



VENEZUELA 1998-2021: FROM PETROSTATE TO KLEPTOCRACY

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List of abbreviations

AD: Acción Democrática

Causa R: Causa Radical

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency

COPEI: Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente

DEA: Drug Enforcement Administration

DGCIM: Dirección General de Contrainteligencia Militar

IMF: International Monetary Fund

MAS: Movimiento al Socialismo

MBR-200: Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200

MVR: Movimiento V (Quinta) República

OAE: Organisation of American States

OPEC: Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries

PCV: Partido Comunista de Venezuela

PDVSA: Petróleos de Venezuela Sociedad Anónima

PPT: Patria para Todos

PROVEA: Programa Venezolano de Educación Acción (en Derechos Humanos)

SAIME: Servicio Administrativo de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería

UN: United Nations

1. Introduction

1. Introduction

The research topic of this master thesis is the Bolivarian regime, which we can trace back to 1998 when the ex-military man reconverted into a politician, Hugo Chávez Frías, arrived at Venezuela's presidency. At present, roughly twenty-one years after the instauration of Venezuela's 5th republic that followed the election of Chávez, the country is one of the most collapsed states in the world, quite alarming considering that the country has experienced neither war nor an extremely calamitous natural disaster since 1998.

Any historical approach to the Bolivarian regime must consider three elements: oil, Hugo Chávez Frías, and that unique political and economic codependent relationship constructed between the Castroist and Bolivarian regimes. When Hugo Chávez Frías was elected in 1998, the country was already in bad shape. A situation brought by the harmful effects of being the country with the most significant oil reserves in the world. From the 1970s onwards, Venezuela endured a sequence of economic and political crises caused by the instability of oil prices in the 1970s and 1980s.¹ By the early 1980s, the country's failure to restart economic growth and the import substitution economic model's breakdown meant the end of several of Venezuela's social accomplishments since the beginning of democracy in 1958.² In the 1990s, the persistence of this decay provided fertile ground for the political and social crises taking place during the second presidency of Carlos Andrés Pérez (centre-left Acción Democrática, 1989-1993), with waves of protest during the 1989 *Caracazo* or the 1992 coup d'état

¹ Steven Kettell, "Oil Crisis," in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (31/01/2020). <https://www.britannica.com/topic/oil-crisis>.

"Venezuela: The Rise and Fall of a Petrostate," Council on Foreign Relations, updated 24/01/2019,

<https://www.cfr.org/background/venezuela-crisis>.

Norman Gall, "The Challenge of Venezuelan Oil," *Foreign Policy*, no. 18 (1975), <https://doi.org/10.2307/1147962>,

<http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/1147962>.

² Tarver, *The History of Venezuela*, 101.

Brian F. Crisp, "Lessons from Economic Reform in the Venezuelan Democracy," *Latin American Research Review* 33, no. 1 (1998): 19-20, <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/2503897>.

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attempt led by the paratrooper and commander, Hugo Chávez Frías.³

With the arrival of Hugo Chávez Frías to power, the country would commence experiencing radical changes that had as a starting point the drafting of a new constitution in 1999, that changed even the country's official name to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Thus, it started the Bolivarian period of the country's history. A period that still lingers. 1998's Venezuela was the fifth biggest economy in the region, was considered a democracy, but it was heavily dependant on oil, which would prove to be its doom. 2021's Venezuela is no longer among the top five economies in the region; it is now rather among its most impoverished, ruled by a kleptocratic dictatorship, and no longer a significant player in the oil markets.⁴

In this thesis, we attempt to articulate the history of Venezuela since 1998 around three elements:

- Hugo Chávez Frías, who managed to concentrate almost all power on himself, with disastrous consequences.
- The oil curse, which has shaped Venezuela's history since the 1920s but has taken a more significant toll since the 1970s.
- The Castroist regime, for whom Chávez felt extreme devotion, played a pivotal role in keeping the Bolivarian regime in power.

Having said this, we should dedicate a few lines to discuss one of the most contentious elements of this thesis: the Castroist regime. As pointed out by two very famous experiments, the Sokal affair and the

³Margarita López Maya, "The Venezuelan "Caracazo" of 1989: Popular Protest and Institutional Weakness," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 35, no. 1 (2003), <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/3875580>.

Daniel García Marco, "'Un fracaso militar, un éxito político': 2 visiones opuestas del golpe de Estado fallido en Venezuela que creó la figura de Hugo Chávez hace 25 años," *BBC Mundo*, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-38863571>.

⁴"The Corruption of Democracy in Venezuela," CATO Institute 2008, accessed 19/10/2020, <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/corruption-democracy-venezuela?queryID=f9824ecc64cf70ada9b434681457dd49>.

EIA analysis report: Venezuela, (US Energy Information Administration (EIA), 30/11/2020), <https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/VEN>.

"Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines (% of population)," The World Bank, <https://data-worldbank-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC>.

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Grievance studies affair, there are indications of the prevalence of political bias in some disciplines in the humanities.⁵

The type of political bias highlighted by both mentioned studies seems to apply in the academic writings about the Castroist regime. A simple search in JSTOR seems to confirm this, where we can find publications such as *Fidel, Chávez y el Destino de Nuestra América*,⁶ which is not very far from political propaganda. Likely, despite the tremendous amount of journalistic reports on the goings and comings of the Castroist-Bolivarian special relationship, and by respected medial outlets, such as Reuters or El País, there seem to be some silences in academia around this unique relationship. Such was my surprise when I found nothing written in scientific journals by the renowned scholar William Leogrande PhD, for whom I have deep admiration.

In May 2021, the author of this thesis emailed Professor Leogrande why he has not written more extensively about the Castroist-Bolivarian relationship since he is an expert in Latin America, especially in Cuba. My email and his response can be found in appendices A and B. He responded that there are many contradictions about when this special relationship started and the number of Castroist personnel present in Venezuela. He also pointed out that Cuba has had military agreements with armies in countries such as Angola. I shared with him two pieces of news, one by Reuters, *Special Report: How Cuba taught Venezuela to quash military dissent*,⁷ and another by El País, *Las Relaciones Desmedidas*, written by Cristina Marcano, author of one of the world reference biographies about the Venezuelan leader, *Hugo Chávez sin Uniforme: Una Historia Personal*,⁸ and one of the leading secondary sources used in this thesis.

In the response by Professor Leogrande, he found the article by Cristina Marcano to be accurate but said nothing about the article from Reuters. I have no idea if he disagrees with this article, but it made me

⁵ Stephen Hilgartner, "The Sokal Affair in Context," *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 22, no. 4 (1997), <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/689833>.

Mikko Lagerspetz, "'The Grievance Studies Affair' Project: Reconstructing and Assessing the Experimental Design," *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 46, no. 2 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243920923087>.

⁶ Germán Sánchez Otero and Roberto Fernández Retamar, "Fidel, Chávez y el Destino de Nuestra América," in *Yo soy Fidel*, ed. John Saxe-Fernández (CLACSO, 2018).

⁷ Angus Berwick, "Special Report: How Cuba taught Venezuela to quash military dissent," *Reuters*, 22/09/2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-cuba-military-specialreport-idUSKCN1VC1BX>.

⁸ C. Marcano and A. Barrera, *Hugo Chávez sin uniforme: una historia personal* (Random House Mondadori, 2006).

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wonder whether I should question a report by such a respected and well-established media outlet. I was primarily considering that as someone born in Venezuela, whose most of his family is still in the country, and that I have been told by acquaintances and relatives, who had worked for the government, about what they have witnessed concerning Cuban personnel present in the country. I have no reason to question this 2019 article by Reuters, which indeed has some explosive revelations about the involvement of the Castroist regime with the Bolivarian army.

Another topic that deserves some reflection is that in this thesis, we are dealing with the very repressive Bolivarian regime, which international organisations have accused of crimes against humanity. This is why I would engage in auto-censorship and ask for this thesis not to be included in the thesis repository if my identity is not hidden. But this censorship that I am imposing on myself also affects some of the primary sources we have used for this thesis. Such is the case of the journalistic report called *Cédula Electrónica a la Cubana*, initially published in the oldest and most crucial Venezuelan newspaper, *El Nacional*,⁹ on 17 July 2011. The article is not longer available on their website. To access it, we need to go to the personal blog of the reporter who wrote it, Adriana Rivera, or to the digital journalism platform Armando Info, a world reference in reporting on Venezuela's corruption.

To bear in mind the nature of the state of the media in Venezuela, we should highlight that this year, for instance, the headquarters of *El Nacional* newspaper was taken over by the Bolivarian government, in response to an article they published on the involvement with drug trafficking of Diosdado Cabello — often considered the second most powerful man in the Bolivarian regime—. ¹⁰ This is not by far the first time the Bolivarian regime engages in such media repression. In 2007, the Bolivarian regime shut down the country's oldest television and radio channel, Radio Caracas Televisión.¹¹ Many other cases of media outlets being shut down have happened ever since. Venezuelan independent media exist online and

⁹ Library of Congress staff, "El Nacional," ed. Library of Congress (Washington, 2021).

https://catalog.loc.gov/vwebv/search?searchCode=LCCN&searchArg=sn%2094049761&searchType=1&permalink=y&__cf_chl_jschl_tk__=pmd_65e7f86e69f66fe189582e11da0bb01abc7689f6-1629153379-0-gqNtZGzNAnijcnBszQoO.

¹⁰ Gustavo Ocando Alex, "Venezuela Court Seizes El Nacional Media Building in Civil Defamation Case," *Voice of America* (Washington), 19/05/2021, <https://www.voanews.com/press-freedom/venezuela-court-seizes-el-nacional-media-building-civil-defamation-case>.

¹¹ "Venezuela: TV Shutdown Harms Free Expression," Human Rights Watch updated 21/05/2021, 2007, accessed 01/05/2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2007/05/21/venezuela-tv-shutdown-harms-free-expression>.

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from digital platforms outside the country. According to Reporters Sans Frontier Venezuela is in position 148 out of 180 countries; Cuba, on the other hand, is in position 171.¹²

With this thesis, we aimed at responding to the following research questions:

- **Did the Bolivarian regime transform Venezuela into a kleptocracy and to what extent can such transformation be attributed to the curse of oil?**
- **Has the Castroist regime intervened in Venezuela under the rule of the Bolivarian regime? If so, what is the nature of the Castroist regime's interventionism?**

To answer these questions, we aimed at triangulating three elements: Hugo Chávez, the evolution of the Venezuelan state (from petrostate to kleptocracy), and the special relationship between the Castroist and Bolivarian regimes. Concerning Hugo Chávez, we would be looking into his biography, feature of his political discourse, and discourse analysis of a speech he gave on 1 January 2009. In the case of the evolution of the Venezuelan state, we dedicate a section to the Venezuelan petrostate and the curse of oil and a second section where we explore the evolution of the Venezuelan into a kleptocracy and its use of divide-and-rule strategies. Lastly, in the case of the special relationship built between the Bolivarian and Castroist regimes, we explore Cuba-Venezuela relations before Chávez and then the concrete aspects of the Castroist interventionism in Venezuela, under the rule of the Bolivarian regime, as reported by media outlets.

We should also mention that in order to approach the Venezuelan case without a Western-centric gaze, we attempt to provide a summary of Venezuela's history before the arrival of Hugo Chávez to power.

¹² "Classement mondial de la liberté de la presse 2020 | Reporters sans frontières," Raporters Sans Frontiers, 2021, accessed 01/06/2021, <https://rsf.org/fr/classement>.

1.1 Introduction: Methodology

1.1. Methodology

We would be looking at various scholarly papers dealing with the Bolivarian regime, the evolution of the Venezuelan state from the beginning of the 20th century and how oil has shaped the history of the country. In this sense, we should mention the book *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations* by Michael L. Ross.¹³ The theory around the “oil curse” is central to any understanding of Venezuela. Secondly, we should highlight two journal articles: *Cuba’s dependent interventionism* by Bertil Dunér; and *Kleptocracy and divide-and-rule: A model of personal rule* by Daron Acemoglu, Thierry Verdier and James A. Robinson.¹⁴ These three publications are the base from where we construct our theoretical framework.

Likely, we resource to other secondary sources that deal with Venezuela’s history, Cuba-Venezuela relations and Hugo Chávez and his discourse. Also, to create the narrative of our thesis, we rely on primary sources such as news and reports from respected and well-established media outlets, such as Spanish El País, British Reuters and BBC, Venezuelan El Nacional, American The New York Times. We also used reports issued by NGOs such as the Venezuelan chapter of Transparency International, additionally reports from the UN Human Rights Council or the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

For the discourse analysis of the speech by Chávez of 1 January 2009, we resource to John B. Thompson's in-depth hermeneutic approach, where the analysis takes place in three phases: social-historical context (social-spatial settings, social institutions and technical media of transmission), argumentative analysis (rendering explicit “patterns of inference”) and interpretation or reinterpretation (based on the previous two phases).¹⁵

¹³ M.L. Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations* (Princeton University Press, 2013).

¹⁴ Bertil Dunér, "Cuba: Dependent Interventionism," *Cooperation and Conflict* 22, no. 1 (1987/03/01 1987), <https://doi.org/10.1177/001083678702200103>, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001083678702200103>.

Daron Acemoglu, Thierry Verdier, and James A. Robinson, "Kleptocracy and divide-and-rule: A model of personal rule," *Journal of the European Economic Association* 2, no. 2-3 (2004).

¹⁵ J.B. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication* (Polity Press, 2013), 281-91.

1.2. Introduction: Sources

1.2. Sources

In this thesis, we used several primary and secondary sources, such as:

- Blogs
- Book and book chapters.
- Catalogues
- Encyclopedias
- International news agencies publications
- Journal articles
- Newspapers articles
- Official reports from international organisations and NGOs
- Official websites from state entities, international organisations, NGOs
- Online journalism platform investigations
- Transcripts
- YouTube videos

1.2. Introduction: theoretical framework

1.3. Theoretical framework

We construct our theoretical framework around three publications: the book *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations* by Michael L. Ross; *Cuba's dependent interventionism* by Bertil Dunér; and *Kleptocracy and divide-and-rule: A model of personal rule* by Daron Acemoglu, Thierry Verdier and James A. Robinson.

In the book *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations* by Michael L. Ross we see how the real effects of the curse of oil would not be really felt until the 1980s, after the 1970s Oil Crises, which had brought enormous wealth to oil-exporting countries. This did not translate into the development of the local economy, and domestic industries and agriculture suffered the effects of the Dutch disease. All of this happening in the context of the waves of oil industries nationalisations taking place in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Also, Ross explains oil mono-producing countries are 50% more likely to be dictatorships and be involved in internal conflicts, especially since the 1980s. Part of the reason for the oil curse is also related to the volatility of oil prices, as well the secrecy surrounding those oil revenues, which nurtures corruption. Ross also mentions the fact these countries are getting their income from oil revenues and not from taxes which also is related to their lack of democracy. Moreover, he points out the reaffirming of the patriarchy in the societies of oil-producing countries.¹⁶

In the journal article *Cuba's dependent interventionism* by Bertil Dunér we see how the Castroist regime has militarily intervened in various countries in Africa, such as Angola or Ethiopia, in the 1970s. This interventionism was often in the form of military training, but also with the deployment of military personnel, as well as the supply of utilities such as medical equipment and material, and weapons provided by the USSR. One aspect about this interventionism the author challenges is the idea that the Castroist regime was following the USSR's orders; although he points out that Castro's Cuba depended on the USSR economically for their interventions, that did not mean that they were subordinated to them, also, that the USSR was also dependent on Castro's Cuba to exert influence in the third world, and perhaps the Castroist military personnel were better prepared for the kind of conflicts taking place in

¹⁶ Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations*, 57, 63-64, 74-75, 132-33, 08.

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Africa. The author points out the ideological drive behind these interventionisms and the difficulties of measuring their impact given their secrecy.¹⁷

Ans last, *Kleptocracy and divide-and-rule: A model of personal rule* by Daron Acemoglu, Thierry Verdier and James A. Robinson. In the article, we see how Kleptocracies are present in countries whose state apparatus are dominated and operated for the benefit of the kleptocrats, who use their power to transfer large fractions of the state funds to themselves. The gains of kleptocrats come from their means of using divide-and-rule strategies, made feasible by the weakness of state institutions that place no restrictions on political leaders, and do not require accountability from politicians about their actions.¹⁸ The scholars D. Acemoglu, J.A. Robinson and T. Verdier also include as factors for the success of kleptocracies: political and economic elites place no value to democracy because they are more concerned with gains in the short term; the ruling elite has access to foreign aid; a high ratio of income comes from the exploitation of natural resources; national economic productivity is low, and there are fewer inequalities within the productive sectors, and for that reason, they pose no opposition to the kleptocrats.¹⁹

¹⁷ Dunér, "Cuba: Dependent Interventionism."

¹⁸ Acemoglu, Verdier, and Robinson, "Kleptocracy and divide-and-rule: A model of personal rule."

¹⁹ Acemoglu, Verdier, and Robinson, "Kleptocracy and divide-and-rule: A model of personal rule," 165.

Literature review

2. Literature review

The so-called Bolivarian Revolution, and anything related to this unique historical phenomenon, has been the topic of numerous academic and journalistic writings since 2002. In that year, we locate some of the first publications on this issue. Such is the case of the paper *The Presidential and Parliamentary Elections of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela: Change and Continuity (1998-2000)*, written by José E. Molina V. In this paper, Molina examines how Venezuela's electoral behaviour in 1998-2000 has changed from 1958—the beginning of democracy in Venezuela— and 1998. Molina concludes that an irreversible negative identification with the traditional political parties that had governed Venezuela since 1958 characterised the period that started with Chávez's election in December 1998. He also points out the greater importance achieved by factors such as personality vis-à-vis institutions.²⁰

Also, written by Molina, we have the book chapter “The Unravelling of Venezuela’s party system”, part of the book *The Unraveling of Representative Democracy in Venezuela*. In this chapter, Molina demonstrates his expertise in Venezuela democratic system history; he provides a very detailed account of the history of the country’s democracy since the late 1950s. An account supported by statistical data, including the percentage of abstention, support by each of Venezuela traditional parties, and their gradual loss of popular support by the end of the 1990s, and the emergence of new actors in the democratic system, quite notably, the political parties behind Chávez first election in 1998.²¹

In the article *Democratic backsliding through electoral irregularities: The case of Venezuela*, Javier Corrales, we see the numerous irregularities that have taken place throughout most elections since 1999 are the subject of analysis. The author brings forward his study based on primary and secondary sources covering 24 electoral contests between 1999-2019. According to the author, he concludes that there

²⁰ José E. Molina, "The Presidential and Parliamentary Elections of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela: Change and Continuity (1998-2000)," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 21, no. 2 (2002), <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/3339454>.

²¹ José E. Molina, "The Unraveling of Venezuela’s Party System," in *The Unraveling of Representative Democracy in Venezuela*, ed. J. L. McCoy and D. J. Myers (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

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have been 117 irregularities during this period that have gradually eroded democracy in the country to the point that no free and fair elections can ever take place under the current system.²²

Also, in relation to elections, we have a very detailed report on the 1999 process that resulted in the new Venezuelan constitution. The report called *The 1999 Venezuelan Constitution-Making Process as an Instrument for Framing the Development of an Authoritarian Political Regime*, by Allan R. Brewer-Carías. It is a well-documented account of the whole process that led to the new 1999 constitution. The author, who was present as an international observer, tells us how the whole drafting of the new constitution was done in three months and carried out by a Constituent Assembly largely conformed by Pro-Chávez parliamentarians, which the author does not find democratic, also he points out to the large percentage of abstention —more than 50%— there was for an actual referendum that led to the approval of the new Carta Magna,²³

One of the main topics of analysis of this thesis is the particular relation developed between the Castroist and Bolivarian regimes since the arrival of Chávez to power in 1999. As such, we should bring forward the policy brief *The Cuba-Venezuela Alliance: The Beginning of the End?*, written by Ted Piccone, and Harold Trinkunas. In the policy brief, the authors analyse how the Castroist and Bolivarian regimes have developed a strong interdependence, creating a very asymmetrical relationship between the two. The commerce in goods and services between the two regimes amounts to 20.8 % of Cuba's GDP, while in the case of Venezuela, it only represented 4% of its GDP in 2012. Meanwhile, the Bolivarian regime is politically very dependent on Cuba, not only in the forms of the personnel brought to the country from the island to work on the different social programmes —otherwise known as *Misiones*— but also in the form of military and counterintelligence personnel brought to the South American country to help the Bolivarian regime to control and suppress any dissent. The authors also explain how the Castroist regime has effectively changed sponsors. The USSR up to the 1990s, for the Bolivarian regime, from the beginning of the 2000s. However, the authors conclude that this subsidised economic and political

²² "About Me | Corrales, Javier | Amherst College," 2021, <https://www.amherst.edu/users/C/jcorrales/aboutme>.

Javier Corrales, "Democratic backsliding through electoral irregularities," *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies/Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe*, no. 109 (2020), <https://www.erlacs.org/articles/10598/galley/10915/download/>.

²³ Allan R. Brewer-Carías, "The 1999 Venezuelan Constitution-Making Process as an Instrument for Framing the Development of an Authoritarian Political Regime," in *Framing the State in Times of Transition: Case Studies in Constitution Making*, ed. L.E. Miller and L. Aucoin (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2010).

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relationship may have been only sustainable during the heyday of the oil prices boom of the 2000s and early 2010s.²⁴

Concerning the special relationship created between Caracas and La Habana, we should mention *La Invasión consentida*, a book written under the pseudonym of Diego G. Maldonado to protect the authors' identities. It is a well written and balanced journalistic investigation on that special Castroist-Bolivarian relationship, which includes interviews, official declarations, government documents linked to the press, as well as Chávez speeches. Well-documented research, where we find numerous primary sources such as the investigation carried out by journalist Adriana Rivera on the creation of SAIME — Venezuela's current identification system— by the Castroist company ALBET S.A., published in *El Nacional* newspaper, and in the Venezuelan chapter of Transparency International. Also, investigations in the context of the Panama Papers scandal. The book published by Debate —part of the editorial group Penguin Random House— is a very detailed account of how the Castroist and Bolivarian regimes built their asymmetrical codependent. Also, it puts forward how Hugo Chávez's extreme devotion to the Cuban revolution and Fidel Castro was one of the main drives behind this peculiar relationship still existing to this date.²⁵

We should mention *Hugo Chavez Sin Uniforme: Una Historia Personal*, cowritten by the renowned Venezuelan journalist Cristina Marcano —who has worked for *El Nacional*, *The New York Times* and *El País*— and the Venezuelan novelist, poet and journalist Alberto Barrera Tyszka. This biography of one of the most divisive statesmen in Latin America is a world reference for anyone dealing with the polarising figure of Hugo Chávez. Written and published (2006) while he was still alive, this work offers materials of great value to approach the personality and ideas of Chávez, who is still either, passionately loved or hated. It provides interviews, photographs, and fragments of Chávez's intimate diary, even the

²⁴ "Ted Piccone," World Justice Project, 2021, https://worldjusticeproject.org/about-us/who-we-are/staff/ted_piccone. Stanford University Staff, "Harold Trinkunas," (2021), <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/people/harold-trinkunas>. Theodore JE Piccone and Harold A Trinkunas, *The Cuba-Venezuela Alliance: The Beginning of the End?* (Latin American Initiative, Foreign Policy at Brookings, 2014).

²⁵ "ABOUT LA INVASIÓN CONSENTIDA / A CONSENSUAL INVASION," Penguin Random House, accessed 22/11/2020, <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/635315/la-invasion-consentida--a-consensual-invasion-by-diego-g-maldonado/>.

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testimony of one of his ex-lovers. It creates an accurate profile of a shrewd and persevering man, full of ambition and a tireless cultivator of his own image.²⁶

Chavez and the Bolivarian revolution, by Richard Gott. In the book, the author, who is sympathetic with Chávez, provides a very detailed account of the beginning of Chávez, including his time in the army and his first years in the presidency. Also, how he funded Movimiento Revolucionario Bolivariano 200 (MBR-200) while he was in the army. The book emphasises on the personality and style of politics of Chávez but fails to better explain his arrival to power in the middle of a low point for Venezuela's democracy, as well as how Chávez benefitted from high oil prices during the 2000s, which is the period the book covers besides the beginning of Chávez.²⁷

The Silence and the Scorpion: The Coup Against Chavez and the Making of Modern Venezuela, by Brian A. Nelson, is a very detailed account of the confusing events taking place in Caracas during the two-day-long coup d'état against Chávez. The author is very empathetic with the opposition. He talks in the book about how he lived in Venezuela as an exchange student in 1989. Besides sourcing to Venezuelan media publications, the author interviews nineteen people. Between 2003 and 2007, most of whom seem to be members of the opposition. It is a valuable account that sheds some light on a very brief moment of Venezuela's recent history.²⁸

Concerning Chávez discourse, we have the PhD dissertation *The Discourse of Hugo Chávez in "Aló Presidente": Establishing the Bolivarian Revolution through Television Performance*, by Ricardo Gualda. In this thesis, Gualda analyses Chávez discourse in his weekly TV show *Aló Presidente*. He focuses on some of the discursive strategies employed by Chávez, the use of different genres within the same speech. Also, how Chávez attempted to establish a very intimate dialogue with his audience, and his capability of talking non-stop for long periods, something between 4 to 7 hours. During the show, he demonstrates his showmanship and likes to prove that he is in control. For his analysis, he uses the

²⁶ Marcano and Barrera, *Hugo Chávez sin uniforme: una historia personal*.

"CRISTINA MARCANO | Casa del Libro," 2021, <https://www.casadellibro.com/libros-ebooks/cristina-marcano/113155>.

"Alberto Barrera Tyszka," 2019, <https://www.hachette.co.uk/contributor/alberto-barrera-tyszka/>.

²⁷ Richard Gott, *Hugo Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution* (Verso, 2011).

²⁸ Nelson Brian A., *The Silence and the Scorpion* (New York Nation Books, 2009).

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theoretical framework of critical discourse analysis. Amongst his findings are also the repetition by Chávez of specific topics, his messianism, his use of catholic religious elements. ²⁹

²⁹ Ricardo José Rosa Gualda, "The discourse of Hugo Chávez in "Aló Presidente": establishing the Bolivarian Revolution through television performance" (2012), <http://hdl.handle.net/2152/ETD-UT-2012-08-6047>.

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3. Venezuela before Hugo Chávez

Attempting to have a more profound knowledge of the country's history is rendered necessary to evade a condescending, generic, Western-centric approach to Venezuela. To avoid falling into generalised presumptions based on the labels "third-world," "Latin American," or "oil-producing countries," we dedicate this section to explore, although, with limitations, Venezuela's past before Chávez. Without the intention of being too detailed, we provide in this section a summary of Venezuela's history before the arrival of Chávez to power in 1998. We have divided it into two extensive periods: before and after 1958 —the year of the beginning of Venezuela's now-defunct democracy—. In figure 1 below, we find a map of Venezuela. Given the subject of this thesis, we should highlight on this map the city of Barinas, the capital of Barinas state, on the Venezuelan Llanos, the birthplace of Hugo Chávez.



FIGURE 1: MAP OF VENEZUELA.
SOURCE: WORLDATLAS³⁰

³⁰ "Venezuela Maps & Facts," updated 25/02/2021, accessed 05/05/2021, <https://www.worldatlas.com/maps/venezuela>.

3.1. Venezuela before Hugo Chávez: Before 1958

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3.1. Before 1958

In contrast with Mexico or Peru, before the arrival of Europeans during the first wave of European imperialism, there was no known form of political organisation that encompassed the territory over which Venezuela's contemporary nation-state claims legal sovereignty.³¹ Like other Spanish colonies in the Americas, the land of the Venezuelan colony was a territorial demarcation formed to organise the potential extraction of minerals more effectively.³² During the early Spanish exploration and colonialism of the 16th century, the heavily indebted Spanish crown, led by Carlos V, ceded *Klein-Venedig* to the wealthy German merchant Welser family to discover and extract precious metals.³³

The brief *Klein-Venedig* venture failed in its quest for precious minerals and would pave the way for the nature of the colonial economy in this part of the Spanish empire.³⁴ An agricultural economy based mainly on the forced labour of black slaves to produce and export cocoa (until the 18th century), coffee, tobacco, and cowhides, sold primarily through contraband to the English and Dutch.³⁵ To a great degree, it would be astounding that the 18th and early 19th-century Atlantic Revolution — taking place across Western Europe and the Americas—had Caracas as one of its main centres in South America,³⁶ as Caracas was primarily relegated to the periphery of the Spanish Empire, overshadowed by the more relevant Mexico City or Lima.³⁷ However, the ever-increasing demand for cocoa in New Spain, since the 17th century, and later in Europe, since the 18th century, would see an increasing demand for Caracas's cocoa, bringing much wealth to its cultivated Francophile *blancos criollos* (EN: white creoles) landowners elite, to which the Bolívar family —originally from the Basque country— belonged.³⁸

³¹ William R. Nester, "Global Imperialism's First Wave," in *Globalization: A Short History of the Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2010).

³² H. Micheal Tarver and Julia C. Frederick, *The History of Venezuela* (ABC-CLIO, 2005), 29-35.

³³ Giovanna Montenegro, "'The Welser Phantom': Apparitions of the Welser Venezuela Colony in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century German Cultural Memory," *Transit: A Journal of Travel, Migration, and Multiculturalism in the German-speaking World* 11, 2 (2018): 24, <https://transit.berkeley.edu/2018/montenegro/>.

³⁴ Montenegro, "'The Welser Phantom': Apparitions of the Welser Venezuela Colony in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century German Cultural Memory," 25-26.

³⁵ Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 42-43.

³⁶ W. Klooster, *Revolutions in the Atlantic World: A Comparative History* (NYU Press, 2009), 126-32.

³⁷ Woodrow Borah, "Latin American Cities in the Eighteenth Century: A Sketch," *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine* (1980): 9, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.7202/1020690ar>, <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1020690ar>.

³⁸ R.J. Ferry and R.J. Ferry, *The Colonial Elite of Early Caracas: Formation & Crisis, 1567-1767* (University of California Press, 1989), 46-71. <https://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft5r29n9wb&brand=eschol>.

3.1. Venezuela before Hugo Chávez: Before 1958

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After the independence movement (1810-1823) led by Simón Bolívar, which ended Venezuela's formal attachment to Spain and being part of the transitory Gran Colombia (1819-1831),³⁹ the international society⁴⁰ officially welcomed the new sovereign nation-state of Venezuela. This international recognition was made official, particularly with the formal recognition by the United States —already the most powerful country in the Americas— in 1835.⁴¹ However, the new nation-state would not be a member of this international society in equal terms as its counterparts. There was already an institutionalised hierarchy, which meant that the poor young nation-state of Venezuela would be effectively not entirely independent.⁴²

Between 1895 and 1899, Venezuela had to confront the most powerful political entity of that period, the British Empire, to determine its eastern borders. The British unilaterally established a border between Venezuela and its former colony of British Guiana, which meant that the young nation would lose 159,500 km² of its territory. Initially, the “big brother” of the north, the USA, seemed supportive of Venezuela's claim, given its animosity towards any expansions of its former colonial master in the Americas, in the context of the Monroe Doctrine. But finally, an Anglo-American tribunal would settle the claim confirming the British set border—a validation of Venezuela's standing in the international arena.⁴³

In 1878 the first oil company in Venezuela (*Compañía Nacional Petrolera del Táchira*) would be created, marking the beginning of a new era of prosperity for the country and the commencement of the oil curse. Although, the fundamental, radical changes would not start taking place until the 1920s, with foreign companies' industrial extraction of oil. Starting with the First World War, Venezuela would

³⁹ Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 49-60.

⁴⁰ English School theorists defines it as the the norm-governed "society of states" that permetate international relations, in spite of extant anarchy. Chris Brown, "World Society and the English School:: An `International Society' Perspective on World Society," *European Journal of International Relations* 7, no. 4 (2001/12/01 2001): 427, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066101007004002>, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066101007004002>.

⁴¹ "A Guide to the United States' History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, by Country, since 1776: Venezuela," Department of State: Office of the Historian accessed 22/10/2020, <https://history.state.gov/countries/venezuela#:~:text=U.S.%20Recognition%20of%20Venezuela%2C%201835,the%20Colombian%20federation%20in%201830>.

⁴² Christian Reus-Smit and Tim Dunne, "The Globalization of International Society," in *The Globalization of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 16.

⁴³ "MILESTONES: 1866–1898: Venezuela Boundary Dispute, 1895–1899," <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/venezuela>.

T. Boyle, "The Venezuela Crisis and the Liberal Opposition, 1895-96," *The Journal of Modern History* 50, no. 3 (1978), <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/1876627>.

3.1. Venezuela before Hugo Chávez: Before 1958

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convert into a significant actor in the world's oil markets. By the turn of the Second World War, the country was already the US biggest oil supplier.⁴⁴ In the meantime, the so-called Dutch Disease hit hard the agricultural sector, which had been the breadwinner of Venezuela for decades. In the 1920s, agriculture represented one-third of Venezuela's GDP; by the 1950s, it represented only a tenth.⁴⁵ Moreover, Venezuela, that until the commercial exploitation of oil in the 1920s was sparsely populated and fundamentally rural. From then on, the country would construct its national identity as we know it today, based on the glorification of Simón Bolívar, the narratives created around Venezuela's independence movement, Catholicism, and the Spanish language (just as the rest of Hispanic America).⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Julio Alvarez and James Fiorito, "Venezuelan Oil Unifying Latin-America," *Ethics of Development in a Global Environment*, Stanford University (2005): 4.

Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 61-76.

⁴⁵ "Coffee Exports by Country: trends over time 1905-2010," Harvard Business School accessed 20/10/2020, https://www.hbs.edu/businesshistory/courses/resources/historical-data-visualization/Pages/details.aspx?data_id=2.

Terry Lynn Karl, "Petroleum and Political Pacts: The Transition to Democracy in Venezuela," *Latin American Research Review* 22, no. 1 (1987): 68, <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/2503543>.

⁴⁶ David A. Brading, "Nationalism and State-Building in Latin American History," *Ibero-amerikanisches Archiv* 20, no. 1/2 (1994), <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/43392682>.

3.2. Between 1958 and 1998

1958 marks the beginning of a new period in Venezuela's political history, with the departure from power and the country of the dictator General Marcos Pérez Jiménez, a military leader who had himself fraudulently elected in 1952 and tried to legitimise his power in a plebiscite in 1957.⁴⁷ The provisional government of 1958 organised free and democratic elections in December of that year. The following forty years saw the development of a political system, under the *Punto Fijo* governability pact, regarded as a stable democracy with political parties as central actors; however, it was a system with many flaws. It excluded some political parties, such as the Partido Comunista de Venezuela (PCV). There were divisions within the political parties, military uprisings, and guerrilla movements, which, as in other parts of Latin America, some received training and financing from the Castroist regime.⁴⁸

1958-1968 can be considered a decade of political stabilisation and definition of the game's rules. The *Punto Fijo* Pact was signed by the main democratic parties existing in 1958, Acción Democrática (AD), Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (COPEI) and Unión Republicana Democrática (URD). However, as already mentioned, it excluded the *Partido Comunista de Venezuela* (PCV), which had played an important role in overthrowing the military dictatorship.⁴⁹ In 1961, during the presidency of Rómulo Betancourt (AD), they drafted and promulgated the 1961 national constitution that would remain in place until 1999.⁵⁰

During these first ten years of democracy, the governments formed were coalitions, AD-COPEI in 1959-1964, AD-URD and other groups in the following five years that managed to control military and guerilla

⁴⁷ Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 95-98.

⁴⁸ Karl, "Petroleum and Political Pacts: The Transition to Democracy in Venezuela," 80-87.

Michael Derham, "Undemocratic Democracy: Venezuela and the Distorting of History," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 21, no. 2 (2002): 281-85, <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/3339456>.

Ángel Bermúdez, "Cómo fueron las intervenciones armadas impulsadas por Cuba en América Latina - " *BBC News Mundo* (London), 29/03/2019, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-47674885>.

Tad Szulc, "Castro Seeks To Export His Revolution: His Role in the Rebellion in Zanzibar Reflects Cuba's Activity in Training Guerrillas," *New York Times* (New York), 26/01/1964, <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/01/26/archives/castro-seeks-to-export-his-revolution-his-role-in-the-rebellion-in.html>.

Richard L. Worsnop, "Guerrilla Movements in Latin America," in *Editorial Research Reports 1967*, CQ Researcher Online (Washington, D.C., United States: CQ Press, 1967).

⁴⁹ Steve Ellner, "Venezuelan Revisionist Political History, 1908-1958: New Motives and Criteria for Analyzing the Past," *Latin American Research Review* 30, no. 2 (1995): 98, <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/2503835>.

⁵⁰ Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 104-05.

3.2. Venezuela before Hugo Chávez: Between 1958 and 1998

subversions and enjoyed popular support.⁵¹ During this period, the political system expanded education and health services, engaged in agrarian and urban reforms, and strengthened the two main parties, AD and COPEI, employing clientelist policies.⁵²

Likely, the period saw several military uprisings, quite notably the *Barcelonazo* (1961), *Carupanazo* (May 1962), and *Porteñazo* (June 1962).⁵³ There were several guerrillas movements, some supported by the PCV and others by the Castroist regime.⁵⁴ The PCV would break with the Castroist regime and the armed struggle in 1967.⁵⁵ In that same year, on 2 May, the failed Machurucuto invasion or disembarkment would occur when Cuban and Venezuelan guerilla fighters attempted to interfere in Venezuela through the small town of Machurucuto (175 km east of Caracas), which was a military intervention attempt planned in La Habana.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, in 1959, Juan Pablo Pérez Alfonzo, then the Venezuelan Minister of Mines and Hydrocarbons, at a secret meeting in a yacht club outside Cairo, convinced the Arab and Iranian attendees about the need to reach some agreement to have more control over oil prices. A year later, in September 1960, at a conference in Bagdad, his child would be born: the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).⁵⁷ Initially, it only consisted of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait and Venezuela.

⁵¹ Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 113.

⁵² Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 115-19.

⁵³ Euronews Staff, "Breve historia de los golpes de estado en Venezuela," *Euronews* (Lyon), 30/04/2019, <https://es.euronews.com/2019/04/30/breve-historia-de-los-golpes-de-estado-en-venezuela>.

H.A. Trinkunas, *Crafting Civilian Control of the Military in Venezuela: A Comparative Perspective* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 120.

"Insurrección de Carúpano | Fundación Empresas Polar," Biblioteca Fundación Empresas Polar, accessed 04/04/2021, <https://biblifep.fundacionempresaspolar.org/dhv/entradas/i/insurreccion-de-carupano/>.

Milagros Socorro, "El Estímulo | El Porteñazo y la ayuda del Padre," *El Estímulo* (Bogotá), 02/06/2015, <https://elestimulo.com/climax/portenazo/>.

⁵⁴ Dario Azzellini, "Venezuela, Guerilla Movements, 1960s–1980s," in *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest* (2009).

⁵⁵ Azzellini, "Venezuela, Guerilla Movements, 1960s–1980s," 3.

Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 107-12.

⁵⁶ Joshua Goodman, "Decades after failed invasion, Cuba still eyes Venezuela," *Associated Press* (Machurucuto), 17/05/2019, <https://apnews.com/article/fidel-castro-caribbean-ap-top-news-venezuela-south-america-e5566a41d3c74fb7a7a13db77e1216f6>.

Ángel Bermúdez, "Cómo fue el "desembarco de Machurucuto", el intento de intervención militar en Venezuela ideado en Cuba por Fidel Castro," *BBC News Mundo*, 16/02/2019, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-47263573>.

⁵⁷ William D. Smith, "Unlikely Father of Arab Power" *New York Times* (New York), 02/12/1973, <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/12/02/archives/unlikely-father-of-arab-power-spotlight-he-keeps-a-battered-singer.html>.

Margarita Rodríguez, "Quién fue Juan Pablo Pérez Alfonzo, el "visionario" venezolano considerado el "padre" de la OPEP - BBC News Mundo," *BBC News Mundo* (London), 03/10/2020, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-54194758>.

Keith Johnson, "How Hugo Chávez Blew Up Venezuela's Oil Patch," *Foreign Policy* (Washington), 16/07/2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/07/16/how-venezuela-struck-it-poor-oil-energy-chavez/>.

3.2. Venezuela before Hugo Chávez: Between 1958 and 1998

However, it would gradually grow to many more (Qatar, Libya, United Arab Emirates, Algeria, Nigeria, Angola, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Congo), although a few had left it since then (Indonesia and Ecuador). The next decade would represent the pinnacle of the power it had ever exerted over oil markets.⁵⁸

During the 1970s, party democracy consolidated in Venezuela. In December 1968, unprecedented for this young democracy, a leader from the opposition would be chosen, with Rafael Caldera (COPEI) (1969-1974). The same happened in 1973 with the election of Carlos Andrés Pérez (AD) (1974-1979), and in 1983 with the election of Luis Herrera Campins (COPEI) (1979-1984) without this causing any unrest in the country. The 1970s increase in oil prices enriched the state tremendously. Several vital industries, including oil, were nationalised in 1976; the state made considerable investments in large industrial complexes, and the domestic industry was heavily protected. The state became effectively quite large and with tight control over the economy.⁵⁹

The 1980s saw the first signs of the system's failure. In 1979 the new government of Luis Herrera Campins (COPEI) revealed the colossal magnitude of the state's debt, something between the US \$12 and \$19 billion; he blamed the previous administration of Carlos Andrés Pérez (AD) for it.⁶⁰ In 1982 exchange controls were introduced, and a period of successive currency devaluations and accelerating inflation began.⁶¹ Economic growth became very weak. State intervention in the economy increased, but no longer with a developmental purpose.⁶² Reciprocal accusations of corruption among politicians became increasingly severe and frequent, and the corruption argument became the most potent weapon against political enemies.⁶³ Political parties were weakened, although it was not immediately apparent in the sense that the democratic system appeared solid: the presidential candidates of the two

⁵⁸ "Brief History," Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, 2021, accessed 04/04/2021, https://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/24.htm.

⁵⁹ "Venezuela: Chronology of Presidents," Political Database of the Americas (PDBA) Georgetown University, 2007, accessed 05/05/2021, <https://pdba.georgetown.edu/Executive/Venezuela/pres.html>.
Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 119-32.

⁶⁰ Joseph A. Mann Jr, "Venezuela Finds Debt Up by 45%," *The New York Times* (New York), 08/10/1979, <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/10/08/archives/venezuela-finds-debt-up-by-45-new-estimate-disputed-by-old.html>.

⁶¹ J. Kelly and P. A. Palma, "The syndrome of economic decline and the quest for change," in *The Unraveling of Representative Democracy in Venezuela*, ed. J. L. McCoy and D. J. Myers (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 209-10.

⁶² Kelly and Palma, "The syndrome of economic decline and the quest for change," 212.

⁶³ Molina, "The Unraveling of Venezuela's Party System," 162.

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main parties accounted for legislative elections 78.58% of the votes in 1983 and 74.3% in 1988,⁶⁴ meanwhile for the presidential elections, the two main parties accumulated 91.04% in 1983 and 92.83% in 1988.⁶⁵

The 1990s, however, witnessed a clear breakdown of the system. In 1989 a radical change in economic policy was attempted, and the Venezuelan government reached an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to liberalise the economy.⁶⁶ In February 1989, Caracas and other cities experienced violent protests and looting, and the government sent in the army to restore order, resulting in many casualties. This tragic event is otherwise known as the *Caracazo*.⁶⁷ In the same year, the government made efforts to render the political system more responsive to local and regional problems and needs by organising the first direct elections for city and state representatives.⁶⁸ In 1992, two military coup d'état attempts —the first of them, led by Hugo Chávez— failed but showed the lack of popular support for the system.⁶⁹

Public denunciations preceded the 1992 coup d'état attempts since 1990 by a group of intellectuals called *Los Notables*, lead by the renowned intellectual and politician Arturo Uslar Pietri, which highlighted the corruption of the political system and the ineffectiveness of the judges, including the Supreme Court of Justice.⁷⁰ The 1992 coup d'état attempts were a military failure, but they highlighted the magnitude of the political crisis. In 1993 President Carlos Andrés Pérez (AD) was impeached by the Supreme Court and removed from office on corruption charges.⁷¹ In December of that year, Rafael

⁶⁴ Molina, "The Unraveling of Venezuela's Party System," 157.

⁶⁵ Molina, "The Unraveling of Venezuela's Party System," 158.

⁶⁶ *Annual Report of the Executive Board for the Financial Year Ended April 30, 1989*, International Monetary Fund (Washington DC, 1989), 25-26, <https://www-imf-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/external/pubs/ft/ar/archive/pdf/ar1989.pdf>.

H. W. Singer, "The 1980s: A Lost Decade — Development in Reverse?," in *Growth and External Debt Management*, ed. H. W. Singer and Soumitra Sharma (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1989), 46.

⁶⁷ Margarita López Maya, "The Venezuelan "Caracazo" of 1989: Popular Protest and Institutional Weakness," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 35, no. 1 (2003), <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/3875580>.

⁶⁸ Jose E. Molina and Carmen Perez, "Evolution of the Party System in Venezuela, 1946-1993," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 40, no. 2 (1998): 17-18, <https://doi.org/10.2307/166372>, <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/166372>.

⁶⁹ Associated Press staff, "Venezuela Crushes Army Coup Attempt," *The New York Times* (New York), 05/02/1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/02/05/world/venezuela-crushes-army-coup-attempt.html>.

Sergei Baburkin et al., "The 1992 Coup Attempts In Venezuela: Causes And Failure," *Journal of Political & Military Sociology* 27, no. 1 (1999), <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/45294157>.

⁷⁰ Rafael Arráiz Lucca, "Entrevista a Arturo Uslar Pietri: ajuste de cuentas," *Prodavinci* (Caracas), 16/05/2019, <https://prodavinci.com/entrevista-a-arturo-uslar-pietri-ajuste-de-cuentas/>.

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch staff, *Human Rights in Venezuela* (New York, 1993), 7-8, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/Venez93O.pdf>.

3.2. Venezuela before Hugo Chávez: Between 1958 and 1998

Caldera, founder of COPEI and expelled from that party, was elected under the new party he also founded, Convergencia. He governed with the support of former leftist groups and COPEI dissidents.⁷² The 1993 election results were additional signs of the collapse of the *Punto Fijo* system. The two main parties accounted for 45.96% of the total vote for the legislative elections, while 45.34% for the presidential elections.⁷³ In December 1998, Hugo Chávez Frías, leader of the February 1992 coup d'état attempt, was elected with 56.2% of the vote, however, with 36% abstention.⁷⁴ Three main promises formed the basis of the Chávez campaign: eliminate corruption, create a new constitution that would dismantle the *Punto Fijo* political system, and eradicate poverty and inequality.⁷⁵

Diana Jean Schemo, "Ex-President of Venezuela Sentenced to 28 Months in Graft Case " *The New York Times* (New York), 31/05/1996, <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/05/31/world/ex-president-of-venezuela-sentenced-to-28-months-in-graft-case.html>.

⁷² Víctor Amaya, "Rafael Caldera, de ilustrísimo a chiripa," *El Estímulo* (Bogotá), 24/12/2016, <https://elestimulo.com/climax/caldera-el-saturno-de-copei/>.

⁷³ Molina, "The Unraveling of Venezuela's Party System," 157-58.

⁷⁴ Molina, "The Presidential and Parliamentary Elections of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela: Change and Continuity (1998-2000)," 223.

Noam Lupu, "Who Votes For "Chavismo"? Class Voting in Hugo Chávez's Venezuela," *Latin American Research Review* 45, no. 1 (2010): 17, <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/27919173>.

⁷⁵ Juan Jesús Aznárez, "El ex golpista Hugo Chávez consigue la presidencia de Venezuela por amplia mayoría," *El País*, 07/12/1998, https://elpais.com/diario/1998/12/07/internacional/912985216_850215.html.

"Venezuela's Chavez Era," Council on Foreign Relations, 2021, accessed 05/05/2021, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/venezuelas-chavez-era>.

4. The instauration of the Bolivarian regime

Hugo Chávez Frías —a paratrooper and commander in the Venezuelan army—⁷⁶ as already mentioned, began his particular political career in February 1992, when he led a failed coup d'état attempt against Carlos Andrés Pérez (AD). Before being sent to prison, Chavez delivered a short television message in which he said that "Comrades, unfortunately, for now, the objectives that we set ourselves were not achieved in the capital city [...]".⁷⁷ That mediatic performance with that "*por ahora*", "for now," which he would repeat when he lost the 2007 referendum, earned him a place in Venezuela's collective memory and popular support (A snapshot of that televised moment is shown in figure 2 on the following page. It would be the first time that Hugo Chávez would become known to the general public in Venezuela.⁷⁸ The first out of thousands of hours of televised recordings with his figure to follow in the next twenty-one years. An additional proof that in the case of the so-called Bolivarian revolution, the revolution will be televised, contrary to the famous 1970 song by Gil Scott-Heron.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ C. Marcano et al., *Hugo Chavez* (Random House Publishing Group, 2007).

⁷⁷ Original: "*Compañeros, lamentablemente, por ahora, los objetivos que nos planteamos no fueron logrados en la ciudad capital [...]*" "ESPECIAL | 4 de febrero un torrente histórico que trajo consigo el Día de la Dignidad Nacional," Servicio Nacional de Contrataciones, 2020, <http://www.snc.gob.ve/noticias/especial-4-de-febrero-un-torrente-historico-que-trajo-consigo-el-dia-de-la-dignidad>.

⁷⁸ Damarys Canache, "From Bullets to Ballots: The Emergence of Popular Support for Hugo Chávez," *Latin American Politics and Society* 44, no. 1 (2002): 69, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3177111>, <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/3177111>.

⁷⁹ Marcus Baram, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised - Gil Scott-Heron," (Washington: Library of Congress, 2005). <https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-recording-preservation-board/documents/TheRevolutionWillNotBeTelevised.pdf>.

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**FIGURE 2: HUGO CHÁVEZ "POR AHORA" TELEVISED MOMENT .
4 FEBRUARY 1992. SOURCE: TELESUR⁸⁰**

The day after the failed coup d'état in February 1992, former President Rafael Caldera (COPEI) harshly criticised president Carlos Andrés Pérez (AD) in Congress. He ended up somehow justifying the military uprising: "[...] I would like the Heads of State of the rich countries who called President Carlos Andrés Pérez to express their solidarity in defence of democracy to understand that democracy cannot exist if the people do not eat, if, as Pope John Paul II said, 'we cannot force ourselves to pay the debts at the expense of the people's hunger' [...]"⁸¹ During his second presidency (1994-1999), Caldera would be the one pardoning Chávez in March 1994, even though Chávez was serving a prison sentence and disqualified from participating in the political life in the country. President Caldera's pardon opened the doors of democratic politics to Chávez and allowed him to be a presidential candidate in 1998.⁸² For the first time, the candidates of the two major traditional parties, centre-left AD and centre-right COPEI had little chance of winning, given the strong allegations against them of involvement in corruption and their

⁸⁰ "4F de 1992: Del "Por Ahora" al "Para siempre", " TeleSUR, 2017, accessed 04/05/2021, <https://www.telesurtv.net/news/4F-de-1992-Del-Por-Ahora-al-Para-siempre-20150204-0024.html>.

⁸¹ Original text: "[...] Yo quisiera que los señores Jefes de Estado de los países ricos que llamaron al Presidente Carlos Andrés Pérez para expresarle su solidaridad en defensa de la democracia entendieran que la democracia no puede existir si los pueblos no comen, si como lo dijo el Papa Juan Pablo II, 'no se puede obligar a pagar las deudas a costa del hambre de los pueblos' [...]"

"Caldera: Dos discursos (1989/1992)," 2020, accessed 05/05/2021, <https://secureservercdn.net/198.71.190.10/182.a4e.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Dos-discursos-Rafael-Caldera.pdf>.

⁸² Marcano et al., *Hugo Chavez*, 116-17.

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general discredit. Also, the 1998 electoral campaign fixated on personalities rather than political parties.⁸³

Despite his military and putschist background, Chávez's speech was initially welcomed as a breath of fresh air in an environment where the traditional political parties were utterly discredited. In this way, Chávez managed to win over a high percentage of popular sectors of society.⁸⁴ He was also able to articulate support from many left and centre-left wing political parties and groups. Quite notably, Movimiento Revolucionario Bolivariano 200 (MRB 200) — sectors of the army that favoured a nationalist reformist exit— as well as the left-wing, and Chávez original party, Movimiento V República (MVR) — who had won 35 of the 207 of the parliamentary seat in the 1998 legislative elections, only second to AD with 61 seats—all united under the umbrella of Polo Patriótico. This party coalission also included the PCV, Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), Patria para Todos (PTT), Causa Radical (Causa R), and other minor parties.⁸⁵

⁸³ Molina, "The Presidential and Parliamentary Elections of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela: Change and Continuity (1998-2000)," 227-29.

⁸⁴ Lupu, "Who Votes For "Chavismo"? Class Voting in Hugo Chávez's Venezuela," 25-26.

⁸⁵ Molina, "The Presidential and Parliamentary Elections of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela: Change and Continuity (1998-2000)," 227.

Canache, "From Bullets to Ballots: The Emergence of Popular Support for Hugo Chávez," 73-74.

4.1. The instauration of the Bolivarian regime: The 1999 constitution

4.1. The 1999 Constitution

Hugo Chávez's government electoral program included an in-depth reform of the Venezuelan national constitution of 1961, which he would often call "*la moribunda*" (EN: the moribund).⁸⁶ When he took office as president on 2 February 1999, the oath taken was a declaration of principles in this regard: " I swear before God, I swear before the Fatherland, I swear before my people that on this moribund Constitution, I will enforce, I will promote the democratic transformations necessary for the new Republic to have a Magna Carta appropriate to the new times. I swear."⁸⁷ It was intended to give a foundational value to the new project, which they called "Bolivarian."

The 1961 constitution established particular and restrictive conditions for this kind of reform that would require a broad consensus by all the national political forces. Nevertheless, Chávez ignored these rules and called for a referendum that would legitimise a Constituent Assembly. In the first referendum to allow for the Constituent Assembly to happen, held on 25 April 1999, 81.9 % of voters favoured amending the Constitution. It should be noted that 62.2% of eligible voters abstained from voting.⁸⁸ Three months later, elections were held to choose the members of the Constituent Assembly. In an electoral process quite different from what Venezuelans were used to, only 46.3% of eligible voters participated, resulting in the election of 131 members. Only 5 members belonged to the opposition (and only 1 out of those 5 belonged to Venezuela's traditional parties).⁸⁹

On 3 August 1999, the Constituent Assembly started its sessions. The rush to approve the new Carta Magna was tremendous, and the debates were not too deep, largely thanks to the miniature presence

⁸⁶ Ramón Lobo Ludmila Vinogradoff, "De la 'Moribunda' al 'Muchachito'," *El País* (Madrid), 21/11/1999, https://elpais.com/diario/1999/11/22/internacional/943225206_850215.html.

⁸⁷ Original source text: "Juro delante de Dios, juro delante de la Patria, juro delante de mi pueblo que sobre esta moribunda Constitución, haré cumplir, impulsaré las transformaciones democráticas necesarias para que la República nueva, tenga una Carta Magna adecuada a los nuevos tiempos. Lo juro"

Todochavez website staff, "Toma de Posesión del Comandante Presidente Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías," (Caracas: Instituto de Altos Estudios del Pensamiento del Comandante Eterno Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías, 1999).

<http://www.todochavez.gob.ve/todochavez/3013-toma-de-posesion-del-comandante-presidente-hugo-rafael-chavez-frias>.

⁸⁸ Brewer-Carías, "The 1999 Venezuelan Constitution-Making Process as an Instrument for Framing the Development of an Authoritarian Political Regime," 511-12.

⁸⁹ Brewer-Carías, "The 1999 Venezuelan Constitution-Making Process as an Instrument for Framing the Development of an Authoritarian Political Regime," 513.

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of opposition members. They worked against the clock, and in less than four months, on 20 November 1999, the Constituent Assembly had drafted a new constitution. The constitution drafting would be followed by one month of campaigning, after which Venezuelans could cast their vote. There was 57.7% abstention, and the constitution received 71.8% of positive votes.⁹⁰ The new Constitution marked the beginning of Venezuela's Fifth Republic, which adopted the official name *República Bolivariana de Venezuela*. *Bolivariano/a*, Bolivarian, from then on would be an adjective to be included in almost all of Venezuela's institutions: Cuerpo de Policía Nacional Bolivariana (CPNB), Fuerzas Armadas Nacionales Bolivarianas (FNAB), just to mention a few.⁹¹

With the new constitution, the system of government was changed from representative to participatory. It also aimed to curb the power of political parties over the adjudication of certain public positions, which were done based on patronage and clientelism. Including judges of the supreme court, the general controller, the people's defender, and the electoral council,⁹² although, today we know that in practice, under the new constitution, the people chosen for those public posts would be not based on merits or independently, but based on loyalty to the Bolivarian regime, so in reality, not so different as it was being done in the Fourth Republic.⁹³

Without a doubt, one of the highlights of the reform was the strengthening of the executive power, which allowed the possibility of presidential re-election for a second consecutive term (not possible with

⁹⁰ "1999 Constitutional Referendum Results," Political Database of the Americas (PDBA) Georgetown University, 2006, accessed 05/03/2021, <https://pdba.georgetown.edu/Elecdata/Venezuela/venref.html>.

Brewer-Carías, "The 1999 Venezuelan Constitution-Making Process as an Instrument for Framing the Development of an Authoritarian Political Regime," 515-16.

⁹¹ Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, (Organisation of American States, 1999).

"Fuerza Armada | FANB," 2021, accessed 05/06/2021, <http://www.mindefensa.gob.ve/mindefensa/fuerza-armada/>.

"La Policía Nacional Bolivariana cumple 10 años – Minec," updated 20/12/2019, 2019, accessed 01/06/2021, <http://www.minec.gob.ve/la-policia-nacional-bolivariana-cumple-10-anos/>.

⁹² Brewer-Carías, "The 1999 Venezuelan Constitution-Making Process as an Instrument for Framing the Development of an Authoritarian Political Regime," 517.

⁹³ "Venezuela: Rulings Threaten Free and Fair Elections," Human Rights Watch, updated 07/07/2020,

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/07/venezuela-rulings-threaten-free-and-fair-elections>.

"Venezuela: Chávez's Authoritarian Legacy: Dramatic Concentration of Power and Open Disregard for Basic Human Right," Human Rights Watch updated 05/03/2013, accessed 13/04/2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/03/05/venezuela-chavez-authoritarian-legacy>.

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the 1961 constitution).⁹⁴ However, in 2007 Chávez attempted to reform this to make it possible for him to be reelected indefinitely,⁹⁵ but he lost the referendum that year. After losing, a campaign with his infamous 1992 “*por ahora*” was launched throughout the country.⁹⁶ In 2009, the referendum would be repeated, and Chávez would win it this time.⁹⁷

Likely, the new constitution extended the presidential term from five to six years. The new Carta Magna eliminated the Senate and Congress and replaced them for the unicameral National Assembly. This new parliament would have the right to grant the president legislative power without any limitations.⁹⁸ On the other hand, the new constitution introduced the possibility of recall referendums for all elected positions, which allowed, in theory, the removal of elected authorities in the middle of their mandate. However, when the only ever recall referendum in Venezuela’s history was done in 2004 to remove Chávez, although the results were recognised as valid by international observers, they also pointed out to lack of transparency and the presence of irregularities, as noted by the Carter Centre, one of the international observers present at the vote. Not to mention that Venezuela’s National Electoral Council instrumentalized the whole process to make the recall referendum, a plebiscitary election for the ratification of Chávez.⁹⁹

The new constitution diluted the separation of powers, concentrating all in the executive branch. The president has from then on almost unlimited power. And perhaps, one of the most alarming new features of the new constitution is the loss of civil control over the military, who now respond directly to

⁹⁴ Brewer-Carías, "The 1999 Venezuelan Constitution-Making Process as an Instrument for Framing the Development of an Authoritarian Political Regime," 519.

⁹⁵ Reuters staff, "Chávez pierde el referéndum sobre la reforma de la Constitución," *Reuters* (London), 03/12/2007, <https://www.reuters.com/article/oestp-venezuela-referendum-idESROD32179620071203>.

⁹⁶ D.G. Maldonado, *La invasión consentida*, Kindle Edition ed. (Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial México, 2019), 76.

⁹⁷ Joaquim Ibarz, "Chávez gana el referéndum que le permite la reelección indefinida," *La Vanguardia* (Barcelona), 16/02/2009, <https://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20090216/53640949713/chavez-gana-el-referendum-que-le-permite-la-reeleccion-indefinida.html>.

⁹⁸ Brewer-Carías, "The 1999 Venezuelan Constitution-Making Process as an Instrument for Framing the Development of an Authoritarian Political Regime," 517-19.

⁹⁹ The Carter Centre, "Observación del Referendo Revocatorio Presidencial en Venezuela: Informe Integral," (Washington: The Carter Centre, 2005), 14, 20-23, 82. <https://www.cartercenter.org/documents/2021.pdf>.

"CP/RES. 869 (1436/04) Results Of The Presidential Recall Referendum Held In Venezuela On August 15, 2004 (Adopted at its session held on August 26, 2004) ", Permanent Council of the Organisation of American States (OAS), 2004, <https://www.oas.org/council/resolutions/res869.asp>.

Brewer-Carías, "The 1999 Venezuelan Constitution-Making Process as an Instrument for Framing the Development of an Authoritarian Political Regime," 521.

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the president, and can vote, which was never possible under the 1961 constitution. These new provisions for the military would enable the creation of militia groups that would prove to be beneficial for the Bolivarian regime in keeping the status quo and maintaining its grip on power —especially relevant in a country with a long tradition of military uprisings, just as the one Chávez led in 1992.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Brewer-Carías, "The 1999 Venezuelan Constitution-Making Process as an Instrument for Framing the Development of an Authoritarian Political Regime," 520.

BBC News Mundo staff, "El papel de los militares en la Venezuela después de Chávez - BBC News Mundo," *BBC News Mundo* (London), 08/03/2013, https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2013/03/130307_papel_militares_venezuela_cch.

4.2. The instauration of the Bolivarian regime: The Bolivarian government

4.2. The Bolivarian government

The conquest and submission of the state apparatus seem to have been priorities for Hugo Chávez. Prominent positions of his administration fell into the hands of militants of the MVR, PTT and MBR-200, and other allied groups and personalities, many of them still holding positions to this date. To mention a few, we have the all-powerful Diosdado Cabello, who was one of the initial leaders of MBR-200 and MVR. He is often considered the second most powerful man in the Bolivarian regime. He was part of the 1992 coup d'état attempt. As Chávez in his heyday, he has his own television show —*Con el Mazo Dando* (EN: Hitting it with the mallet). He was indicted with drug-trafficking charges by the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in 2020.¹⁰¹ Likely, we have Cilia Flores, the wife of Nicolás Maduro, and the current “First Lady.” She was also originally one of the members of MVR in 1998. She has held public positions ever since. She is also famous for her *narcosobrinos* (EN: narco-nephews), who are now serving time in the US for drug trafficking charges. The Bolivarian regime spent a significant amount of money in their defence in US courts. The US is also looking to indict her with drug trafficking and corruption charges.¹⁰²

There are many more public figures like Cilia Flores or Diosdado Cabellos in the Bolivarian administration, not necessarily present from its beginnings in the late 1990s, who appear to be always appointed to some public position as one of the features of the Bolivarian government seems to be the eternal cycle of recycling of members of the Bolivarian elite in the allocation of positions in the administration. Meanwhile, from the early 2000s, purges rid the administration of any individuals considered part of the opposition, especially after the confusing April 2002 two-day-long coup d'état

¹⁰¹ Sebastiana Barráez, "Homenaje al golpe de 1992: Diosdado Cabello recibió honores militares que no le corresponden y vistió un uniforme que Hugo Chávez calificaba de “gringo”,” *Infobae* (Buenos Aires), 05/02/2021.

"Con el Mazo Dando," *Con el Mazo Dando*, 2021, accessed 01/06/2021, <https://mazo4f.com/>.

"Nicolás Maduro Moros and 14 current and former Venezuelan officials charged with narco-terrorism, corruption, drug trafficking and other criminal charges," US Department of Justice- Drug Enforcement Administration, updated 26/03/2020, 2020, accessed 06/06/2021, <https://www.dea.gov/press-releases/2020/03/26/nicolas-maduro-moros-and-14-current-and-former-venezuelan-officials>.

¹⁰² Reuters, "Report: US considering charges against Venezuela's first lady | Corruption News | Al Jazeera," *Al Jazeera* (Doha), 29/05/2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/5/29/report-us-considering-charges-against-venezuelas-first-lady>.

Redacción, "Venezuela: condenan a 18 años de cárcel por narcotráfico a Francisco Flores y Efraín Campo, sobrinos de Cilia Flores, mujer del presidente Nicolás Maduro - BBC News Mundo," *BBC Mundo News*, 14/12/2017 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-42361974>.

4.2. The instauration of the Bolivarian regime: The Bolivarian government

attempt against Chávez; the general strike between December 2002 - February 2003, which affected PDVSA principally; and the recall referendum August 2004.¹⁰³

As pointed out by Human Rights Watch in a 2008 report, after the 2002 general strike, 18,000 PDVSA workers were made redundant —nearly half of PDVSA’s workforce— and blocklists were created by the regime to prevent them from finding work in Venezuela’s oil sector,¹⁰⁴ which forced many of these workers to leave the country in what would be one of the first instances of human capital flight for the country, and for some the beginning of PDVSA’s decline.¹⁰⁵ Additionally, after the 2004 recall referendum, a blocklist and database were created to include all those who signed the 2004 recall referendum petition. The “Lista Tascón” and “Programa Maisanta,” as the blocklist and digital database were called, were effectively used by the government to dismiss or discriminate from jobs in the public sector those that signed the 2004 recall referendum.¹⁰⁶

On the other hand, despite having a new Constitution drafted by a Constituent Assembly with a minuscule representation of the opposition¹⁰⁷ and having a National Assembly with a majority of pro-Chávez parliamentarians during long periods of his presidency. Especially after the 2005 legislative elections that the opposition boycotted, which resulted in a fully pro-Chávez National Assembly with 89.9% of positive votes and 75% abstention.¹⁰⁸ Chávez ruled by decree, with the approval of a

¹⁰³ Prensa Provea, "Despido de 18.000 trabajadores de PDVSA en 2003 fue un genocidio laboral, asegura Horacio Medina | PROVEA," *Programa Venezolano de Educación Acción en Derechos Humanos (PROVEA)* (Caracas), 16/04/2021, <https://provea.org/actualidad/derechos-sociales/laboral/despido-de-18-000-trabajadores-de-pdvsa-fue-un-genocidio-laboral-asegura-horacio-medina-2/>.

¹⁰⁴ HRW staff, "Una Década de Chávez Intolerancia política y oportunidades perdidas para el progreso de los derechos humanos en Venezuela," (New York: Human Rights Watch, September 2008), 32-37. https://www.hrw.org/reports/venezuela0908spweb_0.pdf.

Colin Wiseman and Daniel Béland, "The Politics of Institutional change in Venezuela: Oil Policy During the Presidency of Hugo Chávez," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies / Revue canadienne des études latino-américaines et caraiïbes* 35, no. 70 (2010): 145, <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/41800523>.

¹⁰⁵ The Economist staff, "Venezuela's oil diaspora: Brain haemorrhage," *The Economist* (London), 19/07/2014, <https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2014/07/19/brain-haemorrhage>.

¹⁰⁶ staff, "Venezuela: Chávez’s Authoritarian Legacy: Dramatic Concentration of Power and Open Disregard for Basic Human Right."

¹⁰⁷ Brewer-Carías, "The 1999 Venezuelan Constitution-Making Process as an Instrument for Framing the Development of an Authoritarian Political Regime," 511-12.

¹⁰⁸ "Preliminary OAS Observations on the Legislative Elections in Venezuela," updated 06/12/2005, 2005, accessed 05/05/2021, https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=EOM-VE-04.

4.2. **The instauration of the Bolivarian regime:** The Bolivarian government

subordinate National Assembly, and in doing so, he created decree no. 5200 in 2007, which saw the nationalisation of private companies extracting heavy and extra-heavy oil in the Orinoco Belt, such as ConocoPhillips, for which the World Bank has condemned the Bolivarian regime to pay US\$ 8.5 billion in 2019.¹⁰⁹ Also, by decree, Chávez introduced a new land law in June 2010. He did it in a rush in anticipation of the September 2010 legislative elections that allowed the opposition to come back to the National Assembly.¹¹⁰ Although Chávez introduced this new land law in 2010, the Bolivarian regime had already expropriated approximately 3.6 million hectares since 2000, in the context of the 1999 constitution.¹¹¹

El Mundo staff, "Chávez controlará por completo la Asamblea tras el boicot de los principales partidos opositores," *El Mundo* (Madrid) 2005, <https://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2005/12/05/internacional/1133745658.html>.

¹⁰⁹ "Decreto 5.200 Trece años de la materialización de la nacionalización de la Faja Petrolífera del Orinoco Hugo Chávez," updated 26/02/2020, 2020, accessed 05/06/2021, <http://www.minpet.gob.ve/index.php/es-es/comunicaciones/noticias-comunicaciones/49-noticias-del-ano-2020/1250-decreto-5-200-trece-anos-de-la-materializacion-de-la-nacionalizacion-de-la-faja-petrolifera-del-orinoco-hugo-chavez-1>.

Brian Ellsworth, "Conoco left out of Venezuela's Orinoco deals," *Reuters* (London), 25/04/2007, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-nationalization-oil-idUSN2527844220070425>.

Marianna Parraga, "Venezuela must pay Conoco over \$8 billion: World Bank," *Reuters* (London), 08/03/2019 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-conocophillips-venezuela-idUSKCN1QP20V>.

¹¹⁰ Yolanda Valery, "Venezuela: aprobada reforma a Ley de Tierras - BBC News Mundo," *BBC News Mundo* (London), 16/06/2010, https://www.bbc.com/mundo/economia/2010/06/100615_0357_venezuela_ley_de_tierras_ao.

M. A. Bastenier, "Venezuela: la oposición vuelve," *El País* (Madrid), 22/09/2010, https://elpais.com/diario/2010/09/22/internacional/1285106410_850215.html.

¹¹¹ Radio France Inter staff, "El gobierno de Chávez lleva expropiadas 3,6 millones de hectáreas," *Radio France Inter* (Paris), 12/12/2011, <https://www.rfi.fr/es/americas/20111212-el-gobierno-de-chavez-lleva-expropiadas-36-millones-de-hectareas>.

5. Hugo Chávez Frías

In this chapter, we will explore the divisive figure of Hugo Chávez Frías . To understand the Bolivarian regime, we must understand Chávez, who managed to concentrate on his enormous power. He did so, not without a coup d'état as he had initially attempted in 1992, as we would see in this chapter, but by winning elections, some of them, surrounded in controversy, accusations of irregularities, and a high percentage of abstention, as we have seen in the previous chapter.

Latin America has a long tradition of presidentialist governments,¹¹² so in many respects, the amount of power that Chávez managed to concentrate in the executive is not that surprising. However, the way he used this enormous power to change Venezuela forever, and as we can see now, with disastrous consequences, makes the case of this leader quite unique. We have divided this chapter into three subsections:

- Brief biography
- Discourse as a politician
- Discourse analysis of speech of 1 January 2009

¹¹² Scott Mainwaring, "Presidentialism in Latin America," *Latin American Research Review* 25, no. 1 (1990), <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/2503565>.

5.1. Brief biography

Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías was born on 28 July 1954 in the small and rural town of Sabaneta, Barinas state, in Venezuela's eastern Llanos. He was born in a poor household. Both his parents were primary school teachers.¹¹³ As 63.7% of Venezuela's population, Chávez was mestizo.¹¹⁴ At around the age of twelve or thirteen, Chávez would be introduced to communism, by the hand of José Esteban Ruíz Guevara—a member of the PCV and family friend—in the state capital city of Barinas, where he had moved, with his older brother Adán Chávez, from his native Sabaneta to pursue his secondary education.¹¹⁵

In 1971, he joined the military academy, showing a real passion for Political Science. He became an avid reader of Mao Tse-Tung, as well as books about Simón Bolívar, Napoleon Bonaparte, Hannibal, and José Antonio Páez (mestizo leader of Venezuela's independence movement, and first *caudillo* from 1830 until the late 1840s).¹¹⁶ He also said to have read a little known book called *El ejército como agente del cambio social* (EN: The army as an agent of social change), a compilation of papers presented at the 30th International Conference of Human Sciences in Asia and North Africa that took place in Mexico City in 1976.¹¹⁷ Likewise, he read *Principles of War* (1812) by Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz.¹¹⁸

Chávez developed a fixation with a Venezuelan historical character, Ezequiel Zamora (1817-1860), a merchant that would lead a peasant revolt under the *motto ¡Tierra y hombres libres!* (EN: Free land and free men!) in 1846. But that despite this seemingly romantic revolutionary aura, he would finish his days

¹¹³ Marcano et al., *Hugo Chavez*, 23.

¹¹⁴ Heather D. Heckel, Lieuwen, Edwin, Martz, John D. and McCoy, Jennifer L., "Venezuela | Economy, Map, Capital, Collapse, & Facts," (Chicago: Encyclopaedia britannica, 2021). <https://www.britannica.com/place/Venezuela>.

¹¹⁵ Marcano et al., *Hugo Chavez*, 37.

¹¹⁶ Marcano et al., *Hugo Chavez*, 44.

Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "José Antonio Páez | Venezuelan general," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago, 2021). <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jose-Antonio-Paez>.

¹¹⁷ "Asociación Latinoamericana de Estudios de Asia y África (ALADAA)," ALADAA, 2003, accessed 05/05/2021, <https://ceaa.colmex.mx/aladaa/origen.htm>.

Claude Heller (editor), *El Ejército Como Agente de Cambio Social* (Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1980). <https://books.google.nl/books?id=ulA8AAAACAAJ>.

¹¹⁸ Carl von Clausewitz, *Principles of War*, ed. H.W. C. Gatzke (Dover Publications, 1812; repr., 2003). <https://books.google.nl/books?id=lvZ7yaPN5fUC>.

5.1. Hugo Chávez Frías: Brief biography

as a wealthy landowner. He was also the founder of Chávez's natal state, Barinas. After his release from prison in 1994, Chávez confessed to his friend, Nedo Paniz, who housed him for a while, that he thought he was the reincarnation of Ezequiel Zamora. Similarly, he confessed to his friend, military colleague, and participant in the 1992 coup d'état attempt, Jesús Urdaneta.¹¹⁹

Another historical character Chávez fixated on was Simón Rodríguez (1769-1854), a philosopher and educator, one of Simón Bolívar's mentors.¹²⁰ But without question, his most obsessive fixation with historical characters would be with Simón Bolívar. Chávez said that when he was a child, "instead of Superman, my hero was Bolívar."¹²¹ We must say that his cult for Bolívar is something that might have come quite naturally, given that Venezuela has built its national identity around the glorification of this national hero and the narratives created around its independence movement, along with Catholicism and the Spanish language (just as the rest of Hispanic America).¹²² However, it seems that Chávez devotion for Bolívar went to the extreme. While he was alive, it was rumoured that at meetings, he would often ask to leave an empty chair so the spirit of Bolívar could descend and sit on it. This rumour seems to be confirmed by his friend Nedo Pariz mentioned above, as well as by the Venezuelan historian Elías Pinto Iturrieta who consulted with six different people present at meetings with Chávez.¹²³

Before the 1992 coup d'état attempt, Chávez wrote the book *El libro azul: el árbol de tres raíces* (EN: The Blue Book: The Tree with Three Roots),¹²⁴ now freely accessible on the websites of many Bolivarian institutions with a prologue written by Nicolás Maduro, and even an English version. In the book, Chávez explains the theoretical foundations of Bolivarianism, including what he calls the "EBR, philosophical and political system" whose three roots are: Ezequiel Zamora, Simón Rodríguez and Simón Bolívar.¹²⁵ He

¹¹⁹ Marcano et al., *Hugo Chavez*, 107.

Luis Lovea Calanche, "Independencia, «Tierra y hombres libres», las imperiosas necesidades de Ezequiel Zamora," *Correo del Orinoco* (Caracas), 01/02/2019, <http://www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve/independencia-tierra-y-hombres-libres-las-imperiosas-necesidades-de-ezequiel-zamora/>.

¹²⁰ Alberto López, "Simón Rodríguez, el gran educador de América y mentor de Simón Bolívar," *El País* (Madrid), 28/10/2018, https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/10/28/america/1540732409_091457.html.

¹²¹ Marcano et al., *Hugo Chavez*, 103.

¹²² Brading, "Nationalism and State-Building in Latin American History."

¹²³ Marcano et al., *Hugo Chavez*, 113.

Elías Pinto Iturrieta, *El divino Bolívar* (Editorial Alfa, 2016), 182.

¹²⁴ Hugo Chávez Frías, *The Blue Book: The Tree with Three Roots* (Caracas: Ministry of the people's power for Communication and information, 2015). <http://www.minci.gob.ve/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/The-Blue-Book.pdf>.

¹²⁵ Frías, *The Blue Book: The Tree with Three Roots*, 33.

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explains that the acronym EBR—similar to that of the subversive group he founded in the 1980s inside the army— stands for E for Ezequiel Zamora, B for Simón Bolívar, and R for Samuel Robinson —the name adopted by Simón Rodríguez while he lived in exile in Europe for seventeen years.¹²⁶

On 17 December 1983, Chávez was one of the speakers at a military event. He spoke in front of thousand of military men about Simón Bolívar. He started his speech with a quote from Cuba's national hero, José Martí (a historical figure extensively instrumentalised by the Castroist regime):¹²⁷ "But, that is how Bolivar is in the sky of America, watchful and girdled, sitting still on a rock to create, with the Inca by his side and a bundle of flags at his feet; so that is how he is, still wearing the campaign boots because what he did not leave done, it still remains undone today: because Bolivar has still things to do in America!"¹²⁸

This December 1983 speech coincided with the genesis of the Ejército Bolivariano Revolucionario 200 (EBR-200), a military group led by Chávez that started as a political study group but that would ultimately conspire to take over the government. The number 200 is a reference to the 200th anniversary of the birth of Simón Bolívar (1783).¹²⁹ The group would come to national prominence with the February 1992 fail coup d'état attempt against the government of Carlos Andrés Pérez (AD).

The 1992 coup d'état was a failure, but it would make Chávez well known to the Venezuelan public, especially after his short televised "*por ahora*" statement; figure 3 on the following page shows a screenshot of that televised historical moment. He would be imprisoned between 1992 and 1994 in Yare

¹²⁶Frías, *The Blue Book: The Tree with Three Roots*, 44.

Marcano et al., *Hugo Chavez*, 109.

López, "Simón Rodríguez, el gran educador de América y mentor de Simón Bolívar."

¹²⁷C. A. M. Hennessy, "The Roots of Cuban Nationalism," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 39, no. 3 (1963): 357, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2611204>, <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/2611204>.

¹²⁸ Original source text: "Pero así está Bolívar en el cielo de América, vigilante y ceñudo, sentado aún en la roca de crear, con el inca al lado y el haz de banderas a los pies; así está él, calzadas aún las botas de campaña, porque lo que él no dejó hecho, sin hacer está hasta hoy: porque Bolívar tiene que hacer en América todavía"

José Martí, "Discurso pronunciado en la velada de la Sociedad Literaria Hispanoamericana en honor de Simón Bolívar el 28 de octubre de 1893," (La Habana: josemarti.cu, 1893), 2. http://www.josemarti.cu/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/DISCURSO_A_BOLIVAR.pdf.

¹²⁹ Gott, *Hugo Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution*, 38.

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prison (75 km south of Caracas). During his time there, his fame in Venezuela would grow and grow.¹³⁰ By the time he was free, he was already an icon. A survey carried out in 1995 placed him as the third most influential public figure in Venezuela.¹³¹



FIGURE 3: SCREENSHOT OF CHÁVEZ TELEVISED "POR AHORA" STATEMENT. CARACAS. 04/02/1992 SOURCE: TELESUR¹³²

Shortly after being free from prison in 1994 with the presidential pardon of Rafael Caldera (Convergencia, ex-COPEI), he was personally invited by the Castroist ambassador in Caracas to visit Cuba. He arrived at the island for the first time on 13 December 1994. The Castroist regime welcomed him with head-of-state honours. Fidel Castro personally welcomed him at the doors of the plain, as shown in figure 4 on the following page. Castro would also personally say his goodbyes at the doors of the plain.¹³³ Chávez's visit would be the first one out of many to come. Castro and Chávez would develop a close relationship enabling that unique bond between the Castroist and Bolivarian regimes. At an event specially organised for Chávez visit to the University of La Habana on 14 December 1994, as part of his opening speech, he said: "The first time I come physically [to Cuba], because in dreams, to

¹³⁰ Marcano et al., *Hugo Chavez*, 102-03.

¹³¹ Canache, "From Bullets to Ballots: The Emergence of Popular Support for Hugo Chávez," 76.

¹³² staff, "4F de 1992: Del "Por Ahora" al "Para siempre"."

¹³³ Marcano et al., *Hugo Chavez*, 211-12.

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Cuba, we came many times the Latin American youth; in dreams, to Cuba, we came countless times the Bolivarian soldiers [...].”¹³⁴

Throughout his political career, especially after 2005, Chávez expressed an extreme devotion for the Cuban revolution and Fidel Castro on numerous occasions. He would come to consider Castro as his father, as he said it in 2009 at the closing event of the VIII ALBA Summit in La Habana: "Fidel did me the honour -- thank you, my Commander -- of making me his son, and that's how I feel. It is a great honour that I hope to deserve".¹³⁵ Earlier that year, during the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution in Caracas, Chávez would say: “[...] for Cuba we mourn, for Cuba we fight, and for Cuba, we are willing to die fighting if we would have to die fighting for revolutionary Cuba [...].”¹³⁶

¹³⁴ todochavez.gob.ve staff, "Discurso en Aula Magna Universidad de La Habana," (Caracas: Instituto de Altos Estudios del Pensamiento del Comandante Eterno Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías, 14/12/1994 1994).
<http://todochavez.gob.ve/todochavez/2973-discurso-en-aula-magna-universidad-de-la-habana>.

¹³⁵Original source text: "Fidel me hizo el honor -gracias, mi Comandante-, de convertirme en hijo suyo y yo así me siento. Es un grandísimo honor que espero merecer".

Cubadebate Staff, "Fidel me hizo el honor de hacerme hijo suyo, y así me siento (+ Video)," *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de América (ALBA)* (La Habana), 14/12/2009, <http://www.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2009/12/14/fidel-me-hizo-el-honor-de-hacerme-hijo-suyo-afirmo-chavez/>.

¹³⁶Original source text: "por Cuba lloramos, por Cuba peleamos, y por Cuba estamos dispuesto a morir peleando si hubiera que morir peleando por Cuba revolucionaria [...]"

Hugo Chávez, "Intervención del Comandante Presidente Hugo Chávez durante ofrenda floral ante el sarcófago del Libertador Simón Bolívar, con motivo de la celebración del quincuagésimo aniversario de la Revolución Cubana," (Caracas: Instituto de Altos Estudios del Pensamiento del Comandante Supremo Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías, 01/01/2009).
<http://todochavez.gob.ve/todochavez/888-intervencion-del-comandante-presidente-hugo-chavez-durante-ofrenda-floral-ante-el-sarcofago-del-libertador-simon-bolivar-con-motivo-de-la-celebracion-del-quincuagesimo-aniversario-de-la-revolucion-cubana>.

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**FIGURE 4: PHOTOGRAPH OF FIDEL CASTRO WELCOMING HUGO CHÁVEZ.
LA HABANA. 13 DECEMBER 1994
SOURCE: CUBADEBATE¹³⁷**

Two years earlier, in 2007, during the signing in Santiago de Cuba of fourteen new agreements between the two regimes, Chávez would make these very contentious declarations in relation to Cuba: "Let us be aware that we are one nation." Moreover, he expressed that both regimes "in the end we are one government," and that both countries were moving towards a "confederation of Bolivarian, Martian, Caribbean and South American republics, this is not delirium".¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Germán Sánchez Otero, "Fidel y Chávez, su primer abrazo | Cubadebate," *Cubadebate* (La Habana), 16/12/2016, <http://www.cubadebate.cu/opinion/2016/12/12/fidel-y-chavez-su-primer-abrazo/>.

¹³⁸ Agencia EFE, "Chávez insiste en que Venezuela y Cuba son 'una sola nación'," *El Mundo* (La Habana), 23/12/2007, <https://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2007/12/23/internacional/1198384789.ht>.
Marc Frank, "Cuba, Venezuela strengthen economic ties," *Reuters* (London), 15/10/2007 2007, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-venezuela-idUSN1535038020071015>.

5.2. Discourse as a politician

The appearance of Chávez on the Venezuelan political scene after the 1992 coup d'état attempt marked a significant rupture in Venezuela's political discourse. Notwithstanding, it did not break with a populist discursive tradition present in the country since the beginnings of democracy in the late 1950s. Chávez's popular discourse was innovative in using a very colloquial language closer to the popular classes. The real break with Venezuela's political discourse until then was his denunciation of the vices of Venezuela's democracy —namely corruption— and his justification for his 1992 military insurrection.¹³⁹

Chavez discourse thus marked a break with the Punto Fijo political system and the political party dynamics present in the country since 1958. He produced a very personalistic discourse where he often refers to elements of Venezuelan history, as well as the historical characters he idolised, namely Simón Bolívar, Simón Rodríguez and Ezequiel Zamora. He regularly used Catholic religious elements, mentioning Jesus Christ or God, which points out to a messianic perception of himself as the saviour of the country.¹⁴⁰ We find samples of this messianism during the presidential election year 2012 —the last before his death in 2013—where he declared: "I am not me anymore, I am a people."¹⁴¹ Likely, Chávez also said on that year: "Blessed are the poor, for theirs will be the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of justice, the kingdom of peace. Blessed are those who suffer because they will laugh with happiness because they will be happy. The multiplication of the loaves, of the fish, for all of you, to eat. So they

¹³⁹ Juan Eduardo Romero, "El discurso político de Hugo Chávez (1996-1999)," *Espacio abierto* 10, no. 2 (2001), <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/122/12210204.pdf>.

Patricio Navia, "Partidos Políticos como antídoto contra el populismo en América Latina," *Revista de ciencia política (Santiago)* 23 (2003): 259, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237032770_Partidos_Politicos_como_antidoto_contra_el_populismo_en_America_Latina.

¹⁴⁰ Marco Aponte-Moreno and Lance Lattig, "Chávez: Rhetoric Made in Havana," *World Policy Journal* 29, no. 1 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0740277512443528>, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0740277512443528>.

Floreba León and María Gracia Romero, "Construcción lingüística y discursiva de Bolívar y Zamora en los mensajes presidenciales venezolanos," *Opción* 24, no. 57 (2008), <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=31011437007>.

León and Gracia Romero, "Construcción lingüística y discursiva de Bolívar y Zamora en los mensajes presidenciales venezolanos."

¹⁴¹ Original source text: "Ya yo no soy yo. Yo soy un pueblo" TeleSUR, "Ya yo no soy yo, yo soy un pueblo: Chávez," (YouTube). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DmlwRGInWDC>.

5.2. Hugo Chávez Frías: Discourse as a politician

feast and are happy. That is Christ, the one who fought against the empire. Yesterday the Roman, today other empires, the Yankee empire [...].”¹⁴²

Gualda, in his PhD dissertation on *Aló, Presidente*, identifies three types of discourse genre: narration, argumentation and direct dialogue. Many times he would jump from genre to genre in a short time, one of his features. He was an avid orator, who would speak from hours on end without taking a break, most of the time, unscripted. Gualda points out that he would speak on average 75% of the time during his show, which tended to last between little less than 5 up to 7 hours. On 23 September 2007, on the 295th show, *Aló, Presidente* lasted a whopping 8 hours.¹⁴³ Proof that for the Bolivarian regime, the revolution would be, indeed, televised.

Furthermore, in his speeches, he would use strategies to delegitimize all previous democratic governments, as well as the opposition—which he would often refer to as “*escuálidos*” (EN: emancipated or squalid)—.¹⁴⁴ Meanwhile, he would present himself as the bearer of the truth and the agent of the country's transformation into a better one. For this, he would employ othering strategies, presenting an antagonising “we” versus “them,” often helped with constant use of insults, where “them” were the opposition and Venezuela’s traditional parties.¹⁴⁵ Additionally, he would often use the word “*oligarquía*” (EN: oligarchy) to refer to the other “them,” Venezuela’s upper classes. Curiously, the

¹⁴² Original source text: “Bienaventurados los pobres, porque de ellos será el reino de los cielos, el reino de la justicia, el reino de la paz. Bienaventurados los que sufren, porque reirán de felicidad, porque serán felices. La multiplicación de los panes, de los peces, para que todos comáis. Para que se harten y sean felices. Ese es Cristo, el que luchó contra el imperio. Ayer el romano, hoy otros imperios, el imperio Yankee [...]. TeleSUR, “Hugo Chávez pide recordar a Jesucristo,” (YouTube). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iK9-AYxqSJg>.

¹⁴³ Gualda, “The discourse of Hugo Chávez in “Aló Presidente”: establishing the Bolivarian Revolution through television performance,” 106, 78.

Rory Carroll, “Government by TV: Chávez sets 8-hour record,” *The Guardian* (London), 25/09/2007, <http://www.theguardian.com/media/2007/sep/25/venezuela.television>.

¹⁴⁴ Gualda, “The discourse of Hugo Chávez in “Aló Presidente”: establishing the Bolivarian Revolution through television performance,” 211.

¹⁴⁵ Lourdes Cabeza, “El Personalismo en el Discurso Político Venezolano. Un Enfoque Semántico y Pragmático,” *Espacio Abierto* 9 (01/01 2002): 159.

Gualda, “The discourse of Hugo Chávez in “Aló Presidente”: establishing the Bolivarian Revolution through television performance,” 32,156.

5.2. Hugo Chávez Frías: Discourse as a politician

word *boligarquía* (EN: Boligarchy) would be one of the many names given to the new upper class that surged with the Bolivarian regime.¹⁴⁶

The use of these antagonising discursive strategies—including insults—was not limited to Venezuela. He would also employ them at international events. He would gain worldwide fame when he referred to George W. Bush as “*el diablo*” (EN: the devil) at the 61st Annual United Nations General Assembly in 2006.¹⁴⁷ Another famous example took place in Santiago de Chile, at the 17th Ibero-American Summit, where he called the then Spanish primer minister—although referred to as “*presidente de gobierno*” in Spain— José María Aznar, “a fascist”. In response, the then king of Spain, Juan Carlos I, would ask him to quieten, “*¡Por qué no te callas!*” (EN: Why don’t you shut up!).¹⁴⁸

During Chávez speeches, anything could be expected: jokes, personal anecdotes, calls from Fidel Castro, major state decisions, singing. He was a natural showman, which would help him to create a more approachable image of himself. His showmanship was especially true during his weekly Sunday show *Aló presidente*.¹⁴⁹ Also, He attempted to demonstrate that he is trustable and approachable, almost a friend with his personalistic discourse. Likewise, by avoiding using formal language, he separated

¹⁴⁶ Redacción El Confidencial, "Así ayudaron los bancos a la 'boligarquía' de Venezuela a saquear el país," *El Confidencial*, 21/09/2020, https://www.elconfidencial.com/empresas/2020-09-21/bancos-oligarquia-venezuela-saqueo-fincenfiles_2754335/.

Gualda, "The discourse of Hugo Chávez in “Aló Presidente”: establishing the Bolivarian Revolution through television performance," 211.

¹⁴⁷ El País staff, ""Ayer el diablo estuvo aquí. Huele a azufre todavía"," *El País*, 20/09/2006, https://elpais.com/internacional/2006/09/20/actualidad/1158703213_850215.html.

"United Nations General Assembly 61st session," United Nations, 2006, <https://www-un-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/womenwatch/daw/documents/ga61.htm>.

¹⁴⁸ Clarín staff, "El ocaso del Rey Juan Carlos: cuando le faltó el respeto y le gritó "¡por qué no te callas!" a Hugo Chávez," *Clarín* (Buenos Aires), 03/08/2020, https://www.clarin.com/internacional/ocaso-rey-juan-carlos-falto-respeto-grito-callas-hugo-chavez_0_iRcz0PfQS.html.

"XVII Cumbre Iberoamericana Santiago de Chile 2007 - “Cohesión social y políticas sociales para alcanzar sociedades más inclusivas en Iberoamérica”. - SEGIB," Secretaría General Iberoamericana, 2007, accessed 01/06/2021, <https://www.segib.org/?summit=xvii-cumbre-iberoamericana-santiago-de-chile-2007>.

¹⁴⁹ Gualda, "The discourse of Hugo Chávez in “Aló Presidente”: establishing the Bolivarian Revolution through television performance," 1.

El País staff, "Castro llama a Chávez por teléfono en pleno discurso del venezolano en la Cumbre de los Pueblos," *El País* (Madrid), 10/11/2007, https://elpais.com/internacional/2007/11/10/actualidad/1194649215_850215.html.

5.2. Hugo Chávez Frías: Discourse as a politician

himself from the political establishment and attempted to create a familiar bond with his audience, the people.¹⁵⁰

It would be from 2005, a year earlier to when he called George W. Bush “*el diablo*,” that we start seeing a more anti-American discourse, and when he began talking more often about the 21st-century Socialism. He would, from then on, refer more often to historical characters of the Cuban revolution, such as Che Guevara, and of course, Fidel Castro. One of the starting points of this new phase would be the 5th World Social Forum, which took place on 30 January 2005 in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Gualda, "The discourse of Hugo Chávez in “Aló Presidente”: establishing the Bolivarian Revolution through television performance," 76.

¹⁵¹ Germán Sánchez Otero, "Chávez y el socialismo del siglo XXI," *Cubadebate* (La Habana) 2019, <http://www.cubadebate.cu/especiales/2019/02/01/chavez-y-el-socialismo-del-siglo-xxi-ii/>. Maldonado, *La invasión consentida*, 253.

5.3. Discourse analysis of speech of 1 January 2009

Following John B. Thompson's hermeneutic approach to discourse analysis, we would do our analysis in three phases: social-historical context, argumentative analysis and interpretation. The first phase of analysis includes the social-spatial settings, social institutions and technical media of transmission, among other things. In the second phase, an analysis of some of his arguments, and lastly, based on the social-historical context and argumentative analysis, we would attempt to produce an interpretation. Additionally, we should mention that an argumentative analysis aims to render explicit “patterns of inference,” which we would attempt to do by breaking Chávez speech into some of his assertions and organising them around specific topics.¹⁵²

We have chosen the discourse given by Chávez on 1 January 2009 in Caracas' *Panteón Nacional* —the resting place of Simón Bolívar— on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Cuban revolution, as is one of the most telling performances of that new robust partnership built between the Bolivarian and Castroist regimes. Also, Chávez was arguably at the pinnacle of his political career, and he already included elements of the so-called 21st-century socialism into his discourse.

We can find this speech in the Bolivarian official website *todochavez.gob.ve*, where transcripts of nearly all speeches given by Chávez are found, including those offered during his weekly show, *Aló Presidente*. This particular 2009 speech by Chávez has a total length of 3,592 words. However, the original transcript includes an opening speech given by Bolivarian politician Earle Herrera, followed by a speech given by Castroist leader Ramiro Valdés Menéndez. Additionally, it includes references to all sorts of interactions such as “applause” or “¡Viva!”. The original transcript has a total length of 8,387 words; thus, nearly half of the whole transcript are words by Chávez. To facilitate our analysis, we have created a Word file to rid the transcript of references to interactions or exclamations (not produced by Chávez). We have also taken out the speeches by the other speakers during the event. We have used the same segmentation provided by *todochavez.gob.ve*, resulting in twenty-three segments. The final result of the mentioned processing of the original transcript can be found in appendix C, where we highlighted the extracts chosen as samples in our analysis.

¹⁵² Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication*, 281-91.

5.3.1. Social-historical context analysis

At this point in history, Hugo Chávez was well established in power. He had survived a coup d'état attempt and a general strike in 2002. He had won a recall referendum in 2004. However, he had lost the 2007 referendum that would have made it possible for him to be reelected indefinitely, which he would repeat only the following month to when he gave this speech.¹⁵³

Also, at this point, thousands of Cuban workers had arrived in Venezuela to work in the *misiones*, in the context of the 2000's *Convenio Integral de Cooperación Cuba Venezuela* (EN: Integral Agreement of Cooperation). Likely, a daily average of 90,000- 100,000 oil barrels had been supplied to Cuba since the signing of the agreement. Likewise, two secret 2008 agreements between the Castroist and Bolivarian regimes, made public by Reuters in 2019, would allow the Castroist regime to have a strong influence and presence in the Venezuelan army to target and crush any dissent.¹⁵⁴

Chávez had already attended the 2005 Fifth World Social Forum in Rio Grande do Sul, which marks one of the starting points of his use of elements of the so-called 21st-socialism in his discourse. Furthermore, Brent crude oil prices increased steadily since 2004, to reach a historical peak of \$146.08 in July 2008,¹⁵⁵ by the time of the 50th anniversary of the Cuban revolution on 1 January 2009, and prices were around \$40-50.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ staff, "Permanent Council of the OAS.;" alexbellos, "Chavez rises from very peculiar coup," (2002-04-15 2002), <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/apr/15/venezuela.alexbellos>; "In Venezuela's General Strike, the Pinch Becomes Pain (Published 2002)," (2002-12-10 2002), <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/10/world/in-venezuela-s-general-strike-the-pinch-becomes-pain.html>; staff, "Chávez pierde el referéndum sobre la reforma de la Constitución."

¹⁵⁴ Embajada de Cuba en Venezuela Staff, "Convenio Integral de cooperación," (Embajada de la República de Cuba - Embajada de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 2000). <http://www.embajadacuba.com.ve/cuba-venezuela/convenio-colaboracion/>; Nelson Acosta Marianna Parraga, "Exclusive: Venezuela's PDVSA steps up fuel shipments to Cuba as shortages bite," 14/02/2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-venezuela-oil-exclusive-idUSKBN20824M>; Berwick, "Special Report: How Cuba taught Venezuela to quash military dissent.;" Cristina Marcano, "Las relaciones desmedidas," *El País* (Madrid), 30/03/2014, https://elpais.com/internacional/2014/03/28/actualidad/1396026665_272257.html.

¹⁵⁵ Otero, "Chávez y el socialismo del siglo XXI."

¹⁵⁶ Paul Bolton, "Oil Prices," (London: House of Commons Library, 14/07/2021), 8. <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN02106/SN02106.pdf>.

5.3. Hugo Chávez Frías: Discourse analysis of speech of 1 January 2009

From 2006, SAIME, Venezuela's new national identification system, was set up by the Castroist company Albet S.A at a final cost of nearly \$1 billion.¹⁵⁷ In 2007, during the signing ceremony of fourteen new agreements in Santiago de Cuba, Chávez said concerning the island: "Let us be aware that we are one nation." Likely, he expressed that both regimes "in the end we are one government," and that both countries were moving towards a "confederation of Bolivarian, Martian, Caribbean and South American republics, this is not delirium".¹⁵⁸ Moreover, in 2007, the Venezuelan army's motto was changed to *Socialismo, Patria o Muerte* (EN: Socialism, Fatherland or Death), similar to Castroist "*¡Patria o muerte! ¡Venceremos!*" (EN: Fatherland or death! We will win!)¹⁵⁹

The principal assistants to this event were Venezuela's president Hugo Chávez and the Cuban leader Ramiro Valdés Menéndez —one of the original Sierra Maestra rebels of the 1950's Cuban revolution.¹⁶⁰ The event took place on the Panteón Nacional —a national historical monument and the resting place of Simón Bolívar— and as we can see in the picture in figure 4 below. A floral Cuban flag was placed on Bolívar's sarcophagus.

¹⁵⁷ Adriana Rivera, "Cédula electrónica a la cubana," *Armando.info* (Caracas), 20/07/2011, <https://armando.info/cedula-electronica-a-la-cubana/>.

Adriana Rivera, *Más de un millardo de dólares en planes de identidad con Cuba*, Transparencia Internacional (Caracas, 2016), <https://transparencia.org.ve/project/mas-de-un-millardo-de-dolares-en-planes-de-identidad-con-cuba/>.

¹⁵⁸ EFE, "Chávez insiste en que Venezuela y Cuba son 'una sola nación'."

Frank, "Cuba, Venezuela strengthen economic ties."

¹⁵⁹ Reuters, "El Ejército venezolano estrena saludo: 'Patria, socialismo o muerte'," (11/05/2007),

https://elpais.com/diario/2007/05/12/internacional/1178920814_850215.html; El País staff, "El jefe de la Armada

venezolana ordena el uso del lema "¡Patria, socialismo o muerte!," 11/05/2007,

https://elpais.com/internacional/2007/05/12/actualidad/1178920801_850215.html.

Randy Alonso Falcón, "¡Patria o Muerte! ¡Venceremos!," *Cubadebate* (La Habana), 05/03/2020,

<http://www.cubadebate.cu/opinion/2020/03/05/patria-o-muerte-venceremos-2/>.

¹⁶⁰ "Combate de El Hombrito (1958) - EcuRed," EcuRed, 2021, accessed 05/06/2021,

[https://www.ecured.cu/Combate_de_El_Hombrito_\(1958\)](https://www.ecured.cu/Combate_de_El_Hombrito_(1958)).

5.3. Hugo Chávez Frías: Discourse analysis of speech of 1 January 2009



**FIGURE 5: CUBAN LEADER RAMIRO VALDÉS AND HUGO CHÁVEZ
PANTEÓN NACIONAL, CARACAS 1 JANUARY 2009
SOURCE: LA VANGUARDIA¹⁶¹**

The original transcript of this speech is found in the Bolivarian website *todochavez.gob.ve* (specifically on the following link [Intervención del Comandante Presidente Hugo Chávez durante ofrenda floral ante el sarcófago del Libertador Simón Bolívar, con motivo de la celebración del quincuagésimo aniversario de la Revolución Cubana - TodoChávez en la Web \(todochavezenlaweb.gob.ve\)](#)) Concerning this transcript, we must say that, although Spanish is the native language of the author of this thesis, we have created our own ad hoc translation of certain selected extracts into English to present our analysis.

At the event, Ramiro Valdés Menéndez and the Venezuela politician also spoke. It was broadcasted through Venezuela's public TV channel Venezolana de Televisión (VTV), and possibly through all the open-signal private TV channels of the country. The intended target audience was the Venezuelan people.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Redacción, "Venezuela, Bolivia y Nicaragua felicitan a Cuba por el 50 aniversario de la revolución," *La Vanguardia* (Barcelona), 01/01/2009, <https://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20090101/53609059194/venezuela-bolivia-y-nicaragua-felicitan-a-cuba-por-el-50-aniversario-de-la-revolucion.html>.

¹⁶² Cuba Información Staff, "Acto en Venezuela por el 50º aniversario de la revolución cubana " (06/01/2009: Cuba Información TV). <https://cubainformacion.tv/cuba/20090106/26672/26672-acto-en-venezuela-por-el-50-aniversario-de-la-revolucion-cubana-y-parte-4>.

5.3.2. Argumentative analysis

Chávez political discourse became dominant ever since he came to power, even though he disrupted the dominant political discourses present in Venezuela until 1998. Yet, his discourse was still part of a continuum of populist political discourses existing in the country since 1958. The dominance of Chávez discourse is clear if we take Foucault's "mechanics by which one is produced as the dominant discourse":¹⁶³ the discourse was produced at an event with public funding and in a national public monument —where lies the remains of the ultimate hero and prominent protagonist of Venezuela's independence movement narrative. Thus, he used the state machinery to produce this January 2009 speech — as is the case for all his speeches during his presidency.

A see-through feature of this speech is the mode Chávez constructs his subject position vis-à-vis the Cuban revolution. Chávez uses the pronoun "nosotros" (EN: we) nineteen times throughout the speech. He identifies "us" with "the people of Venezuelan" and the "Bolivarian revolution". Venezuelan people/Bolivarian revolution/we are presented as true followers of the Cuban revolution. Equally, he creates identity bonds between the peoples of Cuban and Venezuelan and the Cuban and Bolivarian revolution. As in the following extracts:

"[...] our peoples are already one, our revolutions are already one; the empire that attacked us and taught us will end up being paper tiger, as Comrade Mao Tse Tung said."¹⁶⁴ (see Appendix C, segment 17)

" [...] give us how to serve Cuba and she will have in us children. Children of the great fatherland."¹⁶⁵ (see Appendix C, segment 7)

¹⁶³ S. Mills, *Discourse* (Taylor & Francis, 2006), 17.

¹⁶⁴ Original Source text: "[...] nuestros pueblos ya son uno solo, nuestras revoluciones ya son una sola; el imperio que nos asechó y nos asecha terminará siendo tigre de papel, como decía el camarada Mao Tse Tung."

¹⁶⁵ Original source text: "[...] dénos Cuba en que servirla y tendrá en nosotros hijos e hijas. Hijos de la Patria grande somos"

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“The Bolivarian Revolution came here to stay, we did not come here to betray once again the hope of the people of Simón Bolívar, we came here just as you came to Havana on a day like today 50 years ago.”¹⁶⁶ (see Appendix C, segment 19)

Moreover, we should remark that in the Spanish language, frequently verbs are said without personal pronouns —otherwise known as *pronombre tácito* or tacit pronoun— so an examination of the subject positioning within the speech must look into verbs in the second person plural, not only the pronoun “we,” as in the following extract, which in Spanish the tacit pronoun is used:

“The Cuba of Martí, the infinite Cuba we love, for Cuba we mourn, for Cuba we fight, and for Cuba we are willing to die fighting if we had to die fighting for revolutionary Cuba.”¹⁶⁷ (see Appendix C, segment 5)

Again, we see a subject positioning where “we” equals the Venezuelan people, and as a collective, these are willing to “fight or die for Cuba,” according to Chávez.

According to Hall, identification in a discourse is the "recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal". A continuing construction process, where "like all signifying practices, it is subject to the 'play' of *différance*. It obeys the logic of more-than-one. Since it operates across difference as a process, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of 'frontier effects'. It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process."¹⁶⁸ In this sense, Chávez employs othering strategies where he places a “frontier” between that “we” he is constructing in his discourse and the “empire” —the US— which is repeated seven times in this speech, as in the following extracts:

¹⁶⁶ Original source text: ““La Revolución Bolivariana llegó aquí para quedarse, nosotros no llegamos aquí para traicionar una vez más la esperanza del pueblo de Simón Bolívar, nosotros llegamos aquí así como ustedes llegaron a La Habana un día como hoy hace 50 años”

¹⁶⁷ Original source text: “[...] *la Cuba de Martí, la Cuba infinita que amamos, por Cuba lloramos, por Cuba peleamos, y por Cuba estamos dispuesto a morir peleando si hubiera que morir peleando por Cuba revolucionaria [...]*”

¹⁶⁸ Hall Stuart, "Introduction: who needs identity?," *Questions of cultural identity* (1996): 2-3, <https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781446221907.n1>.

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“[...] two countries with great riches, two countries with deep roots, two countries on which the empire not only placed its eagle eyes but on which it lashed out by nailing its imperial eagle claws.”¹⁶⁹ (see Appendix C, segment 10)

Or in the excerpt:

“ [...] from Venezuela the invasion of Grenada was supported to curtail the Grenada Revolution, this was a conspiracy base of the CIA, the Pentagon and the empire, Venezuela was the shame of this Continent [...]”¹⁷⁰ (see Appendix C, segment 13)

A trait of Chávez discourse is his constant references to historical characters. In this case, he also constructs a symbiotic unified identity between Venezuela and Cuba by referring to Simón Bolívar and José Martí. Chávez mentions Bolívar thirty-one times, and Martí, sixteen. An example of this use of both Bolívar and Martí to create that symbiotic identity we find in the following extract:

“Fidel said, 'Look for him, his name is José Martí...' I said the same one day while in jail; who was the leader of this? Look for him; he is called Simon Bolivar[...] Martí and Bolivar are closer together today than ever before.”¹⁷¹ (see Appendix C, segment 17)

Also, this speech by Chávez belongs to a discursive tradition that we can link to the radical left-wing in the political spectrum, as we find samples of intertextuality that suggest that political extreme-left discursive tradition links. Intertextuality is understood here as the relation of text with other past texts,

¹⁶⁹ Original source text: “[...], dos países con grandes riquezas, dos países con unas raíces profundas, dos países sobre los cuales el imperio no sólo colocó sus ojos de águila sino sobre los cuales arremetió clavando sus garras de águila imperial[...].”

¹⁷⁰ Original source text: “[...] desde Venezuela se apoyó la invasión a Grenada para cercenar la Revolución de Grenada, esta era una base de conspiración de la CIA, del Pentágono y del imperio, era Venezuela la vergüenza de este Continente [...]”

¹⁷¹ Original source text: “[...] Fidel dijo: ‘Búsqwenlo, se llama José Martí...’ Igual dije yo un día preso ya, ¿quién dirigió esto? Búsqwenlo, se llama Simón Bolívar[...] Martí y Bolívar están hoy más juntos que nunca [...]”

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which had been used to create meanings in other historical contexts.¹⁷² As such, we find instances of intertextuality in the following extract:

“[...] when Simón Bolívar returned to Caracas, having taken heaven by storm, because Bolivar took the sky by storm, even though the phrase emerged, as we know, many years later in the Russia that was raising under the leadership of Lenin; but already Simón Bolívar had taken heaven by storm, and not only was it a metaphor, no, Ayacucho is heaven, Potosí is heaven, utopia.”¹⁷³ (see Appendix C, segment 6)

In the above extract, we can clearly see a reference to the 1907 "to storm heaven" phrase by Lenin found in the preface to the Russian translation of *Karl Marx's Letters to Dr Kugelmann*. The English translation of the passage where this famous phrase is found goes as follows: "And like a participant in the mass struggle, to which he reacted with all his characteristic ardour and passion, Marx, then living in exile in London, set to work to criticise the immediate steps of the 'recklessly brave' Parisians who were 'ready to storm heaven.'"¹⁷⁴ Also, we discover references to the 1946-1947 interviews to Mao Tse Tung, done by the American journalist Anna Louise Strong, where Mao clarified his "all imperialist are paper tigers" concept.¹⁷⁵ Also, throughout the speech, as a typical feature of Chávez discourse where he shows himself as a "friend," we find that he takes the time to tell us little stories about his life, the life of "Fidel", Martí and Simón Bolívar. He constructs his narrative as both the narrator —who articulates the language that forms the narrative— and the focalisator — the possessor of the "correct" point of view.¹⁷⁶ As such, we find it in the following extract:

¹⁷² Naomi van Stapele, "Intersubjectivity, self-reflexivity and agency: Narrating about 'self' and 'other' in feminist research," *Women's Studies International Forum* 43 (2014/03/01/ 2014): 15, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2013.06.010>, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277539513001210>.

¹⁷³ Original source text: “[...] cuando Simón Bolívar retornó a Caracas, después de haber tomado el cielo por asalto, porque Bolívar tomó el cielo por asalto, aún cuando la frase surgió, como sabemos, muchos años después en la Rusia que se levantaba dirigida por Lenin; pero ya Simón Bolívar había tomado el cielo por asalto, y no sólo era una metáfora, no, Ayacucho es el cielo, Potosí es el cielo, la utopía.”

¹⁷⁴ "Preface to the Russian Translation of Karl Marx's Letters to Dr. Kugelmann," Marxists.org, 1907, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1907/feb/05.htm>.

¹⁷⁵ Tracy B. Strong and Helene Keyssar, "Anna Louise Strong: Three Interviews with Chairman Mao Zedong," *The China Quarterly*, no. 103 (1985): 489, <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/653968>.

¹⁷⁶ M. Bal and C. van Boheemen, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (University of Toronto Press, 2009), 19.

5.3. Hugo Chávez Frías: Discourse analysis of speech of 1 January 2009

On the other hand, Chávez discourse is part of a lengthy political Venezuelan tradition of populism, where the leader's charisma, personalism, and messianism are prevalent.¹⁷⁷ Nevertheless, he produces a discourse that takes a stance against Venezuela's democratic past, demonising the two main political parties, AD and COPEI, by denouncing their corruption, elitism, and supposed subordination to the US. He tones down the importance of Venezuela's democracy since the 1950s and denigrates the politicians and political parties that preceded his arrival to power.¹⁷⁸ As we find in the following extract:

“Here they came, the so-called leaders: Rómulo Betancourt, Jóvito Villalba, Raúl Leoni, Rafael Caldera, Carlos Andrés Pérez and those so-called parents of democracy ... and installed a true tyranny of the elite, of of the elites, a bourgeois state kneeling to the American empire.”¹⁷⁹ (see Appendix C, segment 13)

Chávez also mentions president Rómulo Betancourt (1959-1964, AD) —considered one of the fathers of Venezuela's democracy— who met Fidel Castro shortly after the success of the Cuban Revolution on an official visit by Castro to Caracas at the end of January 1959.¹⁸⁰ As we find in the following extract:

“It was precisely the Venezuelan Democratic Action government led by Rómulo Betancourt, one of the most active in the international conspiracy against Cuba, of course, obeying the mandate of the North American empire.”¹⁸¹ (see Appendix C, segment 13)

By reading the previous extract "against the grain" —where we also interpret the "silences" considered as important as the uttered words—¹⁸² we see that Chávez is not telling us the main reason for Castro's

¹⁷⁷ Emilia Bermúdez and Gildardo Martínez, "Hugo Chávez: la articulación de un sentido para la acción colectiva," *Espacio abierto* 9, no. 1 (2000), <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/122/12290104.pdf>.

¹⁷⁸ Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 131.

Romero, "El discurso político de Hugo Chávez (1996-1999)," 237.

¹⁷⁹ Original source text: "Aquí llegaron los supuestos líderes: Rómulo Betancourt, Jóvito Villalba, Raúl Leoni, Rafael Caldera, Carlos Andrés Pérez y aquellos supuestos padres de la democracia [...] e instalaron una verdadera tiranía de la élite, o de las élites un Estado burgués arrodillado al imperio norteamericano [...]"

¹⁸⁰ John D. Martz, "Revolution, Reformism, and the Failure of Insurrection: Political Change and the Venezuelan Experience," *Caribbean Quarterly* 41, no. 3/4 (1995): 64, <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/40653943>.

¹⁸¹ Original Source text: "fue precisamente el gobierno venezolano de Acción Democrática dirigido por Rómulo Betancourt, uno de los más activos en la conspiración internacional contra Cuba, claro, obedeciendo el mandato del imperio norteamericano"

¹⁸² K. Willemsse, *One Foot in Heaven: Narratives on Gender and Islam in Darfur, West-Sudan* (Brill, 2007), 23.

1959 official visit, which was the request of a \$300 million loan in the form of oil. Chávez also chooses to ignore the financing and training of guerrilla movements in Venezuela instigated from La Habana, including the infamous 1967 Machurucuto disembarkation.¹⁸³

5.3.3. Interpretations

In this speech, Chávez constructed a “we” subject position amalgamating the identities of the Venezuelan people, himself and the Bolivarian revolution, while putting that “we” as subservient to Cuba and its revolution. He employs othering strategies to mark a frontier between that “we” and the “empire,” presenting himself as the bearer of the truth. In his discourse, we also find instances of intertextuality with other emblematic discourses that can be linked to the radical left in the political spectrum. On the other hand, his discourse is part of a long tradition of populism present in the country since the beginning of democracy in the late 1950s, based on the leader's charisma, personalism and messianism. But at the same time, he denigrates Venezuela's democratic past and its representatives by denouncing the corruption of Venezuela's traditional political parties. Lastly, he keeps silent about the uneasy relations between Castro's Cuba and Venezuela in the 1960s and about the corruption of his own government. All of which was taking place with the background of high oil prices, especially in 2008.¹⁸⁴ The supply to Cuba of an average of 90,000-100,000 oil barrels per day, in the context of several agreements between the Castroist and Bolivarian regimes since 2000. Likely, the adjudication to Castroist Albet S.A. from 2006 with the creation of SAIME, the new national identification system, and a controversial 2008 secret agreement signed between the two regimes allowed the Castroist intervention in Venezuela's military to crush any potential dissent.¹⁸⁵ Not to mention, Chávez saying in 2007 that both countries were moving towards a "confederation of Bolivarian, Martian, Caribbean and South American republics, this is not delirium".¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 108.

Goodman, "Decades after failed invasion, Cuba still eyes Venezuela."

The New York Times staff, "O.A.S. Official Says Weapons In Venezuela Had Cuban Insignia; Caracas Reports 'More Arms' Leoni's Election to Be Affirmed (Published 1963)," (The New York Times), 14/12/1963, <https://www.nytimes.com/1963/12/14/archives/oas-official-says-weapons-in-venezuela-had-cuban-insignia-caracas.html>.

¹⁸⁴ Bolton, "Oil Prices," 8.

¹⁸⁵ Staff, "Convenio Integral de cooperación."; Marianna Parraga, "Exclusive: Venezuela's PDVSA steps up fuel shipments to Cuba as shortages bite."; Berwick, "Special Report: How Cuba taught Venezuela to quash military dissent."; Marcano, "Las relaciones desmedidas." Rivera, "Cédula electrónica a la cubana."

¹⁸⁶ EFE, "Chávez insiste en que Venezuela y Cuba son 'una sola nación'." Frank, "Cuba, Venezuela strengthen economic ties."

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Given the social-historical context existing when Chávez gave this 1 January 2009 speech, celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Cuba revolution in Caracas, and at the resting place of Simón Bolívar. How are we supposed to interpret when Chávez said: “[...] for Cuba we are willing to die fighting if we had to die fighting for revolutionary Cuba.”?¹⁸⁷ One possible answer is that Chávez is not hiding his devotion for the Castroist regime, for whom, as president of Venezuela, gave access to such sensitive areas as identification and the army, not to mention a steady supply of oil. Perhaps a confirmation that he, as president, allowed a consented foreign intervention, which would permit him to maintain his grip on power in Venezuela, as well as to provide funding for the Castroist regime he revered.

¹⁸⁷ Original source text: “[...] *la Cuba de Martí, la Cuba infinita que amamos, por Cuba lloramos, por Cuba peleamos, y por Cuba estamos dispuesto a morir peleando si hubiera que morir peleando por Cuba revolucionaria [...]*”

6. From petrostate to kleptocracy

In this chapter, we explore Venezuela's history with oil. As Ross stated in *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the development of Nations* (2013), the real effects of the curse of oil would not be really felt until the 1980s, during the hangover years that succeeded the oil party era of the 1970s. For many oil-producing countries as Venezuela, the enormous wealth brought during that period did not translate into more development but rather, more corruption and mismanagement. The situation was exacerbated further by the wave of nationalisations of oil industries around the world in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, such as in the case of Venezuela in 1976.¹⁸⁸ However, the effects of oil curse, such as the Dutch Disease, had already affected Venezuela very early on, with the collapse of its agricultural sector, quite especially its coffee exports by the 1950s, Venezuela's main source of income until the 1920s —together with cocoa, although less so from mid 19th century.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, the oil curse would impact Venezuela again in the 21st century in the context of high oil prices of the late 2000s and early 2010s; more corruption and mismanagement characterised this period, in combination with the secrecy surrounding oil income. But this time it had also affected PDVSA, the Venezuela breadwinner. By 2020, it has been estimated that Venezuela received more income from remittances from its large diaspora than from oil exports.¹⁹⁰

We have divided this chapter into two subsections:

- The Venezuelan petrostate and the curse of oil
- The advancement into a kleptocracy

¹⁸⁸ Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations*, 47-66.

¹⁸⁹ staff, "Coffee Exports by Country: trends over time 1905-2010."

John V. Lombardi and James A. Hanson, "The First Venezuelan Coffee Cycle 1830-1855," *Agricultural History* 44, no. 4 (1970), <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/3741520>.

Nikita Harwich Vallenilla, "The Eastern Venezuela Pioneer Front, 1830s–1930s: The Role of the Corsican Trade Network," in *Cocoa Pioneer Fronts since 1800: The Role of Smallholders, Planters and Merchants*, ed. William Gervase Clarence-Smith (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1996).

¹⁹⁰ Bolton, "Oil Prices," 9; Luis A. Pacheco, "PDVSA 1998: antes de la tormenta," *Prodavinci*, 17/10/2018,

<https://prodavinci.com/pdvs-a-1998-antes-de-la-tormenta/>; Daniel Wallis, "Venezuela's PDVSA to keep funding socialist programs under Maduro," *Reuters* 15/04/2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-election-oil-idUSBRE93E0B520130415>; Provea, "Despido de 18.000 trabajadores de PDVSA en 2003 fue un genocidio laboral, asegura Horacio Medina | PROVEA."

Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations*, 64.

6.1. The Venezuelan petrostate and the curse of oil

A petrostate is an informal term used to refer to states that rely almost exclusively on, or to a great degree, on income coming from the export of oil or natural gas. In these states, economic and political power is concentrated in a minority elite. Corruption is widespread, and political institutions are frail and lack transparency.¹⁹¹ This seems to be quite the case of Venezuela from the beginnings of oil extraction in the country in the early 20th century. As such, *caudillo* Cipriano Castro in 1904, through a decree-law, appointed himself as the only administrator of oil concessions. Juan Vicente Gómez, likely, would follow Cipriano Castros footsteps and run the granting of oil concessions for personal gains.¹⁹²

In 1920, a new oil law meant to restrict the power of foreign oil companies was created. But by 1922, the law was changed for the benefit of the big oil companies running the concessions in Venezuela. All to the benefit of Juan Vicente Gómez (1908-1935), whose long dictatorship was characterised by the prevalence of corruption. Gómez —who would become the most prominent landowner in the country— and his entourage also benefitted enormously from the agrarian business, especially cattle, one of the main economic activities in Venezuela. They would come to have a monopoly over the wealth generated by the agrarian sector, and then, with the start of industrial exploitation of oil at a grand scale in the 1920s, they would pitch in the royalties generated by the oil concessions exploited in very favourable conditions by American and European oil companies.¹⁹³

It is hard not to draw similarities between the Gomecista regime of the early 20th century and the Chavista or Bolivarian regime at the beginning of the 21st century. Like Hugo Chávez, Gómez also attempted to establish a connection between his persona and Simón Bolívar.¹⁹⁴ Officially, and

¹⁹¹ "Venezuela: The Rise and Fall of a Petrostate," Council on Foreign Relations, updated 24/01/2019, <https://www.cfr.org/background/venezuela-crisis>.

¹⁹² Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 77-79.

¹⁹³ Doug Yarrington, "Cattle, Corruption, and Venezuelan State Formation during the Regime of Juan Vicente Gómez, 1908-35," *Latin American Research Review* 38, no. 2 (2003): 11-13, <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/1555418>.

¹⁹⁴ José de Córdoba Muñoz and Schaefer Sara, "Deceased Leader Is Idolized Like His Own Idol, Bolívar," *The Wall Street Journal* (New York), 08/03/2013 2013, <https://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323628804578348590938157724.html>.

6.1. From petrostate to kleptocracy: The Venezuelan petrostate and the curse of oil

suspiciously coincidentally, Juan Vicente Gómez was born and died on the same day as Simón Bolívar (24 July and 17 December respectively).¹⁹⁵ Chávez was obsessed with Simón Bolívar, and he used and manipulated this historical character extensively for the promotion of his own persona and of his so-called revolution. Gómez died as one of the richest men in Latin America with control over numerous industries.¹⁹⁶ Chávez, who unlike Gómez came from humble origins, died a very rich man according to many sources, and his whole family are now part of the Bolocracy —the new upper class formed by members of the military, government officials, entrepreneurs, cronies and family— although the majority of them are thought to no longer live in Venezuela. Moreover, today critical sectors of the Venezuelan economy are now at the hands of a few individuals who are part of the Bolivarian regime or are well connected to it.¹⁹⁷

Likewise, the Gomecista and Bolivarian regimes shared the same dislike for any form of dissent and employed all kinds of human rights violations to suppress it.¹⁹⁸ Also, the dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gómez saw the beginnings of Venezuela as a petrostate and the starting point of the curse of oil. Nevertheless, corruption did not start in Venezuela with the petrostate. As in most countries in Latin America, corruption is as old as the country. Samples of this extant corruption were already present in colonial times. The Caracas elite made their wealth with the contraband of cocoa, tobacco, cowhides, and precious metals sold to the Dutch and the British, contravening Spanish colonial monopoly laws.¹⁹⁹ In 1813 —during Venezuela's war for independence— and again in 1824, Simón Bolívar decreed the death penalty for corruption cases.²⁰⁰ In 1875, for instance, the minister of finance during one of

¹⁹⁵ Time Magazine Staff, "VENEZUELA: Death of a Dictator," *Time* (New York), 30/12/1935.

¹⁹⁶ R. Gallegos, *Crude Nation: How Oil Riches Ruined Venezuela* (Potomac Books/ University of Nebraska Press, 2019), 58.

¹⁹⁷ Semana Staff, "Los bienes que habría dejado Chávez," *Semana* (Bogotá), 14/03/2013, <https://www.semana.com/mundo/articulo/los-bienes-habria-dejado-chavez/336733-3/>.

Héctor Pereira Agencia EFE, "Venezuela: ocho años después de la muerte de Hugo Chávez | EL ESPECTADOR," *El Espectador*, 05/03/2021 2021, <https://www.elespectador.com/mundo/america/venezuela-ocho-anos-despues-de-la-muerte-de-hugo-chavez-article/>; Fernando Llano, "Los clanes chavistas más poderosos de Venezuela | EL ESPECTADOR," *El Espectador* (Bogotá), 02/07/2017, <https://www.elespectador.com/mundo/america/los-clanes-chavistas-mas-poderosos-de-venezuela-article-700940/>.

Jessica Carrillo Mazzali, "Los nuevos ricos del barrio - Chavismo Inc," *Chavismo Inc.*, 04/06/2020, <https://chavismoinc.com/los-nuevos-ricos-del-barrio/>.

¹⁹⁸ Gallegos, *Crude Nation: How Oil Riches Ruined Venezuela*, 58.

staff, "Venezuela: Chávez's Authoritarian Legacy: Dramatic Concentration of Power and Open Disregard for Basic Human Right."

¹⁹⁹ Ricardo Cierbide Martinena, "La Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas y los vascos en Venezuela durante el siglo XVIII," (1997): 66, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/11497564.pdf>.

²⁰⁰ Coronel, "The Corruption of Democracy in Venezuela."

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Antonio Guzmán Blanco's dictatorship was already talking about the messy state of the nation's finances.²⁰¹

Venezuela's 20th century last military dictator, Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1948-1958), was not any different from Juan Vicente Gómez, although seemingly contained— corruption and lack of transparency. He also followed his Gómez in using oil revenues to fund many projects that served as building blocks of Venezuela as a nation, such as the building of the Maracaibo Lake bridge or Guri Hydroelectric Dam.²⁰² With the arrival of democracy, the 1960s were characterised by more transparency in the use of public funds during the presidencies of Rómulo Betancourt (AD), Raúl Leoni (AD) and Rafael Caldera (COPEI). During these years, the Venezuelan democracy transformed into a model for many countries and attracted many immigrants, including many political exiles. However, the dependence on oil revenues that had transformed the country into a petrostate at the beginning of the 20th century was not to change with its transition into a democracy. As already mentioned, the transition set forward by the 1958 "*Pacto de Punto Fijo*," a pact between the representatives of the main political parties of that time, AD COPEI, and the lesser-known URD, which guarantee the share of power between the AD and COPEI and the distribution of oil wealth among their respective clientelist networks.²⁰³

But, despite the prevalence of corruption, political instability and concentration of power in the hands of few, Venezuela was not that different from many countries in Latin America until the 1970s. It would not be until the 1980s, as indicated by Ross in his book *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations*, that we would start seeing the real damaging effects of the oil curse. From the 1980s, countries whose economies depended mainly on oil or natural gas exports were 50% more likely to be dictatorships or embroiled in civil wars, more corrupt and more vulnerable to the ups and downs of oil prices.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 69-70.

²⁰² Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 95-99.

²⁰³ Harold A. Trinkunas, "The Crisis in Venezuelan Civil-Military Relations: From Punto Fijo to the Fifth Republic," *Latin American Research Review* 37, no. 1 (2002), <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/2692104>.

²⁰⁴ Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations*, 25-26.

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As also explained by Ross, the oil curse seems to have its roots in the 1970s oil crises. At this point, many oil-producing countries had nationalised their oil industries, which meant that their economies were inundated with copious amounts of money, which rather than benefitting, were very damaging in terms of corruption and mismanagement. Also, it brought crippling effects to other local industries, especially agriculture, as the effects of the Dutch disease set in.²⁰⁵ This was especially true for Venezuela that had nationalised its oil industry in 1976.²⁰⁶ Ross further explains how the Dutch Disease makes local agriculture and manufacturing industries smaller and more dependent on government subsidies.²⁰⁷ In the case of Venezuela, during the first presidency of Carlos Andrés Pérez (AD) (1974-1979), a programme called “La gran Venezuela” would be launched, which attempted to diversify Venezuela’s economy with the creation of a series of heavy industries in the South of the country. As part of the programme, the government spent \$2 billion and created around 300 state companies that never profit. This period saw the first explosion of massive corruption that expanded beyond the ruling elite. Also, many instances of mismanagement, such as the gift by the Pérez administration of a ship to Bolivia. As a gesture for their claim to access the sea lost in the 19th century’s *Guerra del Pacífico* (English: War of the Pacific).²⁰⁸ Additionally, Venezuela’s agricultural sector suffered greatly, again a consequence of the Dutch disease. By the 1970s, Venezuela imported 80% of its food stocks, close to 90% today. But these effects had already taken place in the early 20th century when Venezuela stopped being one of the top world coffee producers and exporters due to the beginning of oil exploitation.²⁰⁹

Starting in the 1980s, corruption continued to be at very high levels. Mainly during Jaime Lusinchi presidency (AD) (1984–1989), which saw \$36 billion disappeared through a programme of currency control established in the country since 18 February 1983, on the otherwise known as *Viernes negro* (black Friday), which saw the devaluation of Venezuela’s currency for the first time in decades.²¹⁰ The triggers of this massive theft were no different than those that would enable corruption during the first quarter of the 21st century: frail political institutions, absence of administrative transparency and

²⁰⁵ Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations*, 54-55.

²⁰⁶ Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 124.

²⁰⁷ Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations*, 56.

²⁰⁸ Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 123-33.

²⁰⁹ staff, "Coffee Exports by Country: trends over time 1905-2010."

Terry Lynn Karl, "Petroleum and Political Pacts: The Transition to Democracy in Venezuela," *Latin American Research Review* 22, no. 1 (1987): 68, <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/2503543>.

²¹⁰ Tarver, *The History of Venezuela*, 131.

Edgardo Lander and Luis A. Fierro, "The Impact of Neoliberal Adjustment in Venezuela, 1989-1993," *Latin American Perspectives* 23, no. 3 (1996): 50, <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/2634107>.

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controls, colossal amounts of money at the hands of the government, and populism. By 1997 some estimate that \$1 trillion have gone up in the air since 1972.²¹¹

Furthermore, as a consequence of the 1970s' oil crises, by the beginning of the next decade, world oil consumption dropped dramatically, especially in industrialised countries, but also in countries like Brazil, where an alternative ethanol industry was developed. The lack of consumption, together with the successful development of new oilfields in Alaska, the North Sea, Siberia and the Gulf of Mexico, and the lack of agreement among OPEC members over production quotas, lead to a world oil surplus known as the 1980s oil glut. By the end of the decade, oil prices dropped as low as below \$10 per barrel (\$22 approximately in today's dollars). Furthermore, OPEC lost its preeminent position in the world oil markets as new non-OPEC big producers emerged, quite especially the USSR that became the biggest oil producer in the world.²¹² The 1980s' world oil prices collapse had great repercussions on the Venezuelan economy that was and still is totally dependent on oil revenues. The economy contracted, and inflation rose from 6% to 12% between 1982 and 1986 up to 30 to 40% yearly by the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, with a peak of 84% in 1989.²¹³

²¹¹ Coronel, "The Corruption of Democracy in Venezuela."

²¹² Edward R. Fried, "After the Oil Glut," *The Brookings Bulletin* 18, no. 3/4 (1982), <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/43199743>.

²¹³ Marta Kulesza, *Inflation and hyperinflation in Venezuela (1970s-2016): A post-Keynesian interpretation*, Working paper (2017), 11-14, <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/171264/1/1004712634.pdf>.

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When Hugo Chávez was first elected president in 1998, three big promises formed his campaign: creating a new constitution, combating poverty, and eradicating corruption. To this date, only one of those three promises was kept, creating a new constitution. And Venezuela's 1999 new Magna Carta and other legislative amendments that came after have only served to destroyed all previous political institutions and put in its place a new bureaucracy that better served the interest of the Bolivarian regime and the proliferation of corruption. The rise in international oil prices did not translate into institutional or administrative strengthening. On the contrary, it resulted in disorganised and fragmented social spending that did not translate into improved productivity, led to waste, inefficiency, corruption and a severe increase in public debt. Also, With the arrival of Chávez to power, there have been three significant transformations in the Venezuelan oil industry: the loss of independence of PDVSA, the steady decline in PDVSA's productivity, and a significant increase in oil income during the second half of the 2000s, and the first half of the 2010s. All three factors have contributed to nurturing massive corruption to levels never experienced in the country.²¹⁴

Coronel, a renowned political scientist expert on Venezuela, identifies three types of corruption taken place since the arrival of Hugo Chávez to power:

- Grand corruption, directly linked to political decisions by the Bolivarian political elite.
- Bureaucratic corruption, linked to Venezuela's public sector
- Systemic corruption, linked to the interface between the private and public sectors²¹⁵

The corruption developed with the Bolivarian revolution has effectively created a new elite, the *Boligarquía* (EN: Boligarchy), and a new type of entrepreneur, the *Bolichicos* (EN: Boliguys).²¹⁶

²¹⁴ G. Coronel, "Corruption, Mismanagement, and Abuse of Power in Hugo Chávez's Venezuela," (2006).

Marianna Parraga, "Exclusive: Venezuela's PDVSA steps up fuel shipments to Cuba as shortages bite."; Pacheco, "PDVSA 1998: antes de la tormenta."; Wallis, "Venezuela's PDVSA to keep funding socialist programs under Maduro."

²¹⁵ Coronel, "The Corruption of Democracy in Venezuela."

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Moreover, the new type of corruption experienced in Venezuela since the arrival of Chávez to power has meant the demise of PDVSA. As published by the New York Times in October 2020, Venezuela used to be the biggest producer and exporter of oil in Latin America, earning on average \$90 billion per year in the 2000s; in 2020, the country was only expected to earn \$2.3 billion. Less than the remittances sent by Venezuela's now large diaspora community.²¹⁷ This means that the country no longer meets one of the criteria to be a petrostate, that is, most of its income coming from oil and natural gas exports.²¹⁸

Indeed, the Bolivarian regime, under Maduro leadership, has increasingly been resourcing other ways to obtain income to keep afloat, quite notably with the sale of gold. Some of this gold is being illegally mined in the country's south. But the Bolivarian regime has also made no reparations in emptying Venezuela's central bank vaults to provide gold for those sales. According to several reports, gold is later to be sold in Turkey, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates.²¹⁹ Furthermore, the gold is mined in the South of the country, in what is called the *Arco Minero* (EN: Mineral Arch), just south of the Orinoco River. The exploitation of gold in the area has meant destroying large sections of tropical forest and pollution. It has affected indigenous communities, and it has created an environment of generalised lawlessness. Many of the mines are controlled by criminal gangs or Colombian guerilla groups —Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) and dissidents from Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)— 220 with the complicity of Venezuela's Bolivarian army.²²¹

²¹⁶ Redacción El Confidencial, "Así ayudaron los bancos a la 'boligarquía' de Venezuela a saquear el país."

Antonio María Delgado Nathan Jaccard Antonio Baquero Jay Weaver, "Los 'bolichicos' abrieron su caja de valores en Luxemburgo," *Armando Info* (Caracas) 2021, <https://armando.info/los-bolichicos-abrieron-su-caja-de-valores-en-luxemburgo/>.

²¹⁷ Anatoly Kurmanaev Sheyla Urdaneta, Isayen Herrera, Adriana Loureiro Fernandez, "Venezuela, Once an Oil Giant, Reaches the End of an Era - The New York Times," *The New York Times* (New York), 07/10/2020 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com.eur.idm.oclc.org/2020/10/07/world/americas/venezuela-oil-economy-maduro.html>.

²¹⁸ Labrador, "Venezuela: The Rise and Fall of a Petrostate."

²¹⁹ Reuters staff, "Mali, Emirates facilitated Venezuelan gold trade in 2020, opposition says," *Reuters* (London), 05/03/2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics-gold-idUSKCN2AX0QO>.

Mark Lowen, "Turkey warned over Venezuela gold trade," *BBC News* (London), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-47092784>.

Ben Bartenstein Patricia Laya, "Iran Is Hauling Gold Bars Out of Venezuela's Almost-Empty Vaults," *Bloomberg*, 30/04/2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-30/iran-is-hauling-gold-bars-out-of-venezuela-s-almost-empty-vaults>.

Irmak Karel, "Turkish foreign policy in Venezuela: What factors can explain Turkey's sudden and accelerated rapprochement with Venezuela in the last years?," *Relaciones Internacionales* 92 (01/01 2019): 10-11.

²²⁰ (EN: National Liberation Army; Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)

²²¹ "Arco Minero Destroys Venezuelan Forests | Global Forest Watch Blog," Global Forest Watch, updated 25/03/2021, accessed 05/06/2021, <https://www.globalforestwatch.org/blog/commodities/arco-minero-venezuela-gold-mining>.

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Likely, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights reported in 2020 on the situation on the *Arco Minero*, with the exploitation of miners who are pushed to work up to twelve hours without any protective equipment. Likely, the miners must pay 10-20% of their earnings to the criminal gangs or guerrilla groups controlling the mines and 15-30% to the owner of the mills where the gold is extracted. Also, reports of sexual exploitation, including minors, and other sorts of human rights violations. A situation where there is no state and order is at the hands of criminals gangs or guerrilla groups.²²²

As these territories where the state is absent in the south of the country, we also have areas where the state has not presented in urban centres, quite notably in and around Caracas. Areas euphemistically called *Zonas de Paz* (EN: Peace zones), where since 2013, under the rule already of Nicolás Maduro, large areas of towns or *barrios* (EN: Venezuelan name for a shanty town) were put under the control of gangs, and the police or any state security entity withdrew. Such was the case of the Barlovento region, a few kilometres west of Caracas. Once a thriving beach touristic destination, now it lays abandoned and under the control of criminal gangs, with a local population who had deserted the area. In more recent developments of these so-called “peace zones”, during the month of July 2021, an armed battle, lasting several days, took place in Cota 905, a *barrio* in Caracas. The Bolivarian security attempted to take back control from the powerful “Banda del Koki” (El Koki’s gang), apparently with success., but the gang’s leader, El Koki, was never captured.²²³

In a 2019 report, the Venezuelan chapter of Transparency International, after reviewing official publications in 20 countries, could gather a total of 70 corruptions cases involving 300 individuals and 12

"Illegal Mining in Venezuela: Death and Devastation in the Amazonas and Orinoco Regions," Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/illegal-mining-venezuela-death-and-devastation-amazonas-and-orinoco-regions>.

²²² "OHCHR | Venezuela: UN releases report on criminal control of mining area and wider justice issues," United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, updated 15/07/2020, accessed 05/06/2021, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26096>.

²²³ Daniel Pardo, "Cómo se vive en las zonas de paz de Venezuela bajo control de los "malandros" - " *BBC News Mundo* (London), 28/05/2015, https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2015/07/150727_venezuela_zonas_de_paz_dp.

Lina Shaikhouni Vanessa Silva, Manuel Zambrano, "Venezuela's paradise beach resort turns into violent nightmare " *BBC News* (London), 29/05/2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-latin-america-57027348>.

Florantonia Singer, "El Koki, the Venezuelan gang leader challenging Maduro’s security forces," *El País* (Madrid), 20/07/2021, <https://english.elpais.com/usa/2021-07-20/el-koki-the-venezuelan-gang-leader-challenging-maduros-security-forces.html>.

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Venezuelan state entities (including PDVSA). According to their calculations, \$300 billion were syphoned out of Venezuela through these corrupt schemes. In their report, they point out to several investigations worldwide: 27 in the United States; 8 in Spain; 6 in Argentina; 3 in Brazil, Ecuador, Portugal and Colombia respectively; 2 in Uruguay and Zwitserland respectively; and 1 in every one of the following countries, El Salvador, Aruba, Puerto Rico, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Liechtenstein, Bulgaria, Mexico, Italy, Bolivia and Andorra.

In that 2019 report, Transparency International highlights the violations of human rights resulting from these corruption schemes, as well as the type of crimes committed, that include: money laundering, irregular assignation of public contracts, bribery, overpricing, illicit currency exchanges, drug trafficking, contraband of gold, gasoline and medication. Moreover, they point out that out of all reviewed 70 cases, only 22 had resulted in court convictions or advances in the legal processing.²²⁴

In 2020 the DEA accused Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro of "narcoterrorism" and launched a warrant to capture him and other thirteen members of the Bolivarian regime and two former members of the Colombian FARC guerrilla. The US government has even offered \$15 million rewards to anyone who can capture Nicolás Maduro. According to the indictment, the US believes there has been a "narcoterrorism conspiracy" since 1999 to provide massive supplies of cocaine to the US, carried by the so-called *Cartel de los Soles* (EN: Suns Cartels) —a reference to the badges in the shape of a "sun" that Venezuelan generals have in their uniform.²²⁵ According to a 2018 report by the nonprofit think tank InSight Crime, there is solid ground behind those accusations by Washington.²²⁶

6.2.1. The Bolicracy and divide and rule

²²⁴ Transparencia Venezuela, "Casos de corrupción de Venezuela en el mundo," (2020). <https://transparencia.org.ve/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/05-Casos-de-corrupcion-de-Venezuela-en-el-mundo.pdf>.

²²⁵ staff, "Nicolás Maduro Moros and 14 current and former Venezuelan officials charged with narco-terrorism, corruption, drug trafficking and other criminal charges."

²²⁶ "Drug Trafficking Within the Venezuelan Regime: The 'Cartel of the Suns'," Insight Crime, updated 17/05/2018, 2018, <https://insightcrime.org/investigations/drug-trafficking-venezuelan-regime-cartel-of-the-sun/>.

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Kleptocracies are states controlled and run for the benefit of a minority elite, which uses its power to transfer large fractions of the state resources to themselves. The triumph of kleptocrats rests on their capability of using divide-and-rule strategies, made possible by the weakness of institutions that neither place restrictions on political leaders —the kleptocrats— nor they make them accountable for their actions.²²⁷ The scholars D. Acemoglu, J.A. Robinson and T. Verdier also include as factors for the success of kleptocracies:

- Politicians or productive sectors place no importance to democracy because they are more concerned with gains in the short term.
- The ruling elite counts with foreign aid.
- High percentage of income comes from natural resources.
- National economic productivity is low, largely thanks to the nature of an economy reliant on the exploitation of natural resources.
- Less inequalities within the productive sectors, who are the most likely to pose any opposition to the kleptocrats.²²⁸

If we apply these factors to the current Bolivarian regime, we have that since contested elections of 2018, the Bolivarian regime is less concerned with any kind of democracy and more concern with perpetuating themselves in power.²²⁹ Other samples of this we find in the arrival of Maduro to the presidency. After the death of Chávez, he was placed as interim president, and then, he won the elections in 2013 by only 1.4% above its rival Henrique Capriles. Also, despite allegations of irregularities

²²⁷ Acemoglu, Verdier, and Robinson, "Kleptocracy and divide-and-rule: A model of personal rule."

²²⁸ Acemoglu, Verdier, and Robinson, "Kleptocracy and divide-and-rule: A model of personal rule," 165.

²²⁹ BBCNews Staff, "Venezuela election: Maduro wins second term amid claims of vote rigging," *BBC News* (London), 21/05/2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-44187838>.

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and request for a manual recount of the vote, Venezuela's National Electoral Council —controlled by the regime— denied the petition.²³⁰

During Maduro's second term in office, since 2018, the only political institution still having members of the opposition was the National Assembly, which did not accept the results of the contested 2018 elections, and from where one of its members, Juan Guaidó, would come out as leader of the opposition in 2019. He did it with the support of the National Assembly, and under an interpretation of the Bolivarian Constitution, he was named by the opposition-controlled National Assembly president of Venezuela since Maduro was not considered legitimate. He had initially won the support of a great part of Western countries, but a lot has rained since then. Divide-and-rule strategies employed by the Maduro regime has meant that this attempt to overthrow the Bolivarian regime was not a success. Among these strategies, we find the creation of a parallel Constituent Assembly, harassment of the opposition, and blockade of foreign humanitarian aid linked to the opposition.²³¹

Although the leadership of Guaidó has retained some support from international leaders, quite notably from the US and some European countries, it has not been the case for the Venezuelan population, whose support for Guaidó has already wained down an additional sign of the Bolivarian regime's rule-and-divide strategies success. Moreover, the opposition led by Guaidó has also lost support from other sectors of the opposition, so much so that they will not support him and his part of the Venezuelan opposition that is going to engage in new fresh negotiations with the Bolivarian regime starting in August 2021.²³²

²³⁰ William Neuman, "Venezuelan Court Rejects Challenge to Presidential Election Results," *The New York Times* (New York) 2013, <https://www.nytimes-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/2013/08/08/world/americas/venezuelan-court-rejects-challenge-to-presidential-election-results.html>.

²³¹ BBC News Staff, "Juan Guaidó: The man who wants to oust Maduro," *BBC News* (London), 23/01/2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-46985389>.

²³² Agencia EFE staff, "Ni Maduro ni Guaidó, venezolanos que abogan por una nueva era," *Agencia EFE* (Madrid), 21/09/2020, <https://www.efe.com/efe/america/politica/ni-maduro-guaido-venezolanos-que-abogan-por-una-nueva-era/20000035-4324663>.

Marcos González Díaz, "4 claves del nuevo diálogo que gobierno y oposición de Venezuela mantienen en México - BBC News Mundo," *BBC News Mundo* (London), 14/08/2021, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-58211972>.

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Concerning the third factor mentioned by D. Acemoglu, J.A. Robinson and T. Verdier, about the availability of foreign aid by the ruling elite, under Maduro's presidency, under the constraints of the worst humanitarian crisis in the region since 2014, coupled with the collapse of essential services, hyperinflation, and scarcity of essential goods, including gasoline. The Bolivarian regime has counted, first of all, with the aid of the Castroist regime to squash any dissent within the Venezuelan army. Likely, Iran has sent several shipments of gasoline to Venezuela in exchange for gold, in the context of a collapsed PDVSA that no longer can produce derivatives such as gasoline or kerosene in enough quantities to satisfy the domestic demand. Also, Turkey has played an important role to keep the cash-strapped regime afloat by the purchase of Venezuelan gold. Furthermore, although the regime has refused to accept foreign humanitarian aid linked to the opposition, it has accepted humanitarian aid sent by its allies, China and Russia, including anti-Covid-19 vaccines.²³³

And lastly, although Venezuela is no longer able to produce and export oil as it used to twenty years ago, it still relies heavily on the exploitation of its natural resources for income, as the Bolivarian regime is doing with the gold illegally mined in the south of the country. All of which in the context of a country that produces little, and whatever productive sector still surviving in the country is not very likely to oppose the Bolocracy in order not to jeopardise their business.²³⁴

²³³ Berwick, "Special Report: How Cuba taught Venezuela to quash military dissent."; Antonio de la Cruz Moisés Rendón, Claudia Fernández, "Understanding the Iran-Venezuela Relationship," (04/06/2020). <https://www.csis.org/analysis/understanding-iran-venezuela-relationship>; Vivian Sequera Marianna Parraga, "Tankers carrying Iranian fuel begin entering Venezuelan waters - data," *Reuters*, 29/09/2020; Joseph M. Humire, "The Maduro-Hezbollah Nexus: How Iran-backed Networks Prop up the Venezuelan Regime," <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/the-maduro-hezbollah-nexus-how-iran-backed-networks-prop-up-the-venezuelan-regime/>; Ben Bartenstein and Peter Millard Fabiola Zerpa, "Iran sends biggest ever fleet of oil tankers to Venezuela: Defying US sanctions, Iran sends flotilla of about 10 vessels to help the Latin American nation fight a crippling fuel shortage.," *Aljazeera*, 06/12/2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/12/6/biggest-iranian-flotilla-yet-en-route-to-venezuela-with-fuel>; Patricia Laya, "Iran Is Hauling Gold Bars Out of Venezuela's Almost-Empty Vaults.," Lowen, "Turkey warned over Venezuela gold trade.," Reuters Staff, "Venezuela receives shipment of Russian Sputnik-V coronavirus vaccine," *Reuters* (London), 02/10/2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-venezuela-russia-idUSKBN26N2XO>; TeleSUR staff, "China Sends 1.3 Million COVID-19 Vaccines to Venezuela," *TeleSURenglish* (Caracas), 24/05/2021, <https://www.telesurenglish.net//news/China-Sends-1.3-Million-COVID-19-Vaccines-to-Venezuela-20210524-0003.html>.

²³⁴ Sarah Ruiz, "Arco Minero Destroys Venezuelan Forests | Global Forest Watch Blog.," Rendon, "Illegal Mining in Venezuela: Death and Devastation in the Amazonas and Orinoco Regions." Corina Pons and Mayela Armas, "In hungry Venezuela, food producers step up exports to survive," *Reuters* (London), 23/10/2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-exports-insight-idUSKBN1X215M>.

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But the current kleptocracy, with its rule-and-divide strategies, we see today was a long time in the making. Divide-and-rule strategies were already present during Chávez time. When he first came to power amid the collapse of Venezuela's political system, the opposition was virtually disarmed in the face of an atypical president, who wielded an unusual and colloquial discourse, with constant attacks to leaders of the opposition, including the use of insults. The initial political tension plunged the opposition into bewilderment, which did not know whether to confront Chavez with democratic methods or through violent and coup mechanisms. This path led to the attempted 2002 two-day-long coup d'état and subsequently to the oil strike at the end of that year. The bewilderment continued after the 2004 recall referendum and revolved around allegations of electoral fraud and its manipulation by the Bolivarian regime.²³⁵

The "Tascón List," the list of signatories requesting the 2004 recall referendum, served to persecute and purge opposition supporters. Also, the opposition decided to abstain from participating in the legislative elections of December 2005, which meant that practically all the National Assembly seats went to the ruling party, with a vote with 75% abstention, which allowed Chávez to govern with a total absence of parliamentary control until 2010.²³⁶

Doubts remained present in the opposition on the occasion of the referendum to approve the constitutional reform in December 2007. Although there was strong pressure from some opposition sectors to abstain from considering the referendum antidemocratic, the memory of the 2005

²³⁵ Molina, "The Unraveling of Venezuela's Party System," 157-58.

Gualda, "The discourse of Hugo Chávez in "Aló Presidente": establishing the Bolivarian Revolution through television performance," 119.

alexbellos, "Chavez rises from very peculiar coup."

Wiseman and Béland, "The Politics of Institutional change in Venezuela: Oil Policy During the Presidency of Hugo Chávez." Centre, "Observación del Referendo Revocatorio Presidencial en Venezuela," 14, 20-23, 82.

²³⁶ staff, "Una Década de Chávez Intolerancia política y oportunidades perdidas para el progreso de los derechos humanos en Venezuela," 32-37.

staff, "Preliminary OAS Observations on the Legislative Elections in Venezuela."

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parliamentary elections and their use by Chávez against the opposition, made parts of it wanting to participate.²³⁷

²³⁷ El País staff, "Venezuela convoca el referéndum sobre la reforma constitucional para el 2 de diciembre," *El País* (Madrid), 03/11/2007, https://elpais.com/internacional/2007/11/03/actualidad/1194044402_850215.html.

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7. The Castroist and Bolivarian regimes, a special relationship

To understand the history of Cuba and Venezuela since 2000, we must address the unique relationship built between the Castroist and Bolivarian regimes.²³⁸ Ever since the success of the Cuban Revolution, the Castroist regime has militarily intervened in numerous countries, supporting guerrilla movements in Latin America, such as in the case of Venezuela in the 1960s. But also, in Africa, such as in the Angolan Civil War (1975-1992), in support of its communist government. Also, in the Horn of Africa, in the conflict between the communist government of Ethiopia against Somalia (1977-1978). Likely, they also supported the Sandinistas during the Sandinista insurgency (1978-1992). Their support was in the form of training, military personnel, but also the supply of weapons provided by the USSR. The Castroist regime was able to do so independently but strongly depended on USSR's subsidies and weapons. Until the 1990s, the economic dependence of Cuba on the USSR amounted to 75% of its total trade, according to some estimates. The kind of interventionism carried out by Cuba in these mentioned countries was a dependent one, as stated by B. Dunér in his journal article "Cuba: Dependent Interventionism."²³⁹

In the case of Venezuela, we see something entirely different. The Castroist regime had funded, and trained guerrilla movements in Venezuela in the 1960s and was also behind an attempt to carry out military intervention in 1967. With the arrival of Hugo Chávez to power —and that special personal bond built between Castro and Chávez, where the latter would go as far as to consider himself the son of the former— Venezuela provided generous subsidies to the Castroist regime in the form of oil. Also, direct investments in Cuba's infrastructure, including the Cienfuegos oil refinery or the submarine cable connecting now Cuba and Venezuela, as explained in the following subsections. In exchange, the Castroist regime would send thousands of its workers, help the Bolivarian regime contain any dissent within the Venezuelan army. Likely, the Castroist regime would have access to areas as sensitive as identification systems, as explained in the following pages. The Castroist interventionism in Venezuela is

²³⁸ Javier Lafuente Ewald Scharfenberg, "Cuba y Venezuela, una relación de socialismo y petróleo," *El País* (Madrid), 27/11/2016, https://elpais.com/internacional/2016/11/26/america/1480149584_124558.html.

²³⁹ Dunér, "Cuba: Dependent Interventionism."

Gary Prevost, "Cuba and Nicaragua: A Special Relationship?," *Latin American Perspectives* 17, no. 3 (1990), <http://www.jstor.org.eur.idm.oclc.org/stable/2633815>.

Mauricio Vicent, "'Cuba vivirá una grave crisis si termina la ayuda venezolana': Entrevista a Carmelo Mesa-Lago," *El País* (Madrid), 09/12/2015, https://elpais.com/internacional/2015/12/09/actualidad/1449693038_285796.html.

7. The Castroist and Bolivarian regimes, a special relationship

again a dependent one, like those carried out in Africa or Latin America before the 1990s, but, this time, it is not the USSR footing the bill; it is the Bolivarian regime paying for the intervention of the country it wants to control, Venezuela.²⁴⁰

In order to explore this unique historical phenomenon, we have divided this chapter into the following subsections:

- Cuba- Venezuela relations before Hugo Chávez
- SAIME
- *Misiones*
- The military
- A subservient relationship

²⁴⁰ Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 108.

Goodman, "Decades after failed invasion, Cuba still eyes Venezuela."

"Cable submarino Cuba-Venezuela - EcuRed," EcuRed, 2021, accessed 01/06/2021, https://www.ecured.cu/Cable_submarino_Cuba-Venezuela.

Marianna Parraga Sarah Marsh, "Cuba takes over Venezuela stake in refinery joint venture," *Reuters* (London), 14/12/2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/cuba-venezuela-idUSL8N1OE79H>.

Marcano, "Las relaciones desmedidas."

Staff, "Fidel me hizo el honor de hacerme hijo suyo, y así me siento (+ Video)."

Berwick, "Special Report: How Cuba taught Venezuela to quash military dissent."

7.1. The Castroist and Bolivarian regimes, a special relationship: Cuba- Venezuela relations before Hugo Chávez

7.1. Cuba- Venezuela relations before Hugo Chávez

Fidel Castro chose to visit Venezuela a few days after the success of the Cuban revolution in January 1959. Venezuela was, in fact, the first country he visited during the international tour that followed the success of the Sierra Maestra guerrilla campaign, which would take Castro and a committee of revolutionaries around the world as it happened in New York later on in April 1959, where he was welcomed by the masses in what some called the Fidelmania. Castro was also welcomed by the masses in Caracas. Around 100,000 people attended an event at the Simón Bolívar avenue, coincidentally on the first anniversary of the Venezuelan democracy, 23 January 1959.²⁴¹

During his stay in Venezuela, Castro would meet one of the founding fathers of Venezuela's democracy, Romulo Betancourt, who had just won the elections on 7 December 1958. During their meeting, Castro asked the Venezuelan leader to agree on a 300 million loan on favourable terms in the form of oil supply to the island, which Betancourt —whose government excluded Venezuela's communist party— rejected.²⁴²

The following decade the Castroist regime would fund and train Venezuelan guerrillas. By the end of 1961, Venezuela stopped diplomatic relations with Cuba as a response to the Castroists support for the left-wing guerrillas present in the country. In 1963, the Venezuela authorities discovered a shipment of weapons sent by the Castroist regime, which would make the Organisation of American States to (OAS) impose the first-ever economic and diplomatic sanctions against the Castroist regime.²⁴³ On 2 May 1967, the Machurucuto disembarkment occurred when a small group of Venezuelan and Cuban guerrilla

²⁴¹ "60 Years Ago, 'Fidelmania' Took New York City By Storm," NPR, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/20/715393922/60-years-ago-fidelmania-took-new-york-city-by-storm>.

"Fidel viaja a Venezuela, en enero de 1959 ", Cubadebate, updated 23/01/2014, 2014, <http://www.cubadebate.cu/especiales/2014/01/23/fidel-viaja-a-venezuela-en-enero-de-1959-video/>.

²⁴² Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 102.

The New York Times Staff, "Betancourt Says He Denied Castro a \$300 Million Loan," *The New York Times*, 20/07/1964, <https://www-nytimes-com.eur.idm.oclc.org/1964/07/20/archives/betancourt-says-he-denied-castro-a-300-million-loan.html>.

²⁴³ staff, "O.A.S. Official Says Weapons In Venezuela Had Cuban Insignia; Caracas Reports 'More Arms' Leoni's Election to Be Affirmed (Published 1963)."

Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 108.

7.1. **The Castroist and Bolivarian regimes, a special relationship:** Cuba- Venezuela relations before Hugo Chávez

fighters attempted to carry out a military intervention planned in La Habana.²⁴⁴ Venezuelan media widely covered the affair at the time. A picture of the cover page of *El Nacional* referring to this is shown below in figure 6.



FIGURE 6: EL NACIONAL FRONTPAGE
13 MAY 1967
SOURCE: BBC MUNDO NEWS²⁴⁵

In 1974, the then President Carlos Andrés Pérez (AD) attempted to normalise diplomatic relations with Cuba and remove the OAS sanctions against the Castroist regime. Pérez would argue that, although he disagreed with the Castroist ideology and form of government, he thought things have changed since the 1960s.²⁴⁶ In 1989, Castro would visit Caracas for the second time, on this occasion for the inauguration of President Carlos Andrés Pérez second term in office (1989-1993).²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Bermúdez, "Cómo fue el "desembarco de Machurucuto", el intento de intervención militar en Venezuela ideado en Cuba por Fidel Castro."

Goodman, "Decades after failed invasion, Cuba still eyes Venezuela."

²⁴⁵ Bermúdez, "Cómo fue el "desembarco de Machurucuto", el intento de intervención militar en Venezuela ideado en Cuba por Fidel Castro."

²⁴⁶ Tarver and Frederick, *The History of Venezuela*, 129.

²⁴⁷ Ewald Scharfenberg, "Cuba y Venezuela, una relación de socialismo y petróleo."

7.1. **The Castroist and Bolivarian regimes, a special relationship:** Cuba- Venezuela relations before Hugo Chávez

When the 1992 coup d'état led by Chávez took place, Castro did not show sympathy, at least in public, with Chavez's putsch. And in fact, he showed support for President Pérez, to whom he sent a personal message.²⁴⁸ However, two years later, he would welcome Chávez in La Habana with head-of-state honours.²⁴⁹

During Rafael Caldera's second presidency (ex-COPEI, Convergencia), 1993-1998, relations between Cuba and Venezuela were cordial. In 1997, Fidel Castro visited Venezuela for the third time on the 7th Ibero-American Summit.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Casa Editorial El Tiempo, "Solidaridad Continental con Pérez," *El Tiempo* (Bogotá), 05/02/1995, <https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-28404>.

²⁴⁹ Otero, "Fidel y Chávez, su primer abrazo | Cubadebate."

²⁵⁰ "VII Cumbre Iberoamericana Isla Margarita 1997 - SEGIB," Secretaría General Iberoamericana, 1997, accessed 01/06/2021, <https://www.segib.org/?summit=vii-cumbre-iberoamericana-isla-margarita-1997>.

Carlos A Romero, "Venezuela y Cuba. "Una seguridad diferente", " *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos. Nouveaux mondes mondes nouveaux-Novo Mundo Mundos Novos-New world New worlds* (2009), <https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.4000/nuevomundo.55550>.

7.2. SAIME

In 2006, the Castroist company Albet Ingeniería y Sistemas Sociedad Anónima—funded in 2005—signed together with the Bolivarian Ministry of Interior a contract that would enable the establishment of the *Servicio Administrativo de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería* (SAIME) (EN: Administrative Service of Identification, Migration and Foreigners),²⁵¹ the new government entity where people living in Venezuela - nationals and foreigners – would be able to process their identification documents. According to documents obtained by the journalist Adriana Rivera, and initially published in the article “*Cédula electrónica a la Cubana*” (EN: Electronic ID Cuban style) in the Venezuelan newspaper *El Nacional* on 11 July 2011, as well as the article “*El cubano que diseñó el SAIME*” (EN: The Cuban who designed SAIME) on 25 November 2013, also originally in *El Nacional*, everything from the structure and network system to the service's web portal was designed by Castroist personnel, particularly by the Cuban engineer José Lavandero. Castroist personnel established how each area functioned: the objectives and values, the organisational chart, the job profiles, economic planning, human resources management, procedure manuals and instructions, relations with other public administration bodies, and even furniture.²⁵²

Castroist personnel installed the networks in all of SAIME’s offices and the headquarters of SAIME in Caracas. According to the documents accessed by Rivera, the modernisation of the identification process came at the cost initially of \$91.5 million. However, it required an additional credit of \$135.9 million, but, according to the Venezuelan chapter of Transparency International, more resources

²⁵¹ "Reseña Histórica," SAIME, No date, accessed 01/05/2021, <http://www.saime.gob.ve/institucion/resena>.

²⁵² ALBET, "Contrato de Desarrollo y Suministro de la Cedula de Identificación Electrónica para la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, a Ejecutar en el Marco del Proyecto Transformación y Modernización del Sistema de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela," (*El Nacional* (originally published), 2008).

http://c431537.r37.cf2.rackcdn.com/contrato_tarjetas_firmado.pdf.

Adriana Rivera, "Cédula Electrónica a la Cubana," *El Nacional* (originally published) (Caracas), 17/07/2011,

https://yonacienestarivera.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/el_n_prv_17072011_s_001.pdf

https://yonacienestarivera.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/el_n_prv_17072011_s_002.pdf

https://yonacienestarivera.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/el_n_prv_17072011_s_003.pdf

Rivera, "Cédula electrónica a la cubana."

Adriana Rivera, "El cubano que diseñó el SAIME," *El Nacional* (originally), 25/11/2013,

<http://www.hacer.org/latam/venezuela-el-cubano-que-diseno-el-saime-por-adriana-rivera/>.

Maldonado, *La invasión consentida*, 204.

7.3. The Castroist and Bolivarian regimes, a special relationship: SAIME

were allocated year after year, to sum up at the end, around \$1 billion. Venezuela also gave full powers to the Castroist personnel for all matters concerning the new identity documents, even though Cuba lacked the technology and experience.²⁵³

According to the Venezuelan engineer and Bolivarian regime defector, Anthony Daquin, in an interview by Rivera included in her article "*Cédula electrónica a la Cubana*," no Venezuelans technicians were included in the modernisation process, and Castroist personnel had absolute control over the software and hardware at consulates, migration checkpoints and SAIME offices, and SAIME headquarters in Caracas.²⁵⁴ As Albet S.A. did not have the technology to fulfil its contractual obligations, they turned to Gemalto México S.A., the Mexican subsidiary of the Dutch company Gemalto Holding B.V. to supply them with the polycarbonate ID cards. And for the hardware to print the ID cards, they sourced to the German company Bundes Druckerei GmbH through a third Panamanian Shell company called Billingsley Global Corp linked to the Peruvian banker Francisco Pardo, since Bundes Druckerei did not want to be associated with totalitarian regimes. One of the Panama Papers investigations revealed the comings and goings of this peculiar business affair. The investigation was conducted by two digital investigative journalistic platforms, Peruvian IDL Reporteros and the Venezuelan Armando Info.²⁵⁵

One of the promises, when SAIME was launched, was to provide Venezuelans with electronic IDs. However, the issue of the new electronic *cédulas de identidad* (EN: ID in Venezuelan Spanish) was forgotten for a while. Given the efficiency of Venezuela's public administration, no one was surprised by a long time it was taking for Venezuelans to have their new electronic ID. Year after year, one of SAIME's bureaucrats on duty would announce that the electronic ID cards were about to be released, for it never to happen. Even today, after more than fifteen years and millions of dollars invested, Venezuelans still have the same plasticised piece of paper as *cédula de identidad*, which SAIME — even today, after the modernisation carried out by Castroist Albet S.A— takes a long time and bureaucracy to produce. Hugo Chávez died in 2013 without ever seeing his electronic ID card, neither

²⁵³ Rivera, *Más de un millardo de dólares en planes de identidad con Cuba*.

Maldonado, *La invasión consentida*, 210.

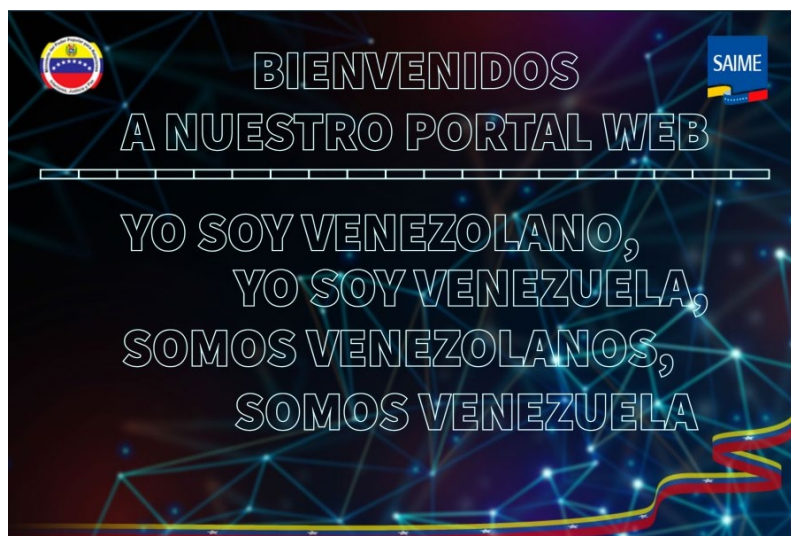
²⁵⁴ Rivera, "Cédula electrónica a la cubana."

²⁵⁵ L. García Téllez, Poliszuk, J., "Negocios secretos: Las triangulaciones de un exbanquero peruano con La Habana y el gobierno chavista en Caracas," *IDL Reporteros/Armando Info* (Lima), 03/04/2016, <https://www.idl-reporteros.pe/negocios-secretos/>.

7.3. The Castroist and Bolivarian regimes, a special relationship: SAIME

any Venezuelans to this date. But, since October 2014, the Castroist *Dirección de Identificación, Inmigración y Extranjería* (Directorate of Identification, Immigration and Foreigners' Affairs) began issuing electronic IDs, or *carnés de identidad* (EN: ID in Cuban Spanish) as they are called in the island.²⁵⁶

When you enter SAIME's official website (<http://www.saime.gob.ve/>), something quite striking is that the first thing you find before actually being able to access the site is a big screen with the following message "Welcome to our website: I am Venezuelan. We are Venezuelan. We are Venezuela." On figure 7 on the following page, we can see a screenshot of this welcome page. Perhaps, this is a sign that the Bolivarian regime is conscious of what it is now known about who is behind SAIME.



**FIGURE 7: WELCOME PAGE OF SAIME OFFICIAL WEBSITE.
ACCESSED 10 JULY 2021
SOURCE: SAIME²⁵⁷**

²⁵⁶ "Responses to Information Requests - Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (Venezuela's "cédulas")," Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, updated 29/03/2012, 2012, accessed 01/05/2021, <https://irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/country-information/rir/Pages/index.aspx?doc=453942>.

Irene Pérez Susana Tesoro, "Nuevo Carné de Identidad en Cuba, desde el 29 de octubre | Cubadebate," *Cubadebate* (La Habana), 15/10/2014, <http://www.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2014/10/15/nuevo-carne-deidentidad-en-cuba-desde-el-29-de-octubre/>.

El Nacional staff, "Hasta 10 horas tardan los usuarios para tramitar la cédula," (11/01/2018), https://www.elnacional.com/sociedad/hasta-horas-tardan-los-usuarios-para-tramitar-cedula_218232/. Maldonado, *La invasión consentida*, 221.

²⁵⁷ "Welcome page," 2021, accessed 10/07/2021, <http://www.saime.gob.ve/>.

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Finally, the whole SAIME affair revealed how the Bolivarian regime was willing to go to create funding sources for the Castroist regime. By the time Albet S.A. was funded in 2005, the Castroist regime had benefited from a steady oil supply. However, without doubt, the most shocking of all in this murky affair was the fact that the Bolivarian regime could have ideally bought the polycarbonate ID cards from Gemalto México S.A. and the printing hardware from Bundes Druckerei GmbH directly.

7.3. *Misiones*

President Hugo Chávez began hiring Cuban employees for his government programmes in 2003. Hundreds of thousands have arrived in Venezuela since then. Not only doctors, nurses, dentists and health personnel, but also teachers and sports trainers; agricultural and electric technicians; computer scientists, statisticians, art instructors and entertainers; architects, engineers, administrators, geologists, secretaries and drivers; fishing teachers and even revolutionary graffiti painters.²⁵⁸ As can be inferred by this wide variety of professions, the *misiones* run by Cuban personnel in Venezuela went well beyond the health sector, traditionally the main service export by Cuba under the Castroist regime since 1963.²⁵⁹

The nature of these *misiones* was outlined by the first agreement —out of the many to come—signed between the Castroist and Bolivarian regimes, and the only one publicly available: the 2000 *Convenio Integral de Cooperación* (EN: Integral Cooperation Agreement).²⁶⁰ Under the original clauses of this agreement —which has been subject to many amendments ever since— Cuba "would provide the services and supply the technologies and products that are within its reach to support the broad economic and social development program" of Venezuela, which the country would pay for with "oil and derivatives" (Article II). The Bolivarian regime would send 53,000 barrels per day of crude oil with a mixed financing scheme (Article III). Likely, the Castroist regime would offer "free of charge" the services of "doctors, specialists and health technicians to provide services in places where such personnel are not available." Venezuela would provide this personnel with accommodation, food, and internal transportation (Article IV).²⁶¹

²⁵⁸ "Misiones cubanas en Venezuela: 18 años de solidaridad y humanidad," Cuba en Resumén, updated 03/03/2020, 2020, accessed 01/06/2021, <https://www.cubaenresumen.org/2020/03/misiones-cubanas-en-venezuela-18-anos-de-solidaridad-y-humanidad/>.

²⁵⁹ "Cuba: Normas represivas contra médicos en misión," Human Rights Watch, updated 23/07/2020, accessed 06/06/2021, <https://www.hrw.org/es/news/2020/07/23/cuba-normas-represivas-contra-medicos-en-mision>.

²⁶⁰ Staff, "Convenio Integral de cooperación."

²⁶¹ Staff, "Convenio Integral de cooperación."

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As already mentioned, this is the only agreement publicly available. It has been subjected to many amendments since, some of which were done as recently as June 2021.²⁶² Venezuela's quantity of oil barrels per day has surpassed for years those 53,000 mentioned in the agreement. Most estimates place it at an average of 90,000-100,000 barrels per day between 2000 and 2016; after the 2019 sanctions on PDVSA, it reached 179,000 barrels per day in 2020.²⁶³

In 2018, Julio César Rodríguez, head of the Cuban *misiones*, said that since the year 2000, around 219,300 Cubans had arrived in Venezuela to work on the *misiones*.²⁶⁴ The massive arrival of Cuban personnel really kicked off in 2003. At this point, Chávez had survived the 2002 two-day-long coup d'état attempt and the 2002 three-month-long general strike.²⁶⁵ As a way to prop his popularity, he started the *misiones* staffed with Cuban personnel, many with names of Venezuelan historical figures, such *Misión Barrio Adentro* (healthcare in poor neighbourhoods); *Robison*, *Ribas* and *Sucre* (education). In 2004, more *misiones* were added, such as *Misión Alimentación* (subsidised food), *Misión Vuelvan Caracas* (job training in poor neighbourhoods), *Misión Habitat* (housing); *Misión Guaicaipuro* (aimed at indigenous people), or *Misión Piar* (small-scale mining).²⁶⁶ All of these missions were paid for directly by PDVSA. According to the Venezuelan chapter of Transparency International, they estimated that between 2001 and 2013, PDVSA spent \$54 billion only on the *misiones* alone. But if considering, all other social expenses that were also billed directly to the state company in the same period, the bills amount to approximately \$208 billion, according to the report.²⁶⁷

²⁶² Cubadebate staff, "Cuba y Venezuela revisan agenda del Convenio Integral de Cooperación," *Cubadebate*, 22/06/2021, <http://www.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2021/06/22/cuba-y-venezuela-revisan-agenda-del-convenio-integral-de-cooperacion/>. "Venezuela y Cuba revisan agenda de trabajo establecida en el Convenio Integral de Cooperación," Ministerio del Poder Popular de Petróleo, 2021, accessed 20/05/2021, <http://www.minpet.gob.ve/index.php/es-es/comunicaciones/noticias-comunicaciones/47-noticias-del-ano-2019/1552-venezuela-y-cuba-revisan-agenda-de-trabajo-establecida-en-el-convenio-integral-de-cooperacion>.

²⁶³ Pablo de Llano, "Cuba ante el precipicio venezolano," *El País*, 13/05/2017, https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/05/12/america/1494606525_996444.html.

Marianna Parraga, "Exclusive: Venezuela's PDVSA steps up fuel shipments to Cuba as shortages bite." Federation of American Scientists, "Venezuela: Overview of U.S. Sanctions," ed. Congressional Research Service (Washington 2021). <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF10715.pdf>.

²⁶⁴ E. Milanés, *Cuba orgullosa de sus colaboradores* (Juventud Rebelde, Caracas, 2018). <http://www.juventudrebelde.cu/internacionales/2018-07-31/cuba-orgullosa-de-sus-colaboradores>.

²⁶⁵ alexbellos, "Chavez rises from very peculiar coup."

"In Venezuela's General Strike, the Pinch Becomes Pain (Published 2002)."

²⁶⁶ Maldonado, *La invasión consentida*, 84-85.

²⁶⁷ Transparencia Venezuela, *Cinco Grandes Misiones en Venezuela*, Transparencia Internacional Venezuela (Caracas, December 2014), <https://transparencia.org.ve/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/1.-Cinco-Grandes-Misiones-Dic..pdf>.

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Different versions of the *misiones* mentioned above would come every year, and some others would be added.²⁶⁸ Many of these *misiones* were controversial, with accusations that some were used to indoctrinate. As reported in the Spanish newspaper *El País* in 2010, in a document leaked to the press, it seems that the Mexican Government at the time was worried about the use of *Misión Milagro* —a programme meant to provide medical eye treatments in Caracas for people from poor rural areas— as a tool to indoctrinate its beneficiaries into hating the US.²⁶⁹ On the other hand, some of the *misiones* were controversial for their intended purposes, such as teaching Venezuelan cultural activities by Cuban personnel, as in the case of *Misión Cultural Corazón Adentro* created in 2008, or the teaching of Venezuelan law, also by Cuban personnel.²⁷⁰ It seems that for the Bolivarian regime, there were no Venezuelans who could do that.

Many Cubans are attracted to work on Venezuela's *misiones* since the salaries are much higher than anything offered on the island. In a 2019 report from BBC Mundo, we find the case of Cuban Doctor Dayli Coro. From \$15 a month in Cuba, she started earning \$125 a month in Venezuela during the first six months, after that, \$250, and on her third year, \$325 a month. Moreover, doctors only earn about 10 to 25% of what the Bolivarian regime actually pays for each of them. They are often housed in dangerous neighbourhoods, and being Venezuela, one of the countries with the highest crime rates in the world; there have been cases of Cuban doctors being raped or murdered. They are often forced to work under precarious conditions, propagate political propaganda and falsify statistics.²⁷¹

In a 2015 interview by the Spanish newspaper *El País* to the prestigious Cuban-American economist Carmela Mesa-Lago, he said that the Bolivarian regime was paying \$10,600 per doctor per month according to his calculations. In what he considered a covered subsidy to the Castroist regime. He also

²⁶⁸ Maldonado, *La invasión consentida*, 86.

²⁶⁹ El País staff, "Misión Milagro: una operación de ojos a cambio de adoctrinamiento," *El País* (Madrid), 18/12/2010, https://elpais.com/internacional/2010/12/18/actualidad/1292626822_850215.html.

²⁷⁰ "Especial | Misión Cultura "corazón adentro", 13 años aportando a la identidad cultural venezolana," Vicepresidencia de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 2021, accessed 01/05/2021, <http://vicepresidencia.gob.ve/especial-mision-cultura-corazon-adentro-13-anos-aportando-a-la-identidad-cultural-venezolana/>.

Bertha Mojena, "Misión Cultura Corazón Adentro, siete años por toda Venezuela," *Agencia Cubana de Noticias* (La Habana), 26/04/2016 2015, <http://www.acn.cu/mundo/9111-mision-cultura-corazon-adentro-siete-anos-por-toda-venezuela>.

Isla al Sur staff, "Una mujer apasionada | Isla al Sur," *Isla al Sur*, 14/01/2008, 2021, <https://islalsur.blogia.com/2008/011405-una-mujer-apasionada.php>.

Maldonado, *La invasión consentida*, 112, 60.

²⁷¹ Redacción, "El mundo oculto de los médicos cubanos que son enviados a trabajar al extranjero - BBC News Mundo," *BBC News Mundo*, 15/05/2019, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-48275780>.

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said that he finds it very difficult for any other country to equal such subsidy, also, that in the case of interruption in Venezuela's funding, the country would plunge into a second *Periodo Especial* (EN: Special period) —the period of hardship that followed the halt of the USSR's subsidy in the 1990s—. Although he clarified that the Cuban international trade with Venezuela amounted in 2015 to 35%, whereas this amounted to 69% with the USSR. Likewise, the Cuban economy today is much more diversified and counts with more foreign investments.²⁷²

The *misiones* brought unquestionable benefits to the most impoverished Venezuelans, but it has also been the source of robust economic benefits for the Castroist regime, as pointed out by the economist Mesa-Lago.²⁷³ Another report that points out this seemingly copious amounts of income is a 2014 report by the Venezuela human rights NGO, PROVEA, where they conclude that the Cuban medical *misiones* alone came at a cost for the Bolivarian regime of almost \$14 million daily between 1 October and 31 December 2011. They made their calculations based on official documents from the Banco Nacional de Cuba and PDVSA.²⁷⁴ However, another big beneficiary of the *misiones* had been Hugo Chávez himself, who, after a drop in popularity in 2003, following the 2002 coup d'état attempt and a general strike, saw his popularity augment significantly and win the 2004 recall referendum. Thus the *misiones* have meant political dividends for his Bolivarian project.²⁷⁵ In November 2006, not long before the December 2006 elections that Chávez won, he said that "The *misiones* have been a real revolutionary mechanism, as engines these last three years to take a big leap, get out [...] of some great difficulties that tied us up"²⁷⁶ According to the Venezuelan survey company, Datanálisis, on that year, a survey about the *misiones* resulted in 72.2 % of surveyed

²⁷² Vicent, "'Cuba vivirá una grave crisis si termina la ayuda venezolana": Entrevista a Carmelo Mesa-Lago."

²⁷³ Vicent, "'Cuba vivirá una grave crisis si termina la ayuda venezolana": Entrevista a Carmelo Mesa-Lago."

"El posible impacto de la muerte de Chávez en la economía cubana," Cubaencuentro, updated 12/03/2013, accessed 01/05/2021, <https://www.cubaencuentro.com/cuba/articulos/el-posible-impacto-de-la-muerte-de-chavez-en-la-economia-cubana-283444>.

²⁷⁴ Provea Staff, "¿Cuánto cuesta a Venezuela la Misión Médica Cubana? - PROVEA," *Programa Venezolano de Educación Acción en Derechos Humanos (PROVEA)* (Caracas) 2014, <https://archivo.provea.org/actualidad/derechos-sociales/derecho-a-la-salud/cuanto-cuesta-a-venezuela-la-mision-medica-cubana/>.

²⁷⁵ Maye Primera, "Chávez pierde fuelle," *El País*, 15/02/2010, https://elpais.com/diario/2010/02/15/internacional/1266188409_850215.html.

²⁷⁶ Original source text: "*Las misiones han sido un verdadero mecanismo revolucionario, como motores estos últimos tres años para dar un gran salto, salir [...] de algunas grandes dificultades que nos amarraban*" Agence France Press, "Sellaron los programas sociales en tres años la alianza entre Hugo Chávez y los más pobres" *La Jornada* (Mexico City), 29/11/2006, <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2006/11/29/index.php?section=mundo&article=040n1mun>.

7.4. The Castroist and Bolivarian regimes, a special relationship: *Misiones*

people showing support for the *misiones* on education, 68.7% for *misiones* on health, and 66.8 for *misiones* on food.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁷ Press, "Sellaron los programas sociales en tres años la alianza entre Hugo Chávez y los más pobres - La Jornada."

7.4. The military

The transformation of Venezuela's military under Bolivarian rule would have one of its starting points with the 2002 two-day-long coup d'état attempt against Chávez. Purges would follow this short-lived military insurrection against the military dissidents that seconded the uprising.²⁷⁸ However, this thorough transformation would not take actual shape until 2004. On that year, during an official event called "March for peace and against paramilitarism", which was presided by Chávez and counted with the presence of military personnel and high ranking officials, Chávez would say as part of a lengthy speech the launching of "[...] three strategic lines, to begin to shape the concept of integral defence of the Nation [...]": "The first of these lines has to do with strengthening the military component. [...]," "The second has to do with [...] continue to consolidate and deepen the civic-military union, the union of the people with the Armed Forces, the union of its Armed Forces with the people [...]," "The third strategic line that I want to insist on this afternoon is also essential, touches the spinal cord of the concept of integral defence."²⁷⁹ He put forward this new plan as "the Hugo Chavez of 2002 was left for history, [he] will not let [himself] be cornered by anything or anyone, [they] are ready to face any threat [...]."²⁸⁰

Similarly to the Castroist concept of "*pueblo combatiente*" (EN: combating people)—a concept that Maduro would relaunch in 2021—²⁸¹ Chávez explains, "that is that today I throw, based on the constitutional mandate, the concept of popular national defence." "It is now about the massive

²⁷⁸ Ludmila Vinogradoff, "Chávez inicia la purga de militares disidentes y reprime las protestas," *El País* (Madrid), 22/02/2002, https://elpais.com/diario/2002/02/23/internacional/1014418805_850215.html.

Brian A., *The Silence and the Scorpion*, 253-83; Brian A., *The Silence and the Scorpion*.

²⁷⁹ Original source text: La primera de estas líneas tiene que ver con el fortalecimiento del componente militar. [...], "La segunda tiene que ver [...] continuar consolidando y profundizando la unión cívico-militar, la unión del pueblo con la Fuerza Armada, la unión de su Fuerza Armada con el pueblo [...], " "La tercera línea estratégica en la que quiero insistir esta tarde tiene también mucha importancia, toca la medula del concepto de la defensa integral todochavez.gob.ve staff, "Intervención del Comandante Presidente Hugo Chávez durante marcha por la paz y contra el paramilitarismo," (Caracas: Instituto de Altos Estudios del Pensamiento del Comandante Eterno Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías, 16/05/2004 2004). <http://www.todochavez.gob.ve/todochavez/1028-intervencion-del-comandante-presidente-hugo-chavez-durante-marcha-por-la-paz-y-contra-el-paramilitarismo>.

²⁸⁰ Original source text "el Hugo Chávez del 2002 quedó para la historia, no voy a dejarme acorralar por nada ni por nadie, estamos listos para enfrentar cualquier amenaza [...]."staff, "Intervención del Comandante Presidente Hugo Chávez durante marcha por la paz y contra el paramilitarismo."

²⁸¹"Pueblo Combatiente ", accessed 25/05/2021, <https://pueblocombatiente.com/>.

7.6. The Castroist and Bolivarian regimes, a special relationship: A subservient relationship

incorporation of the Venezuelan people into the integral defence of the territory, everywhere, for this every citizen must be considered a soldier, each citizen must be considered a soldier. "²⁸² Likely, throughout this 2004 speech, Chávez talks about the eminence of a possible intervention orchestrated by the "empire."²⁸³

In 2005, Chávez announced the cancellation of the 35-year-old military cooperation programme with the US.²⁸⁴ In 2007, the army's motto was changed to *Patria, Socialismo o Muerte* (EN: Fatherland, Socialism or Death), similar to Castroist "¡Patria o muerte! ¡Venceremos!" (EN: Fatherland or death, we will win!)²⁸⁵ A picture of the new motto on a PDVSA oil tank is shown in figure 8 on the following page.

In 2019 Reuters reported about two secret 2008 agreements between the Bolivarian and Castroist regimes for the first time. Under the agreements reviewed by Reuters, Castroist advisors carried out a refashioning of the Venezuelan intelligence services, *Dirección General de Contrainteligencia Militar* (DGCIM) (EN: Directorate General of Military Counterintelligence), to ensure paranoia and fear amongst members of the army, to quash any dissent. The agreements would allow Castroist armed forces: to "train soldiers in Venezuela; review and restructure parts of the Venezuelan military; train Venezuelan intelligence agents in Havana; and change the intelligence service's mission from spying on foreign rivals to surveilling the country's own soldiers, officers, and even senior commanders."²⁸⁶

²⁸² Original source text: "por eso es que hoy lanzo, basándome en el mandato constitucional, el concepto de la defensa nacional popular [...] Se trata ahora de la incorporación masiva del pueblo venezolano a la defensa integral del territorio, en todas partes, para ello cada ciudadano debe considerarse un soldado, cada ciudadana debe considerarse una soldada." staff, "Intervención del Comandante Presidente Hugo Chávez durante marcha por la paz y contra el paramilitarismo."

²⁸³ staff, "Intervención del Comandante Presidente Hugo Chávez durante marcha por la paz y contra el paramilitarismo." Maldonado, *La invasión consentida*, 254.

²⁸⁴ Clodovaldo Hernandez, "El Gobierno de Venezuela rompe 35 años de alianza militar con Estados Unidos," (25/04/2005), https://elpais.com/diario/2005/04/26/internacional/1114466420_850215.html.

²⁸⁵ Reuters, "El Ejército venezolano estrena saludo: "Patria, socialismo o muerte"."; staff, "El jefe de la Armada venezolana ordena el uso del lema "¡Patria, socialismo o muerte!"".

Falcón, "¡Patria o Muerte! ¡Venceremos!."

²⁸⁶ Berwick, "Special Report: How Cuba taught Venezuela to quash military dissent."

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FIGURE 8: PDVSA OIL TANK WITH MOTTO: "PATRIA, SOCIALISMO O MUERTE"
SOURCE: VENEZUELA UNIDA²⁸⁷

The DGCIM has been accused of committing violations against human rights by United Nations Human Rights Council and Human Rights Watch.²⁸⁸ In 2018, Luis Almagro, General Secretary of the OAS, received denunciations that eleven Venezuelans had been tortured supposedly by people with Cuban accents.²⁸⁹

7.5. A subservient relationship

During Chávez presidency, and quite significantly, during his successor's presidency, there have been numerous samples of the extreme lengths the Bolivarian regime is willing to go to provide for the Castroist regime. For instance, In 2007, Chávez embarked on a project to connect the two countries

²⁸⁷ "Contrato colectivo de PDVSA: salarios entre un mínimo 2 dólares y un máximo 24 dólares - Venezuela Unida," updated 24/03/2021, accessed 05/06/2021, <https://venezuelaunida.com/contrato-colectivo-de-pdvsa-salarios-entre-un-minimo-2-dolares-y-un-maximo-24-dolares/>.

²⁸⁸ Alfredo Romero Tamara Taraciuk Broner, Gonzalo Himiob, Daniel Wilkinson, Dan Baum, Joe Saunders, Chris Albin-Lackey, José Miguel Vivanco, María Barragán-Santana, Delphine Starr, Camila Leone, Madeline Cottingham, Fitzroy Hepkins, José Martínez, "Crackdown on Dissent: Brutality, Torture, and Political Persecution in Venezuela," (29/11/2017). <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/11/30/crackdown-dissent/brutality-torture-and-political-persecution-venezuela>; United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Outcomes of the investigation into allegations of possible human right violations of the human rights to life, liberty and physical and moral integrity in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela* (New York: United Nations Human Rights Council, 02/07/2020), https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/VE/A_HRC_44_20_AdvanceUneditedVersion.pdf.

²⁸⁹ Infobae staff, "Luis Almagro recibió denuncias de 11 torturados en Venezuela por gente "con acento cubano"," *Infobae* (Buenos Aires), 28/11/2018.

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via an undersea fibre-optic cable. In January that year, the two governments signed an agreement to establish an "International Communications System".²⁹⁰ The explicit project objective was to improve Cuba's precarious phone services and augment its internet speed. Curiously, as we write this, the internet has been cut off on the island due to the recent rare protests in July 2021.²⁹¹

In January 2008, the Bolivarian regime obtained \$ 50 million for the project out of a series of loans provided by China to be paid by the Bolivarian regime in oil at preferential rates. The fibre optic cable —named ALBA-1—was supposed to be operational in July 2011, but finally, it happened in August 2013. In December 2009, while visiting Havana, Chávez said concerning this submarine cable: "We are going to sign a set of new agreements, binational companies, agreements as important as that of the submarine cable between Venezuela and Cuba, it is the real union, the physical union."²⁹² Unfortunately for Chávez, he was unable to witness that "physical union." By the time the cable was operational, he had already died of cancer in March 2013.²⁹³

We find another sample of this peculiar relationship between the two regimes in the Cienfuegos oil refinery, located in Cuba. As part of a series of new agreements signed between the two regimes in 2009 that amounted to \$3 billion, the Bolivarian regime invested in refurbishing the Cienfuegos oil refinery, after which PDVSA owned 49% of this industrial complex. However, in 2017 the Castroist regime announced that they took over the joint venture and that PDVSA had no longer a stake in the refinery.²⁹⁴

²⁹⁰ Yoani Sánchez, "El cable de fibra óptica entre Cuba y Venezuela comienza a funcionar | Internacional | EL PAÍS," (26/01/2013), https://elpais.com/internacional/2013/01/25/actualidad/1359150993_419023.html.

²⁹¹ Frank Bajak Tali Arbel Barbara Ortukay, "Cuba's internet cutoff: A go-to tactic to suppress dissent," (New York), 12/07/2021, <https://apnews.com/article/business-technology-cuba-ca1ae7975e04481e8cbd56d62a7fb30e>.

²⁹² Original source text: "We are going to sign a set of new agreements, binational companies, agreements as important as that of the submarine cable between Venezuela and Cuba, it is the real union, the physical union"

El Nacional staff, "Venezuela y Cuba firman acuerdos," *El Nacional* (Santo Domingo), 12/12/2009, <https://elnacional.com.do/venezuela-y-cuba-firman-acuerdos/>.

Maldonado, *La invasión consentida*, 244.

²⁹³ José de Córdoba, "China-Oil Deal Gives Chávez a Leg Up," *The Wall Street Journal* (New York), 09/11/2011, <https://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203733504577026073413045462.html>.

staff, "Cable submarino Cuba-Venezuela - EcuRed."

Redacción, "Hugo Chávez, el hombre al que sólo derrotó el cáncer - " *BBC News Mundo* (London), 10/12/2012, https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2013/03/121210_obituario_hugo_chavez.

²⁹⁴ Fernando Ravsberg, "Acuerdos millonarios entre Cuba-Venezuela " *BBC Mundo News* (London), 12/12/2009, https://www.bbc.com/mundo/economia/2009/12/091212_1836_cuba_venezuela_irm.

Sarah Marsh, "Cuba takes over Venezuela stake in refinery joint venture."

7.6. The Castroist and Bolivarian regimes, a special relationship: A subservient relationship

In 2017, after already years of the worst humanitarian crisis in the region since 2014. Including hyperinflation, a collapse of all essential services, and shortages in essential items and medication. The Bolivarian regime sent 10 tons of aid to Cuba after Hurricane Irma hit parts of La Habana in September 2017. Moreover, in 2018, after years of constant declines in PDVSA's oil production —the lowest in thirty-three years— Reuters revealed that PDVSA has been buying foreign crude oil worth \$440 million only to ship it directly to Cuba.²⁹⁵

In the context of the current COVID-19 crisis, we have also found samples of this extreme devotion by the Bolivarian regime towards their Castroist counterparts. In Venezuela, a country with one the lowest vaccination rates in Latin America —only 10.20% in August 2021 according to CNN en Español, only above Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Haiti—²⁹⁶ the Bolivarian regime made sure to provide vaccinations to all the Cuban personnel present in the country. In March 2021, the Castroist news website Cubadebate proudly announced that 95% of “Cuban collaborators” working in Venezuela were already vaccinated, quite possibly with Sinopharm or Sputnik, sent by the Bolivarian regime's allies, China and Russia.²⁹⁷ Furthermore, the Bolivarian regime has been using sections of the Venezuelan population as guinea pigs for the Abdala vaccine, which was developed in Cuba and has not received approval from the World Health Organisation. Likewise, there are no published results about the efficacy of the Abdala vaccine in any scientific journals.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁵TeleSUR staff, "Venezuela envía 10 toneladas de ayuda humanitaria a Cuba," *TeleSUR* (Caracas), 12/09/2017, <https://www.telesurtv.net/news/Venezuela-envia-10-toneladas-de-ayuda-humanitaria-a-Cuba-20170912-0038.html>. Associated Press, "Havana flooded and 5,000 tourists evacuated from coast as Irma hits Cuba," *The Guardian* (London), 10/09/2017, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/10/havana-flooded-and-5000-tourists-evacuated-from-coast-as-irma-hits-cuba>.

"Putting Venezuela's Crisis on the International Agenda," Human Rights Watch, updated 2021-07-08, 2021, accessed 01/06/2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/07/08/putting-venezuelas-crisis-international-agenda>.

Jeanne Liendo Marianna Parraga, "Exclusive: As Venezuelans suffer, Maduro buys foreign oil to subsidize Cuba," *Reuters* (London), 15/05/2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-oil-imports-exclusive-idUSKCN1IG1TO>.

²⁹⁶Yosdany Morejón Ortega, "Inmunizados más del 95% de los colaboradores cubanos en Venezuela," *Cubadebate* (La Habana), 31/03/2021, <http://www.cubadebate.cu/noticias/2021/03/31/inmunizados-mas-del-95-de-los-colaboradores-cubanos-en-venezuela/>.

²⁹⁷ Staff, "Venezuela receives shipment of Russian Sputnik-V coronavirus vaccine." staff, "China Sends 1.3 Million COVID-19 Vaccines to Venezuela."

²⁹⁸Kejal Vyas, "Cuba's New Covid-19 Vaccine Finds Testing Ground in Venezuela," *The Wall Street Journal* (New York), 12/07/2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/cubas-new-covid-19-vaccine-finds-testing-ground-in-venezuela-11625738401>.

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8. Conclusions

The Venezuelan tragic story since the 1980s is one written in oil. Hugo Chávez Frías, an egocentric individual who thought of himself as the saviour of the nation, used Venezuela's petrostate to promote his so-called revolution that resulted in increasing the extant corruption in the country. He came to power with the promise of eradicating corruption and poverty, denouncing the vices of previous governments and the Punto Fijo system. But under his leadership, the old phantoms of corruption came and never left. Transparency, accountability disappeared from Venezuela's state apparatus. There were already signs that this would happen. An individual who wanted to obtain power through a coup d'état should have served as warning signs of what was to come, but it did not. Venezuelans tired of the discredited traditional parties, COPEI and AD, wanted a change, and Hugo Chávez seemed to provide it. Chávez followed the same path of many of his predecessors to Venezuela's presidency and promised a better future and better distribution of the oil rents. However, his down-to-earth approach to public speaking, showmanship, and insults towards Venezuela's *ancient regime*, the fourth republic, seemed to work and enabled him to win many elections.²⁹⁹

Notwithstanding, it would be misleading to say that he nearly won all the elections between 1998 and 2013; besides numerous accusations of irregularities, there were important instances of a high percentage of abstention in a significant number of electoral events, including, quite crucially, the 2000's referendum to approve the new Bolivarian constitution, which was done in a haste and with a Constituent Assembly conformed almost exclusively by pro-Chávez politicians. Furthermore, there are signs that he was not completely honest with his voters. Was his preaching of 21st-century socialism from 2005 onwards the result of an evolution of his political thought? Or perhaps a tactic not to scare the electorate until power is secured? Perhaps, we would never know for sure, but looking into his life and his devotion to the dictator Fidel Castro, whom he met four years earlier to when he was first elected, lead us to think that perhaps his democratic intentions were nothing but smoke. He wanted to

²⁹⁹ Molina, "The Unraveling of Venezuela's Party System."

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be in power for life, but death caught him by surprise. We do not need to look to far to become aware of this. He said himself: "*hasta que el cuerpo aguante*" (EN: until body endures).³⁰⁰

If we say that Venezuelan history is written in oil, Chávez himself is a product of the curse of oil. We now know that from the 1980s, the oil-producing countries would really feel the effects of the so-called curse, which would translate in being less democratic and more likely to have internal conflicts. Chávez came into public prominence as a result of the failed 1992 coup d'état he led in an environment of deterioration of democracy, corruption and living conditions. His arrival later on to the presidency in 1998, would also bring more deterioration of democracy, corruption and living conditions, in the long term, to the degree that the country today is to the brick of being a failed state.

The curse of oil also brought another unintended guest, the Castroist regime. Castro already had shown signs of interest in Venezuela's oil in the 1960s. The first country he visited right after the success of the Cuban Revolution was Venezuela, where he was received that January 1959 by thousand of enthusiastic Venezuelans. Not so enthusiastic, though, was Rómulo Betancourt —one of the father's of Venezuela now-defunct democracy—, who did not agree to Castro's petition of a \$300 million loan in the form of oil. In the 1960s' Venezuela would see the surge of several guerrilla movements, some of which were funded and trained by the Castroist regime, made possible by the USSR's subsidies. In history is preserved the 1967 Machurucuto disembarkation and the attempt to introduced weapons in Venezuela a year earlier, which would trigger the first-ever embargo measures against the Castroist regime. With the loss of its biggest sponsor in the early 1990s, the USSR, Cuba would endure a period of hardships. But the sun would shine again for the Castroist regime with the arrival of Chávez to power. Little after he won the December 1998 elections, in early 2000, both governments were already signing the first of many agreements to come. Cuba would receive between 90,000-100,000 oil barrels daily, investments

³⁰⁰ Francisco Peregil, ""El presidente Chávez sólo quiere perpetuarse en el poder", " *El País* (Madrid), 30/04/2019 2008, https://elpais.com/diario/2008/04/30/internacional/1209506408_850215.html.

Corrales, "Democratic backsliding through electoral irregularities."

Brewer-Carías, "The 1999 Venezuelan Constitution-Making Process as an Instrument for Framing the Development of an Authoritarian Political Regime."

Otero, "Chávez y el socialismo del siglo XXI."; Aponte-Moreno and Lattig, "Chávez: Rhetoric Made in Havana."

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in the island's infrastructure, and very generous compensation for services, such as those provided by Albet S.A.³⁰¹

According to calculations by Cuban-American economist Carmelo Mesa-Lago, Cuban doctors would cost the Venezuelan state \$10,600 per doctor per month. Perhaps some of the most expensive doctors in the world. But it would be during Maduro's presidency where we will see how for the Bolivarian regime providing for the Castroist regime is a priority. We have seen it with reshipment of imported oil to the island, the appropriation by the Castroist regime of the Cienfuegos refinery —where PDVSA had a 49% stake— and more worrying with the use of Venezuela population as guinea pigs for the Abdala vaccine —which had no receive approval from the World Health Organisation—. It seems like the words from Chávez's speech from 1 January 2009, "for Cuba we are willing to die," are not be taken lightly.³⁰²

And last, the curse of oil is also behind the instauration of a kleptocracy in the country. The degree of corruption experience in Venezuela in the last 20 years has meant that even the breadwinner of the country has been affected by secrecy around oil income that nurtures corruption. Today, the Venezuelan state no longer gets most of its income through oil exports, but rather through shady business such as the sale of gold mined in the south of the country, with reports of violations of human rights and lawlessness and areas where there is no state.³⁰³

Juan Pablo Pérez Alfonso —the father of OPEC— already had predicted a gloomy future for Venezuela thanks to oil. He had called oil: "It is the devil's excrement. We are drowning in the devil's excrement." And indeed this really seems to be the case. The downfall experience by Venezuela since the 1970s had

³⁰¹ Staff, "Betancourt Says He Denied Castro a \$300 Million Loan."

Goodman, "Decades after failed invasion, Cuba still eyes Venezuela."

staff, "O.A.S. Official Says Weapons In Venezuela Had Cuban Insignia; Caracas Reports 'More Arms' Leoni's Election to Be Affirmed (Published 1963)."

Vicent, ""Cuba vivirá una grave crisis si termina la ayuda venezolana": Entrevista a Carmelo Mesa-Lago."; Mesa-Lago, "El posible impacto de la muerte de Chávez en la economía cubana."

Rivera, "Cédula electrónica a la cubana."

³⁰² Vicent, ""Cuba vivirá una grave crisis si termina la ayuda venezolana": Entrevista a Carmelo Mesa-Lago."

Vyas, "Cuba's New Covid-19 Vaccine Finds Testing Ground in Venezuela."

Sarah Marsh, "Cuba takes over Venezuela stake in refinery joint venture."

Chávez, "Intervención del Comandante Presidente Hugo Chávez durante ofrenda floral ante el sarcófago del Libertador Simón Bolívar, con motivo de la celebración del quincuagésimo aniversario de la Revolución Cubana."

³⁰³ Sheyla Urdaneta, "Venezuela, Once an Oil Giant, Reaches the End of an Era - The New York Times."

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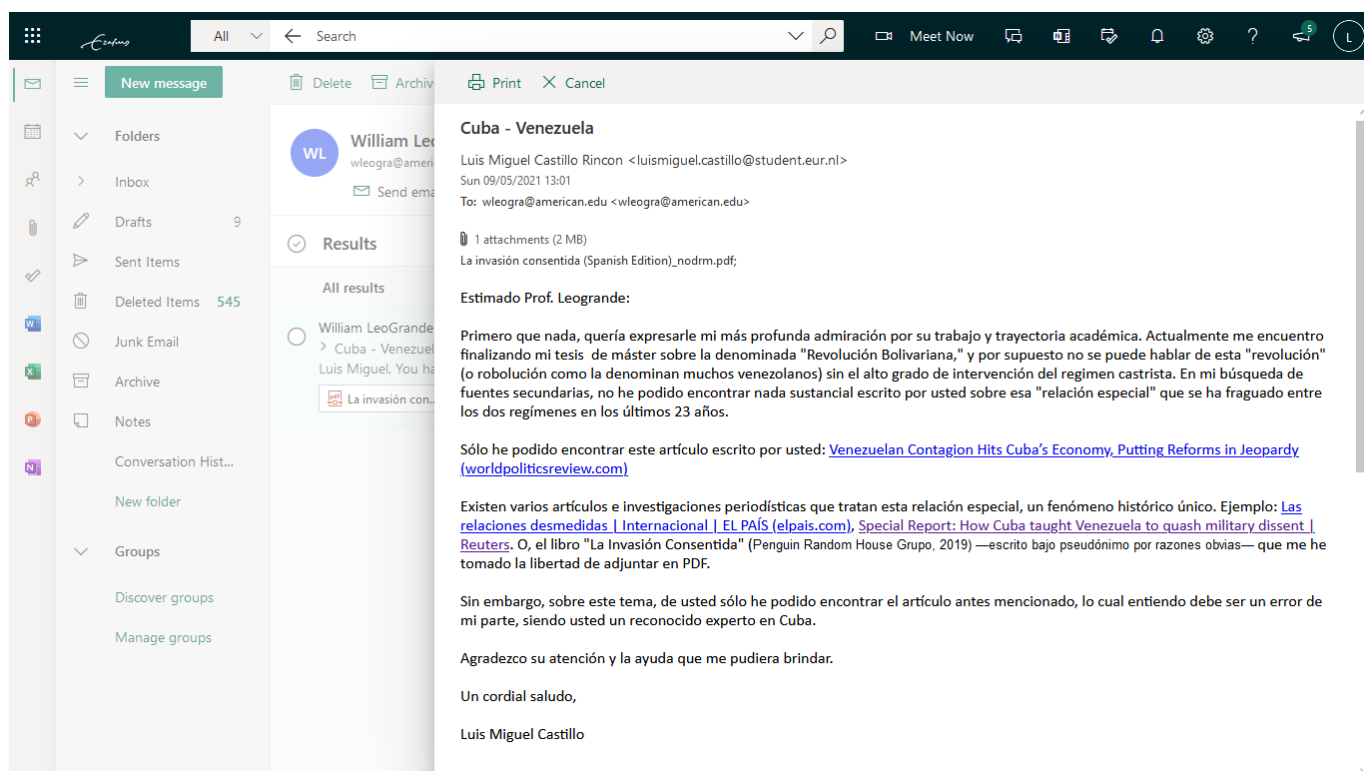
brought Chávez into power in a context of economic decay and disillusionment with Venezuela's traditional parties. Under the rule of the Bolivarian regime, the "devil's excrement" had turned the country into a dictatorial kleptocracy, with an unhealthy codependent relationship with the Castroist regime, which it needs to survive, and it has also damaged the source of the "devil's excrement," PDVSA. The future seems bleak. The era of the petrostate is over. The regime has no intention of ever leaving power, and it counts on allies to keep it afloat.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ Sheyla Urdaneta, "Venezuela, Once an Oil Giant, Reaches the End of an Era - The New York Times." Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations*, 19. Molina, "The Unraveling of Venezuela's Party System."

Appendices

9. Appendices

Appendix A: Screenshot and text of email written to William Leogrande PhD (American University) on 9 May 2021



Cuba - Venezuela

Luis Miguel Castillo Rincon <luismiguel.castillo@student.eur.nl>
Sun 09/05/2021 13:01
To: wleogra@american.edu <wleogra@american.edu>

1 attachments (2 MB)
La invasión consentida (Spanish Edition)_nodrm.pdf;

Estimado Prof. Leogrande:

Primero que nada, quería expresarle mi más profunda admiración por su trabajo y trayectoria académica. Actualmente me encuentro finalizando mi tesis de máster sobre la denominada "Revolución Bolivariana," y por supuesto no se puede hablar de esta "revolución" (o robolución como la denominan muchos venezolanos) sin el alto grado de intervención del regimen castrista. En mi búsqueda de fuentes secundarias, no he podido encontrar nada sustancial escrito por usted sobre esa "relación especial" que se ha fraguado entre los dos regímenes en los últimos 23 años.

Sólo he podido encontrar este artículo escrito por usted: [Venezuelan Contagion Hits Cuba's Economy, Putting Reforms in Jeopardy \(worldpoliticsreview.com\)](#)

Existen varios artículos e investigaciones periodísticas que tratan esta relación especial, un fenómeno histórico único. Ejemplo: [Las relaciones desmedidas | Internacional | EL PAÍS \(elpais.com\)](#), [Special Report: How Cuba taught Venezuela to quash military dissent | Reuters](#). O, el libro "La Invasión Consentida" (Penguin Random House Grupo, 2019) —escrito bajo pseudónimo por razones obvias— que me he tomado la libertad de adjuntar en PDF.

Sin embargo, sobre este tema, de usted sólo he podido encontrar el artículo antes mencionado, lo cual entiendo debe ser un error de mi parte, siendo usted un reconocido experto en Cuba.

Agradezco su atención y la ayuda que me pudiera brindar.

Un cordial saludo,

Luis Miguel Castillo

Estimado Prof. Leogrande:

Appendices

Primero que nada, quería expresarle mi más profunda admiración por su trabajo y trayectoria académica. Actualmente me encuentro finalizando mi tesis de máster sobre la denominada "Revolución Bolivariana," y por supuesto no se puede hablar de esta "revolución" (o robolución como la denominan muchos venezolanos) sin el alto grado de intervención del regimen castrista. En mi búsqueda de fuentes secundarias, no he podido encontrar nada sustancial escrito por usted sobre esa "relación especial" que se ha fraguado entre los dos regímenes en los últimos 23 años.

Sólo he podido encontrar este artículo escrito por usted: [Venezuelan Contagion Hits Cuba's Economy, Putting Reforms in Jeopardy \(worldpoliticsreview.com\)](#)

Existen varios artículos e investigaciones periodísticas que tratan esta relación especial, un fenómeno histórico único. Ejemplo: [Las relaciones desmedidas | Internacional | EL PAÍS \(elpais.com\)](#), [Special Report: How Cuba taught Venezuela to quash military dissent | Reuters](#). O, el libro "La Invasión Consentida" (Penguin Random House Grupo, 2019) —escrito bajo pseudónimo por razones obvias— que me he tomado la libertad de adjuntar en PDF.

Sin embargo, sobre este tema, de usted sólo he podido encontrar el artículo antes mencionado, lo cual entiendo debe ser un error de mi parte, siendo usted un reconocido experto en Cuba.

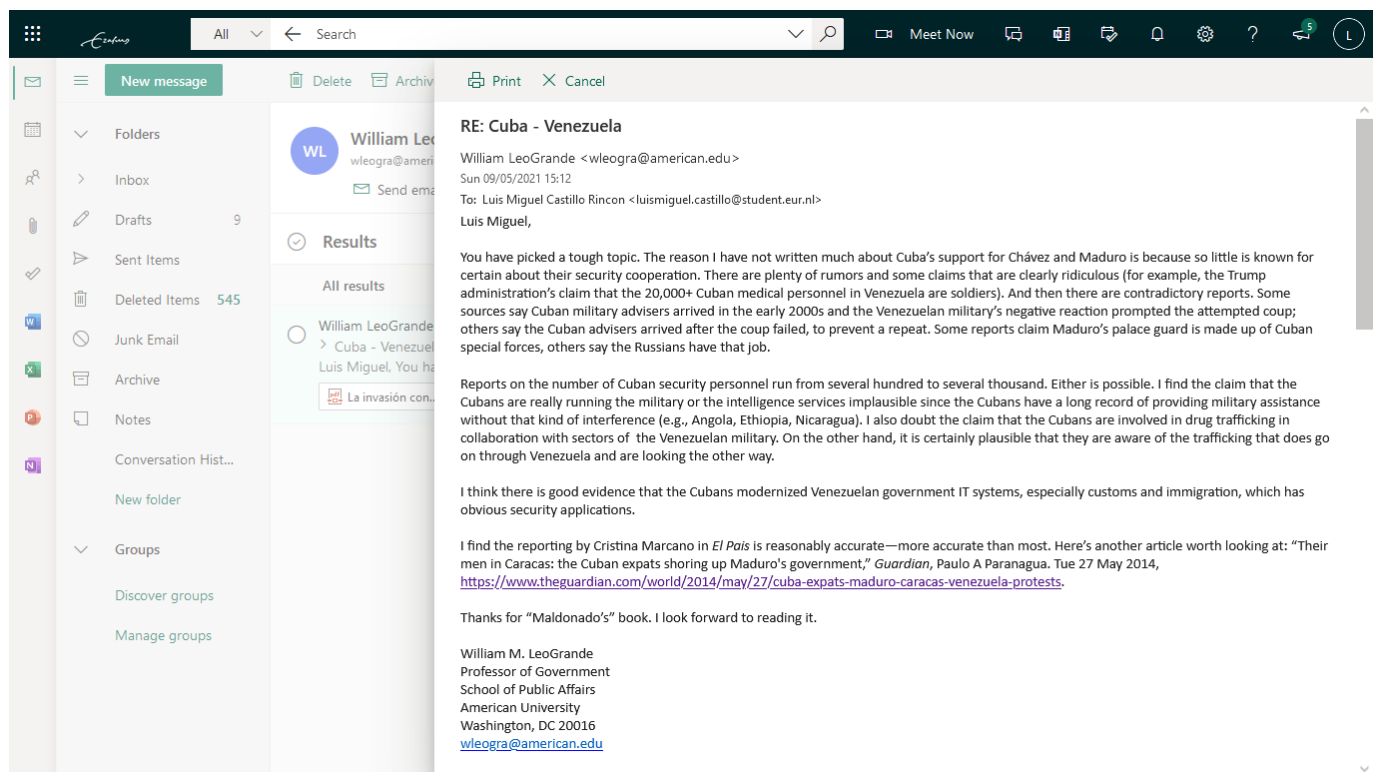
Agradezco su atención y la ayuda que me pudiera brindar.

Un cordial saludo,

Luis Miguel Castillo

Appendix B: Screenshot and text of email response from William Leogrande PhD (American University) on 9 May 2021

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Luis Miguel,

You have picked a tough topic. The reason I have not written much about Cuba's support for Chávez and Maduro is because so little is known for certain about their security cooperation. There are plenty of rumors and some claims that are clearly ridiculous (for example, the Trump administration's claim that

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the 20,000+ Cuban medical personnel in Venezuela are soldiers). And then there are contradictory reports. Some sources say Cuban military advisers arrived in the early 2000s and the Venezuelan military's negative reaction prompted the attempted coup; others say the Cuban advisers arrived after the coup failed, to prevent a repeat. Some reports claim Maduro's palace guard is made up of Cuban special forces, others say the Russians have that job.

Reports on the number of Cuban security personnel run from several hundred to several thousand. Either is possible. I find the claim that the Cubans are really running the military or the intelligence services implausible since the Cubans have a long record of providing military assistance without that kind of interference (e.g., Angola, Ethiopia, Nicaragua). I also doubt the claim that the Cubans are involved in drug trafficking in collaboration with sectors of the Venezuelan military. On the other hand, it is certainly plausible that they are aware of the trafficking that does go on through Venezuela and are looking the other way.

I think there is good evidence that the Cubans modernized Venezuelan government IT systems, especially customs and immigration, which has obvious security applications.

I find the reporting by Cristina Marcano in *El Pais* is reasonably accurate—more accurate than most. Here's another article worth looking at: "Their men in Caracas: the Cuban expats shoring up Maduro's government," *Guardian*, Paulo A Paranagua. Tue 27 May 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/27/cuba-expats-maduro-caracas-venezuela-protests>.

Thanks for "Maldonado's" book. I look forward to reading it.

William M. LeoGrande
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Appendix C: 1 January 2009 speech by Hugo Chávez segmented transcript.

01/01/2009. Discursos y Alocuciones. Comandante Presidente. Panteón Nacional, Caracas, Parroquia Altigracia, Municipio Libertador, Distrito Capital, Venezuela.
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Intervención del Comandante Presidente Hugo Chávez durante ofrenda floral ante el sarcófago del Libertador Simón Bolívar, con motivo de la celebración del quincuagésimo aniversario de la Revolución Cubana

Source: <http://www.todochavezenlaweb.gob.ve/todochavez/888-intervencion-del-comandante-presidente-hugo-chavez-durante-ofrenda-floral-ante-el-sarcofago-del-libertador-simon-bolivar-con-motivo-de-la-celebracion-del-quincuagesimo-aniversario-de-la-revolucion-cubana>

SEGMENT NUMBER	SEGMENTS
1.	<p>Querido compañero, camarada, comandante Ramiro Valdés, comandante y héroe de la Revolución Cubana, del pueblo cubano, y señora Alicia de Valdés; señor embajador Germán Sánchez Otero. En ti Ramiro todos nosotros saludamos este día primero de enero de 2009, este día bonito en el cual Venezuela amaneció vestida de año nuevo, este día bonito, el primero de este año en el cual se cumplen 10 años del inicio del gobierno revolucionario bolivariano, este día especial y especialísimo para todos nosotros en este día de año nuevo, lleno de fe, de fe en el hombre, de fe en el ser humano, de fe en nosotros mismos, de fe en lo que hemos hecho, de fe en lo que hacemos, de fe en lo que haremos, lleno de pasión Patria, lleno de pasión revolucionaria, lleno de esperanzas en un futuro mejor este día de hoy juntamos toda la felicidad que inunda los pueblos, las calles de la gran familia venezolana, para saludar desde aquí con toda esa alegría, con todo este júbilo a Fidel, a Fidel el padre de la Revolución cubana, Revolución que es madre al mismo tiempo de las revoluciones que se levantan en América Latina y el Caribe; en ti saludamos a Fidel, a Raúl y al heroico pueblo cubano, desde el corazón de lo más profundo del alma del pueblo de Bolívar, del pueblo de Venezuela...</p>
2.	<p>Este día de año nuevo, en estas primeras horas del nuevo año 2009, como ya he dicho, con este deseo profundo de felicidad, de paz, de progreso para todos y para todas, venezolanos, venezolanas, cubanos, cubanas, hombres y mujeres de ésta nuestra América y del mundo, Venezuela, la Venezuela de Bolívar, la Venezuela que se ha levantado, la Venezuela que extiende sus manos, a los pueblos de nuestra América no podía dejar pasar la memorable ocasión del 50 aniversario de la Revolución madre, los 50 años de aquel jubiloso día en que tú al lado del Che entrabas en La Habana, en que Fidel junto a Raúl entraban en Santiago, en que las columnas revolucionarias del Ejército Rebelde tomaban las posiciones, las ciudades, huía el dictador, huían los tiranos, y se levantaba libre esa hermosa bandera cubana, no podíamos nosotros dejar pasar este día, qué mejor sitio que reunirnos aquí en torno a las cenizas de nuestros héroes, el primero de ellos Simón Bolívar, el Padre Libertador, y ellas y ellos para llenos de júbilo levantar en alto ese grito, ese canto, esta bandera, este sueño, este compromiso, uno no sabe, nadie sabe, nadie sabrá posiblemente qué fuerzas misteriosas desde hace muchísimos</p>

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	<p>años comenzaron a tejer, queridos compañeros, queridas compañeras, camaradas, hombres y mujeres de Venezuela, hombres y mujeres de Cuba, pueblo cubano, pueblo venezolano, qué fuerzas misteriosas comenzaron a tejer, comandante, camarada desde hace cuántos años esta unión entre Cuba y Venezuela, esta marcha conjunta a un mismo ritmo, a un mismo paso, a un mismo impulso patrio, nadie sabrá. Pero lo que sí sabemos es que es largo ya el camino de batallas conjuntas, de luchas conjuntas, de búsquedas conjuntas, de construcción conjunta para recordar eventos significativos de este camino conjunto, de esta hermandad, de esta unidad entre nosotros, baste recordar que aquel, que aquel hijo de esta Caracas, aquel cuyas cenizas no aparecieron hasta ahora, se las llevó el viento, se las llevó el agua, pero qué importa, vive entre nosotros en este tricolor con el que hoy estamos vestidos de Patria y de año nuevo, aquel caraqueño que se fue de aquí muy joven a la Europa de finales del siglo XVIII, siglo XVIII, y después de haber recorrido como soldado del rey parte de Europa, el norte de África, un día llegó al Caribe, llegó a Cuba, y por distintas razones, esas misteriosas a las que me refiero, fue precisamente en La Habana, fue precisamente en Cuba donde decidió desertar del Ejército imperial y pasarse a filas revolucionarias, inició su carrera de revolucionario, de rebelde precisamente en La Habana, Francisco de Miranda, Mariscal de Francia, comandante del pueblo de los Estados Unidos, en su Revolución de Independencia, coronel de Rusia, y generalísimo de la Primera República, precursor de la Revolución de Independencia de Sudamérica.</p>
3.	<p>Fue en La Habana, fue en Cuba, y allá pasó a Estados Unidos, y se sumó como sabemos, al ejército de Jorge Washington. Basta recordar que en 1815 en el corazón del Caribe en Jamaica el padre Bolívar ya lanzaba su visión geopolítica inmensa que hoy está más viva que nunca, y decía: “Cuba y Puerto Rico ¿no son nuestros hermanos? Vamos a liberarlos, ¿no padecen también el yugo del imperio? Vamos a liberarlos. Sucre, el Abel de la Colombia originaria, Bolívar el padre, apenas habían liberado en Ayacucho del yugo español a los pueblos de Suramérica, antes aún de nacer Bolivia estaban ya elaborando el plan allá arriba en el Potosí, allá arriba en la montaña, allá donde se toca el cielo con las manos, desde las alturas del altiplano boliviano, que nacía Bolivia, miraban hacia Cuba y preparaban el ejército expedicionario y calculaban cuántos hombres harían falta, cuántos barcos, cuántos caballos, cuántas armas, Bolívar lo dijo, la gran Colombia debe ser redonda, sin Cuba no tendría sentido.</p>
4.	<p>He estado pensando comandante Ramiro, dile a Fidel que a partir de hoy la Bandera cubana será izada aquí dentro de este recinto junto a estas Banderas de Colombia, Perú, Ecuador, Bolivia y Panamá.</p>
5.	<p>Señor vicepresidente le encomiendo que antes de que se oculte el sol esté la Bandera cubana izada, porque Cuba es parte de esta patria, de esta unión, y vaya qué Cuba, la Cuba de Martí, la Cuba infinita que amamos, por Cuba lloramos, por Cuba peleamos, y por Cuba estamos dispuesto a morir peleando si hubiera que morir peleando por Cuba revolucionaria...</p>

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6.	<p>Creo que todos los pueblos de nuestra América merecen que su Bandera esté aquí, y ninguno como el pueblo cubano; pero es largo este recuerdo y es largo este impulso de Patria. Sabemos que lamentablemente cuando Simón Bolívar retornó a Caracas, después de haber tomado el cielo por asalto, porque Bolívar tomó el cielo por asalto, aún cuando la frase surgió, como sabemos, muchos años después en la Rusia que se levantaba dirigida por Lenin; pero ya Simón Bolívar había tomado el cielo por asalto, y no sólo era una metáfora, no, Ayacucho es el cielo, Potosí es el cielo, la utopía.</p>
7.	<p>Cuando Bolívar bajó del cielo retornó aquí, de aquí lo echaron, de aquí lo expulsaron, lo mandaron a matar 100 veces, lo difamaron, lo destrozaron las oligarquías que se abalanzaron sobre estas nacientes Repúblicas, el nuevo coloniaje comandante amigo, el nuevo coloniaje Bolívar no pudo evitarlo, y al decir de Martí, en tantas y tan numerosas y tan brillantes ideas que nos dejó, por ahí lo leí hace unos días, uno cada día conoce más a Martí, a José Martí, qué dolor, qué dolor, ser capaz de ver los siglos futuros, y sin embargo estar enclavados en su siglo, ¡qué dolor! Bolívar vio el futuro pero fue incapaz de tocarlo y murió con la sensación de haber arado en el mar, se hundió el proyecto de Bolívar, el de Sucre, el de Miranda, el de Josefa, el de Manuela, se hundió, y como él lo previó en memorable carta desde Guayaquil en 1829, dirigida a todos los jefes de las Repúblicas, a los jefes militares, a los líderes políticos y militares decía: “Si no nos llamamos a un orden nuevo lo que vendrá sobre nosotros, lo que legaremos a la posteridad será un nuevo coloniaje...” Y eso fue lo que ocurrió lamentablemente, dolorosamente. Luego salió Martí, y aquí vino Martí, y esa frase generosa que Cuba ha hecho suya, y que nosotros hacemos nuestra: “dénos, o déme Venezuela en qué servirla y tendrá en mi un hijo...” Lo hemos dicho de retorque: dénos Cuba en que servirla y tendrá en nosotros hijos e hijas. Hijos de la Patria grande somos.</p>
8.	<p>Surgió Martí, Martí levantó a todo lo alto, Martí izó a lo más alto, a lo más sublime a Bolívar, a su pensamiento, a su legado, salió Martí medio siglo después en defensa de Bolívar como ya lo había hecho de manera magistral y luminosa su maestro Simón Rodríguez; pero Martí fue más allá, montó a caballo, desenvaino la espada, y allá quedó su semilla sembrada en dos ríos, en pleno combate, detrás de las Banderas de Bolívar. Memorable su pensamiento, de Bolívar no se puede hablar sino teniendo una montaña por tribuna, y con relámpagos y rayos, así está Bolívar en el cielo de América vigilante y ceñudo sentado aún en la roca de crear con el inca al lado y un as de banderas a los pies, porque lo que él no hizo sin hacer está hasta hoy decía Martí, porque Bolívar tiene que hacer en América todavía, grande en la visión y grande en la pasión, y grande en la vergüenza patria y en el amor patrio José Martí, apóstol de Cuba, apóstol de Venezuela y apóstol de nuestros pueblos.</p>
9.	<p>Ahora, esas fuerzas mágicas a las que me refiero continuaron, continuaron, diría Earle Herrera, haciendo de las suyas, continuaron haciendo su labor callada teniendo historia, acercando caminos.</p>

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10.	<p>Hace 100 años, por estos días finales, 1908, por estos días iniciales 1909, barcos de guerra norteamericanos llegaban a La Habana; barco de guerra norteamericanos llegaban a La Guaira, intervención yanqui en Cuba y en Venezuela al mismo tiempo, y así comenzó el nuevo coloniaje, así comenzó Estados Unidos a concretar la doctrina Monroe de América para los americanos, pero fue simultánea la intervención, una noche larga Fidel y yo descubríamos coincidencias, 1908-1909, comenzaba Cuba y Venezuela a ser dominadas, convertidas en verdaderas colonias yanquis allá y aquí, dos países con una posición estratégica envidiable, dos países con grandes riquezas, dos países con unas raíces profundas, dos países sobre los cuales el imperio no sólo colocó sus ojos de águila sino sobre los cuales arremetió clavando sus garras de águila imperial hasta la médula, hasta los huesos, pasaron 50 años, ¡oh misterios de la historia!, casi al mismo tiempo cayó el tirano allá, cayó el dictador aquí, 1958, avanzaban ustedes por la Sierra Maestra, tomaban pueblos, Radio Rebelde, el pueblo venezolana acompaña a Fidel y a ustedes comandante, amigo, se levantaban los pueblos en una consonancia extraordinaria, una orquesta mágica sublime se levantaba, y aquel año 58 aquí fue de transición una Junta de Gobierno, y el pueblo en las calles, ya lo decía Earle Herrera, un Bolívar para la Sierra Maestra, y Wolfgang Larrazábal, unos fusiles para la Sierra Maestra también, y un apoyo del alma a Cuba.</p>
11.	<p>Fidel Castro, Fidel entró a La Habana el 8 de enero de aquel año 1959, porque ellos tomaron primero Santiago, ustedes entraban a La Habana, eran columnas guerrilleras que avanzaban tú junto al Che, Camilo, Celia, dignas mujeres cubanas, dignos hombres cubanos, la juventud rebelde, dos semanas después de haber entrado a La Habana estaba Fidel Castro aquí en El Silencio, estaba aquí en Caracas rindiéndole honor a Bolívar y al pueblo bolivariano, y Caracas se levantaba rebelde, la cuna de Bolívar, la cuna de Miranda se levantaba rebelde, a los pocos meses llegó aquí el vicepresidente de los Estados Unidos, el pueblo de Caracas repudió, el mismo pueblo que admiró a Fidel, el mismo pueblo que lo aplaudió a rabiar, el mismo pueblo que lloró oyendo sus palabras, que vibró con esa Bandera, rechazó de manera enérgica la presencia del vicepresidente Richard Nixon, y hasta una amenaza hubo del Departamento de Estado, una flota se venía sobre Venezuela, aquí había un clima revolucionario desatado por las calles después del 23 de Enero como producto de la suma de las luchas de os años 40, de los años 50, era el mismo pueblo de Bolívar rebelde siempre, levantisco siempre, alegre siempre, bullicioso siempre, el mismo pueblo, ¿qué ocurrió? Y he allí entonces la necesidad en que siempre estamos de analizar los hechos históricos, de colocarlos en la balanza de la razón, del conocimiento, del estudio, de las conclusiones, de la proyección histórica desde el pasado hasta el presente rumbo al futuro, Cuba se levantó, Venezuela se levantó por vías distintas lo sabemos, pero el efecto: el mismo, se hizo presente una fuerza transformadora, sin embargo aquí en Venezuela no hubo, hubo pueblo, claro, ahí está, ahí estaba en las calles, hubo impulso como en Cuba.</p>
12.	<p>En la genética histórica de nuestros pueblos andan Martí, Maceos,</p>

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	<p>Bolívar, Miranda, allá en Cuba el pueblo cubano, la dirigencia cubana, el liderazgo cubano fue capaz de hacer lo que ya Bolívar decía y dijo en su momento tratando de evitar la debacle del proyecto de la Gran Colombia, y animando a los demás, a los timoratos, a los que dudaban, lo dijo Bolívar con aquella frase: “El impulso de esta Revolución ya está dado, nada ni nadie podrá frenarla o detenerla, lo que nos toca a nosotros hacer es darle la dirección correcta para terminar diciendo comandante Ramiro, Bolívar decía al final de ese planteamiento profundo decía: “Sólo por el camino de la Revolución obtendremos la victoria, por ningún otro.” En Cuba ocurrió tal cual, la Revolución cubana tomó su rumbo, y un liderazgo al frente, y un Fidel y un Raúl, y un Che y un Camilo, y un Ramiro se pusieron al frente del pueblo que había despertado, aquí no, aquí no hubo un Fidel, aquí no hubo un Ramiro, aquí no hubo un liderazgo que fuera capaz de entender el momento histórico y conducir a la victoria al pueblo venezolano a través de una Revolución, no lo hubo...</p>
13.	<p>Y créanme que digo esto con infinito respeto a quienes quedaron en el camino tratando de construir ese liderazgo. Y lo digo sin respeto para los que todavía andan por allí sangrando por la herida, por haberse convertido en traidores y saltimbanquis, y haber sido asesinos de aquel impulso revolucionario, dividieron las fuerzas, saltaron talanqueras, engañaron al pueblo, no hubo capacidad como dice algún sabio de la antigüedad: “Cuando se despiertan las revoluciones lo que nos queda a nosotros es cabalgar la ola de los acontecimientos y tratar de darle dirección, si no se le da dirección se pierden en el espacio, en el tiempo, como ríos desbordados cuyas aguas se van por mil caminos y terminan siendo nada; eso pasó aquí triste y dolorosamente comandante, no así en Cuba. Aquí llegaron los supuestos líderes: Rómulo Betancourt, Jóvito Villalba, Raúl Leoni, Rafael Caldera, Carlos Andrés Pérez y aquellos supuestos padres de la democracia llegaron con su proyecto ya cocinado, habían hecho el Pacto de Nueva York, y vinieron a enfriar el movimiento popular, a dividirlo a confundirlo, y a firmar el pacto de traición a la Patria, el Pacto de Punto Fijo, e instalaron una verdadera tiranía de la élite, o de las élites un Estado burgués arrodillado al imperio norteamericano, Venezuela se convirtió además en una colonia sub imperial, una especie de virreinato, porque desde aquí se conspiró contra Cuba revolucionaria, los gobiernos venezolanos conspiraron contra Cuba, la doctrina Betancourt fue Venezuela; vaya qué ironía, fue precisamente el gobierno venezolano de Acción Democrática dirigido por Rómulo Betancourt, uno de los más activos en la conspiración internacional contra Cuba, claro, obedeciendo el mandato del imperio norteamericano, traicionando el espíritu del pueblo venezolano, martiano y bolivariano; Venezuela se convirtió en plataforma yanqui, todos los gobiernos que por aquí pasaron se trajeron a los cubanos gusanos, mayameros, terroristas y les dieron poder militar y poder policial aquí, y aquí asesinaron, aquí torturaron, aquí conspiraron, aquí planificaron la voladura del avión cubano, terroristas hoy protegidos por el gobierno de los Estados Unidos; terrorismo económico. Desde aquí se planificaron golpes de Estado. Un ejemplo voy a poner, Guyana, la Guyana que era gobernada por un movimiento de izquierda y por un líder de izquierda, Forbes</p>

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	<p>Burnham, aquí se planificó un golpe de Estado contra Guyana, porque era amiga de Cuba, porque tenía relaciones de coordinación con Cuba, desde Venezuela se apoyó la invasión a Grenada para cercenar la Revolución de Grenada, esta era una base de conspiración de la CIA, del Pentágono y del imperio, era Venezuela la vergüenza de este Continente, ¡ahhh! Pero nadie debe olvidar jamás que aquí están en esta tierra las cenizas de Bolívar. Nadie debe olvidar jamás quiénes somos los venezolanos, qué corre por las venas del pueblo venezolano. ¡Ahhh, fuerzas de la historia! Pasaron los años, como dice alguna historia, pasó mucho tiempo.</p>
14.	<p>Yo era niño en 1959, no recuerdo, y además era un niño campesino, recuerdo el día que Fidel me dijo cuando nos conocimos: “Chávez ¿en qué año? 1954, me dijo, ya yo estaba preso cuando tú naciste, estaban ustedes en la Isla de la Juventud, Isla de Pinos, 54, ciertamente; pero uno fue creciendo y oyendo, y luego nos hicieron soldados alguno de nosotros, y crecíamos y oíamos; allí en ese mismo lugar con un uniforme parecido a aquel azul que tiene aquel brigadier, y aquel casco, montaba yo guardia en este mismo lugar hace casi 40 años, García Carneiro, general en jefe y ahora gobernador, y un pensaba, y uno estudiaba, y uno se iba despertando a la conciencia, y pasaron así los años, no voy yo a relatar aquí, Ramiro tiene que estar además en el acto esta tarde en Santiago de Cuba con Raúl y con el pueblo cubano, así que estoy limitado por el tiempo, pero cada palabra la digo con un fervor muy profundo este primero de enero 2009, no voy a relatar todo lo que ocurrió porque lo sabemos, es bien sabido. Pero yo recuerdo Ramiro Valdés, aquellos años 89, 90 cuando en el Ejército venezolano un parto se anunciaba, una fuerza desde dentro, desde la profundidad de lo que significa ser soldado de esta Patria, cuando Venezuela saqueada estaba, hundida estaba, humillada estaba cuando este pueblo rebelde ya estaba desde el 27 de febrero de 1989, recuerdo aquellos días comandante Reyes, cayó el gobierno sandinista como producto del terrorismo imperial y el sabotaje económico, y la guerra que le hizo Estados Unidos y su imperio al pueblo sandinista, y a su gobierno legítimo, revolucionario; pero fue para nosotros un duro golpe en el Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario recibir aquellas noticias, caía la Revolución sandinista, se estremecía la Unión Soviética, y decíamos, ¡Dios mío va a caer también! Y cayó el gigante, como que se apagaban las luces, como que la historia se venía en contra, algunos incluso anunciaban el fin de la historia, y nosotros aquí, por ahí escondidos en esta Caracas, en algunos lugares, allá en una base aérea, allá en un cuartel planificando una rebelión, un movimiento revolucionario; pero recuerdo que siempre decíamos, cayó Nicaragua, cayó el Muro de Berlín, cayó la Unión Soviética, pero ahí está Cuba, ahí está Cuba, y Cuba está allí, Cuba estuvo allí, Cuba permaneció allí, Cuba encendió las luces, Cuba como dijo el Che, como dijo Fidel, y lo demostraron, sigue siendo vanguardia de la dignidad de los pueblos de nuestra América, estuvo allí siempre, está allí y estará allí siempre...</p>
15.	<p>Aquella indigna situación de ser colonia yanqui permaneció en Cuba, pues, desde 1909 hasta 1959, 50 años, aquí también 50 años, y luego</p>

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	<p>se extendió después de la traición al 23 de Enero del 58, se extendió un tramo más, 40 años más; pero fue así como llegó el momento aquí de romper el yugo yanqui 90 años después en 1998, 90 años de coloniaje yanqui, 90 años de estremecimiento de esta casa de nuestros héroes, se estremecía las cenizas de Bolívar, esa Bandera flameaba en un fuego patrio que no terminaba.</p>
16.	<p>Nunca olvidaré aquel 2 de febrero de 1999, Fidel llegó primero que yo, no fue que yo esperé a Fidel aquí como te esperé hoy, Fidel llegó primero que yo aquí, era un día de maremágnum, juramento, toma de posesión, un mar de pueblo dijo Fidel, y es verdad, un mar de pueblo en las calles y vinimos al Panteón, yo tenía llegando y Fidel salió con unas grandes zancadas a esperarme allá en la puerta, y recuerdo que me dijo: “Chávez ¿la hora? Este acto es muy importante pero hay mucha gente allá en Los Próceres esperando...” Hicimos el acto aquí y nos fuimos luego a Los Próceres, y luego en la noche hasta tarde; la Revolución aquel día iniciaba gobierno, claro que ya venía de atrás, de una década de convulsiones desde 1989, y aquí estamos hoy las dos Revoluciones, los dos pueblos de la mano como Miranda en La Habana, como Fidel en el Silencio, como este soldado con ustedes allá en la Plaza de la Revolución; como estos miles de médicos, de cooperantes cubanos atendiendo a nuestro pueblo, demostrándole amor a nuestro pueblo, cooperantes médicos, deportistas, constructores, agricultores, educadores.</p>
17.	<p>Nuestros pueblos se aman Ramiro, nuestros pueblos ya son uno solo, nuestras revoluciones ya son una sola; el imperio que nos asechó y nos asecha terminará siendo tigre de papel, como decía el camarada Mao Tse Tung, y nuestros dos líderes, porque así como Fidel lo dijo yo lo dije igual. Yo lo dije igual inspirándome en Fidel, pero hace años, hacía años que yo había leído que cuando Fidel le preguntaron preso ya quién era el líder del asalto al Cuartel Moncada donde tú estuviste Ramiro, Fidel dijo: “Búsquenlo, se llama José Martí...” Igual dije yo un día preso ya, ¿quién dirigió esto? Búsquenlo, se llama Simón Bolívar.</p>
18.	<p>Martí y Bolívar están hoy más juntos que nunca, y ambos tienen que hacer en América todavía, tú lo decías en tus palabras, una nueva era se abre en el horizonte de nuestros pueblos, en el horizonte de nuestra América, estamos obligados nosotros a seguir luchando, estamos obligados a seguir triunfando ahora cuando estamos al frente de una hecatombe del capitalismo mundial; ahora cuando enfrentamos y enfrentaremos grandes desafíos por venir en este año, en los próximos años. Estamos obligados a seguir juntos, cada día más juntos, y así lo digo desde aquí Fidel, compañero, padre, camarada Raúl; compañero, hermano Ramiro, al pueblo cubano, a los soldados cubanos, Venezuela está de pie, y Venezuela estará y seguirá siempre de pie.</p>
19.	<p>La Revolución Bolivariana llegó aquí para quedarse, nosotros no llegamos aquí para traicionar una vez más la esperanza del pueblo de Simón Bolívar, nosotros llegamos aquí así como ustedes llegaron a La Habana un día como hoy hace 50 años, nosotros llegamos aquí para triunfar Ramiro, y juntos triunfaremos desde aquí con toda la</p>

Appendices

	fuerza de mi corazón, de soldado martiano, de soldado bolivariano, lo grito a los 4 vientos junto al pueblo cubano, junto al pueblo venezolano, junto a ti Fidel, junto a ti Raúl, junto a ti Ramiro, junto a todos: ¡Patria, socialismo o muerte! Nosotros venceremos.
20.	¡Que viva la Revolución cubana! ¡Que viva Fidel Castro!
21.	¡Que viva Raúl, que viva Cuba!
22.	¡Que viva Venezuela!
23.	Muchas gracias compañeros. Feliz año nuevo 2009. Muchísimas gracias.

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