Unmasking the Bolivarian Revolution: An Analysis of the Interpretation of Simon Bolivar in Venezuela

Carlos Munoz Burgos

American University – School of International Service

Spring 2010

Capstone Advisor: Narendran Kumarakulasingam

I. Introduction

It has already been more than ten years since Hugo Chavez assumed power in Venezuela, and instituted an agenda known as the Bolivarian Revolution, which has also worked as his ideological framework (Gott, 2000). After taking office, Chavez made several drastic changes in Venezuela in the name of his newly-established ideology, which later were legitimized in elections. For example, he changed the country's name to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and he also created a Constituent Assembly to draft and promote a Bolivarian Constitution (Marcano and Becerra Tyszka, 2007). Furthermore, he instituted a civic-military action plan known as "Bolivar 2000," and promoted the creation of social organizations for the defense of the revolution known as "Bolivarian circles" (Chumaceiro Arreaza, 2003). All of these was done to honor and commemorate Venezuela's deified national hero, Simon Bolivar.

A large number of scholars and opponents of the Bolivarian Revolution often characterize it as authoritarian, dictatorial, and repressive (Shifter, 2006; Clark, 2009; Corrales, 2006; Corrales and Penfold-Becerra, 2007). However, it seems counterintuitive that Venezuelans, returning to democracy after more than 130 years of repressive and dictatorial rule, would chose an authoritative individual to lead them.

Two motives are widely cited as to why Hugo Chavez was able to win the elections in 1998. First, Venezuelans were tired of forty years of rule by two parties, namely, Accion Democratica (AD) and Comite de Organizacion Politica Electoral Independiente (COPEI). The leaders of these two parties ruined Venezuela, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, by being involved in numerous corruption scandals and adopting policies which only benefitted the wealthiest sectors of the population. And second, the shortcomings of neoliberal policies, particularly cuts in social spending and privatization, augmented inequality in Venezuela, placing more than 70% of the

population in poverty (Herrera Salas, 2005; Hawkins, 2003). Venezuelans no longer

trusted the old system, and they yearned for change. As a result, they elected Chavez as

an alternative to the status quo.

Nevertheless, some scholars have argued that it was not only the

abovementioned events that catapulted Chavez to the presidency (Gott, 2000, Clark,

2009, McCoy and Myers, 2004; Bruce, 2008). They argue that Chavez and his

supporters created a narrative that captured the hearts and minds of the Venezuelan

society by fulfilling their innermost patriotic needs. That is, Chavez has exploited

Simon Bolivar's admiration in Venezuela to justify his projects and further his agenda.

This capstone aims to extend this line of argument by asking, "*How have the*

proponents of the Bolivarian Revolution interpreted Simon Bolivar?" It argues that

analyzing contemporary Venezuelan interpretations of Simon Bolivar helps explain the

popular support that Chavez currently enjoys.

This document examines how Chavistas[1] have interpreted Bolivar by using

discourse analysis and focusing on the imaginaries[2] that have been attributed to Simon

Bolivar throughout Venezuela's republican history. For example, at different periods in

time, Bolivar has been understood as a demigod, a revolutionary, a democrat, or a

Catholic. However, Chavez has been able to remain in power for more than ten years,

with wide popular support because he has been able to use every single understanding

and imaginary attributed to Bolivar at the same time, and he has even created a new one.

In the past, Venezuelan leaders have not been able to use every imaginary at the same

time, so what Chavez has been able to accomplish it exceptional.

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[1] The Chavistas are the supporters of President Hugo Chavez, and his Bolivarian revolution. Contratry to popular belief, the Chavistas not only include the poor sectors of the population but also scholars, doctors, lawyers, and wealthy businessmen (Valencia Ramirez, 2005).

[2] Imaginaries are created by people and they fulfill their needs and interests when their identities have been lost. Section III explains this concept as well as discourse analysis in detail.

This study is significant because, while scholars have analyzed the Bolivarian Revolution in order to understand how power has been constructed (Romero, 2005), how Chavez creates stark divisions in Venezuelan society (Chumaceiro Arreaza, 2003), or how Chavez uses metaphors to legitimize his project (Aponte Moreno, 2008), no one has analyzed how Bolivar is interpreted by Chavez from a discursive perspective.

Section II of this document will explore the literature on the Bolivarian Revolution, and how it has been characterized. Section III will present the framework of analysis which will be employed to answer this document's central question. Section IV will delve into Bolivar's life and achievements, and it will also present the way in which he has been interpreted in the past by the use of imaginaries. Section V will present a discursive analysis of the way the proponents of the Bolivarian Revolution have interpreted Bolivar, and lastly, section VI will conclude with some final remarks.

II. Literature Review

The literature on Chavez's Bolivarian Revolution can be divided into two strands. First, there is academic work that focuses on how successful this revolution has been and on whether it is democratic or not. I will refer to this strand as the Political Economic approach. On the other hand, a second body of literature explores Bolivar as a symbol of national identity and on how Venezuelan leaders have used his figure to gain widespread support from the population and further their agendas. I will refer to this type of analysis as the Interpretative approach.

Political Economic Approach

Much of the literature on the Bolivarian Revolution can be can be categorized under this approach. Furthermore, this approach can be further categorized into two strong contending views: 1) scholarly analyses that support Chavez's revolution, and 2) scholarly analyses that oppose it.

Supporters

     The most enthusiastic backers of the revolution see Chavez as a hero who, inspired by Bolivar, wants to redress social injustices which have long been neglected by the ruling elites. In other words, in their eyes, Chavez is a humanitarian leader, who is committed to fight against the traditional political class, which has only been interested in protecting its prosperous position while denying the masses their rightful share of wealth and political participation. Furthermore, Chavez's supporters contend that he is not only fighting for the least fortunate in Venezuela, but also for the forgotten masses of Latin America. He bravely defends the continent against the mighty United States, and with his unique charisma, he is correcting the power and wealth imbalances which long have plagued Latin America.

     Among those who adopt this position are Heinz Dieterich, Zikki Ergas, Gregory Wilpert, and Ernesto Carmona. Their individual works focus on specific aspects that explain why the Bolivarian Revolution is the right path for Venezuela to pursue. All of their studies argue that Latin America needs to follow an original political and economic agenda which reflects its values and history.

     In 2005, after having written extensively on the socialism of the twenty-first century, Heinz Dieterich published a book titled "*Hugo Chavez el Socialismo del Siglo XXI*" (Hugo Chavez and the Socialism of the Twenty-First Century). In this work, in addition to presenting a mathematical theory for the socialism of the twenty-first century in Venezuela, Dieterich argues that the socialism to be instituted in Venezuela must reflect Bolivar's ideals. To this he writes:

> But of course, instructing on the socialism today, particularly in [Venezuela], is to speak about Simon Bolivar as an icon of Latin American thought; that Bolivar who receives the influence of the utopian socialism of around 1970, and centers its focus on equality, liberty, and supreme social happiness (pp. 11).

Furthermore, Dieterich argues that the Bolivarian Revolution is only the first phase before the institution of the socialism of the twenty-first century. In this phase, Dieterich contends that people will learn more about the values that Simon Bolivar stood for, and when they have completely learned how to live harmoniously with fraternity, equality, and solidarity, then the socialism of the twenty-first century will be finalized. In other words, Dieterich sees Chavez's project as an indispensable transitory period towards the socialism of the twenty-first century.

An overwhelming amount of literature on the Bolivarian Revolution agrees that the failure of neoliberal policies in Venezuela played an important role in the 1999 election of Hugo Chavez (Bruce, 2008; Corrales and Penfold, 2007; Gott, 2008; Jones, 2007; Kellog, 2007). However, Zekki Ergas in his article "The Socialism of the Twenty-First Century in Latin America and Venezuela," further explores the connections between the failed neoliberal policies, which he refers to as The Washington Consensus[3], and the emergence of the socialism of the twenty-first century in Venezuela.

On this last point, Ergas argues that neoliberalism is an ideology which has been forcefully introduced to the people of Venezuela, and consequently, will never be able to work in this country. He agrees with Dieterich that Bolivarian Socialism is the most viable development approach in Venezuela, given that Venezuela is extremely diverse and different from any other country. As a result, the laws, codes, ideas, and models that govern Venezuela cannot come from the "savage Anglo-capitalism, the real-bureaucratic socialism, or the utopian socialism" (Dieterich, 2005). The new socialism needs to be fresh, like the one Simon Bolivar constantly aspired for, and it should reflect the values and ethics that Venezuelans have built in over a century.

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[3] Generally, this term refers to a set of policies championed by the IMF and the World Bank that encouraged developing countries to privatize state enterprises, reduce public spending, deregulate governments, liberalize trade and finance, and encourage foreign investment.

Gregory Wilpert in his 2006 paper "The Meaning of 21st Century for Venezuela," explains what the Bolivarian Revolution is and how Venezuela is moving away from capitalism towards socialism. He argues that the Bolivarian Revolution is a project that will start from zero, meaning that Venezuelans will be the ones who construct the new socialism. Also, the socialism of the twenty-first century has not been predefined, and as such, will be constructed on a day-to-day basis. To support his argument, he cites a speech that Chavez gave in mid 2006:

> We have assumed the commitment to direct the Bolivarian Revolution towards socialism and to contribute to the socialist path, with a new socialism, a socialism of the 21st century, which is based in solidarity, in fraternity, in love, in justice, in liberty, and in equality.

Furthermore, Wilpert, along with Carmona (2005) and Malabe (2005), states that the Bolivarian Socialism is different from the failed socialism that brought down the Soviet Union in the late 1980s; however, he argues that Marx's and Engel's ideas should still serve as a framework for implementing this new socialism.

Finally, a last argument Wilpert makes, which is also present in most of the literature on the Bolivarian Revolution, is that Chavez's project is inclusive for it includes the whole Venezuelan population in it, as opposed to the previous forms of government which were exclusive, and included only a small fraction of the population in them (McCoy and Myers, 2004; Gott, 2000). Wilpert argues that Chavez has transformed Venezuela from being a "representative democracy" to being a "participatory democracy," where the people -and not the government - have power.

Opponents

On the other hand, the opponents of the Revolution – who include the domestic opposition and many in Washington – see Chavez as a power-hungry dictator who has disregarded the rule of law and the democratic process in the name of Bolivar's ideals.

Chavez is accused of leading Venezuela to the abyss by "extending state control over the economy, militarizing politics, eliminating dissent, cozying up to rogue regimes, and carrying out wrong-headed social programs that will set Venezuela back" (Shifter, 2006, pp. 46). Furthermore, these critics argue that his authoritarian way of ruling and his inept social policies lack any soundness and see him as a menace not only to his people, but also to his Latin American neighbors, and U.S. interests.

Richard Gott in his 2008 paper titled "Venezuela under Hugo Chavez: The Originality of the 'Bolivarian' Project" discusses the Bolivarian Missions, which are oil-funded social projects for the poor, and argues that although these projects have been successful in some areas such as literacy, their implementation does not represent Chavez's benevolence at any level. This argument is reinforced in the works of Jones (2007), Bruce (2008), and Marcano and Barrera Tyszka (2007). They all argue that Chavez implemented these projects in late 2003 to bolster his popular support, which was falling in 2004 at the time of the constitutional referendum. In other words, the abovementioned scholars contend that Chavez used Venezuela's oil revenues not to help the most unfortunate, but to further consolidate his dictatorial ambitions.

Additionally, Javier Corrales and Michael Penfold-Becerra (2007) argue that the democratic process in Venezuela has ceased to exist as a result of oil funds being manipulated by the state. They also argue that after the failed coup against Chavez in 2002, the Venezuelan government has been engaged in clientelism in order to achieve electoral success. As a result, the authors contend that the state has become an unreliable force for promoting democracy in Venezuela. Furthermore, this study also demonstrated that there is a direct relationship between high oil prices and popular support for Hugo Chavez, that is, when oil prices are high, Chavez enjoys wide support from the population.

In addition, the scholars and politicians who oppose Chavez constantly refer to him as a dictator, and to Venezuela as a quasi-democracy. Shifter (2006) argues that the Bolivarian Revolution's democratic legitimacy exists only theoretically. Although there are still democratic elections in Venezuela, as well as an executive and a judicial branch of government, Chavez has virtually concentrated all of the powers and decision-making in the hands of the executive. Also, to claim that democracy exists in Venezuela, the supporters of the Revolution argue that dissent is permitted in this country. In fact, they argue that dissent exists in Venezuela because the largely privately-owned media is able to frequently criticize Chavez and his revolution. However, the government has created subtle instruments to silence the opposition. For example, according to the criminal law, it is an offense to show disrespect for the president, punishable by up to 20 months in jail (Shifter, 2006).

An argument similar to Shifter's (2006) position that democratic legitimacy exists only theoretically can be found in Javier Corrales' 2006 article 'Hugo Boss." The following excerpt best exemplifies Corrales' position:

> There are no mass executions or concentration camps in Venezuela. Civil Society has not disappeared, as it did in Cuba after the 1959 revolution. There is no systematic, state-sponsored terror leaving scores of *desaparecidos*, as it happened in Argentina and Chile in the 1970s. And there is certainly no efficiently repressive and meddlesome bureaucracy a la the Warsaw Pact. In fact, in Venezuela, one can still find an active and vociferous opposition, elections, a feisty press, and a vibrant and organized civil society. Venezuela, in other words, appears almost democratic (pp. 33).

Finally, Corrales argues that Venezuela is not democratic, and this might not only become increasingly popular in the region, but in other parts of the world as well.

Interpretative Approach

Several authors have written on Simon Bolivar as a symbol of national identity. In fact, the writings on Bolivar as a representative figure in Venezuela go back to the

immediate years after his death in December 1830. Historian German Carrera Damas'

book "El Culto a Bolivar," written in 1969, traces the history of some of the most

prominent writings on Bolivar and analyses how this hero was immediately portrayed as

almost a deity in the Venezuelan collective imaginary[4].

The main arguments presented by the aforementioned author are that first,

Venezuela's history has been replaced by the life of Bolivar in the minds of this

country's citizens. That is, Venezuelans view their emancipation history as the life and

deeds of Simon Bolivar. Second, in the Venezuelan collective imaginary, Carrera

Damas (1983) argues that Bolivar has served as an instrument to justify their failure to

become a more advanced and egalitarian society. After Venezuela gained its

independence from Spain, the people expected there to be a major change in Venezuela.

However, the ruling elites returned to power to establish a system even more repressive

than the one which prevailed during the colonial period. As a result, people longed for

the return of Bolivar, but since he had already died, his ideas of freedom and equality

became the people's last resort and creed.[5]

It is important to note that the literature on Chavez's discourse is not extensive,

although the number of scholars in Venezuela who focus on this area of study is

significant (Aponte Moreno, 2008). For this study, the content of two works is relevant.

The first is a 2003 study titled "El Discurso de Hugo Chavez: Bolivar como Estrategia

para Dividir a los Venezolanos" by Irma Chumaceiro, and the second is a 2008 doctoral

dissertation by Marco Aponte Moreno.

Chumaceiro Arreaza (2003) employs a critical discourse analysis methodology

to explore how Hugo Chavez uses the figure of Simon Bolivar to intensify the division

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[4] Taken from Aponte Moreno (2008): "[The] 'imaginary' is understood as the symbolic construct through which a national community (in this case the people of Venezuela) defines and represents itself."

[5] Interestingly, some scholars argue that it was never Bolivar's goal to abolish slavery in Venezuela. He only supported this idea when Haitian leader Alexadre Peton agreed to support his forces if he abolished slavery in the continent.

of Venezuelans into two polarized groups: 1) opponents of the Bolivarian Revolution, and 2) supporters of it. She further argues that Chavez's constant repetition of Bolivar in his discourse has a double purpose. First, it legitimizes Chavez's policies and actions, while delegitimizing his opponents. And second, it has allowed Chavez to regroup his supporters under a common ideological framework: The Bolivarian Revolution.

On the other hand, Aponte Moreno (2008) uses discourse analysis to examine the metaphors Chavez uses to legitimize his Bolivarian Revolution. Like Chumaceiro (2003), Aponte Moreno (208) argues that Chavez's metaphorical uses of Bolivar in his speeches are intended to back his revolution, while creating a discourse of exclusion where his opponents are portrayed as enemies of the state. This author also contends that Chavez has been able to create a polarizing discourse of exclusion by using metaphors that define: "(a) the nation as a person who has been resurrected by his government, as a person ready to fight for his revolution, or as Chávez's himself; (b) the revolution as war; and (c) members of the opposition as war combatants or criminals" (Aponte Moreno, 2008, pp. IV). Furthermore, in his work, Aponte Moreno (2008) also claims that in his discourse, Chavez portrays his Bolivarian Revolution as a continuation of Simon Bolivar's wars of independence.

Although there have been scholars who have used discourse analysis to understand the Bolivarian Revolution, their analyses have not focused on trying to understand how Simon Bolivar has been interpreted by Chavez and the the Revolution's supporters.

III. Methodology

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis originated in disciplines such as linguistics and semiotics. However, today, many different braches of the social sciences employ it. Its expanding

importance is not only seen in the large number of studies that use the methods of discourse analysis, but also in the wide scope of its utilization. In fact, discourse analysis has been used to explain issues in disciplines as diverse as history, sociology, psychology, cultural and gender studies, anthropology, political science, and literary theory, inter alia (Howarth, 2001).

For over thirty years, the sustained interest among scholars in discourse analysis has resulted in a vast proliferation of books, specialized magazines, dictionaries, manuals and articles that address the topic. Nevertheless, most of these publications appeared for the first time in languages such as English, French and German, and it has not been until recently that there has been a considerable increase the number of publication in Spanish, in Latin America and Spain. The founding of the Asociacion Latinamerica de Estudios del Discurso (Latin American Association for the Study of Discourse) in 1995, in Caracas, Venezuela, was an important moment for the researchers of the region to focus more enthusiastically on the study of discourse analysis. As a result, today, it can be argued that in Latin America, discourse analysis has reached a point where all of the topics studied in the United States and Europe have been covered, and original ideas are emerging to understand how identities are constructed in the region (Bolivar, 2007).

There are some reasons as to why there has been an explosion of interest among social scientists around the world in employing discourse analysis as their preferred method of analysis. Howarth (2001) argues that this explosion is a result of the delayed impact of a so called "linguistic turn" on the social sciences, and thus, a rapid emergence of new analytical approaches such as hermeneutics, critical theory and post-structuralism. That is, the methods employed in the field of linguistics and semantics are now being employed in the social sciences to understand social phenomena.

Additionally, the reappearance of Marxist theories in the West, as well as an increase in the use of psychoanalytical discourse, has also contributed to a wider diversification of methodical approaches to the social sciences. Furthermore, the materialization of a distinct field of discourse analysis within linguistics in the 1970s, and its successive adoption by practitioners in literary theory and cultural studies, has led to a new way of employing and approaching discourse analysis.

However, the most prominent reason as to why there has been an explosion in the use of discourse analysis is a growing dissatisfaction with mainstream positivist approaches to the social sciences (Howarth, 2001; Ryan, 2006; Milliken, 2001). But what are positivist ideas? Where do they come from? Why have they dominated the general approach to research? What are the limitations that scholars have found in this approach? The following subsection will briefly address these questions.

Positivism

Traditionally, there was agreement among scholars and practitioners that there only existed a single, correct set of procedures for investigating phenomena and presenting findings, and this set of procedures was based on a scientific model of research. Today, some scholars and practitioners still believe that social science research should follow the methods of research employed in the natural sciences. Advocates of this type of approach center on questions such as, what is the hypothesis? How big is the sample? How representative is the sample? What is the control group? As a result, based on this approach, the legitimacy of a piece of research is assessed on how well the aforementioned questions are answered (Ryan, 2006).

The rationale behind employing the scientific method to explore and write about the human experience is to keep the research free from the passions, values, political tendencies, and ideologies of the researcher. This approach to research is known as

positivist or positivist-empiricist, and it has been the hegemonic one in the social sciences. Scholars who prefer this approach believe that they can acquire a complete understanding of the world based on experiments and observations. Also, they see concepts and knowledge as products of straightforward experience, interpreted through rational deduction. Also, something important to point out about the positivist approach is the great emphasis it places on quantification to find answers for the problems of the social world (Ryan, 2006).

Downfalls

Although this approach to research has been the most widely used in the social sciences, many scholars have found it faulty. For example, some scholars contend that using a scientific model in the social sciences can lead to the "dismissal of research as a valuable tool in understanding the rich complexity of social life" (Ryan, 2006, pp.14). In other words, the scientific approach, which positivism advocates, is inadequate to gain knowledge about how people live, how they view the world, how they cope with it, and how they change it because numbers or models cannot capture these ideas.(Ryan, 2006).

In recent decades, much attention has been placed on the limitations of the epistemological[6] foundations of positivism. For example, within positivism, knowledge has been conceived in the following ways: First, what matters is the methodology by which knowledge is arrived at, and that this methodology must be scientific, empirical, and thus, objective. Second, the only topics worthy of inquiry are those that exist in the public domain. Third, the relationship between an individual and knowledge is inexistent; that is, knowledge is regarded as detached from the person who constructs it. Fourth, math and science are given a high status because they are viewed as objective

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[6] Epistemology is a study of how people or systems of people know things and how they think they know things (Keeney, 1983, pp.13).

and separate from the individual. Finally, knowledge is something discovered, and not something produced by humans (Ryan, 2006).

Opposition to positivist epistemology has come from poststructuralists, postmodernists, feminists, critical psychologists, anthropologists, and ethnographers, among others (Milliken, 2001). Nevertheless, critiques of positivism are also embedded in movements for social change, as well as in the knowledge of Eastern and indigenous societies, who perceive all events in the world as interconnected. For example, as opposed to positivists, these cultures have emphasized the neutrality of knowledge, have shown the inadequacies of dualistic thinking[7], and have emphasized the ethical aspects of research (Ryan, 2006).

Doty (1993) presents yet another argument against the positivist approach to research. She argues that a positivist approach to research does not focus on answering *how-questions*; instead, it focuses on finding answers for *why-questions*. For example, in foreign policy analysis, positivists are concerned with explaining *why* some decisions are made, based on the assumption that there are pre-established rules by which all entities behave. The problem with this approach, however, is that it fails to capture *how* these decisions are made, and what roles individuals take in shaping them. In other words, *how-questions* are concerned with explaining how meanings, subjects, and interpretations are constructed by individuals.

Post-positivism

Insights about the limitations of positivism imply that the researcher has to understand her place in the world and what she is bringing is to the research according to her assumptions about knowledge. That is, an essential part of the post-positivist approach is that the researcher must investigate how her own epistemologies affect her

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[7] "Post-positivist values in research are not about being either subjective or objective [(dualistic)], nor do they prefer subjectivity over objectivity. They emphasize multiplicity and complexity as hallmarks of humanity" (Ryan, 2006, pp.16).

research. By examining her own epistemologies – for example, what are the underlying assumptions that make sense of her day-to-day life – the researcher can gain a better understanding of how other people construct and maintain perceptions of the world (Ryan, 2006).

Also, the post-positivist position asserts the importance of values, passion, and politics in research. This type of research requires the ability to understand the construction of meaning, and the power relations between subjects and objects. Furthermore, the post-positivist social researcher assumes a learning role, rather than a testing one. When speaking about post-positivist researchers, Wolcott (1990, pp.19) states, "We regard ourselves as people who conduct research among other people, learning with them, rather than conducting research on them." Finally, post-positivists contend that they cannot simply aggregate data in order to arrive at the "truth," and thus, they write in a reflexive manner and try to avoid authoritarian tones or dogma (Ryan, 2006). The following quote exemplifies this point:

> In post-positivist research, truth is constructed through a dialogue; valid knowledge claims emerge as conflicting interpretations and action possibilities are discussed and negotiated among the members of a community. Researchers don't ask themselves 'is this the truth?' Rather, we talk about the issues raised during the interviews, the participants' reactions, and our interpretations of these interwoven ideas. In this context, it seems right to open up the interpretive discussions [to our respondents], not for them to confirm or disconfirm them, but to share our thinking and how the ideas might be used. (Richie and Rigano, 2001, pp. 752 quoted in Ryan, 2006)

Defining Discourse, Discursivity, and Discourse Analysis

First of all, it is important to understand that discourse analysis is a type of post-positivist approach to research. In fact, the post-positivist emphasis on meaning and the relationship between meaning and language is addressed in the concept of discourse. In order to understand what truly entails discourse analysis and its theoretical approaches, it is important to define discourse, discursivity, and discourse analysis.

Discourse

       Discourse is used to interpret experience and the discourses available at

particular moments in history construct the way people talk, think, and respond to

phenomena. Ryan (2006) explains discourse as follows:

> Discourses are regimes of knowledge constructed over time. They
> include the commonsense assumptions and taken-for-granted ideas,
> belief systems and myths that groups of people share and through
> which they understand each other. Discourses articulate and convey
> formal and informal knowledge and ideologies. They are constantly
> being reproduced and constituted, and can change and evolve in the
> process of communication (pp. 23).

Additionally, Howarth et al (2000) use "discourse" or "discourses" to refer to systems

of meaningful practices that form the identities of subjects and objects. In this

perspective, discourses are concrete systems of social relations and practices that are

essentially political, given that their formation is an act which involves the construction

of antagonisms and the delimitation of boundaries between insiders and outsiders.

Consequently, discourses always involve the exercise of power because their meaning is

based on the exclusion of certain positions, and thus, a structuring of the power relations

between different social agents. Furthermore, discourses are and historical constructions

because they are vulnerable to the political forces which were excluded in their

production[8].

Discursivity

       The "discursive" can be defined as "a theoretical horizon within which the being

of objects is constituted" (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000, pp. 3). That is, all objects are

objects of discourse, given that their meaning is dependent upon a socially constructed

system of rules and differences. Here, it is important to point out that the idea of the

discursive as a horizon does not reduce everything to discourse or questions the

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[8] More on the importance and political nature of discourse will be explored in the "Laclau and Mouffe's" subsection in the pages below.

existence of the world. Instead, "it circumvents skepticism and idealism by arguing that

we are always internal to a world of signifying practices and objects" (pp.3). Laclau and

Mouffe (1985) present this idea in the following way:

> The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has
> nothing to with whether there is a world external to thought, or with
> the realism/idealism opposition. An earthquake or the falling of a
> brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here
> and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as
> objects is constructed in terms of 'natural phenomena' or
> 'expressions of the wrath of God,' depends upon the structuring of a
> discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist
> externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could
> constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive conditions of
> emergence (108).

To sum this up, human beings are placed and inhabit in a world of discourses and

practices, and cannot think or regard objects outside it.

Discourse analysis

The term "discourse analysis" was first introduced by Zellig Harris in 1952 with

the aim of analyzing connected forms of speech and writing. His purpose was to extend

descriptive linguistics beyond the boundaries of a single sentence at a time, and to

correlate language and culture (Aponte-Moreno, 2008). In Howarth and Stavrakakis's

(2000) terminology, discourse analysis refers to the "practice of analyzing empirical raw

materials and information as discursive forms" (pp.4) That is, discourse analysts treat

linguistic and non-linguistic data, such as speeches, reports, manifestos, interviews,

historical events, policies, ideas, and even institutions and organizations, as texts or

writing. As a result, issues of identity formation, the production of new ideologies, the

logic behind social movements, and the structuring of societies by social imaginaries are

central elements investigated through discourse analysis (Howarth and Stavrakakis,

2000).

Since the late 1960s, numerous analyses that acknowledge the role of language in structuring power have emerged (Aponte-Moreno, 2008). Prominent among these are the works of Saussure (1972), Levi-Strauss (1966), and Laclau and Mouffe (1985). These authors have contributed significantly to the field of discourse analysis, and the literature categorizes them within two schools of discourse: 1) structuralism and 2) post-structuralism.

Structuralism

The Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, is credited for inaugurating structuralism, which is the central element of the abovementioned "linguistic turn," which in turn played an important role in the understanding of philosophy and the social world in the twentieth century. The interest in questions of meaning and signification prompted research into the nature of language, and this served as a catalyst to the employment of linguistic models into the social sciences. Structuralists contend that all human institutions and actions are best understood as symbolic systems of practice, and thus, social scientists have employed this structuralist perspective to understand social formations, and events such as revolutions and the actions of states (Howarth, 2001).

Structuralist theory serves as an important initial point for developing a practical concept of discourse in the social sciences.Iit does this by assuming that there is a clear analogy between language and social relationships. In this light, phenomena as diverse as political ideologies, myths, human relationships, texts, and basketball games can be understood as systems of related elements. In other words, "this means that the individual elements of a system only have significance when considered in relation to the structure as a whole, and that structures are to be understood as self-contained, self-regulated and self-transforming entities" (Howarth, 2001, pp. 17). Therefore, the

structure is what determines the meaning, significance, and function of individual elements of a system.

One of the main arguments that structuralists make is that events that might seem unrelated or inexplicable can be comprehensible in the context of a formal system of relationships. Moreover, in order to define a system of relationships to delimit a set of elements, a novel method of analysis, based on language and mathematics, must be employed. This method consists in portraying social phenomena as relations between elements, constructing possible permutations between them, and analyzing their relationships (Howarth, 2001).

Although Saussure did not develop a particular concept of discourse, he stands at the forefront of this approach to research. This occurs because his theory of language provided a methodological contribution to the social sciences, which in turn allowed politics and other social sciences to be explored through discursive practices. In his theory, Saussure emphasizes the role of social systems in understanding human societies,[9] and this contrasts with the focus on individuals, events, facts, and evolutionary processes in positivist and empiricist approaches to the social sciences. In sum, instead of treating social phenomena as isolated events, Saussure places much emphasis on the overall contexts in which actions occur and are understood (Howarth, 2001).

Saussure's theory of language

Saussure's (1984) major contribution can be found in his proposition that "language is a system of signs expressing ideas" (15). *Langue*, that is, language as a system of signs, consists of the required set of linguistic rules that speakers need to follow in order to communicate meaningfully. He distinguishes language from speech

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[9] Authors such as Marx, Durkheim, and Freund also share this view.

(*parole*), and establishes that the former is used for the individual, while the latter is used for the social. In other words, in order for the individual to express the set of word-images she has in her mind, and thus be understood, she must adhere to the system of linguistic rules that make up the language. Here, it is important to point out *parole* applies to both speech and writing (Howarth, 2001).

According to Saussure (1974), the basic elements of a language are signs. Signs combine a sound-image (the signifier) with a concept (the signified). Hence, the sign *dictator* consists of a signifier that sounds like *dik-tey-ter* – and its written form appears as "dictator" – and the concept of "dictator," which the signifier provides. However, it is important to point out that Saussure defines the nature of the sign as arbitrary because he argues that there is not natural relationship between the signifier and the signified. That is, there is not a reason why the sign *dictator* is associated with the concept of "dictator;" as a result, this can only be explained as a function and convention of the language we utilize (Howarth, 2001).

Furthermore, Saussure does not argue that the function of language is solely to name or denote objects in the world. Such a nominalist perspective would imply a fixed, but ultimately arbitrary, link between words as names and the concepts they represent in the world. Additionally, according to Saussure, signification and meaning "occur entirely within the system of language itself" (Howarth, 2001, pp.19). Accordingly, objects do not pre-exist concepts, but depend on language systems to acquire meaning: languages articulate their own sets of concepts and objects, rather than acting labels for pre-existing objects (Howarth, 2001).

The arbitrary nature of the sign has some further implications. Saussure not only claims that it is irrelevant which signifier is connected with a signified, but that there is not a property which fixes the signified. In other words, the signifier and signified can

only be understood by their relationship to other signifiers and signifieds in a given

language, and this is known as Saussure's *relational* and *differential* conception of

language. This means that language is part of a system of linguistic and conceptual

structures, whose identities are not fixed by references to objects, but by their own

differences (Howarth, 2001). For example, "dog" acquires its meaning not by

referencing to the object/animal, but because it is different from "wolf," "fox," and

other related concepts.

Levi-Strauss' Contribution

Claude Levi-Strauss expands structural linguistics to the social sciences by

developing a structural analysis of anthropological phenomena. He argues that there are

four ways in which linguistics aid in analyzing the social sciences: 1) Attention is

shifted from the study of conscious linguistic phenomena to its principal unconscious

structure; 2) rather than treating terms as independent entities, it focuses on the relations

between them; 3) it aims to discover general rules by either logical deduction; and 4) it

introduces a system of elements. By arguing this, Levi-Strauss uses Saussure's

linguistic model to the study of societies; that is, he understands societies as complex

symbolic structures. As a result, Levi-Strauss tries to uncover the underlying

relationships and structures of human experience and thought that compose social

reality (Howarth, 2001).

In brief, Levi-Strauss' contribution can be can be viewed as an extension of

Saussure's linguistic model to larger sets of social relationships and practices, meaning

that society itself can be understood as a symbolic system. Rather than assuming society

to be the result of individual interactions, or the outcome of the underlying laws of

economic production, or the teleological development of human spirit, attention is

focused on the ever-changing set of signs and codes that make possible distinct social

practices. These ideas provide powerful conceptual resources for putting into light the weaknesses of essentialist, positivist and naturalistic accounts of society, while exhibiting a novel and innovative method of conducting social and political analysis. Also, and most importantly, these ideas create the means for developing a distinctive theory of discourse (Howarth, 2001).

However, there are some problems with the classical structuralist model. For example, by emphasizing the way in which in which social systems determine social meaning, it risks replacing the humanism of existing approaches with an alternative form of essentialism based on the dominance of a complete and static structure. This postulation makes it difficult to provide an adequate account of the historicity of social systems, as well as the role of social agents in bringing changes to it. In other words, Saussure and Levi-Strauss' breakthroughs in the social sciences are often weakened by their own assumptions and arguments[10] (Howarth, 2001). As a result, rather than dismissing the approach in its totality, a deconstructive analysis of structuralism is necessary to better employ Levi-Strauss and Saussure's contributions in the social sciences. The next subsection, explores the advances that have been made in this area.

Post-structuralism

Although the post-structuralist approach encompasses Marxist, post-analytical, and psychoanalytical ideas developed by Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan, and others, this subsection will focus on what many scholars (Howarth, 2001; Howarth et al, 2000; Milliken, 2001) argue is the most elaborate, and perhaps unique, discourse theory for analyzing social and political phenomena, the research program in discourse theory elaborated by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe over the last twenty-five years. Referring to this approach, Howarth and Stavrakakis (2000) write,

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[10] For an extensive exposition of the limitations of structuralism see Chapter 1 in Howarth (2001).

> …while this theoretical approach fully endorses contemporary critiques of positivist, behaviouralist and essentialist paradigms, it is not content to remain at a purely theoretical level. Nor does it eschew important questions of method and epistemology neglected by over-hasty dismissals of science and rationality. Instead, it seeks, where possible, to find points of convergence with these approaches, and endeavors to put forward plausible and empirically justifiable explanations of the social and political world (pp.1).

Moreover, this relatively new approach is first, and foremost, directed at the analysis of key political issues. This is important given that, with a few exceptions, scholars who contributed to the old approaches of discourse analysis neglected traditional topics in political theory and political science. As a result, there were not extensive evaluations of topics such as populist and nationalist ideologies, the discourses of new social movements, the political construction of social identities, the formulation and implementation of public policy, and the different logics of collective action. Additionally, even traditional topics of political science, such as voting behavior and political decision-making, were not examined in the past either (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000).

Understanding discourse through Laclau and Mouffe's theory

Under Laclau and Mouffe's framework, discourse theory assumes that all objects and actions are meaningful, and that their meaning is given by systems of rules which are historically specific (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000). Take for example an indigenous community living in the middle of the Amazon in the lands of a proposed housing development. For some, this indigenous community might just represent an obstacle impeding the quick implementation of the housing development, while for conservationists, naturalists, or human rights activist this group might represent a symbol of a nation's heritage. No matter the position, the indigenous people's meaning depends on the rules of discourse that compose their significance and identity. In discourses of economic development, indigenous populations can be understood as an

obstacle to modernization, while in discourses of human rights they might represent an essential component a country's, or even the world's, ancient practices heritage.

Each of the aforementioned discourses are social and political constructions that establish a system of relations between different objects and practices, while providing "subject" positions with which social agents can identify. In the previous example, the subject positions are those of the developers, conservationists, naturalist, or human rights activists. Also, a political project will attempt to combine different types of discourses in an effort to organize or have control over a field of meaning in order to set the identities of objects and practices in a particular manner (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000).

As a result, discourse theory can be understood as a framework to investigate the way in which social practices articulate and challenge the discourses that constitute social reality. Furthermore, these practices are possible because systems of meaning are reliant on each other, and thus, this makes them non-exhaustive. (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000).

Basic concepts of discourse theory

Thus far, it has been established that discourse theory explores the ways in which social practices methodically form the identities of subjects and objects by articulating together a series of dependent signifying elements available in a discourse. Also, the concept of discourse has been explored and defined; however, in addition to the concept of discourse itself, Laclau and Mouffe introduce four categories that serve as a starting point in the new discursivity. These categories are articulation, elements, moments, and nodal points (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000).

First of all, Laclau and Mouffe contend that every identity emerges through the articulation and re-articulation of signifying elements. As a result, they define

articulation as "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice" (pp. 105). On the other hand, *discourse* is defined as "the structured totality resulting from this articulatory practice" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1966, cited in Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000, pp. 7). Alternatively, "*moments* are the differential position's that appear articulated within a discourse, whereas *elements* are those differences that are not discursively articulated because of the floating character they acquire in periods of social crisis and dislocation" (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000, pp.7); However, "in certain contexts of exteriority… [elements can] be signified as totality" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, pp.113).

However, Laclau and Mouffe's argument of contingency and partial fixity of meaning creates a paradox: If all social forms are contingent and the shift from *elements* to *moments* is never complete, then how is any identity or social formation ever achieved? The answer lies in what is known as *nodal points*, which allow elements to be structured first, into a meaningful system of *moments*, and then into some discourse. As a result, nodal points are reference points in a discourse that coalesce a particular system of meaning (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000).

Alternatively, nodal points can also be explored in terms of articulation. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) characterize the practice of articulation as "the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning" (pp.113). This fixation of meaning must always be because of what is known as the "openness of the social," which is a direct result of the "constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, pp.113). However, given that the system is infinite, it might be difficult to be understood in this way and that is why Laclau introduces the concept of the "empty signifier" (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000).

So far, it has been established in this document that the social field in discourse theory can never be closed; however, political practices have attempted to do this. Laclau (1996) states that "although the fullness and universality of society in unachievable, its need does not disappear: it will always show itself through the presence of its absence" (pp.53). Therefore, even if the total closure of society is impossible in any society, a sense of closeness functions as an ideal - although an improbable one. Societies are hence organized and focused based on such impossible ideals, and what is necessary for the materialization and function of these ideals are the aforementioned "empty signifiers" (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000).

Laclau (1996) explains the paradoxical nature of the empty signifier in the following paragraph:

> [I]n a situation of radical disorder 'order' is present as that which is absent; it becomes an empty signifier, as the signifier of this absence. In this sense, various political forces can compete in their efforts to present their particular objectives as those which carry out the filling of that lack. To hegemonize something is exactly to carry out this filling function (pp.53).

As a result, the articulation of political discourses can only occur around an empty signifier that acts as a nodal point; in other words, emptiness becomes an essential attribute of the nodal point because it is what allows the nodal point to gain hegemony in political practices (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000).

Furthermore, any signifier can function in a similar way. In Laclau's (1996) words, "any term which, in a certain political context becomes the signifier of the lack, plays the same role" (pp.53). Thus, "[p]olitics is possible because the constitutive impossibility of society can only represent itself through the production of empty signifiers" (Laclau, 1996, pp. 53). However, the conceptualization of nodal points and empty signifiers still leaves some unanswered questions in regards to the partial fixity of

the system. With the aid of "politics", the following subsection will address these questions.

The importance of politics

First of all, in Laclau and Mouffe's social ontology, "systems of social relations, which are understood as articulated sets of discourses, are always political constructions involving the construction of antagonisms and the exercise of power" (Howarth, 2001, pp.104). That is, politics is essentially about constructing meaning. Furthermore, given the fundamentally political character of social systems, and their vulnerability to forces that are excluded in the process of political formation, a theory for political discourse is necessary. As a result, in an attempt to formalize the study of political discourse, Laclau and Mouffe introduce two important concepts: antagonisms and hegemony (Howarth, 2001).

Antagonisms

Traditional conceptions of social conflict present antagonisms as the collision of social agents with fully developed identities and interests. In approaches like this, the political analyst's task is to describe the causes, conditions, and resolution of conflict. Howarth (2001) presents a comparative study of six peasant rebellions by Eric Wolf to illustrate this approach: Wolf argues that the infiltration of capitalism into traditional peasant communities provided the necessary conditions for a dislocatory event. Then, he argues that the alliances between alienated intellectuals and free poor peasants caused the peasant uprising.

Laclau and Mouffe oppose the aforesaid approach. Instead, they argue that antagonisms occur because social agents are unable to fulfill their identities and interests, and because they construct an adversary who is considered responsible for this discontent. Therefore, reinterpreting Wolf through Laclau and Mouffe's conception,

peasants, who are expelled from their land by capitalist farmers and are forced to work in the city, are prevented from being peasants, and consequently face an obstruction of their identity. Also, it is important to point out that this obstruction of identity is experienced by both the antagonizing force and the force that is being antagonized (Howarth, 2001). This is important because it shows how every social agent is part of the antagonizing process.

In this last approach, the analyst's task is to expose the ways in which the agents' identities are blocked, as well as the different ways in which these obstructions are antagonistically constructed by social agents. In the peasants' case, this would mean exploring the way in which they construct the capitalist farmers or the state as their adversary, as well as the different symbolic resources employed to oppose them (Howarth, 2001).

Therefore, the existence of antagonisms supports Laclau and Mouffe's view that there are no laws of history or universal political agents stimulated by pre-established identities and interests. Also, this view reveals the vulnerability of all identity, because any identity is constantly threatened by something external to it; in other words, social formations depend on the construction of antagonistic relations between social agents inside and outside a social formation. Thus, in Howarth's (2001) words,

> … antagonisms reveal the boundaries or political frontiers of a social formation, as they show the points where identity can no longer be stabilized in a meaningful system of differences, but is contested by forces which stand at the limit of that order (pp.106).

In sum, social antagonisms introduce an incompatible negativity into social relations because they reveal the limit marks in society in which meaning is contested and cannot be stabilized (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000).

Construction of antagonistic relations: Logics of equivalence and difference

In order to account theoretically for the construction of social antagonisms, Laclau and Mouffe attempt to show how discursive systems are threatened by antagonistic relations. Therefore, they try to find a place for a purely negative identity that cannot be integrated into an existing system of differences. In other words, they attempt to find a place for a fully negative identity that cannot be represented positively in a given discursive formation, because if it could be represented, it would simply be another *moment* within the existing discourse (Howarth, 2001; Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000).

To do this, Laclau and Mouffe introduce the concept of *logic of equivalence*, which consists in creating equivalent identities that express a pure negation of a discursive system. That is, the *logic of equivalence* functions by disbanding particular identities of subjects within a discourse and creating a purely negative identity that is seen as a threat to the subjects (Howarth, 2001; Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000). Also, the logic of equivalence can be understood as a logic simplification of the political sphere. Through the articulation of equivalence between elements, the possibility of an interchangeability of elements is increased, while the number of subject positions is reduced (Andersen, 2003).

For example, the Mexican revolution can be understood as different social movements coalescing around a particular discourse. This revolution was possible because the people of the different social movements were able to overlook their internal differences and organize themselves as "the oppressed," by placing themselves in opposition to "others." In this manner, the president, the government, the Church, landlords, and entrepreneurs were made equivalent to each other, and thus, were portrayed as the people's "oppressors" of the people (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000).

On the other hand, the logic of difference is the logic through which the political sphere is widened, and thus, more complex. The elements do not become particularly interchangeable, but the number of subject positions is increased, meaning the positions from which one can be political increases (Andersen, 2003). In other words, the *logic of difference* "consists in the expansion of a given system of differences by dissolving existing chains of equivalence and incorporating those disarticulated elements into an expanding order" (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000, pp.11). While a project that uses the logic of equivalence tries to attempts to divide social space by compacting meanings around two antagonistic poles, a project that uses the logic of difference seeks to weaken an antagonistic polarity in the attempt to severely move that division to the fringes of society (Howarth, 2001; Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000).

For instance, if in the previous example of the Mexican revolution the government would have given certain privileges or benefits to some of the social movements, then they would have been able to disarticulate their political alliances, and thus, would have weakened their opposition to the "oppressors."[11]

Hegemony, myths and imaginaries

The concept of hegemony is central to discourse theory, and it draws upon what has been discussed so far in this section. According to Howarth and Stavrakakis (2000), for discourse theory,

> hegemonic *practices* are an exemplary form of political activity that involves the articulation of different identities and subjectivities into a common project, while hegemonic *formations* are the outcomes of these projects' endeavors to create new forms of social order from a variety of dispersed or dislocated elements (pp.14).

As a result, hegemonic discourses are those that hold prominence and acceptance by social agents at a given point in time.

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[11] An often cited example is the one on South Africa (elaborate on this).

However, although some discourses are prominent at certain points in time, it is important to remember that Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse is based on the complete openness of the social system; as a result, hegemonic discourses are not meant to prevail for ever.[12] In addition, Laclau and Mouffe state that in order for there to be hegemonic discourses/practices, two further conditions, besides the openness of the social system, must be true. First, the existence of antagonistic forces; and second, the instability of the political boundaries that divide them. Hence, hegemonic practices assume there to be a social field linked by antagonism, as well as the presence of elements that can be articulated by opposed political projects. Hegemonic project's main objective is to construct and stabilize nodal points that form the basis of well-established social orders, and they do this by articulating as many elements as possible (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000).

A discourse cannot completely hegemonize a field of discursivity; thus, dislocations and antagonisms can never be thoroughly eliminated. Nevertheless, this does not mean that all discourses are equally successful or unsuccessful at achieving hegemony. As a result, in order to solve this problem, Laclau and Mouffe introduce the concepts of *myths* and *imaginaries*. Both of these concepts are based of the assumption that structural dislocations occurs in social systems (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000; Howarth, 2001).

Myths construct spaces of representation that attempt to structure spaces which have been dislocated. Their success is mainly hegemonic, given that they involve the creation of a new objectivity by rearticulating dislocated elements. Throughout their lifetime, myths function as buffers that fulfill various social demands and dislocations. However, when myths become extremely successful in serving as buffers for social

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[12] Milliken (2000) argues that there are some discourses that remain hegemonic for very long periods.

demands and dislocations, then they are transformed into imaginaries (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000).

Laclau defines a collective social imaginary as "a horizon" or "absolute limit which structures a field of intelligibility" (Laclau in Howarth, 2004). Examples of this include the Christian Millennium and the Enlightenment along with its positivist understanding of progress.

As has been presented in this section, Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse provides a framework for analyzing social phenomena and practices which are essentially political. The next section will apply the theoretical formulations explored in the attempt to understand how the *chavistas* have constructed and interpreted Bolivar in Venezuela.

IV. Simon Bolivar: Life and Imaginaries

Life

Simón José Antonio de la Santísima Trinidad Bolivar was born in Caracas, Venezuela, on July 24, 1783. The youngest of five children of the marriage between Juan Vicente Bolivar and Maria Concepcion Palacios, Bolivar was born into one of the richest and most aristocratic families in the Spanish Americas. The Bolivars owned haciendas, mines, slaves, and their business interest did not only span across Venezuela, but also in the Caribbean. Nevertheless, Simon Bolivar's life was not untroubled; in fact, his life was one of struggle and deep suffering (Polanco Alcantara, 1994).

Bolivar lost his father at the age of three, and his mother at the age of nine. Afterward, he was placed under the care of his maternal uncle, Carlos Palacios - a very demanding and strict man. As a result, unhappy, young Simon escaped to his older sister's house on July 23, 1795. A late eighteenth century case before the *Real Audiencia* shows that this entity ruled that Bolivar be taken, by force if necessary, from

his sister's house. Bolivar refused to leave his sister's house, so Carlos Palacios "ordered a black man to apprehend young Simon," and take him to Simon Rodriguez's house – his future mentor (Polanco Alcantara, 1994, pp.13). Young Simon was dragged away kicking and screaming, while the people of Caracas observed.

For four years, he lived in the house of his tutor, Simon Rodriguez, and then, as a young adult, Bolivar travelled to Europe, first to Spain between 1798 and 1801, and then to France and Italy between 1804 and 1807. In Madrid, he continued his studies, and although he was not a dedicated student, the revolutionary atmosphere of the time stimulated him to devour the works of Voltaire and Rousseau. During this time, he not only became well read in the classics, but he also became a good rider and swordsman (Jones, 2007; Gott, 2000).

In Spain, he also found love. In 1800, at the age of seventeen, he met Maria Teresa Rodriguez del Toro, the daughter of one of Spain's chief aristocratic families. Two years later, in May 1802, they married and returned to Caracas. Nevertheless, only eight months after their wedding, Maria Teresa contracted yellow fever and died, leaving Bolivar widowed at twenty and sinking him once again into suffering. Bolivar vowed never to marry again, and he never did; instead, he pursued his dream of liberating South America (Jones, 2007; Polanco Alcantara, 1994).

Some years later, Bolivar would say that if his wife would have not died, he would have not gone further than becoming mayor of San Mateo (Chavez, 2009). A few months after his wife passed away, he returned to Europe, where he spent some years in France and Italy, and was reunited with his mentor, Simon Rodriguez. In 1805, Bolivar, along with Rodriguez, climbed the Monte Sacro in Italy. There, he made his famous oath, swearing to God that he will not rest until his continent is free. In Rodriguez's presence he stated:

> I swear before you, I swear to my parents' God and to them, I swear
> to my honor and I swear to my homeland, that I will not allow my
> arm to rest, not my soul, until I have broken the chains that oppress
> us by will of the Spanish might! (Bolivar, translated from Polanco
> Alcantara, 1994)

In 1808, after a trip through the United States of America[13], Bolivar returned to

his *hacienda* in Venezuela, and immersed himself in the clandestine independence

movement. The movement was fully under way two years after Bolivar's arrival. On

April 19, 1810, a major uprising broke out against the Spanish in Caracas, forcing the

Spanish captain-general to resign, and allowing a revolutionary junta to take over. A

few weeks more than a year later, Bolivar told the deputies of the national congress:

"Let us banish fear and lay the foundation stone of American liberty. To hesitate is to

perish" (Chavez, 20009, pp.ix). A day later, on July 5, independence was formally

declared, and what is known as the First Republic was established; however, a decade

of bloody fighting still lay ahead (Gott 2000; Jones, 2007).

The Spanish did not accept the republican rebellion in Caracas, for they still

controlled other parts of the country and the continent. On March 26, 1812, a strong

earthquake struck Venezuela, destroying much of Caracas and affecting many of the

independence troops. The Catholic Church, loyal to Madrid and extremely hostile to the

republican regime, used the disaster to state that the event was a sign of God's wrath

against the revolutionaries. Also, many pro-Spanish individuals argued that even nature

was against the patriots. To this, Bolivar responded: "If nature is against us, we will

fight and make it obey us"[14] (Jones, 2007).

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[13] The interested reader might find it appealing to know that the town next to Harpers Ferry, WV, is named after Simon Bolivar. For more information visit: http://www.bolivarwv.org/History.aspx

[14] This became one of Bolivar's famous sayings. Chavez used it in December 1999 when floods and mudslides devastated Caracas, leaving an estimated fifteen thousand dead. This was Venezuela's worst natural disaster of the twenty first century. Also, just like in Bolivar's time, the Catholic Church – Archbishop Jose Ignacio Velasco to be more precise – suggested that the floods wear a sign of God's dislike of Chavez.

After the earthquake, the republican forces were weak, not well-armed, and divided amongst themselves. Nevertheless, soon they had to be on a defensive mode: The Spaniards had recaptured Puerto Cabello, while Bolivar was away from Cartagena. Francisco de Miranda, who had fought in the French Revolution and attempted to organize a rebellion against Spain in 1806, was in charge in Caracas and attempted to make peace with the Spanish commander. The republicans demanded Miranda as a traitor and handed him over to the Spaniards. Later, he was taken in chains to Cadiz, Spain, where died in prison (Gott, 2000).

In the meantime, Bolivar has escaped by sea from Venezuela and arrived in Cartagena, New Granada (Colombia today), an enclave under control of independent republicans at the time. There he published his first great political statement, the *Cartagena Manifesto*, where he analyzed the reasons for the First Republic's defeat, and called Venezuela and New Granada to join forces in the struggle against Spain. In addition, he demanded that the Spanish government in Cartagena be replaced by a strong centralized government:

> Government must prove to be formidable and ruthless, without regard to law or constitution, until peace is established. I believe that our enemies will have all the advantages as long as we do not unify out American government. We shall be inextricably caught in the web of civil war, and be shamefully beaten by that little horde of bandits which pollutes our country (Bolivar in Gott, 2000).

Inspired by the Manifesto, the republicans in Caracas elected Bolivar as the commander of an expeditionary force that would assure Venezuela's liberation. Then, as part of a three-month campaign known as the *Campaña Admirable*, Bolivar defeated the Spanish army in several battles, and recaptured Caracas on August 6, 1813 – this established what is known as the Second Republic. The Congress reconvened, and gave him the title of *Libertador* (Polanco Alcantara, 1994; Gott, 2000; Jones, 2007).

The Second Republic was short-lived, however. With the end of the Napoleonic wars in Europe, the Spanish sent fresh troops to Latin America. At the head of these troops was General Jose Tomas Boves, a ruthless and skillful commander who was able to mobilize the peasants, slaves, and Indians of the *llanos* into a force as mighty as that of Bolivar's republicans. As a result, a year later in July 1814, Boves captured Caracas, and punished the revolutionaries: yet another chapter was closed in the history of the independent Venezuelan republic (Chavez, 2009; Gott, 2000).

Once again, Bolivar escaped to Cartagena and in December, he captured Bogota. Nevertheless, the arrival of brand new troops from Spain brought new defeats, and in May 1815, he went into exile once more – this time to Jamaica. There he spent from May to December, and met many refugees who had fled Venezuela and Nueva Granada as a result of being persecuted by the Spanish Empire. During his stay in Jamaica, he wrote his famous *Letter from Jamaica*, which included a visionary plan for the future of a united single Latin American country, which span from Mexico to Chile: "We are a macrocosm of the human race. We area a world apart, confined within two oceans, young in art and science, but old as human society. We are neither Indians nor Europeans, yet we are a part of each other" (Gott, 2000).

Then, as part of an unsuccessful return to Caracas, he went to the independent republic of Haiti, where he planned an expedition to Venezuela to continue with the struggle for liberation. Bolivar arrived in Port au Prince on January 1, 1816, and was welcomed by President Alexandre Peiton, who agreed to provide him with guns, boats, supplies and money in exchange for a promise to free the slaves in all the territories he liberated. In addition, Peiton also allowed Bolivar to recruit sailors for his invasion fleet (Gott, 2000).

The attack to Venezuela from Haiti was a disaster. Bolivar's fleet captured the island of Margarita, but was repelled from the mainland in July 1816 at Ocumare and Carupano. However, Bolivar was not deterred, so he returned to Haiti to prepare a new expedition. By the end of the year, Bolivar returned to the Venezuelan mainland – this time at Barcelona (Polanco Alcantara, 1994; Gott, 2000). A new phase in the war against the Spanish had started.

In April 1817, Bolivar sailed up the coast to the delta of the Orinoco River. Moving up the river, he established his base at Angostura – today Ciudad Bolivar in his honor. There, he forged an alliance with Jose Antonio Paez and Francisco de Paula Santander, leaders of the *llaneros*, the men of Venezuela's plains. Jones (2007) describes the *llaneros* as a devastating and irregular cavalry force that became the backbone of Bolivar's new army. Bolivar's forces fought for over two years in the llanos and other spots, until they were finally ready to launch an attack on Colombia (Gott, 2000).

In 1819, in one of the most audacious strokes of Latin America's independence struggle, Bolivar's forces climbed the mountains from the *llanos* into the Spanish vice-royalty of New Granada. To be more specific, Bolivar led twenty-four hundred men through the Orinoco jungles during the rainy season, and up into the sub-zero trails of the Andes. Many of the *llaneros* were shoeless, not well-clothed, and had never been exposed to such low temperatures; consequently, some of them died of exposure. Some gave up, but those who survived and made it over the mountains and to the other side, caught the Spanish off guard. The royalist officers never expected an assault from this direction, and thus, five thousand of them were defeated at the battle of Boyaca on August 7, 1819. Three days later, Bolivar entered Bogota triumphantly, while the

Spanish viceroy escaped to the sea to never return. Colombia was now under the republicans' control (Gott, 2000; Jones, 2007).

Bolivar left General Santader in charge of Bogota, as vice-president of New Granada, while he climbed back down the slopes of the Andes and sailed down the Apure to the Orinoco. He arrived at his old headquarters in Angostura in December 1819, and in an address to the Congress he talked about his vision:

> The union of New Granada and Venezuela is the goal that I set for myself even in my earliest fighting days. It is the desire of all the citizens of both countries, and would give the assurance of South American freedom (Bolivar quoted in Gott, 2000, pp. 105).

Soon, present-day Ecuador also became part of Bolivar's unification plans. The Congress of Angostura appointed Bolivar as the president and dictator of a new unified state known as the Republic of Gran Colombia. This republic was a federation of the old Spanish departments of Venezuela, New Granada (Colombia), and Quito (Ecuador) (Clark, 2009; Gott, 2000).

For a brief period, there was a truce. However, in June 1821, Bolivar and his men advanced north and defeated the Spanish at the bloody battle of Carabobo. The road was now open to Caracas, and thus, Bolivar arrived in his natal town triumphantly at night. Venezuela was now completely liberated, and a new Congress assembled at Cucuta to draft a constitution for the new republic. Also, the new Congress formally elected Bolivar as president in September 1821 (Polanco Alcantara, 1994).

By this time, Bolivar was formally the leader of the joint republics of Colombia and Venezuela. However, he had wider ambitions, and thus, he did not stay long in Caracas. He believed his duty was to be Latin America's liberator, and that is why earlier that year he had sent one of his top officers, General Antonio Jose de Sucre, south to provide his services in the liberation of Ecuador. Sucre had travelled to the Guayaquil, and was now in need of aid (Gott, 2000).

Once again, Bolivar left Santander in charge in Bogota, and he travelled south in December 1821 towards Quito. While he advanced from the north, General Sucre advanced from the Pacific, from the port of Guayaquil. On May 24, 1822, Sucre's forces defeated the Spanish army at the battle of Pichincha. Bolivar arrived three weeks after on June 16, but he shortly moved to Guayaquil (Polanco Alcantara, 1994). The three territories of Gran Colombia were now free from Spanish rule. Argentina and Chile had also been liberated by the revolutionary forces of Argentina led by General Jose de San Martin. Peru remained the only territory under Spanish rule in South America (Gott, 2000).

San Martin marched into Lima from the south and declared Peru an independent territory on July 28, 1821; however, many Spanish troops still controlled other parts of this country. As a result, San Martin travelled to Guayaquil to seek Bolivar's assistance in completely defeating the Spanish army. The two generals met on July 26, 1822. The details of this meeting still remain a mystery; nevertheless, what is clear is that Bolivar refused to assist San Martin in his attempt to completely defeat the Spanish. San Martin returned to Lima, and resigned all his positions. Then in 1824, he went back to his natal Argentina, and then left for exile to Europe to never return (Polanco Alcantara, 1994; Gott, 2000).

In September 1823, Bolivar marched to Lima to prepare for a final assault on the Spanish army in the Andes. With a fresh expeditionary force, he scored a crucial victory against the Spanish at the battle of Junín in August 1824. However, his campaign and final moment of glory came at the end of the year, on December 9, when the Spanish viceroy surrendered to General Sucre at the battle of Ayacucho (Chavez, 2009; Gott, 2000).

Sucre pursued the remnants of the Spanish army south the Andes and into the country of Upper Peru. This country was finally liberated in April 1825, and was given the name of Bolivia in honor of Simon Bolivar. At last, Spanish America was totally liberated.

Bolivar "could now claim to rule one of the greatest empires of any military leader in history, some three million square miles in extent, the size of eastern and western Europe combined … In ten years, he personally had covered at least twenty thousand miles on horseback … and fought in some three hundred battles and skirmishes" (Look for source in Jones). Furthermore, "[he] was just forty-two years of age, yet, the world, or at least the Americas, appeared to be at his feet" (Look for source in Jones, 2007). However, this did not last for long.

Bolivar spent the remaining months of 1825 in Bolivia, and then, he returned to Lima at the end of the year to be elected president of Peru in 1826. His extensive empire was now too large to be controlled by one person, and consequently, political problems began to emerge in each individual state. Dissension appeared in Peru, and soon it was followed by war between Venezuela and Colombia. The two generals he had left in charge in Venezuela and Colombia - Paez and Santander, respectively – quarreled, and Gran Colombia ceased to exist in 1828. Furthermore, Peru invaded Ecuador in 1829, in an attempt to capture Guayaquil (Gott, 2000).

Bolivar rushed back to Caracas to save the federation, but it was too late. After six months of trying to regroup the government, authorities passed a resolution expelling him from Venezuela and asking him to never return. He left to Bogota, where he was equally condemned. Tuberculosis was destroying Bolivar's lungs, so he decided to leave his native continent and seek exile in Europe. Nevertheless, he only made it to the small Colombian town of Santa Marta (Jones, 2007).

Bolivar died on December 17, 1830, at age forty-seven. He died bitter, penniless, and friendless. Before dying, he wrote a letter to an Ecuadorean general, in which he stated what some call Latin America's prophesy: "America is ungovernable. Those who serve the revolution plough the sea. The only thing to do in America is emigrate" (Bolivar in Gott, 2000).

Imaginaries

- The Cult of Bolivar[15]

Bolivarianism, which can also be understood as the Bolivarian ideology, is based on the cult of Bolivar, which started more than 150 years ago in Venezuela. Although this cult started developing during Bolivar's lifetime, as a result of his military victories and accomplishments, it was not until 1842, when his remains were repatriated from Colombia to Venezuela, that his cult was solidly reinstated in Venezuelan public life. Bolivar's prestige suffered a weakening while Gran Colombia was splitting; however, this did not mean that Venezuelans forgot his persona. In fact, it is because he survived in the minds of Venezuelans that he was able to return to Venezuela's collective life a few years later (Carrera Damas, 1969).

Bolivar returned to Venezuela's public life as an instrument of the radical liberals – those whose beliefs were in stark contrast to what Bolivar stood for. They converted Bolivar into a symbol of their own policies, and declared themselves protectors of his remains and continuators of his program. Through this means, the cult of Bolivar begins to perform three functions: 1) being an element of national unity, by dissuading separatist attitudes; 2) being an element for a cohesive government, by providing a set of coherent goals for it; and 3) being an element of national self-

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[15] This subsection will draw substantially from Marco Aponte-Moreno's 2008 doctoral thesis "Metaphors in Hugo Chavez's Political Discourse: Conceptualizing Nation, Revolution, and Opposition."

improvement, by serving as an example to stimulate the Venezuelan civic spirit (Carrera Damas, 1969).

From its emergence in 1824, the cult of Bolivar has shown different degrees of intensity throughout history. Carrera Damas (1969) argues that the cult started as a *cult of the people*, but then it turned into a *cult for the people*. That is, at first, Bolivar's cult was promoted by the people, but then, the government and institutions promoted it for the people. The institutionalization of this cult provided an ideological universe for Venezuelan society to exist. Furthermore, given its historical legitimacy, this universe had always enjoyed wide support and respect from Venezuelans (Aponte-Moreno, 2008).

Bolivar's cult has allowed politicians and institutions to use Bolivar's social imaginaries for political purposes. Mora-Garcia (2002) exposes Bolivar's collective representation in Venezuela in the following way:

> The Bolivar who lives in the collective imaginary is the one who feeds the political imaginary. That Bolivar who the people sing to, that Bolivar who accompanies the people in their mobilizations, that Bolivar who cries with his people, that Bolivar who is worshiped by the people, that Bolivar who the people carry in their processions; that is the Bolivar that allows the people to connect with the political ideal. That Bolivar who had become a political imaginary is the hero who brings back sovereignty to the people, the hero who provides subsidized stores for the poor, the hero who creates a university for everyone, the hero who gives hope to the poor and those who suffer (pp.105).

Aponte-Moreno (2008) infers several imaginaries from this quote. For instance, Bolivar the militant – "that Bolivar who accompanies the people in their mobilizations;" Bolivar the saint – "that Bolivar who the people carry in their processions;" Bolivar the liberator – "the hero who brings back sovereignty to the people; or Bolivar the populist – "the hero who provides subsidized stores for the poor." These are just a few examples

of imaginaries that have been available to leaders in Venezuela to fulfill special political interests.

Imaginaries, the collective mindsets, are not decreed or imposed, but are constructed through long periods of time. Furthermore, they are fragile because they are not a product of human reason, and thus, political leaders attempt to sentimentally connect to the masses through their imaginaries. In other words, politicians will try to manipulate and exploit imaginaries in discourse in order to achieve their objectives, and that is exactly what they have done in Venezuela ever since Bolivar died (Aponte Moreno, 2008).

Carrera Damas (1969) identifies four major four prominent imaginaries associated with Bolivar at different periods of history. These are, 1) Bolivar the demigod, 2) Bolivar the revolutionary, 3) Bolivar the democrat, and 4) Bolivar the Catholic. The following subsection will address each of these imaginaries in detail.

Bolivar the Demigod

Antonio Guzman Blanco, a Venezuelan dictator who held office in three different occasions, is often credited as the person who institutionalized the cult of Bolivar in Venezuela. First, in 1874, he transferred Bolivar's remains from the cathedral to the National Pantheon, and he also placed Bolivar's equestrian statue in the center of Plaza Bolivar in Caracas. Then, in 1879 he ordered to published General O'Leary's *Memorias* to pay tribute to Bolivar's legacy, and in 1883, he celebrated Bolivar's centenary with a display of political speeches, publications, and erection of new statues (Aponte-Moreno, 2008).

The first Venezuelan president who attempted to deify Bolivar was Juan Vicente Gonzales, who in 1840 states that all Venezuelans should adore and imitate Bolivar's

life. However, Guzman Blanco was the first one who described him as an incomparable man and a demigod:

> Bolivar, like Jesus Christ, is not a hero of the fantastic epics. Bolivar is the continent's liberator, the creator of the American republics, the father of free citizens. He was born for this; for this, God gifted him with talents such as courage, audacity, and perseverance that are incomparable here on earth, as well as in the past, present, and future (Guzman Blanco in Carrera Damas, 1969, pp. 195 – 196).

Here, it is important to point out that Guzman Blanco, being one the radical liberals briefly discussed above, held an ideological position quite different from that of Bolivar. For example, Guzman Blanco was a positivist who founded the Liberal Party and attempted to create a Venezuelan church independent from the Vatican. Bolivar had specifically opposed an idea like the aforesaid earlier in the century, thus showing a contradiction that reveals a breach that often exists between Bolivar's ideals and the imaginaries associated with him (Aponte-Moreno, 2008).

Bolivar the Revolutionary

Bolivar's different portrayals that have existed at different periods in time have not only depended on the efforts of institutions, governments, or politicians that have promoted them. In fact, these representations have also depended on the socio-political circumstances of the period in which they emerge. For example, in the period between 1830 and 1903, Bolivar was not represented as a revolutionary. This occurred because during this period, Venezuelans witnessed 39 violent revolutions; as a result, revolutions were discredited and no longer represented as a solution in the minds of Venezuelans. Instead, they were portrayed as the source of all the problems that this country was facing: there was certainly a fervent anti-revolution sentiment during this period.

Nevertheless, at other moments in history, when an anti-revolution sentiment has not been present, Bolivar has been represented as a revolutionary. According to Carrera

Damas (1969), as far as popular aspirations are concerned, representing Bolivar as a

revolutionary represents perfection: "The Bolivar created for the people is also a

revolutionary, and by being so represents perfection in the realm of popular aspirations

(pp.237). Nevertheless, he also contends that most historians do not consider Bolivar's

legacy a real revolution because his historic work, if rigorously approached, cannot be

defined as a revolution.

   Although historians claim that Bolivar's life and legacy are not that of a real

revolutionary, this has not stopped politicians from representing him as a revolutionary

(Carrera Damas, 1969). Once again, this shows a breach between "historical realities

and subsequent imaginaries" (Aponte-Moreno, 2008, pp.84).

Bolivar the Democratic leader

   The imaginary of Bolivar as a democratic leader has existed since the second

half of the nineteenth century, and it emerged as a means to offset the autocratic

accusations that were made to Bolivar after he became dictator of the Republic of Gran

Colombia in 1828. This imaginary has survived many dictatorships and is considered by

historians as probably the strongest one attributed to Bolivar (Aponte-Moreno, 2008).

Furthermore, Carrera Damas (1969) argues that based on testimonies, this imaginary

seems to have achieved an extremely high degree of acceptance among Venezuelans.

   After thirty years of dictatorship under Juan Vicente Gomez, that is, by the late

1930s, the imaginary of *Bolivar the democrat* had been consolidated. For example,

Irazabal (1939) justifies Bolivar's democratic values, notwithstanding his admiration for

the English monarchic system:

> The English system of government, despite its monarchic character,
> was at the time, as it still is, a regime more democratic than the
> absolute monarchies and republics of our countries. It was based on
> its democratic content and its political stability that Bolivar tried to
> imitate it in the newly formed nation. But it was not in anyway
> because of sympathies towards autocratic governments… As a result,

> Bolivar's sympathy towards the English way of governing does not prove his autocratic vocation; rather, it proves his unquestionable democratic vocation (pp.124).

With respect to this quote, Carrera Damas (1969) states that Irazabal (1939), relying on the imaginary of *Bolivar the democrat*, "turns the accusatory evidence against Bolivar into proof of Bolivar's democratic vocation" (Aponte-Moreno, 2008, pp.86).

Bolivar the Catholic

Given the several conflicts Bolivar had with the Catholic Church, the imaginary of the Catholic Bolivar has been more difficult to create that the other three presented in this subsection. For example, in 1812, Bolivar threatened Archbishop Narciso Coll y Patt to death for his anti-independence activities. Also, the Catholic Church in Bogota excommunicated Bolivar in 1814 (Aponte-Moreno, 2008).

Despite Bolivar's generally negative relationship with the Church, the imaginary of the Catholic Bolivar was able emerge as a result of the few instances in which he held a positive interaction with the aforementioned institution. For instance, in the independence wars' final years, Bolivar held diplomatic relations with the Church for tactical reasons. Also, during his dictatorship, from 1828 to 1830, he suspended some liberal policies, particularly in the area of ecclesiastical reform (Aponte-Moreno, 2008).

Nevertheless, the consolidation of the imaginary of the Catholic Bolivar occurred during the celebrations of the centenary of Bolivar's death. In 1930, the Venezuelan Catholic Church gave tribute to Bolivar with the following words:

> As Venezuelans, we see him as the Father of our Land; as archbishops, we recognize him as the distinguished Magistrate, the benefactor of the Church: let's thankfully remember the especial effort that he put during the great war, in order for the people not to be deprived from having pastors, or being "orphaned," as he once said it with poetic tenderness… (Carrera Damas, 1969, pp.239).

This way, the Catholic Church ended all of the conflicts it had with the Liberator, and provided an open road for the imaginary of the Catholic Bolivar to be widely used in the years to come.

The imaginaries of Bolivar have proved to be extremely efficient in restructuring social dislocations in Venezuela, particularly during Chavez's Bolivarian Revolution. The following section will show how Chavez has interpreted the imaginaries discussed in this section, and how he has created a narrative that today is accepted by the majority of Venezuelans.

V. Unmasking the Revolution

Context

The Bolivarian Revolution emerges as a result of several circumstances that occurred during the latter half of the twenty-first century at two different levels; that is, the re-emergence of Bolivarianism must be understood as a response to sub-continental circumstances, which I will refer to as the "international domain," as well as to Venezuelan domestic circumstances, which I will refer to as the "local domain."

- International domain

First, it is clear that Bolivarianism emerges as a response to the disappointments created by neoliberal policies that date back to the 1970s. On September 11th, 1973, the neoliberal experiment started in Chile, when General Augusto Pinochet overthrew Salvador Allende, the first democratically elected Marxist president in the Western Hemisphere, in a CIA-backed coup. Pinochet installed a bloody dictatorship that repressed the left, as well as popular organizations and workers' movements. This created the perfect environment – a "Petri Dish" – for the late Milton Friedman and his Chicago Boys to "reconstruct the Chilean economy . . . along free-market lines, privatizing public assets, opening up natural resources to private exploitation and

facilitating foreign direct investment and free trade" (Harvey 2006, pp.12). However, not all countries in Latin America were introduced to neoliberalism through coercion; in fact, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, these orthodox policies were embraced by electorates in Latin America because they became the only development strategy available to lift people out of poverty (Gott, 2008).

Throughout the 1990s and in the early 2000s, neoliberalism in Latin America was embodied by the so-called Washington Consensus, a set of policies championed by the IMF and the World Bank that encouraged the countries of this region to privatize state enterprises, reduce public spending, deregulate governments, liberalize trade and finance, and encourage foreign investment (Jordan, 2006)[16]. These policies promised Latin American countries a huge improvement in their economic performance, or in other words, a road to imminent prosperity. Unfortunately, instead of delivering what they promised, these policies gave Latin Americans financial crises, higher unemployment, mediocre growth, further impoverishment of large numbers of their populations, increased inequality, and corruption (Gott, 2008; Marcano and Barrera Tyszka, 2007).

With a few exceptions, unfettered markets truly affected Latin American countries from the time they were instituted as a development strategy. To get an idea, according to the IMF, from 1980 to 2005 income per person grew only 10% in the region. Alternatively, between 1960 and 1980, that is, before the reforms were implemented, income per person grew 82% (Jones 2007). With respect to this, Weisbrot

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[16] The term "Washington Consensus" was first coined in 1989 by John Williamson, Senior Fellow at the Institute for International Economics. In a 2004 paper commissioned by Fundación Centro de Estudios Internacionaled de Barcelona (CIDOB), he argues that the international financial institutions, namely, the World Bank and IMF, have completely skewed his definition of the Washington Consensus. See Williamson (2004). In this paper, I use the term Washington Consensus as the 1990s and 2000s set of neoliberal economic policies championed by the IMF and World Bank.

(2006) comments that "the past twenty five years have been an unprecedented failure for Latin America."

Second, the traditional Latin American reformist movements, especially social democratic parties, failed to keep up with a changing world. For example, projects like Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA) in Peru, Partido Revolucionario Institucionalista (PRI) in Mexico, and Peronism in Argentina, which emerged in the 1930s and lasted for several decades, were not able to keep up with the social and economic challenges of a world that was moving towards further integration. Their demise also pulled other Latin American currents such as Christian Democracy down the drain, leaving behind a political void, in terms of projects that were instituted to support the poor (Vivas, 2009).

Finally, a last circumstance at the international level, which contributed to the emergence of Bolivarianism, was the decline in global perspectives that Latin America was producing. In the beginning of the twentieth century, a Latin America intelligentsia movement was at its height, and it opposed the United State's obsession with material prosperity. They argued that Latin America, with its racial mixture, Catholic-based humanism, and passion for the arts, offered a platform for a different civilization. This new civilization is what the early twentieth century Mexican intellectual, Jose Vasconcelos, referred to as the "Cosmic Race" (Vivas, 2009).

However, this optimism declined around the mid-twentieth century. In the 1960s and 1970s, a final shift towards a pessimistic view of Latin America among its intellectuals led them to believe in some of the arguments put forth by Modernization theory[17]. This theory argued that Latin America's failure was in part due to a "psychology of backwardness," which predominated among the inhabitants of the

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[17] A theory that states that economic growth modernizes society as a whole.

Americas. Consequently, Latin America – and the third world – was sentenced to being

nothing else than a periphery of the advanced capitalist societies of the north; in other

words, their economies were destined to be dependent on the world's centers of power[18]

(Valenzuela and Valenzuela, 1978).

Today, few voices claim anything original and distinctive as a development

strategy in Latin America. In fact, it seems like intellectuals in Latin America have

moved into mainstream ideological currents of thought; in other words, today,

intellectuals in Latin America are following globalization to the letter, and thus,

embracing anything that might suggest openness to world markets (Vivas, 2009).

- Local Domain

On January 23, 1958, an alliance of civilians and a disgruntled faction of the

armed forces ousted General Marcos Perez Jimenez, and a new ruling civic-military

junta – the Patriotic Junta – scheduled elections for later in the year (Myers, 2004; Gott,

2000). Before the coup, Venezuela had experienced less than one year of elected

democratic leaders in almost 130 years of independence. However, from the moment of

the coup until 1992, Venezuela enjoyed its most prosperous democratic period in

history. In fact, it was a truly remarkable exception in a continent plagued with

dictatorships and autocratic leaders (Clark, 2009). In regards to this, scholars talked

about Venezuela's democratic "exceptionalism" (McCoy and Myers, 2004).

On October 31, 1958, a few weeks before the elections of December 7,

Venezuela's three main political parties – Accion Democratica (AD), Union

Republicana Democratica (URD), and Comite de Organizacion Politica Electoral

Independiente (COPEI) – signed a famous agreement known as "Punto Fijo" to

maintain the democratic order in Venezuela. Here, it is important to point out that AD

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[18] This last deduction is not strictly part of Modernization Theory; in fact, it comes from Immannuel
Wallerstein's World System's Theory.

and COPEI were hostile toward the fourth most important party in Venezuela, the Partido Comunista de Venezuela, and as a result, this group was not invited to be part of the 1958 agreement. This is relevant given that their leaders also played a major role in the struggle against Perez Jimenez dictatorship (Clark, 2009; Myers, 2004).

On January 1, 1959, Romulo Betancourt, "the father of Venezuelan democracy," took the presidential oath and started an era of peaceful transfers of power in Venezuela. He handed over power in 1964 to Raul Leoni, who in 1969 handed it over to Rafael Caldera, who in 1974 handed it over to Carlos Andres Perez, who in 1979 handed it over to Luis Herrera Campins, who in 1984 handed it over to Jaime Lusinchi, who in 1989 handed it over once again to Carlos Andres Perez (Clark, 2009). All of these presidents were members of Punto Fijo's AD or COPEI parties.

Although Punto Fijo brought stability and a lasting representative democracy to Venezuela, it had some major problems which started to appear after the currency devaluation of 1983. McCoy and Myers (2004) argue that the institutional and policy choices made by Venezuelan elites during the years when Punto Fijo became the accepted political regime contained four vulnerabilities that led it to collapse in the 1990s.

First, those who designed the regime were reluctant to lessen their dependence of its institutions on income from oil. Second, the founders of the new regime neglected the state's weakened regulative capability, a weakness that impeded the government to allocate resources when the country's income declined. Third, Punto Fijo's hypothetical power-sharing agreements became institutionalized in ways that positions occupied by Caracas-based leaders of AD and COPEI were impenetrable. Those in power did not allow young leaders to ascend to power, and made sure that the organization of their respective parties was dependent on them. Finally, the last vulnerability was a result of

the exclusive pacts that Punto Fijo made with businessmen, party leaders, and labor

unions, leaving sectors of the population, such as the urban poor, intellectuals, and

middle-class civil society marginalized and without a voice.

These weaknesses created a Venezuelan population which heavily depended on

the distributive generosity of the government, and who perceived the political party as

the foremost symbol of stability and democratic representation. In other words, in this

perspective, the people constructed itself as nothing else than a simple spectator, that

did not expect anything but its social needs to be satisfied by the actions of the political

parties in power (Romero, 2005). This spectator role did not only evolve as a result of

the large social spending the government incurred, but also because of the

inaccessibility of the political regime. As mentioned before, this structure started to

show its vulnerabilities in the early 1980s.

The 1980s started with an economic crisis that began with the decline of

international oil prices and the subsequent devaluation of the bolivar, Venezuela's

currency, on the so-called "Black Friday" on February 18, 1983 (Herrera Salas, 2005).

The following years were gloomy as well, and the government had problems being the

generous social provider it had been in the past; in addition, this role was becoming

more difficult every time, not only because of the crisis, but because of a growing

population (Clark, 2009). During the last months of President Jaime Lusinchi term,

which lasted from 1984 to 1989, the crisis worsened, and the last act he did as president

was to suspend repayment of the foreign debt. Venezuela's foreign reserves were finally

running out after twenty years of reckless spending and unmatched corruption (Gott,

2000).

Carlos Andres Perez had taken office at the beginning of February 1989. This

was his second term, and people had reelected him because he was remembered as the

man in power during glorious days of "Saudi Venezuela" in the 1970s, when the country was perceived as an affluent state. Many speculated on what his economic reforms would entail, but based on his past support for big government, no one imagined what was about to come (Myers, 2004).

Soon after taking office, on February 16, 1989, Carlos Andres Perez announced that he would follow the policies of the Washington Consensus as his economic strategy, and thus, a process of fiscal austerity and privatization of state enterprises began. As part of this neo-liberal economic packet, the price of gas had been scheduled to increase by 100 percent on Sunday, February 26. However, in order to avoid any social unrest, bus owners were allowed to increase their fares by only 30 percent on the first working day after the spike in the price of gas, and an additional 30 percent three months later (Gott, 2000).

Bus owners did not obey the government's mandate and increased their fares by 100 percent on the very first day to cover their own increased costs. Poor commuters were angry and soon, riots began to appear in every major city of Venezuela. At first, buses were overturned and burnt, but a few hours later, the rebellion included widespread looting and the devastation of shops and supermarkets. Young people from the suburbs – the area where poor people reside – invaded downtown Caracas and the moved on to the residential areas were the rich live. Rioting and looting continued throughout the night and the following day, developing into a prolonged rebellion know as the *Caracazo* (McCoy and Myers, 2004; Gott, 2000).

However, this rebellion was soon followed by days of brutal military repression. Soldiers soon moved into the shanty towns and started shooting anything that moved. The official figure of people killed was 372, but the other sources contend that this figure was over one-thousand in Caracas alone. According to a government official, this

repression was intended as a warning to the poor, so that they would not do it again. People became afraid, and this event cast a lasting shadow over the 1990s, which created a climate of hopelessness and political apathy (Gott, 2000).

The poor were repressed and the political party system once and for all forgot about them. Furthermore, the neoliberal policies of the Washington Consensus, with their international focus, also left the most impoverished sectors of the population forgotten. As a result, on February 4, 1992, a young colonel by the name of Hugo Chavez Frias, attempted to overthrow Carlos Andres Perez in a coup, but failed in his attempt. Chavez was later imprisoned, after he confessed being the mastermind behind the plot against Perez (McCoy and Myers, 2004).

Chavez was unsuccessful in overthrowing Carlos Andres Perez, but a year later, the leaders of Accion Democratica (AD), Perez's own party, accomplished what Chavez could not; that is, getting rid of Perez. In 1993, Perez was impeached by Congress on charges of corruption, placed under house arrest, and removed from office. Rafael Caldera won the 1993 elections, and soon after, when he was inaugurated in 1994, he pardoned Chavez and released him from jail. The stage was set for Chavez triumphal reemergence in the 1998 presidential elections.

Chavez's election as a dislocation of the hegemonic system

It has clearly been established that after 1992, there was a structural dislocation in Venezuela's hegemonic political system. This system was based on the predominance of the political party system, which was embodied by the Punto Fijo agreement. Furthermore, this system was an elitist one in which regular people, particularly the disfranchised sectors, did not play an active role. So disconnected was the political system from the people that, as was mentioned above, the people became spectators of a system that for some time provided everything to them. The majority of

identities in the social system remained fulfilled as long as the party continued working as a provider, and the people as receivers.

The Venezuelan political party system saw its complete demise after Carlos Andres Perez was impeached and placed under house arrest. Also, when Caldera ran against COPEI in 1993, he destroyed the party he himself had created (Clark, 2009). Corruption was rampant too, and the clientelistic model of democracy that AD and COPEI had established stopped being tolerated by Venezuelans. The traditional political parties, whether in power or in the opposition, became incapable of controlling the increasingly acute problems of Venezuelan society, and thus, their once loyal followings began to diminish.

Clark (2009) argues that after this, the stage was set for a change, and that anyone could have seized the moment. However, I argue that this is not the case: the stage was set for Chavez's Bolivarian project to gain hegemony in Venezuela. Although the social space was open for an infinite number of discourses to gain power and hegemony, the Bolivarian Revolution was the only discursive practice capable of complementing unfulfilled identities, and restructuring dislocated elements through ideas that have always been present in the Venezuelan collective imaginary. In other words, the time was ripe for a spiritual and democratic revolution led by an authoritarian leader, as will be further discussed below.

Before proceeding with the imaginaries used by *chavistas* to interpret Bolivar, and to better understand them, it is important to explain how the events presented in the context represent a structural dislocation of the system that led to an identity crisis in the majority of Venezuelans. First, at the international level, the lack of production of ideas, as well as the demise of traditional political parties that supported the poor, left Latin Americans -including Venezuelans - without a major group to identify with. Second, in

Venezuela, the old political party system stopped being what the people admired, and hence, the latter could not identify with it anymore. Once again, the peoples' identities were put in jeopardy, and consequently, they had to look for something, a *myth* perhaps, to solve this problem.

Bolivar's imaginaries in Chavez's Bolivarian Revolution

The structural dislocation that occurred in Venezuela, as a result of the political party system crisis, was so severe that only something as powerful as the cult of Bolivar was able to fix it. In fact, this cult has always existed and has become a historical need in Venezuelan society, "its role has been to disguise a failure and delay a disappointment, and so far, it has done it satisfactorily" (Carrera Damas, 1969, pp. 42). The conditions were perfect for Chavez to once again invoke the liberator to fulfill the needs and interests of a society whose identity had been challenged by a system that failed to deliver to it.

As opposed to other periods in history, when not all of Bolivar's imaginaries could be put into use at the same time for different reasons, the context in which Chavez emerges allows him to use all of them (demigod, revolutionary, democratic leader, and Catholic), and even create a new one -Bolivar the socialist – to consolidate his power. Hugo Chavez, or anyone else, could have not been able to exploit Bolivar and use all of his imaginaries in a different context. Without a dislocation of the old hegemonic system, where the political parties, along with foreign strategies of development, failed to deliver to the marginalized sectors of the population, the Bolivarian Revolution as we know it would have never been able to take place.

The following subsection shows how Hugo Chavez has interpreted Bolivar by using the several imaginaries that have been attributed to him. Also, the way in which

Chavez uses these imaginaries will show how he has constructed an ideology which has allowed him to stay in power for over ten years.

- *Bolivar, the democratic leader*

Like Venezuelan leaders of the past, Chavez interprets Bolivar as a democratic leader. However, it is important to define democracy in the realm of the Bolivarian Revolution to understand how Bolivar is interpreted. In order to do this, two models, or conceptions, of democracy must be defined: 1) representative democracy, and 2) participatory democracy.

The general western view of democracy is one where the government is associated with the individual rights pertaining to the liberal tradition. Bobbio (2005) argues that '"liberalism" denotes a particular conception of the state, in which the state is conceived as having limited powers and functions; democracy denotes one of many possible modes of government; namely, that in which power is not vested in a single individual or in the hands of a few, but lies with everybody, or rather with the majority" (pp.1). Moreover, the limits of state power are related to John Locke's doctrine of natural rights, which establish that all people enjoy basic rights, such as the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (Vivas, 2009).

Additionally, the notion of democracy as government of the people, in contrast to government of the few, has ancient roots that go back to the Greek, where it was exercised directly. In modern times what has remained are representative forms of democracy, which include parliamentary systems, presidential systems, or combinations of both. Vivas (2009) argues that Chavez's opponents faithfully defend the liberal democratic tradition, which combines representative forms of government with individual liberties.

On the other hand, Bolivarianism supports a participatory type of democracy, where the people are the main actors, and their rule is exercised directly. This is what Chavez calls "real" democracy. Bolivarianism opposes representative democracies because it contends that through elections they masquerade the domination of the rich over the poor; in other words, the people are excluded from the democratic process (Vivas, 2009).

Based on the aforementioned premises, Chavez condemned the 40 years of representative democracy before his presidency, and called for a new type of democracy which would include those who had been excluded.

> …January 23, 1958 brought with it a new betrayal to the Venezuelan people, and that is why I have said in these weeks, ratifying *our* will of popular struggle, that the people of Venezuela are one of the most betrayed people in history and that these people do not deserve even one more betrayal, [the Venezuelan] people are not to be betrayed, together with the people you struggle and you build a homeland. (Chavez, 2003)

Here, it is important to notice how Chavez's condemnation of the previous 40 years of representative democracy creates an antagonism through *logic of equivalence*, making every single government before his, not only responsible for the exclusion of the people from the democratic system, but for a betrayal. Thus, the governments of the democratic period become adversaries of the Bolivarian Revolution. The antagonism in the above quote is created by the use of the phrase "our will of popular struggle." This phrase places the people in stark opposition to the governments of the democratic period, while giving them a sense of belonging in Chavez's project.

Chavez's interpretation of Bolivar through the imaginary of the democratic leader portrays him as a champion of participatory democracy. A proponent of participatory democracy in the Bolivarian context is thus one who opposes everything associated with Venezuela's representative democratic period. Elements such as

government decentralization, the Washington Consensus, and the elitist oligarchic

system are particularly identified as the most notorious discontents of the representative

system. As a result, Bolivarianism's interpretation of the democratic Bolivar is

constructed by portraying him as an anti-federalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-oligarchic

leader who was betrayed by the elites in power.

> With respect to the anti-oligarchic and betrayal point, Chavez states;

> … you know that Bolivar was betrayed in life by the depredatory oligarchy, this same oligarchy that today wants to croak like roosters, this same oligarchy that today ridiculously threatens the revolutionary government, because it is ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous, this same oligarchy was the one that betrayed Bolivar, the one who expelled him from Venezuela in 1829-1830 and then ordered to kill him, and almost killed he was, the same oligarchy who forbade him to return to Venezuela… (Chavez, 2001).

Here, the democratic leader is a victim of the oligarchy, and although the text

does not show him fighting against his opponents, Chavez tacitly interprets Bolivar as a

combatant against the oligarchies who expelled him. Also, Chavez likens the oligarchy

of the past with the one of the present to create an antagonism, which gives his

revolution more strength. This is evident when he says "Bolivar was betrayed in life by

the depredatory oligarchy, this same oligarchy that *today* wants to croak like roosters."

The oligarchs have not only betrayed the people as was shown above, but they have also

betrayed Bolivar, their inspirational leader. Thus, if people like Bolivar, and the

oligarchs – which have always been the same according to Chavez – are attempting to

once again kill him, then they do not belong to the revolution.

> With regards to Bolivar being an anti-imperialistic democratic leader, Chavez

uses the following passage written by Bolivar in his famous *letter from Jamaica* to

justify his claim:

> … when a state becomes too extensive, either in itself or from its dependencies, it falls into confusion, converts its free form into a sort

of tyranny, abandons those principles which ought to preserve it, and at length degenerates into despotism. The essence of small republics is permanency, that of great ones is changeability, but always inclined to dominion" (Simon Bolivar in Chavez, 2009, pp. xii).

Chavez interprets this as an anti-imperialist position. He writes: "We can see here that Bolivar was an anti-imperialist – the first anti-imperialist in the history of the Americas." Chavez's assertion is not clear in   (Chavez, 2009, pp.xii). Chavez's interpretation might not be clear at first; as a result, it is important to present the context for the above-cited passage: Bolivar writes this as he talks about Rome, and how it system collapsed as a result of it being too large and not being able to provide rights to all of its citizens.

The Bolivarian anti-imperialist interpretation of Bolivar is also based on some statements Bolivar made about the United States of America. For example, the following quotes are often cited by supporters of the revolution: "The United States seems destined by Providence to plague Latin America with miseries in the name of freedom." Also, "There in the North, at the head of this continent, is a very large nation, very hostile and capable of anything." Alternatively, in regards to the Monroe Doctrine, he once asked: "What kind of brothers are these, those in North America, when even Spain has now recognized our independence and the still refuse to do so? Proponents of the Bolivarian Revolution use this quotes as to show that Bolivar was anti-imperialist, and to associate this dislike of the United States with the failed policies of the Washington Consensus.

Finally, a more complete portrayal of the democratic Bolivar who opposes the elites was exposed in Chavez's 2007 inaugural speech:

> Blessed is the citizen ... who under the coat of arms ... convenes national sovereignty to exercise its absolute will ...! His absolute will! Bolivar had this revolutionary democratic vision...! Not a bourgeois democratic one ... Bolivar attacks the elites ... he always

calls the people to participate in the [democratic] process! (Chavez, 2007).

Here, Chavez not only shows an anti-oligarch Bolivar, but he also shows a Bolivar who supports a participatory democracy because "he always calls the people to participate in the [democratic] process." This passage is also very important to demonstrate how Chavez interprets the democratic Bolivar. First, he defines democracy as "Not a bourgeois one," but one in which people participate, and this further supports his representative democracy project. *The people* are invited to participate in the democratic process; therefore, they are not part of the bourgeois. This last point also shows an antagonism where the bourgeois (elites, democratic system, and oligarchs too) becomes *the people's* adversary because they oppose what Bolivar, their revolution's leader, stood for.

- *Bolivar, the revolutionary*

As opposed to the period between 1830 and 1903, the conditions in Venezuela, when Chavez took office, were optimal for a revolution to take place, and that is what occurred. Nevertheless, there are some who contend that the Bolivarian Revolution is not a revolution per se, and thus, Chavez is incorrectly labeling his project (Clark, 2009). However, discussing whether the Bolivarian Revolution is a real revolution is not of importance here. What concerns us is whether the proponents of Bolivarianism have interpreted Chavez as a revolutionary, and the evidence suggests they have.

Referring to Bolivar as a revolutionary, Chavez (2009) writes:

Bolivar was a true revolutionary. He became more revolutionary each day as he advanced in his struggle across South America, pushing for the liberation of slaves; confiscating land and distributing it among the indigenous people; setting up schools, including ones for girls, indigenous children and the children of slaves[19] (pp. xiv).

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[19] This passage also includes imaginaries of the "socialist" Bolivar, which will be further explored below.

It is important to notice that in this excerpt Chavez defines "revolutionary" as someone who is engaged in egalitarianism. Being a warrior or having a sword is not what makes Bolivar a revolutionary; instead, fighting for the equality of the people as well as for their opportunities in life is what characterizes him as a revolutionary in Chavez's interpretation.

Additionally, on a different occasion Chavez exalted the importance of the revolution in the following way:

> We must triumph through the revolutionary, and not through any other. [Bolivar] knew that only through this path he would achieve victory. Two-hundred years later we must scream and sing: We, with Bolivar, will triumph in this revolutionary path. Motherland or death. We will triumph!" (Chavez, 2007).

Here, Chavez not only interprets Bolivar as a revolutionary, but also as a champion of a revolutionary process to change Venezuela. In fact, in this excerpt the only way to achieve victory is through a revolution, which was endorsed by Bolivar two-hundred years ago. Once again, by doing this, the proponents of Bolivarianism are able to legitimize their project.

- *Bolivar, the demigod*

The imaginary of Bolivar, the demigod, has also been used by the proponents of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela. There are several instances in which Bolivar has been interpreted as an almost divine being during Hugo Chavez's presidency. The following are just a few:

> … the immortal *caraqueño*[20], the bolivarian, the leader of all times, the eternal commander of this revolution, who is no other than Simon Bolivar, the greatest man that this continent has given birth to. *Viva* Bolivar! (Chavez, 2002).

> In thousands of towns, on thousands of roads, during thousands of days going around the country in these past five years, I repeated in

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[20] A person from Caracas, Venezuela.

front of many Venezuelans this phrase of our *infinite Father*, the Liberator (Chavez, 1999).

The imaginary of demigod is clearly present in the aforementioned quotes. In the first one, Bolivar is interpreted as *immortal* and *eternal*. Furthermore, he is the greatest man in the Americas, implying that no one can be above him. On the other hand, in the second quote, Chavez refers to Bolivar as *infinite Father*, also attributing him with divine qualities.

Also, in 2007, Chavez started his inauguration speech by saying, "*Bolivar, Padre nuestro que estas en el aire, el agua y en la tierra*" - the Catholic prayer "Our Father," starts the same way in Spanish. As a result, Chavez in this case not only interpreted Bolivar as a demigod; in fact, he took the imaginary to a different level and turned Bolivar into God.

- *Bolivar, the catholic and socialist*

Given that the imaginary of the catholic Bolivar cannot be greatly exploited, as a result of Bolivar's problematic relationship with the Church, the proponents of the Bolivarian Revolution compare Bolivar's life with Jesus' life to present Bolivar as a good catholic to the people. The following reflects this idea.

> "[Bolivar] lived like Jesus Christ and died in calvary. He lived and died in a Christ-like manner, just like Jesus Christ. And his last proclamation is a hymn of pain, but at the same time, it is a hymn of love, of farewell."

> "Bolivar wanted to make a revolution, he wanted to eliminate privileges, he wanted all of us to be equal, he wanted to redistribute land for the poor, he wanted unity between the people and the military, and he wanted independence as well as a united South America to oppose the empires of the north" (Chavez quoted in Noticias24, 2008).

Comparing Bolivar and Jesus' lives not only allows Bolivar to forcefully be understood as a Catholic at a certain level, but it also paves an avenue to argue that Bolivar was a socialist.

Bolivar's thought was socialist, or maybe we can say, pre-socialist, because the nucleus of socialist thought is social justice. Jesus Christ was a socialist, [because like Bolivar], he proclaimed equality, peace, and love among everyone (Chavez quoted in Noticias24, 2008).

Also, although in the past Chavez had briefly mentioned that Bolivar was a socialist, it was not until 2007 that he seriously started constructing the imaginary of the socialist Bolivar. Evidence of this is the way he utilized Bolivar's phrases in his 2007 inaugural speech. In reference to this, he started by quoting Bolivar: "… that all men are born with equal rights to the goods of society… this has been established by the plurality of wise men…" He then asked the audience, "Please tell me if this is not socialism? Equal rights to the goods of society." He continued by citing Bolivar once again: "nature makes men unequal in genius, temper, strength, and character. Laws correct these differences because they place an individual in society, so that society, education, industry, and arts provide him with a fictitious equality … political or social equality." Then he asked, "Please, someone tell me if this is socialism or capitalism?

The way Chavez creates the socialist imaginary in the previous examples is very interesting because given that some might argue that Catholicism and socialism are opposed worldviews, despite some of Catholicism's egalitarian ideas. Bolivar made many statements while he was alive, however, some of these, can have a different meaning when they are taken out of context, and this is a strategy Chavez exploits (Price, 2009).

Conclusion

The Bolivarian Revolution is a phenomenon that deserves careful examination in order to be understood. Chavez's ascension to power occurs at a time of identity crisis in Venezuela; in other words, it occurs at a time when the people are not able to identify with a system that stopped delivering to them after 40 years of existence. The political party system's crisis provides the perfect conditions for Hugo Chavez to implement his

Bolivarian Revolution, exploit the figure of Bolivar, and thus, fulfill the population's innermost needs and interests.

It has been argued that Chavez has been able to remain in power for more than a decade as a result of Venezuela's vast oil resources. His critics contend that with the income from oil, Chavez has been able to buy the hearts and minds of the most unfortunate Venezuelans. However, although this statement has some validity, it fails to show what have really fulfilled the hearts and minds of poor Venezuelans.

The dislocation of the hegemonic system in Venezuela was only able to be restructured by a new hegemonic discourse which has always been embedded in the Venezuelan collective imaginary. Chavez has been successful for more than ten years because he has been able to exploit all of the imaginaries that have been attributed to Bolivar in order to legitimize his revolution.

This capstone is only a first attempt at understanding the symbol that drives the Bolivarian Revolution: Simon Bolivar. A more in-depth examination is necessary to provide a better understanding of how the proponents of the Bolivarian Revolution have interpreted Simon Bolivar throughout the revolution, and if this interpretation has changed at various points to fulfill Venezuelans' needs and interest. If this is the case, it could be argued that the Bolivarian Revolution, by working on an open social system and constantly renovating itself, could last for a very long time.

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