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New Wine, Old Bottles, Flamboyant Sommelier: Chávez, Citizenship, and Populism

Anthony Peter Spanakos
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Abstract *At points of crisis of political representations and economic insecurity, populists are more likely to emerge. That was true of earlier forms of populism in Latin America and it seems to be so now. There are some important differences though and these are shown by exploring Chavismo as an “extreme” case study of populism. Chávez has pushed a model of citizenship which is antithetical to neoliberal models in that it encourages politically engaged citizens, increases worker rights through an increasingly interventionist state, and encourages anti-imperialist solidarity and actions. By understanding how populist orientations of Chávez created possibilities and constraints on that citizenship, social scientists can better understand what populism is and is not.*

In a frequently downloaded video posting, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez referred to US President George W. Bush as a “donkey,” “genocidist,” and an “alcoholic” amongst other niceties.¹ On the floor of the general assembly of the United Nations, he referred to Bush as “the devil.”² Chávez’s critics have used similarly inflammatory language to describe him.³ But what exactly is Chávez?

Ellner and Hellinger argued that he is neither an authoritarian nationalist, along the lines of Nasser, nor a neopopulist like Fujimori.⁴ Since then, identifying exactly what Chávez is and over what sort of government he presides has been

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¹ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TI0_VzFxTzs> (accessed September 18, 2008).

² See <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=binMjEiS8AY>> (accessed September 18, 2008).

³ Steve Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics: Class, Conflict, and the Chávez Phenomenon* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publications, 2008).

⁴ Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger, “Conclusion: The Democratic and Authoritarian Directions of the *Chavista* Movement,” in Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger (eds), *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era: Class, Polarization & Conflict* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003).

somewhat of a growth industry.⁵ It has been especially important for those on the left and those who study the left.⁶

Chávismo can be identified as a sort of left populism.⁷ It is left in that it unabashedly identifies itself with socialism and economic redistribution. It is consistently in rhetoric, and sometimes in policies, highly critical of neoliberalism and capitalism (the latter less so). It is populist in the relative lack of clarity of its ideology and programs, the multiclass base of its support, and its reliance on the personal connection of a leader with masses of people who believe themselves to be excluded.⁸

Though the nature of populism draws attention to the “charismatic leader,”⁹ populism in Latin America emerges cyclically, during times when the gulf between citizen and state and market widens considerably.¹⁰ In this sense, populism not only aims to reduce the spaces between the citizen and the state and the citizen and the market during a crisis, but, in doing so, helps to reframe and reconstruct the boundaries of citizenship. Collier and Collier show that populism in Latin America was not simply a strategy but had long-term effects in terms of “shaping the political arena”¹¹ and one of the most important legacies of Chávez may be that the new form of citizenship he promotes shapes how citizenship is understood within Venezuela and other countries in the decades to come. While there are many aspects of this citizenship, this article will highlight three: (1) the importance of active engagement in politics; (2) participation in the market and production for excluded sectors; and (3) defense of economic sovereignty and promotion of solidarity with groups and states that share common goals or threats. Each of these characteristics figures as part of a response to the perceptions of the weakness of citizenship during the 1980s and 1990s.

Chávez’s populism infuses these areas with meaning which centers on citizen rights and responsibilities, though not without considerable problems. Political participation is encouraged through polarization and degrading the voice and actions of opponents. Economic inclusion is most effective through consumption which is more a product of commodity prices and an overvalued exchange rate

⁵ Anthony Peter Spanakos, “*Que regime é este? The Left in Brazil, Chile, and Venezuela*,” *Revista Análise Econômica-UFGRS* 26:50 (September 2008).

⁶ Jorge G. Castañeda, “Latin America’s Left Turn,” *Foreign Affairs* 85:3 (2006), pp. 28–43; Jorge G. Castañeda and Patricio Navia, “The Year of the Ballot,” *Current History* (February 2007), pp. 51–57; Mathew R. Cleary, “Explaining the Left’s Resurgence,” *Journal of Democracy* 17:4 (October 2006), pp. 35–49; Hector E. Schamis, “Populism, Socialism, and Democratic Institutions,” *Journal of Democracy* 17:4 (October 2006), pp. 35–49; Marie Kennedy and Chris Tilly, “Making Sense of Latin America’s ‘Third Left,’” *New Politics* 11:4 (2008), pp. 11–16; Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, *op. cit.*

⁷ Luke March, “From Vanguard of the Proletariat to *Vox Populi*: Left-populism as a ‘Shadow’ of Contemporary Socialism,” *SAIS Review* XXVII:1 (Winter–Spring 2007), pp. 63–77.

⁸ Michael L. Conniff, “Introduction: Toward a Comparative Definition of Populism,” in Michael L. Conniff (ed.), *Latin American Populism in Comparative Perspective* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982).

⁹ José Pedro Zúquete, “The Missionary Politics of Hugo Chávez,” *Latin American Politics & Society* 50:1 (2008), pp. 91–121.

¹⁰ Kenneth M. Roberts, “Latin America’s Populist Revival,” *SAIS Review* XXVII:1 (Winter–Spring 2007), pp. 3–15.

¹¹ Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

than real changes in production processes. Finally, citizens who are sympathetic to Chávez do demonstrate solidarity with other groups and countries that challenge US hegemony, but this places them in the position of supporting regimes that often reduce the space for citizenship and repress labor.

The first section of the article assesses the role of populism in Latin American politics, emphasizing how populism enters Latin America during periods of political and economic crisis. The article then looks to how Chávez perceived and sought to solve a similar crisis in Venezuela by presenting a “protagonistic” citizenship which rejects boundaries between citizen and representative, politics and economics, and even Venezuela and other countries. In doing so, it relies on secondary analyses of various Chávez-initiated programs and rhetoric as well as a unique set of 92 in-depth interviews conducted in Venezuela between January and August 2008 with sympathizers and opponents of the government. The interviews are particularly important in that they give concrete evidence of the ideational understanding of what citizenship means to citizens in a government that is constitutionally defined as a “participatory and protagonistic” democracy. Since populism emerges when there is a citizenship gap, how populism shapes citizenship is fundamental for identifying populism. By exploring populism within Bolivarian Venezuela, an extreme case, this article offers deeper understanding and refinement of a critical concept for political inquiry in developing countries.

Populism and Citizenship in Latin America

The roots of the relationship between state and society in Latin America are largely linked to populist moments in 20th century Latin America. The citizen, as a bearer of political, civil, and economic rights,¹² was formed in the midst of the crises generated by the collapse of foreign markets for Latin American goods during the Great Depression and the demographic shift toward urbanization and industrialization which destabilized the hegemony of landed rural elites. From these crises,¹³ a new regime with a different concept of state–society–market relations emerged, engendering new forms of citizenship.

The collapse of foreign markets provided the impetus for endogenous development and industrialization, shifting power from rural agro-exporters toward nascent industrialists.¹⁴ The demographic shift from rural to urban, the rise of organized labor, and the increased political salience of massified politics created pressures on the new urban elites and the restricted democracies they managed.¹⁵ Mass mobilization, particularly organized labor, made demands for greater political and economic rights within multiclass alliances led by charismatic leaders. Importantly, under the influence of populism Latin American governments became more conscious of support amongst the masses, economic

¹²T. H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays* (London: Heineman, 1963).

¹³Colin Hay, “Crisis and the Structural Transformation of the State: Interrogating the Process of Change,” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 1:3 (1999), pp. 317–344.

¹⁴H. W. Arndt, “The Origins of Structuralism,” *World Development* 13:2 (1985), pp. 151–159.

¹⁵Peter H. Smith, *Democracy in Latin America: Political Change in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

rights and subsidies were established, suffrage was expanded, and organization (at least within preferred unions) was encouraged. It was within this context of state-led growth, populism, and opening but restricted democracies that the modern citizen emerged in Latin America.

Although populist leaders from Juan Perón in Argentina to Getulio Vargas in Brazil to Salvador Allende in Chile employed different manners of incorporating their supporters,¹⁶ populists shared rhetorical claims which were anti-elitist, inclusionary of marginal groups, and suspect of unregulated market activity. Populist projects were elite-led, top-down, and often used popular support as a means of strengthening the presidency vis-à-vis elite interests. Populists used their ability to mobilize the masses as both a legitimating tool and leverage against political opposition.

Populists often presented themselves to elites as non-Marxist, anti-communist or even the only real alternative to socialism.¹⁷ At the same time, the new repertoires of politics in which they were engaging occupied an ambiguous position during the Cold War, particularly after the 1959 Cuban Revolution. Indeed, populism and its specter were equally fundamental aspects of second wave democracies in Latin America as well as the wave of authoritarianism that replaced those regimes.¹⁸ Despite the instability of populist democracies and non-democracies, populist leaders, parties, and, more importantly, populism became a defining feature of social, political, and economic incorporation of the masses as citizens in Latin America.

When the current wave of democratization began in Latin America in the 1980s, it was juxtaposed to economic emergency measures and the deregulation of markets.¹⁹ Precisely when citizens were regaining their political rights *qua* citizens their economic rights and the distributive obligations of the state changed quite radically. State regulation of markets was reduced, state production largely privatized, fiscal budgets cut, monetary policy was used exclusively to control inflation, and the provision of public services was increasingly transferred to private agents and/or nongovernmental agencies. In the midst of such a transformation, analysts considered whether populism in Latin America was dead.²⁰ After all, populations seemed demobilized, organized labor weakened, the informal sector ballooned, and few leaders saw a practical alternative to neoliberalism, which was presented as the “responsible” other to populism.²¹

¹⁶ Collier and Collier, *op. cit.*; see also Roberts, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ March, *op. cit.* In the case of the Acción Democrática leaders of Venezuela and their predecessor, Ellner writes “they . . . delayed raising the banner of socialism in order to avoid a show-down with the nation’s conservative classes.” Steven Ellner, “Populism in Venezuela, 1935–48: Betancourt and *Acción Democrática*,” in Conniff (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 147.

¹⁸ Smith, *op. cit.* See also the argument made for instability in modernizing countries more generally in Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order and Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

¹⁹ Philip Oxhorn and Pamela K. Starr (eds), *Markets & Democracy in Latin America: Conflict or Convergence* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999).

²⁰ Paul Drake, “Conclusion: Requiem for Populism?” in Conniff (ed.), *op. cit.* Also see David Leaman, “Changing Faces of Populism in Latin America: Masks, Makeovers, and Enduring Features,” *Latin American Research Review* 39:3 (2004), pp. 312–326.

²¹ Rudiger Dornbusch and Sebastian Edwards (eds), *The Macroeconomics of Populism in Latin America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

By the 1990s most Latin American governments had eliminated high levels of inflation through liberal inspired stabilization programs and voters rewarded the politicians held responsible for that.²² In this context, Kurt Weyland improbably called presidents like Carlos Menem in Argentina, Alberto Fujimori in Peru, Fernando Collor in Brazil—all presidents who pursued neoliberal economics—“neopopulists.” Although earlier populists were associated with redistributive economic strategies, creation of rights for labor, and economic nationalism, Weyland argued that neopopulists were populists because of the “personalistic, populist leadership, which claims an electoral mandate from ‘the people’ but determines the content of this mandate at will . . .”²³ And though neoliberalism involved reducing the strength of organized labor, macroeconomic stabilization and overvalued exchange rates created consumption booms which were reminiscent of earlier populist episodes. Citizenship could then be increasingly understood in liberal terms, specific rights detached from organized politics of contestation, and economic participation from the side of consumption rather than production. Moreover, the fragmentation of labor in the informal sector made broad ranging policies, like overvalued exchange rates, produce multiclass benefits, while other policies reduced “rigidities” in labor markets that had previously been considered “rights.”

Since the Asian crisis, Latin America has witnessed both a rise of the left and a populism which has, at least rhetorically, rejected neoliberalism. The emergence was not surprising given popular disappointment with democracy and inequality following an era in which states’ control and participation in markets decreased and authoritarian governments were replaced with electoral ones.²⁴ Castañeda has argued that the left has and should have a place in Latin America given the high levels of inequality and the lack of social justice.²⁵ There is also a potential appeal for populism which, Conniff writes, is “a repudiation of those forces hindering popular representation, social mobility, and rising standards of living for the masses.”²⁶

At the same time, while persistently high levels of inequality, low growth, and low-quality democracy encourage populism, the international context has also been important. The end of the Cold War has reduced support for armed leftist revolution and armed rightist resistance in most countries in the region, allowing democracy to become the dominant form of government.²⁷ Socialism is no longer linked to the Soviet Union which both frees it from association with totalitarianism allowing it to be a more acceptable term in mainstream political discussions, but also makes it difficult to define it in any meaningful way. As such, left populists like Hugo Chávez or Bolivia’s Evo Morales can speak of socialism and use policies that are often entirely consistent with the state capitalism of previous governments (of the right, center, or left).

Despite the relative ambiguity, Chávez claims to be building 21st-century socialism and is doing so through left populist politics. This is particularly important

²²Susan C. Stokes (ed.), *Public Support for Market Reforms in New Democracies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

²³Kurt Weyland, “Neoliberalism and Democracy in Latin America: A Mixed Record,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 46:1 (Spring 2004), pp. 135–157 at p. 149.

²⁴See Roberts, *op. cit.*

²⁵Jorge G. Castañeda, *Utopia Unarmed: Latin American Left after the Cold War* (New York: Vintage, 1994); Castañeda, “Latin America’s Left Turn,” *op. cit.*

²⁶Conniff, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

²⁷See Castañeda, *Utopia Unarmed*, *op. cit.*

for scholars as Chávez and chavismo constitute “extreme cases” for scholars studying populists and populism, respectively. The collapse of the Punto Fijo two-party system in Venezuela and the rise of Chávez²⁸ can be “considered to be prototypical or paradigmatic of” the phenomenon of populism.²⁹ For this reason, exploring the contours of Chavismo’s contribution to new postulations of citizenship helps scholars understand the possibilities and weaknesses of contemporary left populism. Notably, in contrast with older versions of populism in that: though it is highly top-down there is an important bottom-up component; it is more comfortable with the label socialism than earlier versions; and the international context in which Chávez asserts his project is propitious for developing countries aggressively pursuing foreign policies that aim at multilateral balancing.

Bolivarian Citizenship

Venezuela is one of the few Latin American countries to have not one but two lost decades (the 1980s and 1990s) during which there was virtually no economic growth.³⁰ The popular revolt of February 27, 1989, the “Caracazo,” was a galvanizing moment in terms of resistance against a politician who had within days of entering office, backtracked on electoral rhetoric and implemented an austerity program.³¹ When two *coup d’état* attempts were launched three years later, they received remarkable popular support,³² and the coup leader who made a televised appeal to his comrades to turn themselves in, Lt. Colonel Hugo Chávez, became an instant hero to many segments of the population. The two party system that had dominated Venezuela since 1958 was unable to mount viable governments and voters increasingly chose oppositional and then anti-political candidates, culminating with the election of Chávez to the presidency in 1998. In February 1999, when he took office, Chávez’s approval was over 80% in public opinion polls, suggesting that almost the entirety of the country wanted change.³³

Since coming to power, Chávez has claimed to lead a Bolivarian Revolutionary Process (*el proceso revolucionario bolivariano*) which has changed considerably over the past decade. In 2005 Chávez announced that the *proceso* aims to create 21st-century socialism, a term that serves better as a compass than an indication of policy preferences.³⁴ A more accurate label might be what Chávez calls “complete democracy” (*plena democracia*), a fulfillment of the new Constitution’s self-

²⁸ Henry Dietz and David J. Myers, “From Thaw to Deluge: Party System Collapse in Venezuela and Peru,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 49:2 (2007), pp. 59–86.

²⁹ John Gerring with Jason Seawright, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 101.

³⁰ Julia Buxton, “Economic Policy and the Rise of Hugo Chávez,” in Ellner and Hellinger (eds), *op. cit.*, pp. 115, 113.

³¹ Margarita López Maya, “The Venezuelan Caracazo of 1989: Popular Protest and Institutional Weakness,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 35 (February 2003), pp. 117–136.

³² Daniel H. Levine and Brian F. Crisp, “Legitimacy, Governability, and Reform in Venezuela,” in Louise W. Goodman, Johana Mendelson Forma, Moisés Naím, Joseph S. Tulchin, and Gary Bland (eds), *Lessons of the Venezuelan Experience* (Washington, DC: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1995).

³³ Keller & Associates, “La popularidad de Hugo Chávez,” personal communication with the autor, no date.

³⁴ Margarita López Maya (ed.), *Ideas para debater el socialismo del siglo XXI* (Caracas: Editora Alfa, 2007).

identification as a “participatory and protagonistic democracy.”³⁵ This vision of democracy claims to coexist and complement representative democracy, though it is openly anti-liberal and aims to reconstruct and politicize public spaces. The politicization of localities, of citizen struggles with water, food, need for sports and recreational possibilities in shanty-towns (*barrios*³⁶), coincides with a greater politicization of political identity.

The most ideologically committed Chavistas see their citizenship in their daily struggle against empowered and entrenched elites in order to assert and preserve their own power. Citizenship is thus an agonistic struggle against enemies, internal and external, and it calls for alliances spurred by local political initiatives, mass rallies, as well as support for struggling “people” (people who struggle against similarly perceived enemies) in other contexts (geographic or historical).³⁷ This presumes that the political is a broad and expansive category in which popular participation is critical for both legitimacy and consciousness-raising.³⁸ The Bolivarian citizen, that is, the one who accepts and adopts the vision promoted by Chávez, is therefore the antithesis to the more truncated versions of citizenship which emerged in Latin America and much of the developing world during the last two decades of the 20th century. That citizen’s involvement in politics was voluntaristic, nongovernmental organizations and social movements aimed for autonomy from the state, economic liberties were privileged over entitlements, and US influence was considerable and welcomed.³⁹

³⁵ See Daniel Hellinger, “When ‘No’ Means ‘Yes to Revolution’: Electoral Politics in Bolivarian Venezuela,” *Latin American Perspectives* 32:8 (2005), pp. 8–32. Chávez told Aleida Guevara: “This is true democracy, extending far beyond formal political democracy that limits choice to whether or not a particular governor should be elected.” Chávez in Aleida Guevara, *Chávez: Venezuela & the New Latin America* (New York: Ocean Press, 2007), p. 49.

³⁶ Though *barrio* conventionally means “neighborhood,” in Venezuela it refers to shanty-towns. The word *urbanización* is used to connote a neighborhood and the implication is that it is wealthy.

³⁷ This is consistent with Žižek who writes “the true opposition today is . . . between globalization (the emerging global market new world order) and universalism (the properly political domain of universalizing one’s particular fate as representative of global injustice).” Slavoj Žižek, “For a Leftist Appropriation of the European Legacy,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 3:1 (February 1998), pp. 988–1009 at p. 1007.

³⁸ That is because “*The political* may be defined as everything that concerns . . . explicit power. This includes the modes of access to explicit power, the appropriate ways of managing it, and so on.” Cornelius Castoriadis, “Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime,” *The Rising Tide of Insignificance*, translated from French and edited anonymously, p. 34, < www.aporiainternational.org/englishtextc.html > . Maintaining politics within the administration of government functions ignores the way in which power is constructed and alternative ways of “managing it.”

³⁹ Norbert Lechner, “The Transformation of Politics,” in Felipe Aguero and Jeffrey Stark (eds), *Fault Lines of Democracy in Post-Transition Latin America* (Miami: North–South Center Press, 1998). In distinguishing third wave from previous waves of democracies, Smith notes the shift toward the center by much of the right and left and the reduction of space for policy innovation and discussion. He finds that, current democracies in Latin America are extraordinary in the restraint over public demands, that they are less utopian than in the past. This evokes the work *Utopia Unarmed* by Jorge Castañeda who identifies two lefts—one institutional and one radical, clearly favoring the former.

Engaged, Partisan Citizens

The *proceso* has effected the common citizen, never before was there so much protagonism in the political process. Here the people were mute. They voted and returned to their house . . . Now, you are not only an observer of politics, you are participating in politics . . . Now [the people] think "I am a protagonist in my own process."⁴⁰

Now the institutions are in the streets.⁴¹

One theme that recurred throughout interviews with both pro-Chávez residents of *barrios* who believe that they are protagonists of their own struggles as well as opponents of the Chávez regime is that under the previous democratic government, citizenship was largely limited to voting every five years and politics was dominated by often corrupt institutions such as political parties, business organizations, and organized labor.⁴² Resistance to this had always existed and was visible during the 1980s and 1990s, but the rise of Chávez accentuated it, massified it, gave it a name, and often funded it. By contrast, the Chávez vision of the citizen assumes that citizens cannot transfer their sovereignty to representatives but must remain the "protagonists" in their own drama. This vision was enshrined in the 1999 Constitution which declares Venezuela a "participatory and protagonistic" democracy.⁴³

Chávez has been a candidate in or presided over 11 elections in 11 years including consultative elections about whether to hold a constituent assembly, voting on the new constitution, a referendum to revoke the president's mandate, and a vote on proposed constitutional amendments. Simply from the perspective of opportunities to express voice through elections, Chávez has increased the political role of the citizen. But the elections in Venezuela are more than simply ballot-checking moments and Chávez's polarization of politics has made every election in some way a referendum on his leadership and an opportunity for his supporters to make their claims against an elite class which victimized them and robbed them of the agency as citizens for so long. Chavista discourse along with the opposition's similarly polarizing language make it nearly impossible not to take sides.⁴⁴ Polarization also encourages a centripetal tendency toward all politics around Chávez.

The centrality of Chávez is exaggerated by his ubiquitous presence in television and print media. In addition to generating most of the news in the country, he hosts a weekly several hour long television show on Sundays, *Aló Presidente*, and he regularly engages in extensive public announcements which private media are obligated to carry. On the often campy *Aló Presidente*, Chávez engages in a deliberately popular and even vulgar discourse in which high politics of diplomacy are mixed with everyday life concerns. Lampooned for the campy-ness

⁴⁰ Teacher, Barquisimeto, March 5, 2008.

⁴¹ Government Official, Petare, May 2008.

⁴² Michael Coppedge, *Strong Parties and Lame Ducks: Presidential Partyarchy and Factionalism in Venezuela* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

⁴³ María Pilar García-Guadilla, "Civil Society: Institutionalization, Fragmentation, Autonomy," in Ellner and Hellinger (eds), *op. cit.*

⁴⁴ Javier Corrales, "Oil and Polarization in Venezuela," in Jonathan Eastwood and Thomas Ponniah (eds), *Revolution in Venezuela* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

and demagoguery of this by the opposition, his supporters appreciate the sincerity and accessibility, though some lament his use of foul language and his constant threats to opponents. More importantly, his repetitive rhetoric easily enters into their own and his constant discussion of politics has spurred the valuation of politics amongst his supporters.

When asked “how often do you talk about politics?” the most common answer given was “every day.”⁴⁵ One pro-Chávez street vender said “often, everything is politics.” A pro-Chávez junior high school teacher said “every day. I search out the subject. It is the way to learn how to see how people think, because every person is a political person . . .”⁴⁶ In shaping not only what is discussed but how it is discussed, Chávez has changed the way that citizens interact with and dissect a concept of politics which has grown increasingly into a spectacle presented on television. His banalization of politics both reduces the technocratic pretensions of neoliberal versions of citizenship while encouraging citizen debate and activity in politics. Interviewees who supported President Chávez constantly referenced their comments in terms of what Chávez said on an issue and spoke of how they discussed these issues with people in their world (family, co-workers, other people in community organizations). This shift from reflection in discussion to action by claiming newly established rights through participation in newly created public spaces is fundamental. So is the agonism of the spaces and the sense that in claiming their rights citizens are re-claiming them from “oligarchs.”

The *misiones*⁴⁷ and the other government programs and community-based programs are generally given names that “belong” to the Bolivarian movement of Chávez or are given military titles encouraging a perception that the new spaces are not open to non-Chavistas. With the exception of Mercal and to a lesser extent Barrio Adentro, these new spaces are seen as Chavista spaces. This is due to both the incessant politicization of government acts by Chávez as well as the initial rejection by members of the opposition of these programs. Regardless of who is to blame/credit, the spaces are partisan and this is consistent with the emerging understanding of citizenship. Citizenship, after all, is a project based on agonistic struggles of the *pueblo* (“people”). The inherent assumption of enemies of the people, a defining element of populist discourse, is constantly present. After all, the *misiones*, *barrio adentro*, and other new structures are considered to be spaces that have been given by Chávez and their existence is ensured by the consciousness of rights-claiming citizens.

One architect who was being attended to on a Saturday at a fair of government services in the *barrio* of Petare, remarked that it was good to have the services, but

⁴⁵ Again, this is based on the investigator’s research in Venezuela in 2008 referred to earlier.

⁴⁶ Interviews conducted in Catia, Caracas, on April 12, 2008, and Carora, Lara, on March 7, 2008.

⁴⁷ The *misiones* are highly visible and popular manifestations of government reaching out to its citizens. They include programs to reduce illiteracy (*Robinson*), give university degrees (*Ribas*), reduce problems with eyes (*milagro*), support and spread popular culture (*cultura*), remunerate women in *barrios* (*madre de barrio*), among other issues. The results of these *misiones* are highly disputed although they are quite popular. See Mark Weisbrot, “An Empty Research Agenda: The Creation of Myths about Contemporary Venezuela,” *Center for Economic and Policy Research* Issue Brief (March 2008), p. 1, also p. 4; Francisco Rodríguez, “An Empty Revolution: The Unfulfilled Promises of Hugo Chávez,” *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2008), pp. 49–62.

he wished they were not partisan.⁴⁸ Similarly, one sociologist explained “I think that the government invites participation but it does not create spaces of plurality when it does so, there is a certain unidirectionality . . .”⁴⁹ This perception of a lack of pluralism is worsened by the fact that the government makes no effort to separate the missions and other state-funded enterprises from the government, the president, the party, or the *Proceso*.⁵⁰

Chávez rallies are peopled by many who come aboard buses that belong to Misión Ribas, Misión Robinson, Misión Sucre, amongst others and are treated to food and entertainment founded by the state. The sense of citizenship inherent in a state-sponsored claims-making is radically different from that of the 1980s and 1990s when economic rights and subsidies were reduced and protests against these changes were repressed by the state. Although critics of Chávez are correct when they identify a lack of accountability when he says that government problems are a matter of lack of revolutionary conscience and the failure of the people themselves to act, this is consistent with the sense that the government will create and establish rights and local institutions to provide them, but the citizens must claim these rights and institutions. And it is by using *barrio adentro*, shopping in *mercal*, having a friend who received a bachelor’s degree through a *misión*, protesting against the “enemies” of Chávez/the people who want to roll back all of those benefits that pro-Chávez informants believed that they exercised their citizenship.

Perhaps the most important venture in the area of promoting an active, yet partisan, citizenship is the creation of the communal councils. Created by decree by President Chávez during a public broadcast, they were formed in law in June 2005.⁵¹ Basing itself on the idea of local participation found in the Constitution, communal councils are organized units of between 200 and 400 families which receive roughly \$60,000 for infrastructural and other projects. By 2007, some 20,000 communal councils were registered with the government.⁵² The community councils represent, according to Chávez, one of the fundamental ways in which the *Proceso* will advance by building small communities that take “co-responsibility” for affairs of local existence including media, sports, health, education, urban or rural land issues, popular economy, security, water, and other issues.⁵³ Though the Chávez experimentation with local governance is part of a history of neighborhood councils⁵⁴ and other forms of local governance, emerging particularly as a result of decentralization in the 1980s and 1990s, there are important innovations of the communal council models, innovations which are the direct result of the populist manner in which they were formed.

⁴⁸ Interview, Petare, May 24, 2008.

⁴⁹ Interview, San Martín, May 16, 2008.

⁵⁰ Trino Márquez, “Partido y pluralidad,” in Gregorio Castro (ed.), *Debate por Venezuela* (Caracas: Editorial Alfa, 2007).

⁵¹ Margarita López Maya, “Sobre representación política y participación en el socialismo venezolano del siglo XXI,” in Castro (ed.), *op. cit.*

⁵² Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

⁵³ Thais Maingón and Arturo Sosa Abascal, “Los consejos comunales: ¿Espacios para la construcción de ciudadanía y el ejercicio del poder popular?” Draft (May 22, 2007), p. 14.

⁵⁴ María Pilar García-Guadilla, “Poder popular y límites de la democracia participativa en Venezuela: la experiencia de los consejos comunales,” paper delivered at the *II Conferencia de la Sección Venezolana de la Latin American Studies Association*, Caracas (May 2008).

The two most exhaustive studies of communal councils⁵⁵ are highly critical of the promotion, design, and administration of communal councils in Venezuela. There are a number of reasons for criticism. First, rather than resulting from bottom-up pressures to include citizen participation and to improve government efficacy, as was the case in other countries, the Venezuelan communal councils were created by a speech act of President Chávez, with no public debate.⁵⁶ The irony of a space for a self-assertive citizenry being decided with no popular consultation was not lost on most commentators.⁵⁷ Second, the relationship between the new local communities and existing municipal governments is unclear. Whereas in the widely cited experience in Porto Alegre (Brazil) participatory publics complement elected municipal governments,⁵⁸ it remains unclear whether communal councils are intended to complement or replace municipal governments in Venezuela.⁵⁹ Particularly concerning is that rather than being under and part of municipal government as a means of rendering more robust ties between local government and society, as is the case in Brazil, the communal councils operate under the jurisdiction of the executive branch of the national government and create disincentives to coordinate with other local and municipal authorities.⁶⁰ They therefore serve to both increase autonomy vis-à-vis a micro-community against the municipal and state level elite as well as decrease that autonomy vis-à-vis the president.

Though he uses a language and even creates institutional spaces which allow for the possibility of greater participation, the context for creation of an active citizen is shaped by the nature of Chávez's left populism. Chávez encourages local community action and the groups display more autonomy from Chávez than might be expected,⁶¹ and although Chavismo is top-down as were previous populisms in Latin America, bottom-up pressures are important and cannot be denied.⁶² That said, the centralization of politics—its articulation, the shapes it takes, how struggles are fought—within the figure of the leader in a populist environment places a disproportionate amount of power in the leader. The disproportionality is particularly stark when comparing semi-organized groups of 200–400 shanty-town dwellers vis-à-vis a highly centralized executive branch in a petro-state during a commodities boom.

Also, like previous populisms, Chavismo aims at inclusion of previously excluded groups, relies on internal enemies, and citizenship becomes a curious mix of partisan inclusion in which rights and socio-economic obligations are granted following a period of political and economic crisis.⁶³ However, they are

⁵⁵ Maingón and Sosa Abascal, *op. cit.*; García-Guadilla, "Poder popular y límites de la democracia participativa en Venezuela," *op. cit.*

⁵⁶ Margarita López Maya, "Sobre representación política y participación en el socialismo venezolano del siglo XXI," *op. cit.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*; Márquez, *op. cit.*

⁵⁸ William R. Nylen, *Participatory Democracy versus Elite Democracy: Lessons from Brazil* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁵⁹ Daniel Hellinger, "Defying the Iron Law I: How Does 'el pueblo' Conceive Democracy," in *Participation, Politics and Culture in Venezuela's Bolivarian Democracy*, Daniel Hellinger and David Smilde, eds (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming)

⁶⁰ Maingón and Sosa Abascal, *op. cit.*

⁶¹ Sujatha Fernandes, "Barrio Women and Popular Politics in Chávez's Venezuela," *Latin American Politics and Society* 49:3 (Fall 2007), pp. 97–127.

⁶² See Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, *op. cit.*

⁶³ Roberts, *op. cit.*

granted through a process that is heavily tied to a leader and their guarantee is limited by their partisan nature. This engenders an opposition (or an extreme group within it) who see the new institutions and rights as ephemeral and believe that elimination of the charismatic leader will restore previous concepts of the citizen. This attitude seems to have guided those leading the coup against Chávez in 2002. Its failure and the subsequent majoritarian electoral victories of Chávez until 2007 attest to both the successful creation of a new concept of citizen as well as the inability of that citizenship to be embedded within society absent the leader who generated it.

Co-management and Consumption

The economic model has developed slowly, unevenly, and not without contradiction.⁶⁴ Notably, economic policy was liberal from 1999 until the coup in 2002.⁶⁵ Since then, the model developed is one characterized by fiscal and monetary expansion, centralization of distributional moneys through the presidency, creation of social *misiones* (missions) in poor areas, threatening private companies with expropriation, recovery of abandoned companies, subsidizing economic cooperatives, and organizing workers in the “popular economy.” The economic strategy of the Chávez government emerges in a context which emphasizes the participation of excluded sectors in the market and production. It does this by both encouraging worker co-management, cooperatives, and by expropriating companies that fail to resolve labor troubles. This is standard fare for left populism. Expropriations and extortion of private companies is part of a larger geopolitical struggle (see next section). However, where Chavismo seems most effective in terms of economic inclusion is not in the area of rights, co-management, or recovered companies, but simply in the area of consumption, something that was the foundation of the support for neopopulists.⁶⁶

Excepting the first few years of his administration when oil prices were low, government spending was restricted, and when political instability as a result of a prolonged petroleum worker strike and a coup d'état, the Venezuelan economy has grown considerably. One pro-Chávez think-tank writes that the economy “has grown by more than 87 percent . . . [t]he poverty rate has been cut in half, and unemployment by more than half.”⁶⁷ Additionally, government spending has increased from 18.8% of GDP in 1999 to 29.4% in 2007. Public sector employment increased from 1.254 million people, or 14.6% of the workforce in 1999 to 2.17 million people or 18.5% of the workforce in 2008.⁶⁸ Although the results of government economic policies (and even the figures)⁶⁹ are disputed, what is less disputed is that fiscal and monetary expansion has spurred consumption and that petroleum revenues have been funneled into supporting social projects (*misiones*,

⁶⁴ Again, see *Ibid.*; for a government account of this see Haiman El-Troudi, *Ser capitalista es un mal negocio: claves para socialistas* (Caracas: Centro Internacional Miranda, 2007), p. 19.

⁶⁵ Buxton, *op. cit.*

⁶⁶ Weyland, *op. cit.* See also Susan C. Stokes, “Economic Reforms and Public Opinion in Fujimori’s Peru,” in Stokes (ed.), *op. cit.*

⁶⁷ Weisbrot, *op. cit.*, p. 1, also p. 4.

⁶⁸ Suhelis Tejero Puentes, “Sector privado pierde terreno en generación de empleo,” *El Universal*, June 25, 2008.

⁶⁹ Rodríguez, *op. cit.*, p. 51. See also Weisbrot, *op. cit.*

Mercal, amongst others) as well as to cooperatives and to pay for a growing number of expropriations.

Chávez's petroleum strategy—reinvigorating OPEC, cutting production, driving up the targeted price range for petroleum, increasing royalty taxes, nationalizing oil production, imposing a windfall tax⁷⁰—was part of a strategy aimed at establishing “sovereignty” over the country's most important industry. The increased prices in petroleum and in government revenue have allowed the national budget to increase by a factor of almost eight since 1999. Some of this revenue is being used very conspicuously in funding cooperatives, recovered factories, social programs, and distribution of low-cost food.

“According to *International Oil Daily*, an energy trade publication, PDVSA spent \$14.4 billion on social programs in 2007 (as compared to \$6.9 billion in 2005).”⁷¹ The fact that the petroleum revenues are being used for development and sent to programs that are seen as directly benefiting the poor is applauded by pro-Chávez supporters. It validates a sense of citizen efficacy in which their government is responding to their interests. As one government employee commented “among the most important accomplishments [in the area of economics] is the recovery of the petroleum industry. I consider the state control of the petroleum industry not only as motor of the economy, but also as a means of national and international negotiation.”⁷² Or, as one agronomist explained “the economic success is based on the use of petroleum to protect the people.”⁷³ This sense that petroleum is being and should be used “for the people” and that previously elites used it “for their own benefit” and transferred their profits to the US rather than reinvesting them is ubiquitous in Chávez's speeches and it appears periodically in Chavista interviewee comments about current economic conditions.⁷⁴ It is rarely identified as part of a socialist strategy but is understood in a language of either “good governance” or “economic sovereignty.”

Establishing sovereignty has involved highly visual and dramatic expropriations including that of steel producing SIDOR (owned by the privately owned CEMEX of Mexico) in which the energy minister and president of PDVSA (the Venezuelan national petroleum company) along with workers and the Venezuelan military occupied SIDOR plants.⁷⁵ The visual complements the trend in perceptions amongst investors of worsening protection for private capital throughout the Chávez administration. The Heritage Foundation's reports on economic liberty, which reflect traditional neoliberal concerns, show a substantial decrease in economic liberty since 2002.⁷⁶ The decrease in the Heritage Foundation's indicator of economic liberty is the result of government

⁷⁰ Jon Lee Anderson, “A Reporter at Large: Fidel's Heir: The Influence of Hugo Chávez,” *The New Yorker*, June 23, 2008; Bernard Mommer, “Subversive Oil,” in Ellner and Hellinger (ed.), *op. cit.* See <http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/06/23/080623fa_fact_anderson?currentPage=all> (accessed June 19, 2008).

⁷¹ Cesar J. Alvarez, *Venezuela's Oil-Based Economy*, June 27, 2008. See <http://www.cfr.org/publication/12089/venezuelas_oilbased_economy.html?breadcrumb=%2Fregion%2F254%2Fvenezuela#7> (accessed September 17, 2008).

⁷² Interview, May 22, 2008.

⁷³ Interview, Maracay, April 12, 2008.

⁷⁴ Publicist, Petare, May 24, 2008.

⁷⁵ “Chávez anuncia que nacionalizará cementeras mañana a medianoche,” *El Universal*, August 17, 2008.

⁷⁶ See <<http://www.heritage.org/Index/>> (accessed September 18, 2008).

intervention in markets most notably expropriations such as the 2005 nationalization VENEPAL, a paper concern, 2007 nationalization of oil production in the Orinoco belt and the private telecommunications company (CANTV) and the electric company (Electricidad) and the 2008 nationalizations of Banco de Venezuela and SIDOR.

In all cases Chávez paid or has offered to pay “fair” compensation for the seized assets and in some cases created mixed companies. What is relevant is that the official government announced policy of taking over companies in “key” areas remains ambiguous, Chávez has justified several expropriations based on labor disputes, and there have been both cosmetic and policy changes to make public ownership of corporations different. This means facilitating entry of public sector workers into *misiones* which give job training or provide education. One CANTV employee explained “I worked here for years, now that it is a public company, I can go to the university and get a degree.”⁷⁷

None of this is terribly novel given the history of populism in Latin America and Venezuela particularly. During the last petroleum boom PDVSA and other public companies were created. In fact, Chavismo is very similar to Punto Fijismo in that it uses relatively inefficient versions of state-managed capitalism to employ allies and punish enemies.⁷⁸ What is more innovative is the nature of state-business-labor relations which has changed. That relationship had been based in corporatism and tripartite negotiations but the system broke down with labor losing a considerable amount of negotiating power during the 1980s and 1990s.⁷⁹ Chávez has engaged academics and labor leaders who reject the labor union associated with the Punto Fijo system (CTV). Chávez placed activist/academic Carlos Lanz in charge of ALCASA where he “pledged . . . to replace the Taylor system which privileges worker productivity at the expense of humanitarian working conditions.”⁸⁰ When the government nationalized INVEPAL it turned over 49% of its stock to workers and allowed workers to choose two of its five members of the board of directors.⁸¹ At the same time, Chávez fired some 19,000 workers from PDVSA who had participated in the three-month long strike of 2002–2003. Each case is obviously different, but it is important to recall that while more “socialist” and “human” conditions are created for workers, the Chávez government is not averse to punishing workers who invoke their rights in ways that threaten his government.

The concept of populism and its top-down leader-centric vision is critical here. It is Chávez who takes over a company ostensibly to defend its workers and he gives new rights of participation to these workers. But it is also Chávez who, on *Aló Presidente*, fired workers, read the names of people who signed petitions to call a referendum to remove him from power, and regularly identifies who are his/the people’s enemies.

The importance of PDVSA also suggests that PDVSA is not a company which the government is prepared to sacrifice to “socialism.” Internal critiques abound of

⁷⁷ Interview, La Pastora, Caracas, March 11, 2008.

⁷⁸ See Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

⁷⁹ Steve Ellner, “Organized Labor and the Challenge of *Chavismo*,” in Ellner and Hellinger (eds), *op. cit.*

⁸⁰ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics, op. cit.*, p. 197.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

the government's employment of state capitalism which does not change the means of production.⁸² In general, public ownership has meant expanded opportunities for public sector workers through publicly funded programs but it has not changed management. In some cases, there has been greater worker participation in management decisions but this has been limited to leading radical labor leaders like Orlando Chirinos of the Unión Nacional de Trabajadores to declare that he "... rejects 'static' *cogestión* [co-management] and insists that the system eventually transform itself into complete Worker control, at the same time that it calls on the confederation to lead Worker takeovers of mailing companies."⁸³

Where the government has allowed for greater worker control has been in the area of cooperatives, an area that has received considerable government support. Over 140,000 cooperatives were registered with the government by 2006. But few cooperatives would survive without government funding and supervision of funds sent to cooperatives has been poor and even sympathetic observers consider cooperatives to be part of an employment strategy rather than part of any long-term and self-sustaining piece of a new productive model.⁸⁴

In fact, what seems the most successful path for citizen inclusion in Bolivarian Venezuela has been consumption. High levels of government spending, negative interest rates, monetary expansion, an overvalued exchange, and government programs to spur purchase of automobiles have fueled both consumption and speculative activities. The Bolívar is fixed at 2.150 to the US dollar though the parallel rate fluctuated between 3.0 and 5.5 between January and August 2008. Access to dollars at the official rate is limited and controlled through a government agency, CADIVI. This agency has spent billions of dollars to make low-cost dollars available to Venezuelan citizens. Venezuelan citizens were allowed to spend up to \$3,000 in international credit card purchases at the official exchange rate in 2007, a figure later reduced to \$400. Nevertheless, between those numbers as well as access to official rate dollars when traveling, "Venezuelans spent more than \$4 billion ... [in 2007]. By contrast, Cadivi approved just \$2.2 billion for food imports, even though the government is battling serious food shortages."⁸⁵ In January 2008, the government announced that Cadivi received \$3.6 billion in January alone.⁸⁶

Venezuelans feel richer and Chavistas think that being able to consume is a fundamental part of their identity as citizens. Bolivarians constantly invoked the term "purchasing power" and occasionally used the increase in that as an explanation for inflation and product shortages. But, as one critical supporter said, the poor people "for the first time are eating chicken because of Chávez ... There is the power to consume but there is no development. ... The Bolivarian schools have advanced but they go there for food not education."⁸⁷ Similarly, a teacher comparing the economy under Chávez with previous periods said "now, people

⁸² See Hellinger, "Defying the Iron Law I," *op. cit.*

⁸³ In Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

⁸⁵ Benedict Mander, "Venezuelans Go Abroad for Easy Money," *Financial Times*, January 29, 2008, available online at: <http://us.ft.com/ftgateway/superpage.ft?news_id=fto012820081928015348> (accessed January 28, 2008).

⁸⁶ Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias, "BCV ha asignado a Cadivi US\$ 3.600 millones en enero," *Diario Vea*, January 29, 2008, p. 17.

⁸⁷ Teacher, Carora, March 6, 2008.

travel because they have money. There are more cars. In this *barrio* it was difficult to see cars. Now almost every house has a car . . . or a motorcycle.”⁸⁸

Thus, while Chavismo differs from earlier populisms in that it explicitly identifies itself as socialism and anti-capitalist and has engaged in some limited experiments in the area of co-management, its most fundamental policies display the traditional reliance on state capitalism. As one analyst said, “we have the same situation as always, high prices, economic distortions strangling the domestic market, poverty, inefficiency of the state. Honestly, I do not see anything new.”⁸⁹ That the state used its increasing management of the market as a way of generating employment and rewarding supporters and punishing opponents is also nothing new.

What is “neo” about the populism is the reliance not on organized sectors, mass labor unions, or political parties, but upon the multisector benefits derived from public goods (such as an overvalued exchange rate, negative interest rates, preferential credit). In this way, despite very different sorts of policies and rhetoric, Chávez’s base of support shares much with Weyland’s neopopulists. That is, the citizens are less part of a new model of economic integration where workers participate in all aspects of the production process and more part of an old model where citizens are integrated into the market through their wage labor and their use of those wages to consume goods.

Sovereignty and Solidarity

Since Bolivarian citizenship understands politics as the process of mobilizing against exclusion and repression by elite groups, it involves an awareness of the need to establish the sovereignty of the country and repel imperialist threats. The obvious concern of the Chávez administration in the area of foreign policy has been how to maintain critical commercial relations with the United States while also resisting the latter’s threats to the former’s survival. Particularly since the April 2002 coup which briefly removed President Chávez from office, Chávez has pursued an aggressive policy of “balancing” US hegemony by diversifying oil markets, increased military spending, deepening relations with governments that in some way threaten Washington (Iran, Russia, Libya, China), and trying to absorb other countries in Latin America into a regional bloc to counter US influence. His foreign policy has been determined by the price of petroleum and perceived threats to his government’s survival. It is also the outgrowth of his labeling of domestic opposition as “lackeys of the Empire” and “country-sellers.”

The need to reclaim the country from an elite who sold out the country, making it a “colony” of the United States, fits easily into the narrative in which Bolivarian citizens must reclaim domestic space from which they were excluded by that same elite. As was the case with politicizing citizenship and encouraging participation in the market, Bolivarian citizenship in this regard is developed through polarizing discussions and mobilization. The government produced weekly *La Hojilla*, regularly identifies enemies of the people and general villains. These villains are to be found everywhere. The state of Israel, for example, is regularly taken to task, usually in cartoons, for the conditions in which Palestinians live. The

⁸⁸ Teacher, Los Lanos, June 2, 2008.

⁸⁹ Professor, Altamira, June 8, 2008.

Dalai Lama is regularly lampooned as a stooge of the US empire.⁹⁰ The majority of the ire in *La Hojilla*, and in President Chávez's discourse, is reserved for the United States, the Colombian government, and the "oligarchs" of Venezuela. Articles discuss US imperialism, infiltration of FBI agents amongst US activists in the 1960s, the coup against Allende, and comments on "genocide" in Iraq and elsewhere. They show President Uribe of Colombia as a servant of President Bush, critique Plan Colombia, and defend the FARC and the ELN.

The US remains Venezuela's most important trade partner as the purchaser of roughly 60% of its crude oil exports and as the largest source for its imports.⁹¹ In fact, US exports to Venezuela have grown during the consumption boom of recent years. Despite that, the Chávez government has traveled extensively signing agreements in oil production and refining as well as other areas with various governments as a way of diversifying markets and reducing dependence on the US.⁹² Chávez has also been aggressive toward the US and any other country that challenges Venezuelan sovereignty.

When Exxon Mobil won a judgment in a British court freezing as many as \$12 billion of PDVSA assets in February 2008, Chávez threatened to cease selling petroleum to the US immediately.⁹³ A similar threat was issued when there was speculation that the US might place Venezuela on the list of countries that support terror. Chávez threatened to cut off oil sales to any European Union country that supported immigration laws which were seen as anti-Latin American.⁹⁴ This recalls the comment of a government worker who considered petroleum fundamental for the economy as well as for national and international negotiation.

On March 2, 2008, Chávez dedicated a significant amount of time on *Aló Presidente* to informing the Venezuelan public about the Colombian invasion of Ecuadorian territory to attack a FARC camp, expressing solidarity with Ecuador, and ordering ten battalions to the border with Colombia. Immediately, he contextualized the Colombian incursion within the narrative of Bolivarian struggles. The attack was by a "lackey of Washington," a "paramilitary," a "mafia" leader, Colombian President Uribe, and Chávez dedicated a moment of silence to Raul Reyes, the FARC's second in command, who died in the bombing. Reyes, Chávez said, was a true "revolutionary," who gave his life for peace and the people's struggle.⁹⁵ According to Chávez, he was killed by the agents of Washington, using military equipment made possible by *Plan Colombia*, while trying to negotiate the peaceful release of hostages held by the FARC for several years.

⁹⁰ Cartoons of the Dalai Lama were especially visible prior to and during the Olympic Games in Beijing. They functioned as a counter to US protests on behalf of Tibet.

⁹¹ Alvarez, *op. cit.*

⁹² Since taking office in February 1999, he has spent more than one year abroad pursuing a multilateralization of global affairs: Anderson, *op. cit.*

⁹³ Simon Romero, "Chávez Backs Off Threats to Halt Oil Exports to US," *New York Times*, February 18, 2008, available online at: <<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/18/world/americas/18venez.html?fta=y&pagewanted=print>> (accessed February 18, 2008).

⁹⁴ Julia Kollewe and Graeme Wearden, "Chávez Threatens EU with Oil Boycott," *The Guardian*, Friday June 20, 2008, available online at: <www.guardian.co.uk> (accessed September 16, 2008).

⁹⁵ See *Aló Presidente*, March 2, 2008. See also Abel Zuñiga, "El asesinato y el asesino," *Diario Vea*, March 5, 2008, p. 5.

Bolivarians believe that the CIA works “24 hours a day” to topple their government⁹⁶ and they see Plan Colombia as a hypocritical war of repression which gives the US a justification to maintain a considerable military presence in the region. Not surprisingly, a pro-Chávez university leader said: “We are very happy with international relations, the FARC are representatives of the repressed classes, [Colombia has] a fascist government which kills people . . . [Venezuela] has stopped US imperialism for now, with ALBA. There is still imperialism but now we are in Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia . . .”⁹⁷

The US war on drugs and terrorism, the identification of the FARC as narco-terrorists, the understanding that the Chávez government is openly sympathetic of the FARC, and the recovery of a laptop of former FARC leading voice Raul Reyes, have led the US government to make many declarations about Venezuela’s lack of support for anti-drug efforts and possible support for terrorism. President Chávez constantly includes these accusations in his speeches, linking them to the coup against “President Salvador Allende” and “President Manuel Noriega.” The invasion of Panama is particularly important given that its pretense, identified by Chávez, was “drug smuggling,” and US claims of Venezuela’s lack of cooperation in the war on drugs and terror.

Though Manuel Noriega never occupied the position of president of Panama, the point about the US invasion on charges related to drug traffic, buoyed by concerns of US support of opposition forces, cemented by the perception of US involvement in April 2002,⁹⁸ allows Chávez to characterize his position as being defensive, against a ruthless imperialist threat. He returned to this theme in early September 2008, when he expelled the US Ambassador, Patrick Duddy, in solidarity with Evo Morales who had done the same for Duddy’s counterpart in Bolivia. The US ambassador to Bolivia was accused of supporting separatist military groups in Bolivia and Chávez accused Duddy of supporting a thwarted assassination/coup attempt.⁹⁹

The Chávez government played tape recorded “evidence” of a conspiracy amongst retired generals and Chávez claimed that the United States, the private media, traditional political parties, as well as anti-Chávez civil society was behind the coup attempt. The accusations are fantastic, but not without some element of credibility, particularly given the participation and/or lack of condemnation of the above actors in the April 2002 coup. At the same time, regardless of the veracity of Chávez’s accusations, or even their acceptance by Venezuelans, part of being a Bolivarian citizen means seeing the CIA in every action by the Venezuelan

⁹⁶ Eleazar Díaz Rangel, “La CIA trabaja ‘24 horas’ para desestabilizar al Gobierno de Chávez,” *Últimas Noticias*, February 17, 2008, available online at: <<http://www.noticias24.com/actualidad/?p=12076>> (accessed June 10, 2008).

⁹⁷ Student, El Valle, April 10, 2008.

⁹⁸ Eva Gollinger, *The Chávez Code: Cracking US Intervention in Venezuela* (Pluto Press, 2006) argues that there was a clear plot to destabilize the Chávez government. At the same time, many elite informants who were contacted by US government officials insist that the relationship between the US and the coup-leaders was much more indirect or ambiguous. That the US government supported civil society groups that mobilized against the government seems clear, but that the US government, or any series of offices within the US, were entirely informed and supportive is far less clear.

⁹⁹ Simon Romero, “Alleging Coup Plot, Chávez Ousts US Envoy,” *New York Times*, September 12, 2008, available online at: <<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/13/world/americas/13bolivia.html?ref=world>> (accessed September 12, 2008).

opposition, part of a perpetual master plan to eliminate Venezuela's new found "sovereignty."

It also means showing solidarity with the opponents of the US government. As mentioned earlier, this means that Chavista weeklies like *La Hojilla* often critique the Dalai Lama. His politics and goal of peacefully defending his "people" from an occupying power are compatible with Bolivarian ideas of peaceful popular struggle and the Chinese government's brutal use of violence to suppress violence and its considerable restrictions of freedom of press and expression are antithetical to the modes of governance employed by the Chávez government to this point. But the identification of Tibet independence with Washington and particularly the US effort to impose a change in Chinese domestic policy is seen as a threat and so Chinese sovereignty is privileged over the popular struggle of Tibetans.

Similarly, the alliance with Putin is concerning. The Chávez government purchased \$4 billion of arms between 2004 and 2008 with most of that coming from Russia or Belarus,¹⁰⁰ and as of September 2008, was discussing joint military operations in the Caribbean, and thus does not appear to be a natural candidate for solidarity. Though both Putin and Chávez regularly lash out against media, Chávez has used "responsible journalism" laws to encourage self-censorship whereas the Putin administration has jailed journalists. Chávez allowed opposition RCTV's television license to expire and it continues to function on cable whereas Putin has closed and taken over critical television stations. Russia is not a member of OPEC but a free-rider who has benefited from production cutting agreements but has made it clear that it will not sacrifice its interests for the sake of OPEC strategies. Nevertheless, Chávez makes very visible his relationship with Putin. This is both to send a message of independence to the US and to draw the ire of liberal domestic opposition (whom he will label as more loyal to US than Venezuelan interests).

Similarly, his long-standing ideological (and perhaps financial and military) support for the FARC in Colombia is also somewhat uncomfortable. While one can compare the rhetoric of the FARC with the idea of agonistic struggles central to Bolivarianism, the methods used are radically different. Bolivarianism relies upon electoral victories and peaceful political processes. This may be because Chávez's coup in 1992 failed, that he later found that he could be competitive in elections, and he was immediately restored to power in 2002.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, as Hellinger has written, the *proceso* is unique in that it has been a Revolution that has been and is occurring through electoral processes.¹⁰² Only in June 2008, after the appearance of documents on Reyes' laptop linking top Chávez officials to the FARC, did Chávez make clear his lack of support for the FARC's methods and call for a unilateral release of all prisoners.

Balancing the US, however, means supporting FARC and ELN in Colombia or the Zapatistas in Mexico and other groups that act as violent and/or non-violent opposition to elected governments.¹⁰³ The hypocrisy here is easily evident as

¹⁰⁰ See Anderson, *op. cit.*

¹⁰¹ See Cristina Marcano and Alberto Barrera Tyszka, *Hugo Chávez Sin Uniforme: Una historia personal* (Caracas: Debate, 2004) for quotations from Chávez and others which reveal the potential for encouraging "popular" violent struggle.

¹⁰² Hellinger, "When 'No' Means 'Yes to Revolution'," *op. cit.*

¹⁰³ Obviously there are considerable differences between the goals and tactics of these groups. What they have in common is their resistance to sovereign elected governments.

Chávez resents the presence of armed groups within the opposition who took part in the coup against him and has been highly critical of US support for opposition in civil society. The latter justified his expulsion of Ambassador Duddy in September 2008. Chávez's support for opposition in other countries is also at odds with the idea of defending legitimate sovereign governments such as his defense of Chinese, Russian, and Iranian governments' decisions to punish their opposition as they see fit.

Just as Bolivarianism has facilitated mobilized and organized protests to support groups with similar goals or enemies, it has also contributed to the politicization of Venezuelan opposition. For example, not only did pro-Chávez interviewees critique the US and Colombia and less frequently refer to solidarity with the FARC, but anti-Chávez interviewees referred to a struggle against Chávez, Morales, and Ecuador's Rafael Correa. Some offered solidarity for Uribe and many condemned the FARC outright.

In fact, between January and August 2008, one of the most populous demonstrations in Caracas was an anti-FARC rally which was, for all intents and purposes, an anti-Chávez rally. Although speakers did not directly call for support of Uribe or rejection of Chávez, the mass mobilization against the violence of the FARC without programmatic rejection of paramilitary violence or military abuses was a clear sign of support for Uribe. The flood of white shirts both symbolized peace but it is also the color worn in anti-Chávez rallies and the crowd was clearly anti-Chávez. The transnationalization of Bolivarian citizenship has encouraged or made more explicit the opposition's solidarity with its own set of allies, which, in turn, validates the Bolivarian perception of a transnational network of elites that must be overcome. This is particularly important because it shows the shaping effect of Bolivarian citizenship even on its opponents.

Solidarity has been most prominently promoted by the Chávez government through alternative commercial agreements, what Corrales considers part of calls for the regime's "social power."¹⁰⁴ As part of a strategy to redefine the nature of economic and security relations vis-à-vis the US, Venezuela, and the region more generally, Chávez has engaged in a number of high profile anti-liberal and anti-US imperialist policies.

He purchased US\$25 million worth of Ecuadorian debt¹⁰⁵ and US\$3.5 billion worth of Argentine debt.¹⁰⁶ In doing so, Chávez both reduced the leverage of the US in those countries and increased the prestige of his own position vis-à-vis US hegemony in the region particularly because he asked for nothing in return. He promoted a joint investment project between PDVSA and PetroEcuador estimated at \$4 billion.¹⁰⁷

In June 2005, he created PETROCARIBE, an organization through which Venezuela sold discounted petroleum to Caribbean countries with low-interest long term financing. The proposal involved 13 Caribbean nations, a proposal which deferred payments for Venezuelan oil over 25 years and allowed as much as 40% of

¹⁰⁴ Javier Corrales, "The Venezuela Challenge: Hard Power, Soft Power and Social Power," prepared for the *FIU Venezuela Conference*, May 29, 2008, Miami, Florida.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Shifter and Vinjay Jawahar, "The Divided States of the Americas," *Current History* (February 2006), pp. 51–57 at p. 53.

¹⁰⁶ Alvarez, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁷ Roger Burbach, "Ecuador's Popular Revolt: Forging a New Nation," *North American Congress on Latin America* (September/October 2007), pp. 4–9 at p. 7.

that to be paid in barter.¹⁰⁸ Originally, Petrocaribe amounted to 42,000 barrels per day. By 2008, the figure was 85,900 barrels per day and an estimated \$4.6 billion worth of petroleum had been sent to Petrocaribe countries, not counting Cuba,¹⁰⁹ over the four years of its existence. Of that \$4.6 billion, roughly 43% was financed by the receiving countries.¹¹⁰ Though Petrocaribe is not without sound business planning, Chávez allows supporters and opponents to see it as an example of “giving” away the country’s resources.¹¹¹ Although this alienates even potential supporters, the perception of “giving away” resources stands in obvious contrast to US aid which is perceived as coming with very tightly drawn strings attached. Moreover, that aid itself has decreased tremendously in recent years precisely as US hegemony has waned. The contrast between US relations with its hemispheric neighbors and that of Venezuela is most evident in that “Venezuela outspends the United States in foreign aid to the rest of Latin America by a factor of at least five. Last year, US aid amounted to \$1.6 billion, a third of which went to Colombia, mainly to fund Plan Colombia . . . Chávez, meanwhile, pledged \$8.8 billion for the region.”¹¹²

The most ambitious program to challenge neoliberalism and globalization is ALBA (*Alternativa Bolivariana para los pueblos de nuestra América*), a Chávez led agreement that aims at a more humane unification of the peoples of the Americas. Chávez formed ALBA in 2005 along with Fidel Castro and shortly thereafter other countries were invited to join. ALBA defines itself as “a different kind of integration proposal. While FTAA responds to the interests of transnational capital and pursues absolute liberalization of goods, services, and investment, ALBA places the emphasis on the fight against poverty and social exclusion, and, in doing so, expresses the interests of the people of Latin America.”¹¹³ The position is primarily defensive but the weakening influence of the US has allowed for ALBA to be a more aggressive anti-US and anti-capitalist platform. In the 2005 Summit of the Americas in Argentina where the failure to establish a Free Trade Area of the Americas by the original deadline set by Washington was all too apparent, Chávez spoke of “burying” the FTAA, presumably replacing it with ALBA.

While the impact of ALBA in the area of economics is limited, the domestic impact on Bolivarians is significant as they consider Castro, Morales, and Ortega great statesmen who defend their causes and, in turn, whose causes they should defend as well.¹¹⁴ Large rallies were held throughout Venezuela when Bolivia’s

¹⁰⁸ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁹ Cuba’s trade agreement with Venezuela predates Petrocaribe and it amounts to some 80,000 barrels per day which is exchanged for medical services, the lending of doctors for *barrio adentro*, among other services.

¹¹⁰ Fátima Remrio, “Plata en crudo ha reco Petrocaribe,” *Últimas Noticias*, July 14, 2008, p. 14.

¹¹¹ Ellner, *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics*, *op. cit.*

¹¹² Anderson, *op. cit.* Of course, the figures for Venezuela are based on pledged amounts. There is very likely a large gap between what is pledged and what is delivered.

¹¹³ “¿Qué es el ALBA?” available online at: <<http://www.alternativabolivariana.org/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=1>> (accessed June 20, 2008).

¹¹⁴ Shifter and Jawahar, *op. cit.*; Harold A. Trikunas, “What is Really New about Venezuela’s Bolivarian Foreign Policy?” *Strategic Insights* V:2 (February 2006), available online at: <www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/Feb/trikunasFeb06.asp> (accessed June 9, 2008). Ironically, this charter bolstered regional support for Chávez during the April 2002 coup.

Evo Morales overcame a revocatory referendum in August 2008.¹¹⁵ As one Chavista said “Fidel is the father, Chávez is the son. I guess Evo and Correa are the grandchildren.”¹¹⁶ Though the statement was delivered with pride by a supporter, similar comments were made sarcastically by opponents. That both groups identify these leaders with familial language suggests that Bolivarianism has been relatively successful in understanding the struggles of other populists in terms of domestic conflicts.

While it is tempting to see much of this as new, the sense of resisting US hegemony and supporting critics of US imperialism was part of earlier populist experiments in Latin America including in Venezuela.¹¹⁷ Carlos Andrés Pérez believed Venezuela’s position as the wealthiest country in the region, bolstered by a commodity that was then at record prices, gave it both the ability and responsibility to assume a position of leadership in the region and the developing world more generally.¹¹⁸ Tellingly, Caracas is littered with statues of various figures, such as Lázaro Cárdenas, with plaques lionizing them for defending the liberty of their people. But these figures, while at home within Bolivarian Venezuela, were built in previous eras where Venezuelan governments pledged their solidarity with state-led development programs, anti-imperialist leaders, and the New International Economic Order. Of course, this solidarity never jeopardized commercial relations with the US.

What is different is the degree of US decline. Although the US was entering into a relative period of decline in the 1970s, exactly when the commodity boom facilitated Pérez’s populism, the Debt Crisis in the 1980s exaggerated the recovery of US power within the Americas. The decline that the US faces now may be as short-lived or part of a more permanent downward trend. What is apparent is that while Soviet power was declining by the early 1980s, leaving the US the predominant world power, the rise in China has created a permanent change in international relations and challenges the US in many important ways including in the Western Hemisphere. For example, foreign investment in Venezuela has been abysmal relative to even smaller economies in the region in recent years, the Venezuelan government has been negotiating a \$4 billion fund with the Chinese government which, if actualized, could bring dramatic changes.

The emphasis in this paper is not the changes made by the Chávez government *per se* but the effect they have had on the notion of citizenship. Bolivarians¹¹⁹ do see their struggles intertwined with those of the “*pueblo*” in other Latin American countries and they see President Chávez and selected other presidents in the region defending the *pueblos* against domestic oligarchs and US imperialism. They see expansive and participatory publics and acts of solidarity and strategic alliance building as crucial to this struggle and this constitutes a real and significant change in inter-American relations as well as challenge to the hegemony of neoliberal globalization and liberal democracy. The commitment to

¹¹⁵ Paula Ramón, “El embajador de Bolivia José Alvarado agradeció el apoyo,” *Últimas Noticias*, August 10, 2008, p. 18.

¹¹⁶ Student, Barquisimeto, March 7, 2008.

¹¹⁷ Elsa Cardozo da Silva and Richard S. Hillman, “Venezuela: Petroleum, Democratization, and International Affairs,” in Frank O. Mora and Jeanne K. Hey (eds), *Latin American and Caribbean Foreign Policy* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

¹¹⁸ Anibal Romero, *La miseria del populismo* (Caracas: Centauro, 1986).

¹¹⁹ Again, this does not include all Venezuelan citizens.

socialism is less clear as is the extent to which nonpolitical citizens identify with other popular struggles. Anti-Chávez citizens may be more aware of these linkages, lumping Chávez, Morales, Correa, Castro, and Ortega into similar categories and supporting the US and Colombia more than they would if the US and Colombia were not symbols for resistance against Chávez.

Refining Populism

Like other forms of populism, Chavismo emerged during a time when there was a considerable sense of citizen alienation from the state and insecurity relative to the market. Chávez's answer, which has remained popular for much of the decade that he has been in power, is to create a new type of citizenship. He has done this by engendering a more engaged citizenry, more participation in markets for excluded peoples, and a greater sense of solidarity with other struggling peoples of the world. He has done so by engaging in a populism which is at once inclusive and alienating, grants rights and services but delivers them in a partisan environment where state/government/party differentiation is often nonexistent. Finally, it defends itself against US imperialism by siding with governments and groups that engage in politics that are, at least in large part, antithetical to the values Chávez claims are fundamental to his concept of *plena democracia*. The contours of this citizenship are very typical of populism.

In fact, it is an extreme form of populism. Analysis of extreme cases in the social sciences is exploratory, giving insight into the phenomenon observed rather than assessing causality.¹²⁰ This article has attempted to explore the aspects in which Chávez's populism has configured citizenship in order to better identify what populism is and is not. This is not as straightforward as it would appear.

Most definitions of populism emphasize the political nature of populism—the multiclass support, the top-down channels of authority, and the centralization of the movement's identity around a leader.¹²¹ These definitions do not explicitly imply any policy content. This is contrasted with others who treat economic nationalism and/or policies designed to facilitate inclusion as fundamental aspects of populism.¹²² Exploration of Chavismo is instructive in that roughly from 1999 until 2002, Chávez aimed to reconstruct political institutions through a new constitution and pursued a policy that was mildly defensive of sovereignty but his economic policies were largely liberal.¹²³ Only after the coup in 2002 did Chávez begin a more aggressive series of policy initiatives that could be characterized as economic nationalist and inclusion-oriented. Nevertheless, Chávez had been the extreme example of "populism" within the Americas, even during his "neoliberal period," suggesting that policy content is secondary to the populist label. Additionally, support for Chávez's economic policies receives its largest support from the increased purchasing power of consumers rather than greater rights and more co-management opportunities for workers, just like

¹²⁰ Gerring with Seawright, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

¹²¹ See Conniff, *op. cit.*; Weyland, *op. cit.*; Roberts, *op. cit.*

¹²² See Drake, *op. cit.* See also J. Demmers, A. E. Fernandez Jilberto and B. Hogenboom (eds), *Miraculous Metamorphoses: The Neoliberalization of Latin American Populism* (London: Zed Books, 2001).

¹²³ Buxton, *op. cit.*

Weyland's neoliberal neopopulists whose economic policy content would not be traditionally considered populist, or at least left populist.

A second implication from the exploration of Chávez's populism is relevant to Roberts' definition of populism as "top-down." This is critical for Roberts as he distinguishes the bases of support of Chávez as populist and Morales as "autonomous grassroots mobilization."¹²⁴ Though there is a real difference in the two cases in the nature of mobilization, it may be overstated by Roberts' typology. Scholars are increasingly uncomfortable with speaking of top-down pressures for fear of denying agency to actions of base and middle-level members of political movements. Autonomy is something that was conceived within a liberal framework and the relations between states, movements, leaders, and followers are too messy to be relegated to a discrete distinction according to autonomy or not.¹²⁵ There is an important bottom-up element in Chavismo just as, especially since coming to power, there is an important top-down element to Morales' rule.¹²⁶ But Roberts is correct in highlighting relative differences in power and Morales' base may be understood as more autonomous if autonomy is understood as a continuous variable.

Scholarly debates about populism may be better off avoiding discussions of top-down vs bottom-up tensions and instead focus on the leader-centrism of populism and how much agency the leader and his or her immediate circle have relative to the different layers of their followers. Here the Chávez example is telling in its extremity. *Barrio* residents do not always respond to calls to action especially if they come from discredited local leaders/representatives of the ultimate leader, but the leader's presence in their political life is fundamental and hyperpresidentialist petro-states privilege the president versus almost any form of local organizations when commodity prices are high.

That is, an exploration of the extreme case of populism in Bolivarian Venezuela suggests that populism's most defining characteristics are its leader-centrist orientation, its anti-elite rhetoric, and the multiclass support on which it is based. Left populists may be more inclined to engage in certain policies, or they may do so when economic conditions permit as Chávez has done. Some populists may organize the sectors that support them into national movements or political parties (such as Haya de la Torre in Peru or Perón in Argentina), others may prefer them unorganized (Fujimori in Peru), and others may organize them in ephemeral institutions (Chávez).¹²⁷ But common to all is the centrality of the leader, the attacks against privileged sectors, and the support of large sectors who believe themselves to be excluded.

¹²⁴ Roberts, *op. cit.*

¹²⁵ See Daniel Hellinger and David Smilde, eds., *Participation, Politics and Culture in Venezuela's Bolivarian Democracy* (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming).

¹²⁶ Fernandes, *op. cit.* Stuart Alexander Rockefeller, "Dual Power in Bolivia: Movement and Government since the Election of 2005," *Urban Anthropology & Studies of Cultural System & World Development* 36:3 (2007), pp. 161–193 at p. 166.

¹²⁷ See Roberts, *op. cit.*

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