

**From revolution to reconciliation:**  
**The road of Venezuelan intellectuals to state power and the Bolivarian higher  
education reform**

by

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## Abstract

The present study explores the role of Venezuelan socialist intellectuals in the higher education reform of Hugo Chávez's government since 2003. I examine the historical and social context in which the reform was initiated and which led to the creation of new, instead of the reform of old public universities. I ask if and how the persistence of traditional requirements of academic evaluation and distinction impacts the new Bolivarian institutions of higher learning and the higher education policy of the government. I scrutinize the contradictory encounters between tradition and innovation in the attempts to create alternative educational practice. I speak of how progressive intellectuals affect the direction of reform in a revolutionary government while keeping their role as critics from within.

These questions are addressed through ethnography of the Bolivarian University of Venezuela (UBV) in Caracas. Established in 2003 by left-wing intellectuals and former student activists, UBV became the vanguard institution of the Bolivarian higher education reform. In order to provide schooling for over half a million poor Venezuelans, it employed thousands of educated Venezuelans. New to the academic and teaching profession, they all shared the passion of the radical academics to bring quantitative and qualitative shift in Venezuelan higher education. As a principal degree-granting institution within the mass higher education program called *Misión Sucre*, UBV promotes alternative pedagogy and knowledge production. It presents a decentralized model of university governance, and as well as 'alter-globalization' academic alliances within the Global South.

UBV's radical commitment is routinely questioned from within and from outside with the accusation it reproduces the traditional university model. This contradiction illustrates the dilemma faced by radical intellectuals as they seek to turn an institution, the university, which has typically fulfilled a "modernizing" and reformist function in liberal capitalist systems, into a locus for radical social reform. They do so, moreover, in a globalized context that keeps imposing its liberal hierarchies and values. This leads to a number of contradictions in everyday practices. Intellectuals have to use traditional forms of cultural capital (academic credentials) to legitimate UBV, while challenging traditional elite institutions and distinctions. They also need to reconcile their past as anti-authoritarian activists with their present as agents of state authority and decision-making power.

Analysis of the material shows that these contradictions are consequential, leading to the reproduction of social inequalities which UBV was meant to blunt, or to the creation of new ones—among other, more positive outcomes. The research also shows that, in addition to the systemic and global factors mentioned above, such inequalities are an effect of a type of symbolic capital specific to Venezuelan intellectuals—one monopolized by groups who took part in the intense political mobilizations during the preceding decades of Venezuelan liberal democracy and who received degrees from more ancient and more prestigious universities. This symbolic capital distinguishes what I call a "radical nobility" defined by the gloss of its political radicalism on a base of traditional credentials, unleashing idiosyncratic stratifying status dynamics in the core of the revolutionary system.

To trace these contradictions in the every-day life of students, professors and administrators, and assesses their impact on the outcomes of higher education at UBV, I present the results of eighteen months of anthropological fieldwork. Besides the forty-five semi-structured

interviews with academic intellectuals, who fulfill the task of policy-makers or educators, I also carried out participant observation at the main campus of UBV in Caracas as well as further sites of higher education policy-making and education practice. To historicize the experience of higher education reform, I have also used materials from secondary historical research, detailing the academic and student struggles during the Venezuelan liberal democracy. Using these materials I show how within the Bolivarian higher education field a new form of symbolic capital has worked to conceal the reproduction of stratification. I also claim that while this is the case, higher education in Venezuela could still play an important socializing role within a larger process of recuperating the welfare institutions of the state.

## Statement

*I hereby state that the thesis contains no materials accepted for any other degrees in any other institutions. The thesis contains no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.*

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## Introduction

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the proponents of liberal democracy triumphed over the demise of its antagonist socialist order (Fukuyama 1992). Yet, while Western governments and Eastern dissidents were celebrating this victory, a parallel process, long underway in 1989, turned the celebration into a feast in time of plague. Since the 1970s, under the incentives to modernize, governments around the world embraced neoliberal reforms removing regulative barriers to global capital flows, and dismantling the institutions of the Keynesian welfare state (Panitch and Gindin 2012). Thus, less than two decades after the demise of the Socialist Bloc, a crooked mirror image of liberal democracy appeared in the intervention of national governments to save banks and business elites amidst a deepening the rising economic crisis, catalyzed by the financial crisis in 2008. As a response of the neoliberal “socialism for the rich” (Stiglitz 2009) recurrent waves of protests emerged in countries as distant in their historical and politico-economic development as Romania and Chile, the US and Egypt. Unlike in 1989, when dissident intellectuals demanded only political liberties, the academics and students who have joined the protest wave since 2008, formulated mostly economic demands. Whereas in earlier waves of student and intellectual contentions, members of these rather privileged groups defended subaltern populations or national liberation struggles abroad, this time they are directly affected (Wallerstein 2011). They protested against the decreasing work and educational opportunities, and increasing levels of debt, precarious labor conditions, and poverty rates in developed countries.

The historical urgency and emergency of contention, framed by members of the educated elites, pose a question about the role of intellectuals in processes of social change. In an era when most research on academic communities concentrates on audit cultures, cognitive capitalism, accumulating debt, precarity, and the neo-liberalization of university governance (Strathern 2001; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004; Marginson 2008; Wright and Rabo 2010; Roggero 2011), my study focuses the other side of the coin. In order to address the topic of intellectual participation in processes of social change, and pay attention to how academic institutions and the university could be used in this process, my study examines the role of progressive intellectuals in the Bolivarian Revolution. Focusing on this process of dramatic social reforms in Venezuela since 1999 under the leadership of late President Hugo Chávez, I explore the struggle of a group of radical intellectuals to make the university a tool of social

inclusion for marginalized populations, and to tailor an alternative within the global higher education field.

Having previously researched discursive strategies of dissident critique against state socialist regimes (Ivancheva 2007; 2011), in a country as Venezuela, building socialism today, I was interested to pose similar questions in a grounded ethnographic research program. The main question of my research was if, and how, progressive intellectuals affect the direction of reform in a revolutionary government while keeping their role as critics from within. This question had two separate but interrelated aspects. Firstly, could intellectuals really become agents of radical social reform within the larger field of state power, if this meant subverting their own legitimacy and distinction as a class reproducing the capitalist order associated with democracy and meritocracy? Secondly, could the formerly anti-authoritarian intellectuals retain their critical position within an increasingly autocratic regime, and how? Beyond the question of intellectuals I was also interested in why both old and new socialist regimes put such a strong emphasis on the institution of higher learning and believe in its ability to catalyze radical social change.

To research these questions, from September 2008 onward I did eighteen months of fieldwork at the Bolivarian University of Venezuela (UBV), exploring intellectuals' role in the Bolivarian higher education reform. UBV was an innovative institution of higher learning which was becoming renowned to activists and scholars as an alternative model of mass university. Venezuelan intellectuals with traditional credentials, who dominated the student Left at Venezuela's universities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and many Left wing organizations in the country (López 2005), came to power on board of an emancipatory populist project. They supported the late President Hugo Chávez despite his charismatic and increasingly personalistic political leadership and despite the pervasive bureaucratic ethos of liberal democratic states, widely celebrated throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Intellectuals joined Chávez in his declared mission to strengthen the welfare institutions of the Venezuelan state, weakened by processes of financialization, privatization and austerity, prescribed by the Washington consensus. His Bolivarian government tried to perform these reforms through a promise to use the state as a tool of redistribution and inclusion for poor Venezuelans. Like other populist projects in the Latin American past, Bolivarian Venezuela was based on a multiclass political coalition (Conniff 1999: 14). This alliance was sealed with

the promise of reform, economic development and redistribution of the rent from the rich natural resources of the petrol state. Intellectuals joined army men in this state reform project (Corrales 2007; 2010).

In the socialism of previous decades the urban proletariat was championed by the bourgeoisies and broader coalition of working and popular classes. In the socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the regime championed “the people” as a whole (*el pueblo*). The latter has consisted not only of members of the unorganized informal sector, workers, peasants and indigenous group, but also of all those who joined and supported the government and its project for profound political, economic, and social change. A clear distinction was made not just between rich and poor Venezuelans, but between government supporters and all the rest, rich or poor. The intellectuals could still join either camp according to their political preference and popular sentiment. Those who joined the Chavista camp signed the new social contract inscribed in the 1999 Bolivarian Constitution. Written in defense of a vulnerable majority of the population, the Constitution granted social and political citizenship to all the ones previously deprived of wealth, justice, and democratic rights--the people whom the neocolonial “magical state” (Coronil 1997) formerly subjected to perpetual exploitation and random violence.

Several volumes of academic and popular literature have sought to describe and explain the Bolivarian Revolution. “Revolution” was the term used interchangeably with “process” to denote the social, political, and economic change that took place since Chávez’ election as president in 1998. Initially most authors took Chávez’ charismatic figure and personal biography as a vantage point which allowed them to reflect on the broader process of social change in the country (Gott 2005; Jones 2008; Marcano and Barrera 2006). Only recently have a number of collective books and monographs sought to address the more social and sociological underpinnings of this social and political change. Some have done that researching the transformation of traditional political actors, trade unions and activist groups, related to particular causes as housing and media activism, and exploring the advancements and limitations of the new Bolivarian institutions of participatory democracy (Ellner 2008; Ayala and Quintero 2009; Smilde and Hellinger 2011). Others have traced ethnographically the role of persistent networks of grassroots’ activism as a corrective to the current processes of social change (Fernandes 2010, Ciccariello-Mahler 2013).



While these have focused on the role of rank-and-file Venezuelans in the building of popular democracy, they have tended to tip the balance toward another, society-centric extreme. Showing popular contention, contestation of power, and empowerment they claim that Chávez did not create the popular mass movements, but that he was created by them. In this, these scholarly accounts mirror the polarization of the Venezuelan society represented by public media on the one hand and partisan historiography on the other. Aiming to put forward the “brave people of Venezuela” (*el bravo pueblo*) – those with developed class consciousness actively fighting for a better world (Ciccariello-Maher 2013) – these scholars have tended to overlook the grey zones between elites and the masses. And while the economic elite and political elite, and the middle classes still remain under-researched, the intellectuals, one of the key groups who joined and headed the process of social change in the country since 1999 have also stayed out of critical examination. My fieldwork brings this namely group into anthropological focus in studies of present-day Venezuela – the intellectuals and experts who have come to play a role especially within the higher education reform of the Bolivarian government.

The educated middle class has formed the leadership and the base of many self-proclaimed mass movements and parties in the Venezuelan 20<sup>th</sup> century (López and Hernández 2001; López 2005). They had to take up the struggle to rejuvenate socialism against the negative historical background of the decay of state socialism. They also had to repel the stained image of the failure and lack of popular base of the home-grown Venezuelan Left, mostly due to the latter’s vanguardist strategy (Ciccariello-Maher 2013). Within the Bolivarian process they have served as brokers of power, betwixt and between orders of prestige and orders of popular legitimacy (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). This group has been both of particular importance for the understanding of the regime, and has remained in a particularly paradoxical situation. Within an inclusive mass project of political empowerment through higher education, they had to use their radical and academic credentials in order to legitimize the new regime. At the same time, they had to negate these and all other distinctions inherited from an old system which they wished to abolish.

Yet, the Bolivarian higher education field included different types of actors. While the majority of high-ranking government officials had credentials both from the Left-wing student movements and from the traditional system of public higher education, the academic

staff hired at UBV had neither. These newcomers to the academic field could take pride neither in academic, nor in the radical distinctions of the members of the former student Left. This was even more the case for the students these people taught. Despite their relative mobility they were promised by joining UBV, neither Bolivarian educators, nor their students received the stable income or security typical of the educated middle-classes in Venezuela (or world-wide for that matter). Many stayed isolated both economically and politically. Exploring the contradictory positionality of radical intellectuals as bearers of the old distinctions into a new order, this study points out some trends of the “Bolivarian process” which make possible that distinctions characteristic of the old system, could still be observed at many levels in the new one. They could be seen in institutional designs and classroom settings, in student mobilization and ideology creation and instruction.

This trend is conditioned on the specific conjuncture. Every attempt at a socialist revolution has to be considered a forming part in a wider process of the consolidation of global capitalism. As the history of the Cold war against the Socialist Bloc, and the hot wars in East Asia in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has shown, socialist regimes were not only seen as undemocratic, but attacked because they were preventing free markets and smooth capital flows (Panitch and Gindin 2012: 11). A similar treat was visibly at play in the case of Venezuela, where a *coup d'état*, sponsored by the economic elite, happened already in 2002, during the first mandate of the democratically elected government. Given the real possibility of the army's opposition to radical change and of military intervention against Chávez, intellectuals who supported the government gave up transforming old universities. Instead, they created a whole subsystem of parallel institutions, including UBV, which promoted new principles of horizontal and decentralized higher education. Yet, it still coexisted along the old traditional universities and, had to be accredited according to the traditional criteria.

Holding a diploma from traditional universities, publications in high-ranked peer-reviewed academic journals, and past participation in collaborative research projects were still the valid criteria of evaluation (Ivancheva 2013). Those who fulfill these requirements while holding a position at UBV of the Ministry of Higher Education are almost exclusively the people who participated in radical movements on traditional universities in previous decades. I call this segment of the population who benefits from two opposite types of credentials and modes of distinction “radical nobility”. Coining this term, I follow the theoretical framework of

Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu called traditional academic intellectuals within the French intellectual field “the state nobility”: their proximity to the power elite could be explained through forms of “symbolic capital”, which conceals a combination of cultural and economic capital, attainable through elite origin (Bourdieu 1997; 1998). In the case of the Venezuelan intellectuals, related to the Bolivarian government and its higher education field, I call this peculiar form of symbolic attainment “revolutionary capital”: the participation in revolutionary movements of the past is combined with access to traditional institutions of higher learning, which were a privilege of a chosen few. As the whole legitimacy of the Bolivarian higher education institutions was conditioned upon traditional credentials, the new Bolivarian educators and students who joined UBV also needed to gain such credentials. This was a tough terrain to fight given their origin in the lower classes, heavy teaching loads, large cohorts of students from different ages, backgrounds, and sometimes with special needs. Thus, inequalities were reproduced in the core of the Bolivarian system. While my study explores the issue of reproduction of old hierarchies within the new regime, it is also concerned with the production (or failure) of counterhegemony and innovative modes of political participation. Beyond structural reforms, new regimes also need to provide meaning to social change.

The Venezuelan experiment of radical social change, as most other socialist experiments, was set during what anthropologists call a ‘liminal’ phase (Turner 1995) and some sociologists ‘unsettled’ times (Swidler 1986). In such periods new forms of organization (academic among others) are part of a broad attempt to reset the old structures of society: norms are relaxed and boundaries of groups redefined, creating solidarity among protagonists of social change, and animosity among groups contesting their power. Actors involved in such processes are in a constant and acute competition with antagonistic old and new models of development, and need to offer an answer as to how people should live in and perceive the new conditions. Even if new strategies of action, often draw on existing ones (Swidler 1986), the future is always seen as the only *raison d’être* of the revolutions. It is constantly safeguarded from being judged in its own terms, because it is seen as a pale reality serving a future which is yet to come. This Janus-face Revolution conditions the impossibility to question the contradictory quotidian reality: a critique which is a necessary condition for the possibility of the rethinking of institutional change.

In this respect, one can draw significant parallels with the end of state socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Block. True, the democratic socialism in Venezuela has had little to do with the rather repressive “really existing socialism”. Yet, scholars of the new socialism have neglected to consider how socialist regimes’ concern with capitalism, oligarchies and imperial interests tends to justify ignoring critique, including from the Left. The latter was often suppressed as counterrevolutionary. Balancing power mechanisms, claim for further democratization and challenges to centralized bureaucracies are gradually weakened, and those committed to advancing state socialism often marginalized. The Bolivarian higher education field shows similar tendencies. It has become impossible to critique the late President Chávez or the people whom he selected to govern, as this would immediately mean supporting the counterrevolution. As I show in this dissertation, it has also proved difficult to critique the old guard of the radical nobility: their past in the struggles, coupled with their academic excellence, serves as a two-tiered mechanism to quell anger and contention. This mechanism is strengthened by the presence of the usual “fellow-travelers” (Caute 1988; Hollander 1998; Stern 2007), invested in networks of radical distinction. Their commitment to work in Venezuela, against the distortion of reality which the media in their countries present, is, in a way, remarkable. Yet their rosy accounts of the revolutionary reality reinforce the self-confidence of socialist regimes and the repression of constructive critique.

While socialist regimes suspended critique from within and from the Left, they often invited in the Trojan Horse of Western liberal values masked as “progress”. This is another point on which the two types of socialisms meet. The Cold War was fought on the ground of industrialization and military warfare, which allowed old academic institutions like the Soviet-style Academies of Sciences to be revamped. Besides knowledge production, they allowed spaces of elitist, anti-popular, and ultimately self-interested concern to survive (Fitzpatrick 1979). At the vanguard institutions of culture and knowledge production, old-guard intellectuals could also preserve their self-colonizing sentiments (Kiossev 1999) looking up to core “civilized” countries as a source of salvation for their own downtrodden “barbaric” compatriots. Downwardly mobile heirs of the former bourgeoisie and upwardly mobile new technocratic experts first lost their socialist ideals, working toward expertise and efficiency which they imagined as prevalent on the other side of the Iron Curtain (Konrád and Szelenyi 1979). They embraced Western modernity, packaged with loans in Western

institution and incentives for a liberalized market economy, allowing individual development and pursuit of happiness without the constraints of socialist redistribution and collectivity.

Leon Trotsky once said that “The hostility to criticism of the majority of the official “friends” really conceals a fear not of the fragility of the Soviet Union, but of the fragility of their own sympathy with it” (Trotsky 1998). Despite my own sympathies with the Bolivarian Revolution and its overall project for equitable social change, my work has been dedicated to point out, rather than conceal, the contradictions of the Bolivarian process. Coming from a country and a region which had to survive socialism, led by an oligarchic *nomenklatura* closed to internal critique, to then wake up to the bitter reality of advanced neoliberal capitalism, I cannot afford to spare critique when it appears needed.

### 1. The Bolivarian University as a case study

The principal site of my fieldwork was the main campus of UBV at Los Chaguaramos in Caracas. UBV was created a year after the attempted *coup d'état* against President Hugo Chávez in 2002. It was a culmination of the decades' long struggle of the Venezuelan Left to offer universal access to public services to the poor majority of the petrol state (UBV 2003; Wilpert 2007). Officially inaugurated in 2003, UBV opened its doors a year later to 14,000 students at four central facilities: Los Chaguaramos in the metropolitan area of Caracas, and Maracaibo, Punto Fijo, and Ciudad Bolívar in smaller-size cities (Laberinto 2004: 54). But the voluntary policy for mass access called *Misión Sucre* planned for much wider access: beyond the central campus, numerous local classrooms (*aldeas universitarias*) accounted for an enrollment of half a million new students. The majority currently come from marginalized poor rural and urban communities normally excluded from public services. The local classrooms (hereafter *aldeas*) are usually hosted in night-shifts of primary or secondary schools or in even more informal settings such as people's houses and public squares.

The *Misión Sucre* reform was initiated by the Ministry of Higher Education. One of many redistributive policies of the Bolivarian government (*Misiones*) in the health, food, social and cultural sectors, it aimed to provide rapid solutions to glaring social inequalities. Together with the programs for literacy (*Robinson*), primary education (*Ribas I*), and secondary vocational training (*Ribas II*) (Wilpert 2007), *Sucre* made education de facto universal, without

restriction of background, wealth or nationality. The only condition for admission was to have completed secondary education. Run by the Ministry of Higher Education through the Foundation Misión Sucre, the *aldeas* mushroomed throughout the country. By 2009 they hosted 527,000 students (González 2008). The students' diplomas were granted by experimental universities such as UBV, but also the Military Academy (UNEFA), and the Maritime Academy (UMC). These universities provided teaching staff and were responsible for the academic activities and resources in the *aldeas*. Following the Cuban example they were called “municipalized” universities. They are still funded by the central government but are local in the geographic sense.

UBV's reform was based on the Córdoba Manifesto which defined public higher education in Latin America in 1918, as well as on liberation theology and on popular pedagogy. It aimed not just to provide education, but also to offer a curriculum imbued with the principles of critical social sciences, applied in intensive fieldwork with marginalized communities. UBV's founding charter, the “Rectors' Document”, stipulated equal participation of students and faculty members in university governance (UBV 2003). A reference in university planning popular with both Left and Right-wing intellectuals this document reflected the main lines of opposition of UBV professors to the traditional public universities in Venezuela and reads like a manifesto of alternative mass higher education. It pledged to achieve national integration in two ways— economic, by giving students access to the labor market, and social, by opening the university's doors to the wider community. It was aimed to present both a quick fix to the problem of exclusion of the poor from education, and to challenge the traditional universities.

UBV's curricular design opposed typical disciplinary and administrative departmentalization (UBV 2003). All subjects are intimately related to the envisaged structural transformation of the country: legal studies, media and communication studies, and environmental policy were first three curricula offered. These were soon followed by social management for local government, health management, education, politics and government, architecture, information technology, medicine, animation, and agrarian ecology. The goal was to train practitioners able to reshape Venezuela's laws, politics and economy through a more autonomous and decentralized model of development. The substance of courses was also transformed. All classes revolved around an extensive fieldwork project (*proyecto*). This

entailed for students to do social work in marginalized communities, urban or rural. Education at UBV and its *aldeas* was thus grounded in the very location where intervention was needed, and opposed the convention that science should happen in solitude and education – in a vertical exchange between a master and a disciple.

My research focuses mostly on academic intellectuals and decision-makers in charge of the creation and development of UBV and the broader Bolivarian higher education field within which UBV has a central position. In an interview with Loïc Wacquant, Bourdieu also gave a brief and lucid description of the stages of research of a field: 1) “describing the position of the field vis-à-vis the field of power” 2) discussing “objective structure of the relations between positions occupied by the agents or institutions who compete for the legitimate form of specific authority of which this field is a site in” and 3) : “analyzing the *habitus* of agents the system of dispositions they have acquired by internalizing determinate type of social and economical conditions and which find a definite trajectory within the field.”

(Wacquant and Bourdieu 1989: 37) In order to understand the function of the position of UBV within the Bolivarian academic field (Bourdieu 1988; 1993) a distinction needs to be made. The Bolivarian University does not exhaust the Bolivarian higher education field: the spaces and positions, and their related forms of capital, which produce power relations and are available to agents engaged in the Bolivarian higher education reform. As the Bolivarian system of higher education is only part of the overall Venezuelan higher education field, but both have their relatively autonomous positions in relation on the one hand to the overall global field of higher education (where the actors and positions within the Venezuelan traditional universities gain an upper hand), and to Bolivarian state power (to which the Bolivarian institutions are dearer and closer, though not necessarily more privileged).

UBV has a key symbolic position within the Bolivarian higher education field, and is coordinated by the Ministry of Higher Education, which is the locus of great proximity between state power and higher education decision-makers and educators. Thus, to cover the whole set of actors and positions, related to UBV within the Bolivarian higher education field, my ethnographic fieldwork, unfolded in the main campus in Caracas, in local *aldeas*, in the barrio communities where teachers and students do their field research, at the University of Workers in San Antonio de los Altos where teachers are trained, as well as other sites of intellectual life and political activities in Caracas. Interviews were conducted on these sites as

well as in the Ministry of Higher Education. These sites embody distinct aspects of UBV as an institutional totality. Within the Bolivarian higher education field, I encountered several groups of intellectuals, two which were central to my research, and others who were less so, but enter my analysis.

Among the two central groups, one group I investigated is composed of current professors at UBV. They have contributed to the creation and continuity of UBV and, though they had some critiques, they saw UBV as the last bastion of struggle for a more just and equitable higher education. This group I refer to as “the Bolivarian educators”. Often first generation into higher education, many of them came from professional career tracks and had no academic career, and with few exceptions, no radical credentials before the establishment of UBV. While this group was numerous and could hardly be exhausted, I had the chance to participate in their group training, discussions, and outings, which allows me to portray them in more multi-faceted ethnographies. A second group is that of the educational experts from the Ministry of Higher Education and high-ranking officials at UBV-Caracas, to which I refer as members of “the radical nobility”. Former student activists at the traditional universities in the country during the decades of Venezuelan alleged ‘exemplary democracy’ (1958-1998) they struggled to keep higher education as a free public service and an autonomous domain, free of state intervention. The generational experience of struggle made them reject the hierarchies and distinctions they were subjected to and embrace the goal of equalizing access to and social progress through education<sup>1</sup>. As the members of the latter group were a small number of chairs of departments and advisors in the Ministry, I collected a rather exhaustive set of interviews. Interactions in this formal context were of course of a less spontaneous sort than the ones I cultivated through more sustained presence.

Beside these central groups to my research project, I also interviewed members of two further groups within the Bolivarian higher education field: students at UBV and its *aldeas*, and professors and staff at main-stream public universities who were related to proposals for alternative higher education. While initially I did not factor students as part of the intellectuals I was planning to research, meeting them in a field I realized they were an active part of the field namely as intellectuals: through their engagement in the process of knowledge production they were committed to public intervention and theoretically grounded social critique. With few exceptions, the students whom I present in the empirical



chapters of my dissertation, were those whom I met at classes at UBV-Caracas. Many of them were also engaged in or critical of the student movement there. The group of academics outside of UBV I chose to interview because they participated in the creation of UBV, *Misión Sucre*, or other alternative higher education projects, but have maintained critical distance to its more recent developments.

As the innovation of Bolivarian education concerned its decentralized structure and the large abundance of locations and educational experiences<sup>2</sup>, I did research both at the UBV campus in Los Chaguaramos Caracas and further local sites: other campuses in the country, the decentralized *aldeas*, and the sites of fieldwork with communities and teachers' training. And while I ended up spending much more time in Caracas, my case study as presented here, did not focus on the whole experience of decentralization but rather on the political life of UBV. In this sense, the Caracas campus became my principal field site not in terms of a bounded community of traditional ethnographic immersion, but rather a focal point of an study with the extended case method (Burawoy 1998). Studying it in this paradigm allowed me to extend my position between participant and observer, shifting temporal and spatial dimensions within the case, but also being accountable for external historical and current forces and theoretical implications that informed my case study. Thus, the choice of UBV in Los Chaguaramos, Caracas allowed me to focus on different levels of its development, see its extensions in further sites and contexts – globally and locally. It was also strategically close to other sites of intellectual life in Caracas, and to the antagonist institutions of higher learning, which was a valuable comparative experience.

UBV-Caracas has proved to be the agenda-setter and the jewel in the crown of the reform of Bolivarian higher education. It was the first institution created to represent the all-inclusive mass and gratuitous higher education. It has hosted the main administration of the university that is responsible for all its central facilities (*sedes*) and decentralized classrooms (*aldeas*). With few exceptions it was mostly academic staff from UBV-Caracas who created and headed the national programs and curricula for all of them. Through fieldwork at the UBV campus I observed on a daily basis the participation of intellectuals in a process of inclusive education performing integration and social change. UBV can be seen as a laboratory of alternative higher education both in its form and its content: it is where one could observe

how the intellectuals' visions of a better system are not just theoretically crafted, but also modified and attuned in their everyday practice.

The administrators and academics who worked at UBV-Caracas represented Bolivarian higher education and were most influential in the creation of the university and the overall reform. They were the ones who pushed for social change through higher education. They saw themselves, and were seen from outside, as the active agents not just of the Bolivarian Revolution in general, but also of its higher education reform in particular. Thus, it was they who could answer my question why higher education was seen as a key institution of social change in a socialist country. Their theoretical orientation and practical action presented a more full-fledged reflection of what was the role of academics in the Bolivarian process. Furthermore, the geographical proximity and symbolic gravity of the intellectuals residing in Caracas to the main hubs of state power and intellectual life in the country, places them in a peculiar and interesting position. They were in the best position to voice critique that could easily be heard and potentially affect the field of power. This made the field of intellectuals I at UBV more central to the questions of my fieldwork on the subversion of traditional credentials and the formulation of radical critique from the Left.

Yet, the central role of UBV in the higher education reform defined this group's relation with their colleagues in the rest of the country. I often heard criticisms of the centrality of the Caracas campus when speaking to academic staff on other campuses and *aldeas*. Critique was also voiced from within the Caracas campus against the concentration of power in the hands of "those on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor": the administration of UBV, situated on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor of Los Chaguaramos. At the time of my research this critique was taken in earnest by the experts in the Ministry of Higher Education. In order to counter the centrality of intellectuals on the Caracas campus and of its administration, the Ministry decided to frame an alternative policy – Misión Alma Mater. This program, which proposed smaller, specialized universities, centrally controlled by the government, that would propose short career-tracks for professionals, was to oppose the symbolic domination of UBV in the Bolivarian higher education subsystem and shift the balance back from theory to practice.

Against this background, my work had to both reflect and reflect on a peculiar bias. UBV-Caracas embodied a key contradiction in the Bolivarian process. This contradiction concerns the balance between authority and autonomy, between central and decentralized decision-

making. The attempts to keep academic and intellectual autonomy from a rather centralized state, and to be an agent of this state granting autonomy to its decentralized facilities proved to be a crucial challenge for UBV. Still, in this process, the professed applied education of UBV presented in reality an imbalance where a certain type of theory dominates over practice. Whereas it has been declared as primary to the process of the Bolivarian reform of higher education, the social work done in the *aldeas* has rather taken a back seat in the university reform of the government. This asymmetry is also reflected in the dominance of the members of the radical nobility over the process of legitimation of the whole higher education reform, and the prevalence of decision-making taken in the center, rather than the periphery of the decentralized system of higher learning. Researching this asymmetry from the center, rather than the periphery, my work has not counterbalanced this division. The question of how these processes spread from the center to the periphery and are negotiated or contested there, are beyond the scope of the current project, and need to be addressed by further ethnographic research.

## 2. Fieldwork: caught between two socialisms

When I first went into the field, I wanted to research two different but also interrelated questions. Firstly, I wanted to explore if and how a traditional institution as the university and its actors, academic intellectuals, could become the locus and agents of radical social reform. Secondly, I wished to explore in practice if and how a revolutionary government allowed or limited critique from inside, by revolutionary and radical agents. The two questions fell under the heading of a more general interrogation about the reproduction of dominant classes in society, and about the functioning of the “state apparatuses” (Althusser 2001) and their ability to quell anger and critique. While distinct, both questions ultimately concerned the transformative agency of intellectuals when they become actors in processes of radical social change. As a foreign anthropologist studying a reality I had little primary experience with (Venezuelan political life), the questions did not emerge from the field itself. As opposed to many native anthropologists who are able to apply and test theoretical implications on a case they are already familiar with, my first attempt to approach my field in Venezuela was through comparative theoretical approximations (Narayan 1993). At the same time, coming from a peripheral region and going into another one, and having dealt with

similar issues in my research on dissidents in Eastern Europe, I came to the field with a number of expectations and hypotheses about how the Venezuelan academic field might operate. In other words, the questions which I wished to explore in Venezuela came from a mixture of theoretical frames and practical experience.

To answer these questions, I carried out interviews with key actors in the administration and the academic community of UBV in Caracas, which I contextualized through ethnographies and historical research. I carried out forty-five semi-structured interviews with academic intellectuals from UBV, and with intellectuals who are in decision-making position at the Ministry of Higher Education. Approximately half of the interviews were with women in administrative and teaching positions. The distribution of ages was rather even, starting with recent graduates of UCV who joined the teaching staff in their late twenties, and up to some retired teaching staff who were part of the movement of Academic Renovation. At UBV I interviewed academics from most departments, administrative staff, and students. At the Ministry of Higher Education I interviewed the heads of most departments who were in charge of different activities of the Ministry and of the *Misión Sucre* program, whose office was in the main building of the Ministry. While interviews were a key element and method of my study, theoretical and practical concerns made me realize the limitations of this method when working in Caracas, and with intellectuals. I could hardly treat interviews taken in Caracas as texts per se: far too often I was taken to noisy offices and cafeterias where my recordings proved at best futile, and my handwritten notes were my only source of reference to the interview. Hence, the close analysis of narrative sequences I was first planning to conduct could not quite work as a method of reconstruction of my informants' discourses.

Secondly, and more importantly, the intellectuals whom I studied proved to be a more heterogeneous group than I expected. Depending on their position in Venezuelan society and their discipline, intellectuals could be positioned differently also in relation to me. At the Bolivarian University many of the professors came from a working class background and worked and lived in precarious conditions. They were more often than not the first generation to access universities, were less travelled, less linguistically experienced and had less exposure to traditional cultural institutions than the people at similar positions at traditional universities and myself. In these cases I could see – and sometimes fear – the effects of my privileged position on our interaction: coming from an economically relatively

impoverished Bulgarian family affluent in cultural capital, made me privileged in comparison with them. At times, I would encounter people who were in a position very similar to mine – Venezuelans who had a certain international exposure, but were still limited by their economic situation. In these rare cases I understood Ulf Hannerz’s insistence that in certain communities (as journalists and academics) anthropologists would neither “study down” investigating marginal communities, nor “study up” exploring academic elites: they would rather “study sideways”, speaking to people in a similar situation as their own (Hannerz 2004). Only in a few rare occasions I was in a position of “studying up” (Nader 1972): I would end up at the expensive family houses (*quintas*) or luxury flats of cosmopolitan, Oxbridge- or Ivy League-trained individuals with an upper class upbringing, who often had the most radical visions of an equitable higher education reform.

Due to this variety of positions and the complex reality of educational distinction and stratification I found on the ground, in my fieldwork I took a rather broad definition of intellectuals. Following Dominic Boyer and Claudio Lomnitz I researched the category of intellectual “less as the executor of a particular set of functions or as the possessor of a certain set of attributes, credentials, or capital and more as a social actor, who has, by local, historical standards, a differentially specialized engagement with forms of knowledge and their social extensions” (Boyer and Lomnitz 2005: 107). Interestingly, this definition given by anthropologists – usually following the peculiar, local, and not generalizable – would sound too general vis-à-vis specific definitions by sociologists, which I discuss in the theoretical chapter of my dissertation. In choosing this framework, I make a methodological and theoretical commitment to study practices in historical context. This choice does not, in any case, mean forsaking structural analysis, but it allows me to postponing it to the conclusions rather than using it as a point of departure for the inquiry.

The “Bolivarian academic intellectuals” I dealt with all have a field of expertise – be it a subject they have studied and teach at UBV or a broader field of expertise in higher education policy within the Ministry. Some had a record of public and media intervention while being by training and inclination open to reflexivity and self-reflexivity. This characteristic reflexivity made my informants incredibly interesting and inspiring interlocutors. Yet it posed one significant challenge. It made them all too conscious about their own trajectory, and all too elaborate and rational when justifying their past choices.

Their accounts of how they reached their current employment, research interest, or even situation in their personal life, would always fit into a grand narrative of the history of the country and the current struggle they took part in. More often than not my interviews would contain a part in which I would be given a lesson, and lectured in similar terms about Venezuelan history, one of resistance against capitalism ending triumphantly in the coming of Chávez to power.

No matter how well I “did my homework” learning about the specific craft, movement or episode of history my respondent had been active in, I was often instructed in how to interpret my material and what the important issues were which I would need to remember when I wrote my dissertation. This contributed to the difficulty of my position as an outsider to an institutionalized intellectual field. While they saw their own answers as knowledge I could abuse, my informants far too often turned the interviews into expert format: no matter how much I reframed my questions to inquire into their life-stories and personal choices and interpretations, the eloquent answers would always turn into well-structured discourses of informed opinion and expert knowledge. Even life-story details would come in readily framed for me: “As an anthropologist you need vignettes. There is mine.”

After a few months in the field, and my stay at the teachers’ training session in San Antonio de los Altos I spent time with a number of UBV professors. More informal conversations and less expert interviews followed naturally. In the beginning I was treated as one more student, but they ended up considering that my two Master diplomas and extended field research qualified me to the level of their teaching staff. I was invited a number of times to teach sessions on classes of methods and methodology. I was also invited to give a speech about the Bologna process and “how it messed up higher education in Europe”: a talk which I never gave. What I was never invited to do was to give a talk on my own research or to share my observations on classes, which I found paradoxical in a university that advocated for participatory approaches and required engagement of scholars with the community.

With the experts from the Ministry, on the other hand, my encounters were confined to the interviews. I was typically given half an hour and had to struggle to extend the interview beyond this tiny slot of time— either by asking for an extra session, or — when I was lucky — when the respondent got inspired and started eating into their own time. A successful interview with an expert would thus take up to one hour and a half in a single session,

though not always did I manage to get that much. Getting the information I was looking for seemed to require a lot of effort. With a few exceptions, this happened after at least half an hour of didactic introduction. I often collected stories cast in the same words I heard in public forums or read in interviews published in the press.

In order to go beyond these limitations I adapted my strategies of interviewing and inquiry, being more systematic about asking follow up questions, and extending my ethnographic observations and historical knowledge about “the Bolivarian Revolution”. During the interviews I ended up using more impertinent or sensitive questions which would at times amuse, and at others annoy my informants--usually about students’ employment prospects, or about the systematic publication and dissemination of the knowledge that the university produced in the instances of applied fieldwork with communities. More often than not this identified me in their eyes as an instrumental, ethnocentric colonialist, but resulted in more passionate and profound personal opinions, stories and sometimes information that would contradict the informed expert narrative. When this strategy worked out, I often got a warm hand-shake at the end of the interview and a confession made with a smile that I had made the person think and speak passionately about things they cared about and had taken for granted in their daily routine.

The other strategy consisted in enriching the interview material through vignettes or ethnographic accounts of longer episodes of participant observation in classes at the university, or in public spaces and events. This work gave me another entry point into the theory, historical frame, and ideology that the discourses were infused with, and into how these related to the messy reality--how the “ought to” related to the “being”. Last, but not least, I also carried out historical research through secondary literature about the roots and routes of the student and academic movements which joined Hugo Chávez in his Bolivarian process. The history allowed me to understand better and more processually the ways in which the dominant ideology, cosmology and teleology of the regime formed to support the narrative of the Revolution: which names, events, and theories came up more often than others, and how and why they mattered to the academics.

Like every field research, mine was a mixture between pre-established decisions and contingent occurrences. I had no previous acquaintance within the university and only a few outside. At the Ministry of Higher Education I was helped by one of the Vice Minister

Tibisay Hung's advisors, to get access to most people of charge in different services. At UBV my encounters and breakthroughs were more contingent, casual, and based on a snow-ball type of approach. I went to the classes to which I was invited. Although I gained access to most departments, my observations mostly took place at the four where I created a rapport with certain professors and students: Social Management for Local Governance, Political Studies and Government, Architecture, and Environmental Sciences. This limited my sample, but allowed me to focus on sciences dealing with government and infrastructure. My political and theoretical background turned out to be a central issue. I went into the field with a lot of expectations from a heavy theoretical and biographical baggage. When I arrived in Venezuela, I intuitively expected to side with the opposition. Following conversations with two former Hungarian dissidents about my project in particular, I believed that I would be spied on by a secret police and that a file would be created about my fieldwork: a procedure which scholars of former socialist regimes have been subject to and have been recently writing on (Garton Ash 2010; Verdery 2013). The wise advice of late Venezuelan anthropologist Fernando Coronil--"You never know, Venezuela is so random"--did little to open my mind. Upon my arrival I often felt defensive and made a lot of efforts to protect my data. In 2007, at the time I designed my project, Eastern Europe was slowly waking from the shock therapy applied after the collapse of the Berlin Wall. In countries such as my native Bulgaria, being on the Left was still seen as a heresy. My research on the dialogue between the Eastern European dissidents and critical intellectuals from the West of Europe (Ivancheva 2007) made me aware that 1989 brought no real alternative. Having lived in Western Europe and become interested in groups that openly declared themselves "on the Left" had shown me that the dream of socialism did not die in 1989 or 1991: new attempts were made around the world to establish equality, redistribution and social justice.

It took me only about a month of living in Caracas to realize that the analogies with Soviet-style authoritarian state socialism, so abundant in the opposition's discourses, were not that relevant. The reality of Venezuela was that of a society with newly acquired media freedom, where everyone could freely write and talk against the regime. Elites kept the same lavish life-styles, property and benefits they had before. Still, analogies between Chávez's social democracy and the "totalitarian" socialism in Eastern Europe sold well abroad. Students, media, and NGO activists sponsored by international organizations traveled across the



Western world campaigning against the so-called dictatorship of Chávez. In the former Socialist bloc they were unconditionally supported not just by neoliberal think-tanks, but also by former dissidents including Lech Wałęsa and the late Václav Havel. Knowing their story, as well as the stories of much less known and less protected dissidents in our region, I could not but wonder: in the 1980s Havel and Wałęsa were not allowed to freely travel abroad, and openly speak at mass rallies at home, present their work in official bookstores, criticizing the government without any police intervention. In Venezuela something very different was going on, as I witnessed, most blatantly, at the launch of the essay collection *The Totalitarianism of the XXI century* in 2009. This book, as hundreds of others, contained essays by academic from public universities who could openly declare Chávez a dictator.

I also quickly realized that the polarization of the Venezuelan society was one I had never witnessed in other countries - not even in post-1989 Bulgaria where the “communist” and “anti-communist” labels, although common, had little relation to concrete political programs. In Venezuela the political polarization was a daily experience – from spatial segregation between places visited or avoided, individuals met or not, clothing styles, and time you saw on the display of your watch<sup>3</sup>. While I was freely navigating between different parts of town as an unattached foreigner, dizzyed by the spectacle of social differences and gaps within a single day of living in Caracas, I could feel both the worry and contempt of people on both sides. Acquaintances from the opposition were openly worried about me being in the poor areas, and about my conversion into a *Chavista*. This sentiment was mirrored by my Chavista friends and interlocutors, indignant about me spending time “on the other side”. I soon realized that in order to gain the confidence of the professors and students of UBV and academic experts of the Ministry, I could not afford to do fieldwork on both sides of the divide. As the Chavista side was the one which I was more interested in, and was quickly becoming more sympathetic to, taking sides stopped being an effort. It became a deep methodological and theoretical conviction that the more I understood the history and lived in Venezuela’s deeply stratified society, the less I could claim scholarly “objectivity” if this had to mean being equally ethnographically involved with both parties.

Having taken a side, however, did not make access necessarily easier or suspend suspicion against me. I was still a white middle-class female foreigner. I did not come from a recognized network of activists, and did not master the relevant revolutionary discourse,

ethos, and *habitus*. I came with challenging questions and historically grounded skepticism to parts of the Bolivarian process that I found problematic. My questions in interviews did not always win me my respondents' sympathies. The very fact that I came from Eastern Europe often meant that I would be seen as a compromised figure. The analogies I made at times with the Eastern European experience usually came to naught: "Your countries failed the socialist project," was I told a number of times. For my informants the chapter of historical parallels was definitely closed. From the first day in the field, George Soros – the founder of the Central European University where I did my studies – was mentioned as one of the key enemies of the regime. My school figured on a number of presentations at UBV as one that produced spies for the CIA, the US oligarchy, and staff for think-tanks and the international "Colored Revolutions". To top it all, in the first month I arrived in Venezuela a delegation of former dissidents and liberal intellectuals headed by the former Bulgarian Prime Minister Fillip Dimitrov appeared in Caracas to side with the opposition. I had to state in the most explicit ways that I had nothing to do with this event for UBV professors and students to stop I looking down on me.

The suspicion that I was an agent of imperialist interest came along with a lack of knowledge of the history of my country and region. I was asked on occasions about the imperial history of Bulgaria – a country that was colonized by the Ottoman Empire for more centuries than Venezuelan was under Spanish rule. My country had since been a stake for imperial interests from Russia, USSR, the US, or EU and the self-colonization of our own pro-Western elite. And while I managed to overcome these prejudices through the trust of long-term acquaintance with some of my informants, others gave me little choice but to reconcile with the limitations they imposed on our communications. Suspicion was generally not a personal matter however. I was soon to understand that I was doing fieldwork in a country where there was little value in archives or self-historicization.

Although colonial states and new states generated and maintained archives in their attempts to order and control populations (Karabinos 2008), this practice was not always pursued diligently in a former peripheral colony like Venezuela. It was a part of the Spanish empire which, unlike Britain, was not a "data-intensive empire" (Knight 2000). In addition no significant post-liberation industrial bourgeoisie was there to develop it. Post-colonial theorists such as Edward Said were slowly gaining confidence that "[t]o have such

knowledge of such a thing [archive] is to dominate it, to have authority over it” (Said 1994: 32). Yet, among Venezuelan intellectuals related to the Bolivarian Revolution documents were considered political, and thus the public knowledge of archive documents created by previous administrations was systematically destroyed by their successors.

Due to this limitation, my research of the relatively short history of UBV was confined to materials in the daily national press, which was often hostile to or celebratory of the Chavista “ideological” university. Instead of creating an archive of its own activities, the new administration was engaged in the development of shiny propaganda materials. Asking about access to minutes of meetings and policy documents I would often receive pens, key-holders, mouse-pads, paper-files, notebooks, and other revolutionary paraphernalia. I came back from the field with a significant number of objects which they were producing to honor the Revolution and its President, which became the affective corpo-reality of the new government. They presented a new way in which the magical state (Coronil 1997) reproduced its material splendor and made itself visible and tangible to society, rather than society visibly to itself (Scott 1998). Gaining access to this simulacrum was often an imaginative practice: one that required my participation in rallies, learning the revolutionary ethos and paroles, and speaking out of absences and substitute presences. They also explained, however, the specific parallel institutional universe which the Bolivarian state represented. As a state within the state, they had created a self-referential, parallel system the elements of which stood for each other in tautological and defensive fashion, deflecting (often explicitly) the type of colonial gaze that a science such as anthropology has traditionally been casting on its objects.

If revolutions are difficult to make they are probably many times harder to maintain and the radical social changes they seek to bring about, to enact. In my study of Bolivarian intellectuals, I show how an intellectual field effects and is affected by the contingent and often messy reality of the project of profound social change that is called the Bolivarian Revolution. In their daily effort to dismantle ossified old structures and establish fragile new social institutions, actors, their practices and their contradictions make a powerful illustration of the difficulty of making change happen.

One of the paradoxes which is key to explain the difficulty of social change, and that might define socialist regimes beyond the case of UBV, is the creation of a privileged group (rather

than a class), which I call the “radical nobility.” The field of Bolivarian higher education, I argue, is structured by a characteristic asymmetry in the distribution of revolutionary capital--a form of symbolic capital which combines radical credentials gained from having participated in the former student Left with the traditional credentials of university degrees obtained from traditional universities. In practice indeed, the creation and accreditation of a radically different “new socialist university” has depended exclusively on the legitimacy of traditional Left-wing intellectuals. Because the university is not simply an institution of state reproduction but also an arena of contention, I scrutinize the daily negotiations of the contradictions that unfold from such symbolic dominance within an egalitarian institution.

Another paradox is that the social volatility created by revolutions contributes to the maintenance of their teleological energy. Instability allows actors to decline responsibility for the current state of affairs, and to decline taking into account even honest and constructive critiques: a risk and a responsibility, which the present dissertation takes in earnest. Not sparing my own frustrations and infatuations with the intellectual agents of the Bolivarian process, and not claiming that I could have done better in their place, my hope is to give a critical perspective that feeds back into this and further efforts at radical social change. And while it is difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate a process which is still in many ways in the making, or predict its next developments, I do hope to provide informed insight into the challenges of using the university as a tool for social change.

### A Roadmap

The chapters of the dissertation present different aspects of the participation of academic intellectuals in the process of higher education reform in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The body of the dissertation is divided into two sections. The first one is based on theoretical works and secondary historical sources as well as on narratives collected during the interviews I conducted in Venezuela. This part sets the theoretical and historical background, introduces actors in the context of preceding decades, and puts this historical material in theoretical perspective. The second part is dedicated to the concrete processes of teaching and learning at the university observed through ethnographic fieldwork.

**Chapter 1** provides a theoretical frame for studying intellectuals and academic fields. I start the discussion of the old and new approaches in the sociology of intellectuals, which shed light on the role of intellectuals in processes of social change. I then go on to theorize the relationship between intellectuals and the state, intellectuals and class, and the position of intellectuals vis-à-vis a homogenizing field of higher education. I first discuss research case studies done in the West, and then show the specifics of the Latin America, and Venezuela intellectual fields. I discuss intellectuals and their potential to gain power in and through the nation state, and also pay attention to the hierarchies and relations of power they reproduce.

Chapters 2 and 3 present the history of Venezuela through the prism of struggles over higher education. **Chapter 2** focuses on the period 1958-2002, describing and analyzing the political, economic and social dynamics which undergirded the ascent of Hugo Chávez to power. This analysis shows the important role played by student and academic communities in the rise of Chávez and of the Bolivarian project. The chapter, finally, introduces the Bolivarian reforms by presenting the first years of Bolivarian rule, drawing attention in particular on the decision of the Bolivarian government not to support radical intellectuals in their fight for reform at traditional universities, but to open a new parallel system of higher education. This choice, based on the justified fear of military intervention, established a path-dependent trajectory of reform--one in which starting from scratch with experimental projects has been preferred to building up on stable and enduring institutions – a topic I elaborate on in the next chapter.

**Chapter 3** deals with the following period, from 2003 to 2008 and is based on the biographical information of a single (yet in many ways representative) individual, María Egilda Castellano, the first Rector and the mastermind behind the Bolivarian University. She was summoned back to the Ministry of Higher Education soon after the creation of UBV and started to work there on a new government program. Castellano's story, I argue, illustrates the continuities and ruptures in the Bolivarian programs of higher education. It also illustrates the ambivalent relation of the Bolivarian regime to academic intellectuals. On the one hand the latter are used to legitimize the government's expertise and its higher education reform as based on traditional academic credentials and achievements. On the other hand, they are seen as replaceable – if not totally disposable – and are subject to a policy of constant circulation of managing officers. One important consequence of this

dispositif is that it stifles critique that tends to emerge from loci of administrative power about the implementation of the Bolivarian project. Castellano's trajectory demonstrates intellectuals' actual lack of autonomy and authority vis-à-vis the Bolivarian state.

This motif reoccurs in **Chapter 4** where I discuss the positions and trajectories that constitute and are constituted by Venezuela's higher education field. While university reform shifts constantly from one policy to the next, what remains constant is the peculiar privilege of its radical nobility—a group endowed with the double capital of radical and academic credentials. While they do not reject the distinctions they acquired from traditional public universities (on which UBV also relies for its accreditation), these intellectuals who have militated on the Left receive executive positions in Ministries and in university administration. Their distinction is respected and very much taken for granted by their younger colleagues and students who have neither their past in the movements, nor their advanced academic training. While this hierarchy remains permanent, I argue that the precarious life-standard and working conditions endured by UBV professors and graduates might eventually lead them to challenge further the stratification that structures the Bolivarian academic field.

**Chapter 5** uses ethnographic and interview materials collected during my participation in the teacher's training program. I show that, the decision not to reform the traditional universities through coercion put the Bolivarian government on a risky path—one in fact that probably doomed its symbolic struggle to failure. By becoming a parallel institution UBV became highly dependent on traditional universities for their accreditation. Pressed to evaluate certain teaching and research practices, it had to subscribe and legitimate the old values of the national and global cultural elite. The old dichotomy between elite and mass higher education could thus be reproduced within the Revolutionary UBV itself. For this reason, despite the attempts of the rank-and-file teaching staff to subvert the rules of academic and radical nobility and its hierarchy, they still have to work on a basis of rules defined through traditional academic power games.

**Chapter 6** deals with teaching and learning at UBV. I use materials from participant observation in classrooms and at the remote urban and rural communities. I present the day-to-day challenges and contradictions which emerge from classroom interactions in which horizontal methods of critical pedagogy are implemented while behaviors of both professors

and students are those of people who administer and receive authoritative, inspiring knowledge. Revolutionary, male charisma keeps regulating the professor-student relationship and it is what defines a good teacher. Observation of UBV faculty and students at work in a *barrio* community for their applied fieldwork (*proyecto*), points to another phenomenon, showing how the *proyecto* becomes subsumed under a larger imperative of citizenship building. Extensive fieldwork with communities allegedly puts the educational experience in the service of communities but also do so in the service of the national state. Instead of simply providing education opportunities, UBV and its participatory methodology has been used by the Bolivarian government to make people socialize in its new institutions and internalize their values and norms. The process makes poor women active agents of “the benevolent state”, empowering them symbolically while keeping them and their household economically dominated.

**In Chapter 7** I examine the cracks created by internal opposition to the regime. I narrate the emergence and decay of a Left-wing student movement on the UBV campus. In my first interviews with professors I realized that they expressed disappointment that their own students did not inherit their radical tradition. Yet, when UBV faculty and the university administration were challenged by the emergence of a new UBV student movement, they were all but happy about their students’ activity. They actively negated the radical potential and claims of the movement and discarded it as clientelist and reactionary. Under the critical gaze of both the members of the radical nobility and of new Bolivarian educators, students slowly watered down their critiques to fit within the framework of the Revolution as it was defined by their elders. Contextualizing this wave of protest within the Venezuelan and global history of contemporary student protests, I argue that it reflects the paradoxes of internal critique in all post-revolutionary contexts: the impossibility to critique the agents of a Revolution who assume that no discourse could be more radical than their own.

UBV administration and professors’ hostility toward the student movement echoes the chill cast by Chávez over Left-wing intellectuals when he first acceded to power. It also echoes the quelling of critique in 2009 when a group of Left-wing intellectuals was deterred in their attempt of constructive critique and feedback: an episode to which I return in the **Epilogue** of my study, and reflect on through an interview from 2013 with one of the intellectuals engaged who organized this event. Such instances are telling of how, despite the newly

obtained status of radical nobility, even traditional intellectuals with a radical past remain the dominated part of the dominant class (Bourdieu 1998), their autonomy subjected to the will of the actual power elite.



## **Chapter 1: Intellectuals and the Bolivarian higher education field: theoretical framing and positioning**

In the current chapter I theorize the position the intellectuals as agents within the Bolivarian field of higher education that is intrinsically connected to the power field of a national state as an arena of class struggle, and to the global field of higher education. Given the specifics of the intellectuals, related to UBV, whose variety of positions I described in more detail in the introduction, I discuss a relatively bounded group of intellectuals, as defined by their relatedness to an academic institution of instruction and knowledge production. I do not aim to present an exhaustive picture of forms of intellectual public intervention under the Bolivarian government. Instead, focusing primarily on the intellectuals in the Bolivarian higher education field, I use theoretical tools developed within the tradition of the sociology of intellectuals in order to discuss the positions Bolivarian intellectuals take and relations of power they enter through their participation in the Bolivarian university reform. I also pay attention to how they relate to the broader power field, and if they manage to subvert their position of what Pierre Bourdieu called the dominated sector of the dominant class (1988).

In this chapter I mostly focus on the distinctions within the Bolivarian higher education field, and develop the topic of its historical and hierarchical relation with the state in the next chapter, it is worth reminding however that “the educational institution, which played a critical role in the reproduction of the distribution of cultural capital and thus in the reproduction of the structure of social space, has become a central stake in the struggle for the monopoly on dominant positions” (Bourdieu 1998: 5). In this, the present chapter already suggests a main argument in my dissertation. Sociologists of intellectuals in the West and in Latin American have predicted the emergence of plural intellectual spheres with agents with organic ties to subaltern classes, mediating popular intellectualization (Petras 1990; Eyal and Buchholz 2010; Moraña 2010). Despite these predictions, which correspond to the initial intentions of the Bolivarian higher education reform, the latter has revealed another trend. The members of the “radical nobility” – graduates of the traditional public universities and members of their student Left – kept the dominant positions within the Bolivarian higher education field. Yet again, the heretics became heresiarchs (Bourdieu 1988).

# 1. The category of intellectuals in history and research

The question of the intellectuals' participation in government, and in radical processes of social change, has been present among social scientists throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The figure of *le savant* has been prominent around the French Revolution and Voltaire's campaign in defense of the merchant Jean Calas. Starting with the Decembrists, the Russian Tsarist-time intelligentsia became a subject of discussion during its fight against the regime. Yet, the term intellectual in reference to the involvement of educated classes in politics has only emerged at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the Dreyfuss affair (Jennings 1993, 1997; Acton 1997). It posed these questions not in reference to abstract justice and morality, but in defense of a specific interest of intellectuals as status group and a segment of a class. It reflected the increased number of people in Europe who did not depend on manual labor, but worked in the free professions. Those were the lucky few who had access to education and relative comfort compared to the proletariat. Even when they belonged to the bourgeoisie or the aristocracy, they shared some other tastes and life-styles (Jennings and Kemp-Welch 1997).

While the focus of the Dreyfuss affair was the self-interest and protection of intellectuals, critique was not spared to this newly self-aware group. The first voices concerned with the position of the intellectuals, came from those skeptical about the participation of the intellectuals in revolutionary movements. In the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century already fear was growing among those reading Marx's predictions of the proletarian revolution. This fear was articulated most acutely by anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, who said that the new socialist state would require a complex governance of the masses. Instead of remaining an intermediary entity that would "die a natural death" and transform into the cherished communist classless society, this government would usurp power on behalf of the knowledge-controlling class. They would subject the working class to the rule of a tiny minority: to "the reign of scientific intelligence, the most aristocratic, despotic, arrogant and contemptuous of all regimes" (quoted in King and Szelenyi 2004). Bakunin's thoughts anticipated some of the questions which the Russian Bolshevik Revolution had to address. While an intellectual vanguard usurped power on behalf of the proletariat in Tsarist Russia, its leader, Vladimir Lenin recognized both the threat of traditional intellectuals and their potential: resistant to structural change, intellectuals were still seen as potential educators of

the revolutionary proletariat who would help the working class become aware of the broader social and political processes (Lenin 1989; 1992).

A political leader of the Bolshevik Revolution, Lenin said that the proletariat revolution would abolish the bourgeois state, and only the remnants of the proletarian state were to wither away later on (Lenin 1992). In this, intellectuals who were to help proletarians in constructing dual power (*dvoevlastie*): revolutionary parallel structures of workers and soldiers, which would replace the legislative power, the army and police, and the state bureaucracy with more immediate council power (Lenin 1989; 1999). Lenin never had a systematic view on the role of intellectuals, but from his scarce writings on the topic it appears that he believed that they could be used in the political education and financial support of the working class vanguard of the party. He had little patience for the bourgeois intellectuals related to the Tsarist regime and its institutions, but expected devoted Marxists intellectuals not to use their production to explain to workers about the dire living conditions of the proletariat. They were, instead, to inform them about political developments and ideas in order to raise their class consciousness (Lenin 1989). Lenin trusted the intellectual capacities of the working class, and insisted that workers should be given a better chance: those who were more talented, he reasoned, deserved a preferential treatment by the socialists. He recommended a ratio of intellectuals to workers of 2:8 in all party committees as a “pedagogical” task (Lenin 1992). At the same time, scientific knowledge was a necessary condition for the development of socialist consciousness, and the bourgeois intelligentsia was the agent that could develop science and teach it to the proletariat: after the Revolution all distinction between proletarians and intellectuals would be effaced (Lenin 1989).

After Lenin’s death in 1924, Leon Trotsky used Lenin’s theory to oppose the new Stalinist Bureaucracy. In *The Workers’ State, Thermidor and Bonapartism* (1935) and *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936), Trotsky discussed the Soviet state as “the historical instrument of the working class” that used the national means of production to develop the economy and culture, thus preparing “the conditions for a genuine emancipation of the workers through the abolition of bureaucracy and of social inequalities (Trotsky 1973). As one of the early critics of the new power of bureaucracy over the Revolution, Trotsky compared the domination of the bureaucracy in the Soviet Union to the domination by the Thermidor in post-Revolutionary France: redistributing the gains of the revolution from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie and

leaving the masses aside. Trotsky critiqued “turncoat bourgeois” who joined the upper layer of the workers movement in an ever growing bureaucracy that dominated over the workers (Trotsky 1973; 1998). Research done on the Soviet Union in the Stalinist era has shown that distinctions did not disappear, not even within the higher education field. While the socialist development of the USSR was measured according to the criteria of industrialization and military warfare, old institutions like the Soviet Academy of Sciences were revamped as spaces of privilege of those among the old intellectual elite, who survived the repressions (Fitzpatrick 1979).

The first volumes in the field of sociology of intellectuals, produced in the interwar era, shared some of these concerns (Kurzman and Owens 2002). Antonio Gramsci’s work opened a tradition which saw intellectuals as part of or bounded to other social classes. The Italian philosopher and devoted trade unionist saw a potential threat of traditional intellectuals who sided with the ruling elites. At the same time, he professed the commitment of intellectuals to the creation of an independent socio-cultural and political consciousness among the subaltern populations: all those classes subjugated to the ruling class, which Gramsci saw as a category bigger than the industrial working class (Gramsci 1971: 5-14). Gramsci also thought of the mechanism of “dual power” as a form of revolutionary strategy. Yet, while Lenin was dealing with the top-down government of the Tsarist state, Gramsci spoke of the “integral state” in interwar Europe. This new form of government employed both the insitutionalized coercion of the consolidated political class (political society) and the soft power of the forces of consensus on the social terrain (civil society) (Gramsci 1971). In this political conjuncture, dual power would mean creating counter-hegemony in the basis of the integral state – civil society – and thus decoupling the mutually reinforcing repressive apparatuses (see Thomas 2011). In this conjuncture, Gramsci did not suggest the creation of alternative power structures outside the state. He claimed that it was important to change the balance of power within the state itself. This would entail a “war of position” destroying the state slowly from the inside, instead of a war of movement dismantling it at once. In this process, the institutions of state power would need to be recuperated by intellectuals organically related to class, and used for popular empowerment of the subaltern classes.

Beyond the Gramscian paradigm, discussing intellectuals as related to class, the 20<sup>th</sup> century sociology of intellectuals had two more trends (Kurzman and Owens 2002). In the second

trend, the agenda was set by Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge. Mannheim discussed class, location and generation as crucial to knowledge. Intellectuals were not outsiders of class conflict. Yet, especially those in the social sciences were seen by Mannheim as being able to transcend their class position: becoming unattached or "freely floating" within the class structure, they were able to bring together particular political positions and achieve universal truth (Mannheim 1952). The third trend, known as the new class theory, was started by Julien Benda, analyzed intellectuals as a class-in-itself. Benda's work *The Betrayal of the Intellectuals*, which he wrote in response to the Dreyfuss trial, spoke of the treason of German and French intellectuals, who became apologists, if not mouthpieces of racism, nationalism, and war. Similar theory was applied to the rising new educated elite in both capitalist and socialist states (Gouldner 1979; Szélenyi and Konrád 1979). Drawing heavily on Leon Trotsky's analogy of the bureaucratic Stalinist state as the Thermidor in post-Revolutionary France, redistributing the gains from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie and leaving the masses aside, some authors spoke of "a new bureaucratic collectivism" (Antonio Carlo) or "total bureaucratic capitalism" (Cornelius Castoriadis) (in King and Szélenyi 2004: xx): all processes which positioned intellectuals as a group with an explicit class interest, which could subvert power relations for their benefits.

New class theory was one of the tools to discuss the bureaucratization and new stratification in state socialist countries. The main proponents of new class theory in the socialist world were the Yugoslav author Milovan Đilas (1957) and the Hungarian sociologists Ivan Szélenyi and Gyorgy Konrád (1979). Đilas saw the members of the Communist party as bestowing upon themselves the ownership over the new means of production under state socialist rule, namely the political control which he saw as a form of property. Đilas predicted and then observed that this new knowledgeable ruling class would come to power and use cosmetic populist redistribution but would then decline because of internal conflicts over power and corruption (Đilas 1983). Konrád and Szélenyi theorized a generational gap in post-1956 Hungary. First generation socialist intellectuals, who joined the echelon of state power, often came from the humanities and social sciences. They shared a popular sentiment and belief in socialist ideals. Recruited to the Party due to their class background or political commitment, they moralized on its behalf. Yet despite their attempt to integrate the working class and peasants into the new welfare institutions, they remained mostly inapt to reform

their countries. The 1970s were characterized with the rise of a new technocratic class. Coming from the party *nomenklatura* or bourgeois background, they had chosen a technical science career-track. Expert knowledge eclipsed critical thinking and socialist sensitivity. This process led to the decay of socialist ideals even among party cadres. It allowed these liberal technocrats to turn their credentials into a convertible currency once socialism ended: when liberal democracy and free market became the only game in town, the new capitalism was built not by real capitalists, but by the technocratic elite (Eyal et al. 2000; Lavergne 2010).

In the decade after World War II the US became one of the countries where sociologists paid special attention to educated members of society and their relations to power structures. Similarly to the rise of the Eastern European technocrat, some Western countries witnessed the advent of the white-collar worker: commercial or insurance agents gained proximity to and leverage on economic and political power. Charles W. Mills called the automatic and stark individualism of such educated experts a “salesmanship mentality” (Mills 2002): the specific disposition with which this new bureaucracy served the power elite in its reinforcement of their economic and military power in America and beyond (Mills 1999). Against this background the global 1968 took place. It was a rebellion in which the economic bread-and-butter demands of the Old Left were presented along with claims for political liberties of minority groups. A generation of students rioted on behalf of and side-by-side with workers, sexual and ethnic minorities, and people leading liberation struggles against mighty empires. Students also fought for their own free expression, and liberation from the oppressive norms of their parents’ generation. The riots coincided with the golden age of the welfare state in Europe and America. In the time of the rise of mass universities, an increasing number of people could benefit from the “imputed” relation between productivity gains and education: this made US sociologist Alvin Gouldner declare intellectuals as “our best card in history” (Gouldner 1979: 28-31). Yet, especially in the discipline of sociology, where many radicals worked, scholars lost their adequate language and institutional relations to speak back to state power (McAdam 2007).

In continental Europe, sociological analysis showed that the proximity of intellectuals with state power was not based on language and policy impact only. In his book *The State Nobility* (1998) Pierre Bourdieu showed how in France the academic field served less as a form to transmit knowledge and expertise, and more as a tool of reproduction of privilege within a

chosen number of elite families related to state power. The exclusive entry of students into “preparatory schools” was a key tool in this process. Next generations of members of the elite were trained in recognizable *habitus*. The *habitus* is a set of embodied codes of conduct and dispositions. Inherent from one’s own position within the social structure, it could be developed in the process of socialization and is expressed in language, gestures, and even expressions of grief and humor. While they reveal class adherence, they could be selectively activated in the competition over resources and power positions. Using the language of capital to describe this field of power relations, structured by certain positions and the resources needed to obtain them, Bourdieu compared this process with shareholding of symbolic power (Bourdieu 1998: 79-80). Under the term symbolic, however, he saw the problematic merger of cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu 1997). In this light, the French sociologist called getting a degree at the prestigious public schools related to high positions within the state, scientific, and intellectual production (*grandes écoles*) “dialectic of consecration and recognition”: being certified could be seen as a means of recognition and attainment of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1998: 104). In this hierarchy, gifted students from lower class background, as Bourdieu himself, were at times allowed into the hierarchy of prestige, but in these rare cases they had to symbolically reject their background in order to “convert” (Bourdieu 1998:107-108). This often provoked *hysteresis* – a dissonance between estimation of one’s abilities to mobilize personal resources and to achieve certain position, and the actual constraints in the field (Bourdieu 1984).

With their claims to an anti-authoritarian struggle and life-in-truth within the state socialist regime, dissidents in East-Central Europe created a new wave of interest in the figure of the intellectual (Tismaneanu 1990; Bozóki 1998; Ivancheva 2007; 2011). Yet, with the dissolution of state-socialism, and the entry of former dissidents into politics, they quickly gained gate-keeping positions within think-tanks, NGOs and funding networks, losing their claim to universality to particular interests (Wedel 2001). At the same time, the discursive ideal of the new subject of the post-socialist societies was not the intellectuals, but the “middle class”. This notion, which was then used as a political tool mostly, has recently reemerged as a notion in the press and empirical research (Newman 1999; Heiman et al. 2012). The term has been an empty signifier, designating selectively a category of people nested between the economic elites and the poor. They have often been described through a certain occupation related to the public or service sector and knowledge and culture

production, economic and cultural capital, and perceptions and styles of life. French sociologist Louis Chauvel has shown that this category shifts dramatically from country to country (Chauvel n.d: 6-7). In England the middle class has been seen as a comfortable class accounting for 5- 10% of the population. In France the middle classes (*classes moyennes*) are those who aggregate around the mean of the average income i.e. 50-80% of the population. According to Chauvel, large state-driven reforms in the social welfare state since the WWII have created a class of civil servants, dependent on state-employment. And while in Venezuela and other peripheral countries these numbers might be different, what is sure is that there has been that with the expansion of the university system, the sector classified as “middle-class” has steadily grown. Since the early 1980s the security and stability created for has been steadily decreasing: a process, which Chauvel calls “*declassment*” or lower social mobility, based on the experience of stagnation, new inequalities and social insecurity.

And while by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century an increasing number of scholars started mourning over the end of the public intellectual (discussion in Eyal and Buchholz 2010) Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, and Zygmund Bauman called for a critical rethinking of the role of intellectuals. Bauman differentiated between the intellectual legislator (a moralizer with a claim to universal truth) and the intellectual as interpreter of realities (1987). Foucault developed the concept of the “specific intellectual” (1984): one who uses his or her specialized knowledge to disclose power and domination in all its forms, and with the acute awareness that intellectuals are themselves an instrument of this domination. Even if his view of reproduction through elite schools was rather pessimistic, Bourdieu defended the academic institution as the only vantage point of critical thinking. In his preface to the English edition of *Homo Academicus* (1988) Bourdieu identified a number of academics, who were active around the protests of the French May in 1968, stayed marginalized within the French academy, never gaining considerate prestige in relation to state power elites. Many of these men – Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and Michel Foucault, among others – could not get academic tenure at the *grandes écoles*. They achieved, however, international prestige and publication in specific outlets and became popular in the local press and public debate. In this, “the heretics became heresiarchs”, thus capitalizing on their revolutionary past and subverting the hierarchy of academic power (Bourdieu 1988: xix-xx).



This new paradigm of thinking intellectuals has most recently been taken at earnest by a new generation of sociologists of intellectuals, who define their category of research not as a bounded group, but as a “movement, by which knowledge and expertise are mobilized to inform a value-laden intervention into the public sphere” (Eyal and Buchholz 2010: 117). This definition of Gil Eyal and Larissa Buchholz goes against the 20<sup>th</sup> century sociology of intellectuals: while in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century its main aim was to define intellectuals as an object of scientific research, by the end of this century this literature already debated the disappearance of the public intellectual. Against this background, Eyal and Buchholz sought for a more inclusive definition which would once again render research on intellectuals viable and pertinent. The two sociologists came up with a definition in which neither intellectual labor is limited to cultural production, nor is “public sphere” seen as a single space of limited access and distinction. The authors explore intellectuals in terms of their production within markets and fields, and as public deployment of expertise. The program, which Eyal and Buchholz present, is especially useful to do research within a plurality of public spheres, which new media and forms of communication have expanded. The program has a potential to include under the label “intellectual” new forms of public intervention, which were previously discarded as irrelevant within the bourgeois public sphere. New forms of intellectual intervention and articulation of intellectuality become visible through this new theoretical lens. Such a program also runs the risk to expand the category “intellectual” to every form of interaction in a public space and depoliticize the power relations which it entails. Yet, it is a very useful tool to think of intellectuals in Latin America and Venezuela, where social networks and community media have started to function as a counter-hegemonic space (Moraña 2010; Schiller 2013).

## 2. Latin American intellectuals: articulation of class interest or popular intellectualization?

In Latin America and further (semi-)peripheral contexts, the term of intellectuals has been used to describe a larger proportion of people engaged in intellectual activities, in certain degree regardless of their certification (Castañeda 1993). Liberation struggles against colonial oppression were often led by intellectuals from the new Creole elites with university education from colonial universities, who took power ahead of agencies and ministries in newly formed national governments (Lynch 2006). Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

student movements had become important actors in Latin American politics. In the 1920s students started mass waves of protests in countries such as Mexico, Argentina, Chile, and Venezuela. They demanded social change for the emerging educated middle classes and became important actors in the political systems of many countries in the region (Torres and Schugurensky 2002). Former student movement activists have often been part of the political class or led mass based social movements against it, as respectively the members of the Generation 28 and the organized guerilla in Venezuela (Skurski 1993; Ellner 2008). The Cuban revolution also brought into politics, if not into government, a new generation of political activists, often young and well educated. Yet, in the rare cases when such movements were victorious or visible for society at large, intellectual projects were often side-tracked into autocratic forms of government (Ordorika 2003; Ellner 2008).

In her book *In the shadows of the state*, one of the few attempts to systematically study intellectuals in Latin America, Nicola Miller spoke of the “containment” of Latin American intellectual institutions within a network of state control (Miller 1999). This network had given the state, and not national bourgeoisies, almost exclusive control over universities, forms of promotion, prizes, fellowships, appointments, and publishing (Miller 1999: 45). The state had become the gatekeeper to all forms of cultural capital. Such a centrality of the state was a consequence of a peripheral development. By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century most countries had no significant number of educated graduates, and consequently – public interested in the intellectual production outside the state institutions: so the state became the main sponsor of any public intellectual activity (Miller 1999: 43-44; also Lomnitz 2001: 233). At the same time, in their attempt to quell anger and resist the local landed elites, state administrations supported actors, engaged in cultural and knowledge production that could legitimate their policies. For Miller the dependence on the state meant that intellectuals could not keep their critical distance: they were invited (and often accepted) to join state administrations in fights against national economic elites and their international allies (Miller 1999: 245). Put differently by Columbia’s world-famous writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez, “The state and the powers that be both need us [intellectuals] and fear us. In the history of power in Latin America, there are only military dictatorships or intellectuals... there was so much cuddling of the intellectuals by the state” (quoted in Castañeda 1993: 94)

Claudio Lomnitz saw a more complex relation between intellectuals and the state. Identifying a specific generational gap within Mexican anthropology around 1968, he narrated how anthropologists who studied indigenous and rural communities (*indigenistas*) were attacked by newcomers to the discipline. The use of state resources to both indigenize Mexican modernity, and modernize indigenous communities was not seen as sufficiently radical and critical of the capitalist state (Lomnitz 2001: 231). According to Lomnitz, however, the accusations against the “technocratic” anthropologists to have sold off for a public position (Lomnitz 2001: 233), did not reflect the main risk to which the discipline was exposed: not state co-optation, but an increasing market pressures. Besides, while the *indigenistas* connected the hinterland with the urban contexts, the post-1968 Mexican anthropologists mostly aspired to enter a theoretical dialogue with international theoretical traditions. In this, the new generation lost its immediate relation to subaltern communities. Its key representatives developed a new trope of “deep Mexico”, where “deep” dramatized the racial and cultural differences between urban Mexicans and their rural and indigenous compatriots. In this, the “depth” remained a category deaf to a plethora of local forms of intellectual activity that have remained silenced. Lomnitz claimed that there was a need of intellectual engagement in developing geographies of silence, and researching forms of intellectuality in different communities and localities (Lomnitz 2001: 266).

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the leading intellectuals in Latin America often became subject of censorship, brutal repression, and often exile (Petras 1990; Castañeda 1993). This happened especially in countries as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and Peru which were subject to the rule of right-wing military juntas. For James Petras the 1960s generation of Latin American intellectuals had organic relation to class and popular struggles (Petras 1990: 105). While many intellectuals were on the Left, only the 1968 support of Fidel Castro to Czechoslovakia’s invasion by the USSR broke partly this allegiance. With the coming of the dictatorships, many of intellectuals had to follow the trend of subordination to political and market pressures, to which administrators, businesses and migrant workers were also liable (Petras 1990: 91). In the 1980s a new generation of Left-wing and liberal intellectuals became increasingly dependent on foreign audiences and networks. In a process similar to what has been described for dissidents under state socialist regimes, who (Tismaneanu 1990; Wedel 2001; Ivancheva 2007), international NGOs and foundations aided Latin American intellectuals. While trying to keep autonomy from the repressive state,

they became subordinated to Western governments and private agencies: Western funding allowed part of these “internationally” oriented “institutionalized intellectuals” (Petras 1990) significant means of research and more affluent life-styles. To sustain both, they developed an elaborate and depoliticized vocabulary which glossed over topics as imperial extraction of economic surplus, dependency, and class struggle (Petras 1990: 108; Castañeda 1993: 94). Their research was ultimately funneled into reports tirelessly proving that accommodation with foreign economic and political elites was the only viable option (Petras 1990: 104).

While both Castañeda and Petras were critical of these developments, they both predicted a new wave of Left-wing activism and intellectual ethos in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Petras said already in the 1990s that as a reaction to the 1980s “institutional intellectuals, as well as vis-à-vis the grave economic crisis intellectuals would engage again with social movements and broader popular base (Petras 1990: 111). In the 1990s Castañeda, expressed hopes that a new Left would reemerge, that would be democratic, detached from the legacy and stigma of the USSR and Cuba, and rooted within the struggles of the subaltern classes for equality (Castañeda 1994). Yet, since the emergence of new Left wing governments, he developed the thesis of the “two Lefts” in Latin America. The “right” Left, which originated in former pro-Soviet hard-core communist parties, was, according to him, open-minded, reformist and internationalist (Lula’s Brazil, Bachelet’s Chile, and Vazquez’s Uruguay). For Castañeda, the other “wrong” Left, which stemmed from the indigenous, more organic and populist forms of the Latin American Left (Chávez’s Venezuela, Morales’s Bolivia , and Kirchner’s Argentina) was more “nationalist, strident, and close-minded” (Castañeda 2006). Castañeda neglected, however, that in the latter case, the Left developed political program, in which intellectuals were required to redevelop their organic relations to the subaltern classes. As Mabel Moraña has insisted, in such a process of “popular intellectualization”, the intellectuals do not need to take the leadership, but can be mediators between power, knowledge and subjectivity that has been formerly left mute (Moraña 2010: 19). This has been the intention of the project of the Bolivarian higher education reform.

### 3. Venezuelan Bolivarian intellectuals: a new revolutionary vanguard or the old guard's way to radical nobility?

Unlike most countries in Latin America, Venezuela did not experience a right-wing juntas and dictatorship in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Intellectuals on the Left were subjected to more discrete forms of repression, but especially after the beginning of the 1970s they were allowed to be openly on the Left and even enter the electoral struggle (Ellner 2008). While Venezuelan higher education has been systematically exclusive, those few from lower classes who had the chance to go through university training have benefited from upper mobility through higher education (Morales Gil 2003). The university sector increased steadily even in the crisis-ridden 1980s and 1990s, with 60 percent enrollment rise, expansion of the number of institutions, and a 6.8% of the state budget allotted to its development (Corrales 2007: 14). The Venezuelan university graduates took professions predominantly in the public sector – teaching, infrastructure, healthcare; many also joined the tiny, but lucrative specialized technical domains related to the nationalized petrol industry (Federal Research Division 1990). In this position, the educated classes had leverage on politics and were a force with which the official parties had to count. The narrative of the Bolivarian Revolution, the rise of Chávez has been explained with the mobilization of poor voters against the 1990s neoliberal reforms. Yet, by now it is clear that during the first election in 1998 he was backed up and voted in by members of the middle class, disenchanted with neoliberal reforms in the 1990s. It was in fact only gradually that lower classes recognized the President and supported him in the 2002 *coup d'état* (Wilpert 2007). People from the university sector, together with the army acted as a “supply side” of the high demand of cadres of the Bolivarian government (Corrales 2007).

The university reform of the Bolivarian government played a role in the eventual smooth institutionalization and incorporation of the radical Left into state power. The Venezuelan Bolivarian intellectuals had a difficult legacy to grapple with. After Eastern European and Soviet state socialism collapsed, and socialist regimes in Africa and Asia turned into autocratic varieties of state-capitalism, socialism seemed a lost cause. The Venezuelan experiment with socialism has also taken place in the era of transformed of the state, and amidst increasing waves of protest created by the constant decrease of life standards, securities, and welfare in all parts of the world. The latter had received a response in the rise

of new Left- and Right-wing autocratic populist regimes, which provided a secure discursive and symbolic identity among the excluded. They quelled the anger of the majority of their compatriots, economically dispossessed from the neoliberal austerity reforms and the growing shift of the economy from industry into financial capital. In Europe, where former socialist and social democratic parties took a neoliberal track, Right-wing populist parties ride the wave of discontent projecting the growing class cleavages on ethnic or national antagonisms (Gingrich and Banks 2006; Kalb and Halmai 2011). In Latin America, the debt crisis jeopardized even the most modest experiments of welfare states. As the stigma of Soviet communism was not pervasive, Left-wing political actors with past in internationalist communist or local populist traditions were seen again as valid contenders for power (Petras 1990; Castañeda 2006; Coronil 2011). Constructing socialism in the ruins of the Cold War required the project to be thought through vis-à-vis the contemporary geopolitical context.

The true challenge of intellectuals was to perform a higher education in Venezuela in a system where the traditional universities produced both educational expertise and hierarchies of prestige. The experiment had to face both realistic fears of foreign military intervention and the fearful realization that the knowledge elite in the country was hostile and ill-disposed toward the Bolivarian government. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, despite the proliferation of new institutions of higher learning, public universities as Simon Bolivar University (USB) or the Central University of Venezuela (UCV) remained the ones with highest academic credit and international prestige (Moreno 2008; Parra-Sandoval et al. 2010). Yet, under the neoliberal incentives of consecutive governments in the 1990s they were trying to present reforms as entry exam and student fees, which would make the universities ever more exclusive (Moreno 2008; Morales Gil 2003). Through the election of Chávez as a President and the launching of his platform of Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the intellectuals on the Left received a historical chance to change the rules of academic recruitment. Their initial intention was to make all public universities subscribe to their program of all-inclusive equitable higher education. Yet, the government did not support their campaign against actors at the traditional universities, who opposed university reform (Sánchez 2011). Thus, Left-wing intellectuals had to perform this task through a number of parallel institutions.

UBV was the vanguard university in this process. It was initially aimed to abolish distinctions and hierarchies of prestige among students and academics. Through the first policy

document of the reform – the Rector’s Document – UBV’s administration also promised to challenge the local and global hierarchy of academic institutions (UBV 2003). UBV was to be an innovative, mass university, established to fulfill three tasks at once: to provide social and economic integration of the formerly underprivileged majority of Venezuelans; to perform pedagogic and structural reform within the university; and to create the new cadres of the socialist state. It was tailored upon the ideal of the Latin American public university. Free access to higher education; co-governance of students, faculty and administration; the financial and administrative autonomy from the state; and the applied knowledge for the benefit communities beyond the university: there were all assets in this model which generations of student activists have fought to preserve (Torres and Schugersky 2002; Tünnermann 2008). Yet, by being a university, UBV was created as a counterhegemonic experiment within a global field of higher education dominated by institutions and standards set by the antagonist liberal polity.

By the late 20<sup>th</sup> century meant that different university models of administration, financing and organization – Medieval and Jesuitical, Napoleonic, Humboldtian, and the Anglo-American research university – were all gradually ‘harmonized’ (Ricken 2007). The “entrepreneurial” university became the herald of academic capitalism: the process of commercialization, marketization and privatization of higher education (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004; Bremner 2011). University bureaucracies expanded and introduced a strict audit of academic production, no longer accountable to academics, but to students, industries and further “clients” (Larkham, 1998; Strathern 2000; Wright and Rabo 2010). Academic labor became precarious and deprofessionalized (Jensen and Walker 2007; Roggero 2011). A global field of higher education emerged, tailored upon the standards of Anglo-American research universities (Marginson 2008; Hotson 2010). Intensifying flows and concentrations of knowledge, and relying on the global role of English language, these universities became ‘attractors’ for faculty and students, promising “universal”, “globally applicable” knowledge (Frank and Mayr 2007; Marginson 2007a). Through the Lisbon Strategy (2000) and the Bologna process (1999), the European Union mimicked these core principles (Zgaga 2006), and so did the new world ranking systems. Under a quantified understanding of “quality” through academic peer-review and citation indices, research publications and grant applications, became a priority to teaching (Marginson 2007b; Baty 2011), and “public university” became an oxymoron (Holmwood 2011). Even socialist China

or Vietnam adopted neo-liberal reforms (Wright and Rabo 2010) and entered a competition for creating the “world class” university (OECD 1997; World Bank 2000; Salmi 2008).

It was against the grain of this global development of the higher education field with its new positions and forces that UBV had to prove its relevance. The battle was made even more difficult as the other public universities in the country and the agencies on which the university evaluation depended, had introduced and followed these rules already for decades (Parra-Sandroval et al. 2010). Initially no new institutions were in planning: the Ministry of Higher Education wished to reform and to decentralize the old existing universities. The attempts of the government to introduce such reforms with no coercion in 1999-2003 were met with extreme resistance by opposition forces within the established universities. The creation of UBV and its *aldeas* signaled a decisive split within the public system of higher education. The university autonomy, a stake in myriads of struggles of the university Left in Venezuela throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was now used by those who once opposed it to resist governmental intervention (Moreno 2008; Sánchez, 2011). Against this background, once UBV and its *aldeas* were set in motion, certain pressures emerged that made it accept the mechanisms of evaluation created out of and against its own reality (Ivancheva 2013). Soon the Bolivarian higher education field became the losing end in a traditional neoliberal division between institutions offering vocational training which centered on ‘equity’, and elite universities focusing on ‘excellence’ (Marginson 2008).

This stratification within the Venezuelan academic field helped deepen the disparities among Bolivarian intellectuals. While the Bolivarian higher education reform did not do away with the hierarchy between institutions, it created a new hierarchy within the Bolivarian higher education field. It was related to the domination of a peculiar form of symbolic capital. What I have called “revolutionary capital” is a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1997). As the symbolic capital reproduced at French *grandes écoles* combined economic and cultural capital typical for those from an upper class origin, revolutionary capital merges academic prestige with radical credentials from the former student Left. University education was a necessary condition to be a member of the student Left. Yet, it was also a privilege of a small number of upper and middle-class individuals. To perform and legitimize its higher education reform, abolishing distinctions, the Bolivarian government still needed to accredit the new university institutions with the accreditation institutions, dominated by academics and administrators



from the old traditional universities. Thus, they remained reliant on the academic and radical distinctions of the members of the former student and academic Left.

The group, which is in possession of revolutionary capital, I have called “the radical nobility”. Its members headed the higher education reform of the government and UBV, is what. Not only did they come from better off families and from higher education at the traditional universities in Venezuela and abroad. They also received high-ranking positions at the new Ministry of Higher Education and UBV. The main aim of the members of the Bolivarian radical nobility was to fulfill their own inclusive socialist ideals of a university reform that would radically challenge inequalities. The fact, however, that they took and kept the positions of experts within the Bolivarian process, and used their own credentials to legitimize the reform, contributed to the reproduction of the old system of distinction within the new Bolivarian higher education field. This process was not automatic and was a result of a number of conditions which made the higher education reform of the government difficult to achieve without the reliance on cadres with traditional credentials. In order to legitimate the new Bolivarian institutions as universities, the government needed to train the newly appointed Bolivarian educators as academics.

Usually the first generation to attain higher educational, the new Bolivarian academics had to struggle on two grounds at once. They needed to show they are adequately prepared to become full-fledged academic intellectuals. They also needed to denounce exclusive elite distinctions and keep their organic connection to the popular classes. This rather paradoxical positionality of intellectuals within the Bolivarian higher education field has often created what W.E.B. Dubois, in a different context, called “a double consciousness” (Du Bois 1994). The term was used by the sociologist to describe the difficulties of African American artisans, doctors, lawyers and intellectuals (Dubois’s “wannabe black savants”) to both learn White American culture and revolt against it, having “but half a heart in either cause”. At the same time, they could achieve neither the academic distinctions, nor the radical credentials of the members of the radical nobility. Their lack of post-graduate training before UBV made them late-comers at the academic scene with little potential to outcompete academics on traditional universities. Their presence in the academic scene within the Revolutionary university and when the battle for all-inclusive higher education was allegedly won, made it impossible to rebel against their high authorities – the Bolivarian state and its radical nobility.

The reproduction of stratification within the Bolivarian higher education field did not create a respective polarization that would allow the educators to contest the power position of the radical nobility. This can be explained on two levels. On the one hand, the symbolic “revolutionary” capital of the old radicals allows the project of mass higher education to be inscribed into a larger genealogy of Left-wing struggle. They are the source of legitimacy of revolutionary discourse and practice, and thus – a high instance of intellectual authority. On the other hand, as in former socialist experiments (Fitzpatrick 1979; Stern 2007), the very category of intellectuals has received very controversial treatment within the Bolivarian process. While the Bolivarian government has used the university institution and its agents as a tool for a radical social change, members of the government and the official media have often been openly anti-intellectual. Intellectuals have been described pejoratively as “upper-” or “middle-” class, thus enemies in the class war of “the people” against “the oligarchy”. They have been isolated discursively as traitors, “fifth columns” “*quintacolumnas*”, counter-revolutionary or infiltrated to sabotage the Revolution (see Aponte 2009). Even those who have achieved a higher level of economic and political integration – the members of the radical nobility – have not been able to achieve a real political decision-making power. As I show in my dissertation, the latter has remained a privilege of the President, and those in the highest proximity with him. Thus, even those intellectuals who have reached high-ranking government positions, have been reduced to functionaries, who justify the regime but have little say in the main direction of reform.

In this respect, one can see how the label class has been used to create divisions rather than identities and solidarity even within the Bolivarian higher education field. Especially the term “middle class” has often been used in pejorative terms. While this has been made to create consolidation among “the people”, i.e. the subaltern classes, recognized as Chávez supporters, it has produced a counter-effect. Used by the Bolivarian government in the same way in which capitalist governments and media have used it in the past it blurred the distinction between elites and the poor. While they make significant proportions of the society think of themselves as an elite-in-the-making, they eliminate any attempt solidarity between different groups of people living in precarious conditions. In my dissertation I show, that in Bolivarian Venezuela, those identified as “middle class” and alienated by the political process, are many times the Bolivarian educators themselves. While popular sectors have benefited from certain redistributive and symbolic gains of the Bolivarian process, with the

growing inflation and insecurity, educated Venezuelans have become a subject to the growing stagnation and shriveling privileges. Economically marginalized and discursively alienated many of them have come to despise Chavismo despite its relatively benevolent credit system, redistributive mechanisms, or even in spite of their organic link to and employment with the Bolivarian process. This makes the “middle class” category a potential mobilizing tool against the new socialist system. And while those with credentials in the Left are still struggling to keep their ideals alive in this historical opportunity, more UBV faculty members have joined the lines of those disenchanted with Chavismo. Their gradual disillusionment with the “really existing socialism” contains a real peril for the Bolivarian project of radical social change.

### Coda

UBV and the Bolivarian higher education field, within which it is positioned, are not just *sui generis* phenomena. They are both a result of particular geopolitical positioning, and socio-historical processes in an oil-rich country in the world system semi-periphery. They are set in the wider context of the Latin American public universities, and against the homogenizing standards of the global field of higher education. UBV has brought a great hope for change to the subaltern population of Venezuela. Together with other missions of the government it has shown that oil-rich states could be benevolent to their populations and use the collectively owned resources for the collective benefit of the poor majorities. At the same time, establishing UBV not only as an alternative university, but also as a parallel structure within a global field of higher education, did not abolish stratification, but reproduced it on a new level. Not only did it present new distinctions within the new field of Bolivarian higher education. The attempt to present reform without any coercion against existing traditional structures has proved difficult if not impossible. Against the negative background and the increasing impoverishment of new educated classes in Venezuela, the creation of parallel structures seemed justified only in the short run: brought to irreconcilable contradictions in the long run, it jeopardizes all efforts for alternative higher education. It runs a serious risk to perpetuate precarity and powerlessness for the people it tries to integrate and empower. Reliant on the redistribution of the petrol rent, the Bolivarian regime remains in continuity, rather than in rupture with the liberal democracy in Venezuela (1958-

1998) which Chavismo sets itself discursively against: a topic which I develop further in the next chapter of my dissertation. In this, the Bolivarian socialist project and its higher education field seem to coexist all too comfortably with capitalism. The latter remain their permanent discursive enemy, but also their excuse for the lack of serious and pertinent social change. Against this historical and theoretical background, in my dissertation I show many of the advancements of the contradictions of the Bolivarian higher education reform.

## Chapter 2: Student movements and the state during Venezuelan's liberal democracy (1958-2002)

The student and academic struggles in the second half of the twentieth century Venezuela form the historical context of the establishment of UBV. While it is invested in larger movements and struggles for free mass higher education around Latin America and the world, the Venezuelan student struggle has its own historical specificities. Most importantly, unlike the rest of Latin American and world student movements in that era, the Venezuelan student movement could concentrate on the transformation of the university as a first step of transforming society. This struggle was used to open a broader debate for social integration, and saw the university as a key institution in this change: an aspect which was preserved in the establishment of UBV by members of the former student movements. Besides, the Venezuela's struggles follow the timing of these in the developed countries in the Global North, whereby after a mass financial and symbolic investment in the opening up and autonomy of the public university, it gradually underwent a significant budget shortage and enclosure of liberties and freedoms gained in previous decades.

The opening of the Bolivarian University and the *aldeas* of Misión Sucre in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century went decisively against the grain of the deepening stratification of society and the homogenizing global field of higher education. Yet, as I show in this chapter, the delayed conversation between President Chávez and the student Left, and the decision to open new instead of reforming the traditional institutions of higher learning, turned out to be a double-edged sword. As I show in the next chapters of my dissertation, this historical contingency has led to the creation a split, two-tier system of public higher education, in which the old structures of stratification were translated on new levels: in the distinction of people with academic and radical credentials before the new Bolivarian educators. It is also translated in the continuing exclusion of students of UBV from commercial and public sector jobs. Trained in a persistent master-disciple dichotomy at the university; however, in which academic and radical credentials are imagined as a legitimate part of the establishment, students are not allowed to imagine themselves as radical subjects or to revolt against the persistent class distinctions in the Bolivarian higher education field. This chapter tells the story of the events which led to the the opening of UBV and Misión Sucre and conditioned its further development.

The history of Venezuelan higher education can be divided into five main periods: the colonial (1721-1827), republican (1827-1958), post-dictatorship autonomous (1958-1970), post autonomous and neoliberal university (1971-2001) and the socialist project for university education which still hosts the remnants of the latter period (2003-present). The present chapter tells the story of the last two of these periods that have a significant impact on the current reform of higher education: the time-span between 1958 and 2002. I analyze the waves of contestation and movements for change that took place on the Venezuelan public university. I do not aim at an exhaustive narrative of history of the Venezuelan university since its creation which has already created volumes of research (Leal 1981; Barroeta 1996). Instead, I narrate the formation of struggles on the university as manifestation of the intrinsic power relations which make the university a key arena of class contestation. Capturing certain important moments in the development of the traditional public university over time I focus explicitly on the model university: the Central University of Venezuela (UCV), from which many members of the UBV faculty in Caracas stem.

In the chapter I discuss the way in which university-level policies were supported or contested among faculty, staff, administration, and segments of the population. I retrace the difficult and often ambiguous relation between the university and the state, between the university and its own community, and its link to the broader Venezuelan society, at that era still mostly excluded from higher education. I explain the shifting position of the university and its community in the course of Venezuela's development. Drawing the attention to the mainstream and countercurrents always present at the university, I show power and resistance as mutually constitutive, and as constitutive of the university system and part of the broader field of state power. Thus higher education politics is not just uncontested historical fact. It is a process of imposition, negotiation and development of an institution central to the understanding of the political struggles in Venezuela and around the world.

#### 1. The Venezuelan state in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as an adversary to student struggles

Narrating the history of the Venezuelan student and academic struggles in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in this chapter I also present a more relational vision of how state power functions and impacts institutions as the public university. Debates on the establishment of the socialist system both in the former Soviet Union and in present-day Venezuela, have mostly treated

the state instrumentally: as machinery which needs to be dismantled from within or cracked from without (Abrams 1988). Instead, I explore state power as a relation: one which does not only function through repressive state apparatuses as external to human relations, but as a power relation of agents. As scholars working in the structuralist tradition of Poulantzas have noticed, in this form of analysis the state should be looked upon as both crystallization of class struggle (as a result of historical process of integrating people and homogenizing them through the hegemonic institutions of the nation-state) and its locus (as institutions exist as an arena emanating of the process of struggle between classes) (Carnoy and Castells 2001). In this, the state is first and foremost “traversed by internal contradictions” (Poulantzas 2000: 254): a relation between groups with different power and capital, who compete for their vision of how to organize this relation.

Perpetuated by the hegemonic consent over the organization of this relation, promoted by media and further state and market institutions (Gramsci 1971), the relation between social classes in the state as an arena and locus of class struggle does not exist in a homogenous uneventful historical continuum. It is created and recreated through constant struggle over the dominant form of organization of this relation. Michel Foucault said, “what one calls power in the strict sense of the term: it’s a specific type of power relation that has been institutionalized, frozen, immobilized, to the profit of some and to the detriment of others” (Foucault 1988: 1). Yet, this rather defeatist vision of state power does not allow for history to be written as anything else but a master-narrative, dictated by those in powerful positions in society. Instead, I stand with those who wish to read history “against the grain” (Benjamin 2000) as a series of events with different, often conflicting temporalities shaped by contingent occurrences (Sewell 1996). It could be seen as the relation between movements grabbing control over the lives of others and counter-movements who contest them (Polanyi 2001). At the end of each cycle of struggle or wave of contestation, power relations can still freeze into a constellation of victors and vanquished. Each episode could be read not just as bearing internal dilemmas that the victorious narrative could resolve, but as pregnant with tensions and internal contradictions, which a next countercurrent could burst open.

Since the emergence of the modern nation state and capitalism, this story has been that of struggles of those who realize the deprivation that their hegemonic consolidation causes to the great majority; of those who fight to restrain the market penetrating every sphere of

human interaction. It is a history of most of the people to organize in another, more inclusive way the power relation called a state, controlled by a few. To understand this process and relate it to the Venezuelan recent history, a understanding of the historical stage of the transformation of the state is needed. In the decades following World War two, the nation state was transformed. A new model was created to create growth, employment and stability in post-war Europe and the US: the welfare state. This model did not do away with capitalist accumulation, but harnessed big business through a regulative framework to provide revenue, feeding back into a welfare system of family allowances, pensions, healthcare and education. It cushioned national populations against disruption and allowed greater leverage of trade unions in the negotiation with employers (Offe 1984; Jessop 1990). The model did not do away with inequalities within the capitalist system, but created mechanisms of redistribution among wage workers.

This model was never fully developed outside a number of European countries, but different policies were diffused in further contexts of liberal democracies, including during Venezuela's oil bonanza in the 1970s (see Ellner 2008). It displayed not just dilemmas of the capitalist state, but the very conditions that made it internally contradictory in its very basic principles (Offe 1984: 153). The welfare state was a capitalist state not just because it coexisted with capitalism, but because the legitimacy of the state and its welfare reforms was based on sustaining citizenship as a subject to a permanent market exchange. In order to keep capital profiting, the state had to minimize taxes, social expenditure, and labor rights. And still it could not stop capital to expand to less regulated markets with disposable reserve army of surplus population, ready to work for less benefits and securities than unionized labor. Whenever concessions were made to capital, this resulted in the decreasing capacity of political power to gain support in democratic ways (Offe 1984: 139-144; Jessop 1990: 42-43). While the welfare state became the machinery, which mitigated class conflict, it had no control on capital overaccumulation, the business cycle, and rapid changes of technology (Offe 1984: 150; Jessop 1990: 46).

With the 1970s financial crisis in the West and the subsequent debt crisis in Latin America, the welfare state was suddenly seen as ill. The only solution which the economists of the rising neo-conservative governments found as a cure was neoliberalism: a doctrine of state governance that stood for reducing taxes, tariffs and state regulations, privatizing public



services and industries, reducing the public sector and social expenditure. It disciplined labor through austerity, and made no concessions to unions: instead its aim was to increase the flexibility of labor contracts and curtailed collective bargaining. In the belief that state intervention crippled the self-regulation of the free market, it promoted *laissez-faire* capitalism that had to dismantle the welfare state in order to unleash international capital flow (Offe 1984; Panitch and Gindin 2012). The decay of the Western welfare state was also accompanied by the decline of the institutions of development. Designed by economist John M. Keynes and set in motion with the post-war Bretton Wood Agreement, they were aimed to regulate the monetary system and to project a system of welfare and aid on an international scale. Terminated by the US decision to remove the monetary regulations on the dollar, this signaled the United States' strategy to build global capitalism its imperial project (Panitch and Gindin 2012).

To counter the effects of the debt crisis and to follow the lucrative American model of internationalization of capital, the political elites in many countries welcomed the neoliberal reforms as an only solution. In a global context in which capitalism operated not in a stateless space, but through the mechanisms of sovereign states, it was state elites agreed on a form of "imperialism by invitation" (Panitch and Gindin 2013). Agreeing to implement the reforms as a form of "democracy promotion", they were pressed by the US to carry out their own responsibilities to the smooth flow of capital, and thus to the US-led world order of global capitalism (Panitch and Gindin 2012: 4-8). In doing that, they had to put pressure on the working classes without losing democratic legitimacy (Jessop 1990). As in the West it was difficult to completely abolish welfare institutions, they were instead gradually financialized. With the reduction of services to credits, mortgages and debts, state administrations incorporated the national working classes even further into a commodity relation with capital. The fight against communism in Eastern Europe and Africa was to ensure that no state would remain closed to capital accumulation (Panitch and Gindin 2012: 9-10).

Theorists from peripheral countries have tried to write the history of state from the Global South (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012): in opposition to the narrative of modernity created in the imperial metropolises. They opposed not just Western utopian fiction of homogenous time of universal humanity, but also the romanticizing dichotomies like local (i.e. "pre-modern", non-Western) as opposed to global (i.e. modern, Western). Thus, they have tried

to resists bounded categories fitting into binary oppositions as rational/irrational, modern/pre-modern (Anderson 2002) and other such qualifications introduced to disqualify life in a big part of the world as backward (Navaro-Yashin 2002). In this, what is important to see is that state elites in the periphery have often played a perverse role reinforcing these oppositions. Still, the peculiar positionality of peripheral development that would allow imperialism by invitation needs to be understood not only in terms of economic interests of rational agents, but within a more complex field of power struggle and contestation.

Venezuelan anthropologist Fernando Coronil insisted that this process could be seen as a continuous extraction happening at the expense of resource rich peripheral countries and their downtrodden subaltern populations (Coronil 1997: 6-7). Yet, Coronil also claimed that in such processes, peripheral states also speak out of a subaltern position.

Coronil spoke of the term subaltern as relational concept of social agency that could be used to designate subjects in a more or less subjected state of being (Coronil 1994: 643; 648). The impossibility to speak, or to utter state-ments, the silencing effect of domination, is sometimes adopted by the core of the peripheral state. Discussing the Venezuelan liberal state, Coronil showed how domination was not only constructed from outside, but also embodied and enacted from the state agents. Speaking of the period of Venezuela's liberal, Coronil said "In Venezuela, the political elite remains situated in an unstable neocolonial landscape, which continually undermines national sources of identity and knowledge" (655). Thus, the Venezuelan state has taken itself as a translator between civilization and local backwardness, reproducing a split position between national sovereignty and international subordination. Coronil showed that in oil-rich Venezuela the state preserved its centrality within the territory of the country, acting as a "magnanimous sorcerer" (Coronil 1997: 2). Producing dazzling images of social integration, it has replaced actual structural change with a magical performance, concealing the exploitative extraction of labor and collectively owned natural resources (Coronil 1997). Yet, subjugated to the hegemonic imperial model, it limited its impact on market regulation and become a mechanism to ease transnational capital flows, it lost control over key institutions creating democratic legitimacy among the people.

As in the rest of debt-ridden Latin America, in Venezuela welfare institutions and concessions to labor were only partially developed in the 1970s. The negotiation power of the tiny industrial proletariat and the larger subaltern populations was even lower. In

Venezuela and other countries in the region, rich on natural resources as Mexico, the provision of securities and a decent standard of living for the majority of their citizens, was not seen as a central stake of the states to secure democratic legitimacy (Gledhill 2013). Through the neoliberal reforms, political elites continued to exploit the majority of the population with a political legitimacy based on the so-called “protection racket” (Tilly 1985). To justify extraction or austerity, without offering significant protections in return, they sustained images of hostile enemies within and outside the national territory global powers, local political antagonists or subaltern populations (Thies 2005: 459; 463). Since the first anti-neoliberal riots in Venezuela (1989), Mexico (1994), Argentina (2001), and smaller campaigns reclaiming education, healthcare, and water supplies throughout the 1990s, Latin American started to lose popular support. And while the confrontation over forms of security were a part of the social contract and process of building democratic institutions of the modern nation state (Tilly 1985; 2005), the trust in the political class was betrayed.

Still, the model of the welfare state seemed to have provided a threshold, an irreversible model of struggle and claim-making even where it was still not fully developed. And while countries in the periphery have also staged protests and waves of discontent against neoliberal austerity these have usually had different processes of political contestation. The consolidation of democratic institutions, described by Charles Tilly as a necessary outcome of contentious politics (Tilly 1985; 2005), is not necessarily a mechanism visible in the Venezuelan 20<sup>th</sup> century and its student struggles. Imanol Ordorika’s work on student movements in Mexico has shown that the theory of the state as an arena of class struggle can be applied mostly to Western liberal democracies, where actors in civil society are in the position of pressure group against the representatives of state. Yet, in authoritarian societies – as the majority of the Latin American countries in extended periods over the last century, including Venezuela during its liberal democracy – this contentious politics does not necessarily translate into democratization. Ordorika has claimed that in such societies, scholars should look for a conflict-based understanding of social change and cooperation between society and the state. The interaction of civil society organizations – NGOs and social movements – with state agencies in different cycles usually takes place in cycles of contestation and the result is hardly this of democratic consolidation (Acosta 2007).

## 2. Venezuelan history and historiography through the lens of university struggles

To understand the history of Venezuela's universities in the twentieth century, we need to see them in the bigger picture of Venezuelan history. Venezuela's modern history conventionally starts with the wars of independence against the colonial rule. After the short-lived First (1811-1812) and Second Republic (1813-1814), the Independence from the Spanish colonial rule was only conquered in 1821 by the army of the man who went down in history under the name of the Liberator, Simon Bolivar (1783—1830). Venezuela was back then Bolivar's gradually conquered federation, Great Colombia (1819-1831), which spanned from what are today Venezuela, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, North Peru and North Brazil. This territorial and political unity was soon dissolved and Bolivar – exiled, brokenhearted and poor died on his way to leave the continent from Santa Marta in nowadays Colombia (Lynch 2006). The era that followed was a long century of *caudillismo* (Moron 1979) – the rule of strong despotic men, who endeavored to subject the marginal and poor cocoa-growing country to the will of their political and economic cliques.

Throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the territory of Venezuela was often brought to the brink of serious internal conflicts, including the Federal War (1859-1863) or interventions by European states<sup>4</sup>. The history of the country changed drastically with the discovery of oil at the time of World War I. *Caudillismo's* political rule was still present in the first half twentieth century, but in that era the strife for democracy had finishing the process of state-building. Triggered by the discovery of oil in Venezuela, it was naturally paralleled by the consolidation of democratic institutions: a process usually creating the state institutions engaged in war-making, pacifying internal enemies, creating mechanisms of extraction, and also building networks of support among the protected and exploited population (Tilly 1985). In this process, the democratic institutions are consolidated in a constant negotiation and contention of social movements and popular mobilization vis-à-vis the state (Tilly 2005). The slowly growing industrial proletariat, rapidly expanding urban underclass gradually organized politically. A number of underground parties, created and headed by members of the educated elites guided the struggle for free elections and media, universal suffrage and more economic rights to the people. Several governments were successively established and overthrown, including the first democratic regime in Venezuela's history (1944-1948). A military junta in 1948 brought to power the dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1952-1958).

Pérez Jiménez was expelled by popular uprising from the hills of Caracas on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 1958. the new social contract of Venezuela - the Pact of Punto Fijo – was signed between three of the parties which fought against the dictator – social democratic Accion Democratica (AD), Union Republicana Democratica (URD) and Christian democratic Comate de Organization Politico Electoral Independiente (COPEI). Their leadership of educated liberals and petty bourgeois promoted a right-center politics, which excluded the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV) from the participation in national politics. Initially PCV took a position in favor of the national consensus, expressed in the Punto Fijo Pact and accepted its own exclusion. In the 1960s, however, it radicalized and initiated a guerilla-type struggle together with the secluded youth faction of AD – Movement for Radical Left (MIR). In the 1970s, both changed strategy and entered electoral politics. By then, however, the Left was too weak and fractured by its own internal divisions. Political life of the country was dominated by successive governments of AD and COPEI who offered a moderate populist policy of redistribution, and centralization of economic power through the nationalization of key industries. When the euphoria from the 1970s petrol price boom ended in a debt crisis and neoliberal reforms, the 1980s and 1990s the pact of AD and COPEI was still too strong and the Left – too weak for significant change to emerge.

The sporadic protests that followed in the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the fight against austerity and decreasing security and redistribution, culminated in the first anti-neoliberal riot in the world: the *Caracazo* from 1989. The Caracazo was violently suppressed and the demands of the population were ignored. Against this background Hugo Chávez appeared – first as a protagonist and organizer of a failed military *coup d'état* in 1992, and then as a candidate for in the Presidential race of 1998. His election, less than a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall, promised a Third Way type of politics and moderate economic and social reforms. Yet, the combination between Chávez's origin (he was a son of a small town family of teachers), and his legislation in favor of the rank-and-file people antagonized his political opponents. The radical Bolivarian Constitution from 1999 made Chávez the most hated political figure against which a coalition was achieved among the formerly antagonistic political parties – AD, COPEI and even parts of the Left. In 2002 a *coup d'état* was staged against the democratically elected President. It was organized by private media and segments from the business, and supported by large segments of the political and academic sector. Even if popular discontent and organized military forces brought the President back to

power, in 2002-2003 over 16 000 high-ranking expert staff walked out on the petrol industry. They showed they would not subject to the will of the government and the majority of the population who voted it. In 2005 Chávez declared his program Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Venezuelan 20<sup>th</sup> century has been grasped through the narrative about “exceptional” liberal democracy – does not provide an explanation of the crisis in the 1990s and the rise of President Hugo Chávez. According to this narrative, the clientelism endemic in Venezuelan modern-day politics, has fostered broad class alliances in traditional parties. In this frame of analysis, liberal democracy is “exceptional” as a structural requirement, and Chávez’s alleged authoritarianism is just its next manifestation. As Steve Ellner has claimed, this narrative eclipses evidence and alternative explanations about the actual trends of Venezuelan politics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: class conflict and repressions along class lines, rising poverty and discrimination along ethnic lines, as well as conflicts and factions within the ruling elite (Ellner 2008: 3). And whereas the new “partisan” historiography, related to the Bolivarian government, has paid attention to the first two trends, it has avoided discussing the latter one: the attempt has been to paint the whole period between 1958 and 1998 in dark, denying any variance in the political program and dissidence in party lines (Ellner 2008: 11; 98). Exploring these conflicts, Ellner argues, provides more credible alternative explanations.

As of contemporary Venezuela, taking a similar stance against the polarized historiography on Venezuela, Javier Corrales has added yet another actor missing in the bigger picture – that of the intellectual Left during the liberal democracy. The US-based Venezuelan historian has claimed that most accounts of the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century portray well the structural conditions that have led to the rise of the socialist government of President Hugo Chávez. Yet, he states, they do not represent fully the political origin of most cadres that joined the high-ranking party and political apparatus of the Bolivarian state. Corrales tries to explain what he calls the “supply” of Left wing cadres within the Chávez rule. His claim is that looking deeper into the recent history, one can still see a trend which most historians fail to discuss: while the Left was not allowed into the upper curst of Venezuelan society, they have experienced certain opportunity openings and political mobility, especially within the academy (Corrales 2007; 2010). Thus, in my own work I follow the suggestions of both Ellner and Corrales: I reconstruct the recent history of Venezuela, focusing on the university struggles of the academic Left. Through this lens I narrate the story of Venezuela’s liberal

democracy with its modest achievements and glaring contradictions, and their legacy in the country's present day history.

Beyond a few rather essayistic monographs, collections of polemic feuilletons, country reports and policy documents (see e.g. Alborno 2005; Cadenas ed. 2008; Garcia-Guadilla 2006) little has been written on the history of higher education in Venezuela (though Rojas 2005; Moreno 2008). Idelfonso Leal's enormous undertaking of a historical account of the Central University of Venezuela in the time of Simon Bolivar and the 19<sup>th</sup> century remains unparalleled in the current era (Leal 1981). At the same time, the lack of analysis at the expense of minute detail in his volumes of work has left little analytical and theoretical legacy in the historiography of the university. Newer generations of writers have focused predominantly on certain periods of particular vigor or crisis as the Academic Renovation movement from 1969, but have not positioned the particular events in the wider historical narrative of the country (Mendez 1995). Contemporary analytical works on the Bolivarian system of higher education since 2003 are based on substantial empirical research (Parra-Sandoval et al. 2009, 2010; D'Amario 2010; Muhr and Verger 2006). While D'Amario presents the story of the opening of UBV within the contemporary contradictions of Chavismo, Parra-Sandoval and her team explore the ranking and indices of evaluation of UBV in comparison with UCV and the elite experimental University Simon Bolivar (USB). Muhr and Verger position the higher education reform within the global context of anti-capitalist alliances in the Global South. Due to the focus of their empirical work, none of the abovementioned authors has found it necessary to produce more detailed analysis of the history of higher education. They also present the events before the rise of Chávez in 1998, or even before the establishment of UBV in 2003, either as the unidirectional evolution of a somewhat backward national field of higher education slowly adopting the imperatives of western science (Parra Sandoval et al 2010), or as a systematic construction of an exclusive establishment (Muhr and Verger 2006). With this chapter I add to the debate the historical development of academic struggles as indispensable scenery of the current reforms.

Two articles on the history of Venezuelan higher education are a noteworthy exception from the above mentioned trends. Reinaldo Rojas (2005) and Amado Moreno (2008) state diverse purposes in their works: while Rojas aims at a stricter periodization, Moreno focuses on the historical development of the issue of academic autonomy in the Venezuelan university

system through modern history. While both divide the history of Venezuelan higher education into roughly five periods, Rojas puts more emphasis on the time before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Moreno – on that particular century. For that reason, Moreno’s work is more relevant to my study. It shows how different struggles for autonomy have emerged in the 1980s and the 1990s. Moreno also exposes the paradox of autonomy, manifested in Venezuela’s recent history of academic struggles: previously defended by the Left on traditional universities, after the advent of Chávez to power, autonomy has been used by those who previously fought against it. Forces at traditional public universities antagonist to Chávez used autonomy in order to fend off government reform and intervention. Whereas Moreno is particularly interested in legislative change and the issue of university autonomy, my chapter focuses on the student movements in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The history of academic struggles in Venezuela can be divided into three larger sections: 1958-1970; 1971-2002; 2003 – present. The first period is designated by two laws. The new University Law from 1958 which celebrated the end of the Pérez Jiménez dictatorship granted autonomy to all universities. The new Law of 1970 curbed this autonomy. The period following this second law was marked by a significant number of reforms leading to privatization, commercialization and elitization of higher education. These were followed by respective protests waves. This period ended not with the coming of Hugo Chávez to power, but with the attempted *coup d’état* in 2002 and the effective boycott of the petrol industry. The latter led to the opening of the Bolivarian Universities and the program of mass higher education Misión Sucre. In this chapter I focus on the first two periods 1958-1971 and 1971-2002. The post-2003 developments, which concerns the opening and early development of UBV, I narrate in more detail in the next chapters of my study.

### 3. 1958-1970: the rise and fall of the Academic Renovation and university autonomy

The democratic period of the development of the Venezuela’s university was rather short-lived. Nevertheless, it witnessed the emergence of democratic movements throughout society which have played a role in the formation and framing of current-day Venezuelan higher education reforms. First and foremost, this was the first time when autonomy was presented as a legal provision on the Venezuelan university. Secondly, in this period a significant massification of university education and gradual proliferation of institutions of



higher learning took place. Thirdly, it was a period in which the underground guerilla Left could converge on the campus of the university and find there its most permanent basis. Last but not least, this was the period of Venezuelan history, where the university hosted Venezuela's own 1968ers movement – one that centered on demands for profound reform both of the form, and of the content of higher education, and more importantly, saw the university as a key institution through which the process of radical social change could start. Movement actors from that era have become protagonists in the Bolivarian higher education reform. A genealogy of the movement is drawn from the repressed student Left in that era. The values of mass and gratuitous higher education have been taken on board of subsequent movements, but only came to play a significant role in the reforms after 2003. While this period has a specific symbolic and topical relevance, it was also a peak of achievement in terms of autonomy and desire for change, which was lost in the subsequent decades.

Students and academic intellectuals have been important actors in the process of political change in Venezuelan twentieth century. Academic autonomy was used as a tool to gain territorial and political independences on campuses, used as a vantage point by progressive movements to fight against autocratic political antagonists. Students have formed the nuclei of most modern-day political parties in the country (López and Hernandez 2001; López 2005). The nineteenth century was marked by an illiberal centralized regime headed by power-hungry leaders (*caudillos*). The twentieth century witnessed a significant change with the emergence of democratic movements often with a significant base among university students. It was first manifest in the movement Generation 28 (*Generación del 28*), a cohort of student activists who turned a historical commemoration and academic celebration into a heated debate and protest against the rule of Juan Vicente Gomez in 1928 (Rojas 2005: 91; Skurski 1993: 185-187). Imprisoned, persecuted and exiled, the student activists created some of the first parties in the country – Acción Democrática (AD), Partido Comunista de Venezuela (PCV) and Union of Democratic Reform (URD). The core activists of the parties reassembled in Caracas in the 1940s and formed the first democratically elected government<sup>5</sup>. The same group of leaders of AD, URD, and PCV joined forces with Conservative COPEI in the fight against the dictatorship of Marcos Pérez Jiménez (1948-1958). While he built a new campus for the public Central University, Pérez Jiménez had ambiguous relations with the university. He fostered the opening of private church-related universities but harnessed university autonomy (Rojas 2005: 93).

During the dictatorship the university became the last bastion of free speech and criticism against the government: an issue which was quickly taken care of after the crisis in 1951 and the repressions against the Organization of University Professors (Moreno 2008: 363). Having galvanized popular protest in the poor neighborhoods of big cities, after the overthrow of the dictator on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 1958 the parties AD, URD and COPEI came together to sign the Pact of Punto Fijo (Ellner 2008: 58-60). Together with this new social contract, the former student activists from Generation 28 initiated the process of a first University Law already in 1958. The urgency and priority with which it was voted showed the centrality of the university to the new society. Commissioned and designed by a University Committee headed by Dr Francisco de Venanzi – the future Rector of the main university in the country UCV (Moreno 2008: 357) the law was in line with the principles of the Córdoba Manifesto and the subsequent reforms of the university systems in the whole subcontinent (see Tunnerman 1985: 63). It endorsed the key principles of the Latin American public university: administrative, financial, and academic autonomy; horizontal decision-making shared between professors and students (*cogobierno*); freedom of teaching and the open and transparent competitions for new faculty (*concurso de oposición*); social assistance to students and equitable democratic education, free to all; openness to different political opinions and stances; and declared clear engagement with the national interest and social pertinence of science (Moreno 2008: 356). Yet, while those were shared ideals of Latin American universities, the reality of Venezuelan liberal democracy did not live up to them as did many dictatorships in the region in the 1960s and 1970s. The liberal state formerly embraced the ideal of the freedom of the university, but soon started suppressing it. The bloody battles often resulted with a victory of the state. Yet, the sustained campaigns of contention of academics against the repressive state can also be read as an important part of a process of building democratic institutions within the state (Tilly 2005): one that broke the ground for the emergence of a Left-wing government with progressive emancipatory politics. The exclusion of the Communist Party from the Pact of Punto Fijo and the subsequent exit of the Youth Section of AD Movement for Revolutionary Left (MIR) were in direct relation with the new liberties gained by the university (Ellner 2008: 61). Being granted political and territorial autonomy, students and academics used them to create a mighty resistance. University campuses became an oasis of radical mobilization where armed struggle and revolutionary rhetoric against the government and the global capitalis order flourished in

relative freedom. The abundance of radicalism on campus proved irreconcilable with the staunch anti-communism of the governments of AD in the 1960s (Ellner 2008: 61). Making Venezuela the laboratory for US social democratic politics but also a drilling field of multinational companies and a key instrument to isolate communist Cuba, AD committed numerous human rights violations and repression against the Left throughout the 1960s (Ellner 2008: 61-62). Despite the granted autonomy the interventions in the premises of the university were numerous. The insurgencies caused around the unfavorable Workers and Management Pact in 1961, were repressed by the government (Ellner 2008: 62). A closure of UCV by the government of Raul Leoni (ironically, a former student leader from the Generation 1928) happened in 1966 during the so-called “black December” (*diciembre negro*) (Moreno 2008: 364). The attendant radicalization of the Left through armed struggle impacted the history of the country. In 1969 operation “kangaroo”, a military intervention on the campus of UCV led by COPEI Prime Minister Rafael Caldera (also a former student activist) put an end to the longest sustained campaign of the Venezuelan student Left: the Academic Renovation (*Renovación Académica*) (1968-1970).

The process of Academic Renovation is crucial to understand the subsequent developments of the Venezuelan student Left. In 1969 students and academics from the key Venezuelan universities enhanced on a process of radical mobilization. Under the name of Academic Renovation this campaign mobilized a significant part of the academic community. They stood up for basic freedoms and liberties and against the persecution of the underground Left and for further social rights beyond immediate student demands and necessities. Influenced by the 1918 Córdoba reform and the student protests during the French May and the “global 1968”, the Academic Renovation entailed organized strikes, occupations and sit-ins at Universidad Central de Venezuela in Caracas (UCV), and the other universities in the country<sup>6</sup>. At UCV it started slowly with the occupation of the Sciences Faculty in June 1968, debates across some other faculties in the end of 1968-beginning of 1969, but its really strong part was March-October 1969 with the occupation of Anthropology and Sociology. Centers for sports, culture, and the university library were affected by occupations (Mendez 1995). Within the academic community the Renovation had a different dynamic within different departments.

The Renovation assumed different dynamics in different academic units – between the change of the curriculum, or the change of the structures, the subjection of the university to the need of local communities, or the use of the university to change society (Miguel Acosta Saignes in González Deluca 2008: 80). Still, in the spirit of the above mentioned Córdoba Manifesto (1918) in 1969 the Venezuelan students involved in the Renovation demanded crucial liberties and provisions: more state subsidy under the stipulation of administrative and financial autonomy; the cohesion of teaching research, and extension to the communities and teaching with a social component (*docencia-acción-participación*); scientific modernization; and further substantial participation of students in the decision-making on their studies. Not stipulated in the Law political autonomy was also a central demand: it was necessary to safe-guard the campus of the university as a bastion of the underground Left (Cadenas 2008). In brief, for many students, the Renovation movement was an attempt to show all the country “what a real university revolution needed to be” (in González Deluca 2008: 82): expression of the growing understanding that if the university was to be actively engaged in the transformation of the country, it had to transform itself (J.R. Nuñez Tenorio in Cadenas 2008: 5).

While the Renovation has received much attention in its own time from both academics and the media, the uproar was followed by a remarkable silence (1995). People who lived through these experiences were torn between their own nostalgia and the university problems which the Renovation addressed but left unresolved: the dominance of theory with little practical application of knowledge; the vertical relation between professors and students in classes and university governance; the curricular rigidity and antiquated science (Cadenas 2008: 16-17). At the same time, the Renovation was an expression of its time: the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the US running fight in Vietnam, and the repressions of the student movements in France and in Mexico showed the violent face of both the liberal and socialist politics (Cadenas 2008: 3). It was also an era of the massification of higher education when the university had to come to terms with new subjects, facilities and engagements with reality. The Academic Renovation signaled a *détente* and a new line of conflict in Venezuelan politics (González Deluca 2008: 78-79). Rafael Caldera’s politics of pacification helped the Left to come to terms with its past and enter electoral policies, changing its line from Stalinist to Eurocommunist (López, Monzant and González 2000: 106). However, the growing activity of progressive factions of the Left and the radical wing of COPEI in the

Renovation led to the brutal ending of the Renovation through the military occupation of UCV 31<sup>st</sup> of October (González Deluca 2008; Mendez 1995). Despite the conflictive situations, the support and active participation of the university community, including Rector Jesus María Bianco made the Renovation a first attempt to democratize the Venezuelan university: and one which achieved exactly the opposite of what it intended.

#### 4. 1971 - 2001: the balloon that swale, the balloon that burst

Yet, the reforms of Venezuelan governments ever since the Renovation have been mostly at the detriment of an all-inclusive autonomous public higher education. The 1958 Law granted the university autonomy from state in financial, administrative, and legal matters. This stipulation remained in the new Law from 1970 (LU 1970: art. 9), but with significant amendments. Police could assure vigilance over the campus (Ammendments to LU art.7): a privilege which the state used in the next decades, causing the deaths of many more students than those who died in the previous era of university history (Moreno 2008: 360; 363-364). A National University Council (CNU) was created to ‘harmonize’ planning and organization. In article 20 CNU was given the right to make decisions instead of university administrations and change their governing bodies. The new law also performed a controversial reform. Under pressures from big businesses and the Catolic church it creation a new binary system of public universities (Moreno 2008: 364-365). The old universities were still called “autonomous”, and the new, “experimental”. The latter were ruled directly by the government with regulations established in the Law. Technological Colleges (*Colegios Tecnologicos*, CT), Pedagogical Institutes (*Institutos Pedagogicos* (IP) and University Institutes (*Institutos Universitarios*, IU) were created by CNU. This model turned the experimental subsystem of higher education into vocational training of professionals fit for the job market dominated by big corporations and client firms to the political parties (Moreno 2008: 352). It allowed the entry of a neocolonial model of knowledge, promoted throughout Latin America by parties in power and their counterparts in the US<sup>7</sup>.

The division paved the way for the growing isolation of the autonomous universities and their increasing complicity in the reproduction of an elitist higher education. At the same time, from the beginning of the 1970s on, Venezuelan student movements calmed down for about a decade. Not only did the new University Law hinder mobilization. The 1970s in

Venezuela were a decade of a political stability in Venezuelan in both the national and international aspect. The market prices of crude oil skyrocketed, peaking during the Arab Boycott crisis, letting petrodollars flow en masse into the Latin American country with large deposits of crude oil. The effects were increased by the centralization of state power and concurrent nationalization of the oil industry during the government of AD and Carlos Andres Pérez (1974-1979). Having split several times in the decade of the 1960s over issues like the violent repression of the Left, the land reform and the nationalization of utilities and services (Ellner 2008: 66), in the 1970s AD was coming back to its social democratic origins. Pérez promoted policies of full employment, granting workers severance payment benefits, and made scholarships available for Venezuelans to study abroad. His government nationalized the steel, aluminum and electricity (Ellner 2008: 71-72).

Yet, albeit the switch from tariff-based local bourgeoisie to a political elite active on the transnational markets (Ellner 2008: 76), the government did not affect the interests of the multinational companies or of the home-grown economic elite (Coronil 1997: 246). Without expropriating foreign companies and diminishing their share in the distribution of energy and knowledge production related to this industry, the government took control over the rest of the oil resources, merging the interests of the state and big businesses. Social concessions to workers did not mean better labor options either. In the limited labor market of the oil-dependent “Dutch disease economy”, the government did not invest in agriculture or manufacturing industry: choices that would diversify the production and subvert the piecemeal, dependent assembly character of the local production force (Coronil 1997: 245; 287). The overreliance on international investors, clientelism, and soaring petrol prices made the country accumulated a huge international debt. The global recession in the 1980s hit Venezuela as hard as a few other poorer Latin American countries. As Fernando Coronil put it (1997: 288), “Between the cracks one could fleetingly see that the magic of oil money could no longer sustain the magical state as national oil money dissolved into the global financial torrents of international capital”.

In the 1980s the country and the region entered a significant crisis. In order to protect the interests of the private sector, the government accumulated even further debt to international organizations. The country’s economy was in shock due to the international monetary crisis. An IMF agreement was signed, allegedly to help Venezuela pay back its

foreign debt and stabilize its economy. Among the reforms required by the international organization, the governments had to increase taxes and prices, restrict wage levels, and decrease state subsidies and public expenditure (Lander 1996). Public services were hit first. Student movements from public and private universities came out again to protest the projects of Organic Law of Education which proposed the privatization of the university sector and other public services. Autonomy was translated into incentives of decentralization and deregulations of the universities, which increasingly aimed to establish new individualized systems of student admission and to abolish free entry into higher education (Moreno 2008: 365). Left-wing universitarios also protested against the privatization of buildings which belonged to the universities, and against the increasing prices of and decreasing facilities for their studies (Calderon and Niño 2006). A decrease of state subsidy resulted in the decay of the public school system: a boost of students and income was experienced at exclusive private schools (Moreno 2008). This measure effectively limited the access to the public universities to students from public schools. (Moreno 2008: 370). The new educated classes were experiencing lowering life-standard, employment opportunities, and overall securities (López 1999: 20). From a more immediate reaction to the economic context, the students were gradually started to generate critique and proposals against the institutional establishment that contributed to this process (López and Hernandez 2001: 641).

While Left-leaning academics were slowly mobilizing in the late 1980s, Venezuela was swept by a mass wave of spontaneous mobilization. Next to academic protests, in the 1980s the police was constantly mobilized to crush popular uprising, and the media – to mis/under-represent it (Coronil and Skurski 1991). Catalyzed by the debt crisis and growing state repression among the poor, the 1980s culminated with the bloody *Caracazo* in 1989. The process was catalyzed by the overall militarization of public spaces, an increased number of court trials against student leaders, and a more frequent entry of the national guard and police force into university campuses (López and Hernandez 2001: 633). The wave of student protests in the late 1980s resonated with an early wave of contention against the increasing austerity due to the debt crisis. The last straw that broke the camel's back was an act of the second government of Carlos Andres Pérez. Coming to power with the promise not to sign any further agreements with the IMF, days after his election, Pérez signed an agreement. He committed the country to a “shock-treatment” with draconic austerity measures. The riot was occasioned by one of the first instances of the neoliberal reform: the

100% increase of the prices of home consumption gasoline and the subsequent rise of transport prices (Ciccarriello-Maher 2007). After a riot in a small town in the metropolitan area of Caracas Guarenas, angry crowds went out in the streets of the capital and all big cities (Ellner 2008: 91). The riot was suppressed violently (Coronil and Skurski 1991): death-roll ranging between 300 and 3000 (Wilpert 2007: 17)<sup>8</sup>.

As authors dealing with the student movements in Venezuela have emphasized, the story of these movements has been eclipsed by the new narrative of the Bolivarian Revolution (Lopéz and Hernandez 2001: 632). There the actions of the government are seen as an only reason for the spontaneous outrage of the poor Venezuelans during the *Caracazo*.

Subsequently, the Caracazo has been discussed as the main reason which made Hugo Chávez and a number of middle-rank army officers to attempt a *coup d'état* against the same government three years later. Known as a military rebellion (*rebelion militar*), this coup was staged by the first underground movement of and other army men MB-200<sup>9</sup> in 1992. The role of the student movements in the late 1980s, however, has also been crucial for frame and repertoire of the riots. Student mobilization and the increased of police violence against the student movement in 1987-88 legitimized the practice of street looting that diffused in the *Caracazo*. These protests created a climate of fierce opposition and the two-party system dominated by AD and COPEI. University professors and students joined barrio communities in providing help to the people. As Luis Fuenmayor Toro, a Rector of UBV in 1989 told me “UCV acted as an emergency center. We communicated with the media and offered an emergency point where people could report those missing or killed.” Thus, beside the popular rebellion, the academic Left was part of the process that eventually brought Chávez to power the end of the next decade (Lopéz and Hernandez 2001; Moreno 2008).

The Caracazo did not stop Pérez. His second term in power he continued with full speed to subvert crucial practices and reforms his government had established in his previous term as President. Pérez deregulated prices and interest rates, and currency exchange rates. He lifted the control tariffs and privatized the salt industry, the national airport company Airpostel, and started the privatization of the telecom CANTV, the port system, the social security system and cut the benefits he introduced during his first term in power (Ellner 2008: 90-92). Under the new incentive for decentralization governors gained the power to gather taxes and reterritorialize municipalities: on the principle “the smaller the better” newly formed small



and scarcely populated rich municipalities gained similar financial support as heavily overcrowded poor ones (Ellner 2008: 93-95). After Pérez was impeached, the former COPEI PM Rafael Caldera also had a second term in power: this time in a wide coalition, including guerilla Left Theodoro Petkoff. Caldera bailed out local banks, providing bankers with solid capital which they soon exported out of Venezuela. Wages were decreasing. Inflation was sky-rocketing. Venezuela's government signed yet a next loan agreement with the IMF of a \$1.4 billion, promising the implementation of a next wave of neoliberal reforms. Caldera privatized the remaining share of telecom company CANTV, the steel plant SIDOR, and even part of the oil industry in the process called "the Oil Opening", limiting the share of the state in companies exploiting the oil fields (Ellner 2008: 100-104).

While the fame of young army officer Hugo Rafael Chávez Frias was growing<sup>10</sup>, so was student discontent. Temporally imprisoned and then amnestied by Caldera, Chávez was visited in prison by many Left-wing intellectuals who saw him as a potential ally. While Chávez and the newly formed coalition Movement of the Fifth Republic (*Movimiento V República*, MVR) were starting a campaign for the 1998 Presidency race, Venezuelan Left-wing students and academic started a next round of struggle against austerity. They contested the Bill of Higher Education (*Proyecto Ley de Educación Superior*, PLES). Influenced by the 1994 World Bank report on Venezuelan higher education, PLES introduced entry fees for those pursuing a second degree, post-graduate studies, and for foreign students (art. 10). It incentivized the presence of private enterprises in the financial bodies of universities and a system of auto-financing through credits (art. 11). Benefits and payment to academic staff became subject to competition (Moreno 2008: 369). While demonstrations were raging throughout the country, in August 1998 a Marxist student group from UCV called Utopia staged a spectacular protest. Utopia members marched toward the Congress naked, their bodies painted in blue. Remembered as "the blue ones" (*los azules*) they were violently suppressed by the police (Calderon and Niño 2006). Still, PLES was dropped. The struggle of *Los Azules* proved to be a final battle before Hugo Chávez came to power with wide social support in 1998.

##### 5. The occupation of UCV in 2001: a turning point or a lost chance for radical reform?

As a new President Hugo Chávez did not immediately win Left-leaning intellectuals on his side. He started his first years in power with a timid “Third way” politics. Besides, the military, nationalist, and religious charge of Chávez’s speeches did not attract many intellectuals to vote Chávez. Yet, the mutual appreciation was slowly starting. In its article 102 the Bolivarian Constitution of 1999 stipulated that “Education is a human right and a fundamental social duty; it is democratic, free of charge and obligatory “. In its article 109 it spoke of university autonomy as a principle vital to the “planning, organization, preparation and updating of research, teaching and extension programs”, of all universities. It also promised “inviolability of the university campus” (Constitution 1999). In 2001 the President summoned a group of legislators to draft 49 Laws, which showed the benevolence of his government to the poor people and rejection of neocolonial interests. The Laws of Fisheries and Aquaculture<sup>11</sup>, the Law of Agrarian Land<sup>12</sup>, and the Organic Law of Hydrocarbons<sup>13</sup> were of a particular importance. Fending off private interests of big fisheries, large land-monopolizing *latifundistas*, and foreign corporations, they granted fishermen, landless peasants, and the state more space and control over resources and means of production. These and further progressive measures taken by the government catalyzed the process that led to the attempted *coup d’état* in 2002<sup>14</sup>.

Most historical accounts dealing with Bolivarian Venezuela skip the first period of the rule of the Bolivarian government or delve deeply into it just to find reasons for the attempted *coup d’état* (though Ellner 2008). Yet, the first years of the government were crucial to understand not only the irritation of the elites and the radicalization of the President. Narrating what happened in that period in spheres as higher education explains the dynamic of reforms after the announcement of the course toward the Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In higher education in particular, the first years of the new century were a moment of a significant turning point. In that sphere, the legislation and reform proposed during Chávez’s first term in power, was rather timid (Moreno 2008: 374), but it was still met with probably the strongest hostility. Lobbies of the Catholic Church, the business sectors, and conservative academics formerly in fight against university autonomy, started using it to resist governmental reform and intervention (see Moreno 2008). An occasion when the government could have intervened and insisted on the implementation of more radical

reforms was a process in 2001 which is now remembered as Movement for University Transformation (*Movimiento de Transformación Universitaria*, MTU). The failure of the government to support the protest of Left-leaning *universitarios* turned an opportunity for radical change into a lost chance for radical reform. It led to the creation of parallel institutions, as the Bolivarian University of Venezuela, and, as I show in the next chapters of my dissertation, to the reproduction of stratification in the Venezuelan higher education field.

In 2001 members of the Utopia group who contested the 1998 bill PLES<sup>15</sup>, and further professors and students on UCV became increasingly weary that the oldest university was resistant to the reforms of the government. Left-wing militants from UCV occupied a number of buildings on campus, stating that they would not leave until a profound structural reform took place at UCV. For Sergio Sánchez, a student leader during the 38-days long occupation, MTU was conditioned by growing conflicts at UCV: weekly protests were blocking the canteen, the library and further public spaces (Sánchez 2011). When tension escalated on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March, students and faculty took over the Session hall at UCV. Calling their movement March 28 (M-28) the movement came up with a Project to Reestablish the University (*Proyecto de Refundación Universitaria*). They claimed the two central problems of the university were the elite vision of the institution and the formal representative democracy at UCV (MUT 2001b). They wished free access to the university for wider sectors of the population; education that prepares students not only to work in private firms, but to be able to solve the grave problems of the Venezuelan people; and democratization university governance (MTU 2001a). Yet, while MTU was attacked violently by opponents in the university community, it was also not taken seriously by the higher authorities (Alcaldía Municipal 2011: 14). What is worse, President Chávez stayed silent until the very last days of the occupation, when the energy of the occupiers had drifted away (Rivas 2011).

Yet, even when the President reacted, it was with cold scolding, to the disappointment of intellectuals and students who required a reaction to what they saw as a revolutionary process much earlier (Lanz 2001). Chávez announced two of his Ministers as “mediators” between students and authorities, but both were discarded by the radical Left as “the right of Chavismo” (Rivero Castañeda 2011: 20). He then called to the university authorities “to be opened to change, listen to the students, and give the impulse for a consensual solution that

is definitive and pacific”. Yet, while he supported the university constituent he also claimed students “not to succumb to desperate actions” (in Alcaldia Municipal 2011: 15; Gil 2011: 43). This reaction was a disappointment for many of the participants in MTU. It also came too late. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of April an ugly battle emerged, which was quoted by the media as “UCV teaches a lesson in violence” (in Sánchez 2011: 10). Professors armed with bats and pipes stood up against their students. Many were wounded or hospitalized (Alcaldia Municipal 2001: 10, 16). Subsequently students from MTU were not allowed to sit exams, and some students and faculty were expelled from the university, some later joined UBV (Silva 2011: 26). In the months that followed, the movement split internally among myriads of smaller movements (González 2001; Bracci 2011; Rivas 2011). It caused a split within the Left as well as former Left-wing radicals from the Red Flag (*Bandera Roja*) sabotaged MTU (BR 2001).

The disappointment with Chávez experienced during the Movement for University Transformation in 2001 was short-lived. The 2002 attempted *coup d'état* against his government, staged by members of the Chambers of Commerce (FEDECAMARAS) supported by the main syndicate in the country CTV turned the sympathies of the Left back in his favor. The coup, prepared with the financial help of the US Pentagon (Golinger 2005) was shown by private media as an outcome of the clash between an opposition and a Chavista demonstration on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April 2002. It aimed to kill the President and restore the old liberal democratic order. Yet, the newly self-appointed government of Pedro Cramona only survived two days (Wilpert 2007: 22-23). Days of police violence and a number of deaths in Caracas did not stop hundreds of thousands of people to go out on the streets to protest against the negation of their democratic will, cast in the Election in 1998. Still, the opposition had another attempt to discredit the President. In the late 2002 and early 2003 a general strike in the petrol industry took place. During what government supporters would call a blockade (*el paro petrolero*), about 19 000 highly-skilled workers of PDVSA boycotted the production and were eventually fired. Despite the heroic intervention of lower-skilled technical staff that recuperated the work of the installations (Vessuri et al. 2005), the lesson learned by the crisis was clear. Venezuela had too long been dependent on knowledge, science and technology, produced abroad or by foreign-oriented elites. The silence complicity of the administration of traditional public universities whose members did not denounce the coup against a democratically elected President was telling as well: being

granted autonomy “autonomous universities” had turned into a corporative right that granted freedom and security without requiring accountability and social pertinence in return.

The need to create new educated cadres that would serve the government was clear. What was also necessary was an academic policy that would counterbalance the increasingly elitist and exclusive policies with which public universities increasingly hindered the access of poor Venezuelans to higher education. These two necessities were the key impetus of the 2003 inauguration of the Bolivarian University of Venezuela and the Program for mass higher education *Misión Sucre*. UBV was founded with great enthusiasm and celebration. After 2002 the President made structural changes within the high-ranks of Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA): the state-controlled administration of the petrol industry nationalized in the 1970s. Since it was the high-skilled technical and managerial cadres of PDVSA who walked in thousands out of their jobs sabotaging the industry and leaving the country in disarray, the take over the PDVSA building had an air of anti-capitalism: a fresh start over the deserted ruin of capitalism. The latter process was one of the early signs of Hugo Chávez’s turn toward the so-called Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The alignment of intellectuals on the Left with the Bolivarian process and their acceptance of its leader were also conditioned by this development. It was expressed in the mass exodus of educated cadres from traditional universities and the commercial sector, and the mass entry as faculty of UBV. Chávez, on the other hand, allowed the Left-leaning *universitarios* from the former student movements to lead the struggle for higher education reform. And while the process of “crossing the road” from UCV which was positioned across a busy high-way from the main campus of UBV in Caracas, was symbolic and radical choice for many of them. Yet, it also left a bitter taste for those on the former student Left. Creating parallel institutions instead of reforming or dismantling the old one, the battle in the heart of the old enemy was still not won, but postponed for a next round of struggle.

### Conclusion

Chávez inherited a state which had transformed significantly due to the neoliberal reforms in the 1990s that have reduced public expenditure and the public service sector beyond proportion (Lander 1996). All public institutions – universities and hospitals included – were targeted by privatization or simply withered away under the competitive pressure of private

organizations (Lander 1996; Moreno 2008). The Bolivarian government undertook the difficult task to rebuild these institutions and once again create trust among the population. In other words, it engaged in an effort of state-rebuilding. Armed with oil, it attempted to regain slowly its power and trust of the population. As John Gledhill noted, in the past political regimes in Latin American resource-rich countries have never really used national states to perform redistribution that would allow a significant improvement of their subaltern population (Gledhill 2013). The Bolivarian government has went against this tendency, despite the threat of a *coup d'état* and the constant threat of a new assault from the liberal polity against a new “inconvenient” socialist country (Panitch and Gindin 2012: 9). It has also done that against the negative framework which designated it as a “failed state”: a myth created by Western democracy-makers, western-dominated think tanks, NGOs, international financial organizations and governments to justify neocolonial intervention in the Global South (Ghani and Lockhart 2009; Ross 2013)<sup>16</sup>.

Instead of “rebuilding a failed state” and reproducing Venezuela’s subalternity, the Bolivarian government entered a process of rebuilding welfare institutions and trust among its subaltern population. The story of higher education reform shows how difficult this task has been. Led by pro-Western values, traditional elites and public institutions resisted reform by the new government. In order to counter this resistance without using violence that would delegitimize it in the eyes of international community, the government and its intellectuals and experts were left with little choice but to create parallel structures. The redistribution programs, the so-called Bolivarian *Misiones*, were used to offer healthcare, education, allowances for single mothers, care for people with disabilities, and more recently public housing. Still, their creation did not mean the destruction of the large private sector, and did not allow for reform within the state-sponsored institutions of healthcare, welfare and education. Instead of creating a serious contestation of dual power in which the new democratic institutions would gradually gain control and the old existing ones would “die a natural death” they remained in a constant unequal competition. This ultimately meant that the Bolivarian missions became second class institutions that had little to no chance to compete against the hegemonic old structures. In this, beyond continuous grassroots struggles for autonomy (Ciccariello-Maher 2013), within the Bolivarian Revolution dual power has meant little more than the creation of a parallel institutional universe. Through it the Bolivarian state successfully reached out to and became “implicated in the minute texture

of everyday life” of subaltern communities (Gupta 1995:375). Vis-a-vis the omnipotent enemy of “capitalism”, “the “Empire”, and “the Venezuelan oligarchy” it also received a justification of its own entrenchment into rather than transformation of old state structures: a statement, to which the 2001 episode of student contestation at UBV attests.

As the ethnographic parts of my dissertation show, even if President Chávez and his people came to power by legitimate democratic means, they continued referring to and positioning themselves against the state as an external body. While one of the key slogans of the government would say “Now Venezuela is for the people”, the Venezuelan state was often referred to it as an “old bourgeois state” with “metastases” in the new socialist society. This feature is peculiar but not inexplicable within the framework of Left-leaning populist regimes. The latter term is used here not as a form utilized by international think-tanks, NGOs and democracy-makers to delineate “good governance” from forms of political organization which do not align with their program: a program of minimum state intervention that would allow the smooth functioning of free market capitalism. It is also not used in the pejorative term to designate “used to describe a politician who seeks popularity through means disparaged as appealing to the baser instincts of voters” (Economist 2006). Populism can instead be interpreted as a form of political governance which has a number of characteristic features. Populist leaders are able to bring together a broad popular coalition of unorganized movements and political and economic elites loyal to their government. Populist regimes create new political subjectivity emerges which fosters additionally the shared “we” of the people (Laclau 2001). At the same time, they do not provide a substantive critique of the system as a whole, but provides an antagonist image of a common enemy on whom the malfunctions of the system are blamed (Zizek 2006; 2009).

Scholarship on populism in Latin America has mostly concentrated on the questions if and to what extend does populism have an economic and social program, and if populism is compatible with neoliberalism (Roberts 1995; Conniff 1999; Weyland 2003). Works in this field have looked for common economic patterns between populist regimes in Latin America, often in vain. Yet, by now a number of political similarities have been discussed which shed light on populist regimes as the one of late president Hugo Chávez. Beyond the positive efforts of redistribution and building a positive shared identity among their supporters, populist regimes develop a number of positive and negative characteristics that

often balance or neutralize each other. Insisting on anti-elitist and anti-corruption rhetoric, populist regimes create new elites and expand favoritism and low institutional culture (Economist 2006; Clark 2010). Populist leaders often change direction and do not follow a coherent ideological strategy (Clark 2010), depending on electoral victory and referenda on public issues. In economic terms, they often resort to resource nationalism, and remain dependent on international market while performing premature redistribution (Economist 2006; Clark 2010). My work shows, that despite its enormous effort of redistribution and popular empowerment, many of these characteristics are shared by the Bolivarian government. They pose new questions to the relation between a radical government and a modern nation state. They also ask to which extent the Bolivarian and further democratic socialist governments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Latin America will be willing to show new more productive and organic ways to respond to popular contestation, instead of shunning it with fear or negligence.



### Chapter 3: “Some processes are bigger than a single individual”: continuities and ruptures in the higher education reform of the Bolivarian government

The recent history of higher education in Venezuela is to a great extent reflected in the story of María Egilda Castellano Ágreda de Sjöstrand – the first rector of the Bolivarian University of Venezuela (UBV). Castellano’s path from the student movements in the 1960s, through the academic opposition on UCV, and into the high echelons of state power shows the trajectory of many left-leaning intellectuals from critical opposition to bureaucratic positions in Hugo Chávez’s government. Her way from the first Vice-Minister of Higher Education pushing to reform traditional universities, through the design and Rectorship of UBV, and into the new higher education reform of the government, shows the contingency of intellectual positions within Chavismo. All these shifts of both state policies of higher education, and those of Castellano’s career, are rather telling of the dynamic of the Bolivarian process in two aspects: its ability to perpetuate reform, and its treatment of individual responsibility and agency.

On the one hand, the twists and turns of reform within María Egilda Castellano’s terms as Vice-Minister, Rector of UBV, and Ministry expert show the constant path-dependent change of direction in planning in the Bolivarian higher education reform. They also reveal the conditions and consequences of the stratification within the Bolivarian intellectual field. Castellano’s own efforts as a Vice-Minister before 2002 were dedicated to the opening of traditional public universities: they were supposed to be reform to work at the benefit of the whole society, including the poor communities formerly excluded from university education opportunities. Yet, the continuous Cold War reality, the lived memory of Chile in 1973, of the Cuban embargo, and the attempted *coup d’état* against Chávez made the government reticent to undertake profound reforms. By 2002 reforming traditional public universities, was already be interpreted as an “encroachment” against traditional intellectuals. Using the university autonomy, fought by the Left in bloody battles throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the former enemies of academic autonomy had entrenched themselves at old public universities (Moreno 2008). They had shown they did not support Chávez, and were, with few exceptions, not against military intervention to prevent his democratic rule.

Against this backdrop, reforming traditional universities, Chávez and his government created a separate track: a parallel system of higher education institutions which UBV and the rest of

the *aldeas* of *Misión Sucre* were instances of. Operating within a global field of higher education and a national academic field reproducing class distinctions, however, these new institutions recreated stratification at another level: seen from the traditional academy at the old public universities, they remained “second class” education. Their students – poor Venezuelans – were not rendered eligible to access further placements within traditional post-graduate education and the traditional labor market. In their attempt to bridge this gap, without dealing with the present structural constraints, the Bolivarian government deepened this process: once UBV started developing and centralizing power, the Ministry created yet another parallel structure of public higher learning. Since 2008 the *Alma Mater* program, which Castellano has developed back at the Ministry, was yet another separate track. Instead of providing integration, it created stratification this time within the Bolivarian subfield.

On the other hand, Castellano’s own career path between the Vice-Ministry of Education, into a Rector of the first parallel university – UBV – and then back to the Ministry to head the new government program Alma Mater displays the same shifts on another level. María Egilda Castellano forms part of what I have called “the radical nobility” – the group of intellectuals whose possession of both traditional academic credentials and past in the student Left have put them ahead of the Bolivarian process. Yet, the fact that even her track within the regime is not in her own hands but controllable from above, shows that rotation, or circulation, of high-ranking administrators is endemic within the regime. The latter process might be interpreted in line with Soviet-time practice to overcome the routinization of bureaucracy (Szakadát 1994). Yet, I show that the case of María Egilda Castellano and her removal from the Rectorship of UBV, is a manifestation of a different pattern of circulation. It illustrates to a high degree the attitude of the Bolivarian government to experts as mutually replaceable and of personal agency as contingent: the neglect or lack of desire to conducting deep structural reform at the expense of simply performing reform.

Both these shows these tendencies of the Bolivarian process show one of its central intrinsic contradictions. While it attempts to keep redistribution rates high, its actual responsibility for profound structural social change remains rather low. The attempt of the leadership displays rather populist analysis of structural constraints, trying to look for the enemy within or without, instead of attempting a radical reform of the system itself. Attempting to preserve the charisma of its own leadership, it does not allow for the permanence in power of strong

figures even when they as mere executives. And while one can discover a similar process at both state policy and individual professional level, in this chapter I also narrate how these shifts are negotiated discursively by the government agents. They are presented not as ruptures, but as continuities. In view of the main argument of the current dissertation, I claim this can be explained within the more general order of justification of the Bolivarian process. While trying to structure the new institutions of power, the proponents of the Bolivarian process remain needy of new beginnings as source of justification. Instead of a permanent revolution that would allow for the eradication of the old structures of society, they reproduce the permanent liminality of all new institutions. They reinforce what I would call a weak singularity: the inability of revolutions to draw on past instances, because of their constantly reinforced need to present themselves as pioneering, novel, innovative and unique.

#### 1. The old rector of the new university

I first saw María Egilda Castellano at a meeting and concert at UBV in February 2009. Students from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Social Governance had organized a debate on the *Documento Rector* – its relevance for the present and the future of the university. They had invited a number of speakers to have their say. Already a few months into my fieldwork, I saw the name of the former Rector announced as a guest of UBV for the first time. The event was not announced with posters until the very day of its happening, so as I happened to be in campus, I hurried up to listen to her speech. In the elevator leading to the big official Simon Bolivar Hall, I bumped into a tiny elderly woman with fair hair and blue eyes. Castellano was dressed in an elegant official suit in pastel colors. Her delicate appearance and style seemed to be in stark contrast with the usual casual atmosphere in the halls of UBV. I recognized her face from the black-and-white picture from an interview with her in the online journal “*Laberinto*”, published by the University of Malaga in Spain that I had read before going into the field.

I knew from the interview that Castellano studied Sociology, and finished her PhD in Comparative Higher Education at the Central University of Venezuela (UCV). She taught at her alma mater until 1999, when President Hugo Chávez formed his first cabinet and she was appointed as Vice-Minister of Education responsible for the university sector (1999-2002). Subsequently Castellano became the first Vice-minister of Academic Policies at the

newly established Ministry of Higher Education (2002). She was then selected by President Chávez to head the newly established UBV. At that point, together with a team of sociologists and education scientists mostly from UCV, she co-authored the so-called Rector's Document (*Documento Rector*). Along with their work on UBV already in 2003, Castellano and her team suggested the establishment of *Misión Sucre*: a policy that granted free access to higher education to hundreds of thousands Venezuelan students from underprivileged classes. Beyond the interview in “*Laberinto*”, I also knew that in the fall of 2004 Castellano and her team were asked by President Chávez to resign from UBV: a topic which was widely silenced at UBV, and even at the times it was spoken of, competing interpretations failed to give a convincing answer why this happened. Soon after that she was enticed back to the Ministry of Higher Education to work as an academic advisor of the Minister for the new policy of higher education *Misión Alma Mater* – the position she had when I met her in 2009.

The coincidental meeting in the elevator allowed me to watch Castellano make her entrance into the Simon Bolivar hall quietly and unobtrusively. There was no one appointed to meet her at that stage and I could not detect any significant movement in the audience when she appeared in the room. Situated at the top of the building, Simon Bolivar Hall was the biggest public hall where most ceremonies and big meetings at the university took place. A hall designed for official gatherings and ceremonies of the national petrol company PDVSA, the former owner of the space which UBV now inhabited, Simon Bolivar Hall comprised of an ample space full of rows of blue chairs facing a big stage. The huge space absorbed the tiny figure of María Egilda Castellano. I still managed to follow her moves as she kept on walking and then sat in the first row of blue seats – surrounded by people, but quite visibly on her own. She was soon approached and greeted by a group of mature students who lovingly called her “*Profe*”. A few professors who passed by came to shake hands with her in an ostensibly cordial manner. Then everyone went quiet in anticipation of the discussion.

The discussion, as planned by the students, was organized in a fashion rather untypical for UBV. Unlike the usual sequence of presentations that would strike a lively engaged polemic among presenters and audience, this meeting resembled an end-of-the-year concert. A line-up of student bands played a mixture of folkloric songs, mild guitar rock, and covers of well-known revolutionary hits. Their performances were barely interrupted by short speeches.

Instead of debating the topic of the *Documento Rector*, the interventions of both faculty and students simply celebrated the importance of the university, which was hailed as “a great gift of President Chávez to the people of Venezuela.” As the event coincided with the campaign for the referendum to end the term limit of the President the majority of songs were dedicated to his coming victory. The spirit of the event was that of an electoral campaign.

While the stage was set and the few welcoming performances appeared, I had an increasing feeling that the presence of Castellano at this event did leave a certain air of uneasiness. Castellano’s exodus from the Rectors place in late 2004 was, according to my informants, unforeseen. The few professors from the first cohort of UBV who remained at the university by the time I arrived there in late 2008, remembered her amicably but vaguely. The few speculations I heard about the decision of Chávez to remove her from the position, were neither made with much certainty, nor with much passion. The versions varied but I heard two main explanations more than once. Some professors claimed that her vision of the university – expressed in the *Documento Rector*, the document discussed at that very event – was too post-modern, too unrealistic for the socialist state. It clashed – this version went – with the models, imagined by the Marxist core of the faculty and the hard-core socialist trends in the Ministry of Higher Education. For them the university was to obey the state directives of centralized planning and expert knowledge production, and the key interest would be that in Marxist political economy.

The other version, supported by some of my informants, including students from the first generation of UBV, was related to an act of revenge against some imperatives of student recruitment, dictated by radical Chavista youth. Allegedly, Castellano refused to make the central facility of UBV Caracas – a building with capacity of just about 3000 students, which was usually under high demand for entries – the main point of recruitment of students from Francisco de Miranda Front (*Frente Francisco de Miranda*). A radical student group, the version went, loyal and close to the Bolivarian government, the members of the *Frente* took revenge. Supported by government, they pushed Castellano back and opted for a new Rector.

While both these versions were never confirmed by Castellano herself, a combination between the two seemed to have seriously shaken the position of the first Rector of UBV. Within this scheme, Castellano’s position is clear in the *Documento Rector*. The insistence on decentralized structure, academic freedom, and the pursuit of local knowledge through the

centrally defined intervention project (*proyecto*) appear far too diffuse and far-fetched as compared to a rigid centralized project for a state system of higher education. The next appointed Rector – Orietta Caponi – was recruited from the university where Chávez himself did his Masters degree. An old fortress of right-wing academic politics, the Simon Bolivar University (USB) has a high-ranking Political Science department, rather oriented to train experts of quantitative social science<sup>17</sup>. Yet, it seems that the reasons for the replacement of Castellano with Caponi could hardly be founded on politics.

While Caponi came from an alternative environment and network within Chavismo, her own proclaimed vision of what the university should be was very much in line with the *Documento Rector*. She professed values of higher education that would do away with the dominance of the abstract, technical and cognitive measures of success and failure within the university. In her essay on the Revolutionary university (Caponi 2007), she also claimed that while it was to be a university of the state, it should still leave the day-to-day decision-making autonomy to the students, faculty, and communities. Against the general scheme of Castellano's vision, however, Caponi insisted that all professionals trained at the university were obliged to work for the state for a period of time (Caponi 2007). By the end of her short stay, she also met the hostility of the opponents of decentralization of the university as (Diaz 2005). Thus, Castellano's replacement (or firing) seems more explicable through a conflict of interests and personalism rather than political ideology and line of action.

From what I understood from my informants and oral narratives from students at UBV, the history of the university can be divided very much along the lines of its different rectorships. María Egilda Castellano and her team were remembered as having shown much creativity and hard-work by the people who joined her in conceptualizing the university programs and teaching the first groups of students. According to nostalgic narratives about these first 14 months, it was the period during which there was little division of labor between professors, administrative workers, the first 900 students, and the staff. Everybody was full of energy and initiative. No strictly formed triumvirate of power, and no strict departmentalization of knowledge were in place. Students, professors, and staff would clean or decorate the corridors together and then sit down for an open discussion. Oriana Caponi's rectorship – the shortest of all – was barely remembered by my informants. What was the only trace she left was the increasing bureaucratization of the university which was reflected in its growing

bureaucratic complexity and structure<sup>18</sup>. Against its initial design, she departmentalized and split the university into disciplines. She and her team carefully scrutinized all Programs of Graduate Studies (*Programas de Formación de Grado*, PFG): they aligned the curricula with specific disciplines, leaving little or no possibility for cross-listed classes with other programs.

During the time of Andres Elloy Blanco – a former professor at UCV and current rector of a University Institute – the administration of the university was consolidated as a separate unit, following the traditional rules that required a rector, vice rector, and secretary as the three sources of power at the university. Gradually more and more non-academic workers were introduced into the university and voluntary engagement with the building and facilities was not practiced any longer. A strict division was drawn between students, academic staff, administration and workers, the latter being exposed to gradual flexibilization of their working contracts. Thus, by the time current rector Yadira Córdoba had come to the university in late 2007, criticism from within had already started to rise that the university was hearing against the initial promises of the *Documento Rector*.

Back at the Bolivar Hall, the names of former rectors were not mentioned even once, and neither was their influence on the *Documento Rector* discussed. Rector Yadira Córdoba was not even present herself. “She is away from Caracas, as she followed her duty to campaign for our President!” Vice-Rector Luis Damiani announced when he appeared between two performances. After reading a short welcoming note on behalf of the Rector, the Vice-Rector added a few passionate remarks about the necessity of a debate on the *Documento Rector*. He said it was “a document of utmost importance (*importantísimo*) for the development of UBV and the Bolivarian revolution”. Damiani went on to remind the audience that there was fear going around that the university was only reproducing traditional universities and was thereby going against the principles established in the *Documento Rector*. He repeated one of his favorite slogans – “Let’s municipalize fully the university”. This meant the creation of a full network of university classrooms with no central facilities like the one in Caracas where the event was taking place: an initial idea of the team of María Egilda Castellano, which was fulfilled neither by her, nor by the later Rectors of UBV. After his short introduction Damiani, a former Professor of Sociology at UCV himself, urging the audience for a round of applause for his colleague, the first Rector of UBV – Castellano. The audience complied. Descending the stage he exchanged a comradely hug with her. Then he also left the Hall.

While Damiani's brief words were rather enigmatic for an outsider, to all those acquainted with UBV they had signaled one of the reasons why the *Documento Rector* had been a matter of a heated discussion at the University. Earlier that month one of the numerous Resolutions of the President and his government was published at the Official Newspaper (*Gazeta Oficial* 2009). Decree 36 from the 9<sup>th</sup> of February had announced a new Regulations of UBV (*Reglamento*). Created by the team of Yadira Córdoba and consulted on at a number of meetings with students in Caracas and beyond, the *Reglamento* had sparked controversy at the campus in Caracas. The very publication of the *Reglamento* was seen by students and some faculty as an attempt to violate the initial ideas of the university presented in the *Documento Rector*. Not only were the poorly announced and attended consultations seen as illegitimate by a number of students at the University. The *Reglamento* promoted a rigid structure and disciplinary-divided curriculum, new sanctions and disciplinary measures for students and faculty. An insistence on the centralized governance structure concentrated a lot of power at the hands of the 10<sup>th</sup> floor of the Caracas campus: these were some of the principal issues that the students and some young faculty found problematic about the new Regulations.

Yet, the majority of students and faculty who contested the *Reglamento* were not present at the Bolivar Hall, and neither was Yadira Córdoba, seen as its main proponent. Thus, while the concerts and celebrations were going on, my feeling was increasingly that of an elephant in the room, which Castellano's presence was a sign of; and an elephant out of the room, which Córdoba's absence symbolized. The event was announced for 9 a.m. and had started on time. After a two and a half hours' long repertoire of cheerful songs and interventions, at around 11.40 a.m. Castellano was invited to the stage. Just having started her presentation, she asked how much time was left for her to speak. She was told that the event had to come to an end latest by 12.30 p.m., and that there was still half an hour program scheduled after her speech. The special guest of the event, Castellano looked confused and exclaimed she had prepared a lot of material. Faced with no reaction from the audience and the organizers, she shrugged, smiled, and carried on rapidly, skipping through Powerpoint slides apologetically, as she recognized that time was short.

Castellano's presentation was an attempt to sum up the intellectual and historical origins of the *Documento Rector*. She started with the forefathers of emancipatory education, and concentrated on the socio-historic reasons why UBV had been established in 2003. The long,



richly historical and theoretical, but also hasty speech was at that point beyond my concentration to grasp. It seemed I was not the only one – I could hear the increasing buzz of the audience who at that point had been closed up in the hall for a good three hours. Interrupted several times by warnings about the time restriction, Castellano made haste with her slides. Still half-way through, she was reminded to finish up. She shrugged, gave the audience a somewhat disappointed but warm smile, and said apologetically that she would have loved to be given more time “to explain it all”. She received vigorous applause, and sat down to listen to the last pieces of musical performance before the event was over. Then she disappeared quietly into the crowd and out of the hall, leaving little impact on the atmosphere of the busy room – as if she were never there to begin with.

## 2. Breaking grounds and overflowing rivers: an academic’s road to policy-making

My next occasion to meet the first Rector of UBV was a scheduled interview with her at her office at the Ministry for Popular Power of Higher Education (MPPES). Castellano met me cordially at the reception of the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of the Ministry of Higher Education – the one reserved for some of the higher-ranking academic advisors of the Minister. She took me briefly into her office, which she shared: a sign within the hierarchy of the office that made it look as if she were not that central to the administration of the Ministry. We went to a quieter place – the common lobby of the floor with beige soft leather couches, glass table and an imposing abstract painting in warm colors. There, Castellano suggested, we could make the interview without disturbing her colleagues.

Before I even asked the first question, the former Rector of UBV made an apology. She knew I was interested in UBV, but she could not tell me “how it was developing”. She confessed she had not been following what has been going on at UBV ever since she left. She just “heard it was not evolving well and was going against the vision created in the *Documento Rector*.” She underlined that she cherished and believed in the university, and confessed it was her dearest intellectual endeavor and project. Castellano expressed confidence that the current head of the institution, Yadira Córdoba, was the right person to bring UBV back on track. “But it is difficult, once a river runs out of its bed it is not easy to bring it back there”, Castellano uttered, nodding her head. Then painstakingly, and following

to a large extent her presentation intended for the UBV event where I first met her, Castellano discussed with me the origins of her work on UBV and *Misión Sucre*.

María Egilda Castellano's way into politics and the state apparatus is in many ways symptomatic for part of the intellectuals who I encountered during my fieldwork, and especially those at the Ministry or UBV's administration. Castellano was a member of a faction of the student Left in the past. In her case – and that of people from her generation who entered UCV in the 1960s – this was most often the Youth section of PCV. Yet, in Castellano's words she left the youth faction out of fatigue over the state of the Venezuelan Left after decades in the armed struggle. A participant in the Academic Renovation, for Castellano militancy on the Left in Venezuela was not only related to party politics, but was a sign of general involvement with a broader struggle for reform and emancipation. Castellano became a member of the *Movimiento de Renovación Académica* (Movement for Academic Renovation, MRA), an academic movement aimed at a profound reform of university education. In the early 1980s, Castellano went on sabbatical in England, where she spent two years at the Open University<sup>19</sup>. Castellano defended her PhD in 1997: in her dissertation she debated the socio-historical bases for a higher education politics in UCV.

Having joined the process and being appointed as Vice-Minister was certainly a change in María Egilda Castellano's professional career. She told me she was following the career of Chávez during the 1990s: when he appeared in the media in 1992 after an attempted military rebellion against the neoliberal reform of the Carlos Andres Perez government, and subsequently sent to prison, he was visited by many figures on the Left. "I had my reservation, of course, that he was a military man." But Castellano did believe in the Bolivarian project: "It is one of a profound transformation of Venezuelan society! I trust its leader, he is a man who has maintained his firm behavior and political will to carry out this process." Thus, Castellano saw no reason to reject Chávez's offer to join his cabinet. Once he came to power in the 1998 and had to form his team, he selected her by resume, among other candidates, as a Vice-Minister of Higher Education in what was then the Ministry of Education, headed by Héctor Navarro.

While preparing for our interview, one of the resources I used was the detailed interview at *Laberinto* that also featured the picture of Castellano through which I had recognized her at UBV. Coinciding with the entry of the first cohort of UBV students, the interview at

*Laberinto* was conducted when Castellano was still Rector of UBV. By the time it was published in November 2004, she had already been asked to resign. After the decision of President Chávez to replace her and her team, she left the university. This happened fourteen months after the establishment of UBV. By the time I met Castellano in early 2009, the Rector of UBV had changed three more times. In our interview María Egilda Castellano underlined that the need for new policies required her to take up heavy responsibilities (*carga de alta responsabilidad*).

Soon after taking this position Castellano realized the significant difference between being an academic researcher of higher education, and a policy-maker within the state apparatus. She confessed with a smile, slightly condescending toward her former self, “I recall how Carmen Garcia-Guadilla [an education sociologist from UCV] made an interview with me about higher education some time after I entered the Ministry. And I remembered it recently, how this interview made me realize – me, the sociologist of higher education! – how little did I know of how higher education really worked (*como funciona la educación superior en realidad*)!” Through this anecdote Castellano acknowledged the sudden change of her position in reference to state power and the degree of chance and improvisation during the first months of her work. She also positioned herself and her newly obtained know-how beyond the boundaries of the previous knowledge her former self and other academic intellectuals had.

Unlike many of my informants who refused the category “academic intellectual”, Castellano felt much more comfortable with the term. She confessed this allowed her to write and think more freely than educated people in other professions under the previous governments in Venezuela. Castellano’s approach to her new administrative responsibilities was also one of a public sociologist. During her work as Vice Minister in 1999, Castellano commissioned and headed a study on the problems of higher education in the country that came out with systematic results (Castellano 2002). The results signaled extreme stratification and weakening of the public system of higher education in both its organization and the content it offered. On the organizational side, the key problems the report identified were three.

The first significant problem of the system, according to the survey quoted by Castellano, was that “there was not one integrated system of higher education in the country centrally controlled by the government.” Back in 2000, this plea was not only to be understood as one for a bigger role of the state – Castellano suggested that a major problem was the

impossibility to translate educational qualifications and experience with a single system of reference among the various institutions of higher education within one single country (see Castellano 2002). This made the mobility of students and professors between the different universities practically impossible. “Social exclusion and segregation were a second very grave problem”, Castellano noted. This survey as well as more recent research (Morales Gil 2003) had shown a rapid elitization of higher education in the autonomous public universities. Until the end of the 1980s the public system of secondary education was rather good. In the 1990s the sector was partly privatized and this led to further stratification. In Castellano’s words, there was an ostensible “shrinking of the state” (*reducción de papel del estado*) and reduction of public funding for universities. Thirdly, as Castellano explained briefly during at UBV, Venezuela was demographically divided. A map of her power-point presentation at UBV had shown the 1990s concentration of universities in the overpopulated urban coastal region (North). Hardly any universities could be found in the rest of the country.

On the level of content, Castellano mentioned two interrelated signs of the decay in the quality of higher education. On the one hand, there was a content-oriented shift: More people were being trained in technical subjects than in the humanities and social sciences. “A lot of university students came out of education with no critical thinking and were made to reproduce the system. As I said back then, higher education was turning into a “mill of professionals” without ethics, political and social sensitivity”, she recalled. On the other hand, according to Castellano, a process of closing the universities off was rapidly taking place: education was perceived to be irrelevant to society (*no tenía pertinencia social*) and reaching out to wider communities did simply not take place. Castellano shared her experience from UCV, the oldest university in the country: “The university extension and work with communities – an idea so dearly embraced by the Córdoba Reform from 1918 – was becoming a perfunctory routine. Short courses were held for people in businesses, but no one wished to use them to integrate communities.”

The first steps undertaken in 2000-2002 after the publication of the survey were still not in the direction of creating a new university. This idea, which the President had mentioned on various occasions, only came after the 2002 attempted *coup d’état*. Castellano’s initial efforts as a Vice-Minister were oriented towards three policies to bridge the gaps in higher education

detected by the survey. These policies are described in the *Laberinto* interview with the following keywords: academic networks (*redes academicas*), quality with equality (*calidad con equidad*), and national and international integration (*integración nacional e internacional*) (Laberinto 2004:52). The first project was related to creating new regional centers of resource concentration that would serve all universities in a given area where resources were scarce. These would provide for the universities, but would also serve as a basis for the endogenous nuclei (*nucleos endogenos*). They would allow better resource allocation, but also a more integrated system of higher education where transfer was possible.

The second proposal was to extend higher education to broader communities. It was aimed to increase the number of enrolled students, but also to present programs with a social component. It also addressed student performance (*desempeno estudiantil*) given that many students took double the time they needed to obtain their degrees. “Their places remained occupied and not available to the high demand for university placements”. The third important point was the attempt to think of the Venezuelan policies within the regional development of Latin America, following Bolivar’s incentives of continental integration (Laberinto 2004:52)<sup>20</sup>. To add to this formal reform, a number of propositions addressed content within higher education. In Castellano’s words, the attempt was to bring social sciences and humanities to complement technical training in order to articulate social sensitivity within the field of natural sciences and technology. Complementary to this, a Law of Communal Service for Students was introduced that obliged all students to have extension programs as a mandatory part of their training.

Student performance was also addressed: “Before, it was considered to be a problem of the individual student, whereas our understanding was to look for what was happening in the relation between teacher, student, curriculum, etc.” So, the idea of education experts in the government was to promote integral education (*formación integral*) of professionals with moral function of higher education in the concept. Besides, a number of scholarships were introduced for students with lower income. Curricular changes were suggested by the Ministry of Higher Education that took on board ideas from the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire and socially responsible science.

Except for the publication of the survey in 2000, today no further information about the development of these policies is available to the public. To justify the scratching out of these

reforms upon the establishment of UBV, in 2004 Castellano had said to her *Laberinto* interviewer: “The universities were very slow and resistant to change (*muy lentas y resistentes al cambio*). They accepted the changes theoretically, but did not act with the rapidity that the revolutionary process required (*no actuaron con la rapidez que exige el proceso revolucionario*)” (Laberinto 2004: 52). In our interview years later, she also explained that the pressure put on her by the Ministry required significant changes in the academic staff – special training and limitations to their internal policies. Yet, she was a bit less critical of the universities in general, and said simply, “Well, I do not know what happened with the university networks and the other projects from that era, they were simply not continued after the 2003 changes when the idea of UBV was put into practice. This new idea simply condensed all the previous efforts in one”.

Castellano’s story on the policies developed within the Ministry of Higher Education before 2003 was indeed very detailed, and smoothly merged into the establishment of UBV as its logical continuation. The establishment of UBV in 2003 did, however, mark a whole new direction in the Ministry’s work. Since Chávez’s ascent to power, contested by all other political parties, the Ministry was operating within an already extremely politically polarized system. The attempt to promote any legal reform and especially the bills for a new Law of Higher Education was encountered great resistance in 2001 (MTU 2001). Besides, especially autonomous universities were resisting any reform initiated by the government. Reports issued by education experts not related to the government suggest that any change was seen as political and bluntly “ideological” (Garcia-Guadilla 2006). The complicity of the administration of the autonomous universities during the 2002 attempted *coup d’état* showed that the more conservative academics were so opposed to the President, that they would support the shed of blood to have him out of power.

Pressing for country-wide policies and an integrated system of higher education, the Ministry had eclipsed some small-scale programs promoting wider access to universities. At least two alternative approaches were developed from within UCV during the same period. Firstly, a number of progressive academics developed a pilot project of wider access to higher education, called *Programa Samuel Robinson*. Initiated in 1997 one year before the coming to power of President Chávez, this program of UCV had two main tasks. On the one hand it allowed a number of graduating high-school students from poor communities in the

metropolitan area of Caracas to join preparatory classes at the university for one year. Upon receiving a successful ‘Pass’ on their classes and the program these students were allowed into UCV without an entry exam.

On the other hand, the Samuel Robinson program targeted teachers at poor *barrios*, working at higher risk and on a meager salary. It encouraged them to visit classes for further education and qualification at UCV. This program was proposed to the Bolivarian government as a model of reform for the education system. To the surprise and disappointment of its creators, however, it was not taken on board and is now confined to the budget of UCV and the voluntary work of professors related to it (Programa Samuel Robinson 2001). At the same time, however, paradoxically, the government had also failed to support more radical attempts to carry out ‘revolutionary reform’ from within the traditional universities. An example is the unsuccessful occupation attempt at UCV – arguably the university with the most powerful symbolic capital in Venezuela – that took place in March 2001 which I detailed in the last chapter of the present dissertation. While Chávez failed to support this campaign, the then Vice-Minister Castellano was quoted saying “Under the circumstances of resistance at the autonomous universities all universities in Venezuela have to become experimental“, i.e. not autonomous (BR 2001).

### 3. UBV and Misión Sucre as tools of emancipatory higher education

The establishment of UBV as a new “experimental university”<sup>21</sup> under the direct jurisdiction of the Bolivarian government was a symbolic act of highest significance. The previous projects for reform from within, through the legal framework, or of the whole system by the Ministry of Higher Education were suddenly abandoned. A new, rapid, revolutionary project was put in motion. UBV was supposed to fulfil two tasks at once – both to integrate poor Venezuelans into higher education; and to create new alternative knowledge, research, and teaching practice. In this sense, the new university did not only serve as an embodiment of the new policies of higher education: it was the “jewel in the crown” of the new reform. As Castellano said to *Laberinto*, UBV was to become the Revolution’s “new communicator” (*el nuevo comunicador*) (Laberinto 2004: 53).

While UBV is usually discussed as a lawful result of broader historical processes, its creation can also be seen as an outcome of a very specific turning point in a critical historical conjuncture (Abbott 1997; Kalb and Takk 2005). As a new experimental university, UBV was to be brand new. Yet, UBV's creation was also a clear sign that the government has suffered a defeat in the heart of the Revolutionary Left: the autonomous universities. In 2004 Castellano said that "Already in 2002 Chávez launched the idea of UBV – a different university (*una universidad distinta*)..." In March 2002 President Chávez summoned the commission and "spoke to us about which areas of knowledge need to be represented as priorities at this moment".<sup>22</sup> In 2009 she explained this as a rupture with traditional universities in the "Napoleonic" style: with horizontal governance and no strict discipline division, it would allow for the integration between students and professors in a horizontal structure of governance; between natural and social sciences; between thought and practice. By 2009 it was recognized by most of my informants, Castellano including, that opening UBV was rather a defeat. As María Egilda Castellano told me in 2009, the attempted *coup d'état* showed that "reforming the traditional universities was, for the time being, impossible". Signs of this development were already clear in 2002 when Castellano – still a Vice-Minister, but already at the new Ministry of Higher Education – had to work parallel to the attempted reforms. She was invited to head the commission that elaborated the project of UBV. The commission work was eventually disrupted by the April 2002 attempted *coup d'état* and the petrol strike. The schism running through the field of Higher Education in Venezuela became unbridgeable. High-ranking figures among the administration of the autonomous universities in the country declared their support to the leaders of the coup. The subsequent strike of PDVSA workers in late 2002 and early 2003 – some of whom had also been teaching at the traditional universities – was the last straw that broke the camel's back. The emptied buildings of PDVSA provided the physical and symbolic space for the new university.

In the *Laberinto* interview, María Egilda Castellano spoke extensively about the idea of UBV. She emphasized the axes of integrated education that were represented in this new university through the *Documento Rector*: "the aesthetic, the cultural, the political, the ludic, the methodological, and the epistemological". She emphasized that the way to bridge the gap between theory and practice was the most significant unit of the curriculum – the project (*el*



*proyecto*) which students had to do in cooperation with local communities. There she spoke of the importance of thematic discussions with communities (*mesas técnicas UBV-Comunidad*) that were held to diagnose problems arising at the students' own local communities. She spoke of the challenges to train not only the students but also the professors, in order to allow them to shape together the new citizens of the Bolivarian revolution.

Castellano emphasized to the Spanish journal that there was a provision allowing professors to stay employed full-time in order to remain committed. At the same time, the program was made flexible for the students of UBV, 97% of who were coming from the poor communities in the urban slums (*barrios*), or were adult students working on the side to make a living. Back then, she also spoke of conventions held in cooperation with national companies to provide apprenticeships and jobs for the students: for instance, National Radio and TV for the journalists, state institutions for political scientists, the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands for students in the areas of Agroalimentation and Agronomy (Laberinto 2004: 53-54). Castellano's involvement with UBV was short. Asked why she was replaced as a Rector, she shrugged and smiled, "I still don't know why, but Chávez wanted another role for me. Some political processes are bigger than a single individual".

Thus, in 2009 María Egilda Castellano was still not willing to discuss her role in the creation and initial running of UBV beyond abstract reflections on the main principles and first steps taken after the opening of the university: a discussion that followed very closely what she had already told *Laberinto*. She said it was all in the past now. "I had the chance to lead the university in its first important 14 months, but as I told you, I haven't followed its development from then on". Asked about what she thought might have gone wrong with the institution after she left, she said her understanding was that the principles of the *Documento Rector* were betrayed in the period 2004-2007 before the newest rector came in: "In that period UBV became just a traditional university: they started enrolling students according to their political belonging, professor contracts were flexibilized to part-time employment which is not conducive to an engagement with the environment as we wanted it. And they stopped working with the *proyecto* as we had planned in the beginning".

Castellano's short-lived stay at UBV displayed a rather peculiar conjuncture in the biography of the Revolution. Her shift from a Vice-Minister to a Rector of UBV was not diminishing: she was selected to guide an intellectual endeavour central for the Bolivarian process and its

higher symbolic stake in the field of educational reform. Chávez's quick and sudden request for her withdrawal, just months after the beginning of the first school year of UBV (2004), however, was a matter of a different order. It remained one of the key critical moments for the development of UBV. Castellano was herself summoned back to the Ministry – on a significantly lower position than the one she once held, and one not necessarily consistent with it. As an academic advisor of the new government program *Misión Alma Mater*, she was to head the team thinking of the new policy which would challenge, rather than continue or expand *Misión Sucre* and UBV. Castellano spoke about this as a next step consistent with her biography. But did *Alma Mater* continue *Misión Sucre*?

#### 4. Revolutionary continuity or radical rupture: *Misión Alma Mater*

To my question what could be done to improve the situation with UBV, Castellano answered that there was still not sufficient attention being paid to student employment beyond graduation and that the conventions with state companies were neglected. The state had turned out to be the main employer for such students. Yet, the job data-base of the Ministry of Higher Education had just a few positions at a time. It was not sufficient to provide work for the hundreds of thousands of students who were to graduate from *Misión Sucre* or UBV over the next few years. “Professors’ education also deteriorated, and we need to bring back the communities as a main target of the project. I really hope the new Rector can reintroduce these important aspects of the initial project of UBV”. Castellano also mentioned that the old problem of educational experiences untranslatable among the institutions persisted: “This is still very much a problem nowadays – with the traditional public universities not recognizing the degrees of the Bolivarian ones. So we still search for a solution to integrate the whole system.”

The new policy *Alma Mater* was initially a teachers’ training program. It grew immensely by 2008 to become a new policy (*Misión*) of the government (Zritt and Huerta 2008; MPPEU n.d.). Elaborated within the Ministry of Higher Education, it became what the Ministry would call its next attempt to rectify its own previous policies, and to integrate the whole system of higher education in the country. María Egilda Castellano’s affiliation with *Misión Alma Mater* was not introduced during the event at UBV. I had learned about it because of an interview with her at the bulletin of the UNESCO Institute for the Studies of Higher

Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC 2008). In this interview, she positioned the program within a broader framework of reforms in higher education: she claimed its establishment followed consistently from the initial policy *Misión Sucre*, through UBV and the Latin American School training doctors for the medical centre within the poor barrios in Latin America. Yet *Alma Mater* was seen as an overarching project: “a bigger strategic project for higher education in the country” (IESALC 2008:1-2).

In our interview, Castellano expressed a similar position, saying “The effort of the Alma Mater Program is to achieve access to higher education for all people in the country. It follows the model of municipalisation designed by the former project of *Misión Sucre*, and keeps the *aldeas* as parts of *nucleos endogenos*.” According to Castellano, the difference was that *Misión Alma Mater* did not mean the concurrent creation and municipalization of universities, as had happened with UBV and the dispersed university classrooms *aldeas*. It did, in fact, entail a process of upgrading of already existing universities. But its main focus was on creating new universities directly linked with each other and the central government of the state. “Just now these will be parts of other larger centers of higher education the Socialist University Complex Alma Mater (*Complejos Universitarios Socialistas Alma Mater*, CUSAM): as such, they will share libraries, computers, and technical facilities on a regional basis, without these being part of just one university.”

Asked about the specific difference between *Misión Alma Mater* and *Misión Sucre*, Castellano went on to explain that she saw *Misión Sucre* as a preliminary, preparatory stage for the development of what was now the main task of Alma Mater – a new system of higher education. “*Misión Sucre* was the first response to exclusion. It introduced municipalization. So UBV and *Misión Sucre* are complementary with *Alma Mater*. They are terribly similar (*bastante parecido*) and create a university network.” As much as Castellano was positive about the continuity between *Misión Sucre* and *Misión Alma Mater*, the difference between the two programs spoke rather of a rupture in the overall plan of the government. By 2008 the Ministry of Higher Education had to deal with a serious backlash from the traditional system of higher education. The degrees granted to students of the *aldeas* of *Misión Sucre* were not accredited by the Office for the Planification of the University Sector (*Oficina de Planificación del Sector Universitario*, OPSU). These students were thus not allowed to do further education and post-graduate studies at autonomous and prestigious experimental universities. The

latter still held the majority of MA and PhD programs in the country. Students from UBV and *aldeas universitarias* were suggested to undertake a whole new BA program at the traditional institutions in order to be allowed to do their Masters degrees.

This process was a visible signal that the new educational institutions were not recognized on a national level, let alone within an international higher education context. Besides, as a decentralized university, UBV not only included the central facilities hosted at the former buildings of PDVSA, but also coordinated *aldea* placements for 250,000 students. All these, however, were coordinated predominantly by a tiny bureaucratic apparatus based at the 10<sup>th</sup> floor of the central facility of UBV-Caracas controlled by the rector's office in Caracas. By creating universities directly monitored by the state, however, the Ministry did not necessarily break this increasingly central and independent governance structure and mandate more power to the *aldeas* and local communities. It rather claimed centralized power for itself. Given these challenges, *Misión Alma Mater* came into being as an attempt not just to reform a single university, but to create a new order of universities.

The initial idea that came from within the Ministry of Higher Education was to expand its own universities in order to provide opportunities for post-graduate studies to the „Bolivarian“ students. This provision was envisaged through a rapid transformation of technical colleges (CT) and university institutes (IU) into Politechnical universities. By 2008 CTs and IUs offered short-term programs of vocational training that trained qualified technicians. Yet, like in the case of the university degrees given at the municipalized *aldeas*, they were not accredited by OPSU as full programs of study. To avoid hardship for the numerous students within the Alma Mater program, these institutes and colleges were to gradually be transformed into universities. Together with these, Misión Alma Mater was to establish 52 new institutions (MPPEU n.d.)<sup>23</sup>. It was also to open a number of Socialist University Complexes Alma Mater (CUSAM) where research resources and facilities would be shared among university students and faculty on a regional basis. They would be the new representatives of Venezuela on the global market of knowledge production.

To implement these programs, however, the rules relevant to them should be abided by all public universities: young and old, traditional and experimental. At the time of my interview with Castellano, I only knew about the 29 “upgraded” universities. My face must have showed surprise when she mentioned the number 52. “Yes, it is not easy, you know”, she

noded at me, “these are 52 new institutions that we called Experimental Universities. We are trying to make them integrated with each other. But the project is even more ambitious than that. *Misión Alma Mater* would provide the regulatory framework for all Venezuelan universities.” The concept of a higher education system proposed by *Alma Mater* contradicted the rationale of the old traditional universities. It negated their idea of independence and universality, represented by the autonomous universities. *Alma Mater* however also contradicted the current state of the affairs at UBV : it had to do away with the concentration of a lot of financial, technological and human resources housed at one campus only. Instead it was seen as a network of many small institutions. These would have their own governance structure but would also be centrally controlled by the government.

Less than five years after her exodus from UBV, Castellano’s vision of the future of the Venezuelan university system seemed to have changed. *Misión Alma Mater* was seen by her as a way to negate the traditional universities in Venezuela that resisted government-suggested reform under the banner of “autonomy”. Yet behind Castellano’s narrative of *Misión Alma Mater* as a continuation of *Misión Sucre*, one could find a detail that complicated the scenery of Venezuela’s higher education field even further. *Alma Mater* did not only go against the traditional universities. It went against the main principles of UBV posed in the *Documento Rector* and narrated by Castellano. In actuality the new reform would abolish some of the most important assets of UBV. While UBV aimed to follow the Cuban example and municipalize a small number of big universities centrally controlled by the university administration, *Alma Mater* created a big number of small universities. The latter were directly related to and controlled by the Ministry, thus their autonomy was challenged.

The combination of humanities and social sciences, which UBV offered in every class was also challenged. While the curriculum of the new Polytechnic Universities allowed for a social component in the learning, it also enforced a vision of the dominance of short-term technical training programs directly and instrumentally linked to the productive forces of the state. The place of grassroots decision-making and horizontal structure of the university was stipulated in the design, but still discussed as a desired asset to be achieved at UBV. With *Alma Mater* the control remained completely into the hands of the Ministry of Higher Education, that would elect a hierarchically structured administration and governing bodies of the Polytechnic and new universities. Within this conjuncture, faculty and administrators’

decision-making autonomy was jeopardized, let alone the student participation. With Alma Mater, knowledge oriented towards the local community became a lower priority after the production of cadres that would help the competitiveness of Venezuela in the global market of knowledge production and competition. The government left the idea of a decentralized network of loosely connected classrooms that provide life-long community-oriented learning. It was replaced with a program of a small directly controlled institution that would help a centralized oil-centered state's planned economy.

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While my interview with Castellano was going on in the common room, music was suddenly played loudly in one office. A number of her colleagues ran out of their offices in a visibly elevated mood. With a quick apologetic smile my interviewee interrupted our conversation and asked with a shining face, “What happened, is he staying...?” One of her female colleagues nodded energetically and exclaimed “He’s staying, he’s staying!” Castellano got up and jumped into the extended embrace of her colleague. The two women were soon hugged by another man in a suit, all three bouncing about happily. Bedazzled, I watched the dance of the three professionals at their office in the middle of the working day – rejoicing as it seemed to me the victory of a sports team or of an election campaign. Others strolled out to deliver the news to the rest and promised to come back to celebrate. Castellano came back to sit next to me and we continued the interview, even if recording at that point was already impossible: the music was now even louder and a further number of chatty colleagues with clown-like celebration accessories, food, and drinks were gathering around us for a party. We chatted for a while more, and then I asked her to tell me what this was all about. Her face was radiant, “You know Chávez had to take austerity measures against the global crisis and today he decided which Ministers to expel and which ministries to close. We were afraid our minister was also going to be expelled and the Ministry to be merged with another one. But the President authorized him – so we will keep going!”<sup>24</sup>

I was flabbergasted by this sudden feast caused by the mere fact that the next political move of the President did not take place. Still, I was still not totally surprised. The constant shifts of position of the government were no novelty. Not only was UBV's rectorship taken and left four times before I arrived and twice after. Since Chávez came to power in 1999, the institution that had been taking care of higher education has undergone a series of

metamorphoses. In 1999-2001 it was Ministry of Education but then in 2002 the Ministry of Higher Education was born. In 2007 it was renamed the Ministry of Popular Power for Higher Education, and by the time I left the field in 2011 it was renamed yet again as the Ministry of Popular Power for University Education. The Ministers had also changed several times: the institution went through the hands of Hector Navarro, through Samuel Moncada, Luis Acuña, and Edgardo Ramirez. In 2010 the last change happened when Yadira Córdoba, Rector of UBV was selected to guide the Ministry as well. A year later, she was also put in charge of the Vice Presidency for Social Issues, but was then not invited to join Nicolas Maduro's government after Chávez's death. As a Rector she was first provisionally replaced by Luis Damiani. At the time I was finishing this chapter in the winter of 2012, the Rector was Prudencio Chacon who replaced Córdoba because of her appointment in the Ministry. Besides, almost all high-ranking officials whom I interviewed in the period between 2009 and 2011 had changed their position at least once: never completely expelled, they were given a different position within the Ministry or the Bolivarian process. Even Luis Damiani – the Vice-Rector of UBV who greeted María Egilda Castellano cordially at the UBV event left UBV for UCV after he replaced Córdoba as a Rector. Against this background, María Egilda Castellano's story and her resignation to the arbitrariness of her career shifts within the Revolutionary government seemed more justifiable, though not necessarily just. It shows a rather chaotic path-dependent pattern of rotation within the Bolivarian institutions: one that is not necessarily means to ends, but creates a certain diffusion of responsibility and an impossibility of the Revolution to be steadily institutionalized.

### Conclusion

The story of Castellano reveals a number of advances and challenges the higher education reform in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the role of academic intellectuals in this process. On the one hand, it is difficult to determine to what extent these reforms present continuity or rupture with the past – distant or close – of higher education in Venezuela and Latin America. Venezuelan intellectuals on the Left claim a continuity of the struggles against stratification. Yet, like Castellano, it is mostly members of the radical nobility -- intellectuals with traditional academic credentials from the student left – who retain positions closer to the power field of the state. As the university establishment and the

whole higher education reform are part of the endeavored social change of a populist government, they become part of its effort to establish the wrong element in the system (Zizek 2006). In this process, intellectuals end up being the ones who are seen as a wrong element, or are at best utilized in the search for it. This process becomes one of perpetual ruptures rather than permanent change. This process is rather symptomatic. It shows the induced powerlessness of the government and its intellectuals against envisioned real and not so real, external and internal enemies. Instead of creating a radical alternative, it leads to a constant reproduction of the transience and liminality of the new parallel institutions of higher education.

The decision to abandon the initial policies of integration of the higher education system and create parallel structures could, of course, be explained within the broader political context of Venezuelan and Latin American recent past. It was conditioned by the history of political violence, and military aggression backed by foreign intervention against Left-wing regimes in the Global South and Latin America. It was also accelerated by the resistance by academics at traditional universities, many of who were supported the violent *coup* against the government in 2002. Still, the constant change of direction also provides a context in which the Bolivarian institutions do not hold the chance to become a central piece of reform. They remain arrested in the old structural conditions and discrepancies they are created to address. The constant shifts could be interpreted as a acts in a long-term war of position (Gramsci 1971) creating dual power against the persisting capitalist structures, the enormous energy and resources, the reality on the ground suggests another interpretation. The enormous resources spent to build projects that are then readily discarded and quickly replaced speak of a lack of a sustainable model of institution building. The decision to abandon the project of UBV and *Misión Sucre* and go into a whole new direction put at hazard even the frail efforts made to provide a model of higher education development inclusive to the poor.

Within the broader framework of rapid political rotation of experts within the government, the constant shifts of decision-making are also telling of the role of intellectuals in it. The decision to start from scratch every time resistance appears, and to remove from charge the responsible people, speaks of a peculiar tendency of the Bolivarian process to think of intellectuals as replaceable. Castellano's trajectory reveals a survival strategy of an individual who tries to reconcile these contradictions in her own personal and professional biography.



While the vision of higher education reform of the Bolivarian government shifts, that of Castellano seems to stay more or less firm. She seemed compelled to recreate anew the bits of it in every next project she had started since her entry in the Ministry of Education back in 1999. Despite the constant change of frame of reference, as a Vice-Minister, Rector, and a higher education expert she has been consistently fighting for the same vision of a university: one providing an integrated mass decentralized higher education, accessible to all, which would benefit both academic and local communities and would create science pertinent to the use of the society. She has tried to do that despite being shifted from one institution to another one. She also had to work within frameworks of institutional reform which were hardly compatible: the attempt to reform the traditional academic field in Venezuela; the attempt to create a new parallel decentralized system of higher education institutions; and the attempt to create new centrally controlled and specialized schools for cadre training. Castellano's insistence that these are all consistent shows her reduced options of influencing structural change, and her own biographical retreat to perform localized and piecemeal rather than coherent and persistent reforms.

## Chapter 4: Worlds apart: Bolivarian intellectuals between and radical nobility and downward mobility

In this chapter I present the stratification within the Bolivarian higher education field in both spatial and physical terms. I show the different types of trajectories behind and opportunities and constraints before three different groups of intellectuals who form this field: the members of what I have called “the radical nobility”, the new Bolivarian educators, and the students and graduates of UBV. The first group comprises of the intellectuals who work at the Ministry of Higher Education and the UBV administration. Members of the former student Left, who had higher education and militancy at the traditional public universities, they cared and catered for the opening of higher education places to the poor. As they formed just a small section of the existing educated elite and the Venezuelan higher education field, encompassing traditional public and private universities, the former radicals needed to create new academics, who would teach at the Bolivarian university institutions. In order to provide education for all hundreds of thousands new students, a lot of cadres with Bachelor’s degree (*licencia*) were accepted to teach at UBV and its *aldeas*. This second group had to accumulate academic credentials in order to help the university acquire accreditation. While they had higher education from traditional universities, they did not have the radical credentials which would allow them upward mobility within the regime. The students who enrolled at UBV – a university which faced challenge to get accreditation – were even less accepted. Unlike as UBV faculty - often former professionals in the public private sector – and despite their degree from UBV, UBV students had little to no chances on the job market.

Within a field that relativizes academic merit as a class distinction, one could expect that academic credentials gained at traditional academic institutions, would be of little value. Organic links with communities, experience in social work and teaching would be expected to matter most. Yet, as the old system of university education was still at its place, and was questioning the *raison d’être* of UBV and its *aldeas*, traditional evaluation criteria remained the only measure of accreditation for UBV. The members of the old student Left who possessed such credentials from traditional universities had to preserve the value of their degrees, while claiming a “Revolutionary ethos”. Thus, they kept the upper hand in the job opportunities and in their proximity to state power. In their increasingly precarious labor positions the new Bolivarian educators and their students had no such privileges and stood no chance to

acquire them. In this, they were exposed to unequal power relations and competition both within the Bolivarian higher education field, and within its public institutions.

### 1. New spaces, old hierarchies

As most state institutions the Ministry of Higher Education in Caracas is located in downtown Caracas - next to the metro stop *La Hoyada*, close to *El Capitolio*, the National Assembly and the tiny bit of old colonial town. A space of commerce of predominantly cheap goods and services, all the streets in downtown Caracas were covered with Chinese and Arab shops and diners, ironmongeries and kiosks, shoe- and cloths-shops and hair-dressers. Little to no public space around the central square Simon Bolivar was left untouched by commerce. Yet, the government had gradually reclaimed some of the abandoned key commercial buildings. The 24 stories' high skyscraper where the Ministry of Higher Education was situated was representative in this respect. It was split between the Ministries of Information, Science and Technology, and Higher Education: a conjuncture, which spoke directly of the vision of the government to tie neatly media, science, and education. A monumental column supported the building over a large marble platform. The platform was usually utilized for exhibitions of current advancement of revolutionary science, technology or information<sup>25</sup>. The first seven floors hosted the Ministry of Higher Education.

The first time I went to the building each floor was scattered around a reception, situated intimately close to some of the cubicles and desks of the staff members. On both sides of the reception desks corridors led to the common rooms of the secretaries only separated by transparent smoked-glass walls from the offices of the more prominent members of staff. The visitor could listen to and engage in the conversation between the receptionists and the secretaries, the guards, and some staff members watching the National channel 8 on a loud TV set. The place changed over the next few months after a rapid restructuring. The receptions of each floor were moved forward and surrounded by opaque frost glass-walls with the herald of Venezuela and the name of the ministry carved on them. On both sides there would be benches for the visitors, and code-protected doors led into to the offices. Inside already, the working spaces were refurbished, and more divisions through glass walls were put to create spaces of different rank. Secretaries still shared cubicles and common space, but those of higher positions already had their own cabinets behind the opaque doors.

This change reflected the gradual stabilization of the regime and its stake at permanence. It was also a sign of labor stratification, dividing expert from unskilled staff.

The Caracas campus of the Bolivarian University of Venezuela (UBV) inhabited a different spatial position. Its bounded central facility (*sede*), its relation to the Central University of Venezuela across the street (UCV), and to the extended structure of *aldeas* it coordinated, all brought different concrete and discrete relations of power. UBV was founded with great enthusiasm and celebration. After 2002 the President made structural changes within the high-ranks of Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA): the state-controlled administration of the petrol industry nationalized in the 1970s. Its high-skilled cadres had walked in thousands out of their jobs sabotaging the industry and leaving the country in disarray. Chávez fired permanently those who struck, transferred the administration to the Ministry of Energetics, and donated the space to UBV. This was a clear sign for a fresh start over the deserted ruin of capitalism. UBV's space was also symbolic. It was a new university positioned amidst the old University town. The close distance to the historically important and pleasant campus of UCV across the street, was also practical: faculty and students could use its libraries, lunch-kiosks, and green spaces.

However, if the spatial position of UBV was an advantage, this was counterbalanced by the impracticability of the building. A former seat of the company "Lagoven S.A."<sup>26</sup> (a branch of PDVSA), it was an office building. It was made to host the elite administration of the state-owned company. This gave the ten stories high-rise a certain air of belonging to the *ancient regime*, and thus, its reconquest was symbolic anti-capitalist gesture. Yet, starting a new university at the deserted administrative building of the nationalized state industry was not that easy in physical terms. The technical aspects of the building made it unfit for a university setting. Half the building of UBV was exposed to the noise of a busy highway. Tiny office rooms were refurbished into classrooms for up to forty people. Most professors did not have their own offices, but simply desks or cubicles in shared rooms with numbers of their colleagues. This made the collectives closer, but also made confidential talks and office hours difficult. The rest of the building did not have enough big halls to host public events, and such usually happened in the hall of the elevators on the 3rd or 6th floors. The space for the library was tiny, and so was its collection. The few spaces allotted to internet users did not fulfill the need of a deprived student population, the majority of which could

not afford a personal computer, causing long lines. Social spaces were non-existent except for a few stone benches next to the entrance of the building. The gate of UBV, the “university opened to the community” was protected with a guard and a scanner.

The spatial hierarchy of the building of UBV in Caracas was also seen as an impediment for a more horizontal process of learning. It was topped by the 10th floor administration. The contrast between the design of this floor – similar to the newly established spatial hierarchy at the Ministry of Higher Education – and the rest of the spaces at UBV, was drastic. The top floor started with a granite reception surrounded by comfortable leather couches. The rooms inside were all isolated from the corridor through wooden doors. Meetings could only be arranged through the secretaries and the informality between students, faculty, and administration was rather hindered than perpetuated. The luxury materials, brick walls, and exclusive arts exhibits behind the desks of administrators, were also in sharp contrast to the rest of the rather shabby building. This hierarchy was reflected in language as well: the administration was referred to as “those on the 10th Floor (*ellos al piso 10*). For all these reasons, professors and students alike looked enviously at the other side of the road and said that UCV’s campus– UNESCO world heritage site built in the 1950s – with its covered hallways, extensive fields, and huge libraries: horizontal, user- and environmentally-friendly. As Dario, a professor at Social Governance told me looking up from a bench at the entrance of UBV to the top floor: “What we have here is just a hierarchical old structure embodying what we fight against!” Then he looked toward the entrance, his gaze indicating over the autobahn and into the campus of UCV “What they have over there is a decentralized campus which predisposes to democracy and participation.”

In spite of these shortcomings, the campus of UBV in Caracas was rather well structured. The Zulia campus was located in a field next to land squats and moors, more than an hour drive from the city center. The few *aldeas* of UBV I visited also presented diverse, but often unconventional settings. In Caracas they were usually set in schools and kindergartens, and took their night-shifts when pupils were away. In other smaller towns, classes would mostly take place at the houses of community members or central squares of more secure neighborhoods or villages. The school and kindergarten settings presented a rather strange experience. Although students were usually adults, often older than the professors, they often sat on children’s chairs surrounded by colorful paintings, alphabet drawings, and paper

clips from child magazines and animated books. This atmosphere created a certain feeling of immaturity and even seemed to induce among the students – usually low-skilled professionals and technicians – a playful mood not unlike that of a class of children. In such settings, professors were also embodying the spatial hierarchy, adopting a much more top-down position toward the students and speaking to them as to naughty pupils.

Many *aldea* settings in remote urban and rural areas, however, did not have even that much school-like structure. During my time in Venezuela, I witnessed *aldea* meetings at a community houses, kindergardens and at a small village square. Amidst the interruptions of music, motor bikes, and running children, adult students would sit in a circle – on chairs or on the ground – and listen to their teachers. Professors who volunteered at *aldeas* often complained that while the experiences there were invaluable, the resources were rather scarce. Sent by UBV and the Ministry of Higher education to be a consultant of an *aldea* in the delta of the Orinoco river, Rosa, a professor from UBV Caracas and graduate from UCV started from the capital armed with a laptop, with DVDs, booklets, and all sorts of audiovisual materials in a suitcase.

You can imagine me there, with all my *caraqueña* arrogance: I was delayed for days, waiting for the tide to go downstream to the *aldea*. Once there, I was amazed, the *aldea* turned out to be a shack. Students gathered under the trees. There was no electricity, no running water, not even a normal toilet. I left the suitcase on the ground and told the professor ‘I came here to teach you, but now I think you must teach me how you work under these conditions.’

Such discrepancies necessarily created a difficult internal dynamic and inherent difference between Ministry staff, the UBV administration, and professors at UBV and *aldeas*. Depending on their different positions, distinctions and privileges, this made them proud or humble. The majority of them try to adapt to the new emergency of education necessity and treat their work as community-oriented. What becomes clear, however, is that within these new Bolivairan structures, professors with working class background get working class jobs (Willis 1981). As I show in the next section, this experience depends on their higher education credentials and profile before joining the higher education reform in one of its particular loci. Yet, in this conjuncture, class differences persist within the new Bolivarian field.

## 2. A radical nobility: the new revolutionary capital of the old student Left

“It has been the same struggle, all along”, Bernardo Ancidey looked me in the eyes, as he told me these words in a calm and simple manner. With his leather jacket, sweater and a beard the former student radical from the Central University of Venezuela (UCV) did not exactly fit my initial expectation of how the “Director of Student Performance” at the Ministry of Higher Education would look like. Yet, having already met his co-workers on high-ranking positions at the Ministry, I should have rather been surprised to meet a polished EU-style bureaucrat. “I was a student representative in the Legal Studies department of UCV and a student leader (*dirigente estudiantil*) of the Federation of University Centers (FCU). This was in the 1980s when some of the bloodiest battles with the state took place.” He looked at the side and then said: “Many of our comrades died. If you walk around UCV you can see the plates with their epitaphs still cover the campus.” Ancidey added that the liberal governments were not afraid to suppress protest with violence. Asked what they were fighting for he told me: “Back then we were fighting for what we are fighting now: against the privatization of housing, discrimination, and for mass access to higher education”.

I was introduced to Ancidey by Edgardo Ramírez – back then heading the foreign affairs division of the Ministry, and soon to become a Minister himself. Ramírez, an easy-going and chatty professor at UCV, was mentioned to me as a close fellow of Chávez, who came from the same county as him – Barrinas in the flat lands, *los Llanos*. When I went to make an interview with him I did not know about the familiarity with the great man, which, it turned out, allowed Ramírez frequent appearances on National TV. He received me in his modest flat in the suburb Los Simbolos. He lived with his son, within what seemed a community of neighbors whose doors were never closed behind the front-door metal rim. As he had initially left too little time for my interview he invited me to a second visit to his office at the Ministry. While in his ample office with a view over Caracas at the Ministry he showed me a map of Venezuela marking with quick movements the locations of the student movements in the 1980s where he was a student militant himself.

“Do you know of the Academic Renovation in 1969? Good – so afterwards in the decade of the 1970s student activism was in decay, the Left was weak and fractured. But then in the 1980s new movements mobilized, trade unions, but also students. And now when you walk around this Ministry, every next floor has its representatives” – Ramírez spoke to me of his

own student militancy at the Experimental University “Ezequiel Zamora” (UNELLEZ) in Barrinas. He was elected twice a student representative at the university which was founded to allow students from the flat lands to stay closer to their homes where there were no industries but just agriculture stock-breeding in the lands of big landowners (*latifundistas*). He told me of the difficulties for the Youth Faction of the Communist Party of Venezuela, together with other Left-leaning, feminist and ecologist movements, to reorganize students unions, traditionally dominated by social democratic party *Acción Democrática*. “In my home town, surrounded by vast agrarian lands, the students were the only force to defend the peasants”, he said, speaking of the grave situation of the people from the flat-lands (*llaneros*).

Then in a sudden feat of genuine enthusiasm he smiled and made me walk with him up and down the corridor and the stairs – his leg tightened in a splint after a football injury. While walking the stairs he told me “Juan Barreto, the former mayor of Caracas – he was a student leader at the Journalism school in UCV, and so was the current mayor of Caracas’s area Libertador – Jorge Rodríguez – in Medicine. His father was a militant of the Communist League and was killed by the police: a square at the UCV is now called after him. And here, at this Ministry, it is all full of former *dirigentes* from the 1980s: Bernardo Ancidey was in Legal Studies, Humberto García in Mathematics, two floors under... one floor below, two floors ...” At this point I also started to complete the picture: “I know from our interview that Carlos Alzualde was a student union member in the movement *Plancha 80*. And academic advisors of the Ministry are María Eguilda Castellano, Eduardo Medina Rubio, and Rigoberto Lanz, were active in the 1960s during the Renovation...” I said. “You see?” Ramírez interrupted me, smiling. My words were proving his point that many of the administrators on the Ministry, some among whom I had already interviewed, could be positioned on the student movements’ map which he started drawing for me in his cabinet.

Many more statements similar to those of Ancidey and Ramírez were uttered during my interviews with academic intellectuals on both the Ministry and UBV. These ‘testimonies’ of sort, expressed the hopelessness of the struggle, the shattered illusions, as well as occasional persecutions and death haunted the past of my informants. The genealogy of the socialist side of the Bolivarian movement – formed by a coalition between former militant Left-wingers and military men – was still predominantly related to a student and academic Left, which participated in larger struggles for social rights (López 2005). It was them who,



according to Javier Corrales, provided the necessary cadres and discourse to supply the revolutionary change, due to the gradual openings of opportunities for participation of the Left by the end of Venezuela's liberal democracy in 1998 (Corrales 2007) The battles had been numerous: the underground militancy of the forbidden Communist Party (PCV) throughout the 1960s; the process of decentralization and university reform *Renovación Académica* (1969-1971); the 1970s election campaigns on behalf of a recently decriminalized but also steadily fragmented Left; the 1980s battles for social justice; the 1990s struggles against austerity, privatization, and commercialization of higher education and health. These all have helped create a shared identity among those who fought and supported the Left. The scene of socialist academics was intrinsically related to the struggles of the Venezuelan Left – one of the discretely, but harshly repressed Lefts in Latin America.

Besides their past involvement in the student movement, the intellectuals working in expert positions at the Ministry and the administration of UBV had high academic credentials. They often had a degree from prestigious universities in Venezuela or abroad. Before Edgardo Ramírez took the position of Minister in 2010, the succession of Ministers, Vice-Ministers, and advisors at the Ministry of Higher Education and the Office for Planning of the University Sector (OPSU) came from graduate studies at universities as Oxford (Samuel Moncada), Manchester (Hector Navarro), the Sorbonne (Tibisay Hung; Rigoberto Lanz), the Complutense University in Madrid (Luis Damiani), Cambridge (Luis Fuenmayor Torro). Even those who have predominantly studied at the top universities in Caracas had already gained a PhD and established a career of academics and researchers before entering the field of higher education policy. Many specialized abroad. The combination of their academic expertise, and their radical credentials allowed them the privilege to participate directly in the decision-making process of the government. Hugo Chávez himself came from a military academy, but also had an MA degree in Politics from the elite university Simon Bolivar University. This distinction of the top intellectuals related to the government allowed the deepening of the division between academics from the old and the new system.

In the next section I show that such a prestige and privilege was not necessarily given to or claimed by rank-and-file professors, let alone students at UBV. While it was an objective necessity to keep people with high academic credentials in order to have the programs accredited according to the old system, the fact was that the traditional academic credentials

were an intrinsic part of their social capital: “the aggregate of actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu 1997: 51). What I show is that within the Bolivarian field of higher education this social capital was aided by a peculiar form of symbolic “revolutionary” capital: formed thanks to the combination of education and networks from the traditional universities and radical credentials from the former student Left. And while it might not be the capital most valid among revolutionary networks from the tiny guerrilla Left or the self-organized forces of *barrio* communities (Ciccariello-Maher 2013), it has been preserved within the government and reproduced through its higher education reform. And while the President and his people defied publically merit- and education-based rankings and vanguardist hierarchy within the movement, beyond military men he was surrounded mostly by highly educated intellectuals with a past in the Left. Against this background, in the following section I show the different set of credentials of the rank-and-file UBV faculty who often feel inferior because they could accumulate neither high academic, nor radical credentials that the hierarchy within the field required.

### 3. The new Bolivarian educators

When UBV was established, it faced the typical problem of a new university set in a country with a scarcity of academic cadres. The rent economy and the rather limited service sector had not created substantial niches for qualified workers. An increasing number of vocation training colleges, and post-graduate school programs have opened in the country since 1958, but they were still insufficient to meet the needs of the young and growing population of the traditional universities, let alone the huge rapid increase of students in the new Bolivarian campuses and *aldeas*. Still, due to their resistance to Chávez and his political project, not all highly educated Venezuelans wished to join the new revolutionary university. Many of them treated it with contempt. UBV founders met them half-way: they wished to recruit politically committed people, loyal to the government, and who would understand the need for mass higher education and put energy in this ambitious new project. For all these reasons, the profile of the people who joined the new university as teaching staff was hardly one of academically oriented researchers. And while they were committed to the Bolivarian project, many of them had neither the academic, nor the radical credentials i.e. they lacked the

revolutionary capital that would allow them a full-fledged participation in the radical nobility in the administration of UBV and at the Ministry.

With a few exceptions, usually among those freshly out of university, or already had an academic appointment, the UBV professors I interviewed had a background as professionals and practitioners. Often first generation into higher education among their families, they had often been directed toward a degree and a profession that allowed them a career and a decent income. Chemical engineers, school teachers, public servants, social workers, and lawyers were among the most often encountered profiles of UBV academic staff. Dominica Mendoza, a professor in Politics, whom I met for an interview at the narrow and crowded staff room of faculty from that department, detailed how she chose a career track that eventually led her to UBV:

I entered the department of social work at UCV, but was also training to be a secondary teacher in language and literature at the Simon Rodriguez University in Caracas. As a person coming from a family in the *barrio La Vega*, a daughter of a clerk and a driver, I was rather the lucky exception, and not the rule. We, students from the working classes (*clases humildes*) were never at the same level as those from the middle-class. They had books at home. When I entered UCV it was the first time that I went to a library in my life. And it was unjust that university professors took the level of our middle-class colleagues as a starting point, and not ours. Students from the popular sectors were offered no guidance (*acompañamiento*). Among the few lucky to enter, many did not graduate but quit disheartened.

Dominica did both degrees simultaneously and was working as a teacher during her degree. She said that the possibility to join UBV came as a surprise and relief soon after the end of her degree: “At UBV we stand the chance to make up for the injustice and inequality which students as us encounter at traditional universities. It is not about uniformity, but we offer guidance. People from different backgrounds are treated according to their level: an equitable education”.

Another telling story is that of Samanta Belizario from the department of Social Management, ten years older than Dominica. I had an interview with Samanta in an empty classroom on the noisy side of UBV. We were there to leave her child – just off from school

– to run around us in the ample space of the classroom rather than the staff room: she was trying to leave her colleagues, usually tolerant to children, to have a few moments to work without the playful kid in the room. Like many of her students, Samanta was also doing a Masters degree while teaching full-time at UBV. She did not have the money to put her child in daycare, and her husband was working full-time as well. Samanta was also among those students from working-class background who stayed at the university and finished their degree. Yet, her path afterwards was hardly an even one.

Coming from a family from the lower classes (*sectores populares*) I was the first one in my family to enter university. I was surprised I was accepted in psychology which is usually difficult to get in. In this subject you need to choose your career track or specialization in the last years. I was really interested in social psychology, but decided to enter organizational psychology and human resource management instead – it seemed a career with better prospects: no one ever helped me make my choice. I had to do my best to earn my living.

When she finished her degree, Samanta recalled in our interview, she lacked academic guidance, and the possibility to undertake an academic career seemed remote. In our interview, Samanta detailed her convoluted career path – shifting jobs in the sector of human resource management. “I hated it. It was an invaluable lesson as you see how the system works from within, but there is no social value to it.” She wanted to teach and started a degree in teaching at a Technical College in Caracas, but she got discouraged: there seemed to be no easy way between the degree and getting teaching experience. She started working as a security instructor at glass factories in the center of the country. Only there, ten years into the career of a professional, she received the news about the new university UBV hiring faculty. She tried to go back to Caracas from where she was, but was only accepted at the university campus in Punto Fijo. “Once I landed this job, I knew it was my dreamed job.”

Nowadays Dominica and Samanta are among the most excellent research and teaching staff at UBV, according to their superiors and their colleagues. Their words however, are telling of the type of lived experiences of education and work that many of the UBV professors brought with them into their work. They are a clear sign of the insecurity which many graduates even of prestigious public universities as UCV coming from underprivileged

background felt at the university. An academic career was not an option that seemed viable at first: they received little encouragement from their professors, who offered no encouragement that they could ever become eligible for an academic job. Changing teachers' positions in the case of Dominica, and geographical positions and careers, in the case of Samanta, both of them only landed an academic position once UBV was formed. Yet, they also had to face new challenges. They were again to compete according to the rules set to reinforce the privilege of their former classmates: in order to make the education they gave to their students eligible, they needed to upgrade their academic qualification and researchers' credentials while teaching full-time.

Yet, the majority of the UBV faculty still embraced unanimously and uncritically the past in the movements of the members of the radical nobility ahead of UBV and the Ministry of Higher Education. Being radical and a true political activist was unquestionably related with a past in the student Left: a past which many of them did not take part as students coming from lower-classes were not socialized with the often middle-class dominated radical groups on public universities (López 2005). Dominica, who ran for elections and engaged in localized resistance against the left-turned-right student organization *Bandera Roja*, claimed she had “a reactionary youth” when compared to her professors' past in the student movements. Javier Tafalla, a professor in Social Governance, from the same UCV cohort as Dominica, said to me once “I find the anti-academicism of some of my colleagues disturbing. I look up to academic-activists from the 1968ers generation at UCV.” About his own activist experience, Javier said timidly he was a student representative at the UCV department of Sociology, but: “As former UCV rector once said, rightly, the generation of students before us, in the late 1990s was called the ‘Generation Moron’ (*generación boba*). They lost it all but were at least in a big symbolic struggle against the establishment. Our generation was called “X” (*generación X*).” Asked why, he told me “...probably because in the 2000s, the struggle seemed lost, and the movement and the university was a bastion of the middle class.”

Even further, with the accumulation of academic credentials while at UBV, many new faculty members started gazing more and more jealously across the street to UCV and its graduate programs “where real science is made”. While UBV remained in an inferior power relation to UCV both in terms of radical past and academic credentials, UCV was still the place where most Ministry and UBV administrators taught in the past or even at the time I

was at the university. Some expressed this inferiority in their conversations with me and felt ashamed they were part of UBV. Javier claimed he admired people like Vice-Rector Luis Damiani, an academic sociologist, whom he called the intellectual father of UBV:

No one from our generation has these capacities that the former student Left on UCV had: to combine the academic excellence and the revolutionary militancy. At UBV there is a lack of respect for academic excellence. When UBV colleagues speak against UCV: I can't believe it! In this country the only true university people (*universitarios*) are from this university. Damiani also still teaches there still!

Javier was the first among my informants to leave UBV. While a few of his colleagues started the MA program designed by UBV, he and the majority of the others were doing a post-graduate degree at more prestigious public universities. As many of them had to take post-graduate training programs there in order to have UBV accredited, some of them experience that their credentials were becoming more recognized at the traditional universities, but UBV as a whole was not a prestigious university to stay on in order to build an academic career. Even before finishing his MA at UCV, Javier applied for a job at UCV and become an Assistant Professor there. He told me he felt happier there: "At UCV one can at least do proper science". At the same time, the MA program at UBV, to which many of the colleagues of Javier subscribed was difficult to sustain. It was to start in 2008, but by 2011 when I was last in the field, it was hardly initiated. A few of my acquaintances were taking it with mixed feelings. Samanta was one of them. Yet, due to economic pressures, she and her family had to leave Caracas, and to my knowledge she had not finished the program. At the same time, while UBV faculty members were leaving the university, the hierarchy between education and teaching at UBV and UCV was reproduced also in the hiring strategies of UBV. University graduates from UBV were not hired to teach at their own university. New faculty members were recruited from UCV and other public universities. This even UBV's hiring strategy reproduced *par excellence* the old division which UBV was created to subvert. Thus, while the value of teaching at UBV or working at the Ministry could not to be measured through the conventional methods of evaluation typical for rankings (Parra Sandoval et al. 2010), the divisions also meant the persistence of certain hierarchy of symbolic capital: one which would conceal other forms of economic, social, or cultural

capital all part of the old system of distinction and prestige. UBV professors were seen as less “intellectuals” than those who would come from a middle class background a generation before them, and gained traditional and radical credentials at the old universities and their student Left. And while the new Bolivarian educators humbly admired their elders and those with a better standing in the academic-cum-radical hierarchy, it seemed that this hierarchy depended on specific class and generational distinctions that excluded them. Having accepted the hegemony of the new form of power embodied in the possession of revolutionary capital, the new Bolivarian educators did not articulate or seemingly see the lines of the generational and class conflict, and did not try to act upon it.

Against this background, in the next section I explore how the above-mentioned distinction affected the students and alumni of UBV – the beneficiaries of the higher education reform of the government. I show that while UBV and the *aldeas* were producing more and more people with formally finished higher education degree, most of them did not acquire high-ranking positions in the government. For such positions the government also used cadres trained at the traditional universities in the country and at elite universities abroad. In this division, UBV students could not score even as high as their professors, who had – by means of their education at traditional universities – received first professional, and then academic job. Thus, while the opportunity to get an education gave students from poor and marginal communities a certain empowerment and dignity, the majority of them remained again excluded from the traditional job market and education opportunities.

#### 4. The children of the Revolution: new socialists on the old job market

While UBV faculty were finding it difficult to live up to the requirements of academic and radical credentials all at once, the struggle was even more difficult for their students. UBV was initially established on a historical materialist analysis of the living conditions of marginalized and repressed working classes in Venezuela and Latin America (UBV 2003). It was aimed to address discrepancies and discrimination by giving students from impoverished backgrounds a better chance to get a job. In a country where higher education is the only marker of social success and often the only way to be visible and employable on the job market, the concern with the systematic exclusion of students was more than explicable. Yet, the experiences of students on the job market were mostly demoralizing.

The Bolivarian university and the *aldeas* were not able to support the the number of registered students by providing them full scholarship. The scholarship was only 200 Bolívares a month. With a minimum salary of 900 Bs.f, the sum of 200 was not enough to allow students play their daily expenses as individuals, let alone support a family. Students mostly lived out of the support of their families, partners, children, or worked while studying. They often had to work and study to support their family. Part time students often failed to meet the required grades to win the scholarship, which made them drop out altogether. Cohort ranks thinned out over the years leading to graduation and only a few individuals out of groups of 30 to 40 would obtain their technical or bachelor's degree. Moderately demanding requirements and professors's general unwillingness to "understand" students' constraints could not help with the realities of many individuals' economic situation. Even worse, UBV diplomas were not fully recognized for admission in post-graduate programs at traditional universities or on the job market. By 2010 the majority of programs that were offered through *Misión Sucre* were only accredited by the University Council, not by the Office of Planning of the University Sector (OPSU). This basically meant that the education they dispensed was not considered up to national standards.

According to both professors and students, many graduates from the Bolivarian system are denied access to post-graduate studies at traditional universities. "It is terribly exclusive as always: our students go, show their diplomas, and they are simply smiled at and asked to start a BA from zero at the 'accredited' university." Susana González, head of a department at UBV told me during our interview, pointing over toward her own Alma Mater, the Central University UCV, just across the street from UBV: "We are now trying to place more students, but demand will exceed supply for years". Vice-Rector Luis Damiani added to that, "Our own faculty members have no choice but to take graduate courses at traditional universities as we still have not developed such courses. It is a serious situation, because making a new university with cadres trained in an old one very difficult." And just as UBV was starting its own post-graduate programs, PDVSA new employees were sent to take English classes at the British Council to prepare them for subsidized MA degrees in Texas<sup>27</sup>.

In the conventional job market UBV students faced similar problems problem was the same. "Commercial employers don't value Bolivarian diplomas," said Julio and other graduates from the first UBV cohort of graduates. Two years after graduating from the



Politics and Government program, at the age of 35, he had still not found a permanent job and was supported by his parents' assistance. Geraldin, graduate of the first cohort of Environmental science was in a similar situation. "At UBV I was told that the moment we finished the university we would be able to find a job in public administration. But from 300 people who were accepted at PDVSA this fall only three were from UBV. The others were from the traditional and private universities." She also told me of her colleagues' bitter disappointment when they made it to public office: they were mostly given routine tasks, making coffee and photocopies. Geraldin also lived with her parents in a *barrio*, where she hoped to develop projects through the community council of her block. She had sent a number of applications to state banks – the Communal (*Banco Comun*), Venezuelan (*Banco de Venezuela*), and Women's (*Banco de la Mujer*) Banks – asking for credit to fund her project. Thus far, however, the applications had failed and so had many of those coming from UBV students. In fact, of all groups of students I met at UBV only once class could get a grant from for a project with a sea-side community. Filling in applications had low or no returns.

Although if professors maintained that the chances were higher for UBV graduates in state institutions, Geraldin's words were confirmed by my interviewees in the Ministry of Higher Education. "The Human Resource chief of PDVSA is my close friend, but we have frictions on that point: he refuses to accept my arguments why we should employ students from the Bolivarian University, and always prefers such from established public and private schools" Carlos Alzualde from the Ministry of Higher Education told me with a bitter smile. "If you are asking if the public sector can offer jobs for the majority of the students that we educate, the answer is no – one of the weaknesses of the system is that we first created UBV and then started to think about student employment": these were the words of Bernardo Ancidey from the Strategic Planning Sector of the Ministry, and ex-chair of OPSU. They both suggested contacts at PDVSA to inquire into this subject, but the respective officials never responded to my request for an interview. The intake of UBV students at expert positions did not change while I was in Caracas.

Against this backdrop, UBV students' confidence about finding a job upon graduation sounded sometimes puzzlingly exaggerated. Their great expectations spoke of a certain cognitive dissonance or *hysteresis* (Bourdieu 1984) between the main promise of the higher education field, and low convertibility of the cultural and capital accumulated at UBV, which

could hardly get any meaningful economic value. Henry, a fifty years old student, was divorced and childless. He started medical school at UCV when he was younger, dropped out and traveled to the USA where he worked random precarious jobs in construction. Back in Venezuela he taught English as a foreign language until the possibility to study at UBV came about. He received a scholarship and was a good student. His scholarship did not allow him to get his own place, so he moved in with his parents who supported him. While being in his third year in the politics and government program, he was lagging behind his classmates, partly due to issues of computer literacy and struggling to prepare offline, handwritten homework. In spite of this Henry was still cheerful and positive he would find a job with the government, in international affairs, and travel abroad as an ambassador of the country to some distant place.

A student who (I thought so at least) stood a slightly better chance to get into such a position was Vincent. Vincent came from a distant barrio and had to travel two hours to get to the university or later to his work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in downtown Caracas. Vincent' came from a working-class family who managed to send all their children to university. One of his siblings was a lawyer, and another a civil servant. A student activist in his first years, he was slightly burned out by these activities, and decided to help change at some other point in his life. He was employed at the position of a very excited about his work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and was studying French – his first language after Spanish. However, for the three years that his employment in the Ministry lasted, he did not change status or position: he carried on working as a lower ranking administrator, reading lots of Venezuelan and foreign history, and dreaming about being sent for a mission abroad.

Even if initially I thought Vincent stood in a good position to run for a diplomatic office, my illusions about his chances quickly dissipated when I met Andres. A person the same age as Vincent and Yunier, he worked higher up at the same Ministry. A child of diplomats and a graduate from an American liberal arts college, Andres was chairing the office of a Vice-Minister. With a BA degree like Vincent and Yunier, Andres had never worked to make a living in his whole life. He came back to Caracas and entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at a much higher position than any of the two UBV graduates. In addition to his connections in the diplomatic milieu, his knowledge of languages made him upwardly mobile. At the time I met him at a reception of the British Council, he was undergoing state-subsidized distant

learning MA training at a prestigious European university. It was apparent that Andres had an upper hand in just any competition at the Ministry against Vincent, let alone Henri: besides a better start in life, he also had the traditional qualifications and distinctions that the upper-middle class upbringing provided. He was socializing with diplomats and foreign journalists, as well as rich Venezuelans from both opposition and Chavista circles. His ample private flat in a posh area was just a short drive to the Ministry on his air-conditioned car: physically and symbolically miles away from the tiny rooms in family houses in *barrios* where Vincent or Henri lived, and from which both needed a good hour in jeeps, busses and then metro to reach their work at the Ministry.

The comparison between the trajectories of Henri, Vincent and Andres, as well were like a notebook example of how reproduction functioned in society. Despite the introduction of an alternative higher education, it shows that institutions in the Bolivarian state are still very much functioning within the *doxa* (Bourdieu 1998) of the institutional reproduction inherent from the liberal democracy: keeping intact the hierarchical power relations and arrangements so that access is granted to those in higher position as their universal privilege. In this, both Andres's family links to the establishment dating from the previous regime, his privileged education and fellows in the diplomatic career, and his upper-middle class embodied cultural *habitus* have formed his social capital. The paradox was not that Andres's social capital far exceeded that of Henri or Vincent, but that its importance has not been reduced or rendered irrelevant under the socialist government. On the contrary, the old rules of stratification persisted. Despite the new supply of graduates, traditional universities home and abroad were still considered to be the legitimate supplier of credentials for the employment of students by both the state and the market. What is more, both Andres's success and the enrollment of MA cadres at prestigious Western universities shows that the local system of traditional public universities still remained lower in the esteem even of the government: a grave sign of the reproduction of the hierarchies of the global field of higher education (Marginson 2008) within the new Bolivarian system.

Yet, as Pablo, a mature student from Political science and a member of the motorized *barrio* forces who defended Chávez upon the attempted *coup d'état* in 2002 told me: "It is more than an inaccessible professor funneling knowledge down your head. Here we are working with practitioners who make us help communities with applied knowledge". For him the

experience at UBV was eye-opening: “I was working as a butcher until I was 40 – I did not know I was working class. Thanks to my professors at UBV I realized the class division that has always been there, but I could never articulate it before. Now I know it and act on it.” Geraldin herself said that after studying at UBV she has definitely decided not to take a commercial job, “After training at UBV you are most fit to become a community organizer (*promotor social*). You work with communities to help them mobilize and solve their own problems”. One department had better results placing its students: the program in Social Communication, or Journalism. Its students often worked in student media on campus e.g. the school’s radio – *Somos UBV* – the UBV web-page, on some less frequent publications that came out infrequently or local radio and TV stations.

Yet, even if the students who could find a job were not more than the lucky few, getting a commercial job was, somewhat ironically, scorned by UBV professors and members of the radical nobility at the administration and the Ministry. It was not considered as a possible and dignified outcome of the university training. In their discourses most professors worked toward a particular “hidden transcript” i.e. the implied rather than explicit requirement of the system of schooling (Margolis 2001). The professors had strong expectations that already the first cohort of students would realize through their education the meaninglessness of the conventional capitalist occupation system. “We are trying to show all the dysfunctions of the commercial job market and to make students recognize the importance of applying their knowledge in community work”, Ariel Vegas, a teacher in Environmental studies shared with me. “But students want jobs, and they are disappointed when they don’t have money to support a better life-style”, she continued disappointed. Upon my question about the job chances after CEU, Vice-Minister Ruben Reinoso told me angrily.

Your instrumental, Western way of thinking reflects the neoliberal education you get over in Europe. It does not allow you to see beyond the application of the knowledge of students on the job market. We are not trying to have this instrumental attitude here, in which work is the only way to progress in society. We're trying not only to train professionals but also to apply knowledge in direct action in community councils (*consejos comunales*). It is a process of perpetual learning. But tell me, do you know if there is one single country, has a fully fitting education supply and job market?

While neoliberal governments in the Europe Union were running their highest rates of youth unemployment since 2008, I could hardly give a positive answer to Reinoso. Gazing over to the West to see who was doing worse, however, did not help much. It was clear that socialist Venezuela was not advancing at high speed in solving this problem which most societies faced with the decline of the Keynesian welfare state and the deep economic recession in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Yet, the theoretical normativity of the members of the radical nobility with which they solved real-life structural constraints of their students, was striking: they still required that their students internalize unemployment or low-ranking administrative work as a norm of their successful training. While the students got no jobs and clear prospects for the future, they were supposed to tirelessly mobilize their communities while no funding was available for communal work either. They had to internalize the values of the education programs of the government and to perform the role of the new Bolivarian citizen: one who would work endlessly with communities either as appointed by the government or as a free-lancing entrepreneur dependent on fugitive communal bank funding.

Against this background, the question remains if and how students from future cohorts of UBV will deal with the ever growing discrepancies between the initially promised job and the eventual joblessness that their UBV studies meant for them. While faculty and staff, themselves underpaid public servants, were disappointed with the students' desire to get commercial jobs, the new university system reproduced the stratification it was aimed to solve: working class kids got working class jobs (Willis 1981). Yet, unlike the famous ethnography of English lads by Paul Willis, UBV students did little to subvert their own opportunities at the end of their education. It was mostly those who designed their curricula and taught their classes who created both the initial promise, and the intermediary subversion of a "normal job". The growing precarity of their income, and security and the alienating discourse of the government against the middle classes, put them in position to scorn other educated individuals, liable to similar downward mobility as their own.

##### 5. The Bolivarian precariat: a downwardly mobile class?

While the academic credentials of UBV students and faculty were not treated as sufficiently advanced outside the university, they were becoming part of a bigger phenomenon: a growing downwardly mobile educated class, which was living in increasingly precarious

conditions. This process happened on both symbolic and material level and was poorly reflected by most people at the university. Instead, a very simplistic reading of the Marxist training at UBV sometimes resulted in anti-intellectual discourses among students and some professors. Reflecting the speeches of Chávez and politicians and media close to the government, it antagonized not just the rest of the country toward the government and its supporters, but also part of those working for the Bolivarian process. Susana González, a professor in Environmental studies, who left her adjunct position at UCV to head a department at UBV, told me during our interview at her UBV office:

I am sometimes afraid that all this discourse of Chávez against the middle-classes is no good. You see, I am middle-class. I come to work and hear my students shouting how they are going to deal with us till the last blood drop. I am getting afraid that if something happens to him [Chávez], they will come down from the barrios and we will be the first ones they will kill.

Susana's parents were Spaniards who migrated to Caracas in the middle of the 20th century, running away from war and poverty. Susana said that the family did not have much, but her parents were hard-working people. "All they earned, they invested in our education. We were brought up, me and my siblings with the idea of education as a first value," Susana said proudly. The privilege of higher education still allowed Susana and her husband-engineer, to give better chances to their children and enroll one of the few good public high-schools. Most of Susana's colleagues did not have such privilege. They enrolled their kids at cheap private schools with the hope they could get good grades and enter traditional universities. Among the children of UBV professors who were at the age of entering university at the time UBV opened, to my knowledge none were enrolled at the new university. Those who could not enter UCV went to private universities such as Santa María or Universidad Católica Andrés Bello. Thus, even UBV professors had few illusions that the system has indeed changed: the chances which the education at traditional universities and UBV were not equitable for the time being.

Susana's words of being a member of the middle class were not shared by many of her colleagues who came from a working class upbringing and spoke with little or no distance to people from the barrios. They openly admired people from the *barrios* in general as the "good people", "brave people", "the better people", and even spoke of them as the

courageous proletariat of the workers' revolutions. Yet, Susana's words that professors were a target of the hostile discourse against the middle-class expressed the intersection of two increasingly dominant narratives at the university. On the one hand, the use of phrases and slogans as "death to the bourgeoisie", "fight with the middle class to the last blood drop" were not infrequent in student discourses. They were also often said in a milder form by some professors, often such coming from the middle class themselves. On the other hand, Susana's narrative expressed clearly the growing concern with the increased violence on the streets of Caracas. Formerly confined to *barrios* it now affected all classes of society.

Considerably and alarmingly high, the moral panic that crime in Caracas has created is often reflected in conversations among members of the middle class who do not support Chávez, or those who did, but switched their preference<sup>28</sup>. The main worry of the increasing crime and insecurity in the country has been discarded as part of the media war against the regime. Among opposition-supporting and "*ni ni*"<sup>29</sup> circles the stories of recently experienced horror of crime were a quotidian conversation topic. Among Chavistas, and unless it was a personal story one was telling, it was received with aloof look and shoulder shrugging. Whoever expressed publicly concern with violent crime was often scorned by other Chavistas or their own bad conscience that they were "putting arms in the hands of the opposition" by feeding into their discourse.

The crime rates and increased cases of robberies have been perceived with extreme acuteness among professional and educated citizens in Caracas. Living in less protected high-rise blocks of flats in neighborhoods which were often target of robberies and have become less secure than in the past, many have started limiting their own trajectory within the city or try to leave it altogether. The movement of everyone was restricted and unwritten rules of areas in town and early curfews were dominating the city. UBV faculty members were also target of crime. Alegria told me that her car was stolen while she was threatened on a gunpoint before her house in a small gated community in the outskirts of Caracas. "I gave him the key, was shivering. I did not know what to do, what to tell him – I am a socialist, I work for the Bolivarian University that is dedicated to give education to the poor?! That wouldn't have worked" said she smiling with irony and imitating her own shivering.

Juan, a former faculty member at UBV and initially a Chávez supporter, told me that the son of his best friend was killed in a car robbery. After expressing my sympathy, I ask what the

police did. “Why should he go to the police?!” Juan asked me, angry “Every year, about thousands of Venezuelans are murdered just a tiny number of the cases are resolved, and almost none of them end in a trial.” Remembering a motif of the movie *Bowling for Columbine* of US Left-wing director Michael Moore, Juan continued “We have twice the number of US murders per year, with less than one tenth of their population. A revolution? Yes, but why don’t they find a way to deal with violence?”

The subject of living standards was also increasingly becoming an issue for my informants from UBV. They had their modest life-styles, with very few exceptions bought their clothes from cheaper shops in downtown Caracas or lower-end shops at shopping malls. They rarely wore foreign franchises present in Venezuela such as Zara, Berschka, let alone Masons or Benetton. And while certain new fashion was created with revolutionary and urban cool markers as converse shoes, naturally broken jeans, guerilla scarves and hats, many of the professors were not dressed up to the standards of professionals working in private firms. At the same time, however, UBV professors were also experiencing a certain downward mobility in geographical terms as well. Their salaries did not allow them to travel and make the excursions around the world they were dreaming of, and which professors at traditional universities could afford in the past. Thus, except for taking advantage of subsidized cheap goods and services, Bolivarian educators wished to be exposed to consumption and leisure which made members of this class “middle class subjects” (Yeh 2012). Even if such concerns were regarded as “petit bourgeois”, their economic situation was quite dire.

Those of them who did not come from Caracas had to live at the homes of parents and relatives or rent rather expensive rooms and share a house with the landlord or landlady. Those living in Caracas who did have a flat often shared their sleeping room with their children or siblings. Many had to rent the children’s room to strangers: usually single men or women without a family from the country side. Given the significant housing crisis in Caracas (Maritnez 2007; Ivancheva and Krastev fc) this was the only option for many young families to get by. Many of my informants were paying credit in order to buy a flat, a car, their children’s education on credit. Darnelsy and her husband – an engineer – lived almost entirely from his salary. An adjunct staff at the university she received the minimal salary of 1200 Bolivars which hardly paid the basic food they bought – rice, corn flour and bananas, ham and veal from time to time. Living at her parents they were awaiting their second child.



## Conclusion

The intellectual field reflected by the Bolivarian higher education reform displays two trends. Firstly, there is a new level of stratification within the field based on distinctions stemming from both the traditional academic credentials and the revolutionary capital: the combination of the two forms the new radical nobility of the Bolivarian process. A hegemonic consensus is created around this complex distinction, which makes it difficult for younger faculty with less academic and radical credentials to oppose it as an expression of what it is: a class privileges transferred from the former regime into the new one. This discrepancy becomes even more apparent when the job chances of UBV professors, who form the lower stratum of the intellectual field, are compared to those of their students. Students from poor communities end up excluded by the job market, including from expert positions in the government and academic positions at their own university.

Secondly, there is a growing precarity in the life-standards of those in the lower end of this persisting class division especially rank-and-file faculty members of UBV: an issue which creates the dissatisfaction of more and more UBV professors. They end up materially excluded from economic options accessible to people from similar professional group as them. They also end up symbolically antagonized by the anti-middle-class discourse of their students and colleagues, which does not reflect their actual class position: that of the educated but downward mobile precarious working class which has started a wave of contention around the world. John Gledhill has claimed, the flip-side of the new volatility of Latin America grassroots mobilization is precarity, expressed in worsening life-standards, violence and insecurity. In this process, progressive politics is subverted: poor subaltern populations remain criminalized and lower-middle-class, working-class, and peasants become increasingly guided by the politics of fear which is used by old capitalist elites to justify their success at the ballot box (Gledhill 2013).

The past in the student Left on traditional universities added a specific value to the biography of the intellectuals who headed the higher education reform. Yet, both their traditional education and their past in the student Left is a somewhat problematic distinction. As a merit gained within a student Left, it did not necessarily subvert their own credentials. Unlike the “ordinary” activists on the Left, they were the ones privileged to gain higher education, many times at prestigious universities abroad. This dichotomy created not just a

class-based, but also a generational split within the Bolivarian movement. By default – or at least by political conjuncture – younger generations were less exposed to movement experiences and could hardly make any claims to higher decision-making power. Both in terms of division of labor and in terms of spatial location, the reform for radical equality created a strict hierarchy: the members of the radical nobility as a dominant class within the Bolivarian higher education field. This situation was hardly a conscious choice, and rather an unintended consequence of the specific historical and political conditions. Still, it poses a serious challenge for the future of UBV and its standing as one an alternative university.

At the same time, while this distinction has been reinforced, the decreasing life standards and securities of rank-and-file faculty and students at UBV become a source of concern and of a potential tension. As scholarship of the category of “middle-classes” has shown, capitalist states have long been using the contradictory location of middle-classes upon the exploitation axis – being able to exploit working classes this group of people often turns into a useful tool exploited by big capital and its evil twin the state (Wright 1985: 86-7). Turned into the ideal image of “darling”, “deserving”, “hard-working” citizens, the “middle-class” has become an aspirational category: its depoliticised demands of individual rights and freedom of entrepreneurship have become the sample values that states profess in order to reduce conflict to individual strife for a better life-standard (Heiman et al 2012: 19). While states have been engaged to limit the free movement of people at the expense of the free movement of capital, the mobility of commercial images through the new global media has become faster than that of people struggling to obtain them (Heiman et al 2012: 19-20).

Against this backdrop, the Venezuelan Bolivarian government has entered an unequal struggle. It has had to integrate the subaltern population into the welfare institutions of the “traditional middle class” from the era of affluence in the 1960s and 1970s (Harvey 2005: 62) and into the “new global middle class” (Heiman et al 2012: 14). The latter was created in the neoliberal wave of the 1990s, fostering private survival and upward mobility strategies at the expense of deteriorating public services and securities. Western liberal states have been able to control middle class discontent by creating certain privilege within the state service sector that is not directly related to the reproduction of the capitalist classes, but to decommodified services as education, pensions, healthcare (Wright 1997: 462). The Bolivarian government’s class policies have rather remained these of “zero-sum game” (Ellner 2008), performing

redistribution but not offending the interests of the elites. Discursively condemned and alienated as “middle-classes”, UBV’s rank-and-file faculty have remained economically constrained in their life-styles and standards. Their students remain permanently excluded from expert job placements even within the state administration, where graduates from traditional universities are still preferred. This situation is heavy with contradictions potentially threatening to the Bolivarian process: it can turn the very faculty and students of the Revolutionary University into a class consciously fighting against the Revolution.

## Chapter 5: Permanent revolution or permanent liminality: teachers' training on UBV

In the previous chapters I have discussed the reasons and conditions of the establishment of UBV and *Misión Sucre* as both symbolically and qualitatively novel in their design and attempt to integrate the formerly exclusive members of poor communities into higher education. The decision of the Bolivarian government to create new parallel structures of higher learning instead of reforming profoundly the old traditional universities followed the line of least resistance. It was justified through its fear of next military intervention into the affairs of Venezuela, and its failure to take stance in support of the Movement of University Transformation. It reflected the need of the Bolivarian government to become independent from the educated technical, managerial and scientific cadres: those trained in the previous system of higher education and loyal to its pro-Western science and neocolonialist politics of knowledge production.

Yet, I have also shown that in this process, the governance of the higher education reform was taken by people with what I have called revolutionary capital of the new “radical nobility”. In the case of Bolivarian intellectuals this form of symbolic capital signifies the combination of radical credentials from the old student Left and traditional academic credentials. In the new system traditional credentials remain the key to success. This can be observed comparing the credentials, decision-making power, and life-standards of new faculty to those from the radical nobility who got high-ranking administrative positions. It is even more obvious discussing UBV student’s chances on the job market including in the public sector: students from UBV are bypassed by those from traditional universities. Hence, UBV started reproducing the power relations which it tried to abolish.

In this chapter I continue the subject of reproduction of old structures and hierarchies. I work through the controversies of the process of job re-application of the faculty and the attempt of the Bolivarian government to create new standards of evaluation of higher education. The unit of empirical analysis through which I observe this process is the teachers’ training program of UBV. I show how the “revolutionary ethos” (or capital) is theoretically tailored and practically socialized with the new academic faculty. I examine the reactions they develop to this power relation: their attempts to be the subversive agents of social change as the revolution wants them to. I take a closer look at the *curso de oposición*, both in the formal requirements and stages, and in the actual practices of their completion. I show how,

in the Bolivarian process, the tendency of every political and social order to create a firm and hierarchical structure, is subverted in the attempt of the “Revolution” to keep its spontaneity. I also discuss a central contradiction in the Bolivarian process: the opposition between the rather masculine revolutionary charisma, and the female-dominated practice of community organizing. These two fields of power and knowledge production I explore further in the next chapter. Last, but not least, I demonstrate how the necessity to both work within the pre-structured field of higher education, and to negate it, has created an unusually complex and sometimes unnecessarily complicated situation. I claim that it has allowed the professors to permanently shift positions between structure and anti-structure: they perpetuate the permanent liminality of their own position, rather than stabilizing enduring structures and institutions (Turner 1995).

Thus, the Bolivarian Revolution remains a project always in dialectical development. It is never seen as a reality that can be analyzed and critiqued in its own right, but rather a vision of the future that one needs to hope for and work on without questioning the present stage of its development. In this account I find useful to employ the anthropological theory of structure and rites of passage. Following von Gennep (1909), Victor Turner notes there are three distinct stages of rituals enhancing a new structure. The first one is this of separation of the subject of the process from the rest of the group and a set of structural conditions. The second stage is marked as liminal – it is the stage in which the subject of the ritual has ambiguous characteristics vis-à-vis the structural requirements and norms. In the third stage, reincorporation: the ritual is consummated, the state of being is back to the norm, and the position of the person in society i.e. the social system of positions is reestablished (Turner 1995: 94-95). In this chapter I show that as much as it is an academic ritual, the process of on-the-job training of UBV professors resembles in its steps of a rite of passage. At every step the trainees need to reconcile a double standard. They have to both adopt academic language and reflection, and denounce them as reactionary. Going through the stages of separation-liminality-reincorporation, the professors at UBV are being told to align both with the academic requirements, and with the revolutionary norms which negate the latter. This requirement is paradoxically promoted by the members of the “radical nobility”: those who, under the distinction of their revolutionary ethos, enjoy the privilege of both worlds.

### 1. Where theory ends and practice starts: a complication

It was the 5<sup>th</sup> day of a week's long course of Teachers' Training for professors at UBV. Divided into four bigger working groups (*mesas de trabajo*), and split into smaller 5 discussion nuclei, the professors of UBV were doing on-the-job training to pass from adjunct- to a full faculty member status. Held out of the premises of the university, at the University of Workers of Latin America (UTAL), the course was offered to professors who joined the university in 2005, and wished to stay in permanent employment. After submitting their credentials in the first part of the academic year, they had to go through this part of the training, called awareness-rising (*sensibilización*). Listening to lectures in the morning, in the afternoon they had to do group discussions of texts they read together. By the end of the week, they had to make a collective presentation, reflecting on all they had read in different modules, represented in chapters of the reading material. This presentation was part of the overall evaluation of the work of the professors. At the final stage of their job application, they had to present an individual essay in a number of predesigned areas, and defend it before an academic jury.

The University of Workers of Latin America (UTAL) provided the professors with space for reflection and training. It was a solitary campus located just next to San Antonio de Los Altos. The two satellite towns just south of Caracas, San Antonio and neighboring Los Teques, host many smaller universities and institutes, scattered around steep hills. They were also the place where many people working in Caracas lived, including a significant academic and artist community. Still, as in most parts of the country outside Caracas, it is hard to get anywhere without a car or bus, the campus was pretty isolated and UBV faculty hardly ventured out of it for the days they spent there. This was by no way limiting. The old colonial style stone building had an internal and external courtyard with numerous benches; it had a canteen and a small bar, room for multiple people to sleep, as it was serving also as a dorm for the usual working students. UTAL had a patio-type lower floor with ample corridors leading to the stairs to the dorms at two sides of the building. Study rooms covered the lower floor and the rest of the building's upper floors. The main aula was at the first floor – it was a horizontal space with numerous chairs that could host the lectures for all in the mornings. Then the afternoons were dedicated to study in smaller working groups, which finally converged at night in forums of the bigger working groups.

The evening of this 5<sup>th</sup> day, a special guest had come to listen to the presentations of the big working group I had joined and observed for the days of training. Pedro Pablo Linares was a former member of the student movements at the Central University of Venezuela, and of its faculty for decades. He was now a distinguished faculty member of UBV. A man of extraordinary renown among the UBV professors, he was arguably one of Venezuela's best forensic anthropologists. He had discovered and excavated a number of mass graves where members of the student and underground Left were buried during the period nowadays referred to as the Venezuelan "fourth republic" (1958-1998). A man of 60 with noble dark-grey hair and a beard, Linares was dressed in a snow-white linen costume with colorful embroidery around his neck. His stature in the room was that of both academic and personal authority and integrity. Once he entered, the professors, mostly junior to him, toned down their nervous buzz and arranged to start the presentations.

All members of the five discussion nuclei – each having about seven members - were sitting around five tables scattered in different parts of the room. During the work together, they were very much turned into the inside of the smaller circles, but for the bigger group events, all were facing the center of the room. The facilitator – a member of the Academic Direction at the 10<sup>th</sup> floor of the campus in Caracas, was standing between two groups, with his back toward the blackboard where he sometimes jotted down key terms. Linares observed the discussions from a chair next to the door. The essays that were presented to him and to the working group were a result of one day's work. Thais, a young woman from the discussion nucleus I had joined as an anthropologist but also as a participating member of the nucleus, started first. A young lecturer of Social Governance from UBV Caracas, she diligently yet passionately read from the essay on "Critical Hermeneutics", one of the modules the professors had to study and reflect on.

...The Bolivarian current affirms critical hermeneutics as the constructive and holistic knowledge that lifts this same knowledge from the analytical to the synthetic level and vice versa, which comes to say from the macro to the micro, and from the micro to the macro; in the field of the dialectics with its effects and contradictions, it is most important, vis-a-vis the contradictory actions of human beings, to discern the outlines of reality, and in this process to construct a new imaginary of the new Bolivarian republican by

disencumbering him from the nectar of the ideology of liberal bourgeoisie<sup>30</sup>...

Once she had stopped, the room remained silent in the anticipation of the reaction of Linares. He did not say anything, but the room gradually livened up with the applause of our discussion nucleus. Then the moderator of the working group called on another person to do a presentation. An older female professor from UBV-Caracas, Ariel, who had gained the respect of her colleagues over the previous days, started presenting the work of her group. Using a power-point presentation invested with long excerpts of similarly complicated vocabulary, she condemned the Eurocentric academic epistemology and proclaimed the pioneering role of UBV in the global class struggle for emancipated knowledge.

At the end of this speech, Pedro Pablo Linares suddenly rose up, interrupting the applause. He spoke, evidently out of patience. He said that what he heard so far was not bad in its content, but was surprising and disillusioning in the way it was said. "We cannot criticize the traditional university as if we were not a part of it; as if it were *them* and is not *us* who erred." He started, glancing at the faces around the room. "I expected you to use your own words, to speak of your own experiences, and your own revolutionary practice. Instead, you are reproducing the completely esoteric metaphysical language that separates us from the people we have to work with, alienating our own people (*alienando a nuestro pueblo*).” A few people clapped hesitantly as he continued, the rest of the room sunk into silence "Why are we speaking of "hermeneutics"?! This is a true rupture in the communication, a recolonization that brings the language of the Right to the purpose of describing the grave social reality of the poor. And it is the ethos of the poor we need to learn, to speak their language!"

The words of Linares stroke a chord with me. In the days before this event, while I was doing all group exercises with this one discussion nucleus I was attached to, my frustration had been steadily growing. I had been willing and waiting to hear some first-hand experiences from professors from their work in the classrooms and in the barrios. I had been anticipating the sessions as a way to see how they share feedback from their work, and of their own interpretation of critical pedagogy and radical epistemology. I expected this would happen in the *sensibilización* course – out of either the formality of an interview setting with myself - a foreign anthropologist, or the informality of a classroom where immediate action was required. I had thought that this would be a place where honesty would rule, and



where I could hear the professors coming together to share both excellent practice and difficulties of their work. Instead, I was included in a reading group where the reflection was reduced to parroting jargons: both the heavy theoretical vocabulary of the academic articles and the turgid bureaucratic lingo of the official documents they were reading. My attempts of intervention in the group discussions and suggestion of changing the methodology of work were not taken into consideration by my group mates. Thus, for a few days I had been listening with growing impatience and even annoyance. For this reason, my first reaction when hearing Linares's speech was that of a relief and renewed interest in what was happening in the room.

The silence in the room was tense for a few moments. A few of the people looked at each other in a somewhat confused fashion, shrunk, or looked down to the floor seemingly embarrassed. They looked as school-children scorned by a professor they respected and admired. Then the silence was broken by Mariana Moralez, one of the UBV professors from Barrinas. A woman in her forties, she had dominated her discussion table with her imposing figure, and her equally imposing deep voice. She came out among the discussion tables where people were sitting. She faced Linares who was seated in the corner of the room behind one of the discussion tables and looked a bit surprised and somewhat nervous at the lady. With one hand on her hips, the other on her bosom as a sign of contempt, she said:

Listen to me, Professor, and listen well. I am a municipalized professor of *Misión Sucre* in Journalism in Los Llanos. To go to visit my university village classroom (*aldea universitaria*) three times a week, I have to walk for four hours in rubber boots through a river, and then climb the mountain with the help of a mule. I am a journalist in community media, I work with communities. I don't use this awkward vocabulary you are using in the academic world. It is new for me, and my head has been bursting over the last few days. But I was told that this is the way to get trained in revolutionary theory so that I do my job better, with clearer understanding and consciousness: so that I can freely use "the weapons of the enemy". And I came here, and I have been trying to learn this and get it into my head. I pay respect to this theory, and it is damn heavy and a real pain to understand and remember. So why don't you just give us some credit – us people coming here and trying to learn – for having

advanced in understanding and using this vocabulary? Why do you insist instead on making us feel we'll never get it right anyway?

The applause this time burst even before the speech was over. With a few exceptions professors were triumphing. A young professor from the Language training department of UBV Caracas stood up and said it was time they stopped treating the people from the barrios with discontent – “Poor things they don’t understand”, because language is out there to be learnt, and everyone can learn it. Pedro Pablo Linares looked embarrassed, if not ashamed. After a few attempts to say something to the buzzing crowd, he sat down and kept silent until the end of the session.

My own embarrassment perhaps exceeded this of Linares. I realized two powerful mechanisms at work, which I had failed to recognize till that moment. On the one hand, Mariana’s opposition went not only against the lack of recognition of her effort to learn theory, which was not a part of her everyday practice. Her voice was raised against much larger contradictions and power structures in the Bolivarian higher education field. Pedro Pablo Linares and Mariana Moralez represented two distinct, if not opposite types of experience of the revolution which were often playing against each other. Linares was a representative of the mostly male-dominated and patriarchal Latin American revolutionary charisma: his intellectual and student movement background, his dress and conduct were speaking of his position within the radical nobility of the Bolivarian process. With his presence he was the one who validated the genealogy of the past struggles, and the high academic acclaim. Both were necessary for the symbolic legitimacy of the Bolivarian government in the national and global political and academic power field. Mariana, on the contrary, was part of the huge number of female community organizers within the Bolivarian process. Their convincing approach to speak to the subaltern poor population of the country was used by the state in order to be constantly present and legitimate in poor communities: an issue which I discuss in further detail in the next chapter of my dissertation. Thus, it was the hierarchy between those two types of symbolic and cultural capital that clashed in the moment of opposition between Mariana and Linares: a conflict that has been pertinent to the Bolivarian Revolution and for any regime that uses both popular sentiment and revolutionary charisma in order to attract support in the vast majority of the population.

On the other hand, Mariana's vigorous opposition to Linares exposed a contradiction within the Bolivarian process which I had up until then failed to recognize. Coming from the European academy, I had expected that the professors of UBV lived up to the standards of that academy in which I had been socialized and had rather taken for granted. It had become natural to me that the mastery of academic jargon was only recognized when you learned it so well that you could actually do without it. While doing a degree in Philosophy, I had to first learn and then unlearn the complicated words and phrases. Yet, until that point, I had not realized that the same requirements and the same diachronic order of learning and unlearning did not apply to my interlocutors at UBV. On the contrary, I realized that they could only claim their legitimacy by doing both at once, synchronically: they were to master the vocabulary of the traditional academy and manage the cultural and social codes of their own students and marginalized poor communities. They had to become fully-fledged academic intellectuals, while continuing to display profound anti-intellectualism negating the very core of academicism. They had to internalize the academic structure, and then beat it on its ground. This motif I will discuss further in the present chapter, showing how UBV faculty try to reconcile the contradictions on the ground and in their own training.

## 2. A new norm emerging: the rise of the alternative academic

The question of teachers' training central to the Bolivarian reform of higher education. When hundreds of thousands new places were opened on the new programs of *Misión Sucre* in 2003 at UBV and elsewhere, a huge human resource had to be found among the academically trained Venezuelans. To create a legitimate "university" it was necessary to hire people with some experience in higher education. However, it was also necessary to create a distinct type of academics: ones with high social awareness, capable of applying critical pedagogy and of performing both profound social critique and transformative social praxis. Initially hired among the graduates from traditional universities, the majority of professors at UBV and *Misión Sucre* did not possess any post-graduate qualifications<sup>31</sup>. Thus, while teaching full-time, they were required to undergo intensive post-graduate training and defend a large Masters' thesis<sup>32</sup>. Upon graduation, only those who had enrolled into a Masters program could keep their teaching position. They were given the title of Assistant, and were

treated as colleagues of more senior researchers, in the anticipation that they would eventually finish their Masters degree and often continue with a doctoral dissertation.

At the first stage of the submission of credentials, UBV professors were required to have formally completed a BA. They were to start a further course of post-graduate studies (MA or PhD) alongside their new job with the university, and either have completed it, or be close to completion by the time they reapplied to keep their job four years later. In most cases that meant getting training at the MA level. However, in 2008 (when I began my fieldwork), this was only possible at other universities as UBV had only started to develop its own graduate programs.<sup>33</sup> Yet, as a defended MA or PhD thesis was a requirement for the professors to stay at the university, they had to go to the traditional universities to complete their post-graduate degrees. This meant that they needed to obtain further traditional credentials, which they would simultaneously have to subvert at their job.

The process of submission of credentials by UBV professors could be seen as a rite-of-passage of sorts. When professors came to the university and had to prove their expertise, they were supposed to do two seemingly mutually exclusive steps at once. They were supposed to simultaneously upgrade their formal credentials according to the traditional lines of the academic hierarchy, and to undergo a process of ideological awareness rising which went against the grain of the traditional academic system. In this controversial process, by the end of the training they were supposed to have realized the inadequacy of the formal credentials. In this, the submission of credentials can be seen as the act of “separation”: “signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure from a set of cultural conditions (a “state”) or from both” (Turner 1995: 54).

The separation itself can be seen in two directions. On the one hand, in a more direct sense, it is the separation of the cohort of professors who undergo training and defend their critical essay in a job talk each year. Being in this process of training, they are both insiders and outsiders to UBV. They are both its current and potential employees. Upon failure to defend their critical report they have to leave the university. In a broader sense, this is a separation from the broader academic community. The very process of training for the UBV *concurso de oposición* defines the training of professors in a different way: it prepares them to be revolutionary academics, and not just scholars. In a process where the university works at “the risk of reproducing the old distinctions of the bourgeois university system, because

we're working with cadres trained in it" (Luis Damiani, Vice-Rector), creating difference seems to be the highest stake. And as much as difference is created through the training itself, one can see that it is in a sense "different material" that the *concurso de oposición* is working with. The majority of UBV professors do not have the formal biography that would allow them to enter and teach at a traditional university, unlike professors from the autonomous universities. The latter like to emphasise this distinction in order to dis-credit their colleagues from the new mass universities.

Thus, while fulfilling the requirements of researchers, UBV professors also need to be critical to the whole system of distinction that was created through their former and formal education, and by any academic attestation system. To sum up, UBV professors need to simultaneously fulfil the formal requirements of their employment, have the abilities and skills of researchers, while also being critical of the whole system of distinction created through their former and formal education (and of any other academic attestation system). As Luis Damiani, Vice-Rector of UBV assigned to the academic program of the university told me during our interview, "It is really a challenge, as we're working in internal contradiction – we need to do an alternative education with teachers trained in the traditional universities. We need to do double work on that, as we risk to reproduce the traditional system. And we're not fooling ourselves it is going to be an easy struggle, but we're in it (*estamos en esto*)".

### 3. Awareness rising: notes on the creation of an ideological communitas

The process of awareness rising – *sensibilización* – entails intensive group training. In their fourth year on the university professors from all around the country gather to discuss methodological, epistemological, and pedagogical issues related to their work. This is a preparation step, developed to help them defend a critical essay (*informe critico*) reflecting of their practice. This all is to allow the scholars to reflect on the mission and vision of the university. Lectures, text-reading and discussions groups are carried out in concentrated period of time. My fieldwork coincided with the academic year 2007-2008, the year when this training was launched. In that year, it was an extensive process that took place alongside the usual occupation of the teachers. Professors had to undergo a hard test: submit their

credentials, write an essay, undergo a psychological test and 4-5 months of practice. Working in late night shifts was exhausting and distracting for both them and their instructors.

The next year the process was simplified. The professors were simply summoned for a week-long training in the outskirts of Caracas, in a setting similar to a summer-school. In the next years, however, due to the rapid expansion of UBV and *Misión Sucre*, the job application process (the so-called *concurso de oposición*) was carried out among people already hired within the system. They applied and were accepted merely according to their credentials. The actual and more difficult application process that would require their recognition as academic cadres was delayed for four years into their employment as professors at UBV. It entailed three stages – the formal submission of credentials, an “awareness-rising”, and a public defense. I had the chance to join in and actively participate at the awareness-rising process of UBV professors from a number of states in Venezuela in 2009. I arrived at the site with the bus, organized to transport the professors from UBV’s main campus of UBV in Caracas. They had all joined the university in 2005, in the second year of the running degree classes.

UTAL ran as an on-campus dormitory for the workers-students from all over Latin America. It also had a hotel-like part for visitors and regular faculty. UBV professors were hosted there for the duration of their *sensibilización* training. Yet, to cover the need of all professors from this cohort, they needed to be split in two groups<sup>34</sup>. Arriving at the awareness-rising course, everyone was given a Welcome Pack. Along with the main textbook which had come freshly out of print in Caracas the same day the professors were also allotted a copy of the Simon Bolivar plan 2007-2013, a copy of the Blue Book of Chávez, the treatise of Juan Carlos Mariategui’s “Indo-Afro-American Socialism”, and the selected pedagogical works of Simon Rodriguez, better known under his pseudonym Samuel Robinson, the teacher of Simon Bolivar. While the reading material was obligatory, the other copies were for further reading, in case professors found time for them. Some of the Professors had brought along with them one such text which had not been allotted upon this occasion. This collection was playfully but respectfully called by a few professors who had it “Our Bible”. Edited by Vice-Rector Luis Damiani, and the Academic Director of UBV Omaira Bolivar (Bolivar and Damiani 2007), an academic education scholar and a popular pedagogist, the book contained works on Popular Pedagogy in Latin America. Damiani and Bolivar were also the two

officials who edited the official textbook of the teachers' training, and carried out the lectures over the next days.

The central volume of the welcoming pack was a 500 pages book which contained the reading materials of the week. The cover represented a collage – to the left was a crowd of Venezuelans pictured at a Chavista rally – all dressed in red t-shirts and with red baseball caps, all holding flags of Venezuela or the United Socialist Party (PSUV). A strong fist stemmed from the crowd and took the central position in the collage. Holding a rose, it had People's Power (*poder popular*) written on its wrist. Next to it was the image of the classical class pyramid of capitalist society, published in 1911 by the US Magazine *The Industrial Worker*: different sections of society were ordered bottom to top with the peasants and the workers supporting the whole construction, inscribed with the sentences “we feed you”, “we work for a miserable wage”, followed by the bourgeoisie (“we eat for you”, the army, “we shoot at you”), the religious and ideological leaders (“we fool you”), the politicians and kings (“we rule you”), and “capitalism” on top. The title was “National Plan of Formation of Educators, “UBV XXI”, and the subtitle read “Toward the re-impulsion and consolidation of the popular power for an education of the vanguard of the socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century”.

Divided into six sections, each of which had a generalizing question, the book was in many ways similar to the one that professors had worked with in the first year of their training, and which I had read in the days before the awareness-rising started. Yet, some significant differences in the formulation of the chapters must be noted. First of all, unlike the 2008 textbook, which commenced with a chapter on the Pedagogy of Emancipation, a new chapter was introduced in 2009 edition. It was called “UBV yesterday, today, and tomorrow”. It spoke of the past, present, and future of the university, using two central documents of its development: the Rector's Document (*Documento Rector*) from 2003, and the new Regulations (*El Reglamento*) from 2009. While the first document was widely accepted among UBV and further left-leaning faculty as one of the best manifestos of a university in the world, the new *Reglamento* did not entertain a similar renown. On the contrary, at the time of the teachers' training program it had already been challenged continuously by students and young faculty. The presence of the Regulations in the reading list signified implicitly but clearly that they were now introduced as mandatory reading material to professors. They had to be referenced in their critical essays, and in their teachers' practice.

From then on, the chapters followed a similar order as those in 2008, and mostly contained similar reading materials. Yet, some changes were made that introduced certain new key terms introduced by the university administration, as well as certain new directions of thinking, speaking of, and enacting what was called “the Bolivarian revolution”<sup>35</sup>. First of all, with the first maneuver of introducing the normative documents before the pedagogical chapter, the teachers’ practice had to make a way to administration as a priority of the process. Secondly, the emphasis on the new professional, the duty of mastering the new discourse, and the insistence on an alternative social scientific research methodology were also newly formulated priorities: they were a sign of a clear emphasis on the professionalization – of training cadres that would be able to systematize the popular experiences and translate them as intellectual products. Last but not least, the emphasis on revolutionary, rather than emancipatory, political practice also signified a step ahead in the centralization of the political process of 21<sup>st</sup> century “socialist revolution”.

The lectures based on the textbook’s content took place every morning, with short breaks or no breaks at all. On the first afternoon, lists with the names of all participants were distributed, divided into four large working groups (*mesas de trabajo*), each of around fifty individuals. Each group was subdivided into four or five smaller groups. In the afternoons these subgroups would gather in smaller seminar rooms and do group reading and discuss the readings. The evenings were dedicated to individual presentations within each large working group. The last day was dedicated to presentations of the nuclei in front of all other working groups. A debate on the final task of the *concurso de oposición*, the so-called critical essay (*informe critico*), and a feedback session to the instructors, would also take place on the last day. The first days’ lecture was substituted with a speech by the honorary guest of the opening, Luis Bigott. The regular morning lectures during the next three days were carried out predominantly by Vice-Rector Luis Damiani. He did not try to cover systematically the lectures by day and title. Instead, starting from the revolutionary ethos and some challenges to the new university, he gave a series of three more or less free, connected lectures which culminated in a long lecture on the radical methodology which professors had to master, on the third day.

The first presentation was that of Luis Bigott, professor of anthropology and education at the Central University of Venezuela. To make an introduction into the teachers’ training



course, he drew on the overall context of the Bolivarian education. From the first slide onwards, his entire presentation was aimed to outline the enemies of the Bolivarian process and of emancipatory dialectical knowledge. The enemies were to be found in the Venezuelan state in the period of the liberal democracy: political parties, commercial chambers, the trade unions, the high ecclesiastical echelon, and the military sector; in the world Empire of global capitalism with the US Military doctrine; in the classical science of Francis Bacon and Galileo Galilee; in the analytical-deductive method of mathematics and the experimental method of physics wow!; in the denationalized mentality (*mentalidad desnacionalizada*) of technologically and scientifically versed educators; and of the decontextualized knowledge that escapes the understanding of the historical and particular national and global situation of every scholar.

To these he opposed the critical educator, trained at the new Bolivarian facilities who possessed a profound understanding of a new socialist ethics; an inclusive social structure, a socialist productive model and a new national geopolitics and energetic policy; the social movements in the 1960s-1970s; the appreciation of Venezuela's present-day "comrade nations" in these struggles, such as (the presentation claimed) China, India, Russia, and Iran. This knowledge had to be grounded in a dialogue of knowledge with communities, in understanding not just scientific and technological advancement, but also popular religiosity; in accordance with the changes which the writings of Simon Rodriguez and Simon Bolivar, and the study of dialectical-concrete method of social sciences as political economy, had signified in the creation of new radical research methodology. This scholar, according to Bigott, had to obtain a national and nationalized consciousness, and be a historical and culturally active human being. To add to this, his or her in-depth studies of a community would entail a step-by-step examination thereof: a diagnostic, a enabling plan, a preliminary project, a primary diagnostic of the field of work, and collective work with other scholars together with the community aimed at solving the community's problems. The presentation thus outlined the bad and the good subjects of the Bolivarian process. The enemy was the foreign imperial power, represented in the de-nationalized local agent from the higher classes and higher technical training. He or she was condemned for misusing the national resources through the neocolonial model of knowledge. On the opposite side of the equation was the marginalized community. Facilitated by its organic intellectual and popular educator, it had to educate and be educated, performing a dialectical jump to full realization of its potentials.

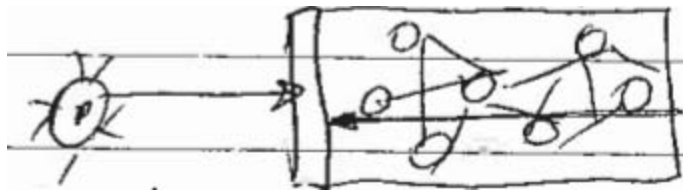
The lecture of Damiani followed the basic dividing lines that Luis Bigott had laid. A lawyer and social scientist who had graduated from the University of Madrid Complutense with a PhD in Sociology, Damiani was famous among young Venezuelan sociologists. Many a cohorts had the introduction class to their discipline taught through an article based on his doctoral thesis. It was a version of this writing as well that the UBV professors had to read and reflect on in order to complete their exercises. He also based his inspired talk on the new Epistemology and Radical Research Methodology on this same text. The text, entitled “The Methodological Diversity of Sociology”, contained chapters of the last reprint of the renowned book of Damiani “The dialectic model of social sciences” (Damiani 1996). It had a section on “The dialectic model of Karl Marx”, and one on “The most recent dialectic models of social research”. The section on Marx was divided into subsections of Marx’s vision of reality as dialectic totality; the role of and relations in production; his theory of science – between appearance and essence; his critique of ideology; his scientific method of research and exposition, and his analytical (positive) and synthetic (dialectic) stage of work.

Damiani also analysed examples of more recent developments of the dialectic research model, namely the works of the Frankfurt School for Social Research. In the text he analyzed the subject-object relation, the role of experience, the relation between theory and history, and theory and praxis, and the Marxist analysis of conjuncture with a specific emphasis on the historical development of Latin America. Damiani mentioned the names of other authors from the Frankfurt school, but mostly focused on Theodor Adorno’s theory. The article had six pages of detailed bibliography. While the majority of the works cited were in Spanish, most of them in fact had been published in the Western world – in US, English, and Spanish magazines, essay collections, and monographies. The dates of the citations started with some classical works published in the 1930s. The greatest number of publications dated from the 1970s and 1980s. The most recent publication was from 1992 this is quite telling.... Damiani’s text was a mandatory reading but it was not seen as a chore: the professors undergoing the teachers’ training attended his lectures with great respect and curiosity. As radical research epistemology was something most of them confessed they never knew, they were eager to learn this new methodology for social research. Damiani’s lecture on this topic was on the third day of seminars, and was extended over more than half of the day. In the first half of the day he presented the critical context in which radical

epistemology was to be carried out – the knowledge of the colonization of science; the reproduction of institutions as the university.

In line with their expectations, towards the end of the morning the UCV sociologist presented the “positivist model of science”: “The one which” -, he said, pointing at me, sitting in the second row – “Mariya, our comrade from Europe performs in her study”. I felt rather embarrassed by his words, and even more so when he drew on the black board the outline of a thesis which resembled the thesis structure that I had been taught as a PhD student: “Theory, Methodology, Historical Context, Hypothesis, Analysis, Conclusion”, Damiani called this linear model of research positivist and said that this was a model based on the work of the isolated Subject working toward the knowledge of the Object: ‘S-O’ he drew on the blackboard. “This is exactly the model of knowledge we would like to refute, as it is errand – it is alienating to the people we are studying, and as social scientists we should not do this error!”, he exclaimed. He then drew a cross over the signs S-O, that he had previously written down, and wrote under that: “S=0”; “S=S”. He said that this is the better type of knowledge – one in which you also gain critical knowledge of the process of study: one in which the subjectivities of researcher and researched community merge in a singular subjectivity and thus social reality is critically apprehended.

Damiani left a pause in the afternoon of the same day to continue his lecture and reveal the methodology of radical research. What he did was to draw an aquarium- or tube-like rectangular plane with a number of small points freely floating in it. He drew the eye of the observer outside of this sphere, which he called the sphere of history. Each one of the points he called concrete historical events. The lines he drew between them were the relations between these different events and social phenomena which the illuminated observer was to apprehend, study, expose, and act upon with the knowledge of their historical reality. The scheme, which I copied diligently from the black board in the seminar room, went like this:



This picture represented, according to Damiani, the historical-materialist method of history. The eye of the beholder was that of the historical scientist, who would observe processes in

their continuity as arriving from history toward him or her (the vector coming opposite to the ray of vision) It connected key historical moments (circles) with the links of material history and class struggle. Like this, it looked for continuities between events in global history which have remained isolated. While this vision of history was very much in line with Marxist and neo-Marxist theories of historical analysis, and the eye of the beholder was particularly reminiscent of Klee's *Angelus Novus* used to illustrate Walter Benjamin's philosophy of history. Oddly enough, however, while Damiani based his critique on this methodology of history-writing as a unique and pioneering, he did not quite seem to recognize an important fact. This same methodology has been discussed, developed further, critiqued and improved in myriads of departments of history, philosophy, sociology, anthropology and further humanities and social sciences in the West. It was precisely in a "Western" university – Complutense University in Madrid – that the Venezuelan historian had received his doctoral title with a work on the same methodology. What is more, Damiani's choice of references seemed rather traditional and Euro-centric, and did not pay even lip-service to endogenous knowledge, science or other forms of history writing and transmission more typical for the communities with which UBV faculty worked. In his fear to reproduce occidental science, he himself committed its principal error: the lack of recognition of other forms of knowledge.

Still, the lecture course, the new research model proposed by Luis Bigott, and the social science methodology offered by Damiani could be seen as an attempt to both remain in the best practice of the traditional academy, and to propose an alternative, though not radically new or innovative canon in its modes and practices. On the one hand, it recognised the revolutionary canon of Marxist literature: one intrinsically related to a great line of white male founding fathers who worked in the metropolitan colonial centers of science and knowledge production. The revolutionary ethos owed much to the insights from their texts and this type of knowledge had to be transmitted to professors at UBV who had to become both academics and revolutionaries. But, while the professors had to learn to criticize the modes of academic knowledge, they also had to be willing and knowledgeable to perform and present social research in the same way as their two instructors, both affiliated and renowned scholars on the traditional university UCV. In this sense, it was hardly surprising that the Pedro Pablo Linares's reaction to the turgid vocabulary presented in the opening vignette of this chapter was seen as an expression of a confusing contradiction.

At best, it was an imposition from the hegemonic power position, which cadres of the traditional academy, now present as a radical nobility of the Revolution, retained over the “newbies” who possessed neither their cultural, nor their revolutionary capital. At worst, it revealed that the older generation of professors, established at the traditional universities, still expected to remain ‘on top’: both to keep their own distinctions, and to lead the restructuring of the new experiences of radical research practice.

#### 4. A spontaneous *communitas*: the anti-structure reestablished

The attempt of the intellectuals from the radical nobility to present and observe the rules of the academic game was not taken without resistance by the UBV faculty in their teachers’ training program. Not only did they insist on their right to use the complicated academic vocabulary: in the period of their ideological awareness-rising, the liminal state of their academic rite-of-passage, they even managed to temporarily overturn the structure and maintain their own spontaneous solidarity and community. The atmosphere at UTAL was full of happy buzz and excitement. It reminded me of a summer school or camp, and it was obvious that the professors were genuinely excited about the coming week. Standing out from the crowd as the only person not employed by the university, I was still counted as a participant and adjunct to a group of three young female professors from Caracas, who were housed together in a shared four-person bunk-bed room. All other professors were given similar rooms along the long corridors of the orthogonal corpus of the UTAL building. In addition to these dormitories, the building had a canteen, a number of bigger and smaller seminar rooms, equipped with white desks and a large patio with shady corridors and benches at the first floor. Outside the rectangular building there was a small bar where participants could buy snacks and coffee. After the first evening, the cafe started selling beers for the professors who gathered there at night to sing, dance, and chat after the intensive days of training.

The training started with a clear drawing of the genealogy of the Bolivarian movement. In the interpretation presented to the teachers, it originated from the university Left of the country in the past decades: the radical nobility of the student movements was reestablished. During the opening ceremony, the two main organizers, Luis Damiani and Omaira Bolivar, sat at the rostrum in a big hall where all the lectures took place. Three seats next to them

were empty and waiting to be occupied. Eventually, two of the places were taken by the two honorary guests who had arrived from Caracas: Yadira Córdoba, rector of UBV, and Luis Bigott, anthropology professor at the Central University of Venezuela. Damiani, Bolívar, and Bigott were among the generation who had initiated the *Renovación Académica* in 1969. Yadira Córdoba was younger and had been a student leader in the 1980s. They had all militated as student and junior professors at UCV in the decades of the liberal democracy. They were among the most highly accredited and respected scholars of the Venezuelan Left that had stayed with Chávez, and were respected by UBV faculty not only because of their academic credentials, but because of their revolutionary past in the Left. As a reaffirmation of the significance of this status, the fifth chair, initially left empty, was filled after a question asked by Bigott: “Who in the room has the longest record of militating in the student Left?” After some joyful discussions and pointing among groups from different cities, Carmen, a middle-aged female journalism professor from Caracas, and former member of the student Left at UCV, was sent by her colleagues to join the rostrum.

The importance of past in the academic and underground Left in Venezuela resurfaced over the next few days. Firstly, it came through the figure of Pedro Pablo Linares – the anthropologist who could not attend the initial gathering, but joined the training during the next days and listened to the group discussions and presentations. Linares told the beginning of his own militancy: the time when he, a child of peasants, had witnessed with his own eyes how two military men had dug a grave in the back-yard of his family and installed a guerilla fighter in it. Only after many years, having studied forensic anthropology, had he dared to dig up the grave, as he later did with many other graves. After Linares had set the tone, the professors’ self-presentation divided them according to whether they had taken part in the student Left or another formation in the same end of the political specter, or had not participated in revolutionary activities.

The group of around ten young professors with whom I spoke humbly said they had nothing much to be proud of from their student years, and pointed me to one or another of the members of the student movements. As a result, at lunch or dinner, I always ended sharing a table with some former member of the movement, or at least being spoken about one by their colleagues. One member of my discussion group, Rafael, had been a member of a catholic group on the Left that had militated in the farther East of the country; Javier from

Barrinas had been militating on the UCV student Left in the 1980s; Raul, a professor from UBV Caracas, had been a member of the 1990s group the *Utopians* in the same university; Ariel, a colleague of Raul in Caracas, had been a member of the student ecological and feminist movements on the private Catholic University Andres Bello; Carlos from Caracas had been a student leader in the History department “although it was in the time when the movement was in deep crisis and lazy – the 2000s”, he told me with apologetic look.

It was obvious that all former student activists were deeply respected by their fellow colleagues, and singled out when the “Revolutionary ethos” was discussed as one of the modules of the teachers’ training. Last but not least, the importance of the radical nobility also came in the negotiation of conditions of the essay writing and competition in the last days of the *sensibilización*. More specifically, Carmen, the same journalism professor Carmen, tried to negotiate more points for a professor who had a past in the Left. Luis Damiani did not allow this to happen and explained why he thought this unreasonable: and : “Look, Carmen, this is now going a bit out of reason – we can’t write in the formal requirements of teachers’ application “Teachers who have militated in the Left get more points”. Still, while the status in the student Left as radical nobility remained out of the official central curriculum of the teachers’ training, it was obviously part of the “hidden curriculum” of the training – even though it could not be formalised, it was a very important asset in one’s biography, and a reason for more respect to be paid by one’s colleagues.

Another aspect that played a central role in the informal conversations and behavior of professors was the so-called “aesthetic-ludic” nucleus of the work at UBV. An issue, discussed in the Rector’s Document (UBV 2003) of the university, it has come out of the teachers’ training program. It had not, however, been excluded from the professors’ self-reflection and the way they wanted to see their work at the university. Yet, it was something that was eclipsed in the discourse. “We are all descendants of Indigenous people, of Indians”, Amilcar from Lara tried to explain to me when I asked about what does the ludic aspect of their work entail. “You are a European, you are rational, you want to have all things explained to you. And we here, we live in two worlds. One of them is your world, that of reason. But we also have access to another world – that of magic... There you don’t need to learn or understand things, you just feel them, and they happen to you. This is the ludic world we are speaking of”. While I was humbled down by this lecture, I did recognize a

similar motif, which in the Slavic world from Poland to Russia and Bulgaria: the trope of the “Slavic” or “Russian” soul, used to express a mixture between existential joy and sadness. This profound and unique spiritual depth – elderly intellectuals in our part of the world insist – could not be recognized and experienced by anyone but a “natural-born” Slav or Russian.

Still, what remained to be the expression of the ludic world of UBV faculty, came out their joyful nights of songs, dances, and chats at the café at night. The atmosphere of summer camp, with jokes ranging from refined intellectual irony to coarse popular jests, innocent flirtations, and most of all – the constant and powerful conviviality of one of the most loved verbs of Venezuelans “*compartir*” (to share) put to good use. The songs sang every night mixed camp fire songs, indigenous and folk tunes, and famous Venezuelan and Latino American pop melodies. An older female professor from Punto Fijo was often convoked to recite a poem: “A little boy was born, with a star on his forehead, the name of the boy was Hugo Chávez Frias, and he was to become a star of a nation” the poem started. A young female professor from Barrinas with a banjo would accompany the performances of some of her colleagues. Initially between the songs she would start chanting the slogan of U-U-U-Be-Ve. Soon however, some of her Caracas colleagues corrected her – the slogan as sang by her, had the same structure as that of UCV, the Central University of Venezuela, U-U-U-Ce-Ve. While many of the professors came from this university, there seemed to be a clear necessity not to sing the song of the university in the very same way. Ariel from Caracas solemnly stepped in the center of the circle drawn by her colleagues, and came up with a suggestion: “Let us make it U-Be-U-Be-U-Be-Ve!” The crowd exclaimed. From that moment on this slogan was repeated both at the informal gatherings, and at the formal meetings of UBV professors.

The ludic form of informality penetrated even the most serious part of the teachers’ training program – the final presentations of the groups. Over the days of the lectures and group discussions, there was a growing frustration that e.g. “there was far too much to read” or something simpler. The intensive lectures usually took half a day and were accompanied by readings and discussions of the thick 500 pages reading material for the whole week. Professors soon realized it was an impossible task to read and reflect on many of them. By the third day, some of the younger women had literally cried that they would fail the exam. Some of the older men who wished to achieve excellence but whose memory was failing



them fell into melancholy about not being able to devour and reflect on everything. They all started expressing the critique that were the training structured a bit better, they could have really benefitted from the training.

“Why aren’t we left some time on our own, to read – to use this most beautiful opportunity (*hermosísima oportunidad*) to read and reflect?” Thais, one of the most diligent participants in the group discussions, burst out in the evening of the third day. It had become clear that most members of our group were too sleepy to continue the group reading, and had to gather early morning before breakfast to finish their daily report. Further voices of confusion and frustration were heard in other groups, expressing the impossibility to read, discuss, and reflect all these texts in the limited time. “This evaluation process castrates all the energy we have, all the creativity which can come out of this beautiful meeting, out of this golden opportunity (*oportunidad dorada*)” “We’ve even performed division of labor in our group to be able to do this all! Imagine, division of labor – what would Marx say if he saw us?” Raul exclaimed during one of the group gatherings.

With no clear solution offered by the teaching staff, except for Omaira Bolivar’s reminder of the need to work hard, the professors in the bigger group to which my discussion nucleus belonged, performed a subversive move. Ariel was the one to suggest it after the tone of discussion had become hysterical: “Look, let us not forget that this is not a matter of cramming, or vomiting essays” she said, standing up. “Why don’t we just get together, and tell the story, group by group, of what happened to us on Monday, then on Tuesday”... she made graceful little jumps around the room to show the progress from day to day. “Because who can say on a Friday, that I deserve 14 or 15 points? Is that the way a Revolutionary University evaluates its professors”. Even before she had finished, a round of applause was in order – this time she happily joined in the applause and a spontaneous and noisy group hug happened, in which all jumped and shouted “U-Be-U-Be-U-Be-Vel!” The news quickly diffused in other groups as well.

Thus, at the final day of the trainings, when all groups had to present, to the great surprise to the instructors of the teachers’ training course, the professors performed rather an artistic program. With the exception of several discussion nuclei, which took the task seriously and made a serious presentation, the majority of groups had prepared a jocular performance. A group of teachers from Punto Fijo in the state of Falcon told the story of the days before –

they had pictures that allowed them to focus on some contradictions in the work ethics of their colleagues and themselves. The intensive partying and greedy mass queuing at the canteen contrasted with the loose and sleepy atmosphere at the discussion groups. The beautiful isolated natural scenery around UTAL was shown as a counterpoint to the reality ‘out there’ represented by a picture of a crumbling house in a Caracas barrio shot from the bus. A photo of Damiani seriously indicating a complicated scheme at the black-board during a lecture, was contrasted to a picture of his “ethos” – dancing and singing in a collective dance at the café. The presentation ended with a quote of the usefulness of contradictions in the dialectical development of history.

Similar presentations followed. Another group just pushed their colleague from Punto Fijo to tell – for the fourth time during the teachers’ training – the poem she had written about Hugo Chávez. The members of my discussion nucleus narrated the name of the group: “*Maraisa*”. An indigenous word from tribes in the Orinoco delta, the word had been taken by our group dominated by professors from Tachira in the opposite part of the country. According to Rafael who coined the name, it signified “My other I”: “the other person whom I treat as myself” in his mother tongue. The description of how the group gradually clicked together at work and party time the conclusion followed (“We conform to the constitution of a new friendship”) Ariel’s group expressed a similar message through an artistic performance. A blind professor from the group was jostled by her colleagues, each shouting “I”, “Mine”, “Ego”: expressions of an egoistic society. The scene ended in a group hug saying “We”, “Ours”. One of them drew the scheme of knowledge  $S=0$ ,  $S=0$ ,  $S=S$  on the black board, to signify the rupture with traditional objectifying science, and a merging between subjectivities in the new model of knowledge.

The way in which the UBV professors subverted the requirements of serious and critical academic conduct during the teachers training program was symptoms of trends underpinning the Bolivarian higher education field. The joyful practices were their own way to relax after the exhausting, often unrewarding academic labor, which they did in overcrowded classrooms and with very low payment. The teachers’ training at UTAL was a place to bond and build a spontaneous community, based on solidarity and understanding of shared values and directions of their work. At the same time, they were following an implicit incentive of the ideological training: they had to recognize the “revolutionary ethos” and the

academic and revolutionary capital that were intrinsically related in this distinction. What was interesting, and unexpected by the members of the radical nobility, however, was that those who did not have a past in the Left were learning to be subversive and rebellious according to a new, much less established framework. In their spontaneous subversion, the UBV “newbies” showed the members of the radical nobility heading the university and the teachers’ training program that they could also be revolutionary. Both the *communitas* building and the practice of subversion, however, were short lived. When they were leaving for Caracas and further campuses on the last day, the UBV professors seemed to realize they were going back to a world where other rules applied: namely, the rules of the academic game set by the standards of higher education field. They had to compete for academic promotion and recognition with scholars from traditional universities. Their mini-revolution had been short-lived: a symbolic reminder of their rather subjugated position in the Bolivairan higher education field, still very much dependent on traditional credentials.

##### 5. The norm is reestablished: new rankings for new academics?

The teachers’ training course was a way for UBV faulty to subvert both the radical nobility of their seniors, and the academic form. Yet, the reality out of UTAL still required them to pass their job talks and enter the competition for academic credit with academics from traditional universities. The attempts to evaluate UBV with traditional measures (Parra-Sandoval et al. 2009; 2010) have showed that a mass teaching and extension oriented university like UBV can not be a leader in either of these categories. It is true that UBV was founded to present quality through equality and social pertinence (UBV 2003; MES 2006). It was designed together with *Misión Sucre* first and foremost to fill in the gap of systematic exclusion and to introduce higher education placements to a majority of the Venezuelan population. UBV and its *aldeas* stand no chance to compete in academic rankings against the private multidisciplinary public universities in Venezuela, let alone the Anglo-American private research intensive ones.

The core values of the indicators of quality of the two most respected university rankings – the Chinese Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) and the Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE) do not correspond to those of UBV and of public universities in Latin America. In the ARWU quality equals the number of alumni and

staff winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals, the number of highly cited researchers selected by Thomson Scientific, number of articles published in *Nature* and *Science*, and of those indexed in Science Citation Index – Expanded and Social Sciences Citation Index, and per capita performance with respect to the size of an institution (ARWU 2011). The THE ranking has more qualitative indicators such as a large reputational survey of anonymous respondents on the research environment, faculty/student ratio, citations, industry innovation, and international members.

Under these circumstances, the quality of the professor should not depend on their credentials and research output, but on a number of capacities difficult to quantify: the ability to transcend their power position; the understanding of cultural codes of human beings living in conditions of misery; the experience and capacity of being a good community organizer. The ratio between professors and students could matter only as much as professors were able to engage the group in collective community organizing in marginalized areas. Learning and teaching could be assessed not by their research output and the recognition by prestigious awards of merit, but through their effective and efficient social work with communities. The language of any work and publications would be local – in the case of Venezuela Spanish or perhaps an indigenous language. Academic publications should be written in a popular and comprehensible style without high-brow jargon. The publications would only matter as much as community problems and their solutions receive reflection and a viable solution, achieved in deliberation between students and the community. These articles would have to accumulate visibility in popular (not necessarily indexed) journals.

Once the new university with its *aldeas* was set in motion, certain pressures had emerged that made it accept the mechanisms of evaluation created out of and against its own reality. Initially no new institutions were in planning. The Ministry of Higher Education wished to reform and to decentralize the old existing universities. The attempts of the government to introduce such reforms with no coercion in 1999-2003 were met with extreme resistance by opposition forces within the established universities. As I have already explained in the historical part of this dissertation, the creation of UBV and its *aldeas* signaled a decisive split within the public system of higher education. Through the concentration of the government on the experimental universities, the neoliberal division between institutions offering

vocational training which centered on ‘equity’, and elite universities focusing on ‘excellence’ (Marginson 2008) has been reversed.

Yet, the stratification of educational experience remained. It has been predetermined by the overall profile of the education system of Venezuela, which the university reform could not properly address but rather reflected. The opening of higher education opportunities happened without a respective reform in the secondary school system still stratified between private high-schools and public ones. Students who came from the two tracks did not hold the same chance to enter higher education at the same level and position. Together with the overall stratification of higher education between old/traditional and new/”Bolivarian” universities, this phenomenon resulted in the deepening disparities along class lines, instead of bridging them. As I have showed in the previous chapter, this is recognized even by professors of UBV or officials in the Ministry who still enroll their own children predominantly in private high-schools and traditional universities.

Beyond the internal job talk, a process through which UBV faculty needed to go in order to secure credit for their institutions was the so-called Program for the Promotion of Researchers (PPI). PPI was adopted in 1990 as a national mechanism for promotion of research excellence. It was designed and executed by the National Observatory of Science, Technology, and Innovation (ONCTI) with the aim to promote nationally conducted research, and to aid young researchers through a financial incentive. A committee of academic peer-reviewers ranked academics on six levels: Candidate, Researcher Level I – IV and Emeritus. These were distributed in six areas of knowledge: physics, chemistry, mathematics; engineering, technology and earth sciences; environmental and agricultural sciences; biology and health sciences; social sciences; and humanities and education (ONCTI 2009: 11). Researchers received one to four “minimum salaries” as a monthly complement (Pericchi 1996). To apply, scholars had to prove they had completed a university degree, research work, conference presentations and publications.

In the first ten years of the Bolivarian government PPI was slightly reformed. In 2001-2002 two requirements for Candidates wrong verb but I can’t think of the correct one right now: the maximum age (35) and minimum academic qualification (PhD). A new category “contribution to the formation of human talent” was introduced. Further citation indices but Science Citation Index were now taken into account: Biosis, MedLine/Pub-Med,

Mathematical Review Cover to Cover, Compedex, Scielo Internacional Clase, and Catálogo de Latindex y Evaluación de Mérito FONACIT 2007 (ONCTI 2009: 6 ; 14). This in effect meant that the government allowed people from outside the academy to become accredited academic cadres. The increased number of Candidates and Level I Researchers over after 2003 was significant (ONCTI 2009: 6; 13) and so was that of registered scholars in the areas of social sciences and humanities (ONCTI 2009: 12). Yet, the struggle to allow attestation to a larger pool of candidates through the PPI was not a sufficient measure of attestation. Scholars at the traditional universities still had more credentials and publications (Parra-Sandoval et al. 2009). Researchers on the alternative universities negated these as distinctions of the pro-market “bourgeois” system. They refused to assess UBV because it is “in the process of making”, as is the “Bolivarian Revolution”.

But the existence of UBV outside and against the currently recognized evaluation mechanisms was not sustainable, unless an alternative evaluation system was developed by and for UBV and *Misión Sucre*. The PPI report from 2009, the final year of its existence, already signaled changes of the respective agenda of the Venezuelan state. PPI was seen as insufficient to evaluate the social pertinence of the scholarship carried out in Venezuela. The PPI vision of a researcher had remained that of a sole individual working in isolation, instead of the research collective (ONCTI 2009: 20). In 2011 the new Program for the Stimulation of Researchers (PEI) was introduced. It presented a qualitatively new attitude to attestation, evaluation, and ranking. It was also a first sign of a changing strategy in the realm of higher education: moving from two parallel systems to one single reformed system of higher education. Without changing the credentials and publication list, a number of new requirements were presented.

In PEI scholarship was assessed according to its “innovation” and “contribution to the satisfaction of the needs of Venezuelan population”. The publications were now counted not only because of being indexed or cited – their content was to be closely examined as well (ONCTI 2011: 1). This qualitative assessment was to allow that publications in the national sites be given similar priority as the international ones. Peer review was extended to books and book chapters. Thesis supervision on all levels, industrial research, introduction classes, and other forms of applied knowledge were to be considered as a form of academic merit within the PEI. (ONCTI 2011: 2). Researchers were divided not in a linear, but in a nominal

manner in two categories “Innovator” (A-B) and three of “Researcher” (A-B-C). Only two of these categories require a graduate degree – Researchers B and C, and the – by any participant in research projects (ONCTI 2011: 4-6).

PEI has sparked critique by conservative scholars. Harvard trained physicist Ismaro Bonalde claimed that the previous program PPI was a symbol of “recognition” and “prestige” and did not exclude certain scholars “as we are made to believe” (Bonalde 2010). For him PPI was the only viable mechanism for inclusion and visibility of Venezuelan research in “a global scholarly community” (Bonalde 2011). He declared that in 2003 the criteria for enrollment in the program were significantly reduced, and that “real” contribution to the academic productivity of the country has mostly been done by the pre-2003 subscribers. Bonalde claimed that an academic article was the true emanation of the results and conclusions of a research; that peer reviewed publication in indexed journal was not a matter of luxury requirement but an essential part of “the universality of science”. (Bonalde 2011) In this profoundly normative view that the supervision of the global, i.e. Western scholarly community is the only attestation of quality research, the Venezuelan scholar arguably shows the practice of “self-colonizing” (Kiossev 1999): the internalized belief of people in peripheral regions in their inferiority to “the West”.

At the same time, however, the introduction of both the job talk at UBV and PEI were an alarm for the scholarly community within UBV and *Misión Sucre* as well. While the job talk tried to provide equitable entry of professors into the craft, and PEI, a “certification” of types of knowledge produced out of the academy. Yet, they both also left a number of questions which need to be solved in future. The new evaluation policies might allow for a reform of the overall criteria of evaluation and experiences of higher education in Venezuela in two ways. They might either allow a revenge of the old hierarchy of academic excellence to gradually take its upper hand and subject the novice Bolivarian educators to its rule. It would, alternatively become responsible for a *laissez-faire* “ludic” policy on academic production, in which quality could be relativized *ad absurdum*. This is a specific risk faced by all new universities as UBV aiming to catalyze social change. This is even more difficult for universities as UBV which have to strive to beat the traditional universities on three fronts – research, teaching and extension. In this, a successful evaluation mechanism is needed that avoids the quantity trap in the assessment but does rely on pertinent forms of research

output as well: an issue which has still not been initiated, let alone accomplished at UBV. The risk of the revenge of the hierarchy still remains a possible and feared outcome.

### Conclusion

The UBV program of “awareness-rising” not only forms a central part not just of the *concurso de oposición* at UBV, but is crucial also for the creation and maintaining of the revolutionary ethos and the popular university. Its complex organization and its rituality provide a way of engaging of all the university administration and already established faculty in the process of training of the ‘newbies’. In this, they show new ways of communication and articulating of a new collective responsibility. The latter is shared by those instructing the new educators and the educators who are being instructed. As a result of this complex and multilateral process of training process, a new intellectual needs to be created: an intellectual who could excel in and subvert the rules of the academic. In this chapter, I have shown that in this process professors are required to both internalize the academic structure, and negate it as rebellious members of the permanent anti-structure to the “bourgeois establishment”. Yet academic excellence is still determined by two remnants of the old system: the male revolutionary charisma and its canon of theory and conduct, and the rules of academic evaluation set by world ranking and citation systems which position Western research-intensive universities as a main reference point of excellence. At the teachers’ training program, UBV professors could subvert both the academic and the radical establishment. Yet, in the process that followed, their instance of ludic conduct was normalized and measured upon traditional standards. To accredit degree programs, the administration and experts from the Ministry – who are themselves recognized in both the radical and the academic hierarchy – had to gradually work for the evaluation and institutionalization of UBV as a traditional university. Trying to both negate the academic distinctions, and live up to their requirements, the government has run the risk to subvert the principles of its own bottom-up “Revolution”. As the opening vignette already suggested – a claim which I develop further in the next chapter - the backbone of social change, as promoted by the regime, is not necessarily the radical nobility, embodying male revolutionary charisma. It is rather the female community organizers in the barrio and professors who work with marginal communities, which UBV and further missions of the government have empowered. They provide the *raison d’être* of



the revolution on the ground. The decentralization and extension of UBV and *Misión Sucre*, not following the traditional rules of academic merit, have been dedicated to these revolutionary women. Yet, with the return of the traditional categories of academic excellence and revolutionary charisma of the Old Left in the Bolivarian higher education field, women are once again subjected to the old rules of the patriarchy. While the university and its academics have claimed that they are performing a spontaneous, organic and unprecedented (*inedito*) process, they have remained weak by never creating an alternative system of evaluation. Instead, they are still reliant on the already existing rules of academic and revolutionary merit: ones that are usually available to people from a specific class origin and trajectory in higher education which have been a scarce resource in Venezuela. Thus, so far UBV and its faculty have missed an important opportunity for radical change. Yet, they can draw on their experience and the history of progressive experiments in the field of higher education both in liberal and socialist polities.

## Chapter 6: The (matri)sociality of the benevolent state: teaching and learning at UBV

The previous chapters of this dissertation scrutinized the difficult position of Bolivarian academics in their attempt to perform radical social change through a traditional institution as the university. I have shown how the academic autonomy, defended by the Venezuelan student Left in bloody battles throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was now ironically used by their antagonists. Resisting reform at the old public universities and denying recognition to the new “Bolivarian” ones, conservative academics helped recreate the old stratification on a new level. UBV opened doors to give better chances to the poor Venezuelans in the traditional job market, but budgets and accreditation were still decided by official bodies, dominated by academics from traditional universities. In order to accredit the “Bolivarian” university degrees, the Bolivarian faculty had to live up to the academic standards, dictated by a homogenizing field of higher education.

The latter process reproduces the already existing stratification on two levels. Firstly, while faculty members at UBV were initially employed to teach with Bachelors degrees only, the need to “upgrade” their credentials was paralleled with the requirement to perform a profound pedagogical reform. Bolivarian academics had to both live up to the norms of academic distinction, and beat it on its ground. On top of that, UBV faculty members were often humbled as middle class and not sufficiently radical. The need to possess not only academic, but also radical credential was a privilege and symbolic resource only of few faculty members who were a part of the former student Left who also had traditional academic credentials. Secondly, not only UBV faculty, but also students coming from the poor community had to obey traditional and radical academic credentials, and become an emanation of the pedagogical reform all at once. Invited to UBV with the promise of placements at the traditional job market, at the university they were required to denounce such options. Instead, they had to embrace the morally noble but insecure and low paid position of community organizers. Obtaining radical credentials, they still do not get equal economic integration to students from traditional universities. Thus, multiple power relations and hierarchies were kept intact.

Against this background, in the present chapter I focus on how the reproduction of old and creation of new power dynamics happens in the process of teaching and learning at UBV. In the first part I narrate my observations from the process of teaching at the main campus at

UBV. I present the cordial and informal relations created in the classrooms at UBV and the way professors try to communicate with students from different age cohorts and walks of life. I also show how critical pedagogy is difficult to put into practice in the classroom. While profess horizontal teaching beyond the master-disciple dichotomy, teachers and students hold in highest esteem charismatic male professors with credentials in traditional universities and radical background. They seem to enjoy horizontal discussion and Socratic maieutics, but prefer and recommend to visitors as myself classes which provide rather traditional systematic knowledge and some tentative conclusions made by the professor himself.

In the second part of the chapter I show how this classroom practice and hierarchy of value does not necessarily translate into the fieldwork experience with *barrio* communities: the integral nucleus of the studies at UBV, which at the time at my research was still called Project of new citizenship (*Proyecto de nueva ciudadanía*, or shortly *proyecto*). I show how the domination of the traditional academic and radical credentials in the classroom is subverted in the *barrio*. There, UBV professors and students step into the ground of *barrio* communities: a world where the rules of academic and radical merit do not function the same way. While academic and radical credentials from the Left become irrelevant, a different type of agency is in order: that possessing the local knowledge and social codes, typical for the *barrio* community. There the question of the relevance of the education at UBV is measured up to its ultimate end: the ability of students to contribute to the improvement of the living conditions of *barrio* residents.

In this process, even male charismatic male academics become dependent on the brokers within the *barrios*: often female community organizers. The spokesperson (*vocero/a*): usually is an active woman within the *barrio*. The busy bee of the Revolution, her ability to multitask is a key indicator of how benevolent the state would be to the community. Discussing the trajectories of three such women, I show how in this role female members of marginal communities are both empowered and exploited by the state. Creating a new sociality of the Bolivarian institutions, they remain dominant within their own community, but dominated by the whole state machine. The Bolivarian state benefits gratefully from their effort and time. Yet it beyond symbolic return, no real structural equality is achieved in the process.

Exploring the challenges which UBV students and faculty face in the *barrios*, I also show that they are not the only state agents coming to the *barrio* on a weekly basis. A large number of

representatives of state services and agencies also venture there constantly trying to organize the communities. In this, UBV while not being able to create a qualitatively different knowledge out of their field experience, faculty and students remain simply a part of a broader project. They partake in a wider network of agents used by the state to promote active Bolivarian citizenship to communities formerly residing in the margins of state power. With the Bolivarian government, all state actors are engaged in an attempt of the state to be closer to its subjects and socialize its new Bolivarian institution. Thus, while classroom experiences remain rather traditional, the fieldwork program, *proyecto*, is the crucial point of the learning process in a surprising way. Instead of serving as a form of knowledge production, I claim that the participation of UBV faculty and students in the barrio with their *proyecto* could be understood as a part of a the rebuilding the welfare institutions of the state which neoliberalism tried to dismantle (Offe 1984; Jessop 1990; Harvey 2005) an attempt of a socialist state project to create counter-hegemony within a dominated economic and symbolic power-field. With UBV students and other agents, the Bolivarian state tries to reinsert its relevance and create trust as a center of power to the majority of the population on the national territory.

#### 1. Teaching and learning in the classroom: traditional or innovative?

Unlike other socialist experiments, in which people with no high-school degree were allowed into higher education (see Connelly 2000; Fitzpatrick 1979), at UBV there was no reverse discrimination or coercion in the entry procedures. A high-school diploma or its *Misión Ribas* equivalent is a minimum requirement for entry. Upon the submission of proof of finished high-school studies, students go through the so-called Program for University Initiation: an introductory course where gaps in their entry knowledge were addressed (MES 2006: 6-7). This program offers three mandatory units: Language and Communication (100 classes), Mathematics (100 classes), and a class on Venezuela in the Global Context (36 classes). Thus, both freshly graduated high school students and adult learners could smoothly acquire college-level education. The initial program was not graded. Even if some students were encouraged to take the introductory classes again, no one was terminally failed. After they passed the initiation program students were eligible to attend regular classes (MINCI 2011).

The classes at UBV main campus in Caracas took place in three shifts – the first from 7am, afternoon from 2pm, and evening from 6pm. The morning shifts were mostly attended by young students on a scholarship – Venezuelan and foreign – who had the free time and resources not to work, or to only work part-time or pensioners who studied after their retired. Students were visibly concentrated and lively debates happened between students from different ages, both men and women. The afternoon shift was visited mostly by part-time working young students, and by single mothers who could afford to leave their children to an older daughter, or a working mother or sister. Some adult learners working at the university also took the afternoon classes. Their concentration often failed and diligent scribbling of what the professor said was replaced with lively discussions of personal concerns and friendly quibbles. The evening shift, finally, was for professionals (both in the public and private sector), low-skill and low-wage workers, and UBV non-academic staff. In this shift it took extra effort from the professor to engage tired working men and women at the end of their work day when neither concentration, nor energy for chatter was exuberant.

These disparities were interesting and telling: they showed that unlike other universities where students would all be about the same age and would have to be measured according to similar standards, at UBV students did their education starting in really disparate positions. Yet, at the same time the effort of professors with students from all age-cohorts and backgrounds showed that more equitable education was attempted – one in which all students mattered similarly much and were an integral part of the role of the university in social integration. Students understood this and willingly participated. Teenage students freshly out of high-school would share a bench and ongoing friendly debate with retired pensioners in the morning; white- and blue collar workers would coincide in the classrooms at night; elderly mothers would be classmates of people the age of their sons and daughters. Sometimes members of the same family but from different generations would attend the same class, or would be in the same departments and cohorts. This unique blend of ages, sexes, and experiences would make for thrilling discussions and dialogues in class. In addition, the presence in about every classroom of students with disabilities was treated with utter respect and consideration. Special facilities, programs, and events were made for students with disabilities. UBV students and professors were all volunteering open-heartedly to help their disabled classmates and colleagues, and provide attention and affection.

Classes at UBV were in no sense structured differently from what I witnessed on Eastern and Western European universities. Most teachers would use the blackboard to outline the next topic in class, some important years in which events happened, or key terms in the lesson. They asked students to copy small texts at the cheap copy service and usually made a mini-lecture on the text in class. Sometimes the teacher presented the text and spoke of the subject matter, other times students made a presentation on a topic. Most first year students gave a presentation relying on their own notebook, and had no audiovisual materials. Classes of Venezuelan Political History, which I sat in for a whole semester, presented a recurrent narration of the key dates of Venezuelan battles of Independence War, but the professor never reached the point of recent history or required students to interpret critically the material. The professor, an older male academic from the former student Left freshly retired from the Simon Rodriguez Experimental University was still very much respected and admired by his students. Especially old nostalgic and nationalist students were enraptured with the detailed knowledge they received in his class. The classes in Constitution with a young female professor entailed close reading of the Venezuelan Constitution of 1999, but no parallels with former Venezuelan or foreign constitutions were attempted.

Although the organization of classes was not different, the relations between students and teachers were different from what I have witnessed elsewhere in two ways. On the one hand, a high degree of informality was maintained between faculty and students. Professors' apparently benevolent attitude created an atmosphere which seemed to encourage students to come to class and enjoy classes in general. The teacher frequently participated in students' chatter and often joked or addressed personal questions to the most visibly excited or noisy student before transitioning to the lecture or seminar. More often than not, the second part of the class was left to informal discussion of various topics of current concern— be it the global capitalist system, some battle of Bolivar, family issues or the baseball game which the Caracas baseball team *Los Leones* won or lost the night before. Students would not often tease their teachers (often younger than most students) about their private lives, but teachers themselves used personal anecdotes to comment on the learning material, even in serious classes as budget planning or political history.

On the other hand, while the university was trying to gain renown with horizontal relations between professors and students, at no other university but UBV did I witness so much

respect and admiration to the teachers, as I saw at UBV. Oddly enough, it was not the “I am one of you” attitude that made students adore their teachers: the more authoritative and expert a professor could prove she or he would be, the more was he loved and pointed as an example. This was even stranger as classes at UBV were supposed to be based on the method of popular pedagogy or pedagogy of the oppressed. Developed by Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire and the critical pedagogy school in the USA, this theory, built on the bases of liberation theology and progressive education practices in poor communities. Breaking up with the master-disciple dichotomy in education, it required a non-instrumental treatment of education, and horizontal and equal treatment of students by professors as equals. Popular pedagogy focused on the value of oppressed and human beings. It also encouraged all who engaged in the education process to treat each other as equal human beings and to build non-oppressive, non hierarchical relations of mutual understanding, support, and solidarity (Freire 1970; 2004). It was an attempt to reverse inequalities and search for subaltern voices: those who have been not just oppressed, but also deprived of their voice and agency within a dominated discursive power field.

For me from the very beginning of my work on UBV, critical pedagogy presented a an appealing mystery: one which I could only partly solve during my observation. Yet, it stayed hermetically foreclosed both to me and – as I was to understand in the process of field research, to many of my informants at UBV. In our conversations and interviews UBV faculty either quoted directly from Freire but could not explain in simple terms how they put his theory into practice, or confessed they were all but clear as to what this practice meant. One of the reasons which could explain this discrepancy was inherent in the very system of critical pedagogy: denouncing Western elite-driven pedagogies. In a radical gesture of opposition to the latter, practitioners of this discipline attempted to leave critical pedagogy authentic and anti-instrumental. To do that, they have never created any systematic guidance or practical manual of application. As one famous educator from *barrio* Petare working for an *aldea* of UBV, Joel Linares, told me: “No one can tell me what to do, I just know it, because I am a kid of the barrio and I work with barrio kids as well. I know their cultural codes, and they know what to expect from me”. After this statement, I asked in a very naïve manner if he would imply that I – a person not coming from a barrio community – would never be able to become a critical pedagogist in the barrio. “I am not telling you this is the case, but I am not telling you it is not the case either”, Joel smiled mysteriously.

For UBV teachers who were often coming from traditional universities popular pedagogy presented more than a theoretical puzzle: it was an everyday practical concern. While they did not know what it meant besides a right humane position towards your students, they all interpreted it rather freely. They mostly defined critical pedagogy in negative terms: as a distinction between their own experiences like students and the ones they have to provide as critical pedagogists in a rather intuitive way. As Darnelsy Garcia, a recent graduate in social work from UCV who taught Environmental Science told me in our interview,

Well, we read all the theoretical texts on “critical pedagogy”, but no one tells you how to do it. So there are no rules I could apply. So, what I do in class is basically what my teachers at UCV did, but I try to do it better. Better, in the sense that I show understanding to the students’ background and needs. The rest is the same.

Samanta, a psychologist by training, told me “You just walk into class, and treat people with respect, not as inferior to you”: a practice which in her classes she performed by chatting with her mature female students in the second shift. They shared with her stories about their children and families, internet and real-life relationships, and other everyday concerns. She shared with them mostly stories about her daughter who studied at a private school, so they could compare her education to the public schools where the students’ children did their studies. Yet, when she had to take the role of a professor and authority, for example when the students became too chatty or lost interest, Samanta confessed she encountered difficulties to perform the role of a “facilitator” rather than a teacher with authority: “They are so silent, the ladies. They just look up to you and expect you to tell them something, to instruct them, but then they don’t really learn it.” This frustration often sneaked into professors’ narratives about their students.

My own observations in classes confirmed what Samanta told me: younger and mature students alike looked up to professors and expected them not just to facilitate sessions, but also to provide them with information and knowledge. With a few exceptions, teachers complied with this role, in which they had been socialized through traditional educational institutions. They needed that even more as the tiny library at UBV and the poor internet searching skill and access to online database of many mature students created situations, in which what professors said was considered as pure truth. Thus, while educational



experiences that I encountered at the university, ranged from traditional to informal but chaotic, even those classes that left a strong impression on students used rather traditional master-disciple approach. Even further, whenever I would ask students and professors to recommend classes which I should visit, I was almost by necessity referred to classes of charismatic male faculty members. They were the ones treated as sages. Their classes were discussed as the contemporary state of the arts. Two such professors were especially highly acclaimed and promoted to me by both students and faculty who insisted I should definitely hear their classes: Ignacio Burgos in Architecture and Rodrigo Suárez in Environment.

Ignacio Burgos was recommended to me by a number of his colleagues and students. “He is the true original thinker at UBV-Caracas, you should meet him!” I was told by Juan, a legal studies professor. “He is the Master (*el Maestro*), we all want to study with him!”, Anjel, a student in Architecture told me when I asked him why he was switching shifts to listen to Burgos’s lectures. An Argentinian man in his 60s, Burgos was known among his colleagues as “the architect-philosopher”. He had left his home country during the military junta in the 1970s, and finished his PhD in Paris before he went back to Venezuela and settled there. He mostly taught *proyecto* classes: an attestation that his methods and approach in teaching were highly appreciated. Yet, as Burgos identified significant gaps in the theoretical and mathematical knowledge of most his students coming from public high-schools, he was trying to advance their understanding in all these spheres in an integral way.

All classes of Burgos rotated around an idea which he had been developing – he called it the “Pole City” (*la ciudad Polo*), i.e. the city-pillar or city-mast. For an ardent utopia reader such as myself *la ciudad Polo* was a truly utopian project: not just a city, but a decentralized system of new cities, which existed in a country with no cars, just train lines to connect the cities in a network of 100 km from each other. Its developer, Burgos, would never admit it was a utopia. On the contrary, he would say “It is something real, in fact, the only reality we need to acknowledge and struggle to achieve if we want to save this polluted and noisy world full of cars where nature is stuck under layers of materials and waste.” Burgos was concerned with every aspect of the city – as a city built from scratch, it had to have its own new street names, infrastructure, institutions, and an own social memory. It had to be organically fit with the surrounding environment, to be inclusive of nature with the whole microcosm that would exist in a piece of land.

To achieve happiness of citizens, Burgos believed they should be working close to their homes or taking the train to the next similarly-sized Pole City. They were to receive free child- and healthcare, education, and were to be exposed to large portions of sport, high culture, and recreation provided at the very city they would live in. Beyond the salvation from environmental pollution and catastrophe, Burgos believed that the Pole City had to provide to its citizens peace and quiet. No cars or buses should be used any longer, but just electric trains and bicycles, and more than anything, people should walk: a practice rather foreign to mostly motorized Caracas residents. Silence and meditative walks in nature were a necessary, for Burgos even indispensable, conditions for a reflexive, creative and happy citizen. The Argentinean architect lacked in Venezuela and especially in noisy, polluted, and often dangerous Caracas. Burgos saw Venezuela's noisy and polluted capital city as the best setting for such an experiment. He was tirelessly working to promote the Pole City to the government institutions, but was disappointed with their stubborn resistance to adopt it.

Unlike most classes, Burgos's classes resembled lectures in an ancient European arts academy: he would sit among the students, often reading to them by translating simultaneously from a French book, then pose a question and wait silently for their replies. He never lectured as such, but encouraged a form of dialogue in which there was no wrong answer. Students in Burgos's class three men, a young woman and an older woman – all believed in the Pole City. When Burgos encouraged me to challenge them and ask questions about their project, they came up with sophisticated explanations of the complex system of contemporary urban life. They had adopted some of their professor's concerns, which – as far as I could tell – were not shared by most Venezuelan students outside Burgos's classroom. The need of solitude and silence were not necessarily a priority for students from Caracas. Having grown and lived in a noisy city with little separation between buildings and spaces, in tiny barrio houses or apartment blocks of flats, UBV students were accustomed to permanent exposure to natural and machine noise. Burgos's students however named noise pollution as one of the primary evils of contemporary urban life. They deplored the use of cars, speaking instead of metro, and rapid electric trains as a better means of transport.

Burgos's demands to keep silence in classes were not a requirement of any other professor whose classes I participated in. At times Burgos would be desperate about the interference of two students chatting with each other, but he would just silently and stoically signify them

to stop, never raising his voice. He would just make a remark like: “In Europe they take their children to the theater or to the opera or to a concert, and they sit and listen in silence. Here children are left to be as noisy as they are”. Such remarks did not make the relations between Burgos and his students less comradely: their respect for him and his classes were visible and they were all convinced they had learned and schooled more from him and his seminars than they would have studied across the street at UCV where some of them were gaining recognition: a high acclaim given to their participation of one of them at an exhibition at the traditional university across the road, which Burgos often boaster with.

Another educational experience which, I was referred to as excellent and invited to visit were the classes of Rodrigo Suárez in the Environmental Management department. A graduate from UCV, a chemical engineer and a former participant in the student movement Utopia, Suárez was initially not destined to become a professor. He finished his degree and worked as a consultant for PDVSA until the coup against Chávez showed him the opposition was still controlling most science production through having their own cadres in key positions in the oil and other resource and knowledge-intensive industries. After witnessing corruption within the Bolivarian system he quit working for the government’s oil company and went to teach – first for the *Misión Sucre*, and then at UBV. With a good sense of humor and passionate commitment in both serious debates and communal recreational activities, Suárez was a favorite of teachers and students alike. His students were coming to classes regularly and in large numbers.

For his classes on “The problem of the environment”, which I frequented, Suárez discussed ten different aspects of the environment – including the work of the media, politics, ethics, and ideology, ecological Keynesianism, relations between financial and environmental crisis, war and environment, and others. Suárez came to class with the print-outs of a short polemic essay he would write each week. He read it to the students, improvising interventions, serious remarks, and witty jokes in-between the text lines. Then he sat among the students and asked them to discuss his paper. To help them speak, Suárez would often criticize himself showing some contradiction or vain expression he wrote into the text. Suárez’s openness and enthusiasm were contagious. He would try to bring a common ground of discussion with all students and no judgment was cast. “I am a contradiction, just read in my life and your own lives to see what the contradictions of the capitalist system are,

and try to come to terms with them,” Suárez would say, in a bitter-sweet tone aimed to remind students that he did not claim a high moral ground. “What can be better than being a professor? Imagine, I am paid to speak up my mind!” Suárez told me once.

Thus, while critical pedagogy and alternative forms of knowledge were not necessarily practiced and created in the UBV classroom, the best education experiences for students and professors were those with little change in the usual matrix of the benevolent master-disciple relation. This was in fact appreciated by students and professors as a quality. Even at the classes of Ignacio Burgos where the professor and the students had a discussion over the book read by him, and Rodrigo Suárez’s classes where his text was presented and discussed, students were not the ones to individually or collectively come up with a conclusion or solution to the problem that was beyond the teacher’s previous knowledge. Most UBV professors presented the key concepts from an etic rather than emic perspective, and then the production of knowledge would still be contained within the exchange of opinion based on these concepts, rather than creating new knowledge on the basis of the discussion.

The few times I was asked to express my opinion about the educational experiences at classes at UBV, it was clear to me I was expected to praise rather than to give an critical comment or suggestion. Still, I admitted publicly that while I met great teachers, I hardly saw horizontal forms of higher education and popular pedagogy at UBV. It was clear to me that the professors were inciting students with their own personal example and knowledge, rather than “facilitating” knowledge to be produced “grassroots” by the students. The traditional reliance of charismatic male authority, as well as division between student and teacher was kept also because of the students’ necessity to trust authorities and realization of the power of knowledge. I insisted that innovative “facilitation” and popular pedagogy were not applied beyond the theoretical disposition and benevolent intention: a contradictory but important reality of the innovative university that must be taken into account in next higher education experiment. Still, when I shared these observations about the experiences in the classrooms, professors at UBV would smile and say “But of course: it is because you just went to the classrooms. You should go to the classes in the *barrios*. It is there where the whole different experience is revealed, you will see!”

Thus, while in this section I discussed the traditional dimensions of education at UBV: the classroom practices of teachers, the next section is dedicated to the experiences from *proyecto*

classes in *barrio* communities. which did not necessarily provide a better understanding of alternative knowledge production and teacher-student relations, but rather put into perspective the question of where higher education fit in a larger process of recuperating and consolidating the welfare institutions in post-neoliberal Venezuela. As I have argued in previous chapters, students were encouraged to join UBV with a promise to get a chance at the job market, by the end of their training they were supposed to have grown out of the idea of joining the traditional labor force. Instead, they were invited to become agents of the state as community organizers, working with *barrio* and remote rural communities for the radical structural change in Venezuela. To be prepared for this, students underwent intensive training at the university: the so-called project (*el proyecto*) later renamed the integral core (*nucleo integral*) of their studies was their extended fieldwork with communities. First year students had to study the history of the community and diagnose its problems. The second year was dedicated to prognostics and a first intervention. These two exercises resulted in a collective thesis that students had to defend individually in order to obtain their diploma as “superior technician” (*tecnico superior*). In the event they pursued beyond the second year for a full Bachelor degree (*licencia*) they had to continue working with the same community.

In addition to attending preparatory sessions, I went to the field with a number of groups doing work with local communities—an assignment called the *proyecto* which was the core of the UBV curriculum since its establishment and the heart of the weekly routine for both teachers and students. In the next section I focus on the *proyecto* experiences at UBV. I show that the extended fieldwork is less an “education” in the cognitive/intellectual sense and more a means for an experience of socialization: the processes through which individuals learn and adopt the norms and values of a particular culture which then allows them to play the roles and understand the meanings expected from them (Schneewind 2001). This process, which happens in the weekly outings of UBV students and professors to a remote rural or urban community for their shared communitarian intervention through the *proyecto* are part of a complex mosaic of actors that represent the state locally. Within the context of a shrunk neoliberal national state that has withdrawn from marginal communities through infrastructure and services, the permanent presence of Bolivarian state agents (as those coming from UBV) at marginalized communities provides a context for a state building through the socialization of the new Bolivarian values, practices, and thus the new

institutions of the state. In this process, female labor receives specific attention--an emphasis that can be seen as both emancipatory and exploitative.

## 2. Misión *Convocatoria*: applied fieldwork in the barrio

O sunny Saturday afternoons I would meet up with UBV professors Miguel Delgado and Esperanza Marquez and their students at the metro-stop of Plaza Sucre in Catia: a *barrio* agglomeration in the West of Caracas. Buses started from this busy commercial square full of street vendors, businesses and cafeterias, and leading to numerous *barrio* sectors. The mini-buses or jeeps which started at the crowded Plaza had to maneuver carefully through the streets packed with people and trucks selling fruit and vegetables, and bring a small crowd uphill. The further up the bus would go, the narrower the road, and the more the staircases and narrow roads between tiny self-made houses. The trip to this *barrio* sector situated on top of a hill could take up to three quarters of an hour, plus a fifteen minutes walk along the ridge of the hill from the last stop. From the sector, one had an astounding view of the green hills of El Avila mountain and the lower barrios including *Nueva Tacagua*.

The sector which I will call *Madre de Dios* was one of the *barrio* sectors one first saw from the highway between the International Airport and Caracas – one that shocked and fascinated newcomers and foreigners. It was among the *barrio* sectors located furthest away from downtown Caracas, the most difficult to reach by public transport, built on a seemingly almost vertical hill. Taking a number of convoluted small streets, passing speedy motor bikes and cars that seemed about to flip into the abyss at any moment, the jeep stopped nearby at a cement wall. This was the end of the road where the jeep would have to make risky small and complicated maneuvers in order to go all the way back the steep streets and into the bigger street that lead downhill. Down, below the cement wall one could see the stunning view, beyond the basketball play-ground (*la cancha*). The only open public space in the neighborhood, *la cancha* was situated just next to the tiny path that would twist and turn between the houses in the sector.

The tiny earth-covered street was the single artery of traffic in this part of the neighborhood. Beyond the small lawn with the *cancha*, the grassy slopes were very steep, and the parts that were not were apparently used as trash heaps. Cars randomly collect the trash in the lower

parts of the sector, but only the jeeps or busses which people took to the metro stop circulated in the upper neighborhoods. The little path was in fact the dividing line between the upper and lower *barrio*. While the ones overlooking from the street were newly built single storey tin and rarely brick-layered shanty houses, directly coming out to the streets, the ones in the lower part were rather stable brick constructions with more courtyards, floors, balconies. This division was historical as much as economic: as in many parts of Caracas, the houses in the barrios first started being constructed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by settlers coming in large numbers from the country side to the capital city (Karst et al 1973) . The newer houses were from more recent waves of migration not only from the country side but from other parts of the city where family houses were not large enough to host new generations.

As in many other *barrios* during the rainy season in Venezuela, a few years back the lower level of houses in *Madre de Dios* were taken down the hill by mud slides, and so was the road leading down to the lower *barrio* sector. Since then, a new cordon of small shacks had been constructed upon the more stable segments of the landslide. By doing so, their owners have put at risk not only their own families, but the higher up *barrio* sector inhabitants, as a future landslide was highly probable. Besides, rubbish was a significant problem, with all sorts of thrash being dumped on the lawn just next to the busy path, and next to the *cancha* where children played and community gathered. Last, but not least, a serious problem with electricity existed in the neighborhood. While pillars and wires were available and the community was well supplied, a number of new houses had drawn wires from the pillars which stayed exposed next to the road and threatened children and passers by.

Once every few Saturdays the group of UBV students, their professors, and myself – an invited guest professor, as I was presented by the faculty to legitimize my being with them beyond the classroom – took the jeep and made our way up the hill. Students and professors equally anticipated their visit to *Madre de Dios*. While it was difficult for them to travel from all over Caracas on a Saturday and make this fieldtrip, it was also a unique opportunity for them to work together on a community project. All the above mentioned problems, as well as the centrality of a student from the community, Yunier, as a spokesperson of the community council in the neighborhood were a reason why this *barrio* sector was chosen by UBV students for their proyecto. As they were students in Social Management who studied the most general skill of UBV training, community organizing, they saw it this community a

good place for intervention. It was a community, Miguel and Esperanza had explained to me. with a shared problem which could be addressed with self-organization and community work toward isolating risky areas and preventing new excessive construction

My penultimate visit to this community was in late April, two months before the end of term. The significant differences with our other outings were three. The first one was that the students were going to meet with a state officer on energy Onufrio who had promised to initiate the technical discussion group with the community. The second difference was that this time they were not going up hill empty-handed but with refreshments and snacks to share with the community. The third respect in which this visit was different than the other ones – and the only one I was marginally responsible for – was that this week there was one more extra task that students were given by their professors. They were asked to carry out interviews with the community, following the methods I had taught in their class in two weeks' sessions before our expedition. This crash-course on qualitative methods of social science had ended with a collective homework preparing a semi-structured interview questionnaire by the students for the outing with the community: a task which the students had worked on with effort and enthusiasm.

The idea of these three novelties coinciding had presented itself during our last trip to *Madre de Dios*. Firstly, at that visit we had coincidentally encountered Onufrio – a functionary who served to communicate between the Ministry of Energy and the community to set a discussion table on energy consumption (*mesa técnica de energía*). Secondly, it was the frustration with the subsequent low turn-out at the assembly with both the UBV students and Onufrio that made the group from UBV take action. They started what their professors called somewhat ironically “*Misión Convocatoria*” – a mission to convoke all the community to come out to the common space between two rows of houses. The “mission” was carried out in two groups – one professor, a few students, and a few active community members joined each. Onufrio and I joined different groups. The two groups split and one went up and the other down from the path dividing the houses in the community. We would knock on each door, reminding the inhabitants there would be a community meeting with the Ministry representative and students from UBV, and asking them to come to a gathering site.

According to Esperanza, whose group I joined, this was an activity that would prove that the community was organized: that is, that it can help itself, “because if you show you can help



yourself, the government will treat you as an organized community and help you”, Esperanza said with a smile to a young lady that was nursing a baby on the steps in front of her house. The truism, reminding of the old proverb God helps those who help themselves, did not yield the expected result of massive turn-out. While many people said they would come, just half of the houses we knocked on opened the door, even if we could hear TV sets or domestic fights between the spouses. On the way back to the open space we met the other group speaking to an old lady. The lady said to all of us "I know about the meeting, I will sign whatever is needed!" This evoked a reaction in the Onufrio who said with a respective but instructive tone "*Señora*, we are not here to get signatures. The community should mobilize because you all share an interest and urgency about certain problems".

Back to the main square, Miguel and Onufrio stated almost univocally that “This community desperately needs a megaphone so people get the message one hour before the meeting.” The community members - by then about twenty of them had gathered at the small opened space amidst the road next to the *cancha* - were then asked to sign three sheets of paper: one for the community council, one for UBV, and one for Onufrio as proof of the first gathering of the *mesa técnica*. Besides community members, all people present at the meeting – including myself – were asked to sign all three lists giving full names, ID card number, address, email and cell phone number. From then on, the talk was about how the “community is idle and needs to get organized” (Miguel); how this lead to all their problems avalanching to the extent that half of the community’s houses could bring the others down the road (Esperanza). After a few of the active community members took the word for self-criticism projected toward the bigger “we” of the community, the conclusion of the talk was to come. The UBV professors and Onufrio gave short speeches on how the community could possibly only organize the way Venezuelans like to mobilize – by sharing.

When Onufrio proposed to come in two weeks, he used the term sharing (*compartir*). Used by Venezuelans to speak as much as the literal meaning of sharing space, food, and drinks, the verb *compartir* goes beyond this narrow meaning. It signifies the communion of people and a practice of well-being in solidarity with others. I had heard the word used by students, faculty, and Venezuelan friends to describe their parties, holidays, or to invite me out for snacks, drinks, or outings. I had also heard the concept from one of the emergent student movements at UBV – the so-called “movement of the partygoer” (*Movimiento Rumbero*): they

had opposed their colleagues' politicizing all issues, and their informal leader Oscar had explained to me "The Venezuelan way to do things is that: after we've partied together, we can do work and be very serious about things. So instead of doing these endless assemblies, we gather, go to the mountain, light a fire, get drinks, and then while enjoying and relaxing we make politics and plan action". Thus, the students' firm decision at the end of *Misión Convocatoria* was to go back to the community for a party should have come as no surprise.

Yet, for me it caused additional complications and, subsequently reasons for reflection. Coming down from the hill, Miguel and Esperanza were very curious about what I thought of the happening at the barrio sector and their conduct during the *Misión Convocatoria*. Not being used to be asked an opinion of the classes I witnessed, my attempt to just nod and smile in appreciation did not come out naturally. So, under their scrutinizing looks I decided to say that if it were me, it would have never crossed my mind to convoke people, but would have rather tried to do some research to figure out what might be encouraging or preventing people to think of themselves as a community or engage in communal activities that benefited the state. After this comment, Esperanza and Miguel stayed silent for a while, then Miguel said "So maybe in the next class you can come and tell us how we can do some research – like interviews, focus groups and such stuff, because, you know I am a historian, and Esperanza is a lawyer, so we never had to do applied research" .

Thus, over the next two sessions I taught the students some interview and focus group methods, speaking of typologies, ways of ordering questions, recording method and touching upon questions of access and self-reflection. This was both a pleasant and a difficult task. Teaching a class of qualitative methods of research while doing qualitative fieldwork allowed me to use fresh examples including from my work with the very group I was teaching methods to and their teachers. At the same time, the overall suspicion of UBV professors to "positivist Western science" of which I was the sole embodiment in their surroundings, made me really conscious of how to present material as probing questions. For instance, my insistence on semi-structured interview was commented by Miguel as "positivist": he said that in such case all but a free floating, intention free conversation prescribed the experience of the people.

Still, I insisted on this method with a simple idea. To my mind, two main issues could present important aspects for this community particular community. The history and power

relation between older and newer members of the community were tense. Besides, the external boundaries of the community that the state considered were not outlined organically but followed the contours designated by state institutions. In this, a number of similar questions in interviews with community members could help identify common problems and patterns and help craft organizational solutions. For this reason, I suggested to the students that the questionnaire contained a first more basic part with interviews for the personal and family history in relation to the *barrio*, and a second more abstract and conceptual part trying to disentangle the meaning of concepts of “community” and “state” in relation to the everyday practice and experience of the respondents.

The term community was one which sounded the most problematic for me. Taken by the Bolivarian government as a tool to designate the poor people beneficiaries of the regime’s redistributive and identity-oriented programs, communities were seen as the organic unit of the beloved people, *el pueblo*. Yet, as Gerald Creed has argued, community has become a seductive term for scholars, politicians, and activists alike. According to Creed, the use of this term has rather masked than disentangled complex realities. It has been overused by regimes on both the Left and the Right to render populations governable. This has often happened by matching territorial and group divisions in a rather artificial way, breaching some possibilities of autonomy and bottom-up self-governance of groups for the purpose of top-down governability. Besides, as Creed has claimed, the communities recognized as successful have by default been those that have hierarchical structure and homogeneity of membership. The term has been used normatively and almost invariably in positive terms. It has been utilized to romanticize the “communion” aspect of group conviviality over a certain territory and long-lasting time. This tendency has left aside the more diffuse (self-) interest that brings together affinity and identity groups, who do not share the same concentration or hierarchy. Thus, often “community” prescribed a fixed reality rather than showing complex processes of formation and transformation thereof (Creed 2006).

In the next week, the students split their attention, dedicated to their *proyecto* class between the class of qualitative methods and the idea of having the party. The agenda of the next community visit was, consequently, rather packed. While the students meticulously counted the people in the communities and diligently provided enough drinks and snacks for all of them, they were going there also “armed” with the interviewing methods I had taught them

and the semi-structured questionnaire that they had themselves prepared under my supervision and with the approval of Miguel and Esperanza. Add to that the meeting scheduled with Onufrio from the Ministry and his ambitious plan to set the *mesa técnica* on that same day, this made the plan sound really ambitious and made everyone excited and prepared to climb up the *barrio*.

On the day, we were all prepared and in a celebrating mood we made our way to the *barrio*. I had myself made a carrot cake. I was eagerly waiting for the opportunity to see the students – three mature students and three youngsters, among which three women and three men – to apply the interview technique to identify the problems of the community. Once there, however, the plan did not seem to work as we hoped. Almost no one was waiting for us. Yunier, the student from UBV who was our link with the community and a few other men were cutting the grass around the wired *cancha* with machetes. A few ladies were cooking soup there too, but it seemed these events had little to do with our appearance. While waiting for Onufrio, who was an hour and a half late, we walked with our provisions – snacks, refreshments, carrot cake – between the *cancha* and the house of Yunier's older sister. People were welcoming to us, but there was little talking between us. In the beginning this suggested jokes on students' part, but it soon became clear: no one would come to the party.

It became worse as the weather turned foggy, and a big dark cloud brought drizzling rain. Yunier brought a plastic table out with an umbrella, so we could put our provisions down and save them and ourselves from the rain. The table stood on the narrow green surface that separated the busy road and the *cancha*, along the grass spaces where rubbish was thrown downhill. There we stood too, in a deteriorating atmosphere. Miguel, Esperanza and the students knew little what to do. At that point I tried to suggest to the students to spread around, maybe find some community members and start asking the more general part of the questions they had prepared – the ones on the social history of the *barrio*, the family history of each individual, their vision of how the community was organized and then, if they succeeded, get the person to speak up about what might be that they see as a central problem for themselves, the community, or their life there.

Yet, these questions were never asked. Yunier was too occupied to transport the grass cut with the machete, and the rest of the students did not seem to take my suggestion in earnest. Two students went to speak to Yunier's sister but no notes materialized from this

conversation. A mature female and male student and a young girl stayed with us around the table. They laughed and joked at my attempts to encourage them. Instead, they started speaking to Onufrio about common acquaintances in the Ministry where he worked. Under his supervision, they diligently found three sheets of paper and started three lists of presence: one for the community council, one for Onufrio and the Ministry, and one for UBV. Yunier signed, and asked his sister and her husband who then left on a motor bike, to sign in as well. The ladies cooking the soup at the *cancha* signed, and so did a few passers-by, including a young mother leaving the barrio with a huge suitcase and her child wrapped around her chest. At the end we all signed all three lists. When the lists were full the drizzling rain was slowly becoming a pouring rain. UBV students helped the ladies clear the *cancha*, and then left to the bus stop, carrying the snacks and my carrot cake which we ate down the hill.

While this story is hardly the only possible development of the *proyecto* excursions happening weekly and sometimes very successfully on UBV, in my experience it was not unique at all. It shows a number of key contradictions of the process of learning and applied knowledge production. On the one hand, this and further *proyecto* experiences showed that most faculty and students were not equipped with research tools – theoretical and methodological – in order to translate the *barrio* reality into any form of systematic knowledge. Most attempts to understand the lack of mobilization in barrio communities ended up in statements like Miguel’s “the community was not organized”, or “the community is apathetic” – a sentence pronounced by Samanta on a *proyecto* class with her adult female students. Statements for local and endogenous versus global occidental knowledge were used as a tool to fend off critique or questions of evaluation. To my knowledge hardly any attempt of UBV faculty was made to develop a replicable methodology: one that would allow them and their students to venture into the field prepared to interpret its reality with a higher level of abstraction. This ostensible lack made the *proyecto* similarly difficult to replicate and evaluate as popular pedagogy and thus remained hermetically closed for “those who know” and all the others.

On the other hand, while neither an alternative methodology of field research, nor such of alternative evaluation has been developed, there is a more pertinent way to evaluate the work of UBV students and faculty in the *barrio*. It is important to see to what extent they help improve the living conditions of the people in the remote communities: those which UBV students and faculty often originate from. Cases as the one described above, as well as other

*proyecto* experiences which I witnessed contributed very little to the material living conditions in the *barrio*. As said earlier, there was little equipment to address, conceptualize, and generalize what prevented the community from mobilizing beyond the obvious hardships with supplies and infrastructure. At the same time, even if UBV manages to develop the necessary methodology to produce qualitatively new knowledge about life in the *barrios*, faculty and students are still with tied hands to contribute to change. What is often necessary for such intervention is not only the self-organization of the communities. What is necessary are sufficient funds to carry out projects as building a system to bring the litter out of the communal space, to construct a better water-purifying station, or a safer electric installation. To do this, UBV faculty and staff can do as little as apply to funding with the few communal banks: a clumsy bureaucratic process in which middle class communities are often more successful because they possess the know-how and lingo of projects, which neither UBV faculty nor its students are still familiar with.

Still, difficulties and contradictions notwithstanding, the visits of UBV faculty and students to the *barrio* communities are necessary for a wider process. In the next section I show what seems to be crucial about the *proyecto* fieldwork with communities was neither the educational experience of students nor the actual help the communities would get. The work with *barrio* communities was much more a matter not of formal university education, but of socialization: the process of socializing the state institutions and practices with professors and students (future and current agents of the states) and with communities (current and future state subjects). Using the examples of female community organizers and spokespersons, I show how these informal ways to perform socialization, a certain sociality of the state is created, especially in marginalized communities. There social actors experience a new empowerment and dignity created not despite, but by the overpresence of the state in their lives. They experience a smooth interconnectedness between their households and lives with the state project: an issue, which makes them bond stronger with those who share the same values and believe in the Bolivarian state. Much more than the education in classrooms and the acquisition of traditional and radical credentials, this is why Bolivarian higher education is useful for the Bolivarian state. I claim that this process is the essence of the Bolivarian Revolution.

### 3. The new Bolivarian (matri)sociality

The choice of a community for *proyecto* work was contingent upon a number of circumstances and conditions. Originally, a student was supposed to choose a *barrio* sector based on where s/he came from. Another criterion was that the local community was a *barrio* or remote rural setting with significant problems. In practice, more than the actual problems experienced by local communities it was usually the student's membership in the local PSUV or the community council that dictated his/her choice of a location. This made her or him a broker between the UBV class and the community and its *vocero* or *vocera*. This made not just the choice, but also the connection between UBV students and the community depend on local Socialist party and council leadership. The presence of brokers/spokespersons in the local communities facilitated access for UBV students, while offering a peculiar entry point. Spokespersons usually came from the oldest resident families. They often were civil servants, or part of the wider representative structures of the state through party membership, political activism and/or administrative offices. Some were once involved with the communist party of Venezuela (PCV), while others were formerly part of establishment parties, mostly AD, or were militant in local independent organizations. This explained their political consciousness and wide repertoire of action, compared to most of their neighbors. Their comparatively higher status rested on symbolic capital derived from this history, which in turn legitimized their pro-active position.

Yunier's family in *Madre de Dios* was the spokesperson family in the *barrio* sector. One of the oldest families in the neighborhood, they had settled there three generations ago. It was his maternal grandfather who came from the region of Aragua, moved to downtown Caracas, married there and built a house on the hill to move in with his wife. His daughters all stayed in the sector, marrying men of this or neighboring *barrio* sectors. Yunier was the oldest son of his family. His parents had three daughters and two sons. Yunier's father died young from a heart attack, leaving his wife – a school teacher – to provide for all five children. She managed to do that with the help of her two older daughters and the extended family in the neighborhood. The family occupied several houses in the small block amidst the little earth-covered street that divided their part of the *barrio* sector. Yunier's oldest sisters lived there with their husbands. One of his sisters whose household was affected in a wave of floods some years back had moved on to rent in a more distant part of the neighborhood, but was

politically active at the community council in *Madre de Dios*. The oldest sister, Yulkensi, married in the part of this neighborhood. She and her husband built a large family house. Their house was overlooking the abyss left by the houses which had fallen downhill. Just two minutes walk from there was house where Yunier, his mom, and his younger brother lived. Yunier was officially the *vocero* of the community, but Yulkensi was its central activist. Women from the community gathered at her ample house to cook and chat. There again state representatives coming to the sector would go first. UBV students made no exception. As in *Madre de Dios*, with a few exceptions, the actual local community leaders at the locations I went to, joining groups of UBV *proyecto* field trips, were women. When the *vocero* was nominally a man, the actual head of the community organization would still often be a woman, usually in some kin relation to the man in question – be it his mother, sister, or daughter. In this, the women in charge – married or not, and with no exception among those that I encountered, mothers and workers – had to sacrifice a large amount of their time for the community organizing. In the case of Yulkensi, this meant that she relied on a network of female friends to take care of her two children. This happened in the form of an implicit exchange where community members were allowed to enter large living-room of her house at will, and women could use the kitchen to prepare a communal soup, grill a chicken, make a salad etc. This was not the case in Yulkensi and Yunior's mother's house. The latter was separated from the street with a fence: people needed to knock and be invited in order to enter. The challenges of the myriads of women in the spokesperson position were revealed to in the story of further community activists, among the UBV graduates including.

It is so much easier to do communitarian work at a homeless shelter than in my *barrio*. In the *barrio* you have to run after everyone in person, and to knock on each and every door to call them for action. In the shelter people have nowhere to hide, so you can always transmit your message.

These were the words of Jisela, whom I met at another outing to Yunier and Yulkensi's community with Miguel, and who was an official at the Bolivarian Ministry of the Commune. While working actively to form communes in the *barrio* of Catia, she was also assigned to help at one of the numerous homeless shelters (*refugios*) which the government opened after the mud slides in 2010 left a hundred thousand *caraqueños* and three hundred thousand Venezuelan homeless. As many workers is low positions at Ministries, Jisela was assigned to



aid one of the shelters in downtown Caracas, where three thousand people lived tightly clustered in bunk-beds on four floors of a public parking. At the same time she had to continue doing communal work with the Ministry, visiting community councils and trying to make them gather and conform communes (*comunas*): the new unit of the Bolivarian process which would gather a number of community councils to plan and engage in what the government had called “social production”. When Miguel and I met her at Yulkensi’s house, Jisela had come all the way up to *Madre de Dios* in on a hot afternoon to speak to community members of how to plan activities for their commune. The members of the community council, however, had failed to materialize once again. Slightly disappointed but cheerful and patient as always she told Miguel, Yuineir and me about her role at the shelter.

Jisela, a graduate from UBV, did not study in its main campus, but at a decentralized classroom of *Misión Sucre*. Coming from a poor barrio family in Catia, she was a mature student who entered first the *Misión Ribas* mission of high-school qualification, and then received her university education even later in life. Like many other women in her situation, she found new hope and energy for struggle in the “missions” of the government. For this reason, Jisela could not help but constantly stress how grateful she was to Chávez “my President” (*mi presidente*), whom she declared to dearly love for having given her the power to change her life. As many other state employees in similar positions, Jisela spent incredible amounts of time and energy on her work. In fact, like Yulkensi, she was among the ones—predominantly women—on whose effort the Bolivarian revolution has been built since its conception. Jisela was working under four “hats”: as a Ministry functionary sent to the barrios, as an organizer of the homeless shelter; as a spokesperson (*vocera*) of the community council of her own *barrio* community; and of the local unit (*batallon*) of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). She was also a mother of three, a wife to her second husband, and an active member of a large extended family. Jisela’s relief about the concentration of homeless people in the shelter was understandable in this context. Instead of having to climb hundreds of stairs up to the top of a *barrio* sector where people would hardly gather upon her appearances, at the shelter they lived all together in a narrow space: she did not need to run around and convoke them endlessly to meet her and mobilize.

As the role of most women in the community councils and government agents at low positions as Jisela, who were the backbone of community organizing in Bolivarian Venezuela,

the role of Jisela was “to help people mobilize and organize”. Moving them around and inciting them to participate in the improvement of their own life conditions: that was the main task of people as Jisela. This was in general seen as the central goal of the activists of the Bolivarian process and the education missions’ agenda in training professionals. It also often served as an excuse for the government to explain the lack of intervention: I was told on numerous occasions that the socialist government in Venezuela saw as eligible only people who mobilized in collectives and not “lazy” or “apathetic” people. An analysis calling people so came often in discourses of low-ranking government agents: it was never a judgment on itself, but came after many efforts they spent to have the respective community mobilize: often with similar success as the one Onufrio, Miguel and Esperanza and their students, or Yulkensi and Jisela achieved at *Madre de Dios*. They never give up, however as stakes were high: if no disaster and need of external intervention affected a community, the mobilization and self-organization of communities was the only way in which they could be rendered visible to the state and aided by it.

The practice of Jisela and other agents of the state was to make the community “available”: to be close by, approachable, easy to summon, and thus, easy to see and decipher with the eyes of the state administration. This vision of communities, however, is everything but the top-down static expert cartography of the Soviet state, which James Scott has described in his work (Scott 1998). It is also far from the anonymous, surreptitiously working social control embodied by disciplinary institutions of the modern European state, described by Michel Foucault (Foucault 1991): be it in its centralizing early modern state effects, or the later decentered neoliberal forms of governmentality. The Bolivarian subjectivity, represented by community organizers as Jisela, is all but the supervised and self-supervising subject who adopts and embodies the govern-mentality of the state. Instead, “the benevolent state” keeps being constantly but unobtrusively present in the *barrios* through the soft human power of predominantly female, motherly caring subjects as Jisela. And while people rejected the memory of the liberal state of as present in their lives mostly through police violence and other forms of physical and symbolic coercion, many embraced its new institutions of the Bolivarian state: they came close and familiar, personified by the familiar subjects of mothers, sisters, or wives from the communities. In this, the socialization of people in the new institutions of the state was natural, familiar, and came in a consensual, though often

suggestive and wishful, rather than forceful manner. This was a new way of creating trust in the state: one in which democratic institutions merged with kinship and affective structures.

In the process of community mobilizing, women were activated on the receiving end of the state's benevolence as well as. Coromoto's story was similar to Jisela's. A mature graduate student of UBV managing a small cooperative with her neighbors, sponsored through a microcredit by the Communal Bank (*Banco Comunal*). Coromoto felt her life was changed through the regime change. She was still living with her three children in the farm on the steep hills outside Caracas, but with the coming of Chávez to power she quit her work at a restaurant, divorced her husband, and finished a degree in Education at one of UBV's aldea. In Coromoto's garden – one of the showcases of the Ministry of Women and the Bank of women – organic broccoli and onions were planted and grew surrounded by her constant loving care. Her house, a self-build tin shack had a big living room with two beds for two of her children, as the oldest one had left, and in the back her bedroom and a bathroom. In the bigger room she would host her neighbors: mostly divorced women or single mothers living in a radius of five kilometers from her, that drove their cars to converge at one or another's house, cook together and bring up their children. In the steep hills where they lived, their cars would often be stuck so they had learned basic skills to repair them, to take them out from the mud, and were constantly helping each other in that, Coromoto told me. She was active in the local branch of PSUV, her cooperative, and the local community council.

The economic hardships of Coromoto and women in her situation were hardly solved with the micro-credits of the government. She confessed that the agricultural work hardly made the women meet ends. The microcredit from the Communal Bank hardly made them cover their production costs. And while they were obliged to sell at subsidized markets in Caracas (*Mercal*) at really low price, their neighboring entrepreneurs will buy their production there and sell it to them at higher price at the neighborhood market. At my astounded gaze at this information, she shrunk, took a handful of earth under her naked feet – she loved to do gardening and feel the ground she told me – and gazing at the stunning view to the hills across, she said while sifting the earth through her fingers:

That's how it is, that's what we are in. But you know, it gave me so much power, the election of *el Comendante* and the education it allowed me, so much

clarity to see I wanted to work in my garden, to plant, to be with the ground where my ancestors have been working for centuries.

Discussing women in cooperatives in Venezuela, Catriona Goss (2011) argued that “Making use of and building on the skills that poor and working class women already possess, while possibly reinforcing certain sectors as ‘feminine work,’ also implies an acknowledgment of these as valuable beyond the domestic and informal spheres. As Goss has claimed, the implementation of these skills in the cooperative context allows women to recognize their ability to participate in the public sphere to improve both their own living standards and contribute to the wider community.” This case was made already in Article 88 of the Venezuelan 1999 Bolivarian Constitution: it granted the otherwise economically invisible housework and reproductive labor the status of work. Besides, labor identity has been just one of the ways to frame the new status of women within the government. The possibility to be called a laborer, a worker, and not just mother or housewife (*ama de casa*) has gone further by allowing a lot of women – including many adult learners – to exceed the otherwise typical labor denominations. Having gone through the social missions of education or vocation training, they have been sometimes employed by the government, but more often engaged in gratifying voluntary community work. For once their caring activity was appreciated and acknowledged. Even further, as I have shown earlier in this section, it was used by the Bolivarian government as a main force to have its subjects socialized in its new institutions.

In this bigger picture, it became clear that UBV’s appearance in the barrios was not used in order to advance formal education. The charismatic radical male professors teaching at the campus or leading their students in the *barrios*, were the opposite pole of state activity from what the powerful women were doing when organizing communities. Those were two sides of the education process, which had to speak a common language. Formal education and the socialization of state institutions had to form mutually reinforcing parts of the same unidirectional process of creation of the new organized Bolivarian subjects and communities. Although UBV faculty and students did not find a way to produce new applied knowledge out of the encounters with communities, their activity was not unnecessary. They remained simply a part of a broader network of state agents, which entered communities on a daily basis to socialize the institutions of the state. They made it possible that the state was

constantly present, tangible, personified in the human appearance of different ministries, state agencies, independent state-funded media, or the educational missions.

In their personification the state entered the houses of people as a community member, and was willingly invited to sit down with them and have a chat. Even without bringing any material benefit, the very presence of the agents of the benevolent state would make it present, recognizable in the everyday life of the community. Not only would it have a human and non-bureaucratic face: it was usually embodied by an active community member.

Through its presence and engagement, a new sociality – the communion, shared practices of household maintenance, and formation of the new subjects, the Bolivarian citizens – was asserted. Thus, it was both socialization of subjects in the new state institutions and a new Bolivarian sociality that the figure of the state agent would bring along as central to the participatory process: a true process of socialization and sharing (*compartir*). In this process, Yulkensi, Jisela, and Coromoto, were instances of successful Bolivarian subjects that were already working for the state and personifying it in its softer, universally caring female social body. Opting for a work as community leaders and organizers, with a government, or volunteering in their free time, they did not – in almost any moment of their life – interrupt the communication with the community. Their activity and involvement went beyond the 9-5pm paid job, beyond the work of the UBV professors who would volunteer a good part of their free time to guide their students' extended fieldwork in the barrios.

Two problems, however, arise for community organizers, and even more so for women among them, which are not solved within the Bolivarian process for the time being. The first problem is the incredible business of the women engaged in the process. The work of Yukseny, Jisela, and many other women who are part of the Bolivarian regime, happens on a daily basis, in every part of their activity and every sphere of their life: from the way they conduct their work, through the way they organize their activism out of work, and to the way they interact with their neighbors, families, people in the street. This work, however, does not always and necessarily bring results and presents an effective coping strategy with everyday chores. In fact, by being over-engaged or over-employed, they are often simply overworked and a lot of their tasks are done in a rather absent-minded and precarious way. This at times contributes to the overall feeling that things are not working as smoothly as they could be. The second problem is that many times, as most recent graduates of UBV and

people from the lower classes in Venezuela, these women do not receive proper payment for their work. Except for the few employees of the state, and those who work in cooperatives, much of the work done by women as community organizers is paid at best through micro-credits. The latter are difficult to get, and do not offer substantial reward for the grantees.

While trying to help the community in all kinds of positions – community council *vocera*, PSUV *batallon vocera*, representative of one or another *mesa de trabajo*, the women who form the mainstay of the Bolivarian process, often are not supported sufficiently to make ends meet. They remain dependent on their extended family and extra employment in the informal sector: an issue which the Bolivarian government has been trying to avoid. Thus, while the Bolivarian government has extracted a lot of effort of these women in order to build its own standing in the poor communities, it has also helped to extend the sole, powerful, but unequal and precarious situation of the Venezuelan woman: instead of a qualitatively new Bolivarian sociality, the Bolivarian regime reproduces what anthropologist Samuel Hurtado (1998) has called the typical matrisociality (*matrisocialidad*). This phenomenon, which Hurtado has observed in Venezuelan poor urban families is manifested in a specific household structure: one based on the permanence of income and care of a single mother with quick rotation and little responsibility of bread earning and childcare by men. Matrisociality has now come to be the main battle unit of the Revolution. It perpetuates a specific feminization of labor which happens at the expense of women's actual and independent economic participation. As much as the Chávez government has brought empowerment and political consciousness to women, it has not liberated them from a *machista* society where men are “breadwinners” (Craske, 1999: 91). It has thus far rather perpetuated the low-paid female labor and left women in unequal economic conditions.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have first discussed teaching and learning at the UBV classroom, and then spoke of the process of extended fieldwork with communities (*proyecto*). I show the different power relations that are produced, negotiated, and subverted within both process of teaching and learning. I have tried to shed a new light on disparities between student and faculty experiences and resources in the urban campuses and during their fieldwork with communities. While traditional education in the classrooms is said to be dedicated to the

emancipation of students and the breaking up of the power relation between students and faculty, it mostly reproduced the old master-disciple dichotomy: one which is dominated by authoritative male professors with a strong revolutionary capital. As I have previously shown, within the Bolivarian higher education field, the latter category conceals the combination between traditional academic credentials and past in the student left and thus reproduces the old distinctions in the classroom.

Yet, here I show how the fieldwork with communities serves a different purpose. Unlike the initial intention, the groups from UBV who go to the field to help improve people's conditions of living, do not have any shared understanding of how their work can help communities in reality. In this, however, the communitarian work at UBV is still not irrelevant. It is part of the broader network of intervention of state agents, engaged in the promotion of the new institutions of the government among communities. Female community organizers are the main tool in the battle government's battle to mobilize communities and help them organize in order to solve their own problems. Yet, having these overworked women do work for the state voluntarily or for a minimal subsistence, preserves their economic dependence and secondary position in the capitalist and patriarchal order still at play in Venezuela.

At the same time, while this process is often erratic and contingent, it provides a way of socialization of the Bolivarian citizens within the new participatory institutions. This process forms part of an attempt of the state to consolidate the formerly marginalized subaltern groups and classes, quell anger and contention, and gain hegemony over an ever larger majority of the population. In this process it acts neither as the repressive apparatus of state socialism, nor as that of Western (neo)colonial powers. It does not try to map and control populations through violence, taxation, and bureaucracy in order to subject the population and render it visible and legible to itself (Scott 1999). It is, instead, an attempt similar to that of populist governments in Latin America and agrarian populist movements in East-Central Europe from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to integrate and provide services to the subalterned larger social classes. Subjects of the state are invited not only to merely internalize (Parsons 1985) the abstract values and norms of the state institutions.

In a process of stat-building, creating the Bolivarian subjectivity, the state socializes its citizens in both senses of the word. It does not just stay the observing and seeing machinery

which makes empirical social reality legible (Scott 1998). Instead, it becomes a significant other (Mead 1962) in the life of the community. Socialized as an agent, it is represented by living human beings that come, knock door, ask questions and share the everyday life of the members of the community. This process does not necessarily create new knowledge that can be then applied in governance policies or in the improvement of the life of poor communities. It does, however, nurture the creation of a new sociality based on affective and effective female labor. It nurtures, empowers symbolically, and mobilizes the old structures of matrisociality of the Venezuelan poor families. They are the subjects of this process of socialization in the poor communities: a terrain where the state has thus far only been present through random forms of coercion and scarce bits of infrastructure. Thus, they become not only the new agents, but also the new active agency. Their networks and families form the new sociality of the Bolivarian state.



## Chapter 7: Chronicle of a Death Foretold: Generation/s of protest on a Revolutionary University

“Five years after its establishment, the Revolutionary university is, sadly, not able to generate a solid student movement. The students are passive and fail to organize among themselves: they mobilize and then demobilize again.” This concern, shared with me by Cecilia, an ex-student activist and current professor in Journalism on the Bolivarian University of Venezuela (UBV), was repeated with surprising frequency by faculty and staff at the university. At traditional universities both in the Western liberal democracies and under repressive regimes around the world, the presence of student movements usually indicates serious crises of institutional legitimacy (see e.g. Searle 1971; Altbach 1989; Ordorika 2003 etc.): “activist movements are not perceived as a normal part of student life” (Altbach 1989: 101). At UBV, on the contrary, the absence of student mobilization was interpreted as a total failure of revolutionary consciousness. This had much to do with the particular history of UBV as the vanguard university of the Bolivarian Revolution, designed by radical intellectuals from former Left-wing student movements from the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the previous chapters of my dissertation I have show how UBV’s own legitimacy always depended on the formative experiences of its faculty and staff in Venezuela’s student Left. Using the revolutionary capital which they have accumulated in the process, they have acquired a status of what I have called “the radical nobility”. This specific distinction has entailed activist credentials from the past in the movements for academic autonomy and free and mass access to higher education. Yet, taking part and being active in the student movements also meant having a university degree gained at a time when only a lucky few had such privilege. I have shown both the intellectual and activist origins of UBV at the Venezuelan public universities since 1969, and the reenactment of and over-reliance on the “revolutionary ethos” in the teachers’ training program. I have also claimed that this form of revolutionary capital has been challenged on two levels. First it was subverted by rank-and-file faculty who has to both acquire and reject academic distinctions under the guidance of the former student activists who kept their own academic privilege intact. Secondly, it was rendered irrelevant within the teachers’ practices of extended fieldwork with students in the barrios. In this difficult terrain of state intervention the masculine revolutionary charisma becomes irrelevant and is replaced by the tireless spokespersons and community organizers.

Often women, they make the state present and familiar in the remote urban and rural settings where it was not present before.

Against this background, in the present chapter I return to the main campus of UBV to speak of a third level in which the domination of the radical nobility on campus was challenged. I show how faculty expectation of the emergence of student radicalism was given a surprising response by the students. What it showed was that while the former student radicals expected that their students would also experience radicalization as a part of the learning process, they were taken by surprise that the protest was actually directed against them. By then the alleged failure of students to mobilize was lamented by professors and administrators. The concern of the faculty that the student movements on the Bolivarian university were not engaging in student activism, had repercussions all the way up the Bolivarian hierarchy: in 2007 President Chávez establish a student movement (VTV 2007) – a movement headed by Rector Yadira Córdoba. Yet, oddly enough, when a sustained student movement campaign emerged it was criticized or merely looked down upon by the majority of UBV faculty and staff. I work ethnographically through this paradoxical self-fulfilling prophesy. I discuss the ways in which professors, administration, and students negotiated the presence of a student movement on the “Revolutionary university” UBV over the span of an academic year. I show how difficult it was for students to find a powerful referent they would fight against, and thus mobilize resources and create a powerful social movement frame.

The events at UBV coincided with the beginning of a global wave of student protest especially in the countries of the Global North (Labi 2009; Baćević 2010; Gaston 2010, Dokuzovic and Freudmann 2010) but also in some countries in Africa and Latin America (Oxlund 2010; Cramona and Slachevsky 2010; Guzman-Concha 2012). These movements addressed their claims toward the state administrations, where officials used the pretext of the global financial crisis to induce a new wave of neo-liberal austerity reforms. Students located the cause of the problem as embodied in national governments. In the Venezuelan case, however, even if higher education reform was in the hands of the state, it was difficult to apply a similar frame of contestation (Steinberg 1998; Snow and Benford 2000). Critique could not be directed against the friendly figures of the Bolivarian policy makers, as they formed the radical nobility. They did not allow their past in the student Left to be

questioned from the standpoint of the present: from within a regime that is not repressive but socialist and benevolent toward movements. More importantly, the nation state itself could not become a target of claim-making. As long as the government officials and the President were seen as victims of the conspiracy of capitalism, vulnerable to a next assault by the opposition and the Empire, he was to be spared all critique. I show how the required unconditional support to revolutionary governments and its radical nobility hindered the development of new generations of activists. I argue that this tendency of institutionalization of the symbolic capital of radical movements needs to be taken into consideration when discussing the very possibility of radical social change within revolutionary regimes which usually hail critical thinking but fail to tolerate critique.

#### 1. UBV: a Revolutionary University?

As a university rapidly created to make up of grand exclusions in the past, in the first years of its existence UBV advanced much, but still a lot was missing. The majority of services on UBV were free for students. They received a scholarship from the state, paid no fees, had three meals a day at the canteen, free internet access, computer literacy, sports and language training, qualification courses and extracurricular activities as cinema, theater, poetry, etc. Buses were available to transport people living in remote areas and upon demand – to students to visit pro-government mass rallies. Yet, five years after the establishment of UBV, some problems had gradually started to materialize. Most of the facilities and events were only available to students on the five campuses of the university, and not to those at the *aldeas universitarias*, an asymmetry that reproduced the typical centralist rather than decentralized model of higher education. The monthly scholarship in 2009 was 200 Bolívars (40 USD). It was not enough to pay the daily expenses of an individual, let alone a family. Students mostly relied on the support of their families or often worked full-time while studying. The chances of graduates of getting a job even in the public sector were tiny.

Academic facilities were also not always adequate to meet the demands. Even at UBV-Caracas that had a canteen, it was often closed for weeks, serving a full meal just once a day, and providing just snacks and a glass of watered powder milk for the evening meal. Buses were futile beyond the rallies in support of the government. While the bookshop was supplied with new book editions, the free library's collection, hosted in a tiny cellar, was way

below that of local community libraries. There were just a dozen stacks of books available, not more than 40 study places in the reading room and no electronic catalogue of the books. Classrooms were narrow, but space for extracurricular activities was almost non-existent. Most public lectures and debates took place in the wider annexes of the corridors, recurrently overbuilt with new and new cubicles for professors. A huge parking lot took more than half the courtyard, and the rest was taken by a baseball pitch. These left no space for socializing outside, except for a small cafeteria and an aisle with a few benches. The university had stipulated co-governance, but the University Council only had a space for one student representative each year. The commercial job-market and the traditional universities were not welcoming to the new “socialist cadres”, as the majority of the degrees remained unaccredited.

Given these rising problems, the emergence of a student movement could be anticipated not just because of the professors’ urgency to have such. During the academic year I spent on the main campus of UBV-Caracas, to my knowledge there were six attempts to form a student movement. Four of these were small-scale initiatives aimed to demonstrate that the students were capable of mobilizing. Just two came out of specific organizational and budgetary claims and grew into a sustained campaign. None of these were recognized by the majority of faculty and staff. Asked about why they saw their students’ mobilization as weak and dysfunctional, professors coincided in a number of reasons. Firstly, quite a few professors criticized the emergence of leaders or organizational nuclei: while they took part in or willingly accepted the vanguard distinction of radical nobility within the Bolivarian higher education field, they refused the very possibility that the student movement formed a vanguard. This idea was considered non-democratic and threatening to the horizontal structure of the university. Secondly, the student movement had to mobilize for a cause of social solidarity, beyond immediate material concerns. Last but not least, even when formed, the student movement was not supposed to stand up against the professors, the UBV administration, the revolutionary government or President Chávez himself. This struggle was to be directed against the old elites and the metastases of its ‘bourgeois state’ in the traditional universities which had become bastions of the opposition. Only the pro-government student movement on UCV as a true heir of their own student struggles and thus, of the radical nobility.

These three requirements went against the basic historical characteristics of students mobilization around the world and in Venezuela. As Philip Altbach argues in one of the only attempts of cross-national overview of student movements “[S]tudent political activism is largely a minority phenomenon... sporadic in nature ...student leaders do not reflect the rank-and-file of the student population” (Altbach 1989:105). In Altbach’s words, these campaigns have a certain urgency and rapid decomposition as they only span the time of a cohort in university (Altbach 1989: 99). He shows that “a generational revolt” and “anti-regime attitudes”, i.e. a frame directed against parents, professors, university and national administrations, have been the usual scholarly explanations of the impulse of student activism (Altbach 1989: 104). This was the case in all Venezuelan student movements in the period of the Venezuelan IV Republic (1958-1998), which UBV administrators, some faculty and Ministry staff massively stemmed from: the Academic Reformation (1969-1970), the protests in the 1980s brutally suppressed by the state, the late 1990s campaign against the privatization of the public universities, and the pro-Chávez Movement of University Transformation in 2001. The small organizational vanguard leadership was led by young people from middle class origins and of left-wing party membership (Beltran Acosta 1994). These had organized in a number of waves of contention, usually triggered by claims for wider access and material benefits for the Venezuelan poor (López 2005; Stephany 2006). The movements were always framed in strong opposition against the complacent older generation, including the fragmenting leadership of the Left-wing parties, the university administration, the local or national governments (Calderon and Nino 2006).

Paradoxically, at the “Revolutionary university” UBV these same characteristics and strategies were named by professors and administrators to explain and lament the alleged lack of student movement on campus. In the following three sections I show how rather than provoking debate or opposition among the students, the explanations were adopted and adapted by them so that no conflict emerged. This process gradually diminished students’ organizational potential, made them silence their claims, subvert their mobilization strategies, and retort to the usual “repertoires of contention” (Tilly 2006) used by the government supporters. All this made their protests look like a total reaffirmation of the hegemony of created by the state and its radical nobility. It made it possible for of the mass media, government, and broader constituencies to ignore the timid expressions of student contention, or even celebrate them as another pro-government rally.

## 2. Protagonist vs. participatory democracy

The first initiative to form a student movement on UBV which I encountered when I started my fieldwork on the campus in Caracas later merged into the only sustained campaign. It came from a group of freshmen and sophomores from the Department of Politics and Government. They mobilized against the reappearance of a few all-time student representatives at UBV-Caracas, who had become small-scale media celebrities. All three I was referred to – two young men and a young woman – came from a middle class background, and figured prominently in the United Socialist Party of Venezuela's Youth faction (*Juventud del PSUV*) as candidates for the coming elections. Professors and fellow students referred to them as the “student bureaucrats” (*estudiantes burocratas*) or “the posh ones” (*sifrinos*) – a term used for the upper-class opposition to Chávez, which was also transferred to the new “Bolivarian bourgeoisie”, the *Boliburgesia*. Soon after the beginning of the school year, the overall frustration with student bureaucrats utilizing all student initiatives for their own political advancement triggered a tiny student mobilization. One of the student bureaucrats, Jaime, started campaigning to become a representative at the University Council. Charmingly elbowing his way up, he could be seen in his official suit, entering different classrooms, inviting his colleagues to events organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs where he worked.

Jaime's ambitious maneuvering irritated his fellow-students from the Department of Politics and Government. At an assembly that he organized within the department he was challenged by freshmen students. “The very idea of a single student representative is wrong, and that of student representation in a participatory democracy even more so”, Hector, a Colombian freshman in Political sciences confronted Jaime first. “We need to form an alternative student organization in which all students can participate”. Other similar opinions heightened the energy in the noisy narrow classroom. Jaime grinned, tapping Hector's shoulder. “I agree, comrade. However, for the time being, it is the only way to have the students represented at the University Council at all.” Heated discussions followed. Many students backed Hector. They criticized the dominant decision-making role of the University Council for its top-down governance that went against the UBV's initially designed horizontal structure. In the understanding of the students, it went against the participatory

incentives of the Bolivarian process. “Our organization should not copy the pyramidal structure of the traditional student unions!” Raul, a sophomore, exclaimed in the middle of the student arguments “we should propose an alternative grassroots model (*de los bases*).” By the end of the debate Hector, Raul and a number of their colleagues volunteered to act: going from classroom to classroom they had to mobilize all students into an all-inclusive movement.

Students on UBV showed a critical attitude against traditional student representation on the university already in the first month of their study. This level of anti-authoritarian consciousness would have come as a surprise to me, did these words not sound as a repercussion of a number of harsh statements that I had already heard at open spaces and lectures around the university. A leading voice articulating this was Luis Damiani, the Vice-Rector of UBV:

It turns out that we, the University of the Revolution, reproduce the old representative democracy. If we want to create new participatory democracy, we have to scratch off the old structures of the bourgeois state, to do away with its legal framework and its vertical leadership. It is not a representation or a vanguard we aim to form at all levels of organization, but a collective including workers and the broader community in the struggle... We don't want mobilization and activity to only take place in Caracas: it needs to be decentralized as the university and include all students and communities. Let us decentralize the university to the last bit!

These words of Luis Damiani said at a celebration at the Simon Bolivar hall were very much reverberated in the UBV community. A warmly appreciated white-bearded sociologist retired from the Central University of Venezuela (hereafter UCV), Damiani was not just an administrator of the university. He was a public intellectual well-known for his militancy in the Left, and radical positions as a professor on a number of occasions in the country's recent past, when Left-wing academics had to stand up together with their students against the Venezuelan state. Damiani's anti-positivist academic articles on the Revolutionary epistemology, and his passionate speeches, were among the main inspirations of generations of left-leaning scholars, and were often cited in classes on UBV and beyond. These words,

which he repeated in similar wording on a number of public gatherings throughout the academic year, at his presentation during the teachers' training program, and in our interview, made no exception. In effect, I often heard the same argument being made by younger and older professors on UBV over the academic year.

Thus, besides the general rhetoric of the protagonist participatory democracy of the Revolution, replayed by the national media, the professors' vision was also adopted by students upon their arrival at the university. Following these overall organizational imperatives, they were soon to realize what kind of student movement they were supposed to build in order to be legitimate in the eyes of their professors. From Damiani's discourse one could clearly distinguish a number of unwritten rules, or characteristics which the student movement had to follow in order to be recognized by the government, faculty, staff, and students alike. Firstly, a recognizable and recognized student leadership was not desired. While the presence of student-"bureaucrats" was endemic and difficult to avoid, it was not just critique to similar ambitions that professors required from their students. The very concept of student "representation" was to be dismantled as an evil remnant of the old system of parliamentary democracy, which the Revolution had replaced with the new protagonist, participatory popular power (*poder popular*) – "grassroots", (*de los bases*) "horizontal" governance. The enthusiasts who organized the student movement had to act subversively against becoming a leadership. Their organization was not to copy the usual framework of university politics that reproduced the pyramidal structures of the traditional "representative" student unions. No vanguard, be it a radical one, was to be formed. Instead, the UBV student movement was to be a monad of revolutionary experience: the whole student body, and even further, the whole people of Venezuela were to be equally presented in it. If this condition *sine qua non* was not fulfilled, any movement would be considered futile. As a response to the demand for all-inclusive horizontal organization, for the rest of the first term, the students from Politics and Government led a campaign to get all students to participate in a general meeting. There a structure of the student movement with no leadership and with equal rights to participate for all would be discussed and approved with consensus. At the first assembly not more than two dozen students took part. Hector and Raul proposed a structure of UBV's student movement: each classroom on UBV-Caracas morning, afternoon, and evening shift was to choose consensually three *voceros*, i.e.



spokespersons. These would both speak to their classmates and voice the opinions of the "classroom assembly" at the "coordination of speakers". The latter would only be an organ of coordination that would convoke the "general assembly". There all students should decide with their own voices on the issues of importance. "'Voceros' are 'those-who-give-voice' to the concerns shared by all, rather than 'those who have voice' and express only their own opinions: they were the sum of consensus of all people in the group." Raul, armed with Hector's laptop, explained this function together with the whole scheme they proposed at the general meeting.

This structure and the central place of the spokesperson, *vocero*, was reminiscent of the overall organization of the "Bolivarian process", the way the everyday aspects of the Revolution were called in the vernacular. As I have already explained in more details in the previous chapter, voceros were main figures in each communal council (*consejo comunal*) – the administrative unit of the Bolivarian reform, and of each battalion (*batallon*) of PSUV – the political "battle" unit of the party. Carrying out a number of small-scale meetings in classroom the new active students campaigned exhaustively for weeks in order to get a big number of students to participate at a general assembly for all programs on UBV-Caracas. This first campaign ended up in the naming or re-naming (in many cases already existent) *voceros* in different classroom. After holding a few general assemblies with scarce participation, the group energy was lowered. They temporarily disappeared from the open spaces of the university, and other groups took over.

### 3. A post-materialist student movement on a materialist university?

The ongoing student discussion over the general structure of the movement at Politics and Government, was paralleled by the rising of more and more immediate concerns among the students. The structural disparities of higher education at UBV were debated and critiqued. Already at the first gathering of the Politics and Government students with the student-"bureaucrat" Jaime, further issues beyond student organizing were raised and discussed by his fellow classmates. 2<sup>nd</sup> year Argentinian student Ricarda criticized the low budget for facilities and services at UBV. A tempered militant with a past on the student Left in her country, she was among the only ones who daringly pointed toward "Professors are overburdened with work, double-employed, and often badly prepared. They funnel theory

down our heads, but give us little practically applicable knowledge. Even the *proyecto* doesn't go as deep as traditional social work". Cornelia, a Peruvian colleague of Hector from the freshmen cohort, emphasized the need of better services at the university: "I went to the library for the first time to look for materials for a class presentation: there is nothing there, it was really frustrating". Sophomore Miguel said it was pressing to bring these issues beyond the borders of the UBV central facilities into the decentralized *aldeas universitarias*. "Only 10 000 out of all 250 000 students of UBV are on the central campuses", he claimed, "The government gives the people on the *aldeas*, mostly mature students, a red t-shirt (*una franela roja*) and they think that's how you get education. In fact, their programs are mostly not accredited by the Office of Planning of the University Sector".

The preoccupation with these and similar pragmatic issues however mostly remained a matter of private conversations and was not articulated until austerity cuts occurred in Venezuela. Pressed by the reduction of prices of crude oil due to the world financial crisis, in the beginning of 2009 the government performed cuts in the budget of higher education as a whole. All budgets of public institutions were reduced by 6%, including those of the ministries, government, the presidential institution etc. The Bolivarian universities suffered the same drawback as the traditional ones. Yet, upon the budget reduction, the Office of Planning of the University Sector (OPSU), revealed a statistic that showed how despite its numerous students, UBV received twenty times smaller budget per student than the Central University of Venezuela (UCV). The comparison with the state expenditure for students at the first experimental university in the country, Universidad "Simon Bolivar" (USB), renown as an US-modeled research intensive excellence in the natural sciences and anti-Chavista attitudes – showed even more drastic disparities. The funding the state allotted to organizing the studies of students from Misión Sucre, equaled 1/40 of that of USB.

**Table 1. OPSU data on university budget per student (source: Colomine 2009)**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Total budget for 2009 (thousands of BsF)</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>Yearly budget spent per student. (BsF)</b>
UCV	1,083	58,000	18,666
USB	377	10,049	37,513
Misión Sucre	495	527,134	939

UBV faculty and staff were aware that these financial constraints were severe on UBV and the *aldeas*, because of the rapid massification of higher education the government had performed in these new institutions. Some were openly criticizing the bad economic conditions on campus and in the *aldeas* in Caracas and beyond. However, when a group of students articulated publicly their claims of better functioning student services and required the rethinking of the redistribution of public funds, there was a surprisingly negative reaction among professors. At the student gathering, where these claims were presented to her, Rector Yadira Córdoba expressed a bitter disappointment. Reminding the audience of her past as a student militant against the privatization of public universities, and a life-long fighter for better access to medical services in the poor Caracas barrios, she spoke to the students in a grim, careworn voice:

I was curious to see what the student movement comes up with. I see you mobilized and even found a chair to moderate and time the discussion, which is great. But how is it that you only call me to speak about the canteen and the library? This shows you like clients, not like revolutionary students.

Some of the colleagues expressed their irritation with the student material concerns on a daily basis in much harsher words. Abril, a former student of the private Catholic University “Andrés Bello”, and an environmental science professor mimicked seemed simply and honestly perplexed:

We create consumerists and clients. Our students have such incredibly low consciousness when it comes to anything but cars, phones, and shopping malls. Look at my phone. This rugged Nokia is what I have for some ten years now. My poor barrio students all have a Blackberry!

The words of both the Rector and her female colleague speak out of two rather complementary positions that compose the frame of the UBV faculty and staff as a revolutionary movement in both its historical complexity of a political generation and intrinsic contradictions.

Calling former student militants of the left in Venezuela some of whom nowadays form the radical nobility one political generation can of course be problematic. Their birth spanned at

least two generations born between the late 1940s and the early 1980s. UBV faculty also had different experience in their age of young adolescence, which is formative of generations (Mannheim 1952; Kohli 1996). A number of older faculty members had formative experiences during the dictatorship of Marcos Perez Jimenez (1948-1958). They were student militants in the 1960s during the *Renovación Académica* while Communist party was still illegal. The *Renovación Académica* achieved the relative autonomy of universities including the banning of police intervention on campus. In later decades student movements against the narrowing access to higher education, its planned privatization, and the neoliberal austerity cuts acted under less restrictions, but under similar levels of repression from the state (Calderon and Nino 2006). Still, from my interviews it seems that the ‘revolutionary ethos’ – a term used by vice-rector Damiani during the teachers’ training program and reappearing in conversations and interviews with university professors – was a frame of social movement, and a political generation. It was formulated in a number of anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist and anti-utilitarian discourses, and around the main requirement of the universal right to higher education for all. Yet, the main campaigns were triggered around concrete material conditions on campus: the privatization of lands belonging to the universities (1980s), the idea of introducing student fees under the constantly decreasing quality of student facilities (1990s), and the dysfunctional canteen (2000s). Thus one can hardly claim that the student movements in the Venezuelan recent past were less concerned with material issues and could transcend material conditions of their existence. On the contrary, these were seen as a reflection of deeper social problems and disparities in Venezuela’s society that students wanted to address and fight against.

The concerns were also to a higher extent understandable the shared structural position of UBV professors. Not only were they the educated cadres that the new regime desperately needed in order to replace the expert professionals who never joined the revolution, or those who sabotaged it during a mass general strike of the petrol industry in 2003. As I have shown in chapter 4, UBV faculty members often came from popular sectors (*sectores populares*). In most cases they were first generation in higher education within their family. They were those who benefited from the opening of mass access to higher education during Venezuela’s petrol bonanza since the 1970s and despite the severe cuts and restricted access of entries in the 1980-1990s. Even despite their rebellious conduct before the 1998 election they had entered the professional job market exclusive to people university graduates. This

common class belonging – by birth and social mobility – in Mannheim’s words (1952: 291) limited them to “a specific range of potential experience, predisposing them to a certain characteristic mode of thought ...and a characteristic type of historically relevant action”. Even further, as most members of student movements influenced by the global 1968 their activism had mostly been “on behalf of” rather than for themselves. True enough, student activists in Venezuela, among other countries, stood up in defense of ethnic, gender, or sexual minorities or national liberation struggles and revolutionary governments abroad. Yet, they also fought for mass access to higher education, and better material conditions on campus, including updated library collections, regular and substantial canteen food, and better sports and recreational equipment.

In this sense, the professors and administrators at UBV required from their students that they discarded the very material concerns, contradicted partly their own frame in a previous stage of the student struggle. In that stage they themselves framed their protests as an educated stratum of the poor majority. They carried on the struggle on behalf of people from similar structural positions who did not receive a similar chance of social mobility through higher education. Through the invention of UBV and *Misión Sucre* the Revolutionary government had made the necessary gestures to the marginalized Venezuelans from barrios and remote rural areas. Yet, the argument that there was much more to be done to bridge the gap seemed to be valid only on the level of official discourse. UBV students, it seemed, were only left with the choice to be grateful and to try and adopt the anti-capitalist and anti-utilitarian discourse without having experienced the same social mobility and economic security as their teachers.

A peculiar paradox disclosed a degree of contradiction in the accusations of UBV faculty and staff against their students being reactionary clients. While the student was slowly gaining pace on UBV, professors and administrators had started to recognize another student movement as a front-runner of the revolution. A student movement, called after the occupation of the Central University of Venezuela *Movimiento por la Transformación Universitaria* on 28 of March 2001 (M-28 as back in 2001) had taken shape at the oldest university of Venezuela. UCV, where most UBV professors had schooled and militated, was just across a street from UBV (YKVE Mundial 2009b). Despite the fact that it had been an oasis of the persecuted student left in the period of liberal democracy in Venezuela (1958-1998), after the

ascend of President Chávez, the administration of this university had become more and more sided with the opposition against his government. And while the Ministry of Higher Education was trying to suggest country-wide reforms and transparency, the resistance among faculty, staff, and students on traditional autonomous universities as UCV often played on the old rhetoric of autonomy that the student Left had previously struggled so hard to achieve.

This conflict became very prominent upon the decrease of the budget, caused by the global financial crisis. A protest wave rose at the traditional universities, led by a mobilization at UCV. The Rector of the Central University – a former Dean of the Department of Dentistry, who acted against the MTU in 2001 – summoned the community and went out on a protest toward the Ministry of Higher Education. Just she and two students supporting the protest were accepted at the Ministry (YVKE Mundial 2009d). The rest of the participants at the march – opposition students know from a previous wave of contention against the Chávez regime as the white hands “*las manos blancas*” (Garcia-Guadilla and Mallen 2010) and many bystanders dressed with t-shirts of opposition parties – were left out. At the debate with the Minister, a former professor of UCV himself, a student from M-28 was allowed to be present, stand up, and attack the Rector before the cameras. Outraged, the Rector left the Ministry and the debate. The state-sponsored media celebrated the heroic deed of the heroic student from M-28 (YKVE Mundial 2009b, 2009c).

In the subsequent months, three students from M-28 became well-known media faces. They were often invited as the paragons of the student movement. Some of them ran for offices in subsequent election campaigns. And while the student movement on UBV was slowly developing under the condescending eyes of faculty and staff at the “revolutionary university”, the former radicals often gazed with envy across the street from UBV where the UCV campus was. Rodrigo Suárez a UBV professor, chemical engineer and a former militant of the *Transformación universitaria* movement at UCV in the 2001 occupation, exclaimed during our conversation his night-shift students at UBV, non of whom was active in the student movement forming on campus:

Student movements at UBV? Nah, that’s something scarce and insignificant. But see M-28 over there at UCV. Now that is a real student movement! They struggle where we once did – as a small vanguard in the

heart of the enemy, in the heart of the old corrupt capitalist system. Our students: they simply don't have what to fight for – we fought for a canteen, a better library, and a scholarship. Now they have all of these. In fact, they have little to fight for.

Suárez was not the only one to voice this position. UBV professors often viewed with nostalgia the students on the other, traditional university, who fought the same old struggle. The vanguard structure of M-28, their alleged representation of hidden Chavista voices on UCV, and their subsequent institutionalization was not seen as an impediment. And while at the Revolutionary university there was a strong expectation against all these three assets of a student movement, on the traditional one the same characteristics made the “real” student movement: the legitimate heir that would continue the battle of David against Goliath. The romantization of M-28 at UBV and in the press became so overstretched, that the student activists from the movement at UCV even felt the need to make a disclaimer. A declaration by them was issued soon after their first public appearance during the opposition march. It stated M-28 was just struggling for the most basic issues like a transparent distribution of the university budget, better canteen, library resources and facilities on UCV, and against its privatization” (Aporrea 2009). At the same time that this claim was made, across the street at UBV the struggle for such goods and services was silenced down as clientelist and reactionary. The attempt of UBV students to diagnose the problems on their own university and create a prognostic frame that would allow them to address concrete solutions was only possible upon two conditions: full gratitude to the Revolutionary government, and the transcendence of the material conditions of university life.

#### 4. A Pro-governmental Protest

Despite the difficulties of organizing a university-wide student movement, the core nucleus of the same group of students at the Department of Politics and Government, whom I had encountered during their confrontation with the “student bureaucrat” Jaime had stayed firm. Becoming closer friends, venturing together into their first experience of being what a famous speech of President Chávez called on them to be “totally radical revolutionary youth” (“*Los jóvenes revolucionarios tienen que ser totalmente radical*”): Marxist readings, revolutionary music, and “cool urban” militant fashion as well as extracurricular militancy were all part of

that. This made it easy for the group to reassemble and act like a vanguard in a next wave of contention: the debate over the new *Reglamento* (internal regulations) of the university. Published in the official gazette, *el Reglamento* (Gazeta Oficial 2009), discussed in further depth in Chapters 3 and 4 of my thesis, was the first attempt of the administration since the establishment of UBV to structure the rights and responsibilities of students, faculty, and working staff. Debated in numerous voluntary workshops around the country over two years, *el Reglamento* was never announced as a significant document challenging the structure and functioning of UBV. Once it was published as a decree of the President himself, it was presented to the UBV community as a consensual and exemplary piece of legislation.

Surprisingly to the majority of the UBV faculty and the administrators, some students and a few young faculty members saw the *Reglamento* as a challenge to the horizontal structure, and to the democratic principles of UBV. Student activists organized a front which they called *Foro Proponente (FP)*. It came out of the joint initiative of two groups who merged: the students from Politics and Government who had temporarily stopped the organizational debates and started debating the appearance of *el Reglamento* and its content, and a group of students from the Legal Studies department who debated the budget of the university. The most active members of two groups came together to contest the new administrative divisions and sanctions introduced by *el Reglamento*. The two groups received the support of two young faculty members – Diego Vasquez and Eduardo Palacios, former student militants from UCV themselves, and respective heads of the Politics and Government, and of the Legal Studies program. *FP* activists could use the offices of these programs to gather and debate. *FP*'s first and crucial initiative was to convoke a meeting with the Rector Yadira Córdoba. to debate the regulations and the budget. The meeting gathered more than 120 participants among students, faculty and staff. The moderator, Cornelia explained *FP*'s position:

The state-administered budget of the university does not suffice the enormous complex structure of UBV and *Misión Sucre*. *El Reglamento*'s has no provision of more transparent governance of the budget. It just speaks of students and university workers in a tiny paragraph. The rest is dedicated to the faculty and academic staff. It came as a top-down bureaucratic imposition. The document does not change the pyramidal



decision-making structure of the university. It reintroduces the University Council where there are just three student representatives from UBV. It does not mention students from the *aldeas*.

As one can see from the first words through which *FP* was presented as a group in the public space of the university, it did take a stance of opposition to the university administration. Cornelia's words which expressed the official position of the members of the forum indicated clearly the lines of contestation which students saw as threatening to the democratic functioning of the university: the bureaucratization and verticality of the university governance expressed not just in the text of the document, but in the gesture of its presentation as a finished fact; the lack of transparency of the management of the university budget; and the persistent inequality between the central facilities and the *aldeas* were the central issues that students wanted to deal with.

The reaction of the administrators and the majority of the faculty was that of mere indignation. At the meeting with students, Yadira Córdoba told them told the students "I want us to talk as socialists. Socialists are honest. And to be honest with you I have tried so hard to help organizing a student movement, but the support and reaction has been really meager." In this, she claimed all the initiative for the formation of a student movement to herself. A former member of the student Left on UCV, former Minister of Science and after 2011 a Minister of Higher Education, Córdoba was one of the key figures within the radical nobility of the Bolivarian process. Claiming the organization of a student movement as her own priority while she was in the position of power was a symbolic gesture: it symbolized the understanding that the power to validate a student movement was still in the hands of those who possessed revolutionary capital.

Beyond the Rector, *FP* was either ignored or its emergence was taken as an outrageous offense against the benevolence of the UBV administration. Upon the insurgence of the *FP*, the opinions of UBV faculty and staff members varied between disappointment with the students' allegedly precipitate conclusions, and the suspicion or accusation of students being reactionary, counterrevolutionary, or infiltrated. "I really don't understand how come they don't like the *Reglamento* – it's a beautiful document, reflecting our struggle and a great step ahead in the Revolution" Ariel lamented during our interview. Yadira Córdoba said the *FP* was a small group (*grupito*) who was not present in the discussion of the *Reglamento* due to

their own fault: the invitation was extended, she insisted, and many students did go to the public consultations of the document. The head of the Social Governance program, Francisco Figeroa, went even further. He lowered his voice in conspiracy:

I can show you pages and pages of transcripts of meetings with students from all around the country which show that we consulted the document. It seems however, that these students that came to these meeting are simply blind to these facts. But I am telling you, there is a reason for this: they are infiltrated. You see, they are mostly foreigners, in this group. A group of spies sent to sabotage the Bolivarian process... a clique of counterrevolutionaries, sent by the opposition.

A similar condescending attitude and utter suspicion against *FP* was expressed by the majority of professors at UBV I spoke to. This vision of the intentional sabotage of the university process by the group was adopted by some other students active in the mobilizations for a student movement, which had no protest claims. Simona, a mature female student and poet with guitar told me outside the meeting with the Rector “These youngsters show such a low respect to our professors who built this university with their own two hands. We can’t have a student movement that does not respect our revolutionary professors! This makes me so sad”. Pablo, a senior student in Local Governance and a recurrent enthusiast of student organizing expressed a common concern used to silence any critique to the Revolution: “Articulating such positions, we end up putting arms in the hands of our enemies, the opposition... You can see them, they act primarily as a vanguard, gather among themselves – who knows what’s boiling”.

This view was only contested among a number of younger faculty members, and especially by the heads of the Legal Studies and the Politics and Government Departments. Both of them former students of UCV during the last wave of contention in the late 1990s and early 2000s, they were trying to help the debates of the students and their activities. When I told Diego Vasquez from Politics and Government, himself married to a foreigner, that some of his students as Colombian Hector, Peruvian Cornelia, and Argentinean Ricarda were called “infiltrated” and “counterrevolutionaries” he laughed bitterly “Our colleagues prefer to remain blind that we have had the incredible chance to receive foreign students with an incredibly high political consciousness through the conventions. We should be proud that

we have them to incite the rest”. Despite the critiques of their professors, staff and other students, the fame of *FP* was increasing. From my conversations to Hector, Raul, and some of their colleagues, I understood that they had not entirely internalized the requirements of their professors not to act as a vanguard. In a meeting of the group which gathered at the Department of Legal Studies Office, Raul told me

We are in a difficult position, we want to challenge the unjust budgets. When I called my classmates to act out, they said ‘We can’t go out to protest, because it is like putting arms in the hands of the opposition’. It is a total confusion. People think we are challenging the government. But we are actually challenging the remnants of the old bourgeois state. We want to make a legal transformation. And in this we have nothing else left, but to act as a vanguard, but such kind of leadership is not recognized, so we appear rather like a mixture: guerilleros, but not real ones”

Hence, vis-à-vis the organizational strategies required from the student movement, which were gradually realized by *FP*, the members of the group once again had to do everything to show they were not a vanguard, urging all students to participate in their actions. To do this, they had to organize a huge number of meetings beyond the scope of the central facility of the campus in Caracas. They spent vast amount of their personal resources and energy to travel to several spots around the country, creating connections with students in other towns. Through these meetings, *FP* managed to organize two big meetings where not only students from the central facilities, but some representatives from university *aldeas* and other towns were presented.

At the second out of two meetings where I was present, the leadership of the movement was expressed in a clear if unobtrusive fashion. A long discussion was carried out in four *mesas de trabajo* on the topics which have been listed as most urgent for the students: the budget, the *Reglamento*, student services, and student movement organizing. All four discussion tables were headed and voiced by *voceros*-members of *FP*. Surprisingly, all tables came to the same conclusion. A critical petition of UBV students was to be drafted with the claims of the students. This petition would then be taken to the National Assembly in a symbolic act of student solidarity. The students from all around the country were to come to Caracas on the

same day and take part in a march. The march was to walk from UBV-Caracas to the seat of the National Assembly where it was to deposit the petition. The petition was drafted by students from *FP* in Caracas. Students from regional centers just had to arrange their travel to the city. A week before the march, posters and flyers were stuck all around the university.

The march was called “Mobilization for the Necessary University” – “*Movilización por la Universidad necesaria*”. Commixes on the posters reaffirmed the statement of mobilization of popular power – a clenched fist, and a schematic sketch of the silhouettes of a crowd raising flags into the sky. The slogans of the march were stated below the graphics, saying firmly “Fight, fight, and fight! Don’t stop fighting for the socialist and popular university! A just budget this is our fight! No more free gifts to the bourgeois! March for the necessary university!” The day of the march brought two surprising developments. Firstly, in order to gain legitimacy, the demonstration was framed completely in line with all other marches within the Bolivarian process. Not just students, but also faculty and administrative staff came along – not only from Caracas, but also from other cities. Dressed in red, with t-shirts with the face of the President, pro-governmental posters and a flag of Venezuela, all forces within the university which I witnessed expressing antagonistic and conflictive views, suddenly joined forces in this march.

Not only did bureaucrats such as Jaime, and mature students like Simona and Pablo, who opposed *FP*, come to the march. The Rector of UBV, Yadira Córdoba headed the march herself and walked the long road to the National Assembly. And not only did Professors like Diego Vasquez and Eduardo Palacios who were sympathetic with the *FP* walk along the Rector: other colleagues of theirs who thought the members of the *Foro* were infiltrated counterrevolutionaries also marched along. Secondly, the declaration that appeared had little to do with the initially discussed issues at the gatherings of *FP*. The proposal that the students handed in to the National Assambly raised a number of critiques against the university system – its laws and its overall budget. Yet, paradoxically, it also fell short of articulating the majority of student concerns raised during the student discussions and. The critical document they previously produced was rendered irrelevant and never officialized.

The main critique was addressed at the laws concerning higher education functioning in Venezuela. The document mentioned both the Law of Organic Education (1980), and the University Law (1970). They were called “bourgeois”, “leading to the reproduction of the

capitalist system", and "creating conditions for a new coup d'etat". Yet, there was no critique of the fact that the laws were never changed with new legislation. These laws were simply never replaced by new legislation despite the 98% dominance of PSUV at the National Assembly at the time. Furthermore, budget-related concerns were just mentioned in the passing in the proposal: transparency figured as a highly desired asset, but the lack of it was attributed to the former opposition and the remnants of the bourgeois state; the UBV/*Misión Sucre* or UCV/UBV asymmetry was touched upon just in a very brief note about how much money the state spent on student services in traditional and in new institutions of higher education. The division within the "Bolivarian system" of higher education into first-class and second-class institution, debated at the student gatherings, was not addressed. Surprisingly, the claims of the *Reglamento* which occasioned the emergence of *FP* were skipped.

Instead of pointing out possible reasons for failure within the governance of UBV/*Misión Sucre*, the document was full of the traditional figures of the enemies of the Revolution: the "usual suspect" antagonists of President Chávez and his government. As culpable for the ancient laws in operation were seen in the face of all "the CIA", the opposition student movements who made the "white-hands" campaign (*las manos blancas*), "the bourgeoisie", "the capitalist system", the current presidents of Colombia and Peru, the "autonomous universities", the "dominant class", "the petty bourgeoisie", "the economic elite", "a bunch of illuminated thinkers", "the university academics" (FP 2009). No one within a political position within the government, the state institutions, the Ministry of Higher Education or UBV itself was attributed any responsibility. There was no single suggestion of change in activities and directions of governmental policies or UBV's internal governance or financial management. The way ahead in higher education reform that students proposed was to get funding and technical support from the National Assembly in order to go all around the country and mobilize communities to debate the new legal framework of higher education. Headed by the Rector and a number of officials and high-ranking faculty, who represented the radical nobility on the university, the protest comprised a big group of faculty, workers and students marching all along with each other in seemingly perfect harmony. All dressed in red and with pro-government posters and flags, they walked through the main arteries of the city. Under the kind smiles and gazes of the faculty, the students were painting anti-

opposition graffiti on the walls of the city. The UBV community gradually reached the final aim, the National Assembly. At the National Assembly, a representative group handed in a statement and a proposal. The document was received in a friendly cooperative manner by the Head of the Assembly and a number of MPs from the Education committee. She tapped Hector on the shoulder in a friendly manner. Further consideration was promised and never fulfilled. Over the next months Diego Vasquez and Eduardo Palacios lost their positions as national coordinators of Politics and Government and Legal Studies Departments. FP soon dissolved: few of its members became part of a committee that the Rectorship co-opted to incite their fellow students in the years to come.

### Conclusion

As much as it was disregarded by UBV professors as a malfunctioning mobilization initiative, *FP* was in fact a classical student movement. Following the description of Philip Altbach (Altbach 1989), one could see a number of characteristics that the students shared with other movements around the world: They were a tiny minority from the campus population of UBV that comprised of radicalized youngsters. They definitely shared a degree of political consciousness more elevated than the rank-and-file students at their university, which was reflected in their position as excellent students of their year whom their professors recognized and were proud of. Half of the students came from a minority group within the student community: Hector, Ricarda, Cornelia, and some of the core sympathizers of the movement were in fact foreign students. They all received scholarship from the conventions of the Venezuelan government with other countries in Latin America. Venezuelans as Raul were from lower middle class families. Besides, they were all young people in their early twenties, with no familial obligations. They only worked part-time and had a clearly more time to dedicate to their studies and activism. This was in contrast to the majority of their colleagues on UBV or the *aldeas* who came to the universities in the night shift after work. Despite it was a classical student movement, *FP* was hardly a success. Determining its “success” or “failure” in social movements in general, and in student movements in particular is difficult of course. The mobilization potential in terms of “unity, numbers, worthiness and commitment” was seen by Charles Tilly as a significant attestation of social movement success (Tilly 1999: 261). Student movements have not achieved significant

political changes, but their effect has been observed in mobilizing a wide number of sympathizers and attracting the attention of broader constituency to a special issue (Altbach 1989). Yet, while *FP* was successful in bringing more people to a march, than many movements in Western countries, they were not successful in another crucial part of social movement organizing. In the aftermath of the march, Hector told me:

UBV is not an island: it develops hand in hand with the Revolutionary process, and with all the sectors of the state that have a very strong discourse. We had to center ourselves in this discourse and that did not allow us a clear line of confrontation. We were very much assumed by the whole revolutionary process – we could not move at our own pace, so once we appeared publicly, we could not delay the march. Instead we were pressed to carry it out quickly, with a high degree of abstraction, and our claims remained a secondary matter... We did not achieve anything, and after the march it was clear we had to take a step back.

Hectors' words speak directly to a set of alternative theories of social movement outcomes. These go beyond the numbers of participants mobilized and the visibility, or the perceived worthiness and commitment to a cause, which were all present in the *FP* self-perception before the march. Being able to articulate a number of central claims against the foreseen cause of a problem or an culpable figure ("diagnostic" frame) and to propose viable solutions to the diagnosed problems ("prognostic" frame) is a crucial aspect of social movement success (Snow and Benford 2000). The concessions or at least recognition that the authorities grant to social movements has also been discussed by William Gamson as a clear sign of social movement advancement (1990). As Hector's narrative and analysis shows both these aspects have been lacking in the student mobilization achieved by *FP*. The very name of the forum as "proponent" rather than "opponent" could be seen as an attestation of their intentions to make a stand for the government and their professors and university administration, rather than withstand them. "Centering within the discourse" of the Bolivarian government about its proclaimed Revolution has been a necessity condition for the recognition of the student movement: the opposite strategy would have been critiqued as leaving the body of "the people" that the Revolution to its vulture enemies.

Yet, taking this stance has also required avoiding the strategic step of framing the movement against the authorities and the state. Attributed to an abstract external enemy, it was impossible to propose solutions to the issues with the budget, the vertical organization of the university, and the structural disparities encountered by its students. Shying away from an honest debate of the shortcomings of the actions of the UBV faculty, staff, and the government, was counterproductive and stifled the student movement energy. Positioned in that conjuncture, the students could not extend their frame to further student struggles in the country, let alone these abroad. They still considered themselves antagonistic to the students in the Empire and Western liberal democracies. And while most student movements out of Venezuela have been fighting against an avalanche of commercialization, marketization and privatization of higher education material concerns have not been foreign to Venezuelan students, including those at UBV.

The repertoire of contention chosen by *FP* also contributed to the self-fulfilling prophesy of their eventual decay. The demonstration (*concentración, marcha*) has always been the uttermost symbol of participation and positive support of all and every supporter of the government of President Chávez: all workers at public institutions joined the marches by the number. Its choice as an expression of *FP*'s contention, made it possible for the administration of UBV to harness the contention and protest claims of students. Joined by the actual proponents and opponents of *el Reglamento*, and directed toward the positive support of the government that performed the austerity cuts, allowed the protest to be seen as just a next pro-government rally. A further difficulty was created by the self-framing of the faculty and staff. On the one hand, students were not allowed to act against the will of the majority of the student body. This revolt would have signified a reaction against the brave people of Venezuela (*el pueblo venezolano*): the urban and rural poor previously deprived of chances to get access to free public services. UBV students sometimes inherited but mostly represented, embodied, and simply were these people. Full of people from all age groups, the student groups at UBV hardly represented a generation or a generational unit – the structural position, chances of career advancement, and the intellectual influence of the revolution reached young and old students in quite a different way.

On the other hand, while UBV professors and administrators were a much more obvious antagonist in the struggle, they did not allow the students to take them as such. Despite the



fact that for ten years now the Bolivarian intellectuals and education experts and bureaucracy were part of the established power apparatus of a nation state, the students respected their professors as paragons of radicalism and activism. The implied requirement that no critique was addressed to the President because it would “put weapons in the hands of the enemy” was transferred to the whole administration of the state and the university. Using their authority of revolutionaries doing all for their students, the administration and the majority of the professors did not allow the articulation of claims against them. In this constellation of power of the Revolutionary government (or its alleged powerlessness vis-à-vis its all-powerful enemies), the only possible reference of the student protests turned out to be the old enemy: the capitalist system and its metastases in the “bourgeois state”, which socialism had not dismantled.

A central difficulty of framing the student movement at UBV has been the usual referent of anti-systemic process, the nation state, in a new role. Student movements in Latin America have traditionally lead historical struggles against repressive right-wing regimes that monopolize state power. As Ordorika’s study (2003) of a number of campaigns of the student left in 20<sup>th</sup> century Mexico shows, the persistence of the Party of Institutionalized Revolution in power has allowed all generations to strike the same battle. The case has been similar in movements in Western countries. Whittier’s study of the replacement of generations in the woman movement in Columbus, Ohio, has shown that while certain characteristics of the membership in the movement change, the antagonist does not. The very fact that the groups she studies can still be called “the woman movement” in singular, speak of the certain permanence of the struggle against the patriarchal order and the state that represents and reproduces it in its practices and policies (see Whittier 1995). In his reflection on the history of American sociology, Dough McAdam shows the typical post-1968 anti-statist disposition of academic sociologists and social-movement members. This, he claims, has led to an unintended consequence: the militant generation of American sociologists achieved a relative academic autonomy but withheld from the mainstream political debate in the country (McAdam 2007).

The antagonism against the state apparatus and bureaucracy could be seen as a referent that could create and has created a strong identification mechanism for generations of student and social movement participants. This could be seen very well in the discourse of my

informants among UBV professors and administrators of their past of struggle against the capitalist system supported by the Venezuelan state. When speaking of the present state, headed by President Chávez and the Bolivarian Government, the picture was much less clear. As Vice Rector Damiani's speech showed, the main referent to the grievances remained "the remnants of the old bourgeois state". The *FP* episode of the FP campaign made it evident that students also adopted this narrative. They had no choice of presenting the Revolutionary state as their enemy: on the contrary, it was seen only as a hero entering in an uneven battle: the Revolutionary state, struggling with the omnipresent metastases of "the old bourgeois state". This whole narrative does not recognize the responsibility of the current government. It also does not recognize the changed role of the nation state – old or new as a contender of social movements. As Philip Cerny has argued, after the neoliberal transformation of the nation state, and the shift from a system of nation state to a system of complex organizations and organisms, it can less and less be seen as "the key structural arena, within which all collective action has been situated and undertaken" (Cerny 1995: 595).

Philip Altbach has claimed that "student movements are often barometers of society" (Altbach 1989: 105). The story of *FP* can also be seen as rather telling of an aspect of the Bolivarian revolution and Revolutionary governments in general. While the group of students shared most characteristics of a typical student movement, the very conjuncture in which they had to operate did not allow them to function as one. Due to the heroic halo of the benevolent state and the radical nobility, they could not frame their campaign and formulate their claims toward those who crafter the higher education reform which UBV was a part of. The key strategy of most student movements to act out a conflict against the older generation, or to express anti-regime attitudes (Lipset and Altbach 1966; Keniston 1968; Whittier 1995) were not an available option for *FP*. The need to use the language of the negotiating antagonist in order to form their own claims as universal for the whole "people of Venezuela" made it impossible from them to gain recognition unless they campaigned as a fangless pro-government initiative. This shows how difficult it is to form radical critique against a power structure and its elite that frames itself as revolutionary, and assumes there is no more radical alternative and discourse than its own.

## Epilogue: The revenge of the hierarchy: the revolution will not be criticized?

I met Michael Lebowitz in Belgrade on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 2013, two months after the death of President Hugo Chávez. An American political economist with a past in radical student activism in the US, and a Canada-based emeritus professor active in politics and critical theory, Michael worked extensively on workers control under socialist governments. I first saw him in Caracas in 2009, where he and his wife, Marta Harnecker, were part of the International Center Francisco de Miranda (*Centro Internacional Miranda- CIM*). A government-sponsored think-tank, CIM was designed by Michael Lebowitz and Marta Harnecker following a Cuban model. A long-standing militant on the Left, exiled from Chile after the coup d'état against Salvador Allende, Harnecker also had a significant experience working with the Cuban government. She was one of the intellectuals personally invited by the President to serve as an expert in the Bolivarian Revolution. CIM gathered all local and foreign fellows appointed to do intellectual work and ideological awareness-rising with high-ranking experts from different Ministries and agencies of the government. They joined the think-tank for short- and long-term research projects that would produce expert knowledge for the government. Sponsored by the Ministry of Higher Education, CIM was based in the nationalized hotel *Anauco Suites* in one of the high-rises of downtown Parque Central. CIM presented the advanced theoretical reflection of the Bolivarian Revolution based on the results of participation of the intellectuals in projects, exploring the Venezuelan reality with critical applied social science. It was as an intellectual bastion of the Bolivarian process and a forum for the global and national Left.

In Beograd Michael Lebowitz was invited by the Center for Emancipatory Politics (CPE) for a workshop called “Stuck in the periphery”. He was to speak about the socialism of the 21st century and draw lines of comparison with the state socialist project, and especially former Yugoslavia and its advanced forms of workers control. The workshop was organized and sponsored by Rosa Luxembourg Foundation. The foundation of the German Party The Left (*die Linke*), which has been aiding financially the intellectual and political work of the fragile new Left-wing formations in the former Eastern Block, including Social Center Xaspel, an initiative I started being active in after coming back from Caracas. When I understood Michael was coming to the region, I contacted him in advance, asking for an interview. In my email I mentioned that one of the questions I would like us to speak about was the

forum “Intellectuals for Socialism and Democracy” which took place at CIM in 2009. When we met in Beograd at the lunch table before the workshop, and I introduced myself personally, Michael remembered this detail of the email. He asked with a smile, “Were you really at that important meeting? It was intense, wasn’t it?” his eyes shining with emotion.

The forum “Intellectuals for Socialism and Democracy” was a crucial event and also a very important moment in my fieldwork. It took place in the first days of June 2009. Organized by CIM, and Presided by its Chair Luis Bonilla Molina, it was a critical moment in the relation between intellectuals and the state; between the radical nobility, and foreign militants of the Left active in Venezuela, and the powerful leader of the country. In my mind it was a critical juncture moment for the Revolution and the opportunity for intellectuals engaged with the Revolution to come up with constructive critique and propose pertinent solutions to the emerging contradictions within the Bolivarian process. A critical juncture (Kalb and Takk 2005) is a moment in history when a number of strategic opportunities are opened: institutional arrangements emerge, that become difficult to change. The forum was one such moment. Following the Referendum for a constitutional amendment that end term limit for the President, it came at a moment when critique started being articulated among government supporters. While the forum came to galvanize the critique, it ended producing a conjuncture in which less and less critique was possible. No matter how well established the intellectuals from the radical nobility were within the higher education reform, they still remained the dominated part of the dominant class. Instead of being used as a voice of critical corrective, they had to conform to the hierarchy of radicality of the Revolution, in which the figure of Chávez had to be placed on top.

The Referendum for the eternal reelection of the Venezuelan President took place in February 2009. It followed two lost election campaigns for the Bolivarian movement. In December 2007 a Constitutional Referendum was won by the “No” vote with 51% in a turnout of 54% of voters. Catalyzed by an aggressive opposition campaign, the low turnout was a sign of the loss of support from the popular bases of the movement. The government experienced a second partial loss during the local elections on 23rd of November 2008. Despite the strong and expensive campaign and the overall victory of the newly formed party of Chávez supporters PSUV throughout the country, the capital Caracas was lost to an opposition mayor. This was a serious loss, as Caracas – a city of over four million people –

hosted the majority of the urban poor, who benefited of the social reforms of the government. On both occasions, President Chávez and PSUV recognized the loss. By not contesting the election results, they confirmed the democratic stance, maintained ever since Chávez's election in 1998. And still, the local elections showed that the government had the support of over 50% of the voting population: a reason for Chávez to appoint the new Referendum less than three months later, which would justify the end of term limit.

The Referendum in February 2009 became a reason for an emergent internal critique coming from government supporters. Before the November local elections, there was a consensual silence among most Chavistas about the controversies and failures within the Bolivarian process. The discussions that took place at the UBV and other spaces of intellectual and popular debate were marked by a peculiar self-censure, in which all articulation of critique toward the government, PSUV, or the President became impossible. In this discursive strategy, all problems or failures of the Bolivarian government were attributed to its enemies. The victory of the opposition in the local election in 2008 was interpreted as a sign of the reproduction of the capitalist system through the mechanisms of representative democracy. At UBV, official gatherings, and assemblies of communal councils one could hear the same reasoning: the victory was won by the persisting structures of the old bourgeois state and its representative democracy, which sabotaged the socialist protagonist direct democracy. The key terms used to describe this process were Gramsci's words that the old never fully dies, and the new is never fully born (*"lo nuevo no termina de nacer, lo viejo no termina de morir"*).

Yet, the rapid shift to a second election campaign, for the Referendum, in just a few months' time, resulted in a sudden and somewhat surprising raise of critical voices. The announcement of the Referendum coincided with the first serious blows of the world financial crisis on the economy of Venezuela, heavily dependent on the rapidly decreasing price of crude oil. Spending the money on a second election campaign within less than two months made little sense. Supporters were slowly giving up on their former strategy adopted after the 2002 *coup d'état* "not to give arms to the enemy". Chávez and PSUV won the Referendum in 2009 with 54% of vote and a turnout of 70%. After the initial joy of the supporters, critique against the direction of the Bolivarian process slowly emerged. The underlying motif of all grievances was the lack of transparency of the campaign's expenditure and the subsequent economic austerity, cutting budgets and jobs, and merging or closing

Ministries (VTV 2009a). Protests of students and workers followed, and so did intellectual critique in the Bolivarian process (Wilpert 2009).

This was the background against which CIM organized the public Forum called “Encounter Intellectuals on Socialism and Democracy: One-way Streets and the Ways Ahead”. As Michael Lebowitz recalled during our interview in May 2013, it was him and Marta Harnecker who came up with the idea and made the call for the conference, and the Chair of CIM Bonilla Molina sent out the invitations. It was a surprise for everyone, however, how many people accepted the invitation, and even a bigger shock when the National TV cameras appeared. As Michael told me retrospectively in 2013 that when they were preparing the forum, they could not predict "all what happened afterwards". The Forum was opened by young Spanish scholar, Juan-Carlos Monedero, who, in a passionate speech declared that the Revolution was suffocating under the “hyperleadership of Chávez. Yet, especially for Venezuelan intellectuals who watched and were present at the forum, the critical opening was made by sociologist Vladimir Acosta. Famous for his program on National TV, Acosta was one of the most prominent members of what I have called the radical nobility of the Bolivarian process: a former member of the youth faction of the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV), he taught at UCV’s School of Economic and Social Sciences (FACES). Acosta’s presence gave credit to the event. An ardent government supporter, he produced a surprise for the audience, when he started his speech with the following statement.

I share, of course, the idea of the extraordinary achievements, which we have made over the last ten year. However, there are important unnoticed or underestimated problems, which have accumulated and have become a menace to the advancement and deepening of this process, which, I believe, we all wish to be successful.

Amidst increasing silence Acosta enumerated thirteen crucial problems that he saw as threatening the revolution (Acosta 2009). He critiqued the lack of clear political program in the face of the vague generic idea of Chávez’s program of Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He outlined the contradiction between the statement that the Revolution was a collective effort, and the fact that no one questioned the centrality of the leadership of Chávez. For Acosta PSUV was not a revolutionary party. Instead it was turning into a mere instrument for electoral victory of the Bolivarian government. He critiqued the lack of change of the

relations of production, and the parallel failure of the government to stop the generation of conformity, precarious behavior, and consumption among the population. He challenged the lack of transparency in public expenditure. Acosta reminded that nationalization happened without affecting the rich and emphasized that the commercial media were number one power-holder in Venezuela. He said bitterly that – given the absence of nation-wide networks of radical movements – moderate currents dominated PSUV and the Revolution. And while Acosta confessed that Chávez was unconditionally “the soul, heart, nerve, and force of this process”, he pleaded people not to suppress their critique.

The speech of Vladimir Acosta was followed by an avalanche of critical speeches. Some were prepared in advance, others just improvised. Anthropologist and feminist intellectual Iraida Vargas, former activist in the student Left in UCV during the Academic Renovation, started on the provocative note, saying that a Revolution did not need a state (Vargas 2009). Michael Leibowitz reminded that according to the ideals of the socialist movement, all revolutionary subjects should be subject to discipline by the revolutionary party. He stressed, however, that PSUV and the Venezuelan reality were still far from such an ideal (Leibowitz 2009). Historian Roberto López from Maracaibo – a former member of a Maoist rural guerilla group in the 1980s – spoke of the division of center and periphery in which the countryside was neglected by the Revolution (López 2009). Economist Víctor Álvarez former Vice-minister of local development, spoke of the actual increase of the share of private companies in the last 10 years, showing evidence from the National Statistics office (Álvarez 2009). Miguel-Angel Pérez Pirella from the government-sponsored research institute IDEA demonstrated that science in Venezuela still worked as individual effort and no real collective work was done to make revolutionary science (Perez Pirella 2009). Gonzalo Gomez – a student organizer at the private Catholic University Andres Bello and current editor-in-chief of the government supported online news pool *Aporrea* – spoke of the failure of the state media to create revolutionary content and format (Gomez 2009).

At times speakers needed to reassert their own position e.g.; “this is not an attack” ; “let us not forget we are here to show support for the Revolution”. The all-time reference to why critique was not voiced earlier was the 2002 *coup d'état* staged against Chávez with the help of money sent to opposition organizations from the US Pentagon (Golinger 2005): an instance which all Latin American Left-wing intellectuals who experienced or followed closely similar

intervention, especially during the fall of the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973, rejected deeply and passionately. The people seated around the table, men and women, intellectuals and professionals, had with no exception a great record of work directly with and for the people of Venezuela: except for academic or public intellectuals and militancy in the Left, many of them had experience as popular educators, community organizers, or trade-union leaders. The meeting went on in the spirit of a shared direction. Different arguments were not side-tracked into ideological debates. There was an implicit understanding, that the Forum should have cumulative effect and opening ways ahead, as the title went, for critical reflection of the Bolivarian process.

Yet, the reactions that followed spoke more of the rest of the subtitle of the Forum, as they turned it into one-way street of critique and reflection. The presentations from the Encounter “Intellectuals on Socialism and Democracy” were transcribed and uploaded on the web portal *Aporrea*. Some presentations were initially copied or parroted in the opposition press but the noise that they produced there was negligible. The negative reaction coming from prominent circles of government supporters, however, was surprising. One of the main publications of the Chavista press *El Diario Vea* published a commentary by a columnist who wrote under pseudonym “The grain of maize” (*El Grano de Maíz*). *El grano de Maíz*, Michael Lebowitz remembered with a bitter smile, was a guerilla fraction connected to Rafael Ramirez – the head of PDVSA who did not allow information from the national oil company to be given to the Ministry of Planning and thus made economic planning in the oil-dependent country difficult if not impossible. *El Grano de Maíz* summarized the event with the words that the intellectuals were “infiltrated bourgeois in the process”. The columnists said the critique of intellectuals present at the Forum was an attempt to destabilize the Revolution from within. Similar opinions came out in *Aporrea*, where harsh critique was voiced against the intellectuals. Their presentations were seen as destructive, counterproductive, and “centered on form” instead on content-related issues. Voices were raised by a trade-union leader against the division of labor that allowed “the so-called intellectuals” to discourage other people to participate (Linares 2009).

The awaited response of Chávez came through the national TV. Seated in an open-air studio with a pastoral landscape in the background, he discredited the attempts of “arm-chair theorists” to criticize the revolution. His sarcasm was strong: “Who has called these



intellectuals Chavista? I did not!” (YVKE Mundial 2009a). He also expressed concern that a lot of people think that they have to solve the problems of Venezuelan society as he had to. “Let them come on Sunday. I will be happy to spend time with my wife and children”, the President addressed the intellectuals (YVKE Mundial 2009a). Chávez did not comment the content of the critiques. Later the same week he made another implicit response. In the week after the forum the Sunday show “Alo Presidente” was screened in a new “theoretical” version (*Alo Presidente Theorico*, VTV 2009b; 2009c). The show represented Chávez entering homes of ordinary people. He would sit at their table, ask questions about their life, and comment their worries through Marxist theory. In one of the shows he scorned a youngster for his desire to work for a telephone company. With a long discussion on what Marxist philosophers said about exploitation, Chávez told the teenager how capitalist telephone companies exploited their workers. The advent of this show in the aftermath of the Encounter was a clear sign: Chávez showed that intellectuals were replaceable.

The response of the intellectuals from the CIM forum was timid and slightly embarrassed. They issued a collective piece containing a vague and general message: despite what the President had said, they reasoned, deep inside his arguments “coincided with the main points in the Forum” (CIM in Aporrea 2009). This fangless response to Chávez signaled distrust in their own power to voice critique against the President so dearly recognized by the Venezuelan people. The same group of intellectuals from the Forum came back together in the fall of 2009 to establish the journal *Comuna*: an act they did not restate their critiques, but stating that their activity was in full endorsement of the President. The journal still languishes but has never taken off as a mass publication. In interviews with intellectuals represented in the forum told me that Chávez had threatened to expel them from PSUV. One of them told me that a letter by Uruguayan intellectual Eduardo Galeano made Chávez reconsider this decision. Since the Forum, no significant attempt was made to reestablish an intellectual tribune that would become a critical corrective to the Bolivarian government. And since the President fell ill with cancer and suffered an untimely death, most critique has devolved from the “no weapons to the enemy” to a “*de mortuis aut nihil aut bene*” trope.

In 2013 Michael Lebowitz remembered the Forum with some nostalgia and some bitterness. Michael seemed truly sad about the death of *el Comendante*, whom he dearly admired. He was so eager to learn, Michael recalled, that some nights he would just call us and ask questions

about a book he was reading. He told me in his eyes it was not Chávez who created the real turbulence for the intellectuals, because “Chávez didn't like public critique - private he took earnestly, publicly not. But then again, he even confessed later that Juan-Carlos Monedero was right and his presidency was a ‘hyperleadership’”. It was, however, Michael went on, people in the closest circle of the President, who, could did not want to be faced with critique and were reticent to follow the incentive for a true bottom-up change which Chávez embraced. The antagonism created a serious threat for the intellectuals at CIM and those present at the Forum. As Michael said, graphically “When it hit the fan we had to struggle for our lives... not literally, but attacks began from everywhere. The Minister of Higher Education Luis Acuna wanted to close CIM or shifting their budget to another Ministry”.

Still, what was reassuring for Michael, was that testimonies on *Aporrea* often supported the positions taken by intellectuals at the Forum. According to him, however, Cilia Flores, then Chair of the National Assembly, and her husband Nicolas Maduro – pointed by Chávez as his heir and then elected as a Venezuelan President – were the two key antagonists of the Forum within the Bolivarian movement. In the aftermath of the Forum, Flores forbade the distribution of the journal *Comuna* among Ministers, confiscating all issues of the journal which Bonilla Molina distributed at a cabinet meeting. “And you know, for me what was striking was that the Ministers actually gave the issues away to her!” Michael exclaimed. For Michael, who had met Maduro in assemblies with union leaders of occupied factories in Ciudad Guayana, this was no surprise. “He has a typical Cuban top-down approach to governance, which he tried to impose on the factories under workers’ control. This makes me seriously concerned about the direction of the Revolution”, Michael confessed.

For me the concern had started already with the Forum “Intellectuals, Socialism and Democracy”. Having studied intellectual dissent under state-socialist regimes, I had realized that socialist governments tend to ignore critique coming not just from the Right, but also from within their close Left-wing circles of intellectuals, workers, and supporters. The Forum presented a critical moment, a turning point in which the possibility for critique of the Bolivarian government was opened and then closed. The reactions of Chávez and the Chavista media allowed for the closure and subsequent symbolic rearrangements that would not allow such critique to happen again. CIM was not given further funding and its programs slowly dissolved. People like Michael Lebowitz and Marta Harnecker have started leaving

Venezuela, and thus, symbolically the hope that the Revolution could actually happen there. And while unlike authoritarian Left-wing governments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Bolivarian government did not apply any violence or silence critical voices, their response to the Forum can be seen as a clear form of symbolic violence. Subduing intellectual critique to a mere expression of a privileged class position, it was a mechanism of “humbling down” constructive critique and disregarding legitimate discontent.

The response of Chávez and the people in top positions in his government was a clear indication that in an increasingly top-down process, even Left-wing intellectuals with a significant past in the struggle against exploitation and injustice were not recognized as a corrective to the revolutionary power outside their own circles. Thus, while I have shown that one of the shortcomings of the Bolivarian process is the formation of radical nobility and reproduction of hierarchy the voice of those engaged in higher education reform and intellectual production is still negligible. One can only wonder what would be the effect of similar critique voiced by those within the Bolivarian process who did not have the proximity to power or credentials of the members of the radical nobility. Nicolas Maduro has shown that he will follow the imperatives of President Chávez. Yet, his conduct in the Forum at CIM and its proceedings have shown that he supports a vanguardist, top-down model of governance, which is not even informed by intellectual critique. Radical bureaucratic has now taken an upper in the Revolution. Judging from the responses of its top representatives after the Forum in 2009, I see a serious peril. The quixotic efforts of the radical nobility and Bolivarian educators to perpetuate change, will have to succumb to the incentives of this new group in power, or will eventually be easily discarded as irrelevant.

## Conclusion

The history of UBV exemplifies the accomplishments and contradictions that define the higher education reform of the “Bolivarian Revolution.” This reform was carried out against the negative historical background of the increasing commercialization of public universities and the repression of student movements during the period of liberal democracy in Venezuela (1958-1998). It was catalyzed by the reticence of the Bolivarian government to support Chavista intellectuals in their fight to implement reform on autonomous public universities after 1998. The establishment of the new university together with a whole parallel system of local *aldeas universitarias* has been both a symbolic victory and a symbolic retreat. It has given poor people a chance to receive free and unconditional access to higher education. The new university still required accreditation and legitimacy within the larger education system however, which had to be granted by the agents of academic authority: academics from traditional universities hostile to the government. As part of a two-tiered system, then, UBV became a second-class university. It receives a smaller budget per student and its degrees are regarded as inadequate. The old hierarchy lives and lives well.

Practices also show that UBV remained reliant on traditional norms even for its administrative and academic functioning. While its professors are often first generation in higher education, the intellectuals who make the ranks of its administration and of the Ministry of Higher Education mostly come from what I have called the radical nobility: they are members of the former student Left with both traditional and radical credentials from their militancy in the movements. Employed by the government to legitimate its reform and carry it out as experts, these radical-yet-traditional academics dominate the Bolivarian higher education field. Combined with their radical past, their academic credentials formed a new source of distinction: that of a revolutionary capital. In the Bolivarian intellectual field, this form of symbolic capital conceals a specific hierarchical power relation, around which hegemony is created. Presented as organically related to the popular struggles of the past, it is accepted by the new faculty and the students of UBV as absolute and allowing no appeal or challenge. Unlike the French “heresiarchs” who became world famous and gained media exposure but were still marginal at home (Bourdieu 1988), the Venezuelan ones received a historic chance to enter state power and change the rules of the academic game.

Yet, the rules have not exactly changed. The new source of “revolutionary” distinction has worked to conceal the reproduction of inequalities that are ubiquitous throughout the Bolivarian higher education field. A strict symbolic but also economic hierarchy is apparent at UBV. When comparing education and social status, material acquisitions, life-standards, and chances at the job market, the members of the radical nobility score above the new Bolivarian educators. All of them, however, are better off than the school’s current students and recent graduates. The former student radicals and the new educators have received their degrees from traditional institutions and keep enrolling their children in these schools, as opposed to UBV students and graduates. And while the opportunity to study at UBV has meant dignity and empowerment for the latter, they hardly stand a chance to get a secure job. They are regarded as low-skill professionals even within the government-controlled public sector. Paradoxically, while class differences between the older and newer generation of intellectuals persist, class conflict remains symbolically precluded and stigmatized as antagonist to the Revolution. Still, the growing precarity to which UBV professors and students are exposed does at times make them hostile to the regime.

At the same time, going beyond the instrumental vision of higher education as dedicated primarily to the accumulation of knowledge and acquisition of jobs, this study put forward the alternative and imaginative ways in which the Bolivarian government has employed the UBV community. Not necessarily able to improve poor people’s lives, or accumulate knowledge about the life in the poor communities, UBV faculty and staff still play an important role in these settings. Through their presence they further the government’s state- and nation-building project and support the creation of new redistributive institutions and services. Like this the Bolivarian government has done reform against the grain of the global trend dismantling of the institutions of the welfare state. Embodied by its agents – low-ranking state employees and students of the Bolivarian university and *aldeas* – the state creates a positive, likeable image of itself among poor barrio and village residents. Getting used to this presence, and sympathizing with the agents of the state, the members of poor communities become increasingly socialized within the new state institutions and its discourse. They become fully-fledged Bolivarian citizens.

A side-effect of this process, in which the political government of a state transformed by neoliberal reforms should be eventually recognized across its territory, is the centrality of

women in the process. For women from *barrio* communities, the Bolivarian Revolution has brought an inspiring and significant change. This has been the first time they were treated not only as workers, house-wives, child-bearers, and care-takers, but also as the agents of a political process and civic community. Becoming community leaders and organizers in poor neighborhoods, they have become the voice of their communities, as well as power brokers vis-à-vis the state. This process has been crucial for bringing new status and power to these women. However, they still often remain in relatively economically dominated positions. They are willingly contributing to the socialization of their neighborhoods and communities in the state institutions and helping the government to literally touch ground with communities. Creating the new sociality of the Bolivarian state, the *barrio* community leaders remain economically subjugated. Their voluntary efforts to legitimize the state's presence in the *barrios* bring them mostly symbolic returns but no substantial economic emancipation.

While the government has made efforts to redistribute its oil revenues toward poor communities, its reforms have been far from consistent. Taking higher education reform as an example, I have shown that time and resources are often spent on programs that are then readily discarded and quickly replaced. In this, the enormous and spectacular redistributive effort is often reminiscent of the material grandeur of what Fernando Coronil (1997) calls "the magical state". While the words of the late President on TV shows were usually taken literally and put into policy documents, the constant shift of direction which they have caused was usually explained through tales of mischief or sabotage by internal and external enemies. The tendency to change the direction of development every time the government faced resistance from opponents seemed justified through the past of the Latin American and Venezuelan Left, where radical regimes have indeed been opposed by mighty enemies. The same motif has been used as a primary excuse for the misfortunes of the benevolent Bolivarian state. While this might be the case in certain instances, the permanent cadre rotation and the change of policy within the government shows that twists and turns often come from within with no substantive explanation. The combination between the induced powerlessness of the government and its alternating power field has made liminality (Turner 1972) a permanent state of affairs. While this permanent liminality can serve as a useful tool to gain sympathy and support during the frequent election campaigns, it has also made the actions of the government ever less accountable and transparent, exuberant in radical gestures, but not in perpetuating profound social change.

A reason for this might be found in the centralization of decision-making in the hands of the late President and a few members of the political power field, which stifled the process of feed-back and made the government impermeable to critique from below. In this, my work has shown that while intellectuals from the radical nobility and faculty and staff of UBV were used to legitimate the reforms of the government, they were not encouraged to assume a critical stance towards it. Despite the permanence of the members of the Venezuelan radical nobility in the echelons of state power, the Bolivarian intellectual field has acquired neither autonomy nor leverage to influence the government. While the radical intellectuals with a history of activism have become hegemony among their own colleagues and disciples, their position vis-à-vis the leader of the Revolution and its bureaucratic functionaries has been precarious. They may have gained privileged positions, but their attempts to provide critical feedback and influence the decision-making process have been futile.

Thus, despite the emergence of a radical nobility, Bolivarian intellectuals face a key dilemma typical of intellectuals in processes of revolutionary social change. My work shows that a trend remains present both in state socialist countries from the 20<sup>th</sup>, and in the new democratic socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Intellectuals in socialist context have indeed traditionally faced a choice: either become a functionary clique, or else be reduced to a marginal critical opposition that stands no chance of carrying out social change. This alternative and its recurrence surfaced in my research when for example students who challenged the faculty and academic administration received a response similar to the one given to intellectuals challenging Chávez and his government. This investigation outlines the difficulties of framing radical critique against a power structure when its dominant groups assume that no discourse or practice can be more radical than their own. The question remains if the lack of critical self-reflection and critique is one of the main deficits of the Bolivarian process, or one of its strongest resistance mechanisms. Yet, it is certain that this mechanism contributes to the constant shift of direction and diffusion of responsibility in the Bolivarian reform. It prevents the government from creating sustainable institutions, and a model of alternative development applicable in and outside of Bolivarian Venezuela.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> I also did a number of interviews with academic intellectuals, who were reticent toward Chavez's government and his education reform. To my surprise, however, in the majority case the responses of the latter revealed superficial knowledge of and interest in what was happening at the new university. Thus, unless indicated in my ethnographic material, such interviews have remained out of the current study.

<sup>2</sup> I made a number of fieldtrips and observations to aldeas universitarias in Caracas and beyond, to UBV-Zulia just out of Maracaibo, and have carried out interviews with faculty from the campuses in Ciudad Bolívar, Tachira, and Barquisimeto. These materials, however, have not entered the current thesis except as ethnographic detail or individual statement or story related to the broader historical process. Though valuable and interesting in their own right, they have not enlightened or discarded further aspects of education at UBV which I observed at its central campus, and it was difficult to include them within the detailed ethnographic writing that concerns UBV-Caracas. At the same time,

<sup>3</sup> While Chávez had decided to change the time of Venezuela not to fit in the NYC time and to give Venezuelans half an hour of sleep, the opposition reaction was to keep their watches on US East-coast time.

<sup>4</sup> Like the UK with the annexation of Guyana (1895) and the embargo set by the Britain, Germany and Italy (1902-3) and the Netherlands (1908)

<sup>5</sup> AD came briefly into power in the period 1945-1948 through a coup d'état headed by Romulo Betancourt but only to call for free election and head the first democratically elected government of Romulo Gallegos. The first democratically minded government of Romulo Betancourt which came to power with a military junta but then promoted democratic election was not very generous in its provision of autonomy. While it stipulated certain amount of co-governance of the election and decision-making within university bodies as the University Council, it was still at the discretion of the government to elect university authorities (Moreno 2008: 362).

<sup>6</sup> La Universidad de Zulia in Maracaibo (LUZ), La Universidad del Oriente in the East (UDO), Universidad de Carabobo in Valencia (UC), and Universidad de Los Andes in Merida (ULA)

<sup>7</sup> Universities as the University of Carabobo and the first "experimental" university "Simon Bolívar" (USB, 1967) were examples of this "soft" intervention. USB was, in fact, opened by a number of conservative faculty members from UCV who did not agree with the main principles of Rector Jesus Maria Bianco and the turbulence created by the Renovation (Mendez 1995)

<sup>8</sup> The Federation of the Victims Families has claimed a number closer to 2000 (Ellner 2008: 95).

<sup>9</sup> 200 was added to commemorate the 200 anniversary of the birth of Bolívar in 1983 – a year after the establishment of the movement (Ellner 2008: 96)

<sup>10</sup> When he stood up in front of National TV in the night following the failed *coup* in 1992, Chávez did something which allegedly no other Venezuelan politician ever did before: he took all responsibility for his failure. He promised apologies and said he retreated from the battle "for now" (*por ahora*) (Ellner 2008: 96; Wilpert 2007: 17)

<sup>11</sup> The Law of Fisheries and Aquaculture guaranteed "the protection of qualified fishing grounds in oceans and rivers, and of fishing settlements and communities...the full economic and social benefits to qualified fishermen... improvement in their quality of life... [and] their genuine and direct participation in decisions by the State in matters of fishing". In practical terms that meant that the territory in which only small fishermen had the right to fish expanded which allowed them to do their craft without being in competition with big ships (De Beaugrande 2008: 26).

<sup>12</sup> The Law of Lands and Agrarian Development, declared "totalitarian" and "communist" (Última Hora quoted in De Beaugrande 2008: 27). As 1% of the Venezuelans *latifundistas* owned more than 60 % of the country's arable land – large estates of often idle land of over 5000 acres. The Law aimed at "eliminating the *latifundio* as a system contrary to justice, the general interest, and social peace in the countryside..." The National Institute of Lands was to recover all idle or uncultivated land, and organize agrarian credit for all Venezuelans who would take rural work as principal occupation. This reform has not been vastly successful because of a mixture of reasons – the land owners fighting and striking back, including with the killings of peasants, and the difficulty to have settled urban population cultivate land (De Beaugrande 2008: 28).

<sup>13</sup> The Organic Law of Hydrocarbons made "[t]he deposits of hydrocarbons whatever their nature may be, existing in national territory ... belong to the Republic, ... properties of public domain, and as such, inalienable" The Law then stipulates the conditions under which mixed (Venezuelan and foreign) companies can gain concessions to exploit the land without causing harm to the environment and the state-owned installation, and

then commends the use of the drilled hydrocarbon substances to the external but also internal market (De Beaugrande 2008: 28-29).

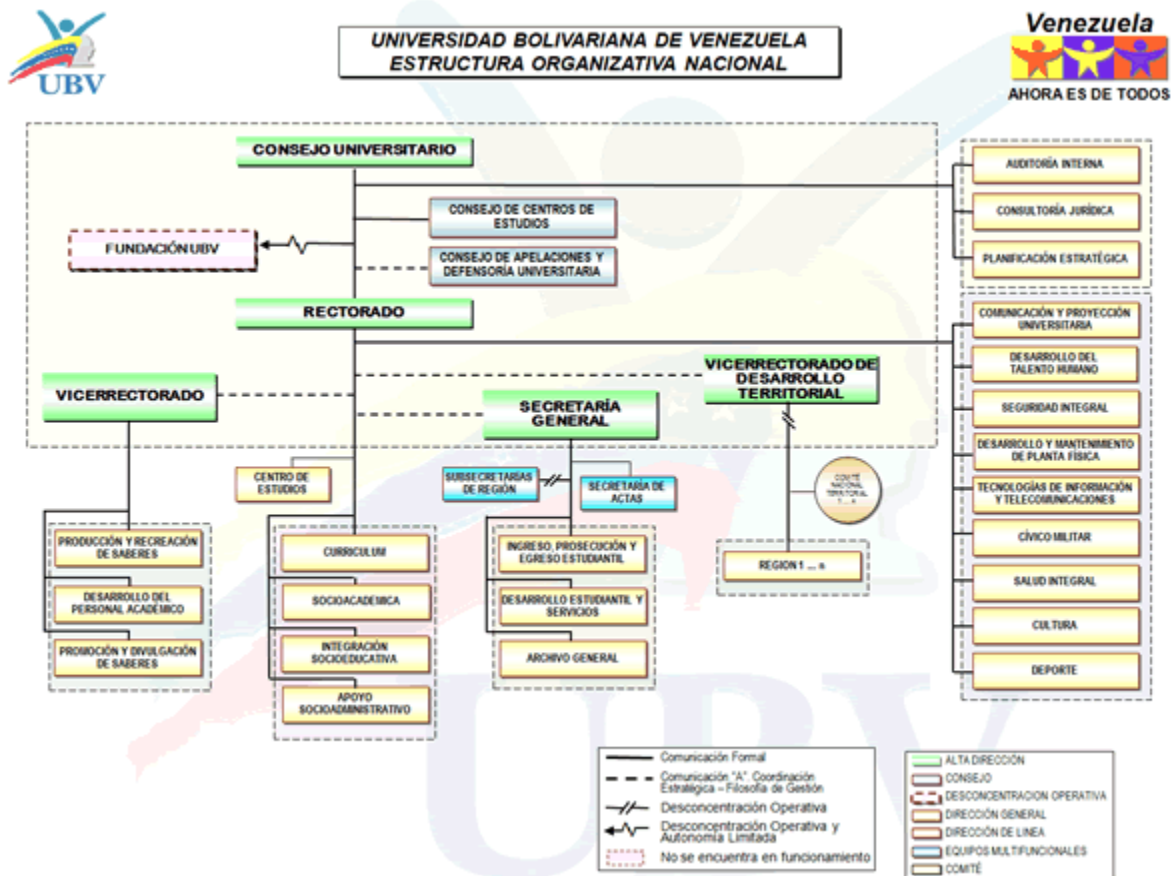
<sup>14</sup> They were cancelled in hours by the interim government of Cramona in 2002

<sup>15</sup> The repertoire of Utopia was used in successive years as well. In 2000 UCV radicals agreed neither with the social democratic candidate for Rector Ocarina Castillo, nor with the conservative Giuseppe Giannetto. They painted a female donkey in blue and placed it in campus as their candidate “*burro rector azul*” (donkey blue rector) (Sánchez 2011: 9-10)

<sup>16</sup> A failed state is one that does not have full possession and regulation over goods and commercial processes happening on its own territory: one which fails to make decisions on issues of importance to the majority population due to the intervention and imposition of the lobbies of power elites. According to the conservative publication Foreign Policy, Venezuela has been ranked with high alert in 2005, and has been considered critical ever since (FP 2005; 2012). Bolivarian Venezuela has managed to reverse the discursive field and show that in the era of neoliberal capitalism, the very notion of a “failed state” is highly suspicious. All states which succumbed to neoliberal capitalism and fail to serve their populations could be considered as failed states. Taking a look into the political system, low economic, foreign growth and debt and unemployment, the exclusive social security system, pollution and carbon gases, the US might rightly be considered a “failed state” (Weisberg 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Paradoxically, except for providing the education of Chavez himself, USB was also the main source of cadres for the neo-liberal think tanks and statistical agencies that headed the anti-Chavez propaganda. Its administration, faculty, and student bodies have been some of the key opponents of the government-headed higher education reform.

18



organizational structure of UBV during the rectorship of Yadira Marlene Córdoba, as influenced by all former rectors.

<sup>19</sup> Based in Milton Keynes, the Open University is an experimental university stemming from the adult education movement and the Labor reform of higher education. The Open University was a progressive policy of Higher Education, which allowed mass access to people from all ages through correspondence classes and tutorials

<sup>20</sup> During our interview years later, Castellanos. explained further the rationale of these policies and gave more examples of what was attempted back then. The *redes academicas* were controlled by the Ministry of Science and Technology. They were an attempt “to create a culture of cooperation, and to break with the individualistic model of science, working toward team projects. Libraries and computer use were to be used by the communities in the respective region. By 2003 eight networks were created. In addition, the Ministry of Higher Education set off to work on new universities. Three new universities, and four *Institutos Tecnológicos* were created by 2002, all in remote border areas of the country away from the coastal region: Barrinas, Tachira, Apure, and Ciudad Bolivar. The goal of these universities was to provide areas of studies relevant in the respective regions that were not represented at the existing private and public colleges there.

<sup>21</sup> As I have explained in more detail in Chapter 1, the original “autonomous” universities were those developed before the 1970s - Universidad Central de Venezuela (UCV), La Universidad de Zulia (LUZ), Universidad De Oriente (UDO), Universidad de Carabobo (UC), Universidad de Los Andes (ULA)., the 1970s reform has led to the production of new centrally controlled university types: the Technical Institutes, University Colleges, as well as the Experimental Universities “Experimental” was a term coined after the first university of this type – Universidad “Simon Bolivar” established in 1967 by a secession of professors from UCV. USB was formerly a “Instituto Experimental” that was later on transferred to the status of a university (USB 2009). Other “experimental” universities were Universidad Nacional Experimental de Los Llanos Eizekel Zamora (UNELLEZ), Universidad Simon Rodriguez

<sup>22</sup> The President declared the necessity to have Social Communication (Journalism) and Law represented among the subjects. As Castellanos said to *Laberinto* in 2004 “He ... saw the need to form new professionals in the sphere of Law. We included Environmental Management, and Social Management for Local Development”. (*Laberinto* 2004:52-53)

<sup>23</sup> - 29 of the CT and IU would be transformed into Polytechnic universities. 9 new specialized universities were to open doors: University of Health Sciences; University of Hydrocarbon; University of Security; University of Languages; University of Telemetric science; University of Agrarian Science ‘Paulo Freire’; University of Economy and Physical Sciences; University of Basic Sciences; University of Tourism. Besides there were 17 small territorial universities that are so far only in the planning phase and that are meant to respond to specific industrial needs of underdeveloped regions throughout the country. Universidad Bolivariana de los Trabajadores (UBT) was another project, formerly established but not accredited. It presented the idea that “universities” should function on factory grounds and that manual workers (*obreros*) would receive qualified craft training. Besides, the Government was opening University of Arts was to be formed by the former School of Arts (drama, ballet, painting) and a University of the People from the Global South.

<sup>24</sup> On the austerity and Ministry merging, see VTV 2009a

<sup>25</sup> In November 2009 it held the model of the Satellite Simon Bolivar launched in space by China. Later this space hosted protests against mainstream media, as well as a meeting between the Minister of higher education and the Rector of UCV.

<sup>26</sup> Lagoven has been named a company-icon of the Venezuelan business. A company branch of PDVSA which was in charge of the exploration, production, refining, and commerce of petrol and its derivatives in the period between 1976-1997. In 1997 after a structural reform, collapsing the filial companies and shifting their activities to commercial units, Lagoven<sup>26</sup> passed under the entity of PDVSA Petrol and Gas S.A. which since 2001 has been called PDVSA Petroleo S.A. Lagoven had its teams all around the country, researching patrol fields in Zulia, the East, the Orinoco delta, and in the waters around Margarita island. As most commercial enterprises of this size, it had a certain corporate profile of involvement with communities, developing cultural and sports activities, as well as a publication series<sup>26</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Email exchange with British Council member, confidential.

<sup>28</sup> As anthropologist Robert Samet has argued, violent crime in Venezuela is difficult to account for. Giving the case of Caracas, and criticizing post-factum his own co-written piece (Samet and Devereux 2008), he shows the extent to which statistics may vary: according to homicide rate the capital of Venezuela can be counted either as one of the most violent cities in Latin America and the world, or as one of many violent cities in the continent (Samet 2012). The difference came from the complex municipal division. The whole metropolitan area of Caracas 3.2 million people was divided in five counties. The county of Libertador forms the city of

Caracas, but is just one of those five. According to Samet the statistics released divided the population of Libertador by the number of deaths in all five counties when accounting for the per capita death rate. Thus, Samet concludes, the media representation of crime in Caracas has been exaggerated in the media – national and international – due to an intentionally wrong count.

<sup>29</sup> From Spanish, *ni...ni*: neither-nor. It has been commonly used to designate those who vote neither for the opposition, nor for Chavez.

<sup>30</sup> La corriente bolivariana afirma la hermenéutica crítica como conocimiento constructor holístico y lleva al mismo conocimiento desde lo analítico a lo sintético y viceversa, es decir, de lo macro a lo micro y de lo micro a lo macro; en el campo de la dialéctica con sus efectos contradictorios, donde lo más importante es discernir frente a un hecho contradictorio donde está la nueva realidad, construyendo el nuevo imaginario del nuevo republicano bolivariano, para desimpregnarlo del néctar de la ideología liberal burguesa. (Grupo Maraisa 2009)

<sup>31</sup> This is hardly new in Venezuela: the major programs in Venezuelan “*licencia*” resemble the German -type Magister studies which also existed in several other European countries prior to the Bologna process. . With the Bologna program, this format was replaced with the 3-2-3 cycles of studies of respectively Bachelors, Masters, and Doctoral studies.

<sup>32</sup> The Masters thesis they would prepare is an equivalent of an MPhil thesis of an English university in terms of workload, research and bibliography.

<sup>33</sup> The MA program which UBV developed around 2009 was in Hydrocarbon science. Over the next years, two further MA programs were developed at UBV: MA in the Sciences for Strategic Development, and MA in the Sciences of Energy Strategies. Both these had their respective PhD programs, and were subdivided in different internal specializations e.g. environmental sciences, social studies, public health in the first case, and petrol, hydroenergy, geophysics etc. in the second.]

<sup>34</sup> I took part in the sessions for half of the professors, coming from the following states: Distrito Federal, Lara, Tachira, Barrinas, and Falcon. Along with them, some individual professors from *aldeas universitarias* in different inner states were also present. These represented half the 2005 cohort representatives, including faculty of two out of the five central facilities in the country (Caracas in the Capital District, and Punto Fijo in Falcon).

<sup>35</sup> The former Chapter 1, now Chapter 2 Emancipatory Pedagogy, had a different subtitle. In the 2008 edition it was entitled “Critical knowledge and radical research for the strategic planning oriented to a social transformation”. In the 2009 edition, it was renamed “Toward the integral transformational formation of the professionals as organic intellectuals of the Revolution”. The respective next two chapters in the 2008 edition were dedicated to the Revolutionary ethos and Ideology. In 2008 the subtitle to the former was “Neoliberal capitalism versus humanist socialism and popular power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century”, and that of the second mentioned “Ethics, tactics and strategy for an *emancipatory* political practice”. In 2009 the two chapters were merged together under the name of “Revolutionary Ethos” with the subtitle “Hegemony, ideology, and power: tactics and strategy for a *revolutionary* political practice”. In the next chapter, “Organization” the difference was in the formulation of the central organizational terms. In 2008 the emphasis was on the “Impulsion and consolidation of the popular power”. In the 2009 edition, the keywords were “Popular education, strategic planning and communitarian participation”. The next chapter 5 was dedicated to Epistemology, but in the 2008 it went under the name of “Critical appropriation of reality in the education of subjectivity for the new forms of organization”, whereas in 2009 it had a twist toward “Alternative research methodology and dialectical processes”. The last section in the 2008 and the 2009 editions differed significantly. The former had the chapter on “Popular education, strategic planning, and communitarian participation” directed toward “Surmounting the domination, exclusion, and poverty of Latin American people”. In the 2009 textbook, a new chapter called for a “Critical hermeneutics and praxis of the social conflict: discourse as a social and ideological-political construction with implications on its translation into the radical pedagogical practice”.