

This paper examines the uniqueness of the Bolivarian Revolution (BR) in Venezuela as a revolutionary phenomenon and an embodiment of a specific form of revolution - a social revolution. Theda Skocpol (1979) writes that social revolutions are the moment when "... rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below" ¹. This paper will utilize the BR to argue that social revolutions are not simply the moment when the elites, either "political" or "ruling," accommodate the masses and respond to them, but rather are the moments when the masses are in control of the political community ². A social revolution is thus a specific type of revolution, and an example of this kind of revolutionary phenomena can be seen in the events of Venezuela since 1989.

The BR is a complex process, and one that this paper will argue can be specifically dated to the political crises incited by the Caracazo in February 1989. This paper will trace out some of these processes, but will also focus on the features of both the social policies and on the creation of new institutions as part of its examination of the social revolution ³. The BR is a complex and ambiguous event that has no clear outcome as of yet. However, there are positive signs in how the BR has been able to foster certain institutional forms that have already radically altered the political community and have the potential to further alter it in the future. Such institutional forms as community councils, misiones, communes, communal kitchens, etc., have been able to enact radical social policies, centred along not only "community participation," but also community "protagonism". Thus, as a social revolution the BR has itself been a life-changing experience for the people who have made themselves the political community, over and beyond the previous ruling powers in Venezuela.

Section 1: Isolating the social phenomena of revolution and social revolution

This paper is not going to go into great depth about developing an analysis of revolutions, and social revolutions, indeed, I have a second paper at this conference that begins that very analysis. On the other hand, in this paper it still might be necessary to lay out some terms, so I would like to highlight the following concepts. It is my hope that what I term useful can help us structure and lay out some thresholds ⁴, that can either be found or not in the Bolivarian revolution, which will thus hopefully guide our interpretation. By developing (quick) definitions of both Revolution and Social Revolution, -and to be clear, although less important to an analysis of Venezuela, there is a huge difference between the social phenomena of revolutions and the social phenomena of social revolutions- I will the move on to my analysis of Venezuela, by which i will begin before the revolution, attempt to explain some of the dynamics that led to the specific, but sustained, political crises that since 1989 have been the shaping of a different political community.

To begin, I would like to sharpen this concept that I just raised of a specific form of political crises. Hagopian suggests that a revolution

...an acute prolonged crisis in one or more of the traditional systems of stratification (class, status, power) of a political community, which involves a purposive, elite-directed attempt to abolish or to reconstruct one or more of said systems by means of an intensification of political power and recourse to violence ⁵.

Now, I am not going to discuss here why the "elite-directed" idea is wrong generally, but in

¹ (Skocpol, Theda, 1979, 4).

² See, e.g.; (Comninel, George C., 2003, 153); (Nearing, Scott, 1926); (Wolin, Sheldon, 1996a); (Kautsky, Karl, 2004); (Davidson, Neil, 2015); (Wootton, David, 1986,);(Marx, Karl, 1992a); (Zolberg, Aristide R., 1972).

³ See, e.g.; (Wilpert, Gregory, 2007); (Lopez Maya, Margarita, 2002); (McCoy, Jennifer; David J. Meyers, 2004a); (Ciccariello-Maher, George, 2007); (Azzellini, Dario, 2017); (Ciccariello-Maher, George, 2016); (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007).

⁴ For "thresholds," please see Robert Dahl's work on Polyarchy.; (Dahl, Robert, 1989); (Dahl, Robert, 1971). The discussion on page 6 (1989) is key, in Dahl's work it is democracy that has thresholds that can be reached, on the other hand, for me, my point is that revolutions themselves, must hit thresholds of different social phenomena to then be regarded as revolutions. My key takeaway is that consequently, not every social phenomena, and as can be seen not every "political crises" hits that threshold, and thus not every social phenomena of revolution can be considered as hitting the threshold of social revolution either.

⁵ (Hagopian, Mark N, 1974, 695).

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Venezuela the political crises hinge precisely on the lack of elite-expectations, as the Venezuelan elites were happy with the political system, which had worked for them. However, it is precisely the fact of a specific “political crises” that is the first threshold of revolution. Now it remains to define the type of political crises, for that we turn to Samuel Huntington who suggests that a Revolution is “...a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies”⁶. Huntington is useful in showing the effects of the political crises on all of the various institutions of the state and the larger political community, but we still are not clear of the actual form taken.

Nevertheless, then in searching for the type of crises, here, Giddens might be useful:

A series of events is not a revolution unless a mass social movement is involved. This condition serves to exclude instances in which either a party comes to power through electoral processes, or a small group, such as army leaders, seize power. Revolution involves the threat or use of violence on the part of those participating in the mass movement⁷.

Although Giddens is clear that an “electoral processes” is different from a revolution, it can be argued that Venezuela’s example, as shall be seen precisely involves a distinct form of electoral processes. The displacement and the form of political crises of a revolution is the use of violence by a mass social movement that it alters the political community. Giddens continues, but I would also clarify that the very displacement of the masses into the political community may itself be this violent, and that consequently, too much control by the masses cannot be assumed. Giddens goes on to suggest, and I would agree that a revolution tends to “the seizure of state power through violent means...”

Revolutions are political changes brought about in the face of opposition from the pre-existing authorities, who cannot be persuaded to relinquish their power without the threatened or actual use of violent means. ...we can define a revolution as the seizure of state power through violent means by the leaders of a mass movement, where that power is subsequently used to initiate major processes of social reform.

Now, depending on who is in control, a revolution may not develop that radically, and even if it does, as the example of Robespierre’s revolutionary leadership shows, the most radical leader will not necessarily led the revolution into something that is able to match the radicalism of the masses.

The point is that a revolution, is the “simple” displacement of the masses into the political community. As Trotsky points out,

The most indubitable feature of a revolution is the direct interference of the masses in historic events. In ordinary times the state, be it monarchical or democratic, elevates itself above the nation, and history is made by specialists in that line of business - kings, ministers, bureaucrats, parliamentarians, journalists. But at those crucial moments when the old order becomes no longer endurable to the masses, they break over the barriers excluding them from the political arena, sweep aside their traditional representatives, and create by their own interference the initial groundwork for a new regime⁸.

In short, revolutions would appear to be the moment when mass action overflows into the political community and that this is the precise form of crises that occurs within revolutions, in other words, a coup d’état or other form of crises of elite-circulation are not revolutions. As these political crises do not contain the emergence of mass collective action, but rather contain moments of crises between rulers. Unlike a revolution, other political crises do not have this *differentia specifica* of revolution.

On the other hand, what then separates revolutions from social revolutions? For me, what is key, is the level of control, whereas it would seem that revolutions, are the “simple displacement of the masses” a social revolution is a political crises where that displacement has been “complexified.” That is, the displacement has been completed, wherein in “simple” revolutions, mass action causes a breakdown in the “political community,” in a social revolution, the displacement is such that the masses take control of the political community.

George Comninel’s 2003 chapter “Historical Materialist sociology and Revolution” suggests that “Social revolutions, then, might be seen to result from the capacity of the common people of a society – whatever its specific class character – to advance their own ideas and

⁶ (Huntington, Samuel P, 2006 264).

⁷ (Giddens, Anthony, 1993, 620); (Calvert, Peter, 1990, 4).

⁸ (Trotsky, Leon, 2008, xv). I owe the quote to; (Goodwin, Jeff, 2001, 9).

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interests as a result of a fundamental political conflict dividing the dominant class”⁹. In Venezuela, as will be seen and as mentioned before, the dominant class was not divided at the time that the revolution in Venezuela began in 1989. In that regard, Comninel’s claim of an “advancement of the common people’s own ideas and interests” as against the “dominant classes” desires, is a wonderful place to start the definition of a social revolution.

Correlated to Comninel’s claim, is Aristide Zolberg’s description of “moments of madness,” which could be used to describe both revolutions and social revolutions, indeed, if defined following my understanding of the work of social revolutions- Zolberg is quite cogent. He begins by asking: “If politics is “the art of the possible,” what are we to make of moments when human beings living in societies believe that “all is possible”¹⁰? Moreover, the fact that “anything is possible” is precisely predicated on the existence of a layer of “collective behaviour”¹¹ opening up space and freeing up all of the varied possibilities, although Zolberg does not correctly follow up on the cogent claims made. In that regard, that precisely the moment of social revolution can be assumed to be different than revolutions, and although Zolberg gets us far, one still has to reconstruct the work of a social revolution, it is my hope that the third and fourth sections of my paper will offer some groundwork. What precisely is possible, in those “moments of madness” when mass action makes everything possible?

Finally, as in the introduction we quoted Skocpol, whose longer quote guides us in several ways. Firstly she starts, by insisting that “social revolutions” have a “distinctive pattern of sociopolitical change,” which in of by itself is not disagreeable, as long as the type of change is kept in mind. For example, Comninel’s revelation that a social revolution is the “advancement” of interests contrary to elites is itself a very specific change, which itself may be enough of a threshold of change that social revolutions do not have to be burdened with other changes, transitions, etc. Skocpol continues

Social revolutions are rapid, basic transformations of a society’s state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below. Social revolutions are set apart from other sorts of conflicts and transformative processes above all by the combination of two coincidences: the coincidence of societal structural change with class upheaval; and the coincidence of political with social transformation¹².

Again, we cannot imagine social revolutions transforming society, beyond the transformation afforded the advancement of interests contrary to elite interests. In fact, Skocpol’s argument runs similar to Comninel’s once one picks up the fact that she suggests that what “sets apart” social revolutions are that they are “accompanied and in part carried through by ... revolts from below,” except I am inclined to further stress in fact, how much social revolutions are actually led and controlled by revolts from below. In my mind, this makes the concept both refined enough that not all political crises, nor all revolutions, are controlled “from below” in fact, very few are, and also leaves the concept open enough that the social phenomena can occur in many different situations, as long as its foundational threshold is reached.

Section 2: Venezuela before 1989: The political community of the Elites

It is a truism that one needs to understand the past in order to understand the present, and Venezuela is no exception. One could go deep into the past of Venezuela, and mark out the different dynamics that have shaped this country. For example, the dynamics of anti-colonialism and anti-slavery that marked the struggles previous to the independence struggles led by Simon Bolivar. Or one could focus on Bolivar’s long struggle to free Venezuela, or on the long post-independence struggles of Afro-Venezuelans, women, peasants, or the Indigenous Peoples against Venezuelan society and state. This paper takes a simpler and shorter view; it will mark the difference between the political community of Venezuela throughout the twentieth century,

⁹ (Comninel, George C., 2003, 94).

¹⁰ {Zolberg, 1972#855@183}.

¹¹ {Zolberg, 1972#855@183}.

¹² (Skocpol, Theda, 1979, 4).

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and will use the years of the 1930s through 1988 as the comparative of the Venezuelan political community in the years starting in 1989 through to the present day. Indeed, 1989 is the year that both Venezuela's revolution and social revolution can be identified, as 1989 was the year that not only did the Venezuelan masses insert themselves into the political community, they became the "only game in town" ¹³.

Consequently, by examining the thirty years before 1989, we will be looking for key differences during that time that could identify not only various dynamics but also specify what changed in the political community after 1989. This section will begin by examining what came before 1958, and then what was known as "Venezuelan exceptionalism" (1958-1988), the Venezuela of the Punto Fijo pact, it will then discuss the emergence of the new exceptionalism of the *Caracazo* that has continued throughout the past twenty-eight years. The next section will give a brief overview of Venezuela's experiences during the *Caracazo* in the early days of Bolivarian Revolution. The last section examines both the radical social policy and new institutional forms of the past twenty-eight years. My central argument is that the twentieth century dynamics of politics is certainly the cause of the twenty-first century dynamics ¹⁴.

As Daniel Levine (1973) begins in his insightful book on Venezuelan politics, "modern political life began for Venezuela in 1936" ¹⁵, but in fact, the tendencies of modernity had already arrived by the early 1920s ¹⁶. In comparison, Terry Karl (1987) argues that without a doubt the basis for modern authoritarianism in Venezuela, and thus the accompanying "deconsolidation of democracy," is the "long-term" capitalist development and "impact of oil, a commodity that initially served to buttress existing regime arrangements, eventually undermin[ing] the social basis for authoritarian rule, thus laying the groundwork for political change" ¹⁷. For Fernando Coronil (2007), the "magical state" (i.e., the Venezuelan state before 1989) "...astonishes through the marvels of power...as a 'magnanimous sorcerer,' the state seizes its subjects by inducing a condition or state of being receptive to its illusions — a magical state" ¹⁸. According to Coronil, the state is itself a "Petrostate," that is, it "[held] the monopoly not only of political violence but of the nation's natural wealth"¹⁹. Levine's description of Venezuela between 1908 to 1935 is of a country suffering under the bloody dictatorship of Juan Vicente Gomez. Gomez's autocratic regime unified the country administratively and politically, effectively eliminating all traces of the nineteenth-century heritage of regional conflict and civil war" ²⁰. However, Levine continues

The oil revenues that began to flow in the 1920's reinforced the Gomez regime and helped create a national army and national bureaucracy- in short, an effective state machine for the first time in Venezuelan history. The sheer growth and potential power of the central government is reflected in the expansion of overall state income and expenditure in the Gomez period ²¹.

Karl, writing in 1987 more than a decade after Levine concurs.

...The birth of the modern Venezuelan state during the twenty-seven-year rule of the caudillo Juan Vicente Gomez (1908-1935) coincided with the discovery and exploitation of oil by foreign companies. As a result of this historic accident of timing, both U.S. multinationals and the U.S. government became essential props in the formation of modern authoritarian arrangements. Colliding with a weak and fragmented civil society, their impact was overwhelming: petrodollars became the bulwark of an alliance that included a hierarchy of military caudillos,

¹³ Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan's (1996) work addresses democracy and without wanting to discuss democracy, I think their description of the consolidation of democracy can help us understand the threshold of social revolution as well. As the difference between consolidation and non-consolidation of democracy would suit a threshold of "social revolution as well." Linz and Stepan's baseline is useful, "we mean by a consolidated democracy a political situation in which, in a phrase, democracy has become "the only game in town " And to which they clarify: "a narrower definition of democratic consolidation, but one that nonetheless combines behavioral, attitudinal, and constitutional dimensions," moreover, they continue: "Democracy becomes the only game in town when, even in the face of severe political and economic crises, the overwhelming majority of the people believe that any further / political change must emerge from within the parameters of democratic formulas". Again, without wanting to discuss the relation between Social revolution, and democracy, I think not if we imagine the term "Social Revolution" in place of "Democracy" but rather their insights into *consolidation* serve to identify certain thresholds of social revolution, see,; (Linz, Juan J. and Alfred C. Stepan, 1996, 5).

¹⁴ See for example,; (Tarver, H. Michael and Julia C. Frederick, 2006).

¹⁵ (Levine, Daniel H, 1973, 14).

¹⁶ (Tarver, H. Michael and Julia C. Frederick, 2006, 14). For Tarver and Frederick, 1918 was that magical year.

¹⁷ (Karl, Terry Lynn, 1987, 67). Also, see,; (Coronil, Fernando, 1997, 4).

¹⁸ (Coronil, Fernando, 1997, 5).

¹⁹ (Coronil, Fernando, 1997, 4).

²⁰ (Levine, Daniel H, 1973, 14-15).

²¹ (Levine, Daniel H, 1973, 15).

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the coffee and cacao producers of the Andes, and the Caracas commercial and financial elite. The foreign relationship was direct: Gomez seized power through a U.S.-backed coup in 1908 and subsequently utilized the oil companies to maintain the stability of his rule for almost three decades. In return for accommodating the companies through cheap oil concessions and favorable legislation, Gomez received rapidly growing revenues that allowed him to equip the first national army, expand a loyal state bureaucracy, lift the tax burden from elites, and develop a sophisticated repressive apparatus.

Oil initially protected this oligarchic alliance from the disruptive strains of industrialization. Because an oil-mediated integration into the world market provided the revenues for a continuous expansion of the country's import capacity, petrodollars delayed indigenous industrialization in this financially rich country. One manifestation of this structural dynamic was the consistent appreciation of the bolivar in relation to the dollar, a currency movement that created an incentive for imports rather than for domestic production²².

Nevertheless, it is clear, that where Karl disagrees with Levine is in whether Gomez was the root of the beginning of the modern sense of stabilization or not. Whereas, Levine is more ambivalent, Karl is clearer and seemingly more cogent in her argument that Gomez's commitment to both capitalist development and capitalist state development worked in tandem to stabilize the state.

In my opinion, the type of governments and style of governance depended on two main impulses, oil development and thus capitalist development and "fear of communism." These dynamics in Venezuela were the common feature of twentieth century world-wide development, including throughout Latin America. Nevertheless, for Venezuela it was at first a fear of Russian communism which, for obvious reasons, metamorphosed into the dominant anti-Cuban style "Castroism" (and at times "Guevarism"). Simultaneously, the Venezuelan state developed internal and external policies necessitated by being a petroleum producing country which engendered the accumulation of oil wealth.

In the period following Gómez's death, a new political party emerged, Accion Democratic (AD), a strange mix of both electoral and mass action party. AD helped foster a coup in 1945, when they were the lead party in an arrangement known as the Trienio, however, this was a period without stability. One reason for the absence of stability was the lack of clarity of AD'S role, and whether they wanted to become the ruling party of Venezuela? Was the AD a radical competitor for the communist party's radicalism or was the AD something else altogether? As these questions remained unsettled, the Trienio rule led to unrest among both the elite and the masses, leading to a counter-coup against the Trienio in 1948. Eventually General Marco Perez Jimenez, one of the masterminds of the coup, became the executive in Venezuela²³.

At the time the Jiménez dictatorship fell in 1958, many comparative political scientists and regional specialist labelled Venezuela as an "exceptional democracy." The nation was stable, it had a 'strong representative democracy' and certainly, considering the Trienio years, had been part of the second wave of democracy²⁴. To be clear, Venezuela did have a somewhat different politics from the middle to the end of the twentieth century from the rest of Latin America in that it did have something of a sustained pluralist polity for the majority of the twentieth century. However, is this enough to discuss a "Venezuelan Exceptionalism," and if it is, does this mean that the mass politics that existed was either in control of the political community of Venezuela, or was there not a conscious avoidance of mass politics and the repression of any different form of politics? I posit that the development of second wave "democracy" lasted for years, during which time other countries in Latin America experienced "brutal dictatorships", but that this "exceptionalism" was not in fact exceptional. We will see that this "democracy" was predicated on exclusion and "elite circulation" alone.

²² (Karl, Terry Lynn, 1987, 67-68).

²³ Thus, a lot of top decision making was predicated on one of these two factors, if not both identified above, most of the time in Venezuela. Moreover, there were several quite conscious methods towards elite circulation, an intent towards a broad coalition, but blocking the "more radical" elements, sometimes through incorporation, sometimes not. The point being the ways the disputes of 1935-1988 were resolved was through keeping elite circulation, and that the common resolution was paternalist exclusionary designs common to pluralist polyarchies. Either through authoritarianism, such as Jimenez's coup, or later through pacted democracy, exclusion of the Venezuelan communist party, along with unapproved social movement layers, consciously evicted the masses from the "democracy" quite accordingly. Moreover, as shall be seen the differences between the authoritarianism of the Jimenez coup in 1948 could certainly be matched with the authoritarian leanings of the pacted democracy. This was a decomposition of democracy, at no point during these years did it flourish, except for those times when it spilled over, but mass action too was mistrusted and a cause for concern, until it was not, the years starting in the 1980s, believed its own lies, and insulated the state against all mass movements, or so it believed.

²⁴ (Ellner, Steve, 2003b, 7, 10); See also; (Wilpert, Gregory, 2007, 183); (Meyers, David J., 2004, 794); (Garcia-Guadilla, Maria Pilar, 2005, 111); (Coppedge, Michael, 2005, 289, 290, 297, 308); (Clark, A. C., 2009, 30-31).

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The “magical state”, with its oil wealth “that allowed it to ‘buy off’ the population” through some form of welfare state, developed slowly throughout the twentieth century, was consolidated through the early years of the PFP with antecedents going all the way back to Gomez²⁵. It was also a state where the masses were consciously excluded. The southern cone countries of Latin America, but most especially Cuba and Colombia (as always), are instructive as both exemplify differences and similarities with Venezuela’s development through these years, as with other OPEC countries. Venezuela’s achievement of modern plurality began as part of the second wave of democracy. With this “magical state” in mind, the Venezuelan state programs were consciously and cynically created by the Venezuelan political (and thus, ruling) elites to maintain power. The basic assumption lying at the heart of the Venezuelan state and the elite was that even when they began to fail to live up to the “pact of the magical state” during the period of neo-liberal restructuring starting in the early 1980s, everything was alright. In fact, the disruption of the magical state only became a true disruption for both the Venezuelan elites and state following the events of 1989, but which beforehand had meant nothing²⁶. By 1958, and perhaps as early as a decade and a half prior, during Gomez’s rule, the elite settled into long-term political control. Only in 1989, was the elite’s control ended, but I jump ahead of myself; let us linger in 1958.

The aforementioned ‘exceptional’ democracy was in fact created by an agreement called the Punto Fijo Pact (PFP)²⁷ among three political parties, AD²⁸, COPEI (Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente)²⁹, and URD (Unión Republicana Democrática)³⁰. AC Clark (2009) argues that the name, *Punto Fijo*, which suggests an “overly rigid and oppressive” pact, was purely an accident of history³¹ as the pact was signed at Punto Fijo, the location of Rafael Caldera’s³² house. However, the pact’s appropriate name evokes both the consciously anti-democratic thinking of the ‘exceptionally democratic’ planners and the way that the pact historically developed³³. Beginning only as a way to incorporate the three parties into a power sharing arrangement, the pact eventually expanded to include business organizations, unions, the military and the Catholic Church³⁴. The idea was for the three political parties to share power, wherein an election would be ‘won’ by the first party and then the next election would be ‘won’ by the second party³⁵. In between elections, the two parties, COPEI & AD, were more or less mutually supportive of each other³⁶. The unions, business organizations, the Church, the

²⁵ See also,; (Coronil, Fernando, 1997, 5); (Wilpert, Gregory, 2005, 10-11); (Hellinger, Daniel, 2003, 30).

²⁶ (Gaster, Jeremiah, 2010b, 21). Also see,; (Coronil, Fernando, 1997, 224); (Wilpert, Gregory, 2007, 83); and; (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 89). Finally,; (Levine, Daniel H, 1973, 8); (Meyers, David J., 2004, 794).

²⁷ *Punto Fijo*, literally *Fixed Point*. See, e.g., (Clark, A. C, 2009, 27-30). In Venezuelan Spanish, *Punto Fijo*, also means crossroads, and is the location that is one of the major oil ports, and thus a way to signal to the capitalists aligned with the oil fields both naturally and internationally that the pact meant business, literally. This also makes sense, the Venezuelan elite who became the state, saw the crossroads of capitalist development and anti-communism, as a conscious plan, *Punto Fijo* being. The PFP in many ways resembles the dichotomy that Wolin suggests lies opposite to “democratic constitutionalism” that of “Constitutional democracies,” those times when democratic elements, were “loosely introduced” but not “the only game in town.” My argument lies in that I am identifying the constitutional democracy of Venezuela as the period before 1989, if there was such a thing as a threshold of the pluralism of polyarchy”, than the second wave was it. If it could be argued that the polity afforded the political elites through the PFP, was that of a pluralist polyarchy, a form of “constitutional democracy” which is not necessarily meeting the threshold of democracy itself, then maybe if the threshold of democracy occurs, one threshold to show it would be that of Wolin’s “democratic constitutionalism.”

²⁸ AD was itself split between the radicals and the “realists” who steered a “true course,” by creating a balance. In 1960, this balance was confirmed when radical Adeco’s left to help form a guerrilla movement.

²⁹ *The Independent political electoral organizational committee*-which was a more Catholic/Conservative party also led by a charismatic leader and which split in the 1970’s between the radical secondary party leaders, the ‘realist party bosses,’ and the party masses, the copeyanos, who followed both sides.

³⁰ *Republican Democratic Union*- a party that simply had a charismatic leader, similar to the other two parties, and which had a small lasting mass presence clustered around those leaders. Soon after the signing, URD, the third party disappeared as a political force –although as a political party it still existed for some time.

³¹ See; (Clark, A. C, 2009, 28); Also see; (Levine, Daniel H, 1973, 36); (Coronil, Fernando, 1997, 217); (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 51-86); (Meyers, David J., 2004, 18); (Karl, Terry Lynn, 1987, 66, 82-83).

³² The founding leader of COPEI and one of Venezuela’s Presidents (1969-1974, 1993-1998).

³³ (Levine, Daniel H, 2002, 248).

³⁴ See; (Levine, Daniel H, 1973, 43-47); (Coronil, Fernando, 1997, 218-220); (Meyers, David J., 2004, 15, 17); (Clark, A. C, 2009, 30-31).

³⁵ (Levine, Daniel H, 1973, 43); (Hellinger, Daniel, 2003, 28-29); (Coronil, Fernando, 1997, 217+ 219); (Coppedge, Michael, 2005, 297); (Meyers, David J., 2004, 18); (Karl, Terry Lynn, 1987, 66, 82-83).

³⁶ (Alvarez, Angel E, 2003, 150-151); (Levine, Daniel H, 1973, 42); (Coronil, Fernando, 1997, 218 + 220).

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military and all of the political parties (excluding the Communists) found comfort in each other's presence, agreeing to lessen social conflict and to support each other in the face of whatever opposition arose. This meant that the two parties were to alternate in power³⁷. This created a form of "Managerial Democracy"³⁸ that had its beginnings in Venezuela long before the Jiménez dictatorship, but which was fully consolidated after Jiménez's coup was ended³⁹, a type of 'magical state indeed, but one predicated on violence'⁴⁰.

Wilpert (2007) identifies the pact's aggressive exclusion of all resistance specifically coming from the left, for example from socialists and communists⁴¹. Thereby, the pact, while lessening social conflict, consciously avoided attempts to end social conflict, and thus maintained the presence of the relations of conflict found in any given "modern" society. Relations of racial power, class power, male power, colonial power, and state power were all social areas of continuing conflict. There would seem to be some levels of popular mobilization, but this was mostly "channeled into elections"⁴², which was how the AD attempted to consolidate itself after 1945, but even that was not completely apparent, and for that reason faced the coup against the *Trienio* in the late 1940s⁴³. Fernandes (2007) suggests that there were many mass mobilizations throughout the 1940s and 1950s⁴⁴. In other words that the political community was unsettled, but at the same time, the political community was secured by successive governments which adhered to Gomez's policies. By the beginning of the 1960s, mass mobilizations died out. The radical generation of the latter half of the 1960s, joined COPEI, which in turn expelled the radicals in much the same way AD had done earlier⁴⁵.

The period of the PFP was known as Venezuela's "Exceptionalism" by political scientists, for there were elections, "peaceful transitions," and no revolutions or strong men coup. But while no dictators took power, what was still considered part of this period included insurgent guerrilla forces plaguing the state, and persistent human rights violations as well as rampant state/business corruption⁴⁶. This corruption was so widespread, it was called "popular looting," in the Spanish, *saqueo popular*⁴⁷. Moreover, there was a generalization of the effects of state power in that state violence became commonplace against the poor, women, Indigenous peoples, and the Afro-Venezuelans communities⁴⁸. Consequently, the idea of Venezuela being an exceptional democracy during this period of its history is patently false⁴⁹. Levine's description

³⁷ (Clark, A. C, 2009, 19, 22-25); (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 54, 58-60, 104); (Coronil, Fernando, 1997, 24); (Meyers, David J., 2004, 12, 15); (Karl, Terry Lynn, 1987, 79 - 80, 82-85, 87-88, 91).

³⁸ The term Wolin (2008) uses to describe the representative democracy that has emerged in the past hundred years, means "...the application of managerial skills to the basic democratic political institution of popular elections...[making elections adventures in profitability by ensuring that] a large campaign contribution represents the kind of surplus power a dynamic capitalist economy makes available," see; (Wolin, Sheldon, 2008, 140).

³⁹ (Coronil, Fernando, 1997, 220, 225); (McCoy, Jennifer, 2004b, 269); (Romero, Anibal, 1997, 11). (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 52). For consolidation; also see; (Linz, Juan J. and Alfred C. Stepan, 1996, xiv, xv, 3-4, 5).

⁴⁰ See for example; (Coronil, Fernando, 1997, 34).

⁴¹ (Wilpert, Gregory, 2007, 11)

⁴² (Levine, Daniel H, 1973, 35), (Coronil, Fernando, 2008, 1). Also, see; (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 99, 102).

⁴³ (Levine, Daniel H, 1973, 28-29 + 49-50); (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 99 + 104); (Meyers, David J., 2004, 14 +18); (McCoy, Jennifer, 2004b, 270, 272).

⁴⁴ (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 99, 103-107). Also see; (Coppedge, Michael, 2005, 301); (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 58, 62-63, 73); (Karl, Terry Lynn, 1987, 73, 75, 82, 85).

⁴⁵ (Karl, Terry Lynn, 1987, 85); and; (Raby, D. L, 2006, 136); (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 59, 64, 68); (Meyers, David J., 2004, 21).

⁴⁶ For Guerrillas, see (Clark, A. C, 2009, 25-26).

⁴⁷ (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 316).

⁴⁸ See for example; (Ciccariello-Maher, George, 2013).

⁴⁹ For Linz & Stepan (1996), pacts are decidedly non-democratic, as even consociational pacts can degenerate and atrophy (Linz, Juan J. and Alfred C. Stepan, 1996, 56+61). But their argument is weakened by their earlier insistence on the "core institutions of democracy" including interparty alliances and their reliance on elections; consequently, their disdain for pacts still allows them to sneak pacts back into their form of democracy through the basic interparty and societal agreements (Linz, Juan J. and Alfred C. Stepan, 1996, 8); Also see; (Karl, Terry Lynn, 1987, 83). Their argument is further weakened through their insistence on capitalism being the baseline of economic relationships, which was certainly true of Venezuela throughout most, if not all of the twentieth century (Linz, Juan J. and Alfred C. Stepan, 1996, 11-13). Especially since the development of oil, but certainly by 1945, capitalist social relations had consolidated themselves and which by 1945, Venezuela was well incorporated into the informal empire of the United States and thus showed the symptoms of Pax Americana, forms of capitalist development, In fact as the Punto Fijo pact was almost completely consociational, it only excluded the non-elites- the masses and the radical left, and while guerrillas were eventually included in the pact they needed to be "brought in" later, it fulfilled all the other requirements for the Linz & Stepan definition of democracy, and thus explains the "exceptionalism" of these years, for example, see; (Hawkins, Kirk A, 2010a, 51), (Karl, Terry Lynn, 1987, 84). But as it did not

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of Venezuelan politics is applicable to Canada as well:

The concentration of forms of action reflects a conscious desire to avoid situations where conflict gets out of hand, to maintain (through party organization) a high degree of control over the consequences of action. Opposition and conflict are tolerated, and indeed, built into the system, but opposition is constrained to work within a set of common procedures and forms. Politics is supposed to work through elections, the congress, elected officials, and the like--through explicitly political mechanisms: Forms of action which are difficult to control (such as mass street demonstrations) are discouraged and often suppressed⁵⁰.

This history cannot be read backwards, as there were many struggles between the radical and the non-radical wings of the parties. However, the leaders, the elites of the parties and unions, were clear in the direction they pushed Venezuela, which was towards “managed democracy.” The political parties of AD and COPEI took on the “managerial position”, hammering out agreements between the different factions of the polity⁵¹. As Karl (1987) bluntly describes the pact, it was “the right to rule for the right to make money”⁵², which was entirely consistent with Gomez’s presidency and especially once oil was discovered. Despite the repression, there was mass action during the period of the PFP, but at no point did it reach a revolutionary boiling point.

While the pact maintained an artificial stability⁵³ by controlling the masses, the pact selectively benefited corporations and private individuals through patronage and polyarchic state maneuverings around civil service positions amongst interested parties⁵⁴. These patronage appointments were clearly a way of preventing Communists and other radical groups from gaining political and popular power, as seemed to be happening in other parts of the world as part of the second wave of “democratization”⁵⁵.

The PFP provided the leaders with the foundation, direction and strength, but the path was laid out even before the Trienio⁵⁶. This path staved off political unrest through defusing mobilization and by buying off the population, tactics that even preceded oil, but became ever more important once oil was discovered⁵⁷. Buying off the populace with huge benefits proliferated⁵⁸ during the early to late 1970’s, especially after the destruction of the guerrilla movements, including their incorporation into the pact and with the rise of oil prices⁵⁹. Increasingly, the magical state soared to even greater heights⁶⁰. Indeed, in 1976, under the first presidency of Carlos Andrés Pérez (CAP), Venezuela nationalized its oil production and increased social spending⁶¹, even though human rights violations and population displacement occurred⁶². The poverty rate declined to ten percent of the general population, with just over two percent

include the masses, it was a false plurality, and even then the difference between pluralism and democracy are also glaring. Similarly, for Robert Dahl, as there was both public contestation and participation, the limits of polyarchy had been reached (Dahl, Robert, 1971, 3); see also (Karl, Terry Lynn, 1987, 83). As the reins of power were contested between two or more parties and were shared between these two parties, since there was popular mobilization, Dahl's extremes were quite fulfilled; (Dahl, Robert, 1971, 6); (Hawkins, Kirk A, 2010a, 58). This again, also holds true of Canada’s polity for much of the later half of the twentieth century, but which similarly to Venezuela, saw an increase of foreign directed investment, but dissimilarly Canada around the time of the beginning of the first world war, as the first stirring of modern capitalist social relations as an internalized relationship, alongside its stirrings towards polyarchy are prevalent alongside its modernization, whereas Venezuelan development somewhat mimicked that precise development after the first world war, with the discovery of oil.

⁵⁰ (Levine, Daniel H, 1973, 8).

⁵¹ (Meyers, David J., 2004, 21); (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 58, 62-63, 74).

⁵² (Karl, Terry Lynn, 1987, 85).

⁵³ (Levine, Daniel H, 2002, 299); (Meyers, David J., 2004, 11-12); (McCoy, Jennifer, 2004b, 265); (Clark, A. C, 2009, 22); (Wilpert, Gregory, 2007, 11).

⁵⁴ (Gaster, Jeremiah, 2010b, 21-22); (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 51-55, 56-58, 59-60). (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 103). (Wilpert, Gregory, 2007, 27).

⁵⁵ (Roberts, Kenneth, 2003, 57); (Meyers, David J., 2004, 11 + 16); (Wilpert, Gregory, 2007, 11); (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 58, 62-63, 73); (Karl, Terry Lynn, 1987, 73, 75, 82, 85).

⁵⁶ (Levine, Daniel H, 1973, 43, 46). (Meyers, David J., 2004, 17); (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 59, 61, 73-74). (Clark, A. C, 2009, 31); (Karl, Terry Lynn, 1987, 6, 83, 88). It must be recalled that while AD had led the *Trienio* it was exclusionary of more than just the Communist Party, but the fact that it excluded the Communist Party was a driving method of the AD even during the *Trienio*.

⁵⁷ (Karl, Terry Lynn, 1987, 80, 88); (Levine, Daniel H, 1973, 47, 49, 84-85).

⁵⁸ (García-Guadilla, Maria Pilar, 2005, 111). (Meyers, David J., 2004, 17). (Clark, A. C, 2009, 22).

⁵⁹ (Wilpert, Gregory, 2007, 88); (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 71, 85).

⁶⁰ (Coronil, Fernando, 1997, 10); (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 71-73, 74).

⁶¹ (Coronil, Fernando, 1997, 11); (Coppedge, Michael, 2005, 310); (Raby, D. L, 2006, 140); (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 71); (Tarver, H. Michael and Julia C. Frederick, 2006, 127).

⁶² (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 106).

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of the total population of Venezuela living in extreme poverty⁶³. But this was not a social revolution, was it even a revolution? Obviously, not. Rather, while the magical state provided benefits to some of its citizens, the poor, women, Afro-Venezuelans, Indigenous Venezuelans were systematically excluded from leading the political community, and in many ways even from participating in the everyday aspect of politics.

But the rise of the “Magical State” took its toll as well, and Venezuela’s ascendancy from third world nation to one that could be considered almost a part of the first world, for its integration within the world market was limited by the vicissitudes of the capitalist world market to which it was imbricated. By the early 1980’s, the price of oil started to fall and successive Venezuelan governments responded by enacting several neo-liberal reforms, making austerity the new norm⁶⁴. The point should be clear, even before 1989, Venezuelans had long been faced with restructurings required by the market in both the state and national economies, which were common under neoliberalism⁶⁵. On February 18, 1983, which became known as “Black Friday”⁶⁶, a neoliberal structural adjustment policy, “the devaluation of 1983”⁶⁷ was put into place. Hellinger argues that this necessitated a changing social response to the balance of forces in the state and economy. Hellinger further explains that “the distributive capability of the system waned, and with it confidence that this democracy would spur development and opportunity”⁶⁸. This devaluation, was hard on the rich and the state, but the austerity programs were devastating for the poor. Consequently, by 1989, more than a decade after of the oil boom of 1973, the poverty rate had risen dramatically to including sixty-two percent of the population with thirty percent of the population living in extreme poverty⁶⁹. Electoral participation also declined during this time. Nevertheless, what is quite interesting to compare is the level of reported demonstrations. On average, there were one hundred and sixty-two demonstrations per year⁷⁰, throughout the 1980s which had no impact within the political community.

By the 1988 elections, Venezuelans were starting to take notice that their 'magical state' was disappearing into thin air, and that their democracy was 'exceptional' only for the ways that economic inequality had exponentially increased⁷¹. However, the PFP still existed, and while the parties still won votes, the days of mass mobilization had ended. The transitions remained peaceful despite the infighting among the elite regarding who had more right to the state’s trough. In 1988, during an election campaign, a massacre took place. On October 29, 1988 during the Presidential elections, the state proclaimed that around sixteen fighters of ELN (*Ejercito Liberacion Nacional*, the Colombian Guerilla group, National Liberation Army) had supposedly crossed the border into Venezuela and, after confrontation, with the Venezuelan military, had been killed⁷². But after the sudden appearance of two survivors of the massacre, it turned out that the Venezuelan army had killed fourteen residents of the Venezuelan border town Amparo⁷³.

During the same 1988 election campaign as the massacre, Carlos Andres Pérez (CAP)⁷⁴

⁶³ (Baxter, in; (Ellner, Steve; Daniel Hellinger, 2003a, 115).)

⁶⁴ (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 106 + 107); (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 79, 81, 85). (Raby, D. L., 2006, 49); (Roberts, Kenneth, 2003, 59); (Wilpert, Gregory, 2007, -108); (Coronil, Fernando, 1997, 305, 370, 375, 391); (Coppedge, Michael, 2005, 314).

⁶⁵ If neoliberalism is only a project of privatization, then the leaders of the PFP pact did not enact a project of neoliberalism, as Corrales (2005) claims. However, if neoliberalism is a project of changing financial sector regulations, governments downloading services to more local governments with lower tax bases, increasing national debt, cutting and restructuring the welfare-state and thereby increasing impoverishment through further restructuring of economic relations, amongst other forms of restructuring then the reforms enacted after Pérez’s first presidency, certainly fulfilled several of these types of projects. This argument that I am making is important for neither “economic polarization” nor the successive political polarization were the fault of Chávez and long preceded his entrance on the stage of Venezuelan politics.

⁶⁶ (Marquez, in; (Ellner, Steve; Daniel Hellinger, 2003a, 199).)

⁶⁷ (Hellinger, Daniel, 2003, 30).

⁶⁸ (Hellinger, Daniel, 2003, 30).

⁶⁹ (Bruce, Iain, 2008, 2); (Coppedge, Michael, 2005, 297, 302); (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 106); (Roberts, Kenneth, 2003, 59).

⁷⁰ (i.e., the years, 1983 through 1988)(Lopez Maya, Margarita, 2002, 203).

⁷¹ (McCoy, Jennifer, 2004b, 277); (Roberts, Kenneth, 2003, 59-60); (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 107); (Coppedge, Michael, 2005, 307); {Morgan, 2007#@81}.

⁷² (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 300); (Lopez Maya, Margarita, 2003a, 212); (Lopez Maya, Margarita; Luis Lander, 2005, 93).

⁷³ (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 301-302); (Lopez Maya, Margarita, 2003a, 212-213).

⁷⁴ Pérez was President twice, first (1974-1979) (CAPI) and then (1989-1993) (CAP II).

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ran for and won the presidency for a second time. Arguably nostalgia for his first term contributed to his electoral success. Venezuelans believed this meant a return to the 'magical state' and his inauguration on February 2, 1989 was well attended⁷⁵. Perez was elected with a mandate to deal with both the massacre and the austerity measures imposed since 1983⁷⁶. However, in the few weeks following his inauguration, Pérez announced the strongest adjustment program yet, the package of *El Gran Viarje* ("The Great Turnaround")⁷⁷. This package came as a complete surprise to the majority of the population⁷⁸, and it only confirmed the death of the "Magical State." As Hellinger (2003) points out: "an undercurrent of political resentment with origins in the period 1941 to 1948 ran just below the surface of Venezuelan Politics during the Punto Fijo era, only to resurface with the crisis of legitimacy after 1989"⁷⁹. But the historical importance of 1989 cannot be underestimated for within that same February of Perez's second inauguration, Venezuela had irrevocably started to change; it had begun the process of the Bolivarian Revolution⁸⁰.

In February 1989, Venezuela's "exceptionalism" actually began to take shape. The *Caracazo*⁸¹, as it became known, lasted for only a few days but it irreversibly changed the country's political and economic landscape⁸². On February 27, 1989, workers and students woke up not to the expected thirty percent hike in bus prices, which would have probably been calmly accepted, but to a hike of more than hundred percent⁸³ mandated by the incoming austerity measures⁸⁴. The gouging angered people, *el pueblo bravo de Venezuela*⁸⁵. Waiting for the bus in 1989's February's heat was a completely different social phenomena from how Jean-Paul Sartre envisioned it⁸⁶. Caracas, a city surrounded by lush green mountains wherein lie the popular barrios (poorer neighbourhoods, e.g., unpaved, without infrastructure or civil society services such as electricity, water or, if available, unreliably delivered). People living in the barrios relied on the bus services for the commute to their jobs and schools in the city. The morning of the hike, the hills around Caracas became alive with the peoples' anger⁸⁷. That day, more or less simultaneously, the uprising quickly spread across almost all of Venezuela⁸⁸. The next few days saw the continuation and expansion of the tumult to such an extent, that almost all of Venezuela was ignited⁸⁹. The army was called in, and officially, at least 287 people were killed (unofficially up to 3000 people), which Coppedge (2004) calls one of many human rights

⁷⁵ (Hellinger, Daniel, 2003, 31); (Roberts, Kenneth, 2003, 62); {Morgan, 2007#@82}; (Raby, D. L., 2006, 141); (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 106); (Coppedge, Michael, 2005, 309, 31, 313). (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 89); (Coronil, Fernando, 1997, 372-374).

⁷⁶ (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 310-314); (Romero, Anibal, 1997, 15).

⁷⁷ In some ways then, CAP II was that brief period before his Great turn around, -CAP III ruled after. {Morgan, 2007#@82}; (Coppedge, Michael, 2005, 305, 311); {Canache, 2002#@73}; (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 106); (Wilpert, Gregory, 2007, 184); (Hellinger, Daniel, 2003, 31); (Roberts, Kenneth, 2003, 62-63); (Raby, D. L., 2006, 141); (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 90, 92).

⁷⁸ (Romero, Anibal, 1997, 21).

⁷⁹ (Hellinger, Daniel, 2003, 28).

⁸⁰ (Gaster, Jeremiah, 2010b, 25-26).

⁸¹ The *Caracazo* was three to five days of rioting, starting on February 27th, 1989 and which started in Caracas, but even on the first day, the occurrences were throughout Venezuela. It is a key part of the discussion in this paper, and as per the argument of this paper, the *Caracazo* is the actual beginning of the Bolivarian Revolution, which by 2017 has had twenty-eight years of developments. This paragraph thus inaugurates the examination of the revolution, the social revolution, *el proceso* that Venezuela has been undergoing since 1989.

⁸² (Burbach, Roger; Camila Piñero, 2007, 181); {Morgan, 2007#@82}; (García-Guadilla, Maria Pilar, 2005, 115-116); (Romero, Anibal, 1997, 12, 14-15); (Ellner, Steve, 2003b, 7); (Roberts, Kenneth, 2003, 63); (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 90).

⁸³ (Lopez Maya, Margarita, 2002, 121); (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 315); (Clark, A. C., 2009, 54); (Raby, D. L., 2006, 49); (Coronil, Fernando, 1997, 376).

⁸⁴ (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 95).

⁸⁵ (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 106); (Wilpert, Gregory, 2007, 188).

⁸⁶ In seeming contradiction to Sartre's description of the "Serialization" (i.e., level of separation, both in the sense of simple alterity, but more importantly, in negative relation to the political community, in the sense that relations of ruling are reinforced, and remain unchallenged). The *Caracazo* was something else altogether. Sartre would have, of course, laughed at the contradiction of the *Caracazo* to his theory, and would have assumed that either it was the exception to the rule (seriality is the norm at the level of present-day society is an unfortunate truth), or, and more intriguingly, waiting for the bus, can achieve a communality that would not be easily achieved otherwise which is an amazing realization. Community can be achieved, even, and especially, at times when community may seem to be all but impossible. See.; (Sartre, Jean-Paul, 2010a, 256-257).

⁸⁷ (McCoy, Jennifer, 2004b, 270); (García-Guadilla, Maria Pilar, 2005, 113, 113, 115-119); (Raby, D. L., 2006, 141).

⁸⁸ (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 94).

⁸⁹ {Morgan, 2007#@82}; (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 91, 94); {Canache, 2002#@73}; (Romero, Anibal, 1997, 14-15); (Lopez Maya, Margarita, 2002); (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991); (Lopez Maya, Margarita, 2003a); (Lopez Maya, Margarita; Luis Lander, 2005).

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violations of the PFP regime ⁹⁰.

One of the observers of the *Caracazo* and its aftereffects was a young military officer named Hugo Chávez Frías, who had already been planning a revolt against the government. Chavez quickly realized that the events of the *Caracazo*, and the events of the following years, the people of Venezuela were eager for a change and had yet to achieve it ⁹¹. On February 4, 1992, Chávez set into motion a coup d'état that ultimately failed but which catapulted him onto the political scene ⁹². During the televised report, as he was being led away to prison, Chávez took full responsibility for the failed coup and said: "*Lamentablemente, por ahora, los objetivos que nos planteamos no fueron logrados en la ciudad capital*" ("Unfortunately, for now, the objectives that we had set ourselves have not been achieved in the capital.") This call seemed to resonate with the masses who remained in a state of disquiet, protesting non-stop since the *Caracazo*. Between 1989 and 1992, there were two thousand and ninety-four manifestations, demonstrations, wildcat strikes, official strikes and blockades in Venezuela ⁹³. This would indicate a breakdown of the PFP, prior to the leadership of Chávez and the emergence of both a revolution and the social revolution, potentially, at the same time but not because of elite direction, rather for self-organization⁹⁴. It could be argued that Chávez quite successfully helped form and formulate struggles and lines of struggle, but not that he was the originator of the struggle.

The elites in an effort to appease the masses, who continued their daily revolts, subsequently arrested, impeached and incarcerated Perez in 1992, before the completion of his term of office ⁹⁵. Thus, the elites attempted to complete what Chávez had started, i.e., the removal of Pérez, but failed to alter the power structures. In the 1993 elections another former Venezuelan president, Rafael Caldera ⁹⁶ was re-elected after promising to end the neoliberal policies of his predecessor ⁹⁷. But within a few years, he too succumbed to the neoliberal scourge and put forward neoliberal reforms ⁹⁸, while at the same time attempting to make deeper restructuring. Caldera could not withstand daily protests either. Although, the 1990s are often seen as the years of the breakdown of the PFP, in actuality it fell apart before 1990. In the 1993 election, many voters did not vote allowing Caldera to win, primarily based on his promise to not continue neoliberal austerity. Nevertheless, Caldera was not a choice against the PFP, but rather was a continuation of the PFP. His leaving the party destroyed COPEI, the party he himself had begun. The bigger problem for the managed democracy of the PFP continued to be the after-shocks of the *Caracazo* and not Caldera's betrayal of COPEI. Caldera, responsible for the release of Chávez from prison two years into his sentence ⁹⁹ and also responsible for the oversight of Perez's corruption trial, was at the same time, as per his neoliberal "turn," also responsible for the continuation of massive state corruption and for the state's violence against protestors. By the next election, in 1998, Chávez was elected to the presidency based on his promise to institute

⁹⁰ (Coppedge, Michael, 2005, 309); (Clark, A. C, 2009, 4); (Raby, D. L, 2006, 49, 142); (Wilpert, Gregory, 2007, 184); (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 95); (Burbach, Roger; Camila Piñero, 2007, 181); (Hellinger, Daniel, 2003, 31); (Roberts, Kenneth, 2003, 63).

⁹¹ (Clark, A. C, 2009, 51); (Burbach, Roger; Camila Piñero, 2007, 11); (Bruce, Iain, 2008, xvi); (Coppedge, Michael, 2005, 314); (Canache, 2002#72-73); (Hellinger, Daniel, 2003, 40); (Norden in: (Ellner, Steve; Daniel Hellinger, 2003a, 96).)

⁹² (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 96); (Wilpert, Gregory, 2007, 187).

⁹³ (Lopez Maya, Margarita; Luis Lander, 2005, 95); (Morgan, 2007#82); (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 108).

⁹⁴ This may be unique in the known history of social revolutions, the elites in their endless squabbles usually unwittingly trigger mass reactions, and upon losing control of the mass reactions have faced periods of social revolution, moments and movements of time, outside their control. This is how one can classify the moments in the Athenian polity of the never certain will for the Oligarchs of the Labouring-peasant citizen of Athens. This would also be the moment of slave revolt in Haiti that destroyed at once imperialism, racism, and slavery of France and the French Empire.

⁹⁵ (Clark, A. C, 2009, 27, 107-108); (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 97); (Raby, D. L, 2006, 143); (Hellinger, Daniel, 2003, 34); (Roberts, Kenneth, 2003, 65).

⁹⁶ Rafael Caldera, an ex-founder of COPEI, the Punto Fijo pact party and for who he had been a Venezuelan president in the years (1969-1974), left his party in 1993 in an opportunistic and cynical attempt to create a new pact, attempting to salvage the elites hold on Venezuela politics. Even after the "Magical State" was ending, with the rise in Austerity, the PFP itself held until the *Caracazo*.

⁹⁷ (Morgan, 2007#82); (Raby, D. L, 2006, 143); (Clark, A. C, 2009, 26-27); (Coppedge, Michael, 2005, 291, 311); (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 99).

⁹⁸ (Raby, D. L, 2006, 143); (Wilpert, Gregory, 2007, 183); (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 61-64). Also see; (Hellinger, Daniel, 2003, 34); (Roberts, Kenneth, 2003, 65). And even after the *Caracazo*, ex-President, Caldera who was also a founder of a PFP party was still able to win. But, his grip on power was quite feeble in face of all of the protests making his continued governability quite lackluster. These protests increased when Caldera, himself, had his *Gran Viarje*.

⁹⁹ (Hellinger, Daniel, 2003, 34); (Roberts, Kenneth, 2003, 65); (Clark, A. C, 2009, 26-27).

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a constituent assembly, a process that resulted in amendments to the constitution which allowed the people a space to develop and institute participatory democratic practices affecting various aspects of their lives ¹⁰⁰.

To say that either Chávez was the beginning of the revolution or that his election was a form of military “strong man leadership,” or is a bourgeois revolution, and to therefore assume that Chávez’s slow process of radicalization is what consequently developed the revolution is to misinterpret the actual situation. Of course, there is a bigger misinterpretation that is possible, that Chávez was the height of corruption, etc. Chávez influenced the revolution that had long-existed before he began his February 1992 coup. That Chavismo consolidated the revolution cannot be doubted, nor can it be doubted that the revolution was consolidated in quite an interesting manner, but to presume that Chávez was the cause of the revolution is not to understand the most recent history of Venezuela, which is rooted in the self-directed actions of communities, starting with the *Caracazo* and onwards. Specifying the moment that political polarization occurred in Venezuela is an important but also surprisingly contentious issue. For many political scientists do not properly examine *Caracazo*, and doubt that it was not only the emergence of not only a political crises in Venezuela, but also the quite distinctive emergence of a new form of the political community itself, they prefer to assume that polarization began in 1998. But neither the Venezuelan state nor its society has been the same since 1989.

Section 3: The *Caracazo* as the rise of the Bolivarian Revolution

With this historical review and analysis of Venezuela through the twentieth century, we are able to finally begin to understand Venezuela and the corrupt-corporatist “democratic” structure underlying both the magical state and the Punto Fijo Pact. Now we will turn back to that magical year, 1989. We have established how before February 27, 1989 the people of Venezuela had grown quite restless under a supposed democracy wherein they held no power and were experiencing the loss of the Keynesian corporatist-balancing act while becoming more deeply impoverished. However, they had not yet begun revolting. The *Caracazo*, as interesting as it is, brought only a few new institutional reforms to Venezuela, but its true importance lay elsewhere. The *Caracazo* exposed the rottenness of the state and of capital to those who were oppressed by it, but moreover, it showed the elites their lack of absolute control. BY definition then, the *Caracazo* was a political crises. Moreover, its crises was the eruption of the masses into the political community. Finally, its eruption into the political community of the masses, was their self-directed control in the political community. In 1989, the *PPF* was killed as was any pretense to the control by the elites and state in Venezuela, and both were killed by collective mass action.

The vast majority were consciously excluded by a system that the *PPF* claimed they were operating on behalf of the masses. The point of examining these years and the theorists of the *PPF* form of democracy is to come to terms with the difference between the years 1958-1988, as done in the previous section, and between the years of 1989 to present, as will be examined in the next two sections. The leaders of the pact proclaimed, at least theoretically, that their adherence to democracy and democratic norms in theory and more importantly in practice, had left people at the way side as happens in all forms of managerial democracy ¹⁰¹. With the *Caracazo*, the pact lost their control of the political community. The defenders of Venezuela’s previous form of democracy believed that democracy was not at odds with the exclusion of the masses through demobilization and political pacts. But this was their downfall, and yet, to today, this misrepresentation of democracy remains fundamental to the ex-elites. In actuality, exclusion of the masses from control of the polis and their oppression are the very opposite of democracy. The difference between *PPF* democracy and the revolutionary impulses born in the *Caracazo* lie not only in their different daily practices, part of which shall be examined below,

¹⁰⁰ (Clark, A. C, 2009, 61); (Alvarez, Angel E, 2003, 150-151); (Hellinger, Daniel, 2003, 43) (Roberts, Kenneth, 2003, 66).

¹⁰¹ (Karl, Terry Lynn, 1987, 64-65, 80, 82, 84); (Clark, A. C, 2009, 23).

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but also in the very leadership of the political community¹⁰². In this section, we shall examine the *Caracazo* and the system that subsequently emerged in Venezuela, which was entirely opposite to the previous system. We will also look at how the *Caracazo* and its aftereffects impacted the Venezuelan political community. The section that follows will make explicit the tie between social revolutions with the Bolivarian revolution.

In my previous research, I came to realize that one of the key aspects of the *Caracazo* is its many different names. I have identified at least eleven different names, coming from different geographical locations and sectors of the population¹⁰³. These many names are the first clue to the puzzle that is the *Caracazo*. The fact that each community has given the event its own name suggests the pivotal nature and significance of the *Caracazo* for the different communities. The moment of the *Caracazo*, was a moment of rupture with what came before, and for each community that participated in or experienced this social phenomena. The point being that it was a surprise to all involved and created a broad community collaborating in mass actions that continues to this day. My aim is towards the reconstruction via EP Thompson of mass action but I know that I fall quite short of the shadow cast by Thompson's pure method¹⁰⁴. Clark gives this accurate description of the *Caracazo*:

a popular uprising in reaction to a series of probably sensible but poorly explained economic measures imposed by Perez. ... The most significant grievance was that Perez had increased the price of gas, which ... affected the cost of many other products and services. Looting was rampant, and the country really was in chaos¹⁰⁵.

Nor is Petkoff wrong, as Coronil and Skurski follow his claims, in his observation of the *Caracazo*:

The protesters were not organized workers but people pushed to the edges of society--to prostitution, drugs and alcoholism. Petkoff argued that the Venezuela that "erupted like a volcano" on February 27 was not 'the Venezuela of workers organized in trade unions or associations. No, it was another Venezuela, it was the non-organized Venezuela, the Venezuela that has been piling up in a huge bag of wretched poverty.' According to him, the Venezuela that 'came down from the hills or up from the ravines' was 'a Venezuela of hungry people, of people who are not part of the conventional organization of society.' This Venezuela had produced 'the roar of a wounded animal.' He blamed the politicians of the ruling parties for having created this other Venezuela, labeling them Doctor Franksteins: 'They created a monster, and this monster came out to complain, came out to demand its share of the immense petroleum booty of all these years'¹⁰⁶.

The point, beyond discussing the truth or not of the claims of Clark and Petkoff, is their surprisingly grudging sense of the emergence of the type of Moral Economy that Thompson examines and which exploded that morning in February¹⁰⁷. I would also say that both Clark

¹⁰² (Lopez Maya, Margarita, 2002, 203)

¹⁰³ For example: "El Caracazo" (The "Explosion of Caracas"); {Gott, 2000#@16}; (Lopez Maya, Margarita, 2003a, 117, 189-119). "La Poblada" (The "Popular"); (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 311). "El Sacudón" (The "Shake-up"); (Lopez Maya, Margarita, 2003a, 117, 136). "El Masacrón" (The "Massacre"); (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 310, 311). "Las Saqueos" (The "Sacking"); (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 316). "Los Eventos" and "Los Successos" (the "events"); (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 311). "La Guerra" (The "War"); (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 311, 351, 322); (Lopez Maya, Margarita, 2003a, 124). "El Dia que Bajaron Los Cerros" ("The Day that the Mountains Came Down"- the poorer parts of Venezuela are in the mountains); (Márquez, Patricia C, 1999, 16). "El Dia que El Rio se Salio de la Madre" ("The Day That the River Left its Bed" - There are also very poor areas beside rivers); (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 310); (Márquez, Patricia C, 1999, 24). "27F-89" (February 27th, 1989); (Lopez Maya, Margarita, 2003a, 120); (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 311).

¹⁰⁴ (Thompson, E. P., 1968); (Thompson, E. P., 1978c); (Thompson, E. P., 1991); (Thompson, E. P., 1978a). I cannot get into an explanation here of the largess of Thompson's work, but his very methodological work highlights both the dynamic ranges. Moreover, as he has always claimed to do "history from below," his work thus reflects a careful reconstruction of mass politics and the collective action that delimits human reality. The point is that Venezuela's story is "from below," Please see; (Ciccariello-Maher, George, 2013); for a very good example, of the type of reconstruction of Venezuela that I mean.

¹⁰⁵ See; (Clark, A. C, 2009, 54).

¹⁰⁶ Teodoro Petkoff, congressional speech excerpts from, ; (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 327). Petkoff is an ex-guerrilla parliamentarian and ex-leader of the Political party MAS (Movimiento a Socialismo, "Movement towards Socialism"). Ellner points out that one of the main parties to support Caldera in 1993 was MAS, led by Teodoro Petkoff who was then Financial minister at the time of Caldera's package, and who was quite willing to go as far as he could to sustain a pact, for Petkoff, democracy was at risk. Petkoff is currently actively involved as part of the opposition against the BR. This is in the end, Petkoff defending the old political establishment against the hordes. Unfortunately, there was no space to do so in this paper, but it is completely necessary to come to terms with the composition of the Venezuelan Demos, to understand the full polity, and while we think that in this quote, Petkoff is quite right, we suspect that this Venezuela that he is describing, the hungry Venezuela, are in-fact, the working-poor, and is not just the "lumpen" as he seems to suggest. For if the statistics are correct then informal work had increased exponentially, and thus the workers in the trade unions had become a minority. This is also key to understanding the social revolution, it was not at first of the organized working class, and in many ways the revolution has remained that of the non-traditional unions and working class organizations, where it was emerged from workplace situations.

¹⁰⁷ For Moral Economy, see; (Thompson, E. P., 1991, Chapter 4 + Chapter 5, Please especially note the discussion on 260-261). The point is the Thompson can help us understand not only the revolution, the displacement of the political elites, but also as shall be seen, the social revolution.

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and Petkoff are right, in that this chaos, this monster, is outside the bounds of Venezuela's "normal" (pre-1989) composition of the political community. Petkoff here points fingers at those doctor Frankensteins, his fellow politicians who created the monster and the chaos, but the monsters of the story are not the masses, rather they are the very elites who disregarded and killed the people.

The *Caracazo* was the moment that both the state and elites lost their hold on the political community - the widespread nature and shocking strength of the masses revealed a weakness for both the elites and the state. The response was both societal and state violence, and the loss of power was quickly responded to by the use of severe repression. Within days, by March 3rd, various reports indicate that the government had killed between 300-3,000 of its own citizens¹⁰⁸. But even with this state violence, with the horror facing "rise of the rivers," why would I still insist that this was the emergence of a social revolution? As Coronil and Skurski (1991) identify various moments of the "events/war" as a social revolution, at the same time, it is very suggestive of Thompson's moral economy:

Soon people turned against grocery stores and food markets. Leaders, generally young men who broke store locks with crowbars and smashed windows, emerged, urging people to take what was theirs. The people surging into the stores found to their outrage that stored deposits of subsidized basic food stuffs that had disappeared from the market were waiting to be sold at marked-up prices. Cases of powdered milk, cornmeal, pasta, and coffee were passed to the street and distributed, as the outnumbered police looked on. Some policemen, themselves poorly paid, helped looting take place in an orderly fashion or took part in it as well. A collective decision to occupy the streets and invade the stores, suspending the rules regulating public movement and commerce, took shape. The street became the site for the contestation of market and political controls widely regarded as immoral and oppressive¹⁰⁹.

The elite's language used to describe the events is tinged with fear of savagery and the loss of (bourgeois, "white") civilization¹¹⁰. "If Politics was not normal," "if politics should be normal, whose politics?" "Who decides?" were all questions being raised in those end days of February, 1989. These questions have no easy answers in Venezuela, as they would not in any other modern society.

Pushing towards a "moral economy," Coronil & Skurski (1991) reveal an important implication of the *Caracazo*:

Looting dissolved momentarily money's ability to regulate collective life. The invasion of business establishments rendered meaningless the barriers that money normally imposes between commodities and consumers, between public and private space. In the midst of an uncertain and dangerous situation, there were overtones of a village fiesta--a sudden abundance of liquor and grilled meat shared at impromptu gatherings in the poor neighborhoods on the hills circling Caracas. Bottles of champagne and brandy made a surprise appearance at parties now enlivened by dance music broadcast throughout the hills from newly acquired audio equipment. The smoke of barbecues mixed with that of burning stores. Against the "etiquette of equality" that

My object of analysis was ... the political culture, the expectations, traditions, and, superstitions of the working population most frequently involved in actions in the market; and the relations — sometimes negotiations — between crowd and rulers which go under the unsatisfactory term of "riot". My method was to reconstruct a paternalist model of food marketing, with protective institutional expression and with emergency routines in time of dearth, which derived in part from earlier Edwardian and Tudor policies of provision and market-regulation; to contrast this with the new political economy of the free market in grain, ... and to show how, in times of high prices and of hardship, the crowd might enforce, with a robust direct action, protective market-control and the regulation of prices, sometimes claiming a legitimacy derived from the paternalist model... worked out within the given field-of-force of eighteenth-century English relations.

Interestingly enough, Thompson's examination of the timing suggests of all that this was taking place after the consolidation and development of the context of English capitalism. But to Venezuela, by 1970, if not much sooner as an oil producing country, Venezuela's capitalist state development was certainly complete long before the *Caracazo*. The social revolution in Venezuela may one be the first successful post-capitalist social revolutions in a country, the long term revolutionary developments, especially those won following Chávez's first election and the consequent years remain instructive, both the failures and the reasons for their failure, and the successes and there is quite a little more success than usually imagined in the Venezuelan case. The periodization of late development of capitalism for all countries, a period that cannot be ignored viz. Venezuela's development, remains the post-war world constructed by the US, and which remains quite largely an instrument of the imperial order developed after 1945, and Venezuela's exceptionalism may help us understanding the first successful instalment of a moral economy under capitalism. Whereas for Thompson, the moral economy referred to the usage of paternalist ties to make arguments against the rise of market dependence, here in Venezuela, I am using it to refer to the Keynesian model of the magical state. (Lopez Maya, Margarita, 2003a, 119); explicitly ties the concept of the "moral economy" with Venezuela and the *Caracazo*.

¹⁰⁸ For example, but not limited to; (Lopez Maya, Margarita, 2003a, 128-131); {Coronil, 1991#755@291}.

¹⁰⁹ {Coronil, 1991#755@315-316}.

¹¹⁰ (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 322). As they point out, "This unabashed inscription of state policies within a colonial framework-the acceptance of massive state violence to oblige acquiescence and forestall greater decline, and the identification of popular protesters as a "primitive tribe" and of Congressmen as "civilizing generals"-went unnoticed, for the opposition shared its underlying premises." Further on is a great instance of elite fear.

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ruled street behavior in this self-defined egalitarian society, the poor sought to assert, even if only momentarily, their image of real relations of equality¹¹¹.

This is one side of what was called the war, the other side was the bodies that began to arrive at the city morgue sometime around 10:00 pm on the 27th of February¹¹². The military was split between leaders, who, like Chavez, had been part of the generation that had studied social sciences rather than counter-insurgency at the School of the Americas¹¹³, and those who embraced the typical military response of violence. On the one hand, there was a military that refused to move against their own people, on the other, there was a military who violently attacked the rising masses. The Venezuelan police, who are notorious for their corruption which preceded the revolution, were also split between a minority who joined with their families in the Barrio and helped loot, and the majority who used the 'events' as an excuse for target practice on their fellow citizens¹¹⁴. Taking matters into their own hands, self-defense organizations in middle- and upper- class neighbourhoods also formed "to protect property"¹¹⁵. It must be understood that the police, the military, and elites were reacting to what was becoming the new normal, they were no longer "in charge."

This moment represented the emergence of a social revolution in Venezuela. Whereas before the *Caracazo*, the people were not truly challenging the rule of the elites, but from the end of February, 1989, onwards, the people do not just insert themselves into the political community, but in many ways they become and maintain themselves as the "only game in town." The Bolivarian Revolution along with the *Caracazo*, brings a new form of moral economy in Venezuela, through the construction of solidarity, and collective action by Venezuela's masses. The point is not that organizations were fully developed by the *Caracazo*, but as shall be seen, there was in fact, an explosion of mass autonomous organizations from that moment forward. Thus, the collective political violence touched off by the *Caracazo*, was the achievement of a political crisis wherein the masses did not simply become a political actor in Venezuelan politics, they won something else by acting in their own name. As a direct result of their collective political action they wrested control from the state, from the elites and from the rest of society. This battle for control continues to the present.

In their examination of the *Caracazo*, Coronil & Skurski (1991) paint a vivid picture of the lower classes of Venezuela extending their reach and strength nationally¹¹⁶. The lower classes also explored and utilized a different meaning of the concept of *saqueo popular*, which alluded to years of sacking of the country's resources by the political, economic, and social elites whose political community was Venezuela 1935- 2017¹¹⁷. During the *Caracazo*, the *saqueo popular* acquired a double meaning. The appropriation and distribution of goods that were usually sold for profit were now to be distributed to those in need¹¹⁸. And as Coronil & Skurski show a "loose organization within and among families" emerged¹¹⁹. These organizations began stopping trucks and distributing goods to the community. Emboldened organizations found huge storage depots from which they were able to feed hungry communities¹²⁰. These chains of expropriation, exchange and distribution, and the organizations that drove them altered the face of Venezuela's democratic governance for at least the next twenty-eight years and into the

¹¹¹ (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 317).

¹¹² (Lopez Maya, Margarita, 2003a, 130).

¹¹³ The School of Americas (now called the "Western Hemisphere Institution for Security Cooperation") is a school in the state of Georgia, U.S.A., where Military leaders, especially from Latin America, learned how to kill, torture and otherwise engage in counter-insurgency. In the 1970s, the Venezuelan military started allowing its officers to take degrees in the social sciences in Venezuelan universities, Chávez himself was part of the program and has an unfinished master's degree in Political Science. Many of the officers, who had participated in the social science program, were pleased with the uprising and felt solidarity with the people of Venezuela, and they refused orders to shoot the people refusing to use force against their own people, (Levine, Daniel H, 2002, 264). Also see: {McCoy, 2004b#793}.

¹¹⁴ (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 315).

¹¹⁵ (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 323). That is, if you will, sometimes even a plurality of organizational structures. It has also been said that later day institutional forms has also benefited middle-class and upper class sectors, but

¹¹⁶ (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 316).

¹¹⁷ (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 316).

¹¹⁸ (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 315-316).

¹¹⁹ (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 316).

¹²⁰ (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 315 + 316).

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foreseeable future.

There was some xenophobic behaviour displayed during the *Caracazo*, but rather than assume this is the predisposition of the masses, perhaps what cannot be justified can be contextualized. Some immigrants to Venezuela had become shop owners and during the looting “anti-immigrant” graffiti accused them of hoarding¹²¹. However, this was true of all shop owners at the time, immigrant or not. I am consciously allowing for the tendency of “looting” to be an ambiguous social phenomena, that is, not necessarily bad, but not necessarily good. The context of looting and how it works needs to be analyzed, but in many cases, looting may be a common “lower class” reaction to capitalist development of hoarding the people’s wealth in places that the people are not supposed to access¹²². This racism is the *Caracazo*’s immediate negative and unjustifiable occurrence. It gives rise to the important question, how much human solidarity can be constructed at any given moment? Another question: Regarding the deaths during the *Caracazo* - who was dying and who was doing the killing? Who was violating whose human rights? The deaths “caused” by the *Caracazo*, can certainly be laid at the feet of the state, rather than the rioters themselves, as can the violations of human rights be laid at the hands of the governments of 1988 through 1998 and those that had power earlier in the twentieth century.

After the *Caracazo*, Venezuela was in complete turmoil. The ‘Punto Fijo pact’¹²³ was broken and the people were constantly protesting - insisting on their right to have their needs met. The Venezuelan people continued to exercise their collective will and collective force to achieve their goals. Between 1992 and 1998, there were over five thousand protests throughout the country¹²⁴. I think all can agree that this is quite a significant threshold. This constant tumult had serious effects on the country’s politics and economics. The Punto Fijo Pact disintegrated not because of elite in-fighting, they would have been happy to have it continue, but rather because in 1989, the Venezuelan peoples refused to be governed any longer by the pact¹²⁵.

Although, some could argue that Chávez’s changes, especially at first, were only cosmetic, it is possible that his form of constitutionalism matched the pace set by the masses, which allowed for more but slow development of other institutional forms. That is, the revolutionary masses heard a promise in *por ahora*, it’s all we can do for the moment. Even so, in the years preceding Chávez’s first election, he was already helping to foster different institutional forms. Chávez’s method of political functioning could be said to have had an overall positive effect in Venezuela’s political community if as the data shows, positive views of democracy in Venezuela increased at least until 2010. Some of the key changes included renaming the country from the “Republic of Venezuela” to the “Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela” and changing the “IVth republic” to the “Vth”. These may be cosmetic, but they are symbolically true¹²⁶, especially in regards to the Venezuelan people who have been consolidating and creating themselves all along.

¹²¹ (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 315 + 319).

¹²² A truism stressed enough throughout EP Thompson’s work that it needs no belabouring. It also does not have to be stressed that all forms of property condensation, will at times face crowds who “gently” redistribute any grain, etc. at times of need. As Thompson points out, “giving” “and “getting” may be the same moment for “authorities” and those “receiving,” but understood quite differently

¹²³ {Lopez Maya, 2003b#786@222}.

¹²⁴ {Lopez Maya, 2005#789@95}; (Burbach, Roger; Camila Piñeiro, 2007, 181); (Roberts, Kenneth, 2003, 61).

¹²⁵ (Raby, D. L., 2006, 153).

¹²⁶ (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 176-179); (Coronil, Fernando, 1998?, 15 + 19); (McCoy, Jennifer, 2004b, 282); (Lopez Maya, Margarita, 2008, 162); (Wilpert, Gregory, 2007, 18). Unfortunately, while the discussion of what exactly the constitution means to Venezuelans, will have to be delayed, this is a key point towards understanding their current situation. For the constitution is “a living constitution,” and is used by the people as their own law, which means in practice it is changeable and malleable, and it is something that they claim as their own on a level that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and at least have never, but I suspect due to the nature of the charter itself, could never be claimed by Canadians. (Burbach, Roger; Camila Piñeiro, 2007, 187); (Gibbs, Terry, 2006, 271); (Ciccariello-Maher, George, 2007); (Levine, Daniel H, 2002, 265-266); (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 270-271); (Raby, D. L., 2006, 198); (Wilpert, Gregory, 2007, 29-44). It will be quite interesting to follow the developments of the new 2017 constituent assembly, which may afford a deepening and strengthening of the revolution, time will tell. In fact, in developments of the day that I am writing this sentence (August 6, 2017) there was a small number of military and mostly civilian personal who attacked a military base, in the name of the National Assembly (i.e., the opposition led assembly). The attack, instigated by the violent opposition in the National Assembly was to counterme the constituent assembly, which supposedly thus has superseded the National Assembly, this attack was repelled by the military, which appears to thus still support the 199 constitution, in its dissolution into the 2017 constituent assembly (i.e., in following the constitutionally acceptable processes of calling a constituent assembly, Maduro took the step to call the Venezuelan people to constituent a potentially more profound, representation over the national assembly).

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The constitution of the new republic “created a completely different kind of [institutional] democratic form - ‘protagonist’ or ‘civilian power’”¹²⁷. This formalized and institutionalized democratic form was intended to foster a political community that “function[s] both within and against the state”¹²⁸. What became known as the “fourth branch of political power” was citizens, from within mass organizations, enacting their “participatory role,” who could theoretically attack the branches of state power. As Gaster (2010b) states, “While the state continued in its typical functions, citizens, through this fourth branch of political power and via their participatory role, would construct decentralized loci of legitimate power. These loci, which while separate from the state, combined executive, legislative and judicial powers in the hands of the citizenry”¹²⁹. Thus “this branch of political power,” has been the revolution in its very legal definition, and was belated recognition of the strength of the masses in Venezuela since 1998.

Before examining these new institutional forms, a comment first about the overly strong pull of electoral politics. While at times these new forms of political power can be expressed through electoral battles, it is important to note that Chavismo is itself so much more than only an electoral program. Some organizations that would appear on their surface to be only electoral in nature, were centered around social studies and on learning and discussing the constitution, Venezuelan history and political issues. It is through these and other various study and work groups that Venezuelans have grown their social revolution. These study groups started to appear once the new constitution was written, but some groups long pre-dated this moment. There was an autonomy that developed within some of these movements and within communities that remains unique. This will be examined further in the next section. As well, in the next section, shifting from a historical overview of the Bolivarian Revolution, I will attempt to answer the question if there is an “alternative to austerity” and to show the thresholds of revolution that have been achieved. I show that in the Bolivarian Revolution a very radical social policy has been reflected in the state, insofar as a state can have a radical social policy. As well, in the next section we will see that where the revolution has succeeded the most is where it has been able to remain autonomous from the state and from the previous ruling elites. This autonomy at times seems to be top down, i.e., Chávez – or Maduro - helped create institutional forms, or, the forms are formalized through legislation, etc.), but on the other hand, it appears that these institutional forms fight against the state. It is almost as if these institutional forms are dialectically related to, but separated from, the state. What interests me is if the forms, in fact, achieve autonomy from both state and society, and to what end are these forms autonomous? It is key to understand the difference between the officialismo balance of Chavismo and the Chavismo of the masses. While Chávez helped shape the revolution, he also fostered autonomous institutional forms that themselves were autonomous from both the state and the society through which they emerged. Thus, in the next section, we will confirm the threshold of a social revolution of the control by the masses in the political community, a control that was refined once Chávez gained power.

Section 4: The emergent Social Revolution and the Bolivarian Revolution

This final section has two parts, it will move quickly through some of the institutional forms that have allowed for radical social policy as “alternatives to austerity,” and this will form the context of the communal power that has grown with the institutionally different forms of radical social policy. Both of these perspectives will bring together the argument about Venezuela’s recent history as the history of a social revolution.

To begin then, according to several sources, one of the first institutional forms that emerged as part of Chávez’s attempts to maintain the on-going unformed revolution were the

¹²⁷ (Alvarez, Angel E, 2003, 151-152); (Gibbs, Terry, 2006, 270); (Wilpert, Gregory, 2005, 23); (Wilpert, Gregory, 2007, 37); (McCoy, Jennifer, 2004b, 281).

¹²⁸ Cf., see;. (Ciccariello-Maher, George, 2007, 44 + 51).

¹²⁹ (Gaster, Jeremiah, 2010b, 34); (Alvarez, Angel E, 2003, 153-155); (Burbach, Roger; Camila Piñeiro, 2007, 184, 186-187); (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 119); (Gibbs, Terry, 2006, 270); (Wilpert, Gregory, 2005, 21); {Canache, 2002#@85}; (McCoy, Jennifer, 2004b, 277, 279, 280).

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“Bolivarian Circles” (BC). An example of this form first emerged soon after Chávez was released from prison in 1995. Based within communities, BCs had four objectives: reading, social investigation, providing community relief, and engaging in electoral battles... As discussion groups, the BCs were supposed to ... gain an understanding of the new constitution. As an organization, the circles had to investigate and learn the situation of the communities in which they were formed. This investigation would then allow the circles to triage community concerns and [supposedly] begin to address community needs” 130. They also engaged in a diversity of tactics. Some circles lasted only briefly, being folded into the “Electoral battle units” of the MBR-200 in Chávez’s first election in 1998 131. Others were not so short lived. Both Kirk Hawkins & David Hansen’s 2006 article, “Dependent Civil Society: the Círculos Bolivarianos in Venezuela,” and Hawkins’ 2010 book *Venezuela’s Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspectives*, suggest that BCs were not as short term as they first appear. It is suggested that some BC’s emerged around 1995, some around 1999, and others around 2001, with time crystallizing this institutional form. Although my research suggests that this history is disputed and contradictory, nevertheless, there is evidence showing that since at least from 1995 through to 2010, Bolivarian Circles played a small role in institutional mobilization of the masses.

I will not focus exclusively on BCs, but at the height of their usage they had approximately 2.2 million members in an estimated 200,000 different circles ¹³². This high number of members and circles, which implies even given a high rate of institutional failure of some sort (which I do not have the research for, but which we can reasonably assume), a huge numbers of Venezuelans participated in these organizational forms. Arguably, BCs are a form of political community that allowed the participants to begin to constitute themselves as sovereign. Hawkins & Hansen (2006) specify:

Attempts by the National Coordination to direct the Círculos resulted in considerable friction between them and the local leadership, and parallel organizations of Círculos emerged ¹³³. ...Some skeptics might argue that the Círculos could not meaningfully be considered an example of civil society because they were initiated by a call from Chávez and were asked to register with the national government. However, if we define civil society as voluntary organizations...then the descriptive data presented above demonstrate that the Círculos should be considered part of Venezuelan civil society: membership the Círculos was voluntary and probably not significantly financed by the state, and most of the Círculos eventually created their own parallel national organization that they felt better represented their interests; in at least some cases Círculos were formed that never registered at all ¹³⁴.

BC’s may disclose the complexity involved in the Bolivarian Revolution and that unclear and somewhat off-putting mixture of officialdom and sovereign institutions ¹³⁵. The state was captured by the revolutionary upsurge, but at the same time, remains a separate institution that is pulled in contradictory directions (revolution/counter-revolution) as was the rest of society. Insofar as any state is maneuverable in revolutionary ways, Venezuela can be an example, both in positive revolutionary terms, and in negative counterrevolutionary terms but in regard to normal operations of a state structure, the negative ways are understandable. The question remains, if the existence of a “revolutionary” officialdom is not absolute, i.e., true revolutionaries leading the state forward, neither is it completely false. The continued existence of Venezuelan state corruption and conservatism cannot be denied, although the revolutionaries do attempt change, has the revolutionary state done nothing positive for the revolution? Moreover, and more interestingly, if the state is opening the space for sovereign institutions, do those sovereign institutions fulfil a threshold of a social revolution? BCs have fought in electoral battles and have a deeper mandate and level of participation than other, earlier forms during the PFP. According to a 2004 survey highlighted by Hawkins & Hansen, most BCs have died out and only a few

¹³⁰ (Gaster, Jeremiah, 2010b, 35). But also see; (Wilpert, Gregory, 2007, 44); (Hawkins, Kirk A, 2010a, 179, 190); (Hawkins, Kirk A; David R. Hansen, 2006, 108).

¹³¹ (Hawkins, Kirk A, 2010a, 176-177). Also see; (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 229); for the Electoral Battle Units of the *Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario-200*, Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200, the 200 signifies two hundred years after the death of Bolívar.

¹³² (Hawkins, Kirk A; David R. Hansen, 2006, 103); (Hawkins, Kirk A, 2010a, 190).

¹³³ (Hawkins, Kirk A; David R. Hansen, 2006, 106-107).

¹³⁴ (Hawkins, Kirk A; David R. Hansen, 2006, 110-111).

¹³⁵ (Hawkins, Kirk A; David R. Hansen, 2006, 120).

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remnants of BCs exist ¹³⁶. Hawkins (2010b), some five years later, did find that some BCs remained ¹³⁷.

What would seem quite significant for this paper's argument is that it appears to be a common occurrence that certain institutional forms predate their "formal" existence, which suggests a self-directed level of control by the people. For example, as suggested by Ciccariello-Maher (2007), different timelines pertaining to the creation and disappearance of Bolivarian Circles make sense given that they were informally organized groups which could exist before formally being given an arbitrary name codified into law ¹³⁸. Many of the following identified institutions were created either by calls from Chávez or by other state actors, or by the people themselves based on the nature of their experiences, styles of organizing, previous institutional forms. In other words, while sometimes political forms are suggested by state actors, the following are not necessarily or technically creations of the state. If the active participation levels are high for a period, or if some form is sustained, then that tells us a lot about the threshold achieved by the Bolivarian Revolution. Of course, structurally the formal mandate may alter the informal structure, but according to my research, even that may not necessarily be a bad thing. For example, the formal structure mandated a membership of BCs between seven and eleven ¹³⁹ members, but my research suggests some circles had up to hundreds of members, and some had smaller numbers ¹⁴⁰, the average reflecting the mandated formalized structure, but with enough variance to suggest that they were not completely top down organizations. In other words, this is precisely the type of development one can expect with the some form of dialectically developing mass action. Chávez opened the door for mass organization and collective political action, and with the 2017 election of the constituent assembly, it is obvious that eight million people remain committed to taking collective action. Although this might not indicate approval of Maduro's government, it certainly does not indicate a government with no support or that the National Assembly has more approval and more of a mandate than the new Constituent assembly has.

Wilpert (2005) argued that the BR has had a "strong progressive, redistributive, and participatory democratic impulse" ¹⁴¹. With this in mind, Burbach and Piñeiro (2007), revealed "the core of the Venezuelan originality lies in its commitment to participatory democracy" ¹⁴². In Fernandes' 2007 claims that "the ability of barrio women in Caracas to build local 'spaces' of political participation partly outside of state control" is crucial for the workings of this new system ¹⁴³. In Gibbs' 2006 article, he identifies the importance of both health and education as integral parts of the "process of re-politicization...[in] the community" in Venezuela ¹⁴⁴. What follows is a brief examination of emergent institutional forms of the Bolivarian misiones, an example of which is the sharing of the social surplus between everyone. The need for these revolutionary programs can be understood simply as "Be[ing] concerned with the well being of the Masses and the Methods of Work" ¹⁴⁵, which explains the important need for such radical social policy. If the people need things that they do not have, helping them achieve what they need fosters human social development ¹⁴⁶. Thus, let us continue with a brief overview of some of the other institutional forms, including *misiones*, community councils, and finally ending with the emergence of communes as an institutional form.

Misiones, mandated by the state, were also mandated with community planning. The first *mision* was *Barrio Adentro*, which means inside the neighbourhood. It centred on the community's health. *Barrio Adentro* was a program wherein doctors from Cuba were placed in

¹³⁶ (Hawkins, Kirk A; David R. Hansen, 2006, 124).

¹³⁷ (Hawkins, Kirk A, 2010b, 46).

¹³⁸ (Ciccariello-Maher, George, 2007, 51-52)

¹³⁹ (Lopez, Nicolas, 2006); (Hawkins, Kirk A; David R. Hansen, 2006, 102 + 106); (Hawkins, Kirk A, 2010a, 177);

¹⁴⁰ (Hawkins, Kirk A; David R. Hansen, 2006, 106); (Hawkins, Kirk A, 2010a, 182).

¹⁴¹ (Wilpert, Gregory, 2005, 7).

¹⁴² (Burbach, Roger; Camila Piñeiro, 2007, 181).

¹⁴³ (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 97).

¹⁴⁴ (Gibbs, Terry, 2006, 269).

¹⁴⁵ (Zedong, Mao, 2006).

¹⁴⁶ (Lebowitz, Michael A., 2006).

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communities which had diminished access to health care for reasons of poverty, access or location¹⁴⁷. The doctors were given houses and offices in the communities, and the communities and the doctors were able to make mutual decisions about the barrio's needs and priorities.

Educational *misiones* soon appeared and included a wide range of programs. Starting with a literacy program, (*Yo sí Puedo*- "Yes I Can"), modelled on the Cuban literacy program, helped foster communities and individual capacities for education. By 2008, the Venezuelan government declared the country illiteracy-free¹⁴⁸. Educational *misiones* also included basic educational programs eventually ranging from primary school all the way up to university programs. At their outset, each community *mision* would offer the programs most needed, then begin offering more advanced programs. It appears that once someone participated in one *mision*, they would then participate in others, this was most apparent in the education *misiones*¹⁴⁹.

Other *misiones* include work training (at first named *Mision Vuelvan Caras*, then renamed *Mision Che Guevara*; direct food distribution and other subsistence items at little to no cost called *Mision Mercal*, and, Guaircarpuro, a *mision* servicing the Indigenous People of Venezuela. There are many other *misiones* operating¹⁵⁰. These *misiones* are not simple, superficial neoliberal restructuring, but rather meant to break the magical state and redistribute some of Venezuela's wealth into social programs, thereby negating austerity. As of the beginning of 2017, it appears that *misiones* are still operating¹⁵¹. *Misiones* did not supplant the BCs, rather the institutional forms are completely distinctive. Wherein BC's were based on study, especially during the constitutional change, a *mision*'s structure is found in both redistribution and community service, and is meant to achieve a level of communal decision-making that is absent in most other political processes. Significantly, as Fernandes (2007) emphasizes, women have tended to be at the forefront of *misiones*¹⁵².

The most important question about contemporary civil society in Venezuela is whether new political institutions represent a fundamental rupture from those that existed prior to the *Caracazo*? In other words, did something fundamental irrevocably change in the Venezuela's political community¹⁵³? And if something did indeed change, what changed? For example, one can ask whether the institutions of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela are inclusive or exclusionary in their organization of the community¹⁵⁴? Do the new institutions contain the totality of the population of Venezuela? Do they enfranchise all of the Venezuelan population or only a part? While some institutional continuity can be traced as far back as the Gomez era and others emerged with the Punto Fijo pact, they were superseded by new institutional forms of mass political organizations starting in 1989. The following section will conclude the examination of Bolivarian Circles and *misiones*, and discuss the importance of community councils, and the very new institutional forms of communes. It is to be noted that several other institutional forms, such as co-operatives, worker's management, amongst others, are left unexamined in this paper¹⁵⁵.

¹⁴⁷ (Hawkins, Kirk A, 2010a, 199, 200); (Gibbs, Terry, 2006, 271-275). (Penfold-Becerra, Michael, 72-79); (Raby, D. L, 2006).

¹⁴⁸ Although, Rodriguez (2008) and Clark (2009) disagree, Weisbrot (2009) concurs, illiteracy has been eliminated. Intriguingly some data suggests a lag and a rise in illiteracy in 2016, alongside rising economic problems, more research needs to be done.

¹⁴⁹ (Hawkins, Kirk A, 2010b, 49-53).

¹⁵⁰ (Gaster, Jeremiah, 2010b, 46).

¹⁵¹ See for, 2006, see; (Gibbs, Terry, 2006). Gibbs's outstanding 2006 piece gives us some tools to understand the relationship between the specific programmes and form of the *Misiones* (the local educative and community programs which provide free health care and education to the communities that lack these basic services) and the more general programme of participatory democracy (276-7). For Gibbs, as well, the BR embodies a grander project of redistribution (266).

¹⁵² (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007)

¹⁵³ (Levine, Daniel H, 2006, 169-173).

¹⁵⁴ Of course, the question of exclusion is very important, does democracy depend on total inclusion? Aristotle suggests otherwise, democracy may be more important as a specific form of political community, wherein the poor have control over the political community, in a way that otherwise never happens in any other political community. That is, democracy, precisely depends on some form of exclusion, the exclusion of the propertied from controlling the political community.

¹⁵⁵ There have been many worker's attempts at fostering a different workplace sociality. However, these have tended to be examples of failures. Although, they too have shown high rates of mobilization. For example, in 1998 alone there were "877" co-operatives; (Azzellini, Dario, 2009, 173); in the following years the number crested at 262, 904, before falling to between thirty thousand to sixty-thousand active co-operatives (Piñeiro, Camila, 2009, 309); (Azzellini, Dario, 2009, 172). This evolution can be traced to the system of NUDES "NUDES (Núcleos de Desarrollo

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Just as precise dates for the emergence of the phenomena of Bolivarian Circles are difficult to specify, the actual dates for the creation of community councils are also elusive. Officially, the form of community councils can be traced to legislation of 2006¹⁵⁶. Nevertheless, Fernandes' article suggests at least two cases of previous community council style organizations. One example goes back to the PFP form of the "popular women's circles" (*Círculos Femeninos Populares*)¹⁵⁷, which were briefly successful before ultimately failing likely due to the nature of the ways that PFP politics incorporated mass movements. Another example is the *Carretera Negra* ("Black Highway") part of La Vega, which was self-organized throughout the 1970s and 1980s¹⁵⁸, implying that even before 1989, parts of Venezuela may have had some institutional forms in place that might have given rise to the current forms. Bruce (2008) gives us another example of the Galipan Community Council that had existed prior to the drafting of the (2006) law¹⁵⁹. Similarly, the *Consejos Locales de Planificación Pública* (CLPP- "Local Public Planning Councils") were possibly the direct predecessor to community councils, as BC's would seem to have preceded the *misiones*¹⁶⁰. Burbach and Piñeiro (2007) illustrate that the CLPP's never truly developed, and while they had some mobilization, the structure was itself lacked planning¹⁶¹.

Hawkins (2010b) isolates some of the particularities of CC's.

In 2005, the government began creating a vast network of Communal Councils (*Consejos Comunales*). These are a new type of neighborhood association, tasked with combining and administering many of the above entities [Urban Land Committees – community organizations that legalize and help community members regulate their housing situation, Health Committees – the community organizations that oversee each community's administration of their Barrio Adentro program, Co-operatives and Bolivarian circles.] Each council is voluntarily constituted by up to four hundred families in a given community [in the urban area], which meet in a Citizens Assembly (*Asemblea de Ciudadanos*); the council proper is an executive committee selected by the assembly. The councils are not purely territorial, in that overlapping councils can exist in the same community]¹⁶².

Tamara Pearson discusses the changes to the concept of quorum that occurred in 2009¹⁶³.

One of the key changes is the new assembly quorum. Previously, there were no set quorums for assemblies (general meetings of the whole community, where all key decisions are made, that must then be implemented by the representatives). The only set quorum was of 20% of community residents for a constituting assembly, where representatives were first elected. 10% was needed for an initial assembly to elect the promoting team which would start off the process of setting up the communal council.

Now, an assembly must have 30% of community members at a first meeting, and if that fails, 20% at a second, in order to make any decision, including voting for representatives.

This is very important because it means that the assembly, or the general community, will have to play a much greater role in council life¹⁶⁴.

This formalization is generated by the state, but what is the purpose of the formalization? Is it meant to create officialism, or does it help foster democratic institutional structures? Pearson observes that although mandated by the state, the formalization does not appear to be controlled or enforced by the state. Lopez (2008) points out that for the formal structure to work, the process cannot be top-down and there was a necessary reform that occurred in 2009¹⁶⁵. Pearson

Endógeno- Nucleus for Endogenous Development), which are networks of co-operatives that offer training through the Misión Che Guevara. The trainees are expected to return to their communities and create new co-operatives. As part of these creations, they are expected to coordinate their activities with other co-operatives and with the communities in which they live, although this has not always worked successfully as Azzellini points out in his insightful piece; (Azzellini, Dario, 2009, 173-174).

Their failure have different reason, a lack of co-ordination, for another the effect of the state's conservatism: the constant battle for funding or maybe as a corrupting, too little help from the state or alternatively too much, and finally although the workers are trying something different, the competitive pressures brought by market dependency limit possibilities. Another factor for failing is that unionization has also either been too little or too much, in the inherent conservatism of union institutions; (Gaster, Jeremiah, 2010b, 49-51).

Other attempts include co-management, and rarely worker's management. All face similar hurdles. On the other hand, as stated high mobilization pushes for some hope. Also, as will be explained, communes are also supposed to be areas of production, which may help with co-ordination, fostering social responsibility, and dual power structures against both the state and elite institutions.

¹⁵⁶ For example, but not limited to.; (Ciccariello-Maher, George, 2007, 44).

¹⁵⁷ (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 104).

¹⁵⁸ (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 114).

¹⁵⁹ (Bruce, Iain, 2008, 153).

¹⁶⁰ (Burbach, Roger; Camila Piñeiro, 2007, 185); (Bruce, Iain, 2008, 156-158).

¹⁶¹ (Burbach, Roger; Camila Piñeiro, 2007, 185) Also two other committees, electrical/ land (Ciccariello-Maher, 2016#@35-36. (differences 2001/2005). Before arriving at the institutional forms of community councils, a few more antecedents are necessary

¹⁶² (Hawkins, Kirk A, 2010b, 37).

¹⁶³ (Pearson, Tamara, 2009).

¹⁶⁴ (Pearson, Tamara, 2009).

¹⁶⁵ (Lopez Maya, Margarita, 2008, 168, 172-175, 178-179).

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makes the point that laws are tools for the state but that the laws themselves were undergoing a shift, becoming a tool of communities.

This is important because, apart from reflecting the change in Venezuela, something very interesting is happening here, where laws are becoming something other than tools for lawyers, and something talked about not just in the court room, but on campus, the streets, the media, among the old and the young, the educated and less educated, the opposition, and even those who thought politics wasn't important.

Now, the laws are tools for raising awareness of people's rights, obligations and protagonist ability. Community council members feel a certain urgent need to know the law, and many will quote various articles from it when the relevant situation arises. So a reformed law means a re-reading, a reminder of elements forgotten, and a re-evaluation of how we are going.

"The law is a guide for the community in general, so the community knows its rights and obligations," said Lisbeida Rangel, a criminology student and culture committee spokesperson for communal council La Columna in central Merida, referring both to the law in general and the communal council law¹⁶⁶.

The historical instruments that states used to shape themselves, specifically, through laws, regulations and practices, can also be used by the community against the state through the community's own interpretation and application of the laws, regulations and policies. This revolutionary relationship between the people and the law is similar to what Wolin identifies as being the relation the Athenian demos had with the law¹⁶⁷. This is especially true if one keeps in mind that in 2017, the second constituent assemble in twenty years is happening, which affords even more space to the revolution and its revolutionaries to maneuver. This revolutionary relationship to the law is particular to both contemporary Venezuela and ancient Athens, and is a positive lesson for Canada and the US. This is sufficient reason to support the recent constituent assembly that propose to further reshape Venezuela¹⁶⁸. Constituent assemblies are another stark difference between Venezuela and Canada and the US as have either never been established, or have been avoided.

The curious failures and successes of the revolution during the last decade are in large part truly due to the communal nature of the Venezuelan political community that has grown since 1989. The communal nature with its foundation in the communities of the poor, of women, Afro-Venezuelans, of Indigenous-Venezuelans, of youth, of the LGBTQ community, remains relatively unknown outside of Venezuela, or is dismissed by political scientists. However, it is vital to keep these people and their struggles in mind when discussing Venezuela. In some ways, the communal nature of the changed political community would not be obvious, making these forms less well known outside of Venezuela. Moreover, they seem to be "underreported" within Venezuela. Community councils have been increasingly nestled in confederations of expanding federalism known as communes. Communes are the final organizational form examined in this paper, and are arguably the most important form that has emerged in Venezuela, especially considering the institutional trajectory that has recently been undertaken. 2017's new constituent assembly are the contemporary main test cases for the new Venezuela, particularly in regards to how these forms can help re-structure and "renew" Venezuela and maintain its evolving revolution. As much as the assembly will potentially refocus the protagonism of the masses and ensure its continuity, the revolution may still succeed. If the sustained mobilization is lost, either through reactionary means of the counter-revolution (including, of course, segments of the state) or through the state breaking the emergent dual power situation, then any revolutionary measures, especially as undertaken by the masses in the creation and maintenance of the revolution through a constituent assembly, will be lost. If the masses are able to sustain their revolution against both the state and the counter-revolution, then Chavismo and the Bolivarian Revolution will continue to succeed. The communes that have evolved from the community councils have been synonymous with sustained mobilization and if they are maintained then the structure could be paradigmatic.

It is possible that the communes, as the coordinating body for a group of communal

¹⁶⁶ (Pearson, Tamara, 2009).

¹⁶⁷ Wolin (1996b)'s whole identification of the process of democratization is key with the understanding of democratic constitutionalism, as a process where "...the evidence suggests that the demos was an active force in all of the reforms ["the fifth century democratization of the Athenian constitution"], exerting pressure, siding with one leader rather than another, and gradually extending its power by gaining access to existing institutions or by establishing new ones";(Wolin, Sheldon, 1996a, 41).

¹⁶⁸ Maybe it is another distraction from Maduro, but maybe the people of Venezuela in 2017 would like to alter the political community shaped in 1999, it might work and it might not. We will have to see.

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councils, will exemplify a shift from lower forms of organizing to higher forms, i.e., act "...as a coordinating body for the nesting community councils"¹⁶⁹. It is obvious that some form of coordinating body is needed, and thus the development of broad coalitions have been fostered. Although formally announced in 2007, communes had pre-existed due to the very nature of the development of the political communities identified throughout the period of reconsolidation. Their emergence was also due to the conservative nature of the state in which some aspects of the revolution were colonized the state; by truly conservative portions and the conservative members from among the most revolutionary and committed state actors. As of 2009, there were one hundred and eighty-four communes, with more under development¹⁷⁰. According to Ciccariello-Maher (2016),

If the state did not create the communes, what the state has done is legally recognize the existence of first the councils and later the communes, formalizing their structure—for better and for worse—and even encouraging their expansion. Some 45,000 communal councils exist today, many of which have been incorporated into the now more than 1,500 communes¹⁷¹.

Communes are not a perfect institutional form, but they are unique and important. Communes are able to coordinate between different communities and lead the drive towards production. It will be interesting to see if the 2017 Constituent Assembly is able to advance the institutionalization and formalization of the incipient communal powers and motor of the revolution. Through the new constitution will the Constituent Assembly be able to implement the guarantees to the *misiones* and other of human social development forms that have been at the core of the revolution?

In order to trace out any possibility of a social revolution in Venezuela, it is necessary to take a step back from the institutional forms and envision several important features that cut across these forms. In other words to reflect on the *thresholds* that have thus been achieved, such as mass control of the political crises, and the displacement of both the state and elites from the political community. There are two reasons that this paper has been arguing for the existence of a social revolution in Venezuela. after 1989. Firstly, "people have been mobilized who were not mobilized before"¹⁷², as the historical comparison shows, the dis-organization of the masses afforded by the PFP was at first a mobilization of the people, but this inclusive popular mobilization slowed, especially as the institutional forms of the PFP failed the masses, as the mobilizations were into the accepted political parties and were channeling mass organization in disorganization¹⁷³. Nevertheless, after the *Caracazo*, and with the previously identified institutional forms, it is obvious that some forms of alternatives to austerity had not only "generated...genuine popular interest and action"¹⁷⁴, but in many ways, was also led by those

¹⁶⁹ (Gaster, Jeremiah, 2010b, 51). and see, (Susan Spronk, and Jeffery R. Webber. "Communal Power in Caracas." Socialist Project EBulletin 382. Last Accessed, Sept.9 2010: <http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/382.php> July 2010). 103.

¹⁷⁰ (Pearson, Tamara, 2009).

¹⁷¹ (Ciccariello-Maher, George, 2016, 18-19). For definition, see; (Ciccariello-Maher, George, 2016, 20-21).

Concretely speaking, Venezuela's communes bring together communal councils—local units of direct democratic self-government—with productive units known as social property enterprises (EPS). Forming a commune is relatively straightforward: participants in a number of adjacent communal councils come together, discuss, and call a referendum among the entire local population. Once the commune is approved and constituted, each communal council and production unit sends an elected delegate to the communal parliament—the commune's highest decision-making body. Like the councils themselves, the parliament is based on principles of direct democracy. Anyone who is elected—just like all elected officials under the 1999 Constitution—is subject to community oversight and can be recalled from power. Communes even manage local security through participatory "collective defense," and an alternative system of communal justice seeks to resolve conflicts through "arbitration, conciliation, and mediation.

Economically, communes are explicitly "socialist spaces," which means that they aim to produce the things that people need locally through socialist enterprises. These enterprises are explicitly non-capitalist and defined by who owns the means of production. They can be either state-owned or, more commonly, directly owned and managed by the communes themselves. Direct ownership means that the communal parliament itself—composed of delegates from each council—debates and decides what is produced, how much the workers are paid, how to distribute the product, and how best to reinvest any surplus into the commune itself.

The goal of the communes—with EPSs as their productive heart—is to build self-managed and sustainable communities that are oriented toward their own collective internal needs. But this local emphasis does not come at the expense of consolidating a broader communal power. Instead, the Commune Law points toward the integration of the communes into a broader regional and national confederation. The goal is ultimately to "build the communal state by promoting, "driving, and developing ... the exercise of self-government by the organized communities" and to construct "a system of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption rooted in social property."

Also see; (Azzellini, Dario, 2017).

¹⁷² (Gaster, Jeremiah, 2010b, 52).

¹⁷³ (Ellner, Steve, 2010a, 58, 62-63).

¹⁷⁴ (Gaster, Jeremiah, 2010b, 53).

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who socially had normally been ruled. If one wanted to use the term “organizational plurality” then it is possible that the Bolivarian institutions are not plural¹⁷⁵, especially, as the opposition is disenfranchised from these organizations¹⁷⁶. However, pace Hawkins (2010b), there is a wider enfranchisement of the greater population of Venezuela, a plurality that was missing from the “exceptionalism” before 1989¹⁷⁷. Moreover, if one wanted to continue focusing on “plurality” there is also a plurality of organizations, both in types and in numbers. Nevertheless, in some ways the political community has shifted quite perceptively since 1998, but by 1989, the change had already accrued.

In almost every example of organizational forms, one could consider that a “social revolutionary” has a part of the “the sovereign body” of each organization and that the only successful form is one that has “the open assembly of members”¹⁷⁸. An institutionalized form of collective decision-making “is the general assembly”¹⁷⁹. It is true that the state and other organizations will sometimes impose themselves through top-down practices, but it is notable that the law in favour of the assemblies remains in place.

For an example of top-down organizational problems, see the following case-study reconstituted from Fernandes (2007). This case study will lead us into the development of Fernandes’ position that conscious struggle against officialismo is at the same time, another form of struggle, which is simultaneously happening alongside the people’s usage of the state¹⁸⁰. Representatives of a nominally revolutionary organization, “Frente Francisico de Miranda” came into the community and demanded that the community change the name of its communal kitchen from a local woman hero of the neighbourhood to the name of a male revolutionary hero of the past. The community resisted. The government’s representative used a misogynist reference to women, insulting both the men and women of the neighbourhood. The community continued its resistance and refused the demand. The case study then evidenced unique levels of male and female co-operation, in areas considered to be women’s occupations and by both the women and men insisting on the constant participation of the women of the neighbourhood, and with the men “stepping up” to share the communal child care and cooking. This seems to indicate a very different level of social transformation. I write this, not with an idea towards proving the revolution’s misogyny as the contrary is, in fact, true. The case study demonstrates the level of officialismo and the insistent independence of the Chavista movement that truly attempts something transformational. No process is perfect and there are certain tendencies that are far from emancipatory. Nevertheless, it is arguable that the democratic nature of these movements attests to their emancipatory character¹⁸¹. Officialismo has its limits, especially as the community’s everyday activities and interactions shift towards communality. It is ironic that the nominally revolutionary organization, “Frente Francisico de Miranda”, as evinced by their name, thought their interventions as truly revolutionary. At the same time, by trying to impose on the community’s own decisions, the Miranda organization was displaying its anti-democratic approach. On the other hand, the community itself displays heroic and revolutionary techniques of organization, especially in regards to searching for gender equity. Obviously, Venezuela has not eliminated male power. But some social transformation has been affected quite materially by the revolution and if other men of the Barrios share one of the men’s declaration that “if we are in this revolution, we have to break with the structures of power that are being generated in the home... structures of domination of men over women”¹⁸², and if they start acting like another man who insists on being in the kitchen cooking, then the revolution can certainly be seen as

¹⁷⁵ (Hawkins, Kirk A, 2010a, 190).

¹⁷⁶ (Hawkins, Kirk A, 2010a, 190)

¹⁷⁷ (Hawkins, Kirk A, 2010b, 31).

¹⁷⁸ (Gaster, Jeremiah, 2010b, 52).

¹⁷⁹ (Gaster, Jeremiah, 2010b, 52).

¹⁸⁰ This discussion is based off several case studies found in; (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 114-121). I also do not want to point so many fingers at the state or revolutionary organizations, my intent is more to show the possibilities, and that the revolution does not lie in the state but in communities.

¹⁸¹ (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 118 + 120-121).

¹⁸² (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 118).

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having advanced against male power¹⁸³. Women are in the position to make the decisions not only about the community kitchen but about all other community needs and the men of the community have started consciously integrating themselves into what was once considered “women's only work”.

Only time will tell how effective these organizations will be. Indeed, Pearson illustrates the threshold that needs to be achieved and maintained:

A spokesperson for the Communal Council Colinas de la Dignidad (Hills of Dignity), Morelbis Aguiar, explained that a commune, which is made up of several communal councils, is local, community self-government, “where we, the people, we are the ones who decide what our community wants and what the improvements are that we want to work on in our area.”¹⁸⁴

General assemblies and their importance points us to a shifting horizon of political power, and may be suggestive of a very profound form of dual power structures. Hawkins (2010b) reveals that there has been an increased participation of for Venezuelans¹⁸⁵. There have tended to be high density of mobilizations for most of the institutional forms post-*Caracazo*¹⁸⁶. Bolivarian circles, had approximately over two million participants¹⁸⁷. Some *misiones* (Ribas and Robinson) had served around two million people in 2004, just one year after their creation¹⁸⁸. Other *Misiones*, such as Mercal, have a grand total of eight million users (while this includes repeat visits, it is still a very high number)¹⁸⁹. Co-operatives have included some 2.5 million people¹⁹⁰.

Conclusion: Venezuela's social revolution: the Bolivarian Revolution after 28 years

In some ways, Venezuela's social revolution is predicated on new forms of solidarity¹⁹¹. Piñeiro, (2009), within the context of Venezuela alone, suggests collective and social property are contradictions to private property, and that some of what has been happening is indicative of new non-private forms of property¹⁹². As Coronil and Skurski (1991) reveal during the *Caracazo*:

People exchanged among themselves what they had obtained in quantity and carved up the sides of beef and pork they had carried away. As a woman later approvingly observed, “Money was no longer important. In a matter of hours we went back to the age of barter.”¹⁹³

Piñeiro contends that attempts to create collective and social forms of property are currently happening in Venezuela¹⁹⁴. Thus, while different forms have been tried and have disappeared, Hawkins & Hansen (2006) have shown that people continue to participate in a variety of institutions even if the structure that they first participated in does not exist anymore¹⁹⁵.

This thread of consideration about the Bolivarian Revolution as led by the Venezuelan masses relies precisely on the forms of protagonism undertaken by Venezuelans which can most clearly be seen in the fervor of February 1989, and also as was undertaken in the coup of April 2002¹⁹⁶ when Chávez was forced from office. In many ways, the counter-coup of the masses

¹⁸³ (Gaster, Jeremiah, 2010b, 56-57); and Mohideen (2009) explains the concept, for example, in conversation, Maria Leon, the Minister of Women's Affairs in 2009 explains the withering away of male power, at least as attempted in 2009:

Talking is not enough. Laws are not enough. Institutions are not enough. We need a cultural change in our views and outlook.” This required mobilizing women to become “a real force, a deterrent force, an army to combat violence against women and to change the notion of women as battered victims and weak human beings.” To mobilize women some 25,000 ‘points of encounter’ for women are being set up where women have easy access to information and services without cumbersome requirements and bureaucratic regulations. These 25,000 ‘points of encounter’ will consist of at least ten women, who will then organize more women to create “an army to combat violence against women ... the point is not only to decrease violence against women, but to eradicate it”. {Moheideen, 2009#@132}.

¹⁸⁴ (Pearson, Tamara, 2009).

¹⁸⁵ (Hawkins, Kirk A, 2010b, 60).

¹⁸⁶ (Ellner, Steve, 2010b, 17-18).

¹⁸⁷ (Hawkins, Kirk A; David R. Hansen, 2006, 103); (Hawkins, Kirk A, 2010a, 190).

¹⁸⁸ (Hawkins, Kirk A, 2010a, 202).

¹⁸⁹ (Hawkins, Kirk A, 2010a, 202).

¹⁹⁰ (Piñeiro, Camila, 2009, 309-310).

¹⁹¹ See, e.g., (Ellner, Steve, 2010b, 16).

¹⁹² (Piñeiro, Camila, 2009, 313, 318, 322, 334).

¹⁹³ (Coronil, Fernando; Julie Skurski, 1991, 316); (Lopez Maya, Margarita, 2003a, #119). I.e., Thompson's understanding that a moral economy is precisely a contradiction with a “market economy” is also a lesson from Venezuela.

¹⁹⁴ (Piñeiro, Camila, 2009, 330-332).

¹⁹⁵ (Hawkins, Kirk A; David R. Hansen, 2006, 124 + 108).

¹⁹⁶ (Gaster, Jeremiah, 2010b, 59); (Ciccariello-Maher, George, 2007, 51); (Lopez Maya, Margarita, 2008, 202).

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against the coup that had forced Chávez from office, is the cleaner example of the protagonism of the masses than the *Caracazo*, for it meant that there was a government of the people that was being defended by the people. And this protagonism of the masses from the *Caracazo* to the April 2002 coup and beyond was against austerity and neo-liberalism, the breadth and depth of the support of the masses for Chávez's government was surprising for the Venezuelan opposition. And this protagonism of the masses is certainly at the core of this social revolution. Fernandes' quote from a barrio spokeswoman, T. Barrios, in which she lays out quite plainly the stakes of the debate:

For me this comes since Chávez. I am 40-something years old, and never in my life have I cared about what was happening in my country, but also my Carretera where I live.... Its like I am fulfilled. This work fulfills me. I want to be involved in everything, I really fell that someone needs me and I can do it... That's why I say, it was Chávez who awoke the woman. He gave us importance, value. ... I studied, but I never felt interested to participate or do other things, to care about people other than myself... It was this voice that told us, we could do it, that if we are united we can achieve something. I was one of those people who never thought about taking to the streets, like I did on April 11th, when they overthrew our president. I said "My God, is this what you feel when you fight for what is yours?" I went all the way to Maracay in a car, I took a flag, and I said to the others, "My God, what am I doing?" I didn't recognize myself... This was all asleep within me and because of this man, his calling, his way of being, or I don't what, I got involved in this thing.... And then I wanted to face the president himself, and tell him how things should be, you may want to do it this way, but I don't agree, that we should do it in this other way to achieve what awe aim to do. That's why I tell you, it was an awakening, a calling, and he made us women go out into the streets, he made us realizes that as women we can also struggle., we can do it and be involved¹⁹⁷.

Consequently, although many participants in anti-coup activities were formally organized in the Bolivarian Circles and thus pro-Chávez, many participants were there simply to protect the constitution and many were there for reasons unknown even to themselves. Soldiers and civilians, previously mobilized and non-mobilized sectors of the population were fighting at the same time to regain their president, their constitution and to force the coup plotters to back down. The masses were the protagonists in the action of those days in April, 2002 as much as, if not more than during the *Caracazo*. In both cases, according to some theorists, the masses were being "uppity" if we want to take the "elite perspective," but their resolution cannot be denied.

The other thread of protagonism that this paper has been discussing is in the high levels of participation found in Venezuela. This high level cannot only be traced to electoral patterns – although, the many elections (at least 14 since 1998) in Venezuela and their consistent outcomes is very significant - but can also be traced through the high levels of continued (either new or renewed) participation in institutional forms, including the formal and legal variants of pre-formed institutions. Examples from 1989 onwards abound, e.g., but not discussed in this paper include the several takeovers of workplaces long before takeovers were legalized by the revolution (and some of the takeovers have never been legalized). There are also programs, *misiones*, and institutions that have seen scales of participation that cannot be dismissed as clientalism or diffusion of the masses as under the PFP institutional channeling.

This threshold of protagonism would, according to Wolin (1996a) - who himself quoting Apollodorus - reveals: "The Athenian *demos* has supreme authority over all things in the polis and it is in its power to do whatever it wishes"¹⁹⁸. This points to a different relationship between leader and led, as Chávez had with the masses. Recall T. Barrios' example again: "And then I wanted to face the President himself, and tell him how things should be, you may want to do it this way, but I don't agree, that we should do it in this other way in order to achieve what we aim to do"¹⁹⁹. Notice the collective "we" with the collective aims, this is not simply a movement focused on one actor, and Chávez was simply a symbol. He was an important symbol, but he was the person with who the collective could meet, and who the collective could dictate terms to. T. Barrios would certainly seem to believe herself to be participating in a reconsolidated democracy. While 2017 may seem like a long time since Fernandes' work was first published, it would appear that as Ciccariello-Maher (2007) suggests, dual power of the people against both

¹⁹⁷ (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 112). The full quote is instrumental in understanding what is precisely occurring, but the work of fully dissecting the quote may have to wait. For now it will have to stand.

¹⁹⁸ For the point,;(Gaster, Jeremiah, 2010b, 61); (Wolin, Sheldon, 1996a, 39).

¹⁹⁹ (Fernandes, Sujatha, 2007, 112).

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the state and society is part of the reconsolidation. Ciccariello-Maher writes that

This distinction... does not dismiss constituted, institutional or illegal power from the outset, but instead subjects that power to revocation by the people ... and [h]as arguably contributed significantly ... to the construction of a serious dual power in Venezuela whose ethical-legal foundation is the constituent intervention of the masses

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Since 1989, Venezuela may truly be achieving its previously “so-called” “exceptional” status. Something has been different, and it might be hard to fully bring the changes to light, but I believe that the pivot of 1989, which still holds true in 2017, is the overarching phenomena of a social revolution working itself out in Venezuela.

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²⁰⁰ (Ciccariello-Maher, George, 2007, 44).

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