

During the 1998 campaign, Bolivarianism continued to be a diffuse and ambiguous politics of protest against oppressors—a rather empty category in that few Venezuelans considered themselves to belong to it. This ambiguity explains the enormous popular support for Chávez when he became president (84 percent, according to Keller & Associates, personal communication), and his administration initially received support from an ideologically broad base. Though there was a potential for alliances among the excluded sectors that eventually became his base, public opinion identified with Chávez as a politician of change rather than in support of any particular program. Since the second third of 2001, when he began to reveal a clearer vision of the Bolivarian citizen in terms of politics, enemies, and preferred regime and when opposition to that vision intensified, his popularity has wavered between 30 and 70 percent (Keller & Associates, personal communication). At least half of his supporters do not support him unconditionally. More consistent supporters tend to be from the popular and working classes and identify themselves as being on the left. Also, the existence of a range suggests that public opinion was better able to recognize Bolivarianism and distinguish it from a politics of hope or resentment. This recognition was the result of the contingent but real merging of micropublics into a particular public, a conscious decision of Chávez to reject the broad coalition that elected him and carve out a majoritarian coalition—to turn a coalition into a public constructed out of many micropublics and then into *the* public.

FROM MICROPUBLICS TO THE PUBLIC

When multiple micropublics coexist and aim to extend their influence, the distribution of power among them is uneven, and their lack of coordination limits the types and strength of the bridges that can be built. The ideational power and political, economic, and organizational resources of the state can swiftly fill the gaps between potentially allied micropublics, transforming them into a public and even *the* public. This is what has happened, though not without resistance and inconsistencies, under Chávez. He focused the preexisting resentment of Venezuelan micropublics by opening political space and discourse to the excluded and establishing himself as the representative of the will of the people and its sole defender.

Chávez identifies “the people” as the fundamental social and moral unit of the nation. While the “nation” implies all Venezuelans, Chávez’s “people” is not inclusive. Like other concepts of “the people” (Hardt and Negri, 2004: xiv), it is uncomfortable with internal heterogeneity and dissent (Wilpert, 2007). Chávez’s discourse is similar to the populist discourse of previous generations in presenting “the people” as the authentic sovereigns of a land that has been cruelly dominated by oligarchs (Spanakos, 2008). It differs from that discourse, however, in calling upon “the people” to be actively involved in the political struggle against that elite class.

Chávez has validated and encouraged the political discussions of micropublics that were ignored when politics-as-administration was given priority over a politics-as-process. He has encouraged the people to actualize their citizenship through political debate and mobilization. In delivering his weekly

television addresses in self-consciously Venezuelan vernacular, he popularizes the language of politics, making it more accessible to his supporters, and sets the public agenda for debate in which they will participate.

An architect in Petare said, "Before, [people] . . . were not concerned about politics. Now it is different. Both people who support the opposition and the government talk about political systems, capitalism, socialism. . . . With the old political parties, these discussions did not exist" (interview, May 24, 2008). A teacher in Petare said, "We are seeing a profound change. . . . He is giving the population itself a chance to participate, to express its own solutions, to resolve its own problems" (interview, May 24, 2008). What is crucial in this sense of empowerment and community is that it is spurred, if not generated, by Chávez. As micropublics link to other networks and form new coalitions, they do so within the boundaries defined and the resources (symbolic, financial, organizational) provided by Chávez. Many of these everyday encounters, political discussions, and connections between individuals and micropublics are facilitated by programs of the Chávez administration such as the *misiones* (social programs targeted at *barrios* [poor neighborhoods]) and the community councils (organizing local neighborhood groups on a microlevel). But for all its successes in increasing people-to-people encounters, the top-down character of Bolivarianism is noted even by supporters (Wilpert, 2007: 190, 195, 201).

The preeminence of the role of President Chávez and his use of the state apparatus is observable even during the celebration of the people's power. In a speech on April 13, 2008, commemorating having been "rescued" from an attempted coup six years earlier, Chávez declared that it was the people who had brought him back to power—that they knew that his government defended them and that the enemies of that government would have reversed any advances. Thus, in the very speech act in which he lauded the autonomy and power of the people, he was (re)creating the people, problematizing the very idea of their self-assertion.

Some of the people gathered at the Palacio de Miraflores for the speech had no doubt participated in the "rescue" of President Chávez, but many had not. Some of the latter were pilgrims bused in from various parts of the republic to participate in the celebration of "people power" guided by their *comandante* (commander). They came in small groups of friends, colleagues, and neighbors but entered into a *marea roja* (red sea), a crowd of thousands of citizens wearing red shirts, many of which bore the insignia of a government mission or program or a state-owned company. It was a sphere in which people felt that they belonged and were not being judged on their level of education, sophistication, or capacity to consume. Chávez repeatedly referred to the various people present, saluting people from different states, people representing different government programs, women, the indigenous, students, and so on. People who had once felt marginalized and invisible suddenly shared the stage with the president. Hardt and Negri (2004: xv) argue that "the multitude" is not homogeneous and "must discover *the common* that allows [people] to communicate and act together. The common we share, in fact, is not so much discovered as it is produced." Although the people were celebrating their "defense of the Process," it was Chávez who had created the "common"; as the head of state and the movement he was its preeminent "producer." Moreover, the celebration was

not of their diversity but of their unity in the formation of a socialist party that had handled dissent and diversity very poorly, falling short of the ideal “multitude” (Ellner, 2007; Hardt and Negri, 2004).

What Chávez had accomplished was the creation of physical and ideational spaces in which people who lived in anomic, dangerous, and marginalized places (such as barrios) were brought together into a collectivity with intrinsic value—different from the collectivity they occupied in society and the market, in which they were seen as outsiders, marginals, beggars, and/or potential criminals. At the same time, they were visible to each other and to Chávez because they bore the signs of resistance to the oligarchs and solidarity with the revolution: red shirts, logos identifying them with particular missions, “compañero” as a term of address. The symbolic glue that united them had been provided by Chávez himself. The various organizations (athletic, cultural, educational), hawkers (selling Che T-shirts and Chávez dolls), and book vendors (selling, among others, Holloway’s [2002] book) became part of a public because Chávez had convoked that public. The transport (the Metro in Caracas, free that day, and the many buses funded by the government) that had brought them, the food that sustained them (prepacked lunches handed out from government trucks), and the very space that they occupied (the streets surrounding the Palacio de Miraflores) were all made available to them by the state apparatus.

FROM COUNTERDISCOURSE TO PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Though the ideology of Chávez has shifted from neo-structuralism to twenty-first-century socialism, the identity of Bolivarians has been fairly consistent since 2002. They are, by his definition, “the people,” the majority of the country—poor, hardworking people long denied space under a pseudo-democracy that protected elite privilege and allowed oligarchs to transfer the country’s massive petroleum wealth out of the country. The government of President Chávez alone advances and defends their interests. The language used is the language of counterpublics, in which subalterns create spaces for overcoming shame, spaces of belonging, and critiquing their oppressors (Fraser, 1993: 14). In the case of Venezuela, the counterdiscourse is in opposition to the concept of “the public” promoted by the Punto Fijo democracy: a pacific society, free of class and racial conflict, in which political concerns were mediated by two relatively centrist multiclass political parties and a corporatist, redistributive state (Hellinger, 2003; Ellner, 2008). In contrast, the counterdiscourse of Bolivarianism highlights class conflict, repression of the Other, oligarchization of political representation, the reduction of politics to administration, and the subordination of domestic needs to the whims of international agents. The majority that was purposely ignored and repressed by the elite has now “awakened” and is unwilling to go back to its barrios (Chávez, 2008). These people are darker, indigenous, uneducated, and not cosmopolitan. They bear the signs of social marginality, and Bolivarianism celebrates those signs. In an early campaign, Chávez circulated a photo of himself with his arms around a number of poor Venezuelans, with the message “These are my people.” It is this recognition that is fundamental to the new social movements and the counterpublics that they create.

MAKING THE PUBLIC AND ITS ENEMIES

Since Chávez and his supporters have held every significant position in national government and many of the important positions at the state and local level (though this is changing) for the past decade, control petroleum revenues and an increasing number of state-owned enterprises, and have tremendous communicative power through public advertising and publicly owned or financed television, newspapers, community radio stations, and even graffiti, it could be argued that Bolivarianism offers a serious challenge to the hegemony of the public it is countering if it does not replace it altogether.

When President Chávez announces new citizen initiatives on his weekly television program *Aló Presidente*, he literally, but virtually, deputizes public action—for example, encouraging discrimination against (and later a call for unity with) people who signed the petition to hold a revocatory referendum. This does not mean that he has control over all action or that Bolivarianism denies its constituent groups autonomy (Hawkins and Hansen, 2006). Although Bolivarianism has been a “coproduction” of state and society (Roy, 2006: 228), Chávez’s ability to legitimate the action of “the people” is preeminent. When the Tupamaros, a gang aligned with the revolution, closed the Caracas barrio known as 23 de enero, the president complained of anarchists, infiltrators, and others who were harming the revolution. Simultaneously, he criticized the popular activist Lina Ron for occupying one of the houses of the Roman Catholic hierarchy on the same day that he was negotiating the release of Colombian hostages by the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Moreno, 2008: 3). Clearly, there are bottom-up and top-down tensions. But the president has a disproportionate amount of power in identifying acts of betrayal and infiltrators and determining when “rectification” is necessary and when action is going “too far.”

This was evident in the responses to questions about the expulsion of Deputy Luis Tascón from the president’s Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (United Socialist Party of Venezuela—PSUV). Tascón had accused José David Cabello, the head of Seniat (the taxing authority) and the brother of Diosdado Cabello, former vice president and governor of the state of Miranda, of corruption and demanded a government investigation. Chávez had immediately had him removed from the PSUV. When asked about Tascón, who a few years earlier had made public the list of people who signed in favor of holding an election to revoke the president’s mandate, Bolivarians echoed Chávez’s discourse. One retired laborer and current activist identified Tascón as an “infiltrator” and a “counterrevolutionary,” the same language Chávez uses to discourage internal dissent, and said, “I agree with the decision to expel him” (interview, Barquisimeto, March 5, 2008). A teacher who supported Chávez agreed that Tascón was not truly committed to the Process but was advancing his own interests (interview, Barquisimeto, March 5, 2008). While the “real” revolutionaries were in the street protesting, she said, Tascón “never mobilized but only wanted to be seen.”

The president also controls public spaces—the Metro, the highways, and the public television channels. Buses and trains are full of revolutionary propaganda, and after the defeat of the constitutional referendum in 2007 large billboards proclaiming that the defeat was only temporary appeared throughout Caracas. In the April 13 rally mentioned earlier, the government could have

argued that the restoration of a democratically elected president was cause for a national holiday, justifying the use of public funding, but Chávez made no such effort and celebrated the event in an extraordinarily partisan manner. The coup was, he explained, one more attack against the people by the conservative oligarchs funded by the U.S. empire to derail the people's intention, socialism (Chávez, 2008).

Similarly, on *Álo Presidente* Chávez regularly engages in campaigning and promoting issues and candidates of his party. On May 18 and 25 2008 *Álo Presidente* was devoted to introducing his public to the various candidates and programs proposed by his party. Whatever its morality or legality,³ control of the public airwaves allows the transformation of partisans into a public.

When the resources of the state and its constitutional head identify its supporters as "the public," dissenters and those who think or act differently are excluded from "the people," the fundamental social unit. As an economist explained, "Those of us who are in the opposition are not Venezuelans to him. We are countryless, dogs of Bush, the empire . . . coup leaders" (interview, Altamira, March 10, 2008). Moreover, in contrast to the liberal public of Habermas or Punto Fijo, the Bolivarian public recognizes and promotes tension and conflict within society, identifies its enemies, and deputizes action on the part of the people to defend the revolution. The persecution of people whose names appeared on the Tascón list was mentioned by many anti-Chávez respondents: "There is a difference between what the government says and what it does. The discussion is about inclusion, everybody participating . . . but . . . if you are in the opposition, against the process, you are outside. They do not listen to your ideas. . . . They depict the opposition as if it only wanted to exclude the majority of the population" (interview, Montalbán, March 1, 2008). Respondents also mentioned the "Tascón list" in questioning the fairness and freedom of elections.

Recalling the violent response of the Pérez government to the 1989 Caracazo, Chávez tells the people that the oligarchs will do this again if they return to power. The headline of the government-sponsored daily *Vea* on February 27, 2008, was "Neoliberal Model: Rebellion and Massacre." The pro-government Territory of the Formation of the New Man published an advertisement in this edition saying, "The people who protested against the empire were massacred; our shanties were painted with the red of our compatriots. . . . The people of Caracas should know who ordered them to kill. The assassins of the people were Carlos Andrés Pérez [and others from his administration]." In the discussion following the showing of a documentary about the Caracazo, one member of the audience said, "We have to remember what we are up against. . . . Just like [in the coup of] 2002. . . . All they know how to do is repress. They did it before and will do it again. They will try to finish us off" (speaker, February 27, 2008). The sense of a threat posed by "them" expressed in a government-funded newspaper and a government-funded public event held to commemorate the Caracazo suggests not only that public resources are being used to expose and intimidate enemies of "the public" but that the construction of "the public" is contingent upon these enemies, even though they have the legal status of citizens.

A CHÁVEZ (CO)PRODUCTION

Heterogeneous, contingent, and fragmented, micropublics are incompletely linked, and resources are distributed unevenly among them. They are influential even when they are not recognized (Warner, 2002: 419; Ikegami, 2000). Fernandes (2007) has shown, for example, how *barrio* women use their Bolivarian identity alongside their identity as residents of the *barrio* to establish a better negotiating position with the state. These and other bottom-up pressures from groups working within Bolivarianism prevent its characterization as entirely created by Chávez. While this tension between bottom-up and top-down approaches within Bolivarianism is one of its defining characteristics,⁵ it is one that only enhances the position of the president. As Ellner (2008) notes, Chávez is unable to reconcile the two approaches but is brilliant in preventing rupture. His leadership skills are supplemented by his charisma, his authority in a highly centralized political system in which opponents hold few positions of state power, and the resources of a petrostate in the midst of a petroleum boom. These factors have created powerful tropisms bending micropublics toward Chávez and making it easier for him to mold the linkages that bind micropublics into a larger collective identity. Thus, Bolivarianism is a coproduction, but Chávez is its most important coproducer.

CHANGING CITIZENSHIP BY TAKING POWER?

The Bolivarian public fits into a new citizenship as an agent in a participatory democracy, a market in which the state is increasingly present in production and regulation and the people are the basic social unit (Spanakos, 2008). This form of citizenship reflects the criticism of many social-movement activists and theorists of the previous mix of citizenship (liberal democracy based on multiclass but hierarchical parties, a capitalist state with state production in key areas, and a homogeneous, conflict-free nation), which they believed silenced subaltern groups, denying their claims of exclusion while allowing their marginalization. Chávez's use of the state apparatus to unify and transform the micropublics made possible the creation of a new public that is more broadly inclusive and encourages political action but also increases the intensity of exclusion. The questions to consider are whether this would have been possible without taking state power and how enduring this situation is likely to be.

There is no question that the changes brought about by Chávez would not have been so rapid had he dedicated himself to establishing social movements that would act outside of formal political power structures. At the same time, the most significant changes came only after the coup attempt, when Chávez broke from his moderate supporters, and only when oil prices rose with PDVSA under the control of his government (Wilpert, 2007). In other words, taking the state was a necessary but insufficient condition.

The more important question is whether the changes are permanent or ephemeral. Bolivarianism will certainly have long-term effects on the way future generations see their political identity and the expectations that they

have of their representatives. It is less likely, however, that the bonds that have been formed among the poor through Bolivarianism will continue without Chávez and without high petroleum prices. Understanding social movements and their linkages with the state through the lens of the micropublic can be especially helpful here. Though Chávez has been remarkably successful in linking micropublics into one public, these links are heavily dependent upon his leadership, the management of internal tensions, and the resources of a petrostate. The difficulty in doing this speaks to Chávez's leadership and use of resources and the inability of others within the Process or in the opposition to provide a credible alternative.

Analyzing social movements from the perspective of dynamic micropolitics that enter into networks and connect to larger institutions such as states and markets proves a very valuable technique for understanding the complexity and contingency behind the building and dissolution of coalitions (Ikegami, 2000; Smilde, 2004). It also sheds light on the way state, ideational, and charismatic power shape micropublic and publics. This has significant ramifications for Hardt and Negri's "multitudes" project, especially since the record of Bolivarianism's creating democracy at the macrolevel and within itself is so ambiguous. It also provides lessons for the rest of Latin America, where new social movements and protests are much more than episodic "multitudes" but still lack the resources to present alternatives to the state. Accordingly, the tension between a politics of resistance and one of confronting and conquering the state will persist, and there will be a tendency to pursue the latter. The Venezuelan case helps to identify the values and pitfalls of such a strategy.

NOTES

1. Over 85 semistructured in-depth interviews were conducted, primarily in Caracas, between January and August of 2008.

2. Immediately after the coup attempt, 67.4 percent of Venezuelans had a favorable impression of Chávez, and 55 percent still did a year later (Canache, 2002: 69).

3. The use of the public media to promote revolutionary politics might be accepted, given that the Bolivarian Revolution is driven and validated by elections (Hellinger, 2005), but the use of public funds that are available only to one coalition to promote political candidates is a grey area.

4. The same advertisement was published in other dailies as well, including those of the opposition.

5. Wilpert (2007: 190) argues that there have been significant innovations and improvements under Chávez's government from the perspective of radical democracy, but "despite the participatory nature of the social programs known as missions, practically all other areas of the government operate in a very top-down manner, where the president is the foremost commander in chief and everyone else has their place in the hierarchy and is expected to obey uncritically. The inability to distinguish loyalty from uncritical obedience makes the implementation of policies not only non-participatory, but also resistant to the correction of mistakes in accordance with criticism from below."

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